



Carmage Walls
Commentary Prize

2018 Entry Form

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What is the subject/title of the entry?

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Is your newspaper under 50,000 circulation or above 50,000 circulation? Under 50,000

Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.)

Mar. 24, 2018 – An editorial calling on the local school board to comply with open meetings and open records rules as it pertains to the termination of an employee of the district.

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Good intentions they may be; the law they are not

On Thursday evening, Scottsboro City Schools Board of Education voted not to renew the contracts of two of the system's principals at a special-called board meeting. Collins Intermediate School principal Julie Petty and Brownwood Elementary School principal Gary Speers are both employed under contracts that will expire on Saturday, June 30.

At an emergency meeting called Friday, the board voted to accept the resignation of a system employee. The vote was unanimous; however, two board members were absent.

At some point after the meeting concluded, our reporter was notified that the identity of the individual resigning would not be disclosed in consideration of their family.

Late Friday evening, Superintendent Dr. Jay Reyes phoned to discuss the matter.

Using the latitude allowed to the school system under public records laws, Reyes committed to providing the requested information in a timely manner next week once the *Sentinel* has submitted the appropriate paperwork for the request.

The *Sentinel* is requesting this information because even though withholding the individual's name may be done with the best intention, it is not allowed according to the law.

While there are exceptions in the law for calling an emergency meeting, such as to accept a resignation, there are no exceptions in regard to withholding the results of the meeting.

"There is no statute protecting that information. The documents are public record, as the board voted on them," said Dana W. Vandiver, Director of Public Relations for Alabama Association of School Boards, when reached by email.

The document she's referring to is the letter of resignation.

The only exception to the law regarding withholding a name is in regard to a non-renewal of a contract. The school system may withhold a name long enough to notify the individual of their contract's status. That exception does not apply in this case.

Huntsville attorney Taylor Brooks represents Scottsboro City Schools. When reached by phone on Friday, he said he was aware of the individual's identity but would need to consult with the system and call the newspaper back. As of press time Friday evening, Brooks had not contacted the newspaper.

Questions remain if the employee who resigned might be one of the two principals whose contracts were not renewed on Thursday evening, or if the individual who resigned is a Scottsboro High School teacher that was placed on paid administrative leave last fall pending a state investigation.

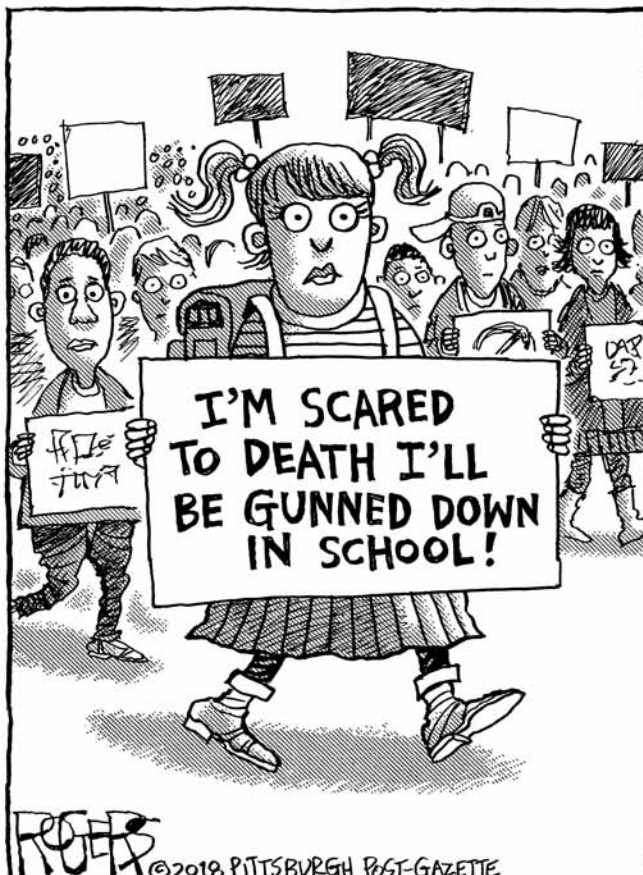
The Alabama Department of Education Communications Department confirmed on Friday, Sept. 29 that Andrew Benson was placed on administrative leave with pay.

The state's investigation has not been finalized, and no court records could be found concerning the teacher.

