

KENTUCKY SCHOOL ADVOCATE

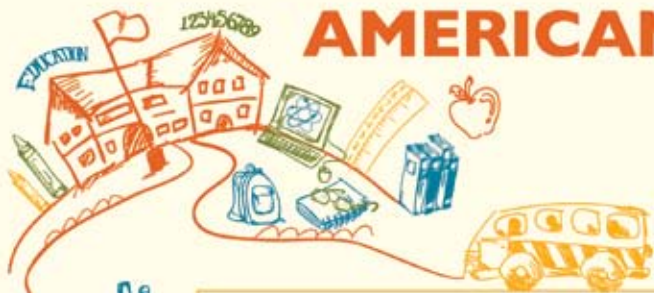
A publication of the Kentucky School Boards Association ■ November 2009

ON THE CUTTING EDGE

Whole child is whole point of Jessamine school

Getting creative with early release time

PRESCHOOL GETS SERIOUS



AMERICAN EDUCATION WEEK

Great public schools: a basic right and our responsibility.

NOVEMBER 2009

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	Open House Day Organize "Open House" activities at your school for neighbors, families, and community leaders.	Parents Day Invite parents into the school for a first-hand look at their children's school day.	Education Support Professionals Day Individuals who provide invaluable services to schools are recognized for their outstanding work.	Educator for a Day Encourage community leaders to serve as "educators for a day" for a hands-on school experience.	Substitute Educators Day Honor the educators who are called to act as substitutes in the temporary absence of regular classroom teachers.	
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

For more information, visit www.nea.org/aew



GREAT PUBLIC SCHOOLS: A BASIC RIGHT AND OUR RESPONSIBILITY

American Education Week

Nov. 15-23

Monday, Nov. 16: Open House Day.

From national commemorations to local community events, millions of Americans celebrate public education

Tuesday, Nov. 17: Parents Day.

Schools invite parents into the classroom for a hands-on experience of what the day is like for their child.

Wednesday, Nov. 18: Education Support Professionals Day.

Individuals who provide invaluable services to schools are recognized for their outstanding work.

Thursday, Nov. 19: Educator for a Day.

Community leaders are invited to serve as educators to get a glimpse of a day in the life of a school employee.

Friday, Nov. 20: Substitute Educators Day.

This day honors the educators who are called upon to replace regularly employed teachers.

American Education Week is sponsored by the National Education Association

FEATURES

ACADEMICS AND ACTING OUT

The Providence School in Jessamine County addresses both those areas in an alternative program that focuses on the whole child. The school is one of three to earn best practice honors in the three yardsticks used by the state education department ... Page 8

IT'S P-12, NOT K-12

School board members can make a difference in the quality of their district's preschool program: that is the message attendees have been hearing at KSBA's Fall Regional Meetings, which have highlighted some local success stories ... Page 10

SEEING CLEARLY

When Crittenden County school leaders began a large-scale effort to improve their schools, they didn't adhere to a boilerplate model. Instead, they created a process for improvement called 2020 Vision that focuses on teamwork and community engagement ... Page 12

TIME TO TRAIN

Teachers learn better when students aren't around. That's one of the reasons several districts are citing for scheduling early-release days in their calendar this year. One district is even taking full days for teachers to work and plan together ... Page 14

MIND-SET IS THE MESSAGE

Educators who are having problems with students should check their own attitudes, according to the keynoter at this year's safe schools conference, who warned that the assumptions made about students can be self-fulfilling ... Page 16

ONE-DAY WONDER

This year's KSBA Winter Symposium will compress all the features of the two-day gatherings of the past into a single day. The other new twist? Discovering how the skills local board members learn while serving can translate into other areas of their life ... Page 21



'Falling' for preschool programs, Page 10



Best practices, Page 8



Teacher time, Page 14

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On the cover



Crittenden County Elementary School student Harley Wesley works on a project with a group in her second-grade class. The entire second-grade class is the Class of 2020 for which the district's new 2020 Vision initiative is named. See article on Page 12.

TAKE NOTE

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Singin' the blues

Five Kentucky elementary schools have won National Blue Ribbon School honors for 2009. The award honors public and private elementary, middle and high schools that are either academically superior, or have made dramatic gains in student achievement and helped close gaps in achievement among minority and disadvantaged students.

