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School Board Sets District Attendance Policy

By NICHOLAS HANCOCK
Editor

In an effort to clear up some past confusion over inter-county school district lines and to define which students can attend a school out of the district of their residency, the Madison County Board of Education adopted a resolution settling the matter at its Sept. 8 meeting in Marshall.

The resolution was adopted by unanimous vote after the board heard requests from four parents who asked that their children continue to attend a school other than the one in the district in which they lived.

In the resolution, the board acknowledged that some students were attending a school outside their geographic district "based on the impression that once a child was enrolled in a school, that child could continue to attend that school until completion," and that parents "were under the opinion that their children could continue to attend the school in which they were last enrolled."

But such is not the case, according to the board. The new policy states students will be allowed to continue in a school outside their district only if the parents make a request for reassignment to that particular school to the board of education. School Superintendent Robert L. Edwards said the requests would have to be made each year.

In addition, parents will be responsible for providing transportation to and

from the school for the students.

Students newly enrolled in the school system will be enrolled "strictly according to the geographic attendance districts," the board decreed.

The policy resulted from the principals at Mars Hill and Marshall elementary schools sending letters to several parents notifying them that their children were attending their schools while living in another school district, according to Edwards.

Two students represented at the meeting were covered by the residency clause in the resolution. Mr. J.T. Fox of Mars Hill told the board he had two residences, the second one being in Marshall; therefore, according to the board, his daughter could continue to attend Marshall School. Mr. Walter Harrell told the board his grandson's situation was settled when his daughter moved to Mars Hill.

The board granted permission for Mrs. Betty Ballard, a teacher at Mars Hill, to take her son to that school for health reasons. Mrs. Ballard lives on Ammons Branch Road in Marshall, according to Edwards. The board also granted permission to Leonard Silver for his children to continue to attend Mars Hill Elementary for this year. Mr. Silver said he lives on Hayes Run Road in Marshall and takes his children to Petersburg on Highway 213 to meet the Mars Hill school bus.

Requests concerning reassignment of two students outside Madison County fared less well at the meeting. Mr. Al

Crooke of the Sandy Mush area was denied permission to send his son to Buncombe County schools, and Mrs. Shirley Ferguson of upper Spring Creek was denied the release of her daughter's school records to the Haywood County school system.

Crooke told the board he had recently suffered a heart attack, was in poor health and operated a farm in the Sandy Mush community. He said he needed his son at home as early as possible from school to help with the farmwork. He said the bus ride from Erwin in Buncombe County would be much shorter for his son. Madison High School Principal David Wyatt confirmed that the bus ride from the Crooke residence to Madison High takes one hour and forty-five minutes. Board member Dedrick Cody motioned to reject the request. Ed Gentry seconded the motion which was passed by the board.

Mrs. Ferguson told the board her daughter was living with an aunt in Haywood County and was already attending school there. The board, in denying release of the records, indicated it still considers Mrs. Ferguson's daughter under the jurisdiction of the Madison school system.

In a similar matter, Roger Swann of Mars Hill appeared before the board to ask if it had heard from Yancey County schools concerning the status of his ninth-grade son. Swann requested the release of his son's school records at last month's board meeting saying legal custody of the student had been

