

# **“The Dumbing Down of Bladen County”**

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Since when did we become so willing to undermine the futures of all the children in Bladen County? When did the mental and physical well-being of the students get circumvented in favor of political and monetary gain? How can the immediate gratification of our school board and leaders take precedence over the creative and intellectual growth of the fledgling generation? These are the questions that rack my brain every time I hear of news regarding to our waning education system here in Bladen County. I think about these issues, and silently observe the dwindling performance of the local schools, and have come to the conclusion that “we are afraid of success.”

First, as an alumnus of both Clarkton School of Discovery and West Bladen High School, let me work my way up to the theme of “fearing success.” The proposed closings of not only Clarkton School of Discovery, but also Booker T. Washington and Plain View Primaries, would put added strain to an already bleak situation of overcrowded classrooms, minimal teaching materials, and inadequate student attention. More so, Clarkton School of Discovery is one of the very few schools in the region that truly represents an enriching, stimulating learning environment worthy of being deemed an institute of excellence. From a multitude of imaginative electives for students to select from, to skillful instructors, to the invigorating atmosphere of scholastic prosperity, Clarkton School of Discovery is a hallmark of academia, and both it and Bladen County would be dealt a great disservice if closure were to ensue.

Secondly, it is apparent that Bladen County is content in watching the gradual decline of the academic abilities of the student body. From the quenching of the in-class Honors and Advanced Placement programs at West Bladen, to the virtual snuffing out of the science fair at both the school and county levels, we are effectively dousing the flame of inquiry in the minds of our students. I have experience with the importance of both of these programs, as taking numerous Honors and AP classes granted me the opportunity to attend college with a full semester’s amount of credit under my belt. The Science Fair sparked the love of science in numerous children my age at the time and enabled me to win all the way up to Internationals, so I was shocked when I volunteered at UNCP this past spring to notice that there was not one project from Bladen County attending Regionals. But apparently none of this matters unless you are adept at kicking or throwing a ball for your school’s team. I first handedly witnessed the partiality given towards sports team (from new uniforms annually, to needlessly cycling of new equipment and seemingly endless sports trips) while art, science, and humanities teachers struggled to pay out-of-pocket for materials and educational outings. There is a stark disparity that needs to be addressed between athletics and academics, especially given that job prospects predominantly favor the latter. Evident from the dwindling of the Honors and AP programs, to the near extinction of the Science Fair, and the discrimination against intellectual growth, the county school system is succeeding in what can be termed “The Dumbing Down of Bladen County.”

Finally, the misguided priorities of the school system and county as a whole have us spinning downward into an already festering pit of ignorance and stagnancy. From riding Principal Todd Finn out of the county on a rail, to the blatant favoritism demonstrated towards East Bladen High School, and even the failed 0.25% school tax referendum of 2014 demonstrate the county's desire to fight the success of our students at every turn. The tax would have simply meant that on your occasional trip to the grocery store, if you purchased \$100 worth of tax applicable items, the total increase in regards to the "school tax" would have been 25 cents. Magnify that by the number of purchases made every day of every year in the county, and our schools would have benefited greatly from such a small tax increase spread across the entire population. But if the rumors are factual that the Board of Education is truly spending money on new office buildings and employees, instead of investing in the schools in the wake of a "financial and scholastic crisis," the money might have been spent on pristine new office furniture anyhow, as opposed to the students' growing scholastic needs.

From the triviality of ensuring that East Bladen remains the epicenter of pride and accomplishment, in spite of numerous tales to the contrary, to the widespread disinterest of cultivating centers of intellectual advancement, the board of education (and Bladen county to an extent) has strikingly failed in their duty to advance the upcoming generation's competency in anything besides athletics and stagnancy. Again, instead of supporting our fellow man in the hopes of their rising far above where we have achieved, we are afraid of the success of others due to the shadow that it may cast on our own accomplishments. This is why, when all is said and done, and the misdeeds have been sown for the students of the future, there is a mass exodus of the bright and accomplished among us, and the only thing those remaining can expect to come into Bladen County is the next Taco Bell.