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Citizens for Union County Teachers

Cutting through the politics to support the Teachers

WANT TO SEE WHAT REAL LEADERSHIP LOOKS LIKE, HEAR HOW TEACHERS AND THEIR ASSISTANTS JOBS WERE SAVED, TAXES WERE CUT AND PROGRESS MADE?

June 22, 2012

*****BREAKING NEWS FROM THE UNION COUNTY COMMISSIONERS*****

HISTORIC NIGHT IN UNION COUNTY! Tonight, Commissioners Simpson, Johnson, and Thomas passed a budget for the following:

- 7 new positions with the Sheriff's Office
- ... - Increased ALL teachers pay (plus the state is providing a 1.2% increase)
- Funded a transportation staff position to maximize our road funding
- Funded all of UCPS capital requests (4.0)
- Saved 295 teachers assistants job by funding an additional \$1.6 million dollar while working with Senator Tucker to make up the difference from the State.

ALL of this among other things while cutting taxes and receiving a history lesson from Commissioner Rogers on her failed leadership!!

Cutting taxes is a first for Union County!! Shows you how two commissioners (Kuehler and Rogers) are committed to their political agenda over doing what is right for the County!

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Union County Commissioners Find the Money To Save Teachers and Teachers Assistant With No Tax Increase or Budget Busting Additional Money! Will the School Board Now Do the Right Thing and

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- » [WANT TO SEE WHAT REAL LEADERSHIP LOOKS LIKE, HEAR HOW TEACHERS AND THEIR ASSISTANTS JOBS WERE SAVED, TAXES WERE CUT AND PROGRESS MADE?](#)
- » [Union County Commissioners Find the Money To Save Teachers and Teachers Assistant With No Tax Increase or Budget Busting Additional Money! Will the School Board Now Do the Right Thing and Save the Jobs?](#)
- » [Union County Secures An Objective Study of School Funding](#)
- » [Why Do UCPS Administrators Allow Abuse of Vulnerable Children? Of All the things Being Covered Up By UCPS, This Is By Far the Most Egregious](#)
- » [Are UCPS Priorities In the Right Place? Can We Really Believe What They Tell Us When It Comes to Teachers and Their Assistants?](#)

Archives

- » [June 2012](#)
- » [May 2012](#)
- » [April 2012](#)
- » [March 2012](#)

Categories

- » [Uncategorized](#)

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Save the Jobs?

June 4, 2012

Below is a proposal from Union County Commissioner Jonathan Thomas that will provide a workable solution and avoid losing any positions. It is time to let the UCPS Board of Education know we want them to get their priorities in order. Take time to contact these folks and tell them it is time to be responsible, save these jobs and support our children!

Dear Union County Friends, Over the last few weeks there has been spirited debate between employees of the school system, the Board of Education, parents and taxpayers. In the course of this debate, one thing is clear; WE ALL CARE about our education system! The question before us is how we continue to maintain our public school system in very challenging financial times. It has been suggested by my political opponents that I, along with Commissioner's Johnson and Simpson don't want to fund our education system. Well, that's simply NOT the truth.

Chairman Simpson has worked very hard for two years to bring transparency to the school board and this budgeting process. The major disagreement lies on the proper allocation of taxpayer money when the state and the county try to rebound from a devastating economy.

At the heart of the matter is the issue of teacher assistants. You may not know but the state of North Carolina is responsible for funding all salaries in public education. The county's responsibility is to fund capital needs. Union County has indeed funded capital needs as it sits over \$500 million in debt that requires a minimum of \$35 million a year to pay down this debt, including interest.

In April, the superintendent recommended to the Board of Education that they cut 353 teacher assistants and 53 teachers for the 2012-2013 budget. Many parents, including myself, were shocked that our Board of Education accepted the superintendent's recommendations and made a cut so deep in the classroom.

This was done well before the County Manager presented her budget to the county and well before the General Assembly met in Raleigh. What's so frustrating is that this was recommended and accepted by the Board of Education before any of us had a chance to look at the budget, especially the capital budget. Our political adversaries decided this was the opportunity they needed to charge at us. And they were quick to spread very misleading bits of information to you and many of your colleagues.

But now is the time to set the record straight. It is clear, and I've stated all along, the funding the classroom is a priority for me, as well as for Mr. Johnson and Mr. Simpson. We believe that funding the teachers who directly impact our students is critical! Many of you believe that too.

