

STUDENTS WILL SHOW WHAT THEY KNOW

Schools To Focus On Math, Reading Skills

BY SUSAN USHER

Outcome-based education, active learning, problem solving and thinking skills, the whole language approach.

These are just a few of the code phrases parents and students can expect to hear as schools gear up for the start of another term next week.

Students report to Brunswick County public schools next Wednesday, Aug. 21. Principals at the four western district schools say they and their staffs are ready though space at the four schools is at a premium.

Union Primary School, for example, has received two additional classroom teachers in anticipation of higher enrollment. Principal Zephia Grissett says she's expecting about 1,000 students.

Shallotte Middle School expects more than 1,100 students, Assistant Principal William Detrie said, while West Brunswick High School has "1,004 on the computer" for grades 9-12, about the same as last year or a little higher.

Principal Bill Shoemaker, who was preparing for the term minus an assistant principal as of Tuesday, says Waccamaw School expects its largest enrollment ever. "We could have in excess of 450 students," he said. "We've never had that before."

"This whole end of the county is growing," said Shoemaker.

While construction of a new elementary school at Supply will alleviate overcrowding at Shallotte Middle and Union Primary at least temporarily, Shoemaker said, "It won't help us a bit."

No students from Waccamaw's district—which includes a stretch along N.C. 211 toward Bolton—are scheduled to attend the new school.

At one time county school officials had contemplated either closing the school or enlarging its service district because of empty classrooms.

"I'd like to see them try to find some empty space now," said Shoemaker. "The county is going to have to look at restricting this end of the county."

Attendance the first two weeks of school could make a difference for the school system as a whole, because a head count for the first 10 days of the term is used by the state Division of Public Instruction to adjust funding and teaching staff allocations.

Focus On Math, Reading

Based on interviews with western district principals, students and their families can expect a greater emphasis on math and reading this year, and at the high school, on students taking responsibility for their assignments.

The opening phrases above reflect the state's and county's emphasis in curriculum areas this year, and the county's determination to bring up student scores on both standardized tests such as the California Achievement Test, which are multiple choice and fact-oriented, and end-of-year state tests, which are more open-ended and expect students to explain their answers to some questions.

West Brunswick High

At West Brunswick High School, for instance, the curriculum emphasis will be on math. The math curriculum has been revised across the board, bringing it in line with the school's experimental ninth grade outcome-based education project and with state changes in math requirements.

Starting with next year's ninth grade class, North Carolina high school students will be expected to take algebra as one of three units of math required to graduate. This will be in addition to four units of English, three units of social studies, one unit of foreign language or the humanities, one unit of health and physical education, three units of science (including biology and a physical science) plus five electives, for a minimum of 20 units.

This year West Brunswick's ninth graders will be expected to demonstrate what they learn to get credit for most courses. To accommodate that change the ninth grade curriculum in most subject areas has been redesigned to allow students more ways to demonstrate mastery of a subject.

The experimental program includes an additional after-school class period for students falling behind their classroom peers, as well as an effort to involve parents more in their children's education.

A series of orientation programs for parents of incoming freshmen is scheduled (See related story this issue.).

Courses are being sequenced to provide alternatives for all students and to prepare all students to take and pass algebra in future years. As in the outcome based education program, in math classes students will be using less pencil and paper and more hands-on activities and demonstrations.

"We hope to do a better job on the end of the course tests which have more open-ended questions where students explain their work," said Ed Lemon, principal.

Using a cooperative learning model, students of varying abilities will work in teams, with the team grade/performance determined by how well all members do their share of the work. "Everyone has as-

signed responsibilities. They can't rely on member of the team. There's a lot of peer pressure for the students to do their part," said Lemon, plus the approach makes it easier for teachers to work with students with a wide range of abilities.

Why so many innovations this year?

"Things have got to change. I don't think we can keep on doing what we've been doing and make any progress," said Lemon.

Shallotte Middle

At Shallotte Middle School, last year's attempt to have all classroom teachers teach reading is out.

"It was a nice concept, but it was a lot to ask of people without the training," said Principal Mark Owens.

Instead, teachers have been re-assigned as necessary so that only those certified in that area are teaching reading and language arts.

The school will continue the Advisor/Advisee program in grades 6,7 and 8, and hopes to obtain the money to complete training of teachers in fourth and fifth grades to use the "Skills For Growth," a Lions Quest program for younger students similar to the "Skills for Adolescence" now in place.

Shallotte Middle will continue to use a "teaming" approach with grades 6, 7 and 8 this year.

