

Chattanooga: Economy takes toll on Bible classes

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Bible in the Schools needs a miracle.

In yet another sign of the economic times, popular Bible history classes at five local schools will not be taught next year and a sixth program will be offered on a reduced basis, officials said.

Out of 17 schools teaching the program, 11 will continue, said Ralph Mohney, who took over leadership of Bible in the Schools in January.

The privately funded nonprofit organization that has paid for Bible history teachers in Hamilton County since 1922 must discontinue programs at Brown Middle School as well as Red Bank, East Ridge, Brainerd and Ooltewah high schools due to lagging donations. A sixth full-time program at Red Bank Middle School will become part time, Mr. Mohney said.

“Many people are hurting right now because of the economy, and that has begun to affect our fundraising efforts,” he said. “As the economy has affected our donors, we had no choice but to scale back.”

Three of the teachers whose Bible history programs are being cut took the school system’s buyout plan and will retire at the end of the school year. Another teacher was on special assignment and the other worked only part time, Mr. Mohney said.

The organization has seen a nearly 25 percent drop in donations this year that has cost it about \$300,000, Mr. Mohney said.

Hamilton County Schools Superintendent Jim Scales said he was disappointed in the program cuts, because the classes give students a unique elective at no cost to taxpayers. But he said he understood the difficulty of raising money in this economic climate.

“We value the programs,” he said. “We had good enrollment in those classes, so it’s now just one less option we have during difficult economic times.”

Mark Lewis, who has taught at Brainerd for 26 years, said it was “fortuitous” that he and two other Bible history teachers decided to retire this year. He hopes the discontinued classes will return once the economy bounces back but, in the meantime, his students will miss the opportunity to read a valuable piece of literature, he said.

“They’re missing out on reading the world’s best-selling



Staff Photo by John Rawlston Steve Clinton teaches eighth grade Bible history class at East Ridge Middle School on Wednesday afternoon. At right is student William Russell.

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[Article: Hamilton County: Mohney to head Bible in Schools](#)

PROGRAM CUTS

Bible history will not be offered next year at the following Hamilton County public schools:

- * Brown Middle
- * Red Bank High
- * East Ridge High
- * Brainerd High
- * Ooltewah High
- * Red Bank Middle*

book," he said.

A bigger concern for Kelly Shaw, who teaches Bible history at Brown Middle, is the loss of an elective class at her school. Mrs. Shaw's classes on the books of Genesis and Exodus and the life of Jesus attract a large number of students who may not have a replacement elective course to choose next year.

"I hate that it's going to be gone, because it is something different that not a lot of schools offer," said Mrs. Shaw, who will teach middle school language arts next year at the new East Hamilton Middle-High School.

Autumn Byess already had her chance to take a Bible history class, but the Brown Middle School eighth grader said she thinks more of her peers should get the same opportunity.

"I think it's one of the things we should be learning in school," she said.

A large part of Mr. Mohney's new job as president of Bible in the Schools is to put a renewed focus on fundraising, he said.

As it is, there already are schools on a waiting list to receive a Bible history teacher, Mr. Mohney said. But he has every reason to believe the organization will be able to restore the program to the schools where it was cut within the next two to three years, he said.

*Will go from a full-time to a part-time program

BIBLE HISTORY

The courses still will be taught next year at the following schools:

- * East Ridge Middle
- * Hixson High
- * Hixson Middle
- * Howard School of Academics and Technology
- * Hunter Middle
- * Loftis Middle
- * Lookout Valley Middle-High
- * Ooltewah Middle
- * Signal Mountain Middle-High
- * Soddy-Daisy High School
- * Soddy-Daisy Middle

Source: Bible in the Schools

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