The Kentucky schools are: East Heights Elementary School, Henderson County; Hager Elementary School, Ashland Independent; Paint Lick Elementary School, Garrard County; Potter Gray Elementary School, Bowling Green Independent; and Ruth Moyer Elementary School, Ft. Thomas Independent.

All 2009 Blue Ribbon Schools – 264 public and 50 private – will be honored Nov. 3 in Washington, D.C.

Safety site

Kentucky school districts now will be able to get timely information about recalled and defective products that may be used in schools, such as toys, food and furniture.

Consumer Reports magazine, the National Parent Teacher Association and the National School Boards Association have teamed up on this alert system, in which the Web-based Consumer Reports School Safety Alert Program will distribute safety alerts and recall notices on children's products.

The site, www.ConsumerReports.org/

One (of 20) to watch

A Jefferson County Schools teacher has made been named to the annual list of "20 to Watch" emerging leaders in education technology.

Lisa Johnson, a technology resource teacher for the district, was among those recognized by the National School Boards Association's Technology Leadership Network for championing technology initiatives that make a difference for students, teachers, school districts, and the greater education technology community. Johnson designed and developed The 180 Degree Classroom, an initiative that restructures the traditional high school math classroom into a student-centered, inquiry-based learning environment.

The 20 honorees were identified through a national search. They were recognized at NSBA's annual Technology and Learning Conference, T+L, held last month in Denver.

schoolsafety, will contain news and videos on the latest product recalls impacting children from the federal Consumer Product Safety Commission and Food & Drug Administration. The National PTA and NSBA will distribute and promote the online resource to their members. NSBA is asking individual school boards across the country to incorporate the link onto school district Web sites.

NSBA President C.H. "Sonny" Savoie said the association is proud to work with the partnership. "Working with our communities—with parents and businesses—and by using the communications tools that are available to us is the best way for school boards to make sure that this kind of message reaches the public," he said.

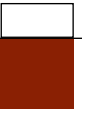
Recovery resource

Kentucky school districts interested in seeking federal money through various initiatives funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act may want to check out Grants.gov, the U.S. government's central information site on federal grant programs.

The Web site now displays all ARRA funding announcements on a single page separate from other grant announcements. It includes a link to the general Recovery.gov site, archives of webinars for those seeking ARRA grants, and a schedule of upcoming webinars. ☘



Photo provided by Jefferson County Schools



'Drastic times' call for 'special measures'

Influenza, intestinal and upper-respiratory viruses are infecting a large number of our staff and students as well as other members of our community. It has been reported by state health officials that this is occurring throughout the state, including among neighboring districts. Unfortunately, we began the school year in Whitley County with a number of our students and staff diagnosed with influenza or some type of viral infection and the problem grew only worse with each passing day. By the end of September, declining attendance percentages forced our district to become the first district in the state to call off school on a districtwide basis.

The potentially devastating impact of H1N1 was fully realized by one of our students, a 14-year-old high school freshman who became seriously ill. She was tested for H1N1 and the test proved to be positive.

This is only one of many stories throughout the state and nation that reveal the serious nature of this "drastic time."

Due to the devastating impact of such stories, parents are afraid to send their children to school even if they aren't sick because they are afraid that their child may experience the same fate as others who are victims of influenza and other viral infections with sometimes severe complications.

School districts are in a dilemma because they are told by officials from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and state epidemiologists that closing schools does not necessarily help prevent the spread of viral infections. However, school officials are under a great deal of pressure from parents and community members to call off school to help prevent and/or reduce the spread of infectious diseases.

It is understandable that parents become upset and concerned when students are being hospitalized with medical conditions resulting from complications of a viral illness or when the illness results in the death of a student or staff member. As board members and school administrators, we must respond to their concerns and



Delmar Mahan

KSBA President and Whitley County Board of Education member

manage our schools in a manner that will assure the parents and students that we are sensitive to the issue at hand and acting in the best interest of our students and staff.

In addition, funding for our school districts is based on Average Daily Attendance, and when the attendance rate goes down, so does the amount of money we receive in our districts. To put it simply, if the students are not at school, it makes it hard for us to have enough money to pay the bills—especially in a period of reduced funding.

