

2001 Press Release Archive

Pickens County Board of Education

March 5, 2001

Re: Pickens County Schools Fully Accredited

Contact: Susan Reeves ph. 706-253-1700

The Pickens County School system has once again found itself in rare company. The Board of Education recently received notification that all of their schools will continue to be fully accredited by both the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and the Georgia Accrediting Commission (GAC). The Pickens County Schools system is one of only 41 out of 180 school systems across Georgia in which all schools are accredited by the rigorous standards of the SACS. Board chairman Melvin Cagle is pleased that all schools also met 100% of the GAC standards which earned the system the distinction of having all schools rated as accredited with quality.

"It's important to us and it's important to our community to know that we are meeting the standards of the two most widely known and highly regarded accrediting agencies in the southeast," said Cagle. " We're proud of our accrediting status because it underscores our commitment to quality schools in the new era of accountability," he added.

Founded in 1895, the renown SACS is one of six regional accrediting agencies in the United States and includes more than 12,000 member public and private universities, colleges, community colleges, elementary, middle, and secondary schools with enrollments totaling almost six million students. Although its standards have evolved over the years to reflect the changes in expectations for schools and public demands for quality education, SACS standards today remain among the most visible and highly recognized educational barometers in the country.

The 97-year-old GAC rates all schools in Georgia according to multiple standards in five areas, i.e. organization, personnel, program of studies, school plant, and finances. GAC's accreditation process is designed to establish and uphold standards, to strengthen the quality of education in each school, and to assure its membership and the general public that the established standards are related to best educational practices.

Pickens County Schools Superintendent Lee Shiver noted that accreditation is important to the school system and the community because it assures a certain degree of accountability to taxpayers. "Accreditation means that our schools have met recognized, established standards and that we have been re-evaluated by professionals who focus on school improvement," said Shiver

"It's certainly an equally important indicator for business and industry leaders who value quality schools and who consider regional accreditation status as an important factor when relocating or expanding," he added.

A fully accredited school system compares favorably with schools in other parts of the country because SACS is a charter member of the International Council of School Accreditation Commissions, which coordinates accreditation activities throughout the world.

School board members and administrators hope that citizens will look for their certificates of accreditation to be displayed prominently in each school with pride. "They represent a lot of hard work and preparation by our teachers and support staff, and they are a recognized acknowledgment of our schools' commitment to continuous improvement," said Shiver. - end-

**Pickens County Board of Education
June 4, 2001**

**Re: Red Cross Awards Local School Administrator
Contact: Stacy Roark ph. 706-253-1700**

Pickens County School administrator Sherry Mullins has been awarded the Red Cross Certificate of Merit for her heroic act of saving the life of another person. This is the highest award given by the American Red Cross to an individual who saves or sustains a life by using skills and knowledge learned in a Red Cross Health and Safety Services course.

Mullins, who was recently named principal of Tate Primary School, received the citation in a special Red Cross recognition program on Wednesday, May 30, 2001, two years to the date when she helped save the life of family friend Tom Muratore.

On May 30, 1999, Mullins, trained in American Red Cross First Aid and CPR, responded to her mother's frantic cries for help. Muratore was next door to Mullins' residence helping prepare for a cookout when he experienced chest pains and collapsed to the floor. When Mullins arrived on the scene, she found that Muratore was not breathing and did not have a pulse. She had her mother call 911 and began CPR.

Mullins' husband assisted her efforts while she administered chest compressions. She was able to sustain Muratore's life with CPR for 10-15 minutes until emergency medical personnel arrived and transported him to the hospital. Although he remained in critical condition for several days, Muratore is now a healthy, vibrant man because of Mullins.

The Red Cross Certificate of Merit honors action that exemplifies the highest degree of concern of one human being for another who is in distress. The certificate bears the signatures of the President of the United States, who is Honorary Chairman of the American Red Cross, and Norman R. Augustine, Chairman of the American Red Cross.

Since its establishment in 1928, over 12,000 Certificates of Merit have been issued to individuals who saved or sustained a life as a direct result of American Red Cross training in its health and safety programs.