But here's part of my frustration with the superintendent and the school board. In their 2012-2013 budget to the county the following requests were submitted (and this is just a small few):

- \$55,000 for 3 lawn mowers (equivalent to almost 3 TAs)
- \$90,000 for 3 new pick-up trucks (equivalent to almost 4.5 TAs)
- \$65,000 for a track resurfacing for a local high school that less than 7 years old. (equivalent to a little of 3 TAs)

Worse, the county manager has reported that she has identified an additional \$6.1 million in their budget that has been spent but spent on what is not known. The Board of Education had a choice to either hold that money and ask to maintain our teacher assistants but they did not choose to

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do that.

When I was elected, I began seeking solutions to issues facing our county, such as securing our hospital. This issue is no different. As a steward of our money, Union County citizen's money, I am charged with making thoughtful decisions. The school board is charged with the same. Clearly we are not on the same page regarding this issue.

You and I are tired of politicians making empty promises and rhetoric. My fellow colleagues on the board, Mrs. Rogers and Mrs. Kuehler have both agreed with me that spending our savings is not the answer to a sustainable education financial system. Unfortunately, what they have NOT offered is a solution to the problem. Friends, enough is enough. After hearing many passionate pleas from the school's employees, parents and friends, both for and against increased funding, I have arrived at a solution that I think will save our teacher assistants but I need your help! The county has allocated the funds below and the commissioners are set to vote on the budget June 18:

-\$2.2 Million in additional operating funds that include \$1.7 Million for teacher increases.

-\$5.2 Million in capital funds

This is an increase of \$7.4 Million over last year's allocation.

Additionally, I still remain very optimistic that the General Assembly will come through with additional funds. My hope is that the Board of Education would request the County Commissioners release the capital funds to be used in operations. I would support this issue and will champion this with my colleagues. This would pay for our teacher assistants. All additional funds from the State could then be used as appropriate by the Board of Education.

While this is not an optimal solution it is one that I believe accomplishes our immediate need. This is of course a one-time solution, a band aid if you will. I am told and reassured that the schools only need more time to fix this problem in Raleigh.

In closing, I ask that you contact your school board, your neighbors and your friends let them know that the funds are available, if the Board of Education chooses to allocate them as suggested. The Board has their meeting Tuesday night. I hope that you'll join me and vocally support what I see to be a viable and sustainable solution.

Union County Board of Education Contact Info:

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- Vice-Chairman John Collins john.collins@ucps.k12.nc.us
- John Crowder john.crowder@ucps.k12.nc.us
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Kind Regards,

Jonathan R. Thomas
Union County Commissioner

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Union County Secures An Objective Study of School Funding

May 23, 2012

<http://www.co.union.nc.us/Portals/0/PublicInformation/News/2012/May/CRI.pdf>

(CLICK ON THE LINK ABOVE TO READ THE COUNTY MANAGER'S PRESS RELEASE)

Union County has hired one to the top accounting firms in the nation to evaluate how we fund education in Union County. While some object, asking why is this a good idea for the Board of County Commissioners to pursue when the Board of Education wanted to fund a study and it was shot down? Simply put, the BOE wanted a study of "efficiency" and possibly how to improve it for a cost of \$200,000.00. The Commissioners are evaluating how we fund education, how it compares to comparable counties and how effectively our money is actually spent for \$40,000.00. There is no comparison in the two proposals. Anyone knows for enough money, an out of town consultant will tell you what you want to hear with an "efficiency study". Apparently, \$200K was a high price to pay in obtaining the "cock and bull report" UCPS needed to make themselves shine. A CPA firm on the other hand, will provide a focused, standard based review that many believe will be quite interesting to say the least.

We have heard of millions of dollars are on hand in the UCPS Fund Balance. We know by year to date printouts there are savings on hand in the facilities budget that could be used to save teachers and assistants yet the only standard the BOE continually touts and hangs their hats on to cast dispersion are performance scores to demand more money. While the BOE and Ed Davis have ducked and weaved to avoid hard questions thus far, that is about to change and rightfully so! Word has it, BOE members and the

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Davis Gang are not happy to be facing long overdue review and objective scrutiny, imagine that.

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Why Do UCPS Administrators Allow Abuse of Vulnerable Children? Of All the things Being Covered Up By UCPS, This Is By Far the Most Egregious

May 17, 2012

[Image](#)

Few circumstances in life genuinely upset me but some of the things parents of autistic children enrolled in UCPS have told me in the course of my scrutiny of the system are deeply concerning. This particular case has encouraged me to speak out. This is the sort of thing that absolutely makes my blood boil and those involved need to be investigated then dealt the most serious consequences and repercussions possible. I am really appalled and disgusted that first, such abuse of some of our smallest and most vulnerable members of society is allowed to take place, but I am much more outraged that the ones entrusted as a “guardians and teachers” are responsible. Furthermore, why in the world do UCPS administrators see the need to apparently drag their feet in handling this sickening matter and once yet again ignore and conspire to cover up the truth?

