

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Schools up COVID measures amid high community spread

By Shawn Jarrard
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Amid rising community and regional spread of COVID-19, the Union County School District decided Jan. 4 to suspend student athletic competitions through the end of last week, with a reduced schedule moving forward.

With safety being the No. 1 priority in keeping students on the court and in classrooms, Board Office staff also put in place temporary measures to limit COVID-19 spread while allowing athletes to compete, and these measures were outlined by the schools in a Jan. 7 letter to parents.

The new mitigations are designed to reduce close physical contact between

players from different schools during this current period of increased local COVID positivity, and to limit the chance of spread from inviting the community and others into the schools.

School Board members discussed this issue and others with Superintendent John Hill, Board Office staff, school principals and department heads in a virtual called meeting Jan. 4.

Acknowledging the situation as being incredibly fluid, school officials said they will continue to monitor the level of COVID locally to determine how athletics may safely proceed in the coming weeks.

Sports competitions did return this week with limited

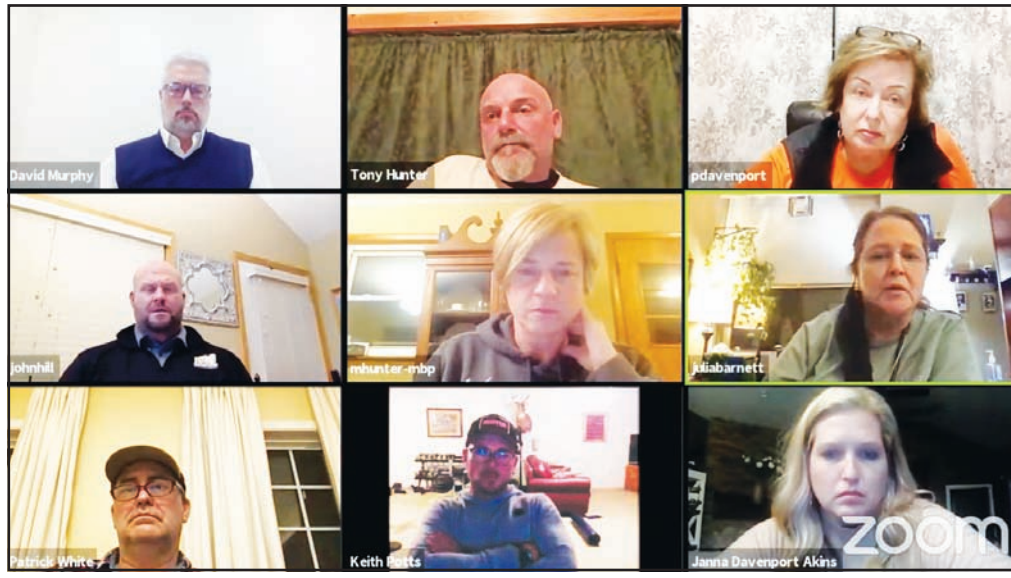
spectator capacity and masking by fans, with the schools reiterating that education remains the top priority ahead of student athletics.

Classes resumed Jan. 5 following winter break, with the majority of students opting for face-to-face instruction returning to campus as scheduled.

Stressing the need for safety while also carrying out their mandate to educate the children of the county – which board members believe occurs best in the classroom – the schools are taking heightened measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 on campus.

School officials arrived at these measures following hours of meetings, including

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School officials held a called meeting Jan. 4 to make some important decisions as COVID-19 community spread continues unabated. It was Julia Barnett's first public appearance as a board member. Photo/Screenshot

Former Hiawassee man charged following DC riot

By Shawn Jarrard
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WASHINGTON, D.C. – A former Hiawassee resident was one of 13 individuals charged last week in federal court "related to crimes committed at the U.S. Capitol," the Department of Justice said in a Jan. 8 news release.

Thousands of people attended a rally in the nation's capital Jan. 6 in support of President Donald Trump, resulting in protesting that turned violent during a raid of the U.S. Capitol Building as Congress worked to certify the presidential election for Joe Biden.

Among the Trump supporters in D.C. last week was Cleveland Grover Meredith Jr., charged Jan. 7 with "making interstate threats to Speaker Nancy Pelosi." Meredith arrived after the rally, though he'd meant to be there, court documents show.