**A Resolution Honoring
June 7, 2001**

**Pickens High School Architectural Drafting
USA-VICA State Champion**

Whereas, Pickens High School student Josh Tippens participated in the Architectural Drafting State Skills USA-VICA regional contest on April 26-28, 2001; and

Whereas, Skills USA-VICA contests are designed to promote leadership and related job skills; and Josh Tippens from Pickens High School competed against nine other area schools at the regional level that was held in February in the Architectural Drafting Contest and won first place to compete at the State Skills USA-VICA competition; and,

Whereas, Josh Tippens competed against twelve participants in the Architectural Drafting Contest at the State Skills USA-VICA competition and won first place; and will represent Georgia in the National Skills USA-VICA Conference in Kansas City, Missouri, to be held in June 25-30, 2001; and,

Whereas, Josh Tippens is also enrolled in the Youth Apprenticeship Program and is employed by Tom Eubanks of T-Designs, and his position has provided an opportunity to gain valuable work experience; and,

Whereas, Josh Tippens exhibited superior ability and a competitive spirit representative of our school system and our community;

And, Therefore, be it resolved that the Pickens County Board of Education in a meeting assembled on this date, does hereby recognize and honor Josh Tippens from Pickens High School for his outstanding performance at the Architectural Drafting State Skills USA-VICA Competition on April 26-28, 2001;

Be it further Resolated, that a copy of this resolution be presented to the Pickens County Progress with a request it be given circulation to the general public. Presented to and unanimously approved by the Pickens County Board of Education, June 7, 2001.

**Pickens County Board of Education
June 8, 2001**

**Re: School Board Reschedules July Meeting: Schedules Budget Workshop
Contact: Stacy Roark ph. 706-253-1700**

The Pickens County Board of Education has rescheduled their next regular meeting. The July meeting was originally scheduled for July 5, but has been rescheduled for July 12 at 6:00 p.m. at the Jasper Primary School media center on College Street.

The board will also conduct a budget workshop at 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, June 19. As always, the public is invited to attend.

**Pickens County Board of Education
June 8, 2001**

**Re: School Board Names New Hill City Principal and
Pickens High Girls' Basketball Coach
Contact: Stacy Roark ph. 706-253-1700**

At their monthly board meeting on Thursday, June 7, the Pickens County Board of Education Approved the appointment of Carlton Wilson as principal of Hill City Elementary School and James Brazzell as head coach for the Pickens High School girls' basketball team.

Wilson is currently assistant principal at Jasper Primary School and will assume his duties as principal of Hill City in January. The Hill City school, located on Highway 53 West in Pickens County, is scheduled to open in August of 2002.

School Board Chairman Melvin Cagle said, "Carlton Wilson brings to the principalship the kind of leadership and energy level that makes a difference in the quality of a school. We think he will be a perfect fit for Hill City."

Wilson said he was extremely excited about the opportunity. "I believe we can make Hill City a school that all of us will be proud of," said Wilson.

James Brazzell will be the new coach for the Pickens High School girls' basketball team, replacing veteran coach Roy Cowart who recently announced his retirement. Brazzell is leaving Vernon High School in Vernon, Florida, where he won a state championship and guided his girls' basketball team to an 84-11 record over the last three years.

PHS Principal Steve Sewell said, "We're looking forward to Coach Brazzell joining our staff and continuing the winning tradition of our girls' basketball program. He was hands down the best candidate available to us; we like his track record; and he's excited about coming here."

In other board action, school officials were given the go ahead to notify parents of non-resident students that they would be required to pay tuition in order to continue attending Pickens County Schools, beginning in August. Non-resident students who attend Pickens High School this year will be exempt from the tuition charge, as will non-resident students whose parents are employees of the school system. Other exemptions may also apply to non-resident students depending on their status specified in the policy that was adopted in 1994.

The school board amended the agenda later in the meeting to approve a spending resolution authorizing the expenditure of school funds for the month of July until a tentative budget is adopted. Board members anticipate adopting a tentative budget for FY02 next month following a scheduled budget workshop on June 19, at 5:00 p.m.