This is Andrew’s Story as shared by his Father, you need to read this if you read nothing else today!

“I have contemplated on releasing this information. However, Union County Public Schools is giving me no choice with their lack of response and actions. Andrew had been attending a Preschool for special needs children at Rock Rest Elementary School provided through the Union County Public School District. We were noticing behaviors that were not characteristic for Andrew. He did not want to come out of the house to get in the car when he was going to school. You see, the school requires school logo uniforms to be worn and that’s the only time Andrew wore these particular shirts which are red with the school logo. He would also get visibly upset when we approached the school entrance. I also had witnessed the aide taking Andrew by the wrist and almost literally dragging him because she was in a hurry while she was fussing at him to hurry up. Andrew has low muscle tone and is not able to walk as fast as his peers, especially not an adult. The teacher was also reporting to me that he wasn’t responding to them and at times even refusing to walk. This was not typical for Andrew.

Due to these and other observations I decided to wire Andrew on April 19, 2012 with a digital recorder to find out exactly what’s going on at school. To my disbelief, things were far worse than I had imagined. I was horrified at what was on the audio recording. The teacher and aide verbally abused, harassed, bullied, and physically forced Andrew and caused him physical and emotional pain. He was yelled at repeatedly to the point of him shaking out of fear to take his backpack off instead of providing him with any assistance. Then you hear a struggle from the teacher with Andrew while she is continuing to fuss at him. Also, due to his low muscle tone and seizure medications he can get fatigued easily. He also has tightened hamstrings which is common in children with low muscle tone. During carpet-time he had laid back on the floor, was not making a sound, and

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wasn't bothering anyone else. The teacher begins to yell at him to sit up. She proceeds to physically force him into a sitting position and forces his legs into the "crisscross applesauce position." This position is uncomfortable and painful for him due to the tightened hamstrings. When he was forced into this position he began to cry. The aide yelled at him to stop crying and had another child to tell him to stop crying. Then the teacher says, "There's no reason he can't sit there just like everyone else. There's nothing enabling him from doing that." Undoubtedly this teacher has very little knowledge about children with disabilities and yet she's teaching a special needs preschool class. The teacher yells at a student for stating the wrong type of weather for this particular day and yells at another student for not pointing correctly as he's counting. Some of the children, including Andrew, were mocked and laughed at for behaviors from their disability they had no control over. There were no positive reinforcements, encouragement, or proper teaching techniques used during any of this audio. Andrew was ignored throughout the day, except for the times he was yelled at and physically forced. At one time the aide was literally screaming at him to "sit down" repeatedly. At the end of the day the aide told Andrew, "Don't come tomorrow either, stay home with your nurse." Then you hear the teacher laugh at the remark. There's much more to this audio to be released. This audio is very disturbing.

Why? Why? Why? Andrew did not make a sound all day except for when he cried out in pain due to the teacher's force. He was never disruptive nor did he hurt anyone. This was done by the teacher and aide out of complete malice. They knew Andrew nor the other children could tell anyone. Andrew is non-verbal and can't repeat anything that's told to him.

This audio recording was presented to the school administrator on April 23, 2012. As of today, the teacher and aide remain in the classroom with the children. I immediately removed Andrew from the class. The district will not give me any answers related to the matter. When I have asked why they haven't been suspended pending the investigation, the district responds with, "This is a personnel issue and we can't release that information to you." When I spoke with the Union County Public School district on Monday they gave me this same answer regardless of what question was asked. There was a closed door school board meeting on May 9, 2012 outside the county concerning personnel issues. Following that meeting, the teacher's position is posted on their website as a job opening at Rock Rest Elementary School for the new school year beginning in August. However, it seems as the district has chosen to leave the staff in place the remainder of the school year to make this quietly go away. We will not let this quietly go away and will give a voice that these children need. We would like an apology from the teacher and aide for the way they chose to treat Andrew. Also, we are looking for answers and for the district to take appropriate action. We would also like to ask, "Is it Union County Public School's stand that verbal abuse, harassment, bullying, and physical force does not warrant removing staff from his/her duties immediately?" It's been over 3 weeks with no answers and the teachers are still in the classroom. We have full intentions of going as far as necessary to ensure districts are not allowed to cover up these type of behaviors from staff. It is our hope that North Carolina joins New Jersey in legislation to pass a law that requires staff to be immediately removed from the classroom that violate any anti-bullying policy.

