

News Release
January 20, 2011
Giles County Public Schools
School Board Meeting

***Pledge of Allegiance**

The School Board Chairman led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

***Organizational Meeting - 2011**

- JB Buckland was appointed as School Board Chairman for 2011.
- Ronald Whitehead was appointed Vice-Chairman for 2011.
- The Board set the third Thursday of each month at 4:00 p.m. as the Board meeting day for 2011 and holding the first Thursday of the month if needed.
- Amanda Tickle was appointed School Board Clerk for 2011.
- Barbara Perkins and Dr. Terry Arbogast, II were appointed Deputy Clerks for 2011.

***Public Comments - General**

GEA President, Gloria Hurt, spoke on behalf of the Giles Education Association. She stated that "Once again we will be fighting hard for education during this session of the General Assembly. On Monday, three of our members will travel to Richmond to attend Lobby Day. It is time to tell the members of the General Assembly K-12 education has many needs, the least of which are merit pay and vouchers. These two ideas simply don't mesh with our current educational needs. Another huge battle we face is House Bill 1416, *the 65% solution bill*. This bill will put unnecessary pressure on local school divisions to spend 65% of future funding on instruction. This misguided bill will have a negative impact on the programs that are not included in the United States Department of Education's definition of instruction. The proposed cuts would be to guidance counselors, librarians, student transportation, principals and assistant principals, nurses, food services, facilities maintenance (heating and cooling), testing to comply with SOLs and No Child Left Behind, curriculum development, physical therapists and Occupational therapists, and other services necessary for Special Education. Budget cuts have reduced the services our students already receive and this bill will eliminate most of them! For several years funding for education has been reduced at the state level. Now, despite revenues in Virginia which are on the increase, the funding of public education continues at a steady decline. The Governor had an additional 509 million dollars to work with and not one penny of this will go into public education. The cost of public education has been shifted to localities which have resulted in frozen salaries and services declining to a critical stage. If we want to attract top-notch candidates to our school systems we must be competitive with other localities. Our kids simply cannot afford to continue losing educational opportunities at this current level. GEA will partner with VEA requesting that the state fund a 3 % raise for all employees. We also believe the annual contribution to our retirement plan should not be shouldered by us, causing us to incur further setbacks in salary which cannot be afforded by staff. Contrary to the belief of our delegates—Virginia teachers are not weathering this storm better than many. If action is not taken now we don't want to be the ones to blame for that. Our children and teachers deserve better and it is time to give it to them."

Giles County citizen, Joe McClung, spoke regarding the adoption of history textbooks. Several years ago he was up at the board office complaining about some of the history material. He saw in the paper that we were adopting new history textbooks. Out of the two history books, one is more current than the other. The fourth grade textbook appears to have controversy about black history and the civil war. He would like to see the school board adopt a more current history textbook. He stated that the School Board better be real concerned about what is being taught to our school children.

Mr. Elwood Lambert spoke in opposition of taking down the Ten Commandments. He wants to know why they were taken down. He is here not to represent himself, but to represent the young children that are going to be involved in this when it is taken away. The School Board has the responsibility to protect these children and have a moral obligation for what is right. We live under a nation of God. If you want to take a vote right now, he feels like we would find out what the majority is. Please do not let our children be deprived of a god given right.

Mrs. Barbara Scheid read a letter from students at Giles High School. She first thanked the School Board for their service to the county. The students were involved in sports and could not be here. "We could not be here as we have practices and auditions to participate in, but please let Mrs. Scheid read our statement. Taking down the Ten Commandments is like taking away the freedom of religion for all of us, not just students, not just the parents of these students, but future students. People that don't believe in God do not have to participate in religious activities at our schools anymore because these have already been taken away. The Ten Commandments is a historical document that is held as a holy document as well to Christians, but first it is a historical document. By hanging the Ten Commandments in our schools, we are showing the history of our nation and what it was founded on, God. No one is forced to read this document. Please reconsider taking the Ten Commandments down and placing them back where they belong."