The board also tentatively adopted a new policy that would permit only those seniors who had met all the criteria for a high school diploma to participate in commencement ceremonies. The proposed policy would take effect with the Class of 2004, this year's freshman class at PHS.

The board will consider final adoption of the new policy at their next board meeting, which was rescheduled for Thursday, July 12, at 6:00 p.m. at the Jasper Primary School media center on College Street. As always, the public is invited to attend.

Pickens County Board of Education
August 3, 2001

Re: Board of Education Approves Budget; Extends Superintendent's Contract

In their regularly scheduled monthly meeting on August 2, the Pickens County Board of Education approved a budget of \$27,099,586 for the 2001-02 school year, a 6.67% increase over last year's budget. School Superintendent Dr. Lee A. Shiver called the budget fiscally responsible and noted that the board could not consider setting the millage rate until they had received a copy of this year's tax digest which has not been released by the county.

"We are in good shape going into the new school year," said Shiver. "Unless there's some ugly surprise, the board should be in position to again lower the millage rate when the time comes. The extension of the SPLOST and the governor's additional construction allocation to provide classroom space for the state mandated Early Intervention Program in grades K-5 will help us tremendously in light of our growth and infrastructure needs."

The board also unanimously approved a two year extension to Shiver's current contract, securing his services through June 2004. Board Vice-Chairman Jerry Andrews made the motion to extend Shiver's contract and Joan Locke seconded the motion.

"When we brought Dr. Shiver to Pickens County we said we were raising the bar of student achievement," said Andrews. "I think we're well on our way and there's already been a big turnaround. He has brought credibility and accountability to this position."

Board Chairman Melvin Cagle agreed with Andrews. "He (Shiver) hit the ground running and hasn't let up since."

"It's an honor and privilege to serve the board and the citizens of Pickens County," said Shiver. "My family and I love our community and I appreciate the board's confidence in me and their willingness to work as a team to improve our school system."

Shiver was appointed superintendent of schools in July 1999.

Pickens County Board of Education

Press Release

September 7, 2001

Re: Local School Board Members Work to Ensure Educational Quality

Contact: Gail Woodall ph. 706-253-1700

Members of the Pickens County Board of Education were recently recognized for successfully completing board member training activities sponsored by the Georgia School Board Association (GSBA) and the Georgia Department of Education. Receiving certificates of recognition at the September 6, 2001, meeting of the board were members: Chairman Melvin Cagle, Jerry Andrews, David Klein, Joan Locke, and Shirley Whitaker. Georgia was among the first states in the nation to require that local school board members receive training to ensure quality educational leadership. Board members receive training on topics such as: Georgia's Quality Basic Education Act (QBE), budgeting and financing, legal and policy issues, school and community relations and the roles and responsibilities of the school board.

State School Superintendent Linda Schrenko said, "It is important that local school board members are knowledgeable and equipped to handle their assignments. This training will help prepare them to handle finance, curriculum, school improvement, and legal issues which they will address for the local system."

"By participating in training and board development activities, local school board members show their dedication to improving the educational system for the student within their communities," said Gary Ashley, GSBA executive vice-president. "Life-long learning doesn't just apply to our students, it applies to all of us --- especially to those in a leadership role in public education."

Pickens County Schools Superintendent Lee Shiver said, "Our board has really worked hard to provide the leadership to improve our entire system, and their efforts are paying off in a big way. I think we're on the verge of a tremendous school year because of their dedication and political courage."

Board member David Klein said he was glad that the training was available to board members. "All this stuff just isn't easy to get a handle on," said Klein. "As a board member, this was one of the best educational experiences I've had and I liked the fact that they focused on the issues that we have to deal with on a regular basis. It's helped me be a better board member and I think I can say the same for my colleagues on the board."

The Georgia School Boards Association is a non-profit association representing Georgia's locally elected school boards.

