

# COASTAL OBSERVER

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EDUCATION | The pandemic effect

## Third of students failed at least 1 class

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI  
COASTAL OBSERVER

More than 1,600 county students in grades two through eight failed at least one class during the first quarter of the school year.

That is 36 percent of students in elementary, intermediate and middle schools.

"We've known that the pandemic was going to have an impact on performance and this data just justifies and validates what we were thinking all along," Superintendent Keith Price told the school board this week.

The percentage of students who failed at least one class dropped to 1,479 (32 percent) in the second quarter.

This is the first time the dis-

Students return to Waccamaw High for four days of school this week. Next week it will be five days.

Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

trict has compiled data for all schools. Principals are known to use data from their own school to identify students who are struggling.

In the first quarter that ended in mid-November, English accounted for the largest share of classes failed: 23 percent. That was followed by math, 21 percent; social studies 19 percent; science, 17 percent; fine arts, 14 percent; and other classes, 6 percent.

In the second quarter that  
**SEE "TESTS," PAGE 4**



CORONAVIRUS

## State expands vaccine access as doses rise

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI  
COASTAL OBSERVER

The state is moving into Phase 1b of the COVID-19 rollout as its weekly supply of vaccines increases by 50 percent.

Starting Monday, people age 55 and older; people 16 and older who currently have cancer, are pregnant or have high-risk medical conditions such as diabetes and Down syndrome; and front-line workers with increased occupational risk, including teachers, will qualify to get the vaccine.

This week, the Department of Health and Environmental Control received approximately 110,000 doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. Officials are expecting 152,300 doses for next week. The increase is due to the addition of the Janssen vaccine from Johnson & Johnson.

Keith Price, superintendent of the Georgetown County School District, believes qualifying to get the vaccination should  
**SEE "VACCINE," PAGE 2**

BROOKGREEN GARDENS

## Gallery opens doors to a world of art

BY CHARLES SWENSON  
COASTAL OBSERVER

A building that changed the way visitors viewed Brookgreen Gardens when it opened more than a quarter of a century ago has been renovated to change the way Brookgreen views the world.

"Traveling exhibits have become a more and more important part of the way that we connect to the art world and the way that we contribute to art history," said Page Kiniry, the Brookgreen president and CEO. "We can now have an exhibit from anywhere in the world."

The Brenda and Dick Rosen Galleries are a \$750,000 renovation of the visitors center that opened in 1994. The \$3.5 million building was part of a planned \$30 million capital improvement plan intended to make Brookgreen a year-round, all-weather attraction.

That's still the goal, Kiniry said, along with a glass conservatory that was part of the original improvement plan.

But the renovated gallery has fulfilled the same goal as the construction of the visitors center:



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

The cover goes on a display of porcelain titled "Hunting" and "Fishing" that belonged to the Ward family, which once owned Brookgreen.

raising the standards.

When work began on the project, Gurdon Tarbox, Brookgreen's director for 31 years, told the design team he wanted some-

thing that would influence people's lives.

The center changed the way visitors viewed Brookgreen.  
**SEE "BROOKGREEN," PAGE 4**

ENVIRONMENT

## Lawmakers differ over best plan to restore flounder

BY CHARLES SWENSON  
COASTAL OBSERVER

Two local lawmakers are taking different approaches, but they share the common goal of restoring the state's troubled flounder fishery. And they have both rejected a call by the state wildlife agency to impose a season on the popular species.

A bill by state Rep. Lee Hewitt that would reduce the catch limit from 10 to five flounder and increase the size limit from 15 to 16 inches was approved by a House subcommittee this week. The bill now moves to the Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs committee.

The bill also allows anglers to keep only one flounder larger than 20 inches. A female that size can lay a million eggs.

"That would help the fishery come back quicker," Hewitt said. "I'm trying to get more eggs in the system."

State Sen. Stephen Goldfinch plans to take a different approach in a bill he intends to file.

"My bill is going to end up increasing the cost of a fishing stamp by a few bucks," he said. The money, which he estimated at \$1.2 million annually, will be used to create a flounder fish hatchery.

Texas and Alabama have successful hatcheries, but only spend half that amount, Goldfinch said.

The legislature last changed the flounder regulations in 2017, dropping the catch limit from 20 to 10 fish and raising the catch size from 14 to 15 inches.

"They said that would improve recruitment by 30 percent," Goldfinch said.

Instead, a recent report showed that flounder stocks are at historic lows. It was developed by North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida.

"It's a regional fishery, you need a regional solution," Phil Maier, deputy director for marine  
**SEE "FLOUNDER," PAGE 4**

INFRASTRUCTURE | The wired county

## Broadband access seen as equalizer for rural areas

BY LILY BRYANT  
COASTAL OBSERVER

As virtual schooling, remote work, and online doctor's appointments expanded due to the coronavirus pandemic, the need for broadband internet access became increasingly urgent. But as officials work to find funds to expand access in rural Georgetown County, they say the need extends beyond the pandemic.

About 7,400 people in the county are without access to broadband, according to Horry Telephone Cooperative.

Georgetown County has 15 areas identified for broadband service by the state's Broadband Infrastructure Program. Four of those areas, in the northeast corner of the county, are listed as priorities. Horry County has just three program areas.

HTC was among 180 service



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Jackson Village Road in Plantersville is one of the areas without broadband service.

providers who received money from the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund last year. The FCC awarded the money in a "reverse

auction," where the bidders had to show they could provide the most service at the lowest cost. HTC received \$729,555.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE



**On the case:** Waccamaw High students argue both sides of the issue in mock trial competition.

**SECOND FRONT**

**Land use:** Keep It Green leader will join Planning Commission.  
**PAGE 7**

**Theater:** For actor, 50, a role for the ages.  
**PAGE 8**



**Sports:** Warriors roll past Carolina Forest to stay unbeaten in lacrosse.  
**PAGE 12**

Obituaries ..... 2  
Crime ..... 5  
Opinion ..... 6  
Crossword ..... 10  
Classifieds ..... 11  
Sports ..... 12

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