

Governor Visits Hardin Park School

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Governor Bev Perdue was in Boone Friday visiting Hardin Park Elementary School. The obvious discussion was Education and the Budget. Superintendents from three area school systems Watauga, Alleghany, and Ashe counties were also on hand as well as Appalachian State's Chancellor Kenneth Peacock.



Watauga County Superintendent Marty Hemric opened the forum, talking about the staggering number of layoffs and staff reductions over the past 3 years. Those included a 23% reduction in Teacher Assistants, and an 8 % reduction in teachers. He was however, extremely thankful to the Watauga County Commissioners who have committed extra funds for this coming year to help fill the gap in the State's budget.

The Governor talked about the bill that lies on her desk, calling it a "Painful Read". She spoke about how for the first time in North Carolina's history, the Legislative body fundamentally backed away from their responsibility to the people of North Carolina to provide a free and public education. She reconfirmed her commitment to doing what she felt was right for education in the state. While the Governor has not publicly made up her decision of the bill, she did ask for five representatives to change their mind and not allow the veto to be over thrown.

Several teachers spoke asking Governor Perdue to stand firm and support the teachers and education throughout the state. One of the greatest concerns for the school system is the More at Four spots and Pre K in the schools. Mrs. Varipapa, a Hardin Park Pre K teacher, stressed the importance of this program and how school systems have access to educational staff and resources that other daycare and childcare providers don't. Mr. Felker, a Science teacher also at Hardin Park, commented on how citizens are "worried about the future of teaching".

Appalachian's Kenneth Peacock also spoke about a plan that will be reviled later this summer. The university is working with Appalachian Health Care and other groups to provide a Retirement Community in the area, which will provide \$10 million in payroll.

The Governor has until Tuesday to decide to pass or veto the bill.