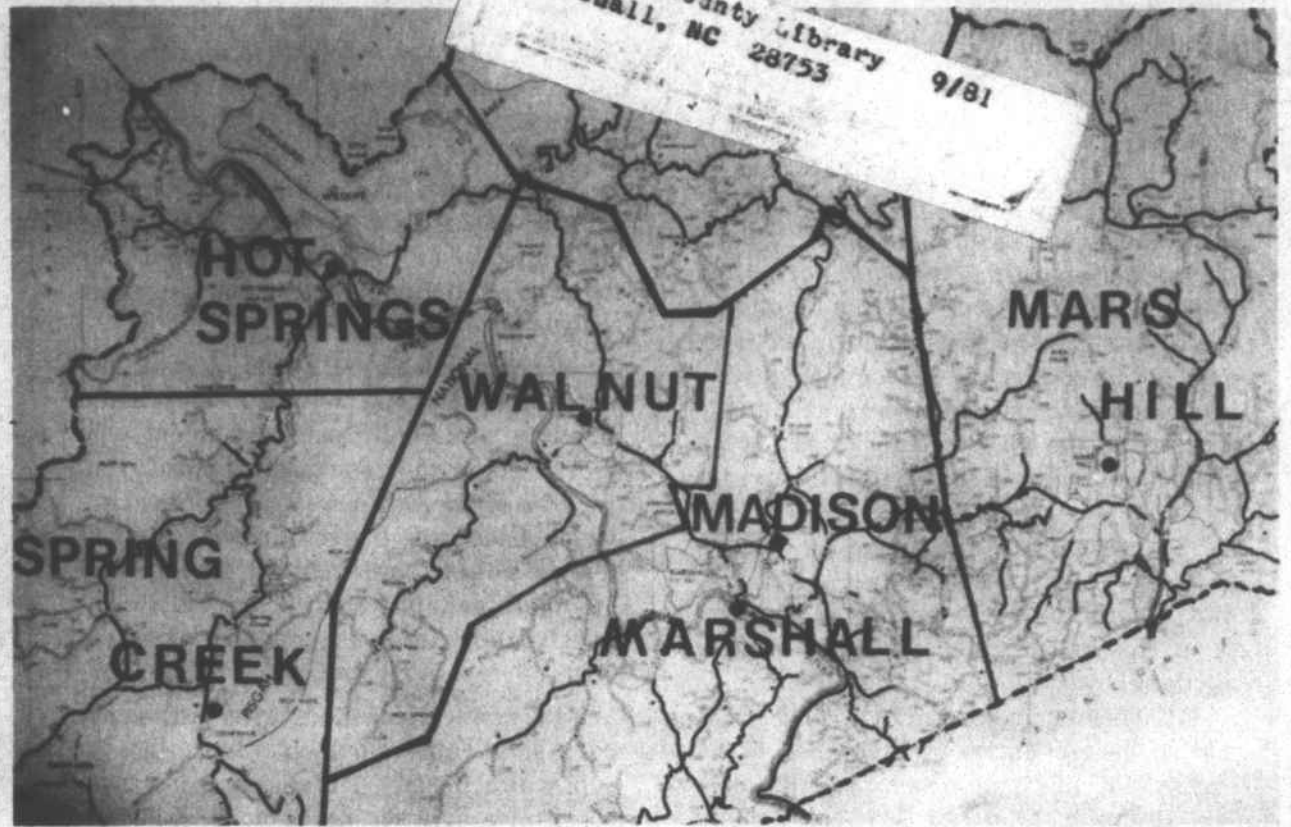


Photo by N. Hancock

School District Lines - Line Dividing Walnut and Marshall Not Valid

assigned to Swann's parents in Yancey County. The board said it had received letters from the superintendent of Yancey schools and the school board at-torney stating they would have to

receive legally documented papers showing the custody transfer before they would accept the boy into the Yancey system.

In other business, the board:

• Hired Judy Sears as an exceptional children teacher at Madison High School.

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Major Concerns Are Politics, Teacher Quality, Leadership

Public's Opinion: Local Schools Not Up To Par

By NICHOLAS HANCOCK
Editor

According to the Public School Opinion Survey conducted by The News Record, Madison County residents rate local schools below Buncombe County schools and North Carolina schools in general, and respondents to the survey consider politics, poor teacher quality and poor administrative leadership as the three major problems in the county education system.

When asked to grade Madison County Public schools, 27 percent of the 139 respondents gave A ratings, 8 percent B, 18 percent C, 23 percent D and 13 percent F. (Eleven percent had no opinion).

In grading Buncombe County schools, 29 percent gave A ratings, 39 percent B, 11 percent C, 1 percent D, and zero percent F. (Twenty-three percent had no opinion).

Madison elementary schools were rated below N.C. elementary schools in general (a 42 percent average A or B for Madison, a 58 percent average A or B for N.C. elementary), and local elementary teachers also fell behind N.C. elementary teachers (48 percent A or B for Madison, 59 percent A or B for N.C. elementary teachers).

Among the six elementary schools, people thought Mars Hill rated the highest (62 percent A or B) and Laurel the lowest (34 percent A or B). Both Spring Creek and Laurel schools rated the most Fs with 17 percent each.

People gave Madison High School a

larger percentage of As (30 percent) than they gave N.C. high schools in general (28 percent A), but the local high school lost to N.C. high schools in the rest of the ratings. Madison High received 9 percent B, 19 percent C, 19 percent D and 17 percent F. (Five percent had no opinion). Ratings for N.C. high schools were 31 percent B, 24 percent C, 4 percent D, and 2 percent F. (Eleven percent had no opinion). The combined A and B total for Madison was 40 percent, and the A and B total for N.C. high schools was 59 percent.

Madison High teachers were given 31 percent A, 11 percent B, 21 percent C, 21 percent D, and 10 percent F. N.C. high school teachers in general were rated 31 percent A, 25 percent B, 24 percent C, 4 percent D, and zero percent F. (Six percent had no opinion on Madison High teachers, and 15 percent had no opinion on N.C. high school teachers).

EDUCATIONAL GOALS

Madison residents feel local educators should consider preparing students for a job or career after graduation as the most important educational goal to set in the school system. That goal was listed 85 times as a first or second priority. Teaching students how to think was ranked as the second most important goal by being listed 71 times in the 1 and 2 slot.

The other educational goals were ranked in the following order: preparing students to go to college, teaching values and ethical behavior, preparing

students to become informed citizens prepared to vote at 18, and developing an appreciation for art, music and other cultural interests.

