

State Board of Education approves reduction in weight of EOC exams

The State Board of Education recently voted unanimously to approve State School Superintendent Richard Woods' recommendation of a .01 percent course grade weight for Georgia Milestones End-of-Course (EOC) exams for the 2020-21 school year.

Given the impact of the pandemic and the clear need for students and teachers to have the flexibility to focus on learning and remediation – rather than end-of-year, high-stakes tests – the Georgia Department of Education applied for a waiver of federal standardized testing requirements for the 2020-21 school year. When that waiver was denied by U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, Superintendent Woods made a series of recommendations to reduce the high-stakes impact of the test, including the .01 percent recommendation for high-school EOCs, waiving the summative Teacher Keys Effectiveness System evaluation for teachers,

and removing Georgia Milestones End of Grades from consideration in promotion/retention decisions.

The vote means students' course grades will not be negatively impacted by their score on the Georgia Milestones EOC. Even for exams already administered last fall, school districts may recalculate course grades with the .01 percent weight.

"I wish to thank the State Board of Education for their unanimous support of this proposal," Woods said. "I firmly believe this is the right thing for kids – we must ensure students and teachers are not penalized for circumstances beyond their control."

The .01 percent recommendation was supported by large majorities of Georgians in public comment. In a survey with 93,079 responses, 86.31 percent said the weight should be .01 percent, 11.35 percent said it should be 10 percent, and 2.34 percent said it should be

20 percent.

Other states have followed the same lead, taking steps to reduce the high-stakes consequences of tests for students, including South Carolina, where a similar 20 percent requirement has been waived. And the National Center for Education Statistics made the decision to suspend National Assessment of Educational Progress testing – known as the "Nation's Report Card" – for the 2020-21 school year.

"I continue to believe, and we continue to see indicators, that Georgia's commitment to compassion over compliance from the onset of this pandemic has been the right path to take," Woods said. "As I've said since the beginning, who we are will be measured not by a test score, but by how we meet this moment, which is why we plan to resubmit our request for federal testing and accountability waivers to the U.S. Department of Education."

City sets occupational tax rates

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voted to reappoint Gregory Zellars to the Board of Elections.

The 2021 Occupational Tax for the City of Lincolnton, which is based upon the number of employees of each business or practitioner, was approved.

The schedule is as follows: 0-2 employees, \$50; 3-10 employees, \$100; 11-20 employees, \$175; 21-30 employees, \$250; 31-40 employees, \$300; 41-50 employees, \$400; and more than 50, \$500.

City of Lincolnton Committee Appointments were made and include:

Finance and Personnel, Chairman Alana Burke and Ernie Norman; Public Utilities – Water and Wastewater, Chairman Alana Burke and Dwaine Biggerstaff; Public Safety - Police and Fire, Chairman Dwaine Biggerstaff and Alana Burke; Public Works – Street and Sanitation, Chairman Melvin Harris and Nicole Kelley; Permits and Ordinances, Chairman Ernie Norman and Melvin Harris; Downtown Revitalization, Chairman Dwaine Biggerstaff and Nicole Kelley; and Public Buildings, Chairman Nicole Kelley and Ernie Norman. The mayor is an

ex-officio member of each committee.

The dates for the regular monthly meetings for the Mayor and City Council were approved for 2021. They are January 5, February 2, March 2, April 6, May 4, June 1, July 6, August 3, September 7, October 5, November 2, and December 7. All meetings are held at 7 p.m. at City Hall.

In its final item of business Council selected Burke to continue to serve as mayor pro-tem.

The next meeting of City Council will be held at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, February 2, at City Hall.



Volunteers distribute 'blessing bags'

Lincoln County Food Pantry volunteers assembled and delivered 150 "blessing bags" which were distributed to all three campuses on Monday, January 4, by LCFP volunteers Emily and Katelyn Enelow.

LCFP will be open today from 9 a.m. - 12 p.m. for distribution at 1066 Firetower Road. The next distribution will be held on Thursday, January 28, and then every two weeks thereafter.

Players honored to be Red Devils

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have someone who believes in them, and who is holding them accountable. They're raising good young men."

While the boys admitted that the season has flown by, it's still been fun in their eyes. So, in looking to the future, each of the juniors expressed an enthusiasm for next year and their involvement in the football program.

"C.J., me, and Donald don't have much time left here, so hopefully we get to change a lot until we leave," Gartrell said. "We want to go all the way next year."

"We have a lot of younger people starting next year too, so it'll be a lot of learning for us and them," Zellars added.

With the thorough understanding that they will be the team's leaders next season, the trio takes it with all seriousness. They know they'll be stepping into a role where they must be an example, striving always to be positive and give the team their all.

"You've got to go out there with the right attitude and be willing to put in the work," Gartrell commented. "If you ain't willing to put the work in, you ain't going to get anything out of it."

After seeing their success this season, despite shaky beginnings and prior doubts, each of the boys said they now believe their futures will be filled with more football. Each explained they'd love an opportunity to play in college.

Their change of heart, they also explained, has come from the new coaching administration that has not only proven themselves in the eyes of the team, but has also given them hope for their personal futures.

"In ninth grade, I said I wouldn't play in college, but now if I got an offer I would take it," Owens said.

"I would take it any day, no hesitation," Gartrell concurred.