Please join me in making Andrew's, and the other children's, voice loud and clear. These type of behaviors will not be tolerated in our schools. No child should be treated this way. But when the teachers prey on the most vulnerable they should be disciplined".

This is the link to Andrew's Blog: <http://andrewsjourney16p.blogspot.com>

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Are UCPS Priorities In the Right Place? Can We Really Believe What They Tell Us When It Comes to Teachers and Their Assistants?

May 17, 2012

[ImageImageImage](#)

Did you know that should the Union County Board of County Commissioners provide stopgap funding to rescue teachers and their assistants slated for termination in FY 2012-2013, the Board Of Education refuses to guarantee that the teachers and assistants will be rehired? It seems that capital expenditures such as take home vehicles and resurfacing tracks that could wait, pay raises to administrators and training outside of the state are top priorities before classroom needs are met. Over forty percent of UCPS employees in the UCPS have no direct classroom responsibility, yet the ENTIRE amount of devastating cuts come from the classroom. This is an outrage and there is no excuse. Our children, teachers, assistants and the classroom tools they need should be our number one priority. The absence of teacher assistants in our schools is going to have a highly detrimental effect on students. Teachers are overworked, called upon repeatedly to do more with less and they desperately need our support.

Other than political theater and divisive tactics to extort more money, how can the leadership of UCPS possibly justify their budgetary position and treatment of those charged with educating our children for the future? If you aren't highly concerned and outraged, you certainly should be!

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The New UCPS Superintendent, New Direction and Leadership or the Same Old Same Old?

May 15, 2012

Sources report the new UCPS Superintendent will be named this afternoon at 5:00 PM. UCPS Assistant Superintendent Mary Ellis has been identified as the high probability selection for the post over the last several weeks. It will be interesting to see if this one was called correctly!

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So UCPS Does Have Money In Hand To Save Teachers and Assistants But Refuses To Pony Up? Are We Also Hearing Even Should UCPS Receive Additional Funding Heads Will Still Roll? Absolutely Amazing and Very Telling Indeed!!!

May 15, 2012

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Now that the “for the children” cloak the bureaucrats hide behind is pulled away and scrutiny of UCPS finances is moves forward, it paints a very interesting picture indeed.

From the Enquirer Journal (By Heather Smith)

Union County’s manager recommends a small increase in funding for Union County Public Schools, but not the \$16 million the school board wanted for retaining teacher assistants.

County manager Cindy Coto told the board of commissioners at a Friday budget workshop that she recommends a \$2.2 million increase in operations and \$4 million in capital, but no additional money for TAs or a school facilities plan.

Additionally, the school board must get county approval before spending bond money on capital projects.

Earlier this month, the school board requested an additional \$16 million to keep TAs and give teachers bonuses. Coto said she had several concerns about the school board’s request.

The request had two caveats, Coto said. The first is that, if the state gave the school district full funding, it would return local funding back to the county. And, after laying off almost 400 TAs, the school system has a funding surplus of \$4.8 million, Coto said. The school board wanted to return an equal share of that surplus to the schools.

Coto said that when she and Simpson met with school officials earlier, Simpson asked if that surplus would be restricted to use only for hiring teacher assistants. officials explained that the money would be allocated to each school to fund “instructional support.” It would be up to each school to decide if the money would be used to rehired TAs or some other form of instructional support.

“You’re saying with these funds, there’s no guarantee of protection for the teaching assistants? Am I hearing that?” Commissioner Jonathan Thomas said.

Commissioner Tracy Kuehler said the school board’s written requests said that it would return any unused local dollars even if the state provided partial funding.

“Not full. It says any dollars equal to the funding the state of North Carolina provides...any dollars, there’s not anything in here about getting full funding from the state, which is what I heard you say,” Kuehler said.

Coto disagreed.

“That’s what Chairman Simpson and I were told,” she said.

In a historic look at local school funding, Coto pointed out that enrollment increased 58 percent from 2003 until now. School funding at the county level, not including debt payments, increased by 260 percent. Overall county revenues only increased by 276 percent in that time, she said.

“Although revenues were not keeping pace with the schools, we funded the schools at actually a higher level than we were receiving dollars for,” Coto said. “Which meant those dollars had to come from some other source and in most cases those dollars came from county operations.”

After a closer examination of the district’s local funding, Coto said it was discovered that UCPS had roughly \$6.2 million in fund balance.

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“What fund balance is, as the board is aware, is if you do not expend all of your funds from a prior year, it rolls over to the next year,” she said.

