

School Board...from Page 1A



The nurses and COVID Team of Union County Schools have earned special recognition for "Going the Extra Mile." L-R: Leigh Ann Hartley, Donna Dyer, Becky Dyer, Susan Karnes, Jeri Ann King and Vickie McCann. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

answers," and he solicited input from board members, faculty and staff in the room.

"We don't just make a decision and wake up and say, 'This is what we are going to do,'" Hill said. "We stress out

about it, we research, we talk to people, we pray about it a lot, and we do a lot of soul searching. We try to do what is best, and regardless of the decision you make, about 50% of the people are going to be

mad." Like many areas, Union County has maintained a fluid attendance policy this year to allow students to more easily switch between online and in-person learning during COVID,

though it appears many students have been missing classes, with the schools not exactly sure why.

Part of the discussion focused on if kids may not be attending in person due to masking at school or for other reasons. Regardless, to regain a sense of attendance as participation, families were asked to declare students as dedicated for either online-only or in-person learning by Feb. 19.

"None of us will really know because of what we have done (with hybrid learning)," Hill said. "We don't know why. I know that if I was a kid and I had a choice to be at home to work on cars or go to school, I would have been in my dad's body shop 100 days out of 100."

"We don't know because we haven't had a mandatory decision. We really wouldn't know until after Friday when people declare because of our loose attendance policy. That is just an unanswerable question."

Board Member Keith Potts expressed gratitude that the schools have been doing so well, especially compared to other districts in the state, according to data presented by Assistant Superintendent Dr. David Murphy.

"This school year, there is still a lot of uncertainty about COVID, the vaccination and all that," Potts said. "The science is just not there, so all we can go on is exactly what Dr. Murphy showed us; it is us compared to other school districts, and we have made it further than any of us have expected."

"At this point, with no more information that is out there, I wouldn't want to change anything now. We have got three months until school is out, and maybe between now and then we will see something and have more information to go on, but right now, we are being very successful, and I would hate to change it."

Board Chair Tony Hunter shared his concerns with requiring students to wear masks, coming down on the side of leaving it up to teachers in each classroom.

"Somebody has to be devil's advocate," Hunter said. "There is no right answer. The science, in my opinion, is incomplete on all the facts that are known to date. Ten years from now, we will know everything about this thing, but right this minute, we are struggling through this thing."

Added Hunter, "I hate telling someone, 'You need to do this, I am going to mandate you to do this,' when I don't have all the facts. I don't, and if you guys have all the facts, please tell the dumb guy."

"I personally think it should be up to the teacher whether or not, in their classroom, the children should wear a mask."

Toward the end of the discussion, everyone in the room agreed that even one COVID death in the school system would be too many, and that all measures needed to be taken to keep faculty and student safety at the forefront.

Hill decided to have school principals talk with teachers and staff who worked in direct contact with students so that their opinions on masks could be heard before an ultimate decision was reached on mandatory masking on school grounds.

Also in the meeting, the School Board awarded Security Guard Wendell Murphy with a "Going the Extra Mile" Award for his services at the High School guard station and directing traffic every morning.

School Police Chief Chad Deyton presented the award, calling Murphy a good friend and someone the students love seeing every morning.

"I got to know Mr. Wendell pretty well here at the school system," Deyton said. "It is just amazing to see the outpour from the kids interacting with Mr. Murphy here at this guard shack. These kids interact with him so well, I get jealous."

Added Deyton, "We all love Mr. Murphy, and he is just so well respected in the

school system. He is always a helping hand and he never gripes. He will work when he needs to. I just appreciate him so much, and I think this award is deserved."

Assistant Superintendent Dr. Paula Davenport also presented the "Going the Extra Mile" Award to the nurses of the school district and to the COVID Team, which has been monitoring the virus and keeping track of mitigation strategies.

"They are a very hardworking and dedicated group," Davenport said. "Nurses are frontline workers, and they encounter things on a daily basis - from a pulled tooth, which is a very prized possession when a child comes home with a necklace and a tooth in it, all the way to very, very sick children that they interact with each and every day."

"Our COVID Team ladies, I sincerely believe that is why we haven't had to close school for COVID, because they do such a good job at investigating where people sat and who needs to be quarantined and that kind of thing."

The final "Going the Extra Mile" Award went to the Union County Schools Police Department for its officers' dedication to keeping students safe and being wherever they are needed no matter the time of day.

"Something that really always has to be at forefront of our thoughts is student safety," Hill said. "I can send these guys a text at 9 o'clock at night, and you are not going to hear anything but 'Yes, sir, whether it is delivering the meals or doing a welfare check on a kid, or worst-case scenario, a tragedy in school.'"

According to Chief Deyton, the department helped deliver 180 hotspots throughout the county along with 168 Chromebooks within one month earlier in the pandemic to make sure kids had access to their educations.

And since the start of the pandemic, there have been more than 125,000 school-prepared meals provided to children in Union County.

The school system and board will continue to honor their "#UnionUnited" slogan by teaming up to overcome any challenges in the coming years and throughout the rest of the COVID-19 ordeal.

People interested in watching the Tuesday, Feb. 16, board meeting may visit the "UC Schools Broadcasts" page on YouTube.

Union County Schools receives Grant from the Governor's Office of Highway Safety



In an effort to involve Georgia students in reducing traffic crashes, injuries and deaths of teen drivers, Union County in Blairsville, GA is proud to announce their receipt of a Students Against Destructive Decisions grant from the Governor's Office of Highway Safety.

The grant will enhance

Union County School's existing SADD chapter with the idea that student input into the solution will help alleviate the problem of teen driver fatalities in Georgia.

"The loss of one life on our roads is one too many, and the fact almost all fatal traffic crashes can be prevented is one reason why we are awarding this grant," Allen Poole, Director of the Governor's Office of Highway Safety said. "The target of zero traffic deaths in our nation is achievable, and we will continue to help develop and implement educational messages,

enforcement campaigns, and other safety initiatives aimed at bringing us one step closer to our goal."

The Union County School SADD chapter will send it's president and advisor to a statewide leadership-training program each fall along with representatives from other high schools that received similar grants.

For more information on this grant program, contact GOHS at 404-656-6996 and for more information on GOHS and its other highway safety programs, visit www.ga-highwaysafety.org.

**Union County American Cancer Society
Presents**

DAFFODIL DAYS 2021

FLOWER OF HOPE PROJECT

Surprise a friend, family member, or "adopt" a group with a Beautiful bouquet of 10 fresh cut daffodils for a \$5 donation to the

AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY

Pre-orders must be in by February 28th

**Contact : PHONE : Mia Crowe @706-897-4519
or EMAIL : crowes@windstream.net**

**Flowers will be ready for pick up 11:00-3:00
Monday: March 15, 2021**

Allegheny Lodge #114 F&AM on Rogers St.
Downtown Blairsville
Behind Cabin Coffee

*****Look for signs and balloons*****

Proceeds support cancer research, education, patient services and advocacy programs of the American Cancer Society and the UNION COUNTY RELAY FOR LIFE .