When asked what one educational goal they thought local schools actually considered the most important, preparing students for a job or career after graduation was the most given answer. (Preparing students to become informed citizens prepared to vote at 18 followed in second place, and "politics," a write-in goal, followed in third place).

Respondents thought developing an appreciation for art, music and other cultural interests was considered the least important goal by the local schools. "Basic education," another write-in, was listed enough times to take second place, and teaching students how to think ranked third.

SCHOOL PROBLEMS

The open-ended questions about problems faced by school personnel, students and parents of students brought up well over a dozen different topics, but a few subjects dominated as the public's main concerns. Many teachers obviously took advantage of this portion of the questionnaire to voice their opinions.

In responding to the question concerning the three biggest problems with which Madison elementary school personnel must deal, the answers given most often were (ranked in descending order) politics, lack of parental sup-

port, and poor administrative leadership.

In mentioning politics, respondents included "fear of losing job" and "political harassment" as major concerns. Lack of parental support included statements such as "parents should work with teachers," and "lack of parental visiting at school." Poor administrative leadership included "lacking authority to hire the most qualified and capable personnel," "having to

hire 'politically qualified' personnel," and "an administrative staff that knows nothing about elementary education."

Other problem areas listed under elementary school personnel were "old, inadequate buildings" and discipline in the classroom.

At the high school level, respondents saw virtually the same problems, but in a different order — politics, discipline and poor administrative leadership.

Drugs tied with poor administrative leadership as the third most mentioned problem, while transportation (bad roads, long bus rides) and lack of parental support were listed enough to rank fourth and fifth.

Typical comments about high school personnel problems were "weak administration," "hiring of marginally qualified teachers," "the political control over the hiring and firing of

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Miller: Locust Post Thefts Are A Problem

According to Charles Miller, District Ranger for the U.S. Forest Service at Hot Springs, three persons pleaded guilty before a U.S. Magistrate in Asheville Aug. 31, to illegal removal of locust post from National Forest Land.

Green locust trees were cut and removed from the Wilkens Creek area off I-40 in the Pigeon River Gorge area. Locust posts thefts along with other products and firewood has been a continuing problem in this area according to

Miller. Those receiving fines were: Jerry Williams, Route 3, Box 205, Clyde; James Hannah, 117 Frasier Street, Waynesville and Troy Green, 104 Chambers Mountain Road, Clyde.

Each of the three received a \$250.00 fine, a 30-day suspended jail sentence, six months probation, six months total restriction from being on National Forest land and loss of National Forest Wood gathering permit.



Photo by N. Hancock

New Tracks Laid Friday

NEW SECTIONS of train track were laid along a 2-mile stretch of Southern Railway

last Friday. Bridge Street was closed for about two hours shortly after noon.

'Riverfest' Activities Set

"Riverfest" activities on the island in Marshall Saturday, Sept. 19 will be kicked off at 10 a.m. with the appearance of the WLOS-TV balloon and TV personality "Mr. Bill." Other activities include clowns and Boy Scouts passing out balloons and a ladies vs. men softball game at noon.

Mrs. O.A. Gregory of the River Improvement Committee said flea market merchants are invited to set up shop under the trees on the island for the day.

A country and western band and the Marshall Hillbilly Clingers will perform in the afternoon. "Woody" the cool and "Smiley" the bear from the U.S. Forest Service will be

on hand in the afternoon along with "Coty Clean-Up" of Asheville's Quality Forward.

Mrs. Gregory said if the river level holds, Brad Howarth of Smokey Mountain River Expeditions will offer float rides to Riverfest celebrants. Essay winners of the contest sponsored by the Marshall Optimist Club will be announced during the day, and the Marshall Recreation Department will sponsor a dance beginning at 7:30 to wind up the evening.

Entries for the French Broad River Week photo contest sponsored by the Marshall Lions Club will be due on Sept. 18. Lion member Jerry Plem-

mons said the contest is divided into two age categories — youth up to 18 years of age and adults over 18. All photo contest entries should be photographs using the river as a theme. They will be judged on originality, relevance to the theme, composition and photographic techniques, Plemmons said. For more information, contestants should call Plemmons at 649-3336 in Marshall.

Plemmons said photo contest winners will be announced at a later date, and that submitted photos should be made during French Broad River Week.

Mrs. Gregory said food and drinks will be for sale Satur-

day by the Town of Marshall and the Marshall Merchants Association. Members of the Marshall Volunteer Fire Department will direct traffic and parking on the island.

To get residents in the mood for the river week celebration, the Madison County Public Library personnel and Brad Howarth have prepared a window display about the French Broad River at the library on Main Street in Marshall. Also, Marshall Elementary School is showing a slide program about the river to classes. The slide presentation was prepared by the Land-Of-Sky Regional Council at the request of the local river week committee.