"We're not doing too many new things," said Owens.

Union Primary

Reading Recovery, an experimental approach to reading and language arts skills, will be used with one class of first graders at Union Primary School this year.

Foy Crary and Kim Royals will team teach the class of about 16 students. Each will teach Reading Recovery a half-day and other first-grade material a half-day.

"They will each serve about eight

students," said Principal Zephia Grissett. "It's very intense."

The program is aimed at ensuring that all students learn to read in first grade, reducing or eliminating the need for future remediation. This is the first year in an expanding three-year project with the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. "Hopefully good things will come out of it," she said.

Also this year, some students will learn conversational Spanish. With space at a premium, new Spanish teacher Elena Foster will join art teacher Gretta Saunders "on wheels," with no classrooms of their own.

Guidance Counselor Sue Chapman plans to expand the school's volunteer program to include more parental involvement as "grade parents" and to involve more community volunteers as tutors.

Waccamaw School

At Waccamaw School, which serves students in grade kindergarten through eight, Shoemaker said he hopes to hear soon on who will be assigned as interim assistant principal while Sybil Mitchell Simmons is on maternity leave.

Also this year staff will finish implementing the whole language approach for teaching language arts and reading, and will "probably" place more emphasis on reading and math.

"Hopefully we're going to get some test scores up," he said. "We don't feel good about our third grade scores (last year) but we did feel pretty good about our higher grade scores."

Also, Shoemaker said he's expecting another "good history bowl team," referring to the school's past record as two-time state runner-up.

"I feel like we're going to have a good year," he said.



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER
SUMMER EMPLOYEES Penny Hill and Jimmy Bryant give the Shallotte Middle School office suite its first new coat of paint in 12 years as staff members began reporting to work this week to prepare for the arrival of students next Wednesday morning.

'Ferocious' Thunderstorms Exacting Their Toll On Area

Three consecutive weeks of "ferocious" thunderstorms accompanied by sharp claps of thunder, flaring bolts of lightning and flooding downpours are making an impact on more than area residents' tempers.

"We've had enough lightning for an average two to three years," Bobby Gore, operations manager at Brunswick Electric Membership Corp. said Monday. Crews have been kept hopping around the clock, responding to scattered problems throughout BEMC's service area.

"Mostly just blown fuses and broken insulators and we've had to change a lot of transformers," said Gore. "It's been a bad year for us as far as lightning goes."

Monday morning crews were dealing with problems at the Sunset Beach substation and with a pole at Grissettown hit directly by lightning.

"When we have an outage we take care of it as quickly as possible," he said. "We have people working through the night when necessary."

While lightning could cause an overhead wire to burn down, Gore said that usually doesn't happen because breakers at BEMC substations take the circuit out instead. The substation then clears the fault and swiftly restores power. In the meantime, however, customers may get a glitch, a flickering light or other indication of a brief interruption in power.

Gore said his office had received only one complaint about computer damage related to the

storms. However, county water customers can thank the weather for late-arriving bills. Thunderstorm activity around the Brunswick County Government Center resulted in downtime for the computer that produces the bills, which meant they went out late.

BEMC crews are not the only units responding to lightning-related problems. County fire and rescue units have responded in the past week to at least three residential fires apparently caused by lightning. On Aug. 6 homes burned in Salt Aire Village at Calabash and Deerfield Estates, Winnabow, with a second fire in Winnabow reported Monday night.

The State Highway Patrol has responded to a rash of fender-benders and more serious accidents, with officers pushing to keep up with the related paperwork.

"I've been sitting in court trying to write reports," Trooper Barney Wilkes said two weeks ago after the rains began in earnest.

The flurry of thunderstorms and lightning activity in July prompted Cecil Logan, Brunswick County's emergency management coordinator, to check with Carolina Power & Light Co. on the possibility of a print-out showing lightning strikes in the county during the month.

Along with the storms have come sightings of funnel shaped clouds at various points across the county, including Leland and Southport,

none of which have been confirmed by the National Weather Service office in Wilmington.

Brunswick County Health Board member Bill Rabon, who lives in Southport, said at Monday's health board meeting that he spotted a funnel shaped cloud that appeared to be headed toward Southport from off the water around midday Saturday.

Said BEMC's Gore, "We've had it for three straight weeks now. It's been several years since we've had storms on top of each other like this, every day, continuous—they're ferocious. It's because of the heat, I guess."

The deluge of rains flooded area fields and were accompanied in some areas by light hail.

