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# Education

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By Dee Ann Campbell  
The Choctaw Sun

**BUTLER** — It's a problem for schools across the country, and right here at home. They can't find them, and they can't keep them.

For schools like Choctaw County High School, the quest to find and retain highly qualified math teachers has been a struggle for several years. But this year has been especially difficult.

Throughout this semester, students in grades 8 and 9 at CCHS have not had a math teacher. The problem has resulted in the delay of grades, parental complaints, and the assignment of substitutes to fill the void.

For the past few years, CCHS has struggled to keep its math department staffed, and when newly-hired middle school math teacher, Ryan Miller, suddenly broke his contract and left last semester, the problem became critical.

For reasons that are still unclear, Miller left CCHS last December, opting to go to Mississippi to teach. His departure left the school with a void in the math department that has proven more than difficult to fill.

But CCHS is by far not the only school to struggle with the lack of math teachers. By the year 2008, there is expected to be a nationwide deficit of more than 2.5 million teachers — many of them in math and science.

The issue is prevalent throughout the country, particularly in the Southeast and West, with most states reporting shortages of teachers in math and science.

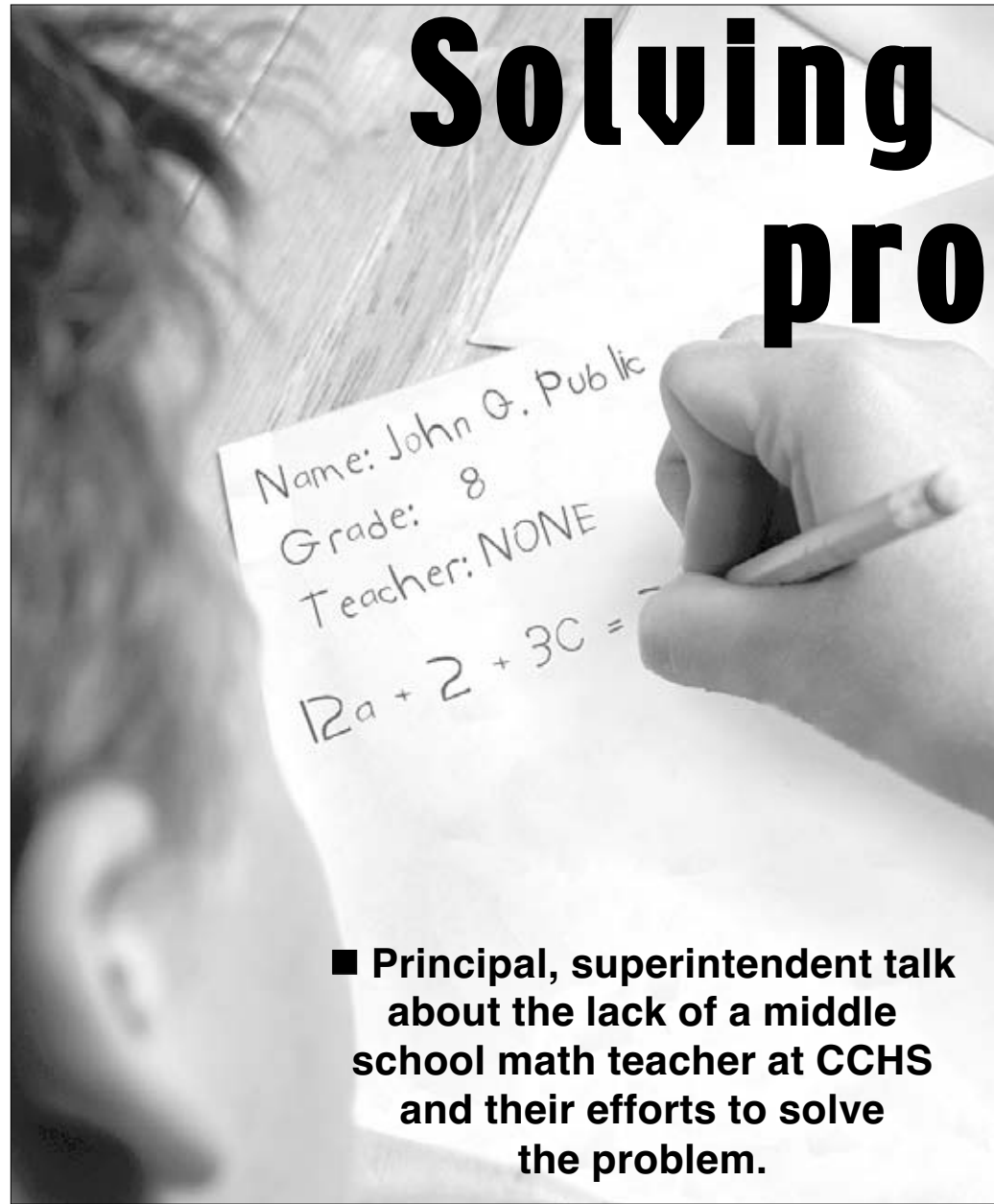
Arkansas, for example, recently reported that about 3/4 of their 194 school districts have a shortage of teachers in those subject areas.