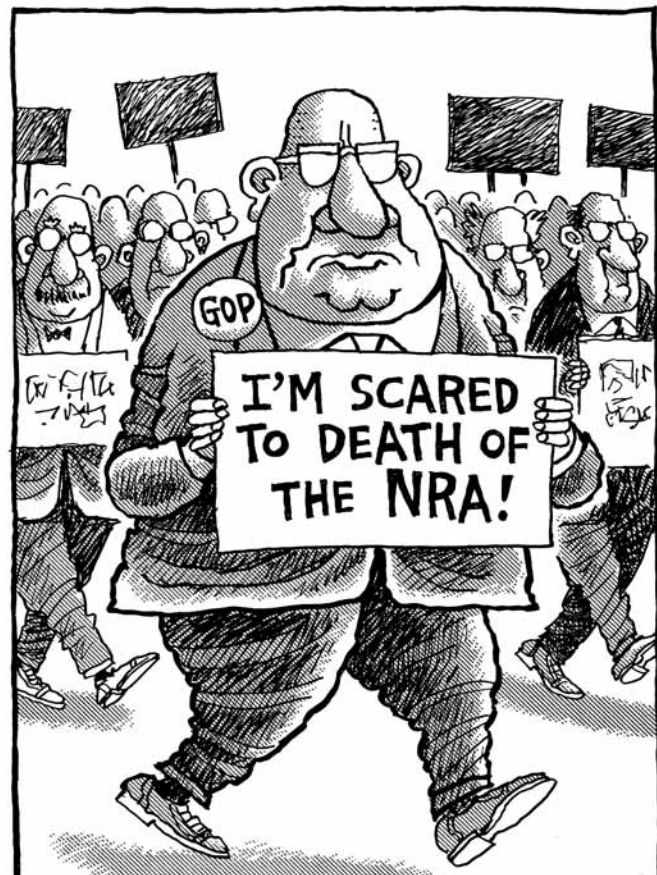
The *Sentinel* is pursuing the request because it is the public's right to know whether a community school will finish the year with an acting principal, or if a teacher accused of wrongdoing has been removed from the system.

We fully expect Scottsboro City Schools to act in good faith and provide the information that is public record upon our submission of the request through the proper channels.

MARCH FOR OUR LIVES...



MARCH FOR OUR POLITICAL LIVES...



YOUR VIEW

We will rebuild our home

Dear Editor:

On Monday, March 19, the City of Jacksonville and the campus of Jacksonville State University suffered severe damage caused by strong storms and tornados.

Numerous reports of structural damage to our campus, city and community have been made, but we are thankful no fatalities and only minor injuries as a result of the storms have been reported. We are happy to report many students were not present as JSU is on spring break.

Along with numerous academic buildings and dormitories, our athletics facilities were also met with devastation. Pete Mathews Coliseum, home to JSU basketball and volleyball, experienced extensive roof damage, causing flooding of the playing surface, lower levels and upstairs offices.

University Field, home to JSU softball, received heavy winds that blew down a light tower, the team's

batting cages and outfield fences. A power pole snapped by the gusts also caused damage to the stadium's backstop.

The JSU Soccer Field and JSU Tennis Courts suffered a downed fence, while the track & field facility, Burgess-Snow Field and Rudy Abbott Field received little to no damage. Many trees are on the ground near each facility.

As surveys of our campus and community continue, and clean-up and reconstruction efforts get underway, we are very thankful that everyone in Jacksonville is reportedly safe, and our thoughts are with the surrounding areas that also endured Monday's wave of severe weather.

Jacksonville State has the distinction of having the "Friendliest Campus in the South," and I believe that sentiment reaches well beyond our university.

Many lost their homes Monday night, but Jacksonville is a tight-

knit community, made up of strong, compassionate citizens willing to help a neighbor in need.

For those looking for ways to help with tornado relief efforts, volunteers are now being accepted by EMA at the Jacksonville Community Center on 501 Alexandria Road SW. Donations and supplies are being accepted the Family Life Center of the First United Methodist Church at 308 Gayle Avenue SW, and monetary donations can be made to the Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama in Anniston. The foundation has set up a fund and 100 percent of donations will go to disaster relief.

While the road to recovery may seem long, the people of Jacksonville will rebuild our home.

—Greg Seitz
Athletic Director
Jacksonville State University

QUOTE OF THE DAY



Endurance is not just the ability to bear a hard thing, but to turn it into glory

- WILLIAM BARCLAY

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YOUR VIEW

Jackson County Sentinel welcomes readers' letters. Text should be original. All letters must contain a complete name, as well as address and daytime telephone number – not for publication.

All letters are subject to editing, and Jackson County Sentinel reserves the right to refuse publication.

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