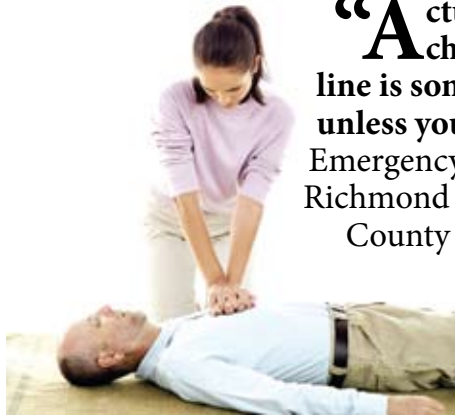
I have written all of this to say that I think "special measures" need to be taken for this "drastic time." As CDC Director Dr. Thomas Frieden said, "We don't know what the long flu season is going to hold. We have not had a flu season like this in 50 years." That was when the 1957 Asian flu pandemic killed 70,000 Americans and 2 million people worldwide.

The "special measure" I propose is that we appeal to the 2010 legislature to allow districts to operate — for this year only — with a "hold harmless" provision for funding our school districts based on Average Daily Attendance. This would allow school boards and school administrators to make decisions that will be in the best interest of students by allowing districts to use the previous year's ADA for funding purposes in the event that the current-year ADA is lower than the previous year's. Students would still have to be in school the required number of days, which also is in their best interest.

I think everyone is aware that the attendance of a student is driven by compulsory attendance laws, but this is a "drastic time" when some parents, unfortunately, cannot afford to take their children to the doctor and will not have a doctor's excuse. Furthermore, many doctors are asking that only emergency-type visits be made to their offices due to the large number of patients they are seeing.

How about it? Let's use a little common sense and act in the best interest of our kids, their parents and our school districts during these trying times. ☘

Quotes on education from Kentucky and elsewhere



“Actually, what we’re trying to do is change the culture, so the bottom line is someday you don’t graduate school unless you really know CPR.” Louisville Emergency Medical Services Director Neal Richmond on an initiative to train Jefferson County middle school physical education teachers to in turn train seventh-graders to do cardio-pulmonary resuscitation. From WFPL-FM Radio News in Louisville.

“This is way funner than doing a worksheet.” Fairview Independent seventh-grader Cory Kearns on his school’s use of a 26-foot-by-35-foot map — located on the high school gym floor — on loan from the National Geographic Society for use in visualizing geographic concepts. From the Ashland *Daily Independent*.

“We were a little worried with the air mattresses that they’d think it was a trampoline.” Walton-Verona Independent Elementary School fourth-grade teacher Emily Wisher on students’ enthusiasm about the school’s Camp Read-A-Lot setup, complete with tents and paper stars on the ceiling to create a camping atmosphere. From the Fort Mitchell *Community Press & Recorder*.

“By 5:15 to 5:20, we had everybody home. Most of the parents worked with us. They understood (that) this is something you just don’t practice for.” Spencer County Schools’ Transportation Director Jack Senior on the district’s successful scrambling to create alternative routes and options to get 300 middle and high school students home after an accident closed a major thoroughfare not long before the dismissal of classes. From the Taylorsville *Spencer Magnet*.

“For the third time since 2005, the Elizabethtown Independen-

dent Schools board is beginning a new search for a superintendent to lead one of the top-achieving school districts in the state. While other districts set their sights on getting into the top 10 percent academically, Elizabethtown’s goal is No. 1. However, if the district’s leadership doesn’t take control of the revolving door on the superintendent’s office, and do it soon, that goal unfortunately will remain elusive.” Portion of newspaper editorial from the Elizabethtown *News-Enterprise*.

“At the elementary and middle schools, students can charge up to three meals, and then they could receive an alternate meal of a peanut butter sandwich and milk, or cheese

sandwich and milk if they’re allergic. We try to be sensitive to this. We want the kids to eat. At some point, we have to make parents accountable for these charges. There has to be some recourse.” Daviess County Schools Food Service Director Lisa Sims on a parent’s complaint about the district’s “alternate meal” option when a student’s food charges exceed allowable limits. From the Owensboro *Messenger-Inquirer*.

“I think the students made a good case. We need to figure out how to improve what you can serve and we need to get rid of the Styrofoam. The students deserve a decent meal, the best we can afford.”