Pickens County Board of Education

Press Release

September 10, 2001

Re: School Board Lowers Millage Rate; Schedules Reorganization Workshops

Contact: Gail Woodall ph. 706-253-1700

In their regular monthly meeting on Thursday, September 6, the Pickens County Board of Education amended their previously approved budget for the 2001-02 school year and lowered the millage rate for the second consecutive year, setting the rate at 15.2 mills. The rate is a reduction of .11 mills from last year's millage rate for the school system. The budget was amended to reflect the use of a portion of the school system's overall fund balance to compensate for the reduction in the millage rate. Pickens County Schools Finance Director Amy Burgess said that the school system should be able to make up the

change in the fund balance by the end of the current school year due to changes made in the K-5 instructional program to maximize state funding.

The board also heard a proposal from School Superintendent Dr. Lee Shiver to reconfigure school grade levels next year when the new Hill City Elementary School opens. Citing severe overcrowding at Pickens County Middle School and a steady increase in student enrollment throughout the school system, Shiver proposed that Hill City, Jasper Primary, and Tate Primary schools be designated as neighborhood K-5 elementary schools and that the current Pickens Elementary School campus be used for a second middle school.

The board will conduct at least two public workshops before the next regularly scheduled board meeting to consider the school realignment proposal and discuss the merits of the proposal compared with several other reorganization options under consideration.

The board will hold workshops on Monday, September 17, at 5:00 p.m. and on Monday, September 24, at 6:30 p.m. at the Jasper Primary School media center on D.B. Carroll Street in Jasper. As always, the public is invited to attend.

Pickens County Board of Education

Press Release

October 1, 2001

Re: Tate Primary School Earns \$72,000 Pay for Performance Award from State

Contact: Sherry Mullins ph. 706-253-5010

State Superintendent of Schools Linda Schrenko has announced that Tate Primary School will receive a \$72,000 Pay for Performance Incentive Award. The state's Pay for Performance Program provides a group incentive monetary award to schools that are successful in achieving annual performance objectives related to student academic achievement, parent involvement, educational programming, and resource development. One of 94 schools in Georgia to receive a Pay for Performance award this year, Tate Primary School is the first Pickens County school to receive the prestigious recognition. Principal Sherry Mullins, who served as assistant principal at Tate Primary last year, cited the dedication and hard work of her faculty and staff.

"This school has a long tradition of commitment to children and strong parent involvement," said Mullins. "Our faculty and staff have put in many long hours and have

worked together to meet the stringent requirements of the Pay for Performance Program. They really deserve the credit.”

Janet Owens, Tate Primary School’s 2001 Teacher of the Year, echoed her principal. “It is fortunate that the State of Georgia has developed a program to recognize the outstanding efforts of educators.

“Tate faculty and staff have always maintained a high level of dedication and collaboration, and now we are able to receive monetary recognition for what comes so naturally to each of us --- focusing on the highest level of student achievement.”

In her award letter to the school, Schrenko said, “Please convey my congratulations to all the members of your faculty and staff, as well as to parents, community members and business partners who assisted in the accomplishment of your Pay for Performance goals.

“You and your faculty are to be commended for successfully fulfilling the rigorous requirements of the Pay for Performance program.”

Pickens County Schools Superintendent Lee Shiver said that the school’s accomplishment is a new watermark for the school system. “Tate Primary has demonstrated what all of our schools are capable of. I know first hand of their determination, work ethic, and desire to be the best. Their results speak for themselves and inspire all of us. We are very proud of our students and everyone in the Tate Primary School family and community.”

Veteran teacher Linda Judkins, who served on the school’s Pay for Performance Steering Committee, said, “[Our] school’s achievement of such a prestigious award was the result of parent, community and school effort. It is my hope that parents and community members will continue to be an integral part of Tate’s continued achievement and success.”

School Board Chairman Melvin Cagle hoped that as many members of the school’s faculty and staff as possible would come to the October 4 board meeting to receive the board’s congratulations.

“This is fantastic,” said Cagle. “It says a lot about where we’re headed as a school system. The faculty and staff at Tate Primary have really distinguished themselves. They’re doing what all of our schools need to be doing.”