California has been battling a math and science teacher shortage for the past several years, with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger now offering substantial monetary incentives to those who choose to go into that area of education.

But the problem is even worse in states like Alabama where teacher salaries are lower than the national average. In Alabama, the shortage of teachers has become a source of statewide concern. Of 100 school systems that responded to a survey conducted by the Alabama Department of Education this year, 98 reported that they have a teacher shortage.

According to the America Teacher's Federation, Alabama ranks 43rd in the nation in teacher pay.

In addition to salary, other issues are affecting the ability of CCHS and other schools to recruit



■ **Principal, superintendent talk about the lack of a middle school math teacher at CCHS and their efforts to solve the problem.**

Choctaw Sun graphics by Mickey Bryant

***“Nobody is going to leave their job in the middle of the year and come teach here.”***

--- Kevin Howard  
CCHS principal

math teachers. While many new graduates have degrees in early childhood education, fewer are qualified to teach at the middle- and high-school level, especially in math and science, and fewer are choosing to go into math education as a profession.

For those college students who do choose to teach math, the requirements to gain highly qualified certification are increasingly difficult, and when they do, the salary is much lower than they could earn in another career field using their math degrees.

“The courses have changed,” CCHS principal Kevin Howard explains. “There are so many more advanced math courses required in college. They can get their elementary education degree and teach up to 6th or 8th grade, but after that, they have to have higher certification.”

“And to be realistic,” he adds, “if you have a math degree, you can do a lot more with it than teaching and earn a much larger salary with a lot less stress.”

It is the level of stress associated with teaching teenagers, as well as the low salary, that keeps young people from entering the profession, and keeps those who do enter from staying.

According to a report by Governor Bob Riley's Commission on Quality Teaching (GCQT), about

14% of teachers in the United States leave the classroom after the first year. Another 24% leave by the end of the 2nd year, and by the fifth year, up to 46% of teachers have opted to leave the field.

“Younger teachers are just not staying in the profession because of the stress level and the discipline that is required these days,” Howard explains.

Regardless of the reasons, CCHS's lack of a middle school math teacher has been a source of much concern this year. Both Howard and Superintendent of Education Sue Moore have been working to find ways to fill the position, including ongoing recruitment efforts from within Alabama as well surrounding states.

“We have contacted retired teachers, colleges,

other school systems, you name it,” says Moore. “Now we are going to statewide application process that will allow us to highly publicize our need for a math teacher throughout the state, and we are searching in other states.”

Moore adds that she has personally made dozens of telephone calls to colleges and universities to try to recruit students who are working on their teaching degrees to come to CCHS to do their student teaching while pursuing their certifications.

While the problem continues for 8th and 9th grades, other math-related issues have been solved at CCHS. The addition of math teacher Andy Huey this year has alleviated some of the problems in 10th and 11th grades, but for the 8th and 9th

grades, there is still no permanent solution. Teacher Beth Gore has also been transferred from the sciences to advanced math courses to fill the void for high school students.

But with fewer and fewer young people choosing teaching as a career — and even fewer opting to use their math degrees to teach — the prospects of finding a math teacher for middle school is challenging.

In the meantime, CCHS has utilized some creative ways to address the problem. The use of long-term substitutes, while not the optimum choice, has been significantly helpful, Howard says. Other teachers are also volunteering to give up their own planning periods to go into the math classroom.

“We have teachers who are going into that classroom to help during their planning periods,” Howard says. “That has been very helpful, and I appreciate them for doing that. I have one teacher who goes in and out of that classroom every day or every other day to help.”

Howard himself had served as math teacher for the middle school following the departure of Miller. But, he says, it was impossible for him to continue to teach those classes and perform his duties as principal.

“I tried that in January,” he says, “but I was getting so far behind in my office. There was no way I could continue to do both.”

In what is perhaps the most creative move to solve the problem, school officials have also been attempting to link CCHS classrooms with those at Southern Choctaw High so that CCHS students can participate in the SCHS math classes through Distance Learning technology.

“The problem has been with the scheduling,” Howard says. “Their math classes are at a different time than ours. It's been difficult to put the two together.”