While those days envisioned are fast approaching for these three Red Devil players, right now, what means the most to them is being a part of the team and supporting each other.

"It's an honor to be a Red Devil," Gartrell said. "All the history, the legacy, the past, it's an honor to be a part of the Lincoln County Red Devil football team."

Kemp urges patience amid slow COVID-19 vaccine rollout in Ga.

By Beau Evans
Capitol Beat News Service

Gov. Brian Kemp asked Georgians for patience Friday as state officials push to distribute around 11,500 doses per day of the slow-arriving COVID-19 vaccine to health-care workers, nursing homes, and people aged 65 and older in some parts of the state.

At a news conference, Kemp said Georgia's vaccine distribution program is "making steady progress" but is still constrained by the limited number of doses the state has received so far. He expects distribution "will be ramped up" in the coming weeks.

"I'm pleased with how hard everybody's working, but I'm not happy with where we are," Kemp

said. "We've got to keep moving the needle. We're working on that every single day."

Around 135,000 vaccines have been administered out of the roughly 554,000 doses shipped to Georgia as of last Thursday evening, according to the state Department of Public Health's website – though Kemp said the website's data is lagging behind the number of vaccines actually given so far.

The governor said local health departments have been swamped with requests to book appointments after he and Georgia Public Health Commissioner Dr. Kathleen Too-mey broadened which Georgians can receive the vaccine last week to people 65-years of age and older, police, and firefighters.

State officials plan to launch a new website soon allowing Georgians to see whether they currently qualify for the vaccine and to schedule appointments for receiving either the Pfizer or Moderna brand vaccines, which both require two doses spaced a few weeks apart.

"I'd like to continue to ask for the people of Georgia's patience as we work hard to swiftly, safely, and efficiently administer the limited supply of vaccine we have to those for whom it would be the most good to get it," Kemp said Friday.

Georgia's rollout has been complicated by large demand for vaccines from health-care workers in metro Atlanta compared to hospitals and clinics in more rural parts of the state, where Kemp said some front-line workers have refused to take the vaccine. He called their reluctance "unimaginable" and urged everyone to get the vaccine once it's available.

Kemp's update on vaccine distribution came as Georgia logged its highest-ever daily total of reported positive COVID-19 cases on Friday, January 8, at 10,400. No new restrictions on businesses or any lockdowns are forthcoming despite the spike, Kemp said, adding he will "have an open mind" in the event "something changes."

"We have much hope on the horizon," Kemp said. "But we've got to hunker down and continue to fight this together."

Roughly 737,000 people in Georgia had tested positive or presumed positive for COVID-19 as of last Friday afternoon. The virus had killed 10,180 Georgians.

New senators, house members take oath of office, begin session

By Beau Evans
and Dave Williams
Capitol Beat News Service

COVID-19 and last week's storming of the U.S. Capitol loomed large in the Georgia General Assembly Monday as lawmakers were sworn in to begin the 2021 legislative session.

Eleven new senators and 20 new House members took the oath of office, as the two chambers – still controlled by Republicans following the November elections – elected their leaders for the next two years.

Besides a requirement that lawmakers wear masks on the House and Senate floors, they will be tested twice a week to discourage the spread of the virus, which has sickened hundreds of thousands of Georgians and prompted the General Assembly to shut down for three months during last year's session.

At least one lawmaker recently tested positive for COVID-19 and was absent Monday, prompting state Sen. Nan Orrock, D-Atlanta, to criticize the slow rollout of Georgia's vaccine program. Just one-third of the 555,800 vaccines shipped to Georgia so far have been administered, according to state Department of Public Health data.

"We must call on the leadership in the state ... to step up," Orrock said. "What we cannot do is tolerate this current level of being at the bottom in the nation for the levels of vaccine we're getting out."

The House overwhelmingly re-elected Speaker David Ralston, R-Blue Ridge, to head that chamber for the next two years. In his acceptance speech, he condemned last week's violent assault on the U.S. Capitol building by supporters of President Donald Trump that killed five people, including a Capitol police officer.

"Last week was a dark day in the history of our nation ... to see American citizens storming our revered Capitol," Ralston said. "There is no possible justification for this loss of life, bloodshed, and damage. America is better than this."

State Sen. Elena Parent, D-Atlanta, criticized Republican state senators who held hearings on Trump's election fraud claims under the Gold Dome, which she said helped spark the riot in Washington.

"This, my colleagues, was a reckless decision," Parent said. "We should not sow doubt, anger, and faithlessness in the citizens who elect us."

Proposals to change Georgia election laws including tighter voter ID requirements and limits on who can cast mail-in ballots look to feature prominently in this year's session after President-elect Joe Biden became the first Democrat to carry Georgia since 1992 and Democrats flipped the state's two Republican-held U.S. Senate seats last week.

"Our elections must be free, fair, free from fraud, secure, and accessible," Ralston said. "We must always tell our citizens the truth."

Senate President Pro Tempore Butch Miller, R-Gainesville, who was re-elected to that leadership post on Monday, urged collaboration between both parties and highlighted the tough challenges ahead on voting laws and COVID-19 bills.

"We've got to keep things in perspective," Miller said. "This is a part-time job but with immense responsibility."

Meanwhile, House members re-elected Rep. Jan Jones, R-Milton, speaker pro tempore, the chamber's No.-2 leadership position. Like Ralston, she has served in House leadership since 2010.



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