For the record, Shallotte Point meteorologist Jackson Canady recorded 4.4 inches of rainfall for the week of Aug. 6-12, well above the three-quarters of an inch typical this time of year.

The maximum high of 93 degrees occurred Aug. 10, while the minimum low of 72 degrees was reached Aug. 9. A daily average high of 88 degrees combined with an average nightly low of 74 degrees for a daily average temperature of 81 degrees, 1 degree above average for this time of year.

Canady said the outlook calls for temperatures and rain to be near normal over the next few days. Temperatures should average from the lower 70s at night into the upper 80s during the daytime, with three-quarters of an inch of rainfall.

West Slates Orientation For Ninth Grade Parents

West Brunswick High School was to hold the first of three orientation sessions for parents of incoming ninth graders Wednesday night, Aug. 14, with additional sessions scheduled tonight and next Monday night.

"I think we'll have a large turnout because parents are apprehensive about their children starting at the high school," said Principal Ed Lemon. "I think we may have the largest turnout we've ever had for anything like this."

Parents were scheduled to attend a specific session by alphabetical clusters, but if they cannot attend on their designated night, they're encouraged to come to one of the other sessions.

"We wanted the groups to be smaller so they could meet in the library and have an opportunity to talk to the teachers," said Lemon. "We wanted to make it more personal."

Schedules for the 300-plus freshmen will be distributed and parents will have an opportunity to talk with their teachers and look over the school.

Parents will receive a handout that explains the outcome-based education approach and how it will work at West Brunswick, and an example, in the English curriculum, of the kinds of things their child will be expected to know before they can receive course credit.

Task Force Exploring Brunswick Habitat Project

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teer groups work to improve existing housing for the poor, Habitat bridges another gap. Its volunteers help low-income families realize the dream of home ownership.

The Rev. Dr. Richard W. Warner Jr., minister of St. James Episcopal Church in Shallotte, and Hancox, pastor of the Holden Beach Baptist Mission, are co-chairing the task force established by the Interchurch Council to assess the need for and interest in the local project.

Hancox has had previous experience with Habitat projects stateside and abroad as a missionary, seminary instructor and college staff member.

"I know it works," he said in a recent telephone interview from his home at Leng Beach. "It's one of the few projects like this I know about."

It's interracial, interdenominational," he continued. "It's people helping people have decent housing. That should be of concern to everyone."

Hancox said that after months and months of discussion, local efforts to form a Habitat project "have turned a corner," with pledges of commitment from individuals and organizations.

Council Chairman Katherine Shawer says for the Habitat project to succeed, it must be a countywide effort, not limited to one section of Brunswick County.

According to Perita B. Price, director of public housing for Brunswick County, the need is county-

wide, based on the number of sub-standard houses identified in the 1980 census (no figures for 1990 are available) and in a recent study made the N.C. Center for Rural Economic Development and the Rural Housing Center.

The 1980 U.S. Census identified 645 houses that lacked complete indoor plumbing, such as bathroom facilities or water supply, and 603 houses that were "overcrowded," having more people in the household than there were total rooms, said Don Eggert, a planner in the county planning department. Those raw numbers are probably similar to the situation found in most other rural counties, he said.

Mrs. Price said the rural housing study concluded that Brunswick County had approximately 800 sub-standard housing units. "That's the latest information we have," she said.

Still, the future of the project depends on need alone, but on community response from the volunteer sector and from prospective homeowners.

"Brunswick County has a lot of people living in substandard housing. We know they're there; we've seen the statistics," said Hancox. "But we will have to see how many are interested in participating in a Habitat project."

Pinpointing both the need and willingness to participate will be one of first assignments for task force volunteers, along with fundraising and public education.

Habitat is funded by contributions from individuals, churches,

corporations, foundations and other organizations which are moved by concern and compassion to help those in need. Contributions are tax-deductible.

With Habitat projects, affluent and poor work as partners. Families selected as homeowners invest "sweat equity," working side-by-side with Habitat volunteers to build their new home.

Then they pay monthly on a fixed, no-interest, no-profit mortgage. The house payments are put into a local "Fund for Humanity" and recycled to help build more

new houses. New homeowners are also encouraged to contribute what they can in addition to their monthly house payment so they, too, can help others have decent housing.

To qualify for Habitat, families apply to the local project. A committee chooses homeowners on the basis of housing need, ability to repay the loan, family size and willingness to participate as a partner in Habitat's ministry.

Those who are interested in the Habitat project but cannot attend the meeting may contact Hancox, 278-3006, or Warner, 842-8498.

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