One of the most obvious problems with the lack of a math teacher for middle school has been the posting of grades. In fact, grades for the last 9 weeks grading period were not posted for several weeks afterward.

The problem, Howard says, is that, since substitutes do not grade papers or post grades, other

teachers have been taking on that role for the math classes, working extra hours to complete the math grades and their own grading, as well.

“It takes time to post grades,” Howard says. “We are getting it done.”

Howard says that the report cards that are going out this week will be complete, including the math grades for 8th and 9th graders.

This week, two prospective applicants have looked at the school as a possibility for next year. Both are from Mississippi.

“But this won't solve the problem this year,” Howard says. “Nobody is going to leave their job in the middle of the year and come teach here.”

Howard also adds that with other states more able to offer incentives, higher salaries, and better benefits to recruit teachers, those who may be prospects for CCHS could choose to go elsewhere.

“We just can't compete with some states,” he says.

The lack of a math teacher for CCHS's middle school has posed a problem that could affect the entire school. With the school now ‘in delay’ and hoping to get out of school improvement this year for the first time in nearly a decade, the math scores are particularly crucial. In fact, it has been math scores on state assessments that have kept CCHS from making Adequate Yearly Progress goals in past years.

And if the school does get out of School Improvement this year, the ‘clear’ status could even offer an unforeseen problem, again related to math teachers.

“I don't know what's to come,” Howard says. “We are hoping to get out of school improvement this year. If that happens, there will no longer be ‘school choice’. We will have even more students here.”

For now, Howard says he is thankful for the substitutes who are filling in, and for the teachers who are volunteering their time to help alleviate the problem.

Both Moore and Howard say they are continuing to work toward recruiting a math teacher for CCHS. But they both also acknowledge that this is a math problem that is difficult to solve, both at CCHS and across the country.

## Carney earns \$24,000 Presidential Scholarship from University of Mobile

**MOBILE** — Meagan Carney of Gilbertown, a senior at South Choctaw Academy, has been awarded a \$24,000 Presidential Scholarship to attend the University of Mobile.

The Presidential Scholarship is UM's most prestigious scholarship. It recognizes individuals with outstanding high school academic performance who have demonstrated leadership capability. The award is valued at \$6,000 per year awarded over eight consecutive semesters and is renewable provided the recipient maintains a full-time student status per semester and a 3.25 grade point average. The scholarship includes a \$1,000 room-and-board grant per year, dependent on the student's living in the res-



Megan Carney

idence halls.

The University of Mobile is a private university affiliated with the Alabama Baptist State Convention.

She is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. David Carney.

## BOE makes personnel decisions, decisions on other issues at Tuesday night's meeting

By Dee Ann Campbell  
The Choctaw Sun

**GILBERTOWN** — The Choctaw County Board of Education made a variety of personnel decisions during the March 13th meeting, including accepting the retirement of several long-time educators.

Effective at the end of this school year, the Board accepted the retirements of Sarah Golightly, Dorothy Ruffin, and Mary Ridgeway from their positions at Choctaw County Elementary, and 1st Sergeant Houston Cunningham from his position with the JROTC unit at Southern Choctaw High.

The Board also

approved the resignations of Corey Kelley as teacher at Southern Choctaw Elementary, and Rebecca Hall as teacher at Southern Choctaw High.

In a unanimous vote, the BOE opted to employ Roderick Vann as Girls' Basketball Coach at SCHS, retroactive to the 2006-07 season. Tracey McIntyre was accepted to fill the position as 2nd grade teacher at CCES, a position vacated by Jennifer Miller who resigned recently to take a position as County Extension Coordinator.

The Board voted to accept employment of Louise Boney as long-term substitute at Choctaw County High, retroactive to Dec. 13, 2006, at a rate

of \$80 per day. Boney's employment was inadvertently left off of the agenda during the December BOE meeting.

Leaves of absence were granted to Tisha Lewis beginning March 12 until May 18 for family medical leave. Dorothy Ruffin was also granted Family Medical Leave.

Two sick days were added back to the record for Annie Scruggs, CNP at CCHS, days that she missed due to an injury on the job.

The BOE accepted a recommendation by Superintendent Sue Moore that they pay \$1,000 in dues for membership in the Alabama Black Belt Superintendent's Association

(ABBSA).

Moore also recommended that the board list the old bleachers at the former CCHS football field as surplus property to be sold to the highest bidder. Moore assured the board that the school had already moved any bleachers that they intended to use at the new stadium. The surplus bleachers are mounted in cement, Moore added, and must be removed by the purchaser.

The BOE voted unanimously to enter into an agreement to provide services for local Head Start students who are disabled. The provision of services is decided upon annually.

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