Because the award is based on the school’s accomplishments during the 2000-01 school year, only those qualified members of the school’s faculty and support staff who were employed at Tate Primary last year will be eligible to receive the state’s award money.

In addition to the parents, students and members of the Tate community, Mullins also recognized the school’s business partners, Crescent Bank, Jasper Family Steakhouse, Roland Tire, Mountainside Pediatrics, school board members, Shiver, and her fellow administrators and colleagues for their support.

“A lot of people helped make this possible,” said Mullins. “The Tate Primary School family appreciates them all.”

Pickens County Board of Education

Press Release

November 12, 2001

Re: School Board Purchases Property

Contact: Amy Burgess ph. 706-253-1700

In a called meeting last Friday, November 9, the Pickens County Board of Education approved the purchase of 39.2 acres from Raymond Edwards for the construction of a new bus garage, bus parking facility and a new school. The property, located along Harmony School Road between Refuge Road and highway 515, was purchased for \$700,000.

The transaction allows the board to purchase approximately seven acres for the bus garage and parking. The board secured a five-month option to purchase the remaining acreage pending the outcome of state mandated environmental and site suitability testing.

Pickens County Schools Director of Finance Amy Burgess said that the purchase would be financed using current budgeted funds for property acquisition and SPLOST (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax) revenues.

“We are truly fortunate to be able to secure property in this part of our county for this price,” said Burgess, “especially given the rising prices for property in Pickens County. Obviously, we wouldn’t have been able to do this without the renewal of our SPLOST.”

The board’s action comes at a time when student enrollment is increasing at a modest, but steady rate. Over the last six years, the net increase has averaged 100 students per year. This year, however, the school system added 170 more students at the beginning of the school year.

Pickens County Schools Superintendent Lee Shiver said that the board's action means that they won't have to worry about property prices or availability when it's time to build the next school.

"We know we'll need another one [school]," said Shiver, "and I would guess it would be within the next 3-5 years given our current growth rate. This is part of the board's strategic planning efforts and it's keeping with our practice of looking down the road 3, 5, and 10 years from now in order to make responsible decisions for our students and the future of our school system."

Pickens County Board of Education

December 3, 2001

Re: School Board Considers Proposed Attendance Zones; Schedules Workshops

Contact: Gail Woodall ph. 706-253-1700

In their late afternoon workshop last Thursday (Nov. 29), the Pickens County Board of Education received county maps depicting the proposed new attendance zones for all students in grades K-8 that would take effect at the beginning of the 2002-03 school year if approved. The proposed zones are intended to help manage growth in student enrollment, promote more efficient transportation of students, and reduce overcrowding at Jasper Primary School and Pickens County Middle School.

When the new Hill City Elementary School opens next fall, it will be one of three K-5 neighborhood elementary schools whose enrollments will be defined by attendance zones which are primarily based on where students live in relation to the closest school. In addition to the three elementary schools, attendance zones will also be established for Pickens County Middle School and a second middle school on the campus of what is now Pickens Elementary School, which was formerly Pickens High School.

Board Chairman Melvin Cagle said that the proposed zones would require a lot of study before the board would give final approval. "These zones are not something we thought we would have to do anytime soon," said Cagle, "but the reality of our increased student enrollments and the middle school situation made them part of our growing pains."

"We'll get the maps with the zones published in the Progress for everybody to see and our superintendent is going to put together a letter to all of our parents explaining what

we're doing and why," said Cagle. "We really want to hear from parents and the community about these attendance zones."

The board has scheduled at least three more workshops to discuss the proposed attendance zones and hear from the public before considering approval at their January board meeting. The next workshop is Thursday, December 6, at 5:30 p.m. just prior to their regularly scheduled board meeting at the Jasper Primary School media center on D.B. Carroll Street in Jasper.

A third workshop is scheduled a week later, Thursday, December 13, at 5:30 p.m., and a fourth workshop is scheduled for Thursday, January 3, 2002, at 5:30 p.m. All interested and concerned citizens are invited to attend any or all of these workshops.

