

## **PRESS RELEASE**

Contact:

Gabriel J. Devono  
Superintendent of Schools  
Gilmer County Schools  
201 N. Court Street  
Glennville, WV 26351  
Telephone: 304-462-7386, ext. 9  
[gjdevono@k12.wv.us](mailto:gjdevono@k12.wv.us)

### **Response to Gilmer Free Press Article Concerning Normantown Elementary School**

September 4, 2015.

This press release responds to the article posted on the Gilmer Free Press website on September 3, 2015, concerning Normantown Elementary School. It is unfortunate that the Gilmer Free Press has chosen to publish what appears to be rumor, instead of actually contacting me, Gilmer County Schools' administration, the Gilmer County Volunteer Fire Department, or the State Fire Marshall, to learn what did occur at Normantown Elementary School. Gilmer County Schools takes seriously the safety of its students and staff, and if the Gilmer Free Press had done so, it would have investigated this matter first, before publicly engaging in unfounded speculation which achieved nothing but spreading fear and disrupting the school's work.

On August 13, a volunteer firefighter walking through the school while it was closed noticed rolled-up paper towels within the school. There was absolutely no flammable liquid present, and the paper towels were not soaked with any kind of fire starter. However, out of an abundance of caution, which should always be the case, Superintendent Gabriel Devono called the State Fire Marshal, which began a standard investigation.

The investigation is ongoing, but at this point, it has revealed no threat to students or the building. Indeed, it is unknown at this point even when the paper towels were placed where they were. Regardless, under the guidance of the State Fire Marshal, Gilmer County Schools took all appropriate steps to ensure that students and faculty are safe, and if there is ever a fire at the school, students and faculty will be alerted immediately by the fire suppression system. At no time do we believe the students or faculty of Normantown Elementary School were in danger.

To be clear, we did not instruct anyone not to talk about this incident or to keep it secret. The incident was in no respect "top secret" as referenced by the Gilmer Free Press. We made the decision to await the results of the investigation to learn whether this can even be determined to be an attempted criminal act of any kind before providing public information about it, because at this point it is only an investigation, and we have seen nothing to indicate that there was an attempted arson at the school. If any information becomes available that changes this, we will certainly share it with parents of Gilmer County Schools students.

Gilmer County Schools administration is monitoring this investigation. Should anyone have questions concerning the administration's actions or the status of the investigation, they are encouraged to contact Superintendent Gabriel J. Devono, whose telephone number is 304-462-7386, ext. 9. Finally, anyone may contact the State Fire Marshal, Arson Division. Its telephone number is 304-558-2191.

Finally, to provide an open forum where this issue can be discussed, Gilmer County Schools will hold an informational meeting for parents of students at Normantown Elementary School. That meeting will be held on September 10, 2015, at 4:30 p.m. in the cafeteria.