Mrs. Becky Weiss spoke in opposition of taking down the Ten Commandments. First of all, she wants to thank the School Board for all you have stood for and she has been very proud to be a part of Giles County Public Schools. "I am getting concerned. We all know that America was founded on biblical beliefs. For our pledge of allegiance that we just did, I pledge allegiance to the flag, of the United States of America, our country, for which stands, one nation, under God (not George Washington, not Abraham Lincoln, not Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and not Barack Obama). Our forefathers came to America and fought for others for their Christian beliefs (our Christian beliefs). They each knew the bible and understood for what it stood for. They had a personal relationship with the creator of the universe and honored him by establishing our country on the beliefs and words written in the bible. Moses had that same belief and was instructed by that same god to give the Ten Commandments to the world. The bible, a collection of written historical documents, compiled by King James, that we all might have the opportunity to hear and know and understand the word of god given to the people for that time. The Ten Commandments are not new. They have been around for more than 2500 years. I understand that we are allowed to have historical documents in our schools. Well, that's just about as historical as you can get. Why is it that one person can decide they want the ten commandments removed and yet hundreds of thousands or millions can't decide that they want them in place? It doesn't make sense when we use a voting system to put our leaders in place. Each one of you has been voted in your positions. Our state officials have been voted into their positions. Our nation's leaders have been voted into their positions. So, that same position, we can't take so that we can decide that we get to keep our beliefs. One person thinks that we need to take them down. Well, I think we need to keep them up, so where's my rights?"

Pastor Creger spoke in opposition of taking down the Ten Commandments. Thank you for allowing him to speak today. He is a pastor of a church. "He would like to remind you that in the past, Christians have not stood up, they allowed Madelyn O'Hara to take prayer out of schools. They didn't stand up when Rowe v. Wade was on the books, but nobody said anything about the lady who got the right to have the abortion did not abort her baby and that child grew up to full age. Please put the Ten Commandments back up in our schools. George Washington said that morality of our country was based wholly upon the Ten Commandments. It was never our forefather's idea for the Ten Commandments and for God to be taken out of the system. The separation of church and state was to keep the state out of the church, not to keep the church out of the state."

Mr. Eric Gentry spoke in opposition of taking down the Ten Commandments. "I am going to speak to you as two different people today. I am going to speak to you as Eric Gentry, a father of an eleven year old, a graduate of Narrows High, a lifelong resident of Giles County that grew up with prayer still in schools, with events as they opened up, still had paddling, which I still think should be done. We turned out all right. People talk to me and say where are you going? I say I'm going back to God's country. They say where's that? I say Giles County. I say that in a joking manner, but I truly believe that we lived in a blessed country and blessed county and we should honor that to God himself by not disrespecting and letting somebody (one person) dictate how we feel about things. Now let me speak to you as Eric Gentry, as a Chairman of the Board of Supervisors of Giles County. I talked to all of my board members last night and today. Don't remove them. We are behind you. We would rather fight the ACLU or whoever would come up than have one anonymous coward who would not even sign the letter come in and tell us how to run our schools. I don't know how it's going to turn out and don't know if it's going to go that far, but you know you have our support as county people and citizens."

