

BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

# The Weekly Press

SERVING BAKER, CENTRAL, AND ZACHARY

THURSDAY, APRIL 21-27, 2022

A PEOPLE'S PUBLICATION

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## Rail corridor between Baton Rouge, New Orleans moved a step closer

**CP** Canadian Pacific's intent to allow one round trip between the two cities without any infrastructure improvements was a part of its pitch for merger approval

Before departing Baton Rouge, Edwards said, "It was only a few weeks ago that we made the request, and the fact that it happened so quickly speaks volumes to the commitment to this link in particular" by the railroad and FRA executives.



Gov. John Bel Edwards

BATON ROUGE, La. — A decades-long effort to create a Louisiana passenger rail corridor between the state capital of Baton Rouge and New Orleans moved a step closer Wednesday when Gov. John Bel Edwards joined Amtrak, federal, and railroad officials on an inspection run along the route.

Among those joining the governor, a Democrat, were Amit Bose, Federal Railroad Administration administrator; Canadian Pacific CEO Keith Creel and his Kansas City Southern counterpart, Pat Ottensmeyer; and Amtrak President Stephen Gardner.

The 12-car KCS consist reprises colors of the route's last scheduled passenger train, the Southern Belle, which made its final run in 1969. The event was especially significant, because attempts to conduct passenger inspection trips on the 80-mile Baton Rouge-New Orleans route had been rebuffed for more than 20 years.

Canadian Pacific's intent to allow one round trip between the two cities without any infrastructure im-

See **RAIL**, on page 2



The Kansas City Southern executive train approaches New Orleans during an Amtrak inspection trip on Wednesday. (Screen shot from Amtrak video)

### State Sen. Cleo Fields to deliver BRCC's spring 2022 commencement address

BATON ROUGE, LA — Louisiana State Sen. Cleo Fields will serve as the spring 2022 commencement speaker at Baton Rouge Community College's 26th Commencement ceremony Friday, May 20, at 9 a.m. The ceremony will take place outside on the Mid City



Sen. Cleo Fields

See **FIELDS**, on page 2

## Louisianans react to Biden renewing onshore oil and gas drilling

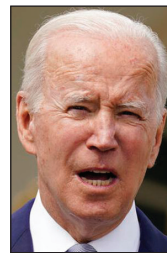
Industry insiders say increased deep-water activity would help the state most

NEW ORLEANS - President Biden is resuming the sale of leases for oil and drilling on federal land but people in Louisiana say what would help the state would be more offshore drilling.

Archie Chaisson is the President of Lafourche Parish.

"On behalf of the American energy worker, I think it's a good thing, right? We're going to put domestic production back to work," said Chaisson.

Reporters asked Chaisson about how reliant his parish is



President Joe Biden



Oil Well (Adobe Stock)

on the oil and gas industry.

"We've seen a slight job, but I will still tell you that as of today about 30% of the parish's budget is made up of offshore oil and gas vessels, the things that supply everything from water and

mud and widgets and people to the offshore oil and gas industry, so we are extremely tied," said Chaisson.

The move by Biden is designed to help drive down high gasoline prices.

Mike Moncla is president of the Louisiana Oil and Gas Association.

"I think it's a positive step for the United States, it just doesn't really help Louisiana much," said

See **DRILLING**, on page 2

### Bills to weaken Louisiana vaccine mandates advance in Legislature

BY: JC CANICOSA

An attempt to prohibit COVID-19 vaccine mandates by Louisiana schools and all levels of government has gained momentum in the Legislature, although proponents' arguments for doing so have been based on misinformation.

Two pieces of legislation that would weaken such mandates advanced from the House Health and Welfare committee Tuesday morning. One resolution would remove the COVID-19 vaccine from the state health department's immunization schedule and require schools to allow unvaccinated students to join classes in person.

Rep. Larry Bagley, R-Stonewell, author of the resolution and chair of the committee, said the COVID-19 vaccine is "experimental" and "we know it has bad effects."

The Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines have received full approval from the Food and Drug Administration. About five out of every one million COVID-19 vaccinations have led to severe allergic reactions, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. There have also been 60 confirmed reports — out of 18.6 million total — of people developing thrombocytopenia

See **BILLS**, on page 2

#### WEATHER

**MON. 04/25**  
Showers  
High 84°.

**TUE. 04/26**  
Showers  
High 77°.

**WED. 04/27**  
Partly Cloudy  
High 80°.

**THUR. 04/28**  
Partly Cloudy  
High 84°.

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# LOCAL & STATE

## College Consensus ranks Southern among the top 10 HBCUs in the nation



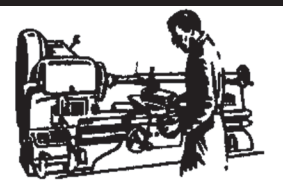
College Consensus recently ranked Southern University as the nation's best Historically Black Colleges and Universities for 2022. Southern ranked number eight out of 50, surpassing schools like Jackson State University, Xavier University, and Clark Atlanta University.

College Consensus' ranking techniques combine the results of the most respected college ranking systems like U.S. News & World Report, which ranked Southern as one of the top 20 Historically

Black Colleges and Universities in the nation for 2021. The College Consensus ranking also includes ratings from thousands of student reviews from Cappex and Grad Reports, a comprehensive and holistic perspective.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, there are 107 HBCUs. Of those, Southern is the flagship of the only HBCU system in the United States. For more on the methodology of this ranking of HBCUs, go to collegeconsensus.com/about/.

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The Baton Rouge Weekly Press strives to be fair and accurate. The newspaper corrects any significant errors of fact brought to the attention of the editor. If you think an error has been made, call 225-775-200

### Weekly Press

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## Majestic Ensemble for Christ Beau, Debutantes 2022 introduces young men and women into society



Majestic Ensemble for Christ Beau and Debutantes 2022 Master Semaj Wells, Miss Gabriella Jolla, Master Brelyn Wilson, Miss Aurora Montgomery, Master Darrell Celestine

### BILLS from page 1

syndrome, which causes blood clots in large blood vessels, after receiving the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

In December, the House Health Committee voted 13-2 to reject adding the COVID-19 vaccine to the list of required immunizations for K-12 schools, daycare centers and higher education institutions. The Louisiana Department of Health added it anyway.

Louisiana law also gives parents a straight-forward way to circumvent school vaccine requirements. Parents can exempt a child from taking a vaccine by submitting written dissent to the requirement or a note from a physician saying the vaccine is not medically advisable.

The health committee also voted 12-5 in favor of a bill that would prevent the state and local governments from issuing proof of COVID-19 vaccination requirements for entry into schools, restaurants and businesses in Louisiana.

Committee members also rejected multiple anti-vaccine bills Tuesday. One of which would have allowed proof of having COVID-19 antibodies from a recent infection be "treated and recognized as being vaccinated." The bill failed in a 7-10 vote.

Another proposal to prohibit vaccines labeled under "emergency use authorization" from being added to the health department's immunization schedule was rejected 6-10.

On the Louisiana House floor Tuesday afternoon, Bagley deferred another bill that would have made it

a misdemeanor for a school or government entity to ask someone about their vaccination status. Lawmakers raised questions about the practicality of proposed law and how it would be enforced.

An example Bagley provided was a public entity asking an employee if they've been vaccinated.

"So we're actually criminalizing free speech?" Rep. Bobby Carter, D-Amite, asked Bagley.

"Yes," Bagley replied. "Once it's criminalized, they'll quit asking that question," he later said.

Rep. Matthew Willard, D-New Orleans, also questioned how fines on local governments included in the bill would work.

"So, the local government would levy a fine upon itself and then get the money right back?" Willard asked.

"Well, if they're the ones that asked (about vaccination status), I guess so," Bagley said, repeatedly turning to a legislative staff attorney for clarity on his bill when questions continued.

Legislators also raised concerns with making it a crime to ask someone about their vaccine status and citing a government employee who was simply carrying out their job.

### FIELDS from page 1

Campus, 201 Community College Drive, on the grounds near the Magnolia Performing Arts Theatre & Pavilion. Degrees will be conferred to students who completed their studies this past spring and last fall. The ceremony will also be streamed live on BRCC's Facebook page: Facebook.com/mybrcc. In the event of inclement weather, the commencement will be held in the Bonne Santé Wellness Center on the Mid City Campus.

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### DRILLING from page 1

Moncla.

Professor Eric Smith is with Tulane's Energy Institute.

"At the end of the day, it wasn't particularly profitable to drill on federal land anyway because of all of the paperwork and

the regulations," said Smith.

Biden's decision also includes a hike in royalties that oil companies pay.

"It increased the federal royalties by 50%, so you know, oil companies right off the bat are going, you know, have to, you know, anytime something like that

See DRILLING, on page 3

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## The Senate advanced bill that would provide financial support for new, existing post-secondary education programs

BY ROSEL FLORES  
LSU Manship School News Service

BATON ROUGE--The Senate advanced a bill 36-0 Wednesday that would provide financial support for new and existing post-secondary education programs for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Louisiana currently offers six higher education programs that allow students with these types of disabilities to enjoy a college experience and grow educationally and socially.

If approved by the House, the fund would help the students increase their social and communication skills, develop employment skills and produce self-sufficient young adults who could become successful employees.

The bill, Senate Bill 192, was sponsored by Sen. Gerald Boudreaux, D-Lafayette, and was discussed more thoroughly on Monday in the Senate Finance Committee, where a large crowd attended to show support.

Boudreaux only spoke briefly about the bill. He introduced an amendment because the fund is subject to appropriations on an annual basis. The bill would just create the fund but would not create the recurring source of revenue for it. He then yielded the floor, so that the people in the audience could present their testimony.

Dr. Gerlinde Beckers, the director of Lions Connected, a post-secondary education program at Southeastern Louisiana University, stated that its program has a 47% acceptance rate and does not have the funding to accept more students.

As of today, 75% of the individuals who have completed the Lions Connected program have been gainfully employed.

Mary Frances Avera, a student in ULLIFE, shared her experience in a similar program at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. She stated that the program had increased her confidence and communication skills as well as allowed her to become more independent.

She said the program is life-changing for people like her with disabilities, and she hoped that it receives additional funding to help as many students as possible.

Dr. Caroline Jurisich, the director of UL LIFE, said the need for programs like this is at an all-time high based on the increasing number of applications each year. In 2019, UL LIFE even began to offer housing for students seeking programs like theirs.

She hopes the programs will be expanded throughout the state to provide more opportunities for students with disabilities.

Yolanda Marks, a passionate single mother of a child with intellectual disabilities, shared her daughter's story. Her daughter is now a college freshman, and Marks asked that the Legislature act as an angel investor and support students like her throughout the state.

"I come here today to ask you to think of this as a business," Marks said. "In order to receive a maximum return on your investment, you need an influx of cash to grow and expand."

"The payout would be you have people who work not because they have to but because they want to be contributing members of society," said Marks.

### DRILLING from page 2

happens it goes to, the end-user ends up paying, so punishing oil and gas for higher royalties, it hurts people at the pump," said Moncla.

Smith is also critical of Biden's energy policies.

"They have a very inconsistent message, they're saying they want more drilling, they want to see more production which would lower the prices. All that's true, the problem is, if the economics weren't so successful with the earlier plan they're not going to be successful when you raise the royalty rate 50%," said Smith.

"You know commodity prices are kind of a fix-all in our industry, so you know activity levels have picked up in the Haynesville shale, there are a lot of rigs up there, south Louisiana has picked up a little bit, you know, we don't have that shale play that has people going crazy down here. But we are more active than we were on the workover rig side, which is fixing old wells," said Moncla.

# Louisiana considers removing political party affiliation



The Louisiana House Committee on House and Governmental Affairs voted 9-3 Wednesday in favor of Green's House Bill 206. Democrats and Republicans supported the proposal that now heads to the full House for consideration.

## Louisiana might prohibit political party affiliation from being listed next to judicial candidates on election ballots if legislation from Rep. Kyle Green, D-New Orleans, gets passed into law

BY: JULIE O'DONOGHUE  
Louisiana Illuminator

The Louisiana House Committee on House and Governmental Affairs voted 9-3 Wednesday in favor of Green's House Bill 206. Democrats and Republicans supported the proposal that now heads to the full House for consideration.

Green, an attorney, said he doesn't think political party should be a primary factor in selecting a judge. Voters should instead rely on the candidate's critical thinking skills and disposition.

Green said those who really want to know a judge's political party affiliation would still be able to find that information online, even if it is not listed on the ballot.

The three committee members who voted against Green's legislation are conservative Republicans: Reps. Dodie Horton of Houghton, Polly Thomas of Metairie and Valarie Hodges of Denham Springs. Horton said she considers political affiliation intrinsic to who a person is and a crucial piece of information people should have in the voting booth.

Not all Republicans on the committee shared Horton's perspective. Committee chairman John Stefanski of Crowley said he had talked to several judges he respected – both

conservative and liberal – who did not think members of the bench should be associated with a political party. Stefanski, a lawyer who is considering running for attorney general, voted for the bill.

Several other states don't list candidates' political party affiliation on ballots for judges and other offices, including school board seats. In some cases, major political parties still endorse specific candidates in those states and distribute flyers to voters at polling places indicating who their preferred candidates are.

If implemented, the ballot change would come with a one-time estimated cost of \$68,000. Secretary of State Kyle Ardoin's office said they would need to pay someone to update their computer systems with the change.



Rep. Kyle Green

## Baker Buffalo Fest was a time of fun, family, and festivities!

BAKER, La. — From April 14-17, the Baker Buffalo Festival was in full swing at City Hall and the adjoining Baker City Park.

The sun was setting, the food was frying, and the music was on full blast. The first night of the Baker Buffalo Festival, "Welcome to Baker", was a welcome good time! MC Roland Stewart brought an unmatched energy to on-lookers and participants alike. The Youth Talent Showcase was

a great highlight of local kids' and students' talents such as the Impact Charter Dancing Dolls and Cheerleaders, the Impact Charter School and the Baker Middle Drum Lines.

The night carried on as the Youth Talent Showcase allowed Sarah Evans who read "Ain't I a Woman" by Sojourner Truth while Jeremiah Howard and McKayla Gross sang

See **FEST**, on page 5



City of Baker Mayor, Darnelle Waites and Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome

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# RELIGION

## Love Is More Than An Option; It's A Priority!

1Corinthians 13:13 John 13:34  
 For centuries we've tried to define love through our human understanding; we've base other definitions on feelings and experiences, whether personal experience or someone sharing their experience.

We must understand the importance of adequately defining something. If we miss the true meaning of a thing, we will inevitably abuse (abnormal use) or destroy it. Proverbs 3:5,6 NLT "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your understanding. Seek his will

in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. Remember, the power to define is the power to fulfill. God's word is the only means of getting a clear understanding of John 1:1-4 NIV "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He

was with God in the beginning. Through him, all things were made; without him, nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and life was the light of all humanity." Hebrews 1:1-2 NIV "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe." If you notice, these two scriptures establish the fact that Jesus Christ is the authority of truth. Jesus, who is the word, is the creator of all things, and he's the final word that establishes all things. To get the true meaning of love, we must trust the Word (Jesus). 1 John 4:7-9 NIV "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him." Paul explains how people will know what Love (God) looks like to the church. His life reveals the true character of God. His life is the expression of love, expressing to us the way he expects us his people to live; love is the most important thing; in 1 Corinthians character 13, Paul points out that we all have gifts we make speak in different languages, or able to articulate God's message with clarity, have great faith, help the poor, etc. We do good works trying to impress others and God, but none of that matters if we don't



Pastor Jerome Smith, Sr.

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See LOVE, on page 5

## HEALTH AND BUSINESS: AN IMPACTFUL DUO

Dr. Gayle Young, HHP, MA, JD  
 Holistic Health Executive and Practitioner



Dr. Gayle Young

Have you ever tried to run a business unhealthy and unhappy? How did that work out for you? Have you ever worked for a company with an ailing workforce, or whose leadership was sick? Not only have I worked for those types of companies, but I was also once a business owner who was sick and dying. I made money, and my business was successful and prosperous, but in the end, it shuttered. I didn't have a health success plan. I did not know that I needed one.

My business plan did not even include a health component other than insurance. So, was my business successful? Through the lens of the impact that businesses are supposed to make in a community, I think I soared - I gave back to non-profits, churches, and schools through financial donations and volunteerism. So that was good. But, not great.

Many of those organizations relied on my donations. I know my church certainly relied on my tithes and offerings. My family relied on me being able to contribute to the welfare of my mother and extended family. My failed health impacted more than me, it impacted the bottom line of my employees and vendors that I worked with and supported.

I was more grieved by what I could no longer do for others than over being so ill. I spent a few years bedridden, always hopeful, envisioning a new day, a new season, and a new opportunity. And I got just what I envisioned and more... a new life and a chance to help others soar.

Even after healing, I was sometimes haunted by the idea

that just three years before I became too ill to work, prosper and care for myself properly. I was the only African American woman chosen as the Baton Rouge Business Report's 2006 Influential Woman in Business. And, in less than two years, I was not influencing anyone, not even myself.

But that all changed when I began engaging in holistic health care. Eating foods that nourished, rather than depleted my body, mind, and spirit. I rapidly healed and began to flourish again.

For other families and business owners, I created, Laughter in Your Belly Wellness, a brick-and-mortar Holistic Health Clinic, executive coaching, and training business. I am doing things differently this time. Very different! I learned through my years of being bedridden on 22 meds, being treated by 15 doctors, and having everything from a brain tumor to lupus, fibromyalgia, and more, that my Health is my best business tool. For an employer, especially a small business owner, it is key to have well-balanced emotional and mental health. I can teach you how to excel in business and health.

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Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. - Hebrews 10:25

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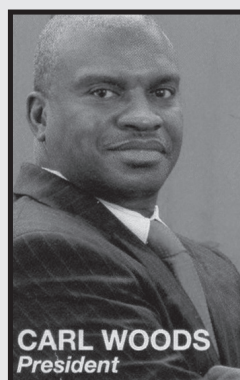


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# BUSINESS

## Cable, internet providers could have to provide refunds automatically after disasters

BY: GREG LAROSE  
Louisiana Illuminator

Customers who want a refund after severe weather knocks out their cable or internet have to contact their service provider and request it. A proposal that advanced Wednesday in the Louisiana Legislature would make those refunds automatic if the outage lasts more than 24 hours because of a state-declared emergency.

Sen. Cleo Fields, D-Baton Rouge, said the onus should not be on disaster victims to contact their cable and internet companies. His Senate Bill 352 would place the responsibility on the providers to issue refunds without calls from customers.

Fields' proposal would also place cable and internet service providers under the regulatory oversight of the Louisiana Public Service Commission, which previously has not had any say-so over these utilities or the rates they charge customers. Cable and ISP companies typically reach franchise agreements with local governments through which their rates are set over the timeframe of the agreement.

Lauren Chauvin with LCTA, the Internet and Cable Association, opposed the bill before the Senate Commerce Committee. She said service providers refunded tens of millions of dollars to customers after Hurricane Ida last year in addition to spending hundreds of millions on infrastructure repairs.



A proposal that advanced Wednesday in the Louisiana Legislature would make customer refunds automatic if cable or internet outages last more than 24 hours because of a state-declared emergency. (Canva image)

"We oppose the new and burdensome regulation and requiring a whole new entity to be regulated by," Chauvin said.

Cable companies need to hear from customers to address outages because they don't currently have the ability to pinpoint them like power utilities, she said. There is also no way to distinguish a weather-related outage from when a customer simply unplugs their internet or cable connection, Chauvin added.

Senators representing areas hard hit by hurricanes in recent years said they supported the concept of the bill but were concerned its wording might not achieve Fields' stated goals. Fields agreed not to advance the bill on the Senate floor if his colleagues would advance it from the committee.

There was no objection, and the bill was moved to the full Senate.

### FEST from page 3

"He Wants It All" by Forever Jones. As the night carried on, there were various vendors ready to serve the crowd funnel cakes, nachos, drinks, and more!

The second night was a "you had to be there" moment with live music from Vince Hutchinson and Heavy Storm Band rocking the crowd on Friday night! Kids were out playing fair games, doing their best to win every prize imaginable. Families were riding the carnival rides, screaming, laughing, and enjoying the amusement-fueled atmosphere.

The Buffalo Festival Parade was a good time for all as Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome led the charge! Floats and cars showcasing members of the City Council such as Councilwoman Glenda Bryant, Councilman Rob-

ert Young, Councilman Dr. Charles Vincent, and Councilwoman Brenda G. Jackson. Bethany Church with participants Campus Pastor Anthony Brown and Caronda Brown, and Associate Pastor Wyatt Shealton. Baker Homecoming Queens, Christian Youth Riders, Rosebud Healthcare and Training, and members of the Baker Fire Department also had a part in the parade.

After the parade concluded, Mayor Waites took the time to thank all the sponsors, partners, committee members, volunteers, and participants who made the Baker Buffalo Festival a huge success. The day went on with the showcase of the Car, Truck, and Motorcycle Show as well as the Youth Food Cook-Off, Face Painting, and other Children's Activities. Live music, as well as a DJ, was playing through the day and night with performances by N'Tune, The Bucket List Band, Mike Foster Project, and The Mellow Band.

Again, families tried their hand at winning at the various carnival games, doing their best to take a stuffed animal home. The Ferris Wheel was in full swing, allowing all those who rode it to get a lookout over the festival grounds. On the last day of the festival, April 17, the fair rides stayed open for families to get a little more of that Buffalo Festival buzz. The Delta Theta Sigma Sorority came out on the final day as seen in the photo below to show their support for Mayor Waites and the Baker Buffalo Festival.

After two years without the Baker Buffalo Festival, many were ecstatic to be able to get out, enjoy such wonderful weather, and take part in purchasing from the vendors who had a booth set up. Thank you to all of those who helped orchestrate and participate in three days of family-friendly and peaceful fun and activities. We'll see you again next year!

## Baker Heights Elementary School Pre-K Scores Among the Highest Internationally

We had the pleasure of interviewing Desiree Collins, the Family and Community Engagement Coordinator of EBR Early Childhood Development Network and Baker resident, to discuss how EBR Early Childhood Community Network has implemented Instructional Learning supports, which have resulted in remarkable improvements at Baker Heights in the Pre-K classes earning them scores that are ranked High Proficient in LDOE Performance Profile 2020-2021 and Spring 2022 scores as high as a 6.50 with Third-party observers. Baker Heights delivers best practices in early child development and learning, measured by this international CLASS™ assessment tool.

Annually, schools are assessed through C.L.A.S.S.™, the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, an international tool that measures high-quality interactions and experiences in early child development. Mrs. Collins explained how the scoring system was developed to assess classroom quality in preschool through 3rd grade. A score ranging from 1 (minimally characteristic) to 7 (highly characteristic) is given for each dimension. The CLASS™ tool is an observation tool that focuses on the effectiveness of classroom interactions among teachers and children, assessing daily interactions that promote children's social and cognitive development. The CLASS™ observation tools have been developed for Infant, Toddler, Pre-3rd grade. The program focuses on interactions that support learning at every age or grade level, utilizing developmentally appropriate interactions organized into domains and dimensions.

The highly admirable results of the educational staff of Baker Heights, where 3 of 4 teachers scored a minimum of 6.0 (Leigh Glaser and Shantell Easley and Tina Walker and Precious Vincent, Marissa Garner-Jones and Carolyn Lewis) with 6.0-7 range being an excellent score. Edna Harvey and McArthur Bell, co-teachers of SPED, scored a 5.97; this score is highly proficient.

**READ MORE** of this story ONLINE at [www.brweeklypress.com](http://www.brweeklypress.com)

### LOVE from page 4

make love a priority; Jesus the Son of God proved the importance of love by dying for a people that deserve the Punishment for sin while we were still sinners he dies. We are his disciples by our love for others; before he left, he gave a new commitment to love one another as I have loved you. That's a priority!

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