

# Falling Dropout Rate Reflects Effort To Keep Kids In School

BY SUSAN USHER

During the 1991-92 school year Brunswick County's drop-out rate for grades seven through 12 dropped to an all-time low of 1.82 percent, reflecting efforts systemwide to keep youngsters in school.

Wendy Milligan, student assistance coordinator for the Brunswick County Schools, said that 79 students dropped out during the year, down from 97 in 1990-91.

Both the number of dropouts and the dropout rate have steadily decreased since 1988, when the N.C. Department of Public Instruction began requiring an actual count, not an estimate as in previous years. Dropout prevention is a priority of the state department and of the Basic Education Program (BEP) reform effort begun in 1985 and state funds pay for most of the county school system's programs aimed at dropout prevention.

The typical Brunswick County dropout is a white male, 16, who leaves school in the ninth or 10th grade. The most likely reason is either poor attendance or choosing work over school. Of the 69 students who left school last year, 69 were white and 41 were males.

West Brunswick High, the county's largest high school, had the largest number of dropouts, 34; followed by North Brunswick High with 24 and South Brunswick High with 11.

At the middle school level, all 10 students who dropped out were white. Seven of those came from Shallotte Middle, the county's largest elementary school, followed by two from Leland Middle and 1 from South Brunswick Middle. Waccamaw Elementary reported no dropouts in grades seven and eight.

Poor attendance is the most frequent reason given for leaving school, said Milligan. "Attendance is a big problem."

Skipping crosses socioeconomic borders. A boy and his girlfriend may skip and "play house" for a day.

When given the opportunity to make up missed classes and work by going to school for several hours on Saturday, students may never show up.

"They don't want to go to Saturday school," she said. "They may leave home, telling their parents that is where they're going and then never show up."

"They feel like they don't belong at school; they're loners. There is no one at home motivating them. Their parents may not value education and may tell their child they don't need an education to do what they do (for a living). They have low expectations."

Other factors influencing a decision to drop out of school include pregnancy, a need to work or other family problems, or

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choosing to work instead of going to school. "They want something—a car—and the only way is to work," she said. The student may drop out of day school and enroll in extended day. But then the student is tired when he comes to class and in the end may let classes "fall by the wayside".

Helping bring Brunswick County's dropout rate down steadily are a battery of programs aimed at helping keep students in school. These range from behavior modification to school/work preparation courses.

More and more effort is being focused on early intervention—reaching the students most likely to have problems in school at the earliest possible age.

Efforts to foster early success for students include preschool programs, kindergarten summer school, Reading Recovery and Chapter I reading programs, one-on-one tutoring as in the ATTAC (Adult Tutors

Teaching At-Risk Children) at Union Elementary and peer tutoring. Other nurturing programs focus more on building self-esteem, leadership and communication skills. These include the Dolphin Buddy Program at Union Elementary and the Quest advisor/advisee approach used in county middle schools.

At Shallotte Middle School, one staff member, Elaine Wright, is using Tough Talk, a behavior modification program that involves law enforcement officers.

At the high school level, the Job Training Partnership Act and the county's counseling program are frequently used, along with a new program this year, Choices. It focuses on teaching students to accept responsibility for the choices they make, and the consequences of those decisions.

Special education programs have been expanded to better reach students with learning problems or handicaps. New efforts include encouraging area businesses (through the local chambers of commerce) to "adopt" a school, said Milligan.

Remediation programs are available at all 12 county schools to help students with their school work.

With the 1991-92 school year, North Carolina began using a new method of calculating the annual dropout rate, a method required by the federal government and

which results in slightly higher figures. Among other differences, the federal system requires that a student be counted as a dropout each year he or she leaves school.

In contrast, the state method counts all students who drop out of school in grades seven through 12. But it does not count students as drop outs if they leave school, return to school and are in school on the 20th day of the following school year. That means a student can be counted as a dropout only once in his or her school career. This state dropout figure is the one that is used in the North Carolina Report Card issued this month.

By the state dropout count, Brunswick County's dropout rate is 1.82 percent, while using the federal method it is 1.94 percent, which includes five students who were repeat dropouts.

The federal dropout calculations will be used in the U.S. Department of Education's release of state-by-state dropout data scheduled in November.

Using the state calculations, Brunswick County has the lowest dropout rate of county systems in the area and also ranks below the state average of 2.77 percent. Neighboring systems and their scores are as follows: New Hanover, 3.54; Columbus, 3.23; Whiteville City, 4.8; Bladen, 2.66; Pender, 3.58; and Onslow, 2.58.

## OIB Man Nabbed After Second Pro Shop Break-In

### CRIME REPORT

A man who allegedly stole \$3,500 from the pro shop at Brickland Plantation Golf Course last October was arrested early Saturday morning after trying to break into the building a second time, police said Monday.

Charles Alfred Absher, 22, of Ocean Isle Beach has been charged with two counts of felonious breaking and entering and one count of felonious larceny, Brunswick County Sheriff's Detective Tom Hunter said.