Reverend Shahn Wilburn spoke in opposition of taking down the Ten Commandments. "Thank you for letting me speak today. I sort of feel a little responsible for putting you through this. We brought the Ten Commandments to the schools. In the late 90's, there was a series of school shootings across our country. It started in Bethel, Alaska. The shooter was 16 years of age. He killed a principal and one student. Two others were wounded. We've heard about Pearl, Mississippi. The shooter was 16 years of age, killed two students, 7 others were wounded.... West Paducah, Kentucky....The shooter was 14 years of age, killed 3 students, 5 others were wounded while they were in a prayer circle. Jonesboro, Arkansas, the shooters were 13 and 11. They were middle school students. Four kids were killed, one teacher was killed, and 10 others were wounded. Edinboro, Pennsylvania, the shooter was 14, one teacher was killed, and two students were wounded. Springfield, Oregon, the shooter was 15 years of age, two students were killed, and 22 were wounded in a cafeteria in Thurston High School. In Richmond, Virginia, the shooter was 14 years of age, killed one teacher; the guidance counselor was wounded in the hallway. In Littleton, Colorado, the shooters were 17 and 18 years of age. Fourteen students and one teacher were killed, including themselves and 24 others were wounded. It was from Littleton, Colorado, on April 20, 1999, that Darrell Scott lost his daughter, Rachel Joy. He came to Riverview Baptist Church to speak. The School Board, and many of you were perhaps present at that meeting. The next morning we met together for breakfast and he shared with you from the heart of a father who had lost their child in a horrific situation. I went to Dr. McCracken after that and I said Dr. McCracken, we would like to, with no fan fair, we would like to post the Ten Commandments and some other historical documents in our school as a reminder of where we are. Dr. McCracken said Pastor Shahn, I have a document here. I spoke to Dr. McCracken yesterday to get him to remind me of the name of the documents. It was the guidelines from the Virginia Department of Education that the Attorney General on June 22, 1995 signed in and he looked at that document from the direction from the Virginia Department of Education and he said we can do that. We just wanted to do that anonymously and had a gentleman in my church that framed up the preamble of the constitution, framed up the Ten Commandments. We let the schools place them wherever they wanted to. We had nothing to do with it after that. We just gave them. People said where did they put them? I said I don't know where they put them. I saw one in Giles, but I don't know where they put them. It was up to them. When we think about where we are and as I asked Dr. McCracken to try to recall that conversation. We posted them sometime in late 1999 and I think that as they have been there, they have not been an offense to anyone that I know of. I spoke yesterday with Mr. Charles Pyle, Director of Communications for the Virginia Department of Education. He sent me those guidelines and as I begin to look at those guidelines, some of those things that were there and I just made a couple of notes. I thought it was interesting in the statement from the guidelines. Our United States Supreme Court has however aptly recognized that public education may not be complete without the study of our religious heritage. I thought that was pretty good. It went on to say and perhaps the reason why we're here is because I wasn't aware of all these guidelines. He said the public schools may offer courses in comparative religion, may study history of various religions and their relationship to civilization. Religious music may be included in music classes, religious art may be included in art classes, and other religious text may be studied in literature classes. School and classroom libraries may include books with religious themes. Schools may offer courses specifically studying the bible or other religious text as literature. The material must be balanced without an attempt to indoctrinate religious belief or non-belief and he gave us a broad spectrum there and I appreciate Mr. Pyle passing that on to me. I do know that the Ten Commandments and the bible can be studied for bona fide purposes and then I try to think if I was sitting where you were sitting. I would just like to have a way to do this and have a way out. The ACLU got a US district court judge, Joseph McKinney, to grant an injunction against the display of the Ten Commandments in Grayson County, Kentucky. That had been under appeal for several years and the county appealed the decision in April 2009. The ruling was issued January 2010 by the 6th circuit court and they agreed that the county had found that the display did not have the effect of endorsing religion nor was there any sufficient evidence to prove that the county displayed for a predominantly religious purpose. So the 6th circuit upheld the fact that it was okay to display the Ten Commandments just as a naked document if you would without any other religious documents. Now the research and Christian Law Association is in the process of sending you a legal opinion. And in that legal opinion, they are going to assure you that the posting of the Ten Commandments with other historical documents is something that they look favorably upon. Their suggestion in fairness was that perhaps you needed more documents other than just one or two. A policy that you could adopt restoring the Ten Commandments would be to put the constitution, the preamble, the Virginia motto, whatever, along with that and you will find court rulings very favorable in that light. I think you will find much support as you go along. When I looked at the Freedom from Religion Foundation, that I understand wrote the letter and raised the complaint from the anonymous person, it struck me that they say on their website that they are a national organization of free thinkers, atheists, agnostics, and skeptics. Their membership is 15,500 people according

to their website and they are in Madison, Wisconsin. If that small of a group in Madison, Wisconsin that couldn't find Giles County on a map if their life depended on it and say to us to jump through a hoop to the detriment of our children and all who walk the halls of our school, what will be next? We have a bible bus, a baccalaureate service, a Common Ground event, what would keep them if we roll over on this issue, what will keep them from stripping and wiping our entire religious heritage? The Ten Commandments do not stand there and preach, but when you walk by and you read thou shalt not kill and if you were in Columbine High School, it would mean something to you or someone else today. So, I urge you to put the Ten Commandments back up and we will stand with you. I have lived in Giles County for 60 years. I have pastored a church for over 30 years and I can tell you that God has never done us a disservice in this county and he's blessed us with the beauty and all we have so we certainly want to honor him by posting his word in the eyes of our students and all that walk the halls."

Reverend Dan Kelley spoke in opposition of taking down the Ten Commandments. "I just want to elaborate on what Pastor Shahn just said. It sounds like if the Ten Commandments are hung as a historical document, that it would be okay. Our church said they will put up the money, do whatever it takes to get the documents framed and have them rehung in the schools. I want you to ask you today is I would rather them be hung and taken to court. If the person shows back up and they don't like them, I want a judge to tell you to take them down. That is my whole argument today. If they don't go back up, then you will force us to go against you to put them back up. I would rather go with you in support to have them put back up. We will put up whatever finances and resources it takes. We are just asking to you get them up. If the attorney contacts you again, tell them we will see them in court."

Mrs. Judy Lawson spoke in opposition of taking down the Ten Commandments. "Until a few minutes ago, I didn't know I was going to speak. I am a blessed lady and I'm going to tell you three reasons I'm blessed. I live in Giles County. I'm blessed because every day I walk into a Giles County Public School, but I made a conscious decision sixteen years ago to walk away from the most liberal county in the country and that's Montgomery County, Maryland. The next is Northern Virginia. We are not Montgomery County, Maryland. We are not Northern Virginia. The first time I walked into a Giles County Public School, I stood there in awe because in front of me sixteen years ago was the pledge of allegiance and next to it was the Ten Commandments. I don't want to lose this. I want to stay where I am and continue to grow old in these beautiful mountains. The other way I was blessed, yes the Ten Commandments in a way did come down, but I saw them on many lockers today."

A motion was made to put the Ten Commandments back up. There was a second to the motion and voting was unanimous.

Mr. Buckland stated that "no board member wanted to do this, but we have an attorney and he advised us. We do try to abide by the law and want our children to understand that there are laws in this country. This law comes from the federal court and we pay an attorney dear, but we have had an assurance from Giles County Board of Supervisors, and most people in this room, if a suit is filed, you will foot the bill, correct?"

***Presentations**

On behalf of the Professional Advisory Council, the following were nominated for their Outstanding Efforts and Continued Support: Erica Gautier – EEMS, Amy Maxey – EEMS, Seth Davis – EEMS, Teresa Link – EEMS, Billy McCraw – MMS, Danny Pyles – MMS, Barbara Scheid – GHS, Donnie Burton – GTC

***School Board Approves Consent Items**

- Meeting Minutes – December 9, 2010
- Bills in the amount of \$ 921,818.80
- Payroll, December 15th, 2010, December 17th, 2010 and January 14th, 2011
- Revenue for December 2010
- Expenditure for December 2010
- Appropriation Request for January 2011

***The School Board Approves/Confirms Personnel/Contractual Items**

The School Board approved the following **Employment:** Reinstatement of Teresa Neel – Eastern District Bus Driver (effective January 3, 2011), Heather Munsey – EEMS Elementary Teacher (effective January 3, 2011),

Melissa Dunford – GTC Part-time

The School Board approved the following **Athletic Coaching Contracts**: Neil Schmidt – GHS Varsity Girls Soccer

The School Board approved the following **Volunteer Agreement**: Theodore Alberts – GTC Welding, Ricky Green – NHS Basketball

***The School Board Hears Reports from the Superintendent**

The School Board approved a Scholarship given by Restoring Lives Community Development Corporation. Restoring Lives Community Development Corporation is pleased to offer the RL CDC Annual Scholarship Program. The goal of the RL CDC is to make a financial contribution to deserving and qualified applicants. This year they are presenting two tracks for their scholarship. The first track is a need based scholarship which will be awarded to students who demonstrate a financial need and who also meet the criteria outlined in the scholarship application. The need based scholarship is for high school seniors entering into their freshmen year at a college or university only. The second track is a merit based scholarship. This scholarship is designed for students who have not demonstrated a financial need, but have maintained a high level of academic success. This scholarship is available to high school seniors entering into their freshmen year at a college/university as well as students who are pursuing an undergraduate degree at a Virginia college/university.

The Educational Feature for our School Resource Officers was postponed until next month and they will present with Macy McClagherty.

***School Board and School Staff Present Comments and Mission Statement Accomplishments**

A School Board member stated that SWVGS is participating in the Capitol Day activities organized by the Friends of Virginia Governor's Schools (FOVGS) organization. On Tuesday, January 18th students from Governor's Schools across Virginia spoke with delegates and senators about the importance of the educational opportunities available at Governor's Schools. The group traveled to Richmond on January 17th and returned after morning meetings at the Capitol on January 18th. Students were chaperoned by Sherry Pugh, Assistant Director at SWVGS, and Bill Anderson, a parent from Giles County who is serving as a representative for SWVGS to the FOVGS. Avery Mahaney, a junior from Giles High School, participated as one of the student representatives from SWVGS.

A Board member stated that the Breakfast at Narrows High School was very good a couple weeks ago and the school looks to be in very good shape!

A Board member stated that we have already done two school tours this year and they think this is a better way to conduct the tours so they don't have to rush at each school. The Board and Superintendent plan to do at least two more schools next month, in conjunction with the School Board retreat.

A Board member asked whether the calendar committee has met. The Superintendent stated that we plan to meet in a couple weeks. It was recommended that the committee be presented with all of the schools delays/closing information for the last couple years. The Superintendent stated that he had an excel document with all of that information, so it wasn't a problem at all.

A Board member stated that they were thrilled with the attendance at the meeting and the comments that were made. Everyone was thanked for their support of the Ten Commandments.

A Board member stated that we are very blessed with our school system.

A Board member commended Giles High School for their copy of the Spantonian.

A Board member commended Mr. Meade for his help out at the high school.

A Board member stated that it was great to see such a large turnout. Everyone conducted themselves well! He hopes we can put the Ten Commandments up and that will be the last of it. We have more important things to do than go to court, but if we do, we will fight that battle when it comes.

A Board member thanked Ms. Hurt for her comments on the budget.

The Superintendent announced information from schools regarding winners of the Virginia Tech 6th Annual Martin Luther King Poster and Essay Contest. They are as follows:

Narrows Elementary/Middle: Alyssa Bishop 1st grade - Second Place; Aliyah Taylor 1st grade - Third Place; Sophia Quesenberry 1st Grade - First Place

Eastern Elementary/Middle: 18 students recognized for participation (no winners)

Macy McClaugherty: 2 Honorable Mentions - Rachel Mills - 1st grade; Will Meredith - 1st grade

The Superintendent stated that Kira Blankenship placed 3rd in the VFW Patriot Pen Contest and Chase Lawson placed 2nd from Narrows Elementary/Middle School. At Eastern Elementary/Middle School, James Link, 7th grader, was a winner in this contest as well. Congratulations to these students!

The Superintendent shared information from the Giles Tech Center. Garret Blankenship and Cody Pagan both placed first in different welding processes in the AWS (American Welding Society) district welding competition. Wyatt Robertson earned both a first and second place in two different welding processes. The competition was held at New River Community College. Congratulations to these students!

The Superintendent updated the School Board members on SOL testing. It has been going on this week. We have received some scores so far and the scores look promising. Narrows High School had Algebra II and Geometry tests. We continue to be optimistic that the scores will be where we need them to be!

The Superintendent and School Board members agreed to extend first semester by two days due to the number of days missed from inclement weather.

***In Other Action**

The School Board approved an additional Field Trip for the 2010-11 school year from GHS/Cecilia McFaden's Photojournalism Class for March 16-19, 2011 to go to Columbia University, NYC (Funding Source – Shield Account) for a convention. There will be 3 students involved in this field trip.

The School Board approved an updated Substitute List. The list included names of individuals who completed all paperwork and attended the substitute training on Tuesday, January 18th at the School Board office.

The School Board approved a Textbook Adoption for Social Studies. The title of the adopted textbook is "World Geography: Building a Global Perspective." The publisher of the adopted textbook is "Pearson: Prentice Hall." This approval is pending confirmation from the Dept. of Ed. regarding the State Boards request to review the current approved history texts.

The School Board approved a Volunteer Agreement for Marie Church (MMS Teacher tasks).

The School Board approved the suspension without pay of employee #1944-11 and #3848-11, pending court outcome.

***Next School Board Meeting**

The next regular School Board meeting will be *Tuesday, February 15th at 4:00 p.m.* in conjunction with the School Board Retreat.