

August 4, 2011

2011-2012 School Year is Officially Here

It was a busy first day of school as teachers and staff welcomed approximately 19,000 students for the start of the 2011-2012 school year. The first day of school is always a challenge and today was no exception as students, staff, and parents try to learn new traffic patterns, parking rules, and both bus and student pick-up and drop-off procedures.

Despite some expected and some unexpected glitches, the school year got off to a good start. Newton County Schools opened not one but two new schools as Flint Hill Elementary opened its doors for students for the first time today and the Newton College and Career Academy also began taking students on a temporary basis at Alcovy High School until the new facility opens up in January 2012. The school system's theme school also opened in its new location at Ficquett and Ombudsman opened their alternative program at Sharp Learning Center on a temporary basis until their official site locations are ready for occupancy.

"Learning new transportation routes, a glitch in transportation software, afternoon traffic flow at the relocated Newton County Theme School at Ficquett and drop-off and pick up at the new Flint Hill Elementary School were severe first day challenges," said Superintendent Dr. Gary Mathews.

The district did have some problems with routing as the transportation department's Versatran software, which produces bus routes for the system, failed to determine the correct routes for some students. According to Dr. Dennis Carpenter, NCSS Deputy Superintendent for Operations, the transportation department is "working on it diligently" and hopes to have the problem quickly resolved.

Traffic flow connected to the opening of the newly-located Newton County Theme School at Ficquett did cause backups on Newton Drive, Mill Street, and U.S. 278, which resulted in a longer than usual student dismissal.

According to Dr. Ruth Anne Smith, principal of the theme school, it took approximately one hour for students to clear the building at the end of the day. She did note that this was still much better than the student dismissal on the first day of school at the Fairview location, when afternoon dismissal took approximately two hours. And this year there are approximately 800 students attending the theme school compared to only 450 when the school first opened at Fairview.

"We are encouraging parents to not park in the bus lanes in the front of the school as this clogged up traffic flow in the afternoon," said Mathews. "Additionally, as we were anticipating, the Highway 142 and Airport Road bottleneck at the new Flint Hill Elementary caused delays as well. Newton County government officials are very aware of the roads issue connected with the new elementary school."

The school system encourages parents to utilize bus transportation for students at all base school sites, especially Flint Hill Elementary, as this has a significant impact on traffic at the schools.

According to Dr. Carpenter, “once bus ridership increases each day at Flint Hill, traffic flow should improve until such time as county government is able to more fully address traffic flow issues surrounding the new school.”

Mathews noted that district officials would hold a briefing on transportation at approximately 5:00 p.m. today.

“We will learn the new bus routes, get the transportation software working, anxiously observe the county’s progress on the road situation at Flint Hill, and regroup related to theme school pick-up in the afternoon,” said Dr. Mathews. “Meanwhile, my visits to Flint Hill Elementary School, Clements Middle, and Eastside High School had students in class and teachers providing orientation and instruction on this first day of school.”