"We really want to hear from people about this," said Cagle. "If people can't get to any of the workshops, I hope they will contact one or more board members or the superintendent with their concerns before our meeting in January."

Cagle said that he expected to hear from parents and citizens who attended the workshops as well. "I know Dr. Shiver and his staff have put a lot of work into this proposal, but it's important that we get the word out to as many people as possible and that we hear from everyone who has a concern," said Cagle.

Copies of the maps depicting the proposed attendance zones will be available at all of the workshops, as well as at each school and the board office on Stegall Drive. Larger county maps depicting each of the attendance zones with identified roads and highways will also be displayed at each school and in the board office.

Pickens County Board of Education

December 7, 2001

Re: School Board Moves Attendance Zone Workshop to PHS

Contact: Gail Woodall ph. 706-253-1700

In an effort to hear from as many concerned parents and citizens as possible, the Pickens County Board of Education has moved their next workshop to the Pickens High School auditorium. The board's third workshop to consider the proposed school attendance zones will be held Thursday, December 13, at 5:30 p.m.

Although the board intends to discuss the proposed zones at the workshop, the primary purpose of the meeting is to gather public input on the issue. There will be no other business conducted at the meeting in order to devote as much time as needed to hear from concerned parents and citizens.

The board will not take any official action at the workshop and is not expected to give final approval to the attendance zones until sometime in January. A fourth workshop is scheduled for January 3, 2002, at 5:30 p.m. prior to the regularly scheduled board meeting at the Jasper Primary School media center on D.B. Carroll Street in Jasper. As always, the public is invited to attend.

December 6, 2001

Dear Parents/Guardians of Our Students:

As you probably are aware, our school system is in the process of establishing new attendance zones for our elementary and middle schools next year. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information about how these zones were identified and determined.

Frankly, we did not anticipate having to do this for some time, but our increasing student enrollments and the 2000 Georgia education reform legislation mandating even smaller classes have required our immediate attention. Attendance zones are a necessary part of planning for a school system with a modest, but steady growth rate.

Their fundamental purpose is to help balance student enrollments in schools without exceeding building capacity or compromising the academic integrity of the individual school. Opening a new school is always exciting for a community, but the new Hill City Elementary School will provide us with an ideal opportunity to reduce overcrowding, maximize the efficiency of our existing school buildings, and accommodate future growth.

Other than students who will attend Pickens High School next year, most students in grades K-8 will be affected by these changes. By providing you with as much information as we can at this time, we hope to minimize confusion and problems associated with transportation and the assignment of students to schools next fall.

The following Q&A document is designed to address most of the issues, concerns, and questions that have been brought to our attention to date regarding the new attendance zones. Maps depicting the proposed zones are on display at each of our schools and in the central office on Stegall Drive.

For more information, please do not hesitate to contact us by phone, letter, email, or just drop by. You are also encouraged to attend one of the two remaining workshops that the board has scheduled (Dec. 13 and Jan. 3 at 5:30 p.m.) to further discuss the proposed zones and to hear from concerned parents and citizens.

Sincerely,

Lee A. Shiver
c. Board of Education

Pickens County Schools

Proposed Attendance Zones for 2002-03

Questions and Answers

1. Q.: Why are attendance zones necessary?

A.: As more students move into Pickens County, more building space is needed to provide classrooms. The Governor's A+ Education Reform Act 2000 also mandated smaller class sizes. Attendance zones are necessary to avoid or minimize overcrowding in schools where the number of students who wish to attend exceeds the physical capacity of the school to accommodate them.

2. Q.: How were the proposed attendance zones developed?

A.: We use a computer program called VersaTran which is designed to help us provide the most efficient bus routes for transporting students to all of our schools. The program requires us to provide the names, addresses, and grade levels of all of our students. Once we enter the enrollment capacity of each of our schools, the program enables us to draw lines on a map of Pickens County that closely (but not exactly) define zone boundaries based on the number of students in those grades who live in the area of each school.