According to a schools audit, the system used about \$6 million in leftover county money to supplement their current year’s budget, Coto said. Unused state funds are returned to the state if a district does not use it all, she said, but the county does not have such a policy in effect.

Overall, Coto said requests like money for TA salary should be the responsibility of the state, not the local government.

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Union County Manager Coto Sets the Record Straight

May 11, 2012

COUNTY MANAGER’S PDF: [The Truth, The Whole Truth and Nothing But The Truth](#)

It is time to call the blatant lies and political pandering by certain County Commissioners, the Board of Education and UCPS Administrators for what they really are. County Manager Cindy Coto has provided the most accurate information thus far in the attached pdf that tells the real story of school funding in Union County to date. While some prey on raw emotions, posture for political gain and grind political axes, the truth tells a much different story than the subjective rhetorical gasoline with which some are constantly fanning the flames of discontent. Cindy Coto is a highly capable County Manager, plays no agenda other than doing a good job and was HIGHLY touted by the two County Commissioners that now are frankly, being dishonest in the positions they now stake. Mrs. Coto was hired because she was the best possible person to fill the job Commissioner Rogers and Keuhler, why do you now act so disrespectful and belligerent to her in your course of business. Does the fact she refuses to be manipulated to suit your agenda and instead bases her actions on the utmost professional conduct and management practices upset you?

I sincerely hope an outside, professional and objective review will soon get underway to prove this entire political theater debacle is nothing more than dogs and ponies circling to serve an agenda. Many of us have called it for what it is from the onset, but some require additional proof before drawing a conclusion and perhaps understandably so. However, for others, once the truth is laid bare, many will be eating a healthy portion of crow it seems.

UCPS has yet to explain where savings from cheaper energy costs went within their current budget. UCPS administrators have yet to explain their penchant for gadgets, gizmos and travel as opposed to funding teachers and their assistants. Ed Davis has yet to explain why teacher assistants will not be guaranteed a job should the county fund these positions as proposed, which was reported in the Charlotte Observer today.

Sleight of hand, political pandering, dog and pony shows as well as downright bald-faced lies, this is our taxes dollars at work? I think teachers need to think long and hard about the bill of goods they are being sold and exactly whom is playing them these days. The current situation is bad enough, running game only adds insult to injury.

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After An Extremely Mild Winter, Where Are Our Energy Costs Savings and Why Are Those Funds Not Being Used to Help Save Teachers and Assistants?

May 8, 2012

Earlier, the announcement in staff meeting by UCPS facilities managers that approximately \$8,000,000.00 in "surplus cash" needed to be expended by the end of the budget year raised quite a few eyebrows. Review of the vague accounting UCPS offers revealed the primary source these funds would in all likelihood would be the local dollars provided to operate and support school facilities. A major windfall should be in hand due to the extremely low cost of energy needs this past winter, but any explanation or clarification concerning this has been nonexistent when questions were posed to Finance Director Dan Karpinski. Once again, his evasiveness and an inability to articulate concise and clear answers to simple questions is cause for suspicion and doubt of UCPS administrators. \$8,000,000.00 in savings would close the Teacher / Teacher Assistant termination debate easily with money to spare.

Why do UCPS administrators refuse to talk about energy savings and leveraging those local controlled dollars to ensure classroom positions are safe? Could these layoffs easily avoided by diligent use of tax dollars or are layoffs used as a carefully calculated political lever in the budget process by UCPS? Given the anxiety and heartache this debacle has already caused, I certainly hope that is not the case!

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Is Simply Asking County Commissioners for a Band-Aid Really All We Need?

May 7, 2012

We need to advocate doing all we can to take care of our kids and teachers but also strongly insist upon improved transparency, accountability and responsiveness concerning school funding from UCPS. The entire schools budget (330 million) is only broken out on five very vague pages. ***Seriously, how can anyone evaluate what is good and what is bad based on such a paradigm?***

We also need to encourage the Board of County Commissioners to call the BOE's veiled threat of mediation. We need to make sure the funding priority is CLASSROOMS and TEACHERS, even if capital and operating expenses are held in check this year. Enough with gadgets, gizmos and travel already, focus on the folks that make the rubber hit the road for a change. ***If UCPS refuses full disclosure, it is time for the courts to shine light in every dark corner if need be.***

We also need to tell our Commissioners to ramp up pressure on the state level to pony up on teacher salary funding (as this is clearly a state responsibility on which the state has fallen far short) as well as pressuring for increase local control of our schools.

Simply asking for another band-aid is not the answer folks!

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