According to a crime report filed by Deputy Keithan Horne, he was called to investigate a burglar alarm at the pro shop late Friday night. As he drove down Goose Creek Road, he said he saw a man walking by the side of the road.

"As I passed him, it appeared in my mirror that he was running," the report said. "I turned back and stopped the subject at the entrance to Long Acres subdivision."

Horne's report said the man's

hands were covered with blood and his clothes were bloody and dirty. He said the man appeared "very intoxicated."

After calling Hunter to the scene, Horne said he drove to the pro shop. There he found a broken window, footprints inside the building and blood on the window frame.

"It was good work on the deputy's part," Hunter said. "Instead of driving by (Absher), he stopped and questioned him, which allowed us to make the arrest."

In other crime reports on file at the sheriff's department Monday:

■An estimated \$17,960 worth of furniture and other items were reported stolen from a residence next to the Mariner's Wacche condominiums at Brickland sometime in the past 10 weeks. The break-in was reported Friday by the owner, a re-

tiree from Danville, Ill. Investigating Deputy Robert Long II found an estimated \$600 damage to the home. Among the items discovered missing were two couches, four end tables, two coffee tables, five stuffed chairs, 10 lamps eight sets of sterling silverware, a microwave oven, a sewing machine and a chest of drawers.

■A Honda dirt bike and helmet valued at more than \$2,100 were reported stolen from a shed behind a home on White Sands Drive, Supply, last week. The owner told Deputy Malcolm Long that he discovered the bike missing Friday afternoon.

■Deputy Robert Long investigated a report that a utility trailer had been stolen from Shallotte District Park sometime in the past two weeks. He estimated the value at about \$1,500.

■A grass trimmer and an auger were reported stolen from a shed behind a house on Tar Landing Road, Shall-

lotte, last week. Deputy Richard Long estimated the value of stolen items at \$355.

■Someone apparently fired a shotgun or pellet gun at two boats at Southport Marine Mart on N.C. 133 sometime last week, shattering two windshields. Deputy Cathy Hamilton estimated the damage at about \$200.

■Deputy Randy Robinson reported the recovery of a red and black Kawasaki street motorcycle from an abandoned house on Ginny's Branch way, off Hiale Swamp Road between Shallotte and Ocean Isle Beach Thursday afternoon. The recovered property report said the bike was found under some old blankets in good condition with the ignition broken off and the chain removed. He estimated its value at \$5,000.

## SENIOR FROM WEST AMONG CHOSEN

### Nine Students Selected For All-District Bands

Derrick Weaver, a senior clarinet player from West Brunswick High School, is one of nine Brunswick County high school students selected to participate in the All-Southeastern District High School Band Clinic Jan. 29-31 at Triton High School in Harnett County.



WEAVER

Band Director Craig Morris said Weaver is the first WBHS student in at least six years to make the cut. "We've had two others try out before and one made alternate."

Weaver expects to major in music at Pembroke State University, he said.

Six students from South Brunswick High and two from North Brunswick High also were chosen during the auditions held Jan. 9 in Fayetteville, said Steve Skillman, cultural arts coordinator for the Brunswick County Schools.

The auditions are sponsored by the North Carolina Bandmasters Association, with the Southeastern Dis-

trict one of six across the state. Students are chosen for one of two bands: ninth and 10th grade or 11th and 12th grade.

After two days of rehearsal at the band clinic, students present a public concert on the third day.

"It's a big honor," said Skillman. "The best players in grades 11 and 12 at district audition in March for honors band."

From South Brunswick the students are Kelly Hartze, trombone,

ninth grade; Keith Fullwood, tuba, 12th grade; Naveen Malik, bass clarinet, ninth grade; Libby Porterfield, French horn, ninth grade; Cybile Wisniewski, flute, 12th grade; and Yoshimi Nishida, trumpet, 12th grade.

Representing North Brunswick will be Maggie Dees, a senior who plays bass clarinet, and Rhonda Clemmons, a sophomore oboist who won first chair in the grades 9-10 band.

### Schools' Nurses Mark Their Day

School nurses serve as "more than a Band-Aid and screening person" these days, says Beatrice Flythe, one of four nurses who serve students in Brunswick County's 12 public schools.

That's the message she wants to get across as nurses observe National School Nurse Day Wednesday, Jan. 27.

"School nursing is in a state of change," she said. "We get involved with the total wellbeing of the student through counseling, observing them and reporting problems. Sometimes we help just by being a neutral person for the student to ven-

tilate his problems can make a difference in a student's behavior."

Flythe is one of four public school nurses in the county system who serve three schools each. Her coworkers are Susan Cozzolino, Barbara Vaught and Kate Williamson.

Their roles include health education, counseling, screening for vision and dental problems and for the presence of lice, and making appropriate referrals.

"Every child needs a school nurse," said Flythe. "Go by on Jan. 27 and wish your school nurse a good day."

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