3. Q.: So if we live closer to one school why are we assigned to one farther from where we live?

A.: One reason is because limited road access in some parts of the county requires further travel than "as the crow flies." Another reason is that the distance between a school and the county lines is not the same in all directions. Usually, the larger a defined area is from the school, the greater the number of students who live there. Once the number of students approaches the maximum capacity of Tate Elementary for example, especially east of the school (to the county lines), the attendance zone line has to be that much closer on the west side.

Because we will have three neighborhood K-5 schools next year, the additional upper grade levels (4-5) at Tate Elementary and Jasper Elementary will need to be in some of the classrooms that currently contain K-3 students. This means that the attendance zones must be drawn to accommodate all students projected to be enrolled in grades K-5 in that school instead of just K-3. Consequently, some of the students who are attending Tate Primary or Jasper Primary this year will be assigned to a different elementary (K-5) school next year because these schools will not be able to physically accommodate all of the current students in K-3 plus next year's students in grades 4-5.

4. Q.: Why can't my child continue to attend the same school under a

“grandfather” rule and the system require all new students to attend the school in the zone in which they live?

A.: The physical capacity of our school buildings would not accommodate all of the students who would be able to do this under a “grandfather” rule.

We are projecting a fall enrollment of 650-700 students at Hill City Elementary next fall and all of these students (with the exception of students new to our system) are currently attending different schools this year. We are also trying to effectively manage an average increase of 100 students per year (since 1995) so that we can avoid or minimize overcrowded schools and classrooms, which can jeopardize student safety and academic achievement.

5. Q.: What other factors besides enrollment numbers and the location of schools and students were considered in the development of the attendance zones?

A.: We also considered the percentage of students receiving free/reduced meals in each proposed zone in an effort to balance the socioeconomic levels of each school’s student population. The maximum projected difference in these percentages among the schools is 5%.

6. Q.: Why is this important?

A.: In general, students with greater economic advantages tend to have higher academic achievement rates. It’s important, therefore, that we minimize large discrepancies in the average socioeconomic level of students among the schools. The proposed attendance zones were developed with consideration given to the projected percentage of students who will attend each school and receive free/reduced meals. Fortunately, higher household income levels are relatively evenly distributed across the entire county.

7. Q.: Why does this decision have to be made at this time?

A.: The school/grade level reconfiguration approved by the board in October requires substantial planning for and implementation of a system-wide transition that will affect all but one of our schools. In addition to opening, staffing, supplying, and equipping a new school (Hill City Elementary), we must also address personnel, staffing, curriculum, equipment and instructional program issues associated with reconfiguring the two middle schools and both Jasper Primary (Elementary) and Tate Primary (Elementary).

Until the board gives formal approval of the proposed attendance zones, we can not assign teaching/staffing units to our schools, nor can we identify and notify the teachers and staff who will be assigned to each school.

8. Q.: In the past the school system has permitted parents who transport their children themselves the opportunity to attend either Tate or Jasper Primary. Why can’t we continue to do that?

A.: With only two schools containing the same grade levels, there were not a lot of parents this year who elected to transport their children themselves away from the school in their residential area. Of those who did, the numbers were relatively balanced between Tate and Jasper.

Next year, we'll have three K-5 neighborhood schools and two middle schools. Because of the projected capacity of our schools and our growth rate, we would be unable to balance enrollments and minimize overcrowding if parents were allowed to transport their children to the school of their choice outside of their attendance zone.

This is why we tried to develop attendance zones that encompass as much of the residential area around each school as practically as possible without compromising the schools' capacities. The 150 student increase the first month of the school year was the largest increase since 1996-97 and we are projecting a record fall enrollment of over 4000 students next year.

As we grow, we will have to adjust our attendance zones to accommodate residential development in different parts of the county. They are a necessary part of our "growing pains," but in order for the zones to function effectively, we can no longer permit parents to transport their children to the school of their choice.

9. Q.: What about the school choice provision in the education reform legislation enacted in 2000? Doesn't that allow me to send my child to the school of my choice?