Jenkins Independent Board of Education Chairman Durward Narramore in response to a presentation by “The Green Team,” a group of student activists working on environmental and health issues, about the quality of lunches and the use of Styrofoam trays in the high school cafeteria. From the Whitesburg *Mountain Eagle*.

“At this point, Franklin County Public Schools cannot con-

Just right



Photo provided by Boone Co. Schools

“Even though we’re so large, we do everything we can to treat each kid as an individual. I don’t think it’s more difficult with more students. Yes, it’s a challenge, but we do whatever it takes to make it work every day.” Stephens Elementary (Boone County) Principal Karen Lowe on dealing with this year’s enrollment of 1,250, making it the largest elementary school in Kentucky. From the Fort Mitchell *Kentucky Enquirer*.

tinue to support the center as we have over the last several years. We don't have \$100,000 this year." Franklin County Schools Superintendent Harriet Buecker on her recommendation to end the district's maintenance and utility financial support for the Thorn Hill Learning Center, a former school building that houses GED instruction, community education and after-school programs. From the Frankfort *State Journal*.

"Public health doesn't recommend closing schools for public health reasons when flu is widespread throughout a community, because you are not going to stop it from being spread. It's going to be spread in churches. It's going to be spread at ball games. It's going to be spread at the mall. The decision to close schools is really based on local school districts' assessment of their situation, whether that be due to significant absenteeism, not wanting to have students fall behind in their learning, for financial reasons or for lacking in the number of staff to keep schools open because school workers are ill." Kentucky Public Health Commissioner William Hacker reacting to the number of school closings in light of the change in federal recommendations about responding to spreading the H1N1 (swine) influenza. From the KSBA eNews Service.

"I'm a firm believer that college is not right for everyone, but I also think we should prepare our students for it.

They may not go right out of high school, but 10 years down the road they may decide to go."

McLean County High School Principal Ashley Troutman (pictured helping

a student with algebra) on his school's increased rigor in instruction through the addition of five new diploma programs and related Advanced Placement courses. From the Owensboro *Messenger-Inquirer*.



Photo provided by McLean Co. Schools

"Co-teaching is being used districtwide. All teachers have been trained to deliver instruction in a collaborative setting. This means two teachers per classroom working together to deliver a high-quality curriculum for regular education and special education students at the same time. They not only plan their lessons together, but student assessments are developed at the same level of difficulty as those given by the state department in the spring." Clay County Schools Superintendent Reecia Samples in a letter outlining the district's plans for improving academics. From the *Manchester Enterprise*.

"The bottom line is we can't let them leave. It's important to us, and it's important to them. If we are going to double the numbers of degrees in this state, everyone is going to have to take a front-seat role in this." Dean



Kahler, associate vice president for academics at Western Kentucky University, on challenges associated with the state's record college enrollment (259,000) this fall. From the Louisville *Courier-Journal*.

"One-hundred and sixty-one... was a driving force. We are on the road to top 10." Union County Schools Superintendent Josh Powell on the district's improvement from a ranking of 161 out of 174 districts to 87th place, based on the "transitional index" for school accountability created by three education groups during the period of the state's redesign of its school accountability system. From the Morganfield *Union County Advocate*.

"I wanted to reward them for their academic work" Casey County High School Principal Barry Lee on a speed and accuracy cell phone "texting contest" — with prizes worth \$1,000 — that is open only to students who made all As and Bs the first six weeks of the year. From the Liberty *Casey County News*. ☘

Taxes, taxpayers and schools

POINT ...

"As a taxpayer, I am tired." Lexington resident Lauren Larson speaking in opposition to the Fayette County Board of Education's decision to take the maximum 4 percent revenue increase with its tax rate.

COUNTERPOINT...

"You can't just wish for great schools; you have to pay for greatness." Fellow taxpayer Reginald Thomas speaking in favor of the tax increase.

From the *Lexington Herald-Leader*

Tears of joy

The Providence School loves students 'enough to educate them'

By Mary Branham

As Tyler Watts stood before his peers, tears came to his eyes as he talked about the teacher who had made the biggest impression on him at The Providence School.

Teaching partner Tonya Clift, he said, has helped him a lot. She got tough when he was sleeping in class and inspired him to do better, he said.

That's something Consuelo Kickbusch, a motivational speaker who heard Watts' story, would appreciate. She visited the alternative school in Jessamine County in early October, forgoing her regular speaking fee because she identifies with the students there; the retired U.S. Army lieutenant colonel was in a similar situation when she was their age.

