

BOE talks EOC Test results and more in work session

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
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First semester End of Course Test results are in, and halfway through the 2017-2018 school year, Towns County High School is performing above average on the whole.

Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong reported the latest results to the Towns County Board of Education during the board's Jan. 2 work session.

"The high school, as you know, takes some of their End of Course Testing in the winter and some of their End of Course Testing in the spring," said Dr. Berrong. "We have our results from the winter."

Of course, overall EOC results are subject to change once spring tests are taken and scored, then averaged in with the EOC results from winter.

In the disciplines of English Language Arts, current year students who took first semester EOC Tests performed above last year's school averages in both American literature and ninth-grade literature.

Winter 2017 EOC scores for biology also show improvement over 2016-2017 aggregate scores, and results for physical science are nearly the same as the most recent overall scores in that area.

However, U.S. History EOC results are not tracking well with scores from last year, according to Dr. Berrong.

The superintendent expects spring scores to be higher than winter scores due to a spring Honors class in the subject, but he said it is unlikely that the school will exceed last year's percentages in U.S. History.

"(The state) did change the curriculum this year and how that was tested, so we think that might be what has affected us," said Dr. Berrong, adding that the school would adjust if that turns out to be the case.

"Economics, which is what we focused on and made some changes last year, for Proficient & Above ... right now, we're at 75 percent," said Dr. Berrong. "Last year, we ended the year at 40 percent."

"For Developing & Above, we're at 95.45 percent. Last year, we were at 69 percent, which was 12th out of 14 in Pioneer RESA. Right now, Econ should come in No. 1. The changes we made for that subject obviously worked."

Continued Dr. Berrong: "Just kind of wanted to give you an update where we are so far on the test scores. Once again, these numbers, depending on what happens (this) semester, if every kid passes, obviously everything goes up. If we don't do as well, they may go down."

"So, these numbers don't really mean anything, but just to kind of give you an idea of where we're sitting at right now. Just wanted to share



Towns County Board of Education, L-R: Laura Banister, Stan Chastain, Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong, Robert Williams, Dr. Kilee Smith and Jerry Taylor. Photo/Shawn Jarrard



Stan Chastain is the new chairman of the Towns County Board of Education. He took over from fellow board member Robert Williams to start 2018. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

those with you."

Also in the Jan. 2 work session, the board discussed the updated 2017 System Improvement Goal document approved by the board a couple of months ago.

Board Member Dr. Kilee Smith expressed her desire for a clearer picture of accountability in the classroom moving forward related to the System Improvement Goal, such as making sure educators are maximizing learning time for students, i.e. teaching bell to bell during classes.

Schools Finance Director Myra Underwood re-

viewed some key system financials with the board: the system is currently running under budget; \$2.6 million in property taxes have come in already, with a majority of collections expected in by March; E-LOST collections are going strong; and SPLIT revenues are greater than budgeted.

Dr. Berrong touched briefly on the U.S. Department of Transportation's addition of four opioids to its drug testing panel for the quarterly random drug and alcohol testing of school bus drivers, effective Jan. 1.

Those drugs include the

following four semi-synthetic opioids: hydrocodone, oxycodone, hydromorphone, and oxycodone.

"Some common names for these semi-synthetic opioids include OxyContin, Percodan, Percocet, Vicodin, Lortab, Norco, Dilaudid, Exalgo," according to USDOT literature.

The Towns County Board of Education holds regular meetings every second Monday of the month at 7 p.m. in the Anne Oliver Mitchell Auditorium on campus, with the next meeting occurring on Jan. 8.

Annual Speech Showcase to continue educating students

By Lily Avery
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Teaming up with the Towns County 4-H program, the Mountain Movers and Shakers have revamped their annual Speech Showcase, and members got a preview in their weekly meeting on Friday, Jan. 5.

Serving as the guest speaker for the showcase preview, Towns County High School student Vanessa Floyd shared her educational speech on pecans, peanuts and all the wonderful benefits these nuts have to offer.

Floyd was followed by TCHS student Summer Rahn, who treated the crowd to a beautiful rendition of the national anthem.

"We have one big project as a group each year," said Gene Moss, MMS Speech Showcase Chairman. "Our speech showcase is that project. We're kicking it off a little earlier this year, and we're doing things just a little bit different."

"We're partnering with our county 4-H program to put this on, because we feel like it will add to the educational component of the showcase, which is going to be more heavily featured this year than how we've done it before."

In years past, the speech showcase has focused on the contest itself, placing emphasis on training and competition, with the intent of winning a cash prize.

While that has worked fine for both the organization and the students previously, Moss and the group decided it would be more beneficial to the students overall if the program shifted focus, allowing

students to become more involved in the learning process of the program.

