

## Newton school leaders address funding, broadband with state legislators



Assembly, school board members meet

From left, District 112 State Rep. Dave Belton, R-Buckhead, and District 17 State Sen. Brian Strickland, R-McDonough, and District 109 State Rep. Regina Lewis-Ward, D-McDonough, meet with Newton County School Board Chairwoman Shakila Henderson-Baker and Superintendent Samantha Fuhrey at the Historic Courthouse in Covington Jan. 11.

---

Tom Spigolon

Updated: Jan 19, 2021, 10:52 AM

**COVINGTON, Ga.** — Newton County School System leaders told state lawmakers about the need for funding public education at a higher level and addressed such issues as broadband access during a recent meeting.

School Board Chairman Shakila Henderson Baker and Superintendent Samantha Fuhrey met with members of the Newton County's legislative delegation as part of a series of meetings with local government and utility service agencies Jan. 11.

The Covington-Newton County Chamber of Commerce organized the event at the Historic Courthouse to precede the beginning of legislative business during the 2021 General Assembly session.

Baker said she hoped the legislators — three of whom are members of the Assembly's Republican majority — would oppose any legislation to allow vouchers to divert public funds to private school tuition.

Republicans have introduced a series of voucher proposals in the General Assembly in recent years.

“We hope you will reach out and try to see our viewpoint,” Baker said.

She said the county school system needs funding to keep operating in a manner similar to a private business.

“If you do not have the funds, you cannot run that business,” she said.

Fuhrey noted the school system saw almost \$11 million in cuts in the state’s 2021 budget.

Lawmakers approved more than \$950 million in cuts to education after the state saw a major downturn in revenues from the shutdown of the economy because of safety concerns about COVID beginning in March.

Fuhrey also said the General Assembly needed to continue to fund equalization grants to low-wealth counties like Newton, which does not have the same level of sales and property tax revenue some neighboring counties have.

She said the county stands to lose \$21 million in revenue without the equalization funding it receives.

The superintendent also said a big issue for Newton schools was lack of broadband access in some parts of the county — which became a major issue after the school system emphasized remote learning in the wake of the pandemic.

She asked the legislators to do whatever they could to make it more accessible throughout Newton County.

The pandemic also has made students’ mental health more of an issue as they deal with its effects, Fuhrey said.

Baker and Fuhrey agreed the school system was working to have mental health clinicians available to students and families.

The state lawmakers represented districts that include parts of Newton County. Four of the six in the county’s delegation attended the series of meetings, including District 17 State Sen. Brian Strickland, R-McDonough; District 112 State Rep. Dave Belton, R-Buckhead; District 110 State Rep. Clint Crowe, R-Jackson; and District 109 State Rep. Regina Lewis-Ward, D-McDonough.

District 43 State Sen. Tonya Anderson, D-Lithonia, and District 113 State Rep. Sharon Henderson, D-Covington, did not attend.