Education, she told the students and staff gathered for her hour-long presentation, gives you a seat at the table. Spell-bound students stayed well after the final bell to meet and chat with Kickbusch.

Her message is one the staff at the school tries to instill in



students every day.

“It’s not enough to love children,” said Providence Principal Denise Adams. “We have to love them enough to educate them.”

That means the students must be held accountable and must work to achieve. Adams has seen the achievement level of her students rise; the school, in its eighth year, grew out of a couple of smaller programs that served students who were failing to achieve in the traditional school setting.

“It’s sometimes behavior ... sometimes behavior is a coping skill because you can’t read,” said Adams.

The Providence School focuses on the needs of the whole child. “The pride and purpose we wanted for our kids was achievement ... managing anger as well as mastering algebra,” Adams said.

The school’s efforts are paying off. Not only are test scores improving, but last year 23 kids graduated with more than the minimum number of credits required for graduation; one student had 36 credits, Adams said.

“A lot of alternative schools do a great job of making kids feel accepted and valued,” Superintendent Lu Young said. “(At the Providence School) they never lose sight of the fact that the best thing we have to offer kids is a good education”

The school is one of three alternative education programs in the state to earn a best-practice designation in all three major measures used by the state education department. The department wants other programs in the state to use these as models, in response to two 2007 studies that were critical of Kentucky’s alternative education programs.

Young said a combination of factors has led to the school’s success.

“It’s a pretty magical balance of culture and academic rigor and strong relationships that make Providence work,” she said.

Providence serves between 200 and 275 students in a year’s time, in both a day and night program. The students range from pregnant teens to a teen father who works during the day and attends classes at night.

Adams said the support of the superintendent and the school board is critical for success of the school.

Gene Peel, a member of the Jessamine County Board of



Providence School student Tyler Watts said teaching assistant Tonya Cliff has made a difference in his life.

Education and KSBA’s board, said the board changed some policies to ensure students are served. For instance, students caught with drugs used to be expelled.

“If we had a place we could send them, a program that was thought out and as well rounded as we could get it, maybe we could get those kids back on track,” Peel explained as the reasoning behind opening Providence eight years ago.

“When kids are not fitting in well,

then a lot of times they get to the position that there may be disciplinary action,” he said, “unless you have some place you can deal with them to get them on the right track for whatever reason they may have gotten off the right track.”

Young said the district set a goal eight years ago of ensuring middle and high school students didn’t fall through the cracks. She believes The Providence School has helped to achieve that goal.

Young said board policy has grown up around The Providence School. The district also established an intake procedure to make placement at the school fair and equitable.

Running an alternative school, “is expensive if you do it right,” said Young. Jessamine County spends about \$17,000 per student each year at the Providence School—that’s about twice the amount spent on other students. In Jessamine County, all state and federal funds—from special education, Title I and school safety, for example—received for students at The Providence School are included in the school budget, she said.

“I believe firmly that all the revenue we receive should follow the students,” Young said.

She believes the investment has paid off.

“I’m very proud of the overall school progress, but I’m always touched by the progress of individual students whom I’ve known and who, when they’re able to enter Providence, just blossom. I love to see that happen,” she said. ☘

Photo opposite page: Providence student Raven Malavenda gets a hug from Consuelo Kickbusch following the retired lieutenant colonel’s motivational speech at the school in early October.



Carol Brooks, a preschool regional training center director based at Berea Independent Schools, details some of the elements of a high-quality preschool program during KSBA's fall regional meeting at Lee County High School.

By Brad Hughes
Staff Writer

If you think preschool is just about play time, snack time and nap time, you haven't been to a top-notch preschool in a while. And if you think having a quality preschool program is a snap, you weren't in the audience during this year's KSBA Fall Regional Meetings.

"We have children already going into kindergarten classes in every elementary school, working on their reading skills," Floyd County Preschool Director Ruth Blackburn told the audience at a session her district hosted at Jenny Wiley State Park.

"We're talking about brain development here," Carol Brooks said to those gathered at Lee County High School for another regional meeting. Brooks is a preschool regional training center (RTC) director stationed in the Berea Independent district.