Now, the training program will not simply be a prerequisite for the contest, but will serve as a way for students to learn public speaking etiquette, speech preparation, and gain confidence standing in front of peers and large groups.

While the contest will still take place at the end of the nearly month-long training, it is not a requirement for students, meaning that the program can still help young people who simply want to learn how to speak in public.

"Some of the kids are interested in competing, and some of them aren't," said Moss. "If they aren't, that's okay. If we can just get them to stand up and get rid of that first initial fear of being in front of a group of people, then what we're doing is worth it."

"If we can help these kids overcome their fears of public speaking, then we've accomplished a lot with what we're doing. That's what this program is all about, helping these kids. It's important that we remember that and keep that as our primary focus through all of this."

"We're here for them, to help them. Public speaking can be scary and stressful, and we want to give these kids the tools to help with that. I really believe that. I've been in this five years, and I'm committed to it because I've seen the difference it can make in a kid's life. That right there makes it all worth it."

During the Jan. 5 meeting, Moss and Towns County 4-H Coordinator Andrew Smith passed out pamphlets and flyers to the members to

be shared throughout the community, highlighting the benefits of the speech program and providing information as to how to get involved.

These pamphlets will also be provided to teachers at Towns County Schools and Eastgate Life Academy.

Training sessions for the speech development and showcase will begin on Thursday, Jan. 25, and will last until Thursday, Feb. 22. Each session will be held at the New Senior Center at 6:30 p.m.

The showcase will be held at the Towns County Recreation and Civic Center on Thursday, March 1.

Prizes for the contest will be \$500 for First Place, \$400 for Second Place, \$300 for Third Place and \$200 for Fourth Place, with a \$100 cash prize for each winner in the sixth, seventh and eighth grades.

Students from the sixth grade through the 12th grade are eligible to participate,



Towns County High School students Brooke Barrett, Kendall Floyd, Kyra Tallent and Lydia Moss at the Mountain Movers and Shakers' weekly meeting on Friday, Jan. 5.

including those who attend Towns County Schools, Eastgate Life Academy and Towns County's homeschooled students.



Gene Moss speaking on the annual Mountain Movers and Shakers speech contest on Jan. 5.

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pornography trade," per the release.

"The ICAC Program, created by the U.S. Department of Justice, was developed in response to the increasing number of children and teenagers using the internet, the proliferation of child pornography, and the heightened online activity by predators searching for unsupervised contact with underage victims," continued the release.

"Anyone with information about this case or any other cases of child exploitation is asked to contact the Georgia Bureau of Investigation Child Exploitation Unit at (404) 270-8870."

The Oct. 12 arrest and subsequent sexual exploitation of children charges by the Colquitt County Sheriff's Office and GBI resulted from information gathered in the course of Wrenn's Union County arrest, and Union County Sheriff's Lt. Daren Osborn believes that Wrenn could have child victims in the area.

Wrenn was arrested in Union County on Oct. 4, 2017, and Lt. Osborn learned during

his investigation that Wrenn had been traveling through Union and Towns counties in the commission of his crimes.

"Back on Oct. 4, at approximately 4:46 a.m., Deputy Alan Patton and Sgt. Brandon Hogsed made a traffic stop on Georgia 515 East, a Nissan, failure to maintain lane," said Lt. Osborn. "Once they approached the car, Deputy Patton detected a strong odor of marijuana."

"The guy admitted he had marijuana in the vehicle. In the console between the seats, they found a mason jar filled with several buds of marijuana."

A further search of the vehicle turned up even more marijuana - several pounds of it, per Lt. Osborn.

"They found a trash bag in the trunk that was full of marijuana," Lt. Osborn said. "The weight on it was right at three pounds, by what we weighed."

Other evidence discovered in an inventory of Wrenn's vehicle connected him to Colquitt County and to Clay County, North Carolina, and Lt. Osborn reached out to investigators of both

counties.

"Clay County, North Carolina, investigators were very familiar with Wrenn" said Lt. Osborn. "They had arrested him several years ago for a grow house, distribution of marijuana over there."

Lt. Osborn relayed that information and evidence from Wrenn's vehicle to Colquitt County investigators, which led investigators to discover a marijuana growing operation consisting of hundreds of plants in Moultrie.

Subsequent to finding the grow house in Moultrie, investigators discovered many thousands of child porn images on Wrenn's computer, per Lt. Osborn.

"The GBI is wanting this put out everywhere in case there's any other victims involved," said Lt. Osborn. "He's been in Union County, he's been in Towns County, he's been in Clay County."

Continued Osborn: "Some people think marijuana's an okay thing. No, it's not an okay thing. It's against the law just like anything else. Look what we turned up with this."

Lt. Osborn said he would like to thank investigators with the Colquitt County Sheriff's Office and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation for their

assistance and hard work in bringing Wrenn's crimes to light.