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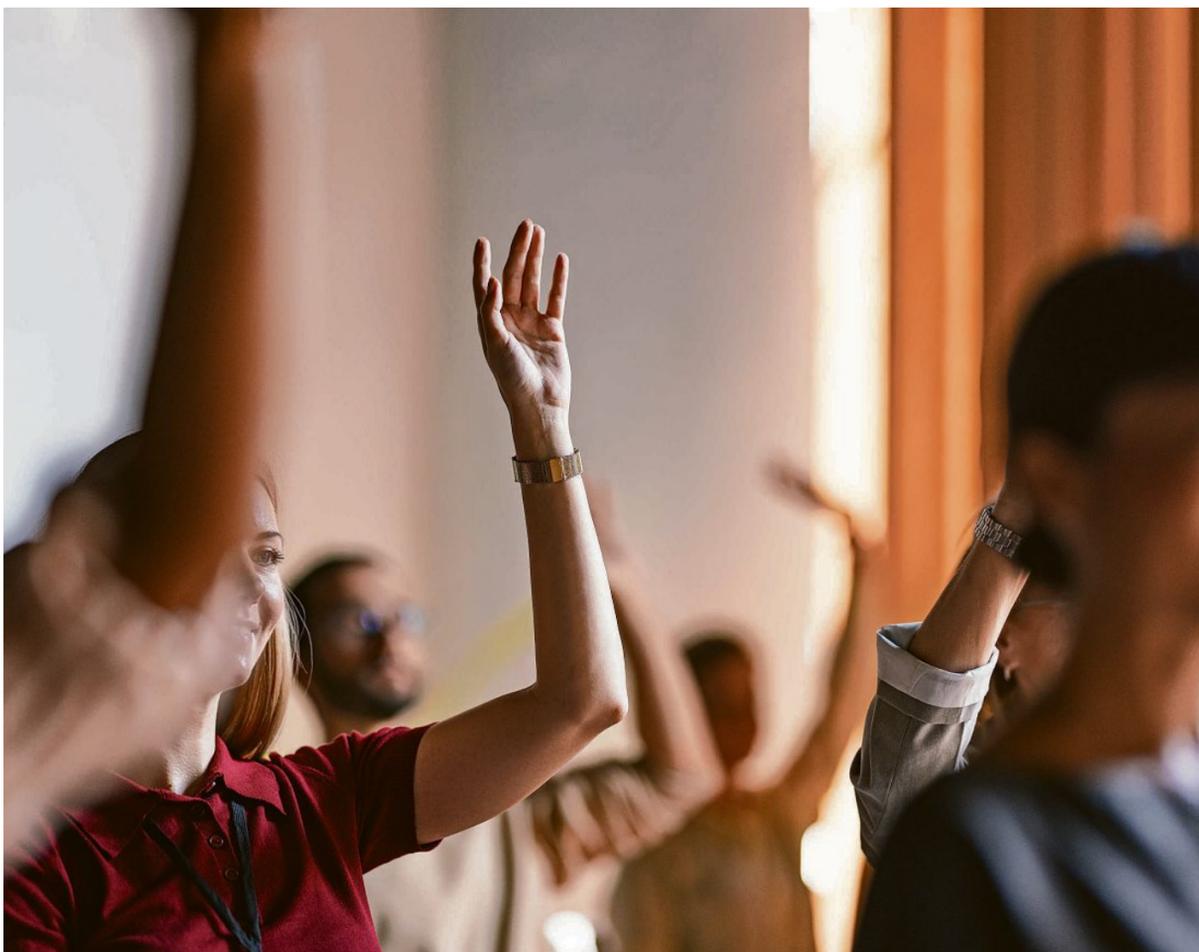
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The Fayetteville Observer

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2026 | FAYOBSERVER.COM

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A 2023 study found that 75% of college students feel free to report their professors if they say something objectionable. Self-identified liberal students were more likely than conservative students to report their professors to the administration. GETTY IMAGES

Student informants spur academic freedom debate

Classroom speech, rights of educators and pupils under scrutiny

Austin Sarat
Amherst College
THE CONVERSATION

Texas A&M University told philosophy professor Martin Peterson in early January that he could not teach some of Greek philosopher Plato's writings that touch on "race and gender ideology."

The university's local chapter of the American Association of University Professors, an organization of professors and academics in the United States, quickly denounced this require-

Silencing a professor from teaching a certain subject fits within what experts have long recognized as encroaching on academic freedom.

ment.

Peterson, in response to his university's direction, replaced the Plato readings with material on free speech and academic freedom.

Silencing a professor from teaching a certain subject fits within what experts have long recognized as encroaching on

academic freedom.

In another high-profile incident at Texas A&M in September, a student filmed an exchange with an English literature professor, Melissa McCoul, who was talking about gender identity.

The student said that McCoul was violating President Donald Trump's January 2025 executive order that recognized "women are biologically female, and men are biologically male." As a result, the student told her professor, as seen in her video, "I've already been in touch with the president of A&M, and I have a meeting with him in person to show all of my documentation tomorrow." Her video went viral.

This represents a growing threat to

See **DEBATE**, Page 3A

CUMBERLAND COUNTY



Cumberland County school board members voted to request \$150 million from commissioners to build a new E.E. Smith High School. ANDREW CRAFT/THE FAYETTEVILLE OBSERVER

School board votes on closures, mergers

Rachael Riley
Fayetteville Observer
USA TODAY NETWORK

Cumberland County Board of Education members held two meetings Feb. 11 to decide which schools in the district should be closed or consolidated, causing some board members to feel the vote was rushed.

Board members were split on some votes that included getting rid of year-round schools, closing nine schools and building three new elementaries, a new E.E. Smith High School and a classroom addition for Gray's Creek High School.

Possible savings to the district

During an auxiliary services committee meeting held before the regular meeting, board member Greg West said that in 2023, the board approved consulting firm MGT to conduct a facilities survey on all of the district's buildings for \$1.2 million, which was presented to the board in February 2024.

See **BOARD**, Page 2A

President and first lady will pay a visit to Fort Bragg

Beth Hutson
Fayetteville Observer
USA TODAY NETWORK

The president and first lady are set to arrive on Fort Bragg this week for an engagement with military families, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt announced during a press briefing Feb.

10.

While Donald Trump has been to the Fayetteville area multiple times — including most recently a June 2025 visit to Fort Bragg for the Army's 250th birthday celebration — this will be Melania Trump's first visit since her husband

See **PRESIDENT**, Page 3A



President Donald Trump speaks at Fort Bragg on June 10, 2025. ANDREW CRAFT/THE FAYETTEVILLE OBSERVER

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Volume 209 | No. 120
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