The fall meetings' preschool focus is part of KSBA's two-year initiative to educate local school boards on the benefits of high-quality preschool programs. It is part of a multi-state coalition and the National School Boards Association, funded by a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts.

Several presenters wanted board members and superintendents to grasp how a successful start developing a child's learning skills is critical to meeting those school leaders' goals for students later.

"When I started out, it was all about meeting the child's social and emotional needs," said Jessie Singleton, a regional early childhood trainer based at the Ashland Independent Schools. "Today, we are leaning more to the academic because we need to prepare them for testing. It's not either/or; it's both areas that we have to focus on."

The board can make a difference

This year, Kentucky is allocating nearly \$74 million to districts to serve more than 24,000 children. Another 13,000 are in Head Start and private day care, often in partnership with the public schools. KSBA Executive Director Bill Scott told audiences at the regional meetings that the local school board is more than an interested bystander in the degree of quality of preschool programs.

"As the brain research tells us, we have a very narrow window to maximize the learning potential of our children. If we are not hitting that window in the 3-and-4 years-olds, we are missing a tremendous opportunity and we'll never have that chance again," Scott said.

"Preschool is not an add-on to your P-12 program. It's an integral part," he said.

Scott and Lawrence County Schools Early Childhood Center Director Toni Armstrong challenged those gathered at Jenny Wiley to have goals for children moving from preschool to kindergarten, much as they have for older students moving from grade to grade and from high school to college.

“One of the best things that school boards can do is to have that clear expectation as a board and superintendent of exactly what it is you want from that preschool program, and what you want children who go through that preschool program to know and be able to do,” said Armstrong.

“Hold your programs accountable to those expectations you set. Look at the assessment. Not just saying, ‘Yep, those students are being assessed,’ but really looking to see what’s being done with that data,” she said.

School boards committed to high quality preschool programs need to have a vision that includes ways to measure how children are being prepared to enter kindergarten, Scott said.

“What kinds of goals (for preschool) do you have in your district improvement plan? You could look at child outcomes from the school readiness scale indicating the percentage of students ready for kindergarten,” he said.

All of the regional meeting speakers acknowledged that

high-quality preschool programs tax any school district’s fiscal resources, especially in these tight budget times. “We’re all pretty broke right now, but when you do have discretionary money, when you build your budget, does the education of your early childhood population enter into your decisions? Do you have funds to improve your programs that would move your district closer to that vision?” Scott asked.

For Ashland’s Singleton, the benefits – or lack thereof – from exposure to quality preschool last far beyond a child’s fourth birthday.

“We share our offices in the same building with our alternative school. I’m convinced that had those children had an opportunity to experience a high-quality preschool, it would have made a difference,” she said.

“We know that early intervention is the key. I’m convinced that if we invest early when they are little, we will save money in not having to provide those alternative classroom situations,” Singleton said. ☞

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'Vision' improves the view for Crittenden

By Madelynn Coldiron
Staff Writer

The Top 10 list in the Crittenden County school district is no laughing matter.

Every school has its own list, as do the school board, superintendent, administrators and transportation, food service and custodial/maintenance staff.

The lists of 10 "commitments" support the district's 2020 Vision initiative that the school board and Superintendent Dr. Rachel Yarbrough hope will transform the district.

"The entire school district is turning the corner to student learning," Yarbrough said. "There just needed to be a more purposeful focus on building a team and having a collaborative, shared vision for student learning."

The effort is as much process as program; as its name implies, it is aimed at rallying all employees behind a common vision for learning, fostering more internal teamwork and making the community a partner in the schools.

Though the initiative wasn't full-blown until after Yarbrough's arrival in the system in July 2008, the groundwork was laid earlier when the system sponsored a business forum to find out what local employers need from the schools and vice versa, said board Chairman Chris Cook.

"We gathered a lot of good information there," Cook said.

2020 Vision takes shape

The district arrived at 2020 Vision after taking a series of steps that involved both internal and external stakeholders.

Among those steps was defining what Yarbrough calls "the big 6" goals for the district:

- Reduce the dropout rate
- Improve attendance
- Increase student achievement
- Develop resource effectiveness
- Establish connectivity
- Build a rockin' climate

The initiative "really crystallized" this summer, Cook said, when district and school administrative leadership held a retreat that board members joined. The retreat produced a list of essential learning skills that their students need to compete in a global economy, to perform well in the workplