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Holmes County school district dismantled, state takes control

Mississippi Today by Kate Royals

Gov. Tate Reeves declared a state of emergency in the troubled Holmes County Consolidated School District on the first day of the new school year and just hours after the district announced it was suing state officials in an attempt to block the takeover.

Signed at 1:25 p.m. on Thursday, August 5, the declaration will immediately dismantle the school district. Interim superintendent Jennifer Wilson will take over, and the local school board will be disbanded. The State Board of Education will act as the district's governing body.

"This isn't a decision I take lightly nor one I make with any delight. Maintaining local control when possible is a foundational principle of conservative governance; however, the serious violations of state and federal law and accreditation standards, serious financial concerns, lack of internal controls,



The Holmes County Consolidated School District Central Office

inappropriate standards of governance, inappropriate oversight by the Board, and the continued poor academic performance (among many other factors) no longer make that possible in the HCCSD," Gov. Tate Reeves wrote on Twitter.

"Ensuring Mississippi kids have access to a quality edu-

cation will always be a top priority. This declaration of an extreme emergency situation within HCCSD will hopefully give the kids of this district a chance at success in life, because each one of them deserve(s) nothing less!" Reeves continued.

This means the district, now termed a "District

of Transformation," now stands to lose its accreditation. School districts that lose accreditation are limited to participation in no more than half of the regular season of any athletic and extracurricular activities. The activities' schedule will also not include the opening day (Continued on page 5.)

Holmes County schools sues to block state takeover

Mississippi Today by Kate Royals

The Holmes County Consolidated School District is suing state officials over what it describes as "sham, unconstitutional proceedings" following the State Board of Education's recommendation that the governor declare a state of emergency in the district earlier this week.

The lawsuit is seeking a temporary restraining order ahead of a declaration by Gov. Tate Reeves that would result in the school district

being dismantled and turned over to the state.

The lawsuit filed in federal court alleges the Mississippi Department of Education did not give the district due process and violated its own policies and procedures in conducting an audit of the district and the subsequent hearings before the Commission on Accreditation and State Board of Education.

The Mississippi Department of Education on Thursday said it does not comment on matters in litigation.

The state department "con-

ducted a two-month audit and provided less than a week's notice for the Petitioners (district) to assess and respond to the audit findings," the lawsuit states. "What is more, Petitioners do not receive an opportunity (to) question anyone regarding the findings. Simply put, the process afforded does not provide an opportunity for a hearing appropriate to the nature of the case."

It also states the board violated the Open Meetings Act when it conducted its deliberations in executive, or

closed, session.

The lawsuit points out that before the department's audit was completed and any proceedings had occurred, the department advertised the job of an interim superintendent position for a District of Transformation. The deadline to apply for the job was July 21, several days before the department had concluded its on-site investigative audit of the district.

On Aug. 3 the State Board of Education recommended Jennifer Wilson, the former superintendent of Greenwood School District, serve as interim superintendent for the district should a state of (Continued on page 3.)

Holmes County ex-school official gets 30 years for sexual battery

Greenwood Commonwealth By Tim Kalich

A former Holmes County school administrator has received a 30-year sentence after pleading guilty last month to sexual battery against a student.

Dyana Thomas was sentenced by Leflore County Circuit Judge Richard Smith to 15 years in prison with the remaining 15 years being suspended upon completing five years of post-release supervision.

The details of the conviction and July 23 sentence were announced Monday by District Attorney W. Dewayne Richardson.

Thomas was arrested in May 2019 by the Leflore



DYANA THOMAS

County Sheriff's Department. At the time, he was living in Greenwood and working as assistant principal of Holmes County Central High School.

Richardson said that an investigator with the Sheriff's Department determined that Thomas, then 49 years old, (Continued on page 5.)

Local schools open for in-person learning

The Central Holmes Christian School and the Holmes County Consolidated School District started the 2021-2022 school year with in-person learning.

The Holmes County consolidated school District began classes on August 5; Central Holmes Christian School had their first day of school on Monday, August 9. From K-3 to K-12, the new school year begins amidst the cloud of COVID-19 and many unknown changes.

For K-3, students came to class with a sense of anticipation and excitement and apprehension. For many of them, it was the first time to leave the comfort of home and family; yet, it is the beginning of a great adventure.

For the seniors, it is the beginning of a year of lasts; the last first day of high school; the last homecoming, the last prom, the last senior party, and the last time that

the class will be together as a group. It is a year of making memories that will last a lifetime.

It is an opportunity to learn to appreciate the classmates that they have taken for granted because they are "family."

It is a time to make academic choices and decisions that may affect or change the course of their lives forever.

It is a chance to grow and enjoy school and be the very best that they can be--- to do the very best in every sport, every activity, and every class in which they participate.

It is a specific occasion to pause and reflect on the person that they want to become---to be the role model for those students that will follow in their footsteps. And, when the time comes to leave as a graduate, to be able to look back with pride and no regrets.

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Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
Partly Cloudy	Partly Cloudy	Scattered T-Storms	PM T-Storms	Scattered T-Storms	Scattered T-Storms	PM T-Storms
3/74	94/74	93.73	91/72	90/72	90/72	91/73
Precip. Chance	Precip. Chance	Precip. Chance	Precip. Chance	Precip. Chance	Precip. Chance	Precip. Chance
24%	24%	40%	38%	43%	37%	35%

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