

School Board...from Page 1A

following the Aug. 26 budget public meeting at 8 a.m. at the board office.

"It's going to be really good, because we're spending the money where we need to, taking care of employees and taking care of kids," Hill said. "We're not having to cut everybody's pay. We do not have furlough days, and we're not going to have a tax increase."

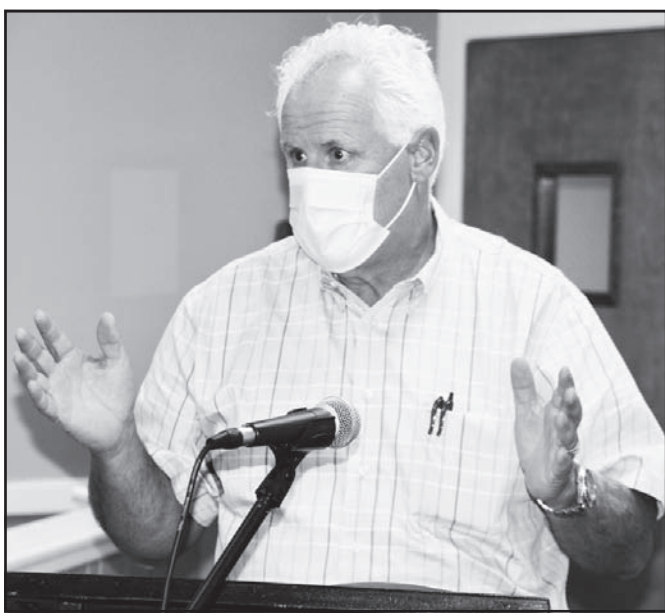
"So, I think that's a blessing, and I feel very confident. Not many districts in the state are in that position, so I'm thankful to be in Union County, I'm thankful for a board that helps us make good financial decisions."

Board Chair Tony Hunter said he felt Union County Schools were "incredibly blessed to be in the position that we're in."

"I've got to take my hat off to everybody involved," Hunter said to the board office staff. "You guys are doing the work. Everybody that's been affiliated with our school system, they're the ones that need a great big thank you, a pat on the back and a good hug when we can actually give a good hug."

In the subsequent regular meeting, Hill welcomed Tax Commissioner Lee Knight, who explained the 2020 property tax digest for the board. As usual, Knight's office is doing well with tax collections, with 99.92 percent of 2017 taxes collected, and 96.94 percent collections on last year's taxes.

Hill also asked all department heads - transportation, facilities, maintenance, custodial, police, etc. - to give the board updates as to the goings on of the school, and everyone reported COVID precautions were in place by



Tax Commissioner Lee Knight spoke about the 2020 tax digest in the Aug. 18 school board meeting. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

the Aug. 17 school start.

According to the system's new "COVID-19 Weekly Update," as of Friday, Aug. 21, four students and two staff had current COVID-19 diagnoses, with 66 students and 19 staff quarantined for possible exposure.

The report is meant to provide transparency to parents and the community to let people know what information the school board and COVID Task Force is using to make decisions.

Instruction is taking place both online and in person this year, with the option to place all students in online-only learning should the need arise.

"I can't tell you how thankful I am that we're able to bring our kids back to school," Hill said. "Seeing those little kids at the primary school, and those young men and women at the high school that are about to be adults and go

out into the workforce - I feel even better that we've done the right thing."

"We're going to continue to do the right thing, and the right thing could be, at some point, a temporary closure of school. I want everybody to know that; there's no reason to beat around the bush about that."

"But we're consulting with medical professionals in our community - not in Atlanta, not in Gainesville. I trust the people sitting in the back of this room. I trust our local doctors. I trust (Union General Chief Nursing Officer) Julia Barnett. I trust (local Emergency Management Agency Director) David Dyer."

"We're going to consult with these people, and we're going to continue to communicate with our board and make good decisions for our kids."

COVID-19...from Page 1A

decline, it picked right back up, and we were doing the same things all over again. If it is on the decline this time, then it is time we work on keeping it that way.

"It doesn't matter if it is declining and we don't do anything. People need to keep having good hygiene. I have two little girls, and I make them wash their hands anytime we go anywhere. It is a good habit, even if this virus wasn't around."

Sara Bleu of Gwinnett was shopping Saturday at From Me 2 U gift shop, where she shared that people should be concentrating on maintaining progress made with COVID to allow the country to return to more of a sense of normalcy sooner.

"I think COVID should

be our main focus as a nation," Bleu said. "I understand the economy isn't fantastic right now and that people are hurting, but that was because of shutdowns related to the pandemic."

"If we get rid of the pandemic or at least enough to where it isn't so widespread, then we can focus on other things. If we do everything too fast, then we are going to spread it again and it will hurt these shops again."

"We thought it went down earlier this summer and people went to beaches in Florida and it spiked up again. This should be our priority."

Still others have a different take, acknowledging the harm the virus has caused around the globe while also feeling it important to work on

more than just keeping COVID at bay, like resident Jeff Strug, who thinks more focus belongs on getting businesses back on track.

"The economy is in shambles, even if nobody really wants to admit it," Strug said at Cabin Coffee on Friday. "Everything is about the election right now, and the candidates are parading around making empty promises, all so they can be president. This does not solve our problem. It is one big game to them, and it is ruining our country."

"We need to take action on this economy, and we need to do it now. I am happy to see some businesses opening back up and staying afloat, but that is all they are doing. We are surviving, not thriving. As a country, we need to do something to help fix these issues, and I don't think \$1,200 checks are going to pull someone out of the gutter."

First Week Back...from Page 1A

their entire class. Other than that, we are only required to wear them in the hall."

Following the successful first week of school, principals are confident that the rest of the year will go smoothly also, and that students should be able to focus primarily on their normal educational routines.

"The students and everybody have taken to this really well," Middle School

Principal Gwen Stafford said. "They are doing what we asked them to do."

"It has just been a great first week, and everybody has been cooperative and helpful and patient and flexible with all the changes and everything we had to do. It has just been a very smooth first week."

"Our car rider and our pick-up and drop-off each day has gone the best I think it has

ever been as far as traffic. I just appreciate everyone - parents, staff and students. It has been great."

The Union County School System will continue following all COVID-19 best practices in consultation with its COVID Task Force to give students the best education possible while keeping people safe on campus.

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