A.: The new law provides for parental choice for certain public schools under certain conditions. The law now allows parents who reside in one school district (not attendance zone), but live closer to a school in another school district, to request that the child attend the closer school outside their district. Also, if a child is in a school with portable classrooms, and space is available in another school, the parents may request that their child attend the school with available space and non-portable/permanent classrooms.

We do not anticipate having any classes in any portable buildings on any of our campuses next year.

10. Q.: When will the board make their final decision about the proposed attendance zones?

A.: The board will probably consider final approval in their January 3 regularly scheduled board meeting or at a called board meeting later that month.

December 19, 2001

**Re: Jasper Primary School's Joan Rutledge is
2002 Pickens County Teacher of the Year**

If the Pickens County Schools 2002 Teacher of the Year could be put in charge of our daily lives, perhaps happiness and success would be as easy to come by as they are for the kindergarten students in her class at Jasper Primary School. "I still try to keep kindergarten a haven for young children," said Joan Rutledge. "I want my classroom to be a place that keeps pressure, stress, and failure at bay."

Rutledge was named Teacher of the Year at the annual awards banquet sponsored by Regions Bank honoring Teacher of the Year nominees from each of the Pickens County Schools on December 3 at the Chamber of Commerce. She will represent the school system in the state competition.

Guest speaker Ben Arp reminded everyone in attendance of the enduring importance of our very first teachers, a point not lost on Rutledge. "I attribute my success in teaching to my family, especially my parents," she said.

"They supported my love of teaching with encouragement and later with financial help in college. As a child, my parents bought [me] a small chalkboard that would fit on the back of my bedroom door. I used that chalkboard to teach hundreds of lessons to my sister, friends, stuffed animals/dolls, and anyone else I could get to listen. And, I still use the chalkboard in my kindergarten classroom today!"

Also honored at the banquet were Gloria Wentworth, Teacher of the Year from Pickens High School, Karen Godfrey from Pickens Elementary School, Tricia Stowers from Pickens County Middle School, and Janet Owens from Tate Primary School. Each school's Teacher of the Year also received \$250 from the Pickens County Board of Education.

Board Chairman Melvin Cagle, who teaches high school in Cherokee County, presented Rutledge with an additional check for \$1000 in recognition of her achievement. "Our board holds a special place in our hearts for the daily commitment and sacrifice that our teachers make for our students. We think it's important to let them know that it's the quality of their work that determines the success of our students and the effectiveness of our school system," said Cagle.

"Joan Rutledge is representative of our very best teachers," said Cagle. "Her reputation as an excellent teacher is well known and hard earned."

Jasper Primary School Principal Peggy Andrews said, "We are thrilled. Joan is one of those teachers that everyone would like for their child to experience for at least one year. Her presence in kindergarten helps all of her students become as successful as they can be as they move through the upper grades. She is a treasure."

Jim Fowler, Executive Vice-President of Regions Bank, presented Rutledge with a \$250 cash award in recognition of her selection as Teacher of the Year. "Regions Bank is proud to honor our school system's Teacher of the Year, and we salute all of the outstanding teachers represented by Joan who do so much for our children every day."

Rutledge was chosen on the strength of her school's nomination package and performance in an interview conducted by a selection committee of citizens from the community. Jay Wright, co-owner and co-manager of Penpoint Newsletters, chaired the committee. "All of the candidates were strong and impressive," said Wright, "but Mrs. Rutledge was our choice for all the right reasons. She is truly outstanding."

Also serving on the selection committee were Michael Horton, Christy Pool, Lorrie Shaw, and Susan White.

Rutledge acknowledged others who influenced her decision to become a teacher including those who taught her as a public school student and her instructors at Berry College. "I feel God had his hand in the direction my life was to take," she said.

Rutledge received her Bachelor of Science degree in Home Economics Education from Berry College in 1985 and her Master's degree in Early Childhood Education from Berry in 1987. She began teaching at Jasper Primary School in 1986.

She and her husband Bradley Rutledge have two children and are members of First Baptist Church in Jasper.