A former Atlanta resident, Meredith moved to Hiawassee in recent years before relocating to Hayesville, North Carolina, sometime in the last year, Hiawassee Police Chief Paul Smith said.

Smith learned about Meredith from his parents, who contacted the chief when Meredith first moved to town because they were concerned about their son's behavior and wanted to inform local law enforcement of his presence.

Meredith made local headlines last June when he attended the Black Lives Matter rally in Hiawassee to stage a counterprotest of sorts, bringing with him his IWI Tavor X95 rifle, the American variant of a weapon used by many in the Israeli Defense Forces.

Pulling into the rally on the Hiawassee Town Square, Meredith had brandished the weapon inside his vehicle in an apparent attempt to intimidate the BLM protesters, upsetting several in the process. Meredith was legally allowed to carry his rifle that day.

At the time, he told the North Georgia News he'd

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Cleveland Grover Meredith Jr. put Hiawassee BLM protesters on edge when he showed up with his rifle to hold a counterprotest of sorts on June 5, 2020. He was arrested Jan. 7, 2021, after communicating threats against House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in Washington, D.C. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Public Health commences COVID-19 vaccine signups

Northeast Georgia Health also offering vaccination

By Shawn Jarrard
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District 2 Public Health has rolled out a COVID-19 vaccine registration link on its website, allowing eligible people to book an appointment for vaccination by their local Health Department.

The signup form can be accessed by visiting www.phdistrict2.org. However, due to heavy demand, all appointment timeslots are currently full through February. In addition to the website, a call center number for potential signups will be made available this week.

Eventually there will be enough vaccine to cover everyone, but so far, demand for the two-dose vaccine has greatly outstripped supply, and residents are being asked to check back in with the website regularly.



Union General Chief Nursing Officer Julia Barnett continued in-house COVID vaccinations at Union General Hospital Jan. 7. Photo/Submitted

"There is enormous demand for the vaccine and the available appointments did fill up quickly," Public Information Officer Dave Palmer with District 2 Public Health said. "We have been trying to hire additional staff as funding allows. "As we add new staff and get them trained, we will make

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Area residents conflicted as rioting hits Washington, DC

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

With 2021 well underway, many people in the nation are taking note of the hypertense nature of politics surrounding the recently concluded 2020 elections, including members of this very community.

A group of angry Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol Building on Jan. 6, resulting in chaos, property destruction and death as legislators worked to select the next president of the United States.

In light of such violence, Judith Abbott of Union County said she felt the country was in desperate need of addressing such political divisions before any healing could begin.

"This country is just a mess right now," Abbott said at the Blairsville Home Depot Friday, Jan. 8. "With



Life goes on in Union County, even amid seemingly never-ending conflict at the national level. Pictured here, people enjoying a trip to Home Depot Saturday. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

all these protests and riots from everyone, nothing seems to be peaceful anymore. You can't go a day without hearing something about the left or something about the right. "We need to get over these

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Ossoff, Warnock upset GOP incumbents to win Senate seats

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The General and Special Election Runoffs of Jan. 5 resulted in both Democratic challengers defeating the Republican incumbents in Georgia's two U.S. Senate races.

Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock's victories mean the U.S. Senate will be going to the Democrats, giving the Democratic Party complete

control over Congress and the White House, as results for the U.S. Presidential Election were certified Jan. 6 for Joe Biden.

Statewide, margins between the candidates were incredibly thin, though this was not the case here in Union County, reflecting the heavily Republican nature of the electorate.

For the U.S. Senate Runoff Election in Union County, Republican Incumbent David Perdue earned 11,609

votes to challenging Democrat Ossoff's 2,569 votes.

Perdue captured roughly 81.9% of the local vote, earning 1.1% more of the total vote in Union County than he did during the Nov. 3 General Election.

In the U.S. Senate Special Election Runoff, Republican Incumbent Kelly Loeffler similarly claimed victory in Union County, garnering 11,590 votes to Democrat Warnock's 2,579 votes.

Locally, 6,956 people voted early in person at the Union County Courthouse, 2,929 people mailed in or submitted an absentee ballot, and 4,321 people voted at one of the 11 precincts on Election Day, for a total of 14,206 ballots cast according to Elections Night results.

Voter turnout was down about 9% in Union County compared with the November election, with only 72.38%

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Jon Ossoff



Raphael Warnock

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