



# The Sequoyah SCRIBE

A student publication of John Sevier Middle School, Kingsport, Tennessee

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Sevier fields a female football player. **PAGE 11**



Tennessee steps up death penalty enforcement. **PAGE 8**

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Scribe Photo/COURTESY OF KCS

**NEW KIDS ON THE BOARD.** Julie Byers, left, and Jim Welsch were recently elected as new members of the Kingsport City Schools Board of Education.

## New members elected to KCS board

BY CHLOE MCCONNELL

Jim Welsch and Julie Byers were elected earlier this year to serve a four-year term on Kingsport's Board of Education. They are both first-time members and join returning members Carrie Upshaw, Eric Hyche and Todd Golden on the board.

The Kingsport Board of Education makes many decisions that affect the school system and John Sevier Middle School, specifically.

"I have 3 kids; two at Dobyns-Bennett and one at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville," Byers said. "I am an Ohio State University alumnus with a bachelors in chemistry and a minor in English. My husband of 20 years works at Eastman Chemical."

Since she has kids in the school system, Byers is personally invested in the choices the Board of Education makes.

Jim Welsch was a teacher for 30 years, so he has a good understanding of students and of how schools operate. He also understands what students need to have the best learning environment.

"I taught U.S. History at Robinson Middle," he said. "I was the head of the 8th grade Washington trip for about 20 years. I was thinking about being a lawyer, but I had always wanted to teach."

Byers does not have a background as a teacher, but has been deeply involved with her children's education

"I have been a mentor to elementary school kids to help with

reading and math and social skills," she said. "I do science demonstrations in classrooms, career fairs and for STEM nights."

The process of campaigning for the school board pushed both Welsch and Byers out of their comfort zone.

"I have always been in the business of promoting others, not me," Welsch said. "That was difficult. That was one of the [reasons] why I never really pursued politics, because you have to want to do that. You have to want to promote yourself."

Byers had been asked for several years to run, but the timing was never right, until now.

See **BOARD** page 5

## Student hairstyles cause controversies across nation

BY AUBREE PUCKETT

In New Jersey, a referee forced a high school wrestler to cut his dreadlocks before he could participate in a match. In Texas, a 4-year-old named Michael Scott had to cut his long hair before he could go to school. These cases are part of a national trend; students' hair choices are increasingly criticized in schools around the nation.

Paige Baker is an 8th grade student. Like many middle school students, she is unsure if there are any specific hair rules at her school.

"I don't know of any haircut or hair color rules," she said.

John Mallick, an 8th grade teacher, agrees.

"I have not seen any specific rules," he said.

In the 2016 Kingsport City

Schools Student Handbook, there is only mention of hair.

"No unnatural hair coloring, i.e., pink, orange, purple, etc., is permitted," the handbook states.

The current handbook, however, does not specifically mention hair at all. Instead, it states that a distracting appearance is unacceptable, although it mostly focuses on clothes.

"If a student's dress or appearance is such that it constitutes a threat to the health or safety of others, distracts the attention of other students or staff from their work, or otherwise violates this dress code, the principal or designee may require the student to change his appearance and/or be sent home according to the handbook," it states.

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Scribe Photo/AUBREE PUCKETT

**CONTROVERSIAL HAIR?** My'yon Lanier wears her hair in a natural style while waiting for school to start.



Sarah Arreola reports on the Americanization of Mexican food.

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Talon Huff goes behind the scenes of Sevier on Stage's production of "Shrek".

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Talon Huff takes a look back at the scholastic book fair at Sevier Middle.

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## First African American Miss Tennessee visits Sevier

BY ASIAH BELL

A teacher from Nashville, Brianna Mason, has become the first African American "Miss Tennessee". While preparing for her time in the "Miss America" pageant, she visited Sevier Middle School to speak with students about her journey.

Mason was born in Nashville. She attended the University of Tennessee in Knoxville and became a teacher. She now teaches first grade in Murfreesboro, where she lives with her cat, named Knight.

"I grew up in Nashville, the big city," she said.

Mason had a good childhood; her mom kept her busy.

"I did theater at my school, I acted in musicals and plays," she said. "I just did a lot of activities, a lot of extracurricular activ-

ities. I was the oldest of five, so we were always very busy when I was a kid."

When she went to college, she was inspired to become a teacher. She has a long history of teaching in her family, including her grandmother, who was a teacher.

"My father was a teacher and is now a principal, and so education has always been in my blood," Mason said. "I always loved kids, and one day I came to the realization: what better way to work with kids than to teach them?"

Mason did her first pageant when she was a freshman in college and she fell in love with it.

"I did the 'Mr. and Ms. Freshman Pageant' at UT and I just thought it was a lot of fun," she said.

See **TENNESSEE** page 4



Scribe Photo/SHAYLEIGH HONAKER

**A TENNESSEE PIONEER.** Brianna Mason, the first African American Miss Tennessee pageant winner, addresses a group of middle school students.

## NEWS BRIEFS

BY AMBER COWDEN

## House votes to impeach President Trump

The Democrats in the House of Representatives have wrapped up an impeachment inquiry of President Donald Trump because they believe that he pressured the Ukrainian president to help him in the 2020 election. President Trump has called the impeachment an "illegitimate process". Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the House, has said that Congress is well within its power to conduct oversight of the executive branch. Trump will now be put on trial in the Senate, which is controlled by the Republicans.

## Kingsport installs controversial blocks on city benches

The city of Kingsport recently installed controversial blocks on benches because of a decision made through the office of the City Manager, Chris McCartt. Many in the public have criticized these blocks because they feel that they were installed to make it harder for homeless people to sleep on the benches. McCartt has said that the city noticed trends of crime near the Kingsport Public Library that sparked their decision to install the blocks in the location. He has also said that the city is working to bring multiple resources and organizations together to see how they can help the homeless.

## Group protests KCS partnership with local church

A group from Wisconsin called the "Freedom from Religion Foundation" has claimed that the Christ Fellowship Church's mentoring program at Adams Elementary School is unconstitutional. The group reported that it has 'warned' Kingsport City Schools that the partnership with the local church violates the separation of church and state. According to the school system, this is not a situation where religion is being brought into the school. Kingsport superintendent Jeff Moorehouse has stated that the program is about "having more hands grabbing an oar" to help students move forward.

## TENNESSEE: pageant winner prepares for Miss America contest

continued from page 1

"I did some research and found the 'Miss Tennessee' organization, and I found out how I could be a part of it and found out how I could get on that stage and compete for the title of Miss Tennessee."

Her favorite things about pageants are all the skills she has developed through competing.

"There are a lot of interviews involved with winning titles," Mason said. "You have to talk to the judges about why you are the best person to win. So, those skills I've gained from training for interviews have helped me with every job I've ever interviewed for."

She did her "Miss Tennessee" pageant at the same place she had graduated from college.

"This year, the Miss Tennessee pageant was in Knoxville," she said. "I was crowned at Thompson Boling Arena, the same place where I graduated from college. That was pretty cool."

Mason had to compete with 26 other contestants.

"There was an interview portion, and then there's an on-stage interview, a talent portion, and evening wear portion," she said. "You have to wear a gown and walk up to a microphone and you give a social impact statement. It's basically what we are passionate about. You have about 10 seconds to do a quick commercial about what you

stand for and why."

The moment Mason won was the time of her life.

"I don't remember a lot of it because it was such a whirlwind," she said. "I do remember crying my eyelashes off. It was amazing to finally achieve a goal I've worked so hard for."

Becoming the first African American Miss Tennessee was extremely special to Mason.

"Especially looking at the history of 'Miss Tennessee', knowing there are girls who have never seen themselves represented in this role, it's very important to me," she said. "I take it as a huge responsibility."

She has a clear message for African American girls.

"You can do anything you set your mind to, even if you don't see yourself represented in your goal, whether that is a title you want to achieve or a team you want to be on or a job you want," she said. "If you don't see yourself represented, that's okay. You can make your own history."

She took one year off from teaching to be Miss Tennessee. She does a lot of speaking events, such as community events. She has spoken at churches. She also participates in a lot of fundraising events and other events that raise awareness for community service.

"I work closely with the Tennessee Department of Education; I serve as their spokesperson for literacy and the 'Whole Child'



Scribe Photo/SHAYLEIGH HONAKER

**WORKING ON BEHALF OF CHILDREN.** Teacher Brianna Mason is using her position as Miss Tennessee to advocate for literacy in Tennessee.

initiative," Mason said. "I also work very closely with a lot of organizations that have something to do with autism. My social impact initiative is autism awareness. I work closely, for example, with 'Autism Tennessee' in Nashville."

The big day of her competition in the Miss America pageant is just around the corner, and Mason is preparing for the competition.

"I'm practicing my talent; I play piano and I practice as often as I can," she said. "I also go over interview questions. That's the main goal of the competition: the girls showcasing their talents, but also how well-spoken they can be on lots of different

issues."

Want to become a pageant star? Mason knows how to get started.

"Definitely find a mentor, find someone who has been around the system or who has done it before," she said. "It took awhile for me to find that for myself. You can't do it on your own. If you have a title you have set your mind on, you can do it. You just have to work hard. Don't be afraid of not winning. You can always learn from each time you don't win."

She also has some advice for middle school students.

"Never give up, no matter the circumstances," she said.

## HAIR: KCS has no specific rules about student hairstyles

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Teachers generally feel that anything that distracts students from learning is a bad thing. Kristen Duncan is a 6th grade Language Arts teacher and assistant dance coach.

"Haircuts and color should not be distracting to learning," she said. "Some styles that are outrageous can be distracting. If it is so over the top that other students stare and become off-task, it is too much. Also, if it causes a student to keep messing with their hair, it is distracting."

Kyleigh Hardie, a 7th grade student, disagrees.

"No one really cares," Hardie said.

According to Hardie, students' hairstyles at Sevier Middle "are cool and unique".

Baker feels that hairstyles really do not create much of a distraction at school.

"If a person in front of you in class has tall hair, it could be distracting, but you just would ask to move and not let it become a problem," she said.

Mallick has not seen any distracting hairstyles. Duncan agrees.

"[I've not seen a distracting] haircut, but I have had students who are consumed with touching or combing their hair," she said.

Although hair policies seem

relaxed at Sevier Middle, not all students are so lucky. Paragon Charter Academy in Michigan recently did not allow an 8-year-old girl named Marion Scott to take a yearbook photo because she had red hair extensions. The school's student handbook only allows "conservative" hairstyles and states that shaved heads, Mohawks and mullets are not allowed. Even the hair color of students is supposed to be "natural".

"I think as long as her parents are okay with it, she should be allowed to have hair as she likes," Baker said.

Duncan believes that the best policy for students is simply to follow the rules.

"If it does not violate school rules, she should be able to take the photo," Duncan said. "If it is in violation of school rules, then she should have followed the rules."

A four-year-old African American boy, Michael Trimble was told he had to cut his long hair off when he started primary school in Texas in August. Trimble's grandmother and other community members are now challenging the school's dress code.

"If the hair was not a distraction, the 4 year old should keep his long hair," Mallik said

Duncan called the decision

made in Texas "ridiculous".

Hairstyles have also been getting in the way of sports. In December 2018, a New Jersey high school student had to cut off his dreadlocks before he could compete in a wrestling match. The referee who demanded the haircut was suspended for two years because the student's civil rights were violated.

"They should not have cut his dreadlocks," Mallick said. "There should be a way to cover his hair."

Duncan can think of few reasons why such a haircut would be inappropriate.

"If it is a safety concern, or if it gives the athlete an advantage," she said.

This focus on hair has happened mostly with African American students and even some adults at work. African Americans often are told that their hair needs to be "neat, clean, conservative, and conventional".

Narvie Harris Elementary School in Atlanta, for example, put up a poster earlier this school year focused on African American hairstyles. The poster showed braids, fro hawks, and twists as inappropriate hairstyles for African American students. This poster caused a major controversy in the community.

"That is ridiculous," Duncan

said. "All of those styles are appropriate and acceptable."

Baker agrees.

"I think that is just wrong to do because that's just a hair style," she said. "I don't see how that could be inappropriate."

According to the Washington Post, some states have started passing laws to stop discrimination against African American hairstyles in the workplace and in public schools. These are called CROWN Acts, which stands for "Create a Respectful and Open Workplace for Natural Hair". New York and California both have CROWN Acts on the books.

"I think the school can tell you restrictions on some things that could be important, but not about hair," Baker said.

She does not believe these kind of incidents could happen at Sevier Middle.

"They let students have their hair as they want," she said.

In the end, there is a fine line between helping students learn and unfairly restricting their rights.

"Schools have a right to set an expectation that ensures all students to have the opportunity to get an education free from distraction," Duncan said. "However, I don't feel that this should include the school's opinion on styles."