

Article – Economic Impact on Schools

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**Dan Brigman, Superintendent
Macon County School System**

Earlier this month, I had the pleasure of attending the annual Volunteer Appreciation Conference at Lake Junaluska. This event is held each year to provide training and educational updates to individuals who volunteer their time and resources to improve education in our district and region. Our county had more than 20 volunteers present for this event including PTO officers, booster club officers, and other volunteers who participated in this full day of workshops and other activities. Workshop topics included Working on Math and Reading Strategies in Grades K-12, Navigating the Educational Environment, Tech-savvy Volunteers and Parents, and Urgent Issues in School-age Children's Lives. A sharing session was also conducted for participants to exchange ideas, questions, and concerns. In addition to a large number of participants, Mrs. Diane Cotton, Reading Specialist for Macon County Schools served as one of the presenters. Mrs. Cotton did an outstanding job and represented our school system very well as she presented a reading and math strategies workshop to participants. At the conclusion of the day, Mr. John Dornan, Executive Director of the North Carolina Public School Forum, addressed the audience with some very insightful remarks. In his address, Mr. Dornan noted the economic situation in our state and nation, specifically the banking industry and how it will impact state revenue in the coming months and years. He also noted the environment our children will enter following completion of high school as one this nation has not experienced since the 1930's. He added this to be a crucial time for strengthening parental involvement and support for education. Today, we rely heavily on the partnerships between school, home and the community to ensure every child has access to opportunities for success during and beyond their K-12 experience.

In Macon County, we are blessed with a large number of individuals who continue to volunteer their time and effort towards making our school system a great place for students. Last year, volunteers documented more than 22,593 hours of service within the Macon County School System. We appreciate each individual for your devotion of time to our schools, clubs and other activities.

The economic condition of our state and nation is a growing concern at all levels of government. Our Board of Education and administration have been proactive during the past year to ensure each dollar is stretched and the efficiency of our school district improved. For example, initial budget planning last spring resulted in planning budget with expansion in capital outlay greater than 100%. Following three budget meetings and no additional dollars, our school system redirected priorities and reduced the budget back to the previous allocation received for four consecutive years. In the current expense budget, initial budget planning based on school district priorities resulted in more than 30% expansion to support needed personnel and program improvements. The outcome for this year in Current Expense was limited to an additional \$900,000, or a 15%

increase in our reoccurring revenue from county government. These dollars were used to address employee salary adjustments and required increases in health and benefits. We are very appreciative for this local increase and, as a result, were able to reduce the amount of dollars needed from our operational reserves to sustain the current level of programs and personnel.

As noted in our school system's Strategic Plan, the Board and administration are making efforts to move away from using fund balance to cover reoccurring costs. In simple terms, it is like using a household's savings account to pay the monthly electric bill. Without a landfall of new dollars from funding sources, this situation is short term and soon cuts will be needed to bring the level of operation within the dollars allocated.

During the coming months, the Board of Education and district administration will continue reviewing programs and other expenditures to maximize our efficiency and proactively respond to the economic situation that may be upon us for several years to come. In Macon County, we have continued to be good stewards of each tax dollar to ensure our students receive a superior education to carry with them into the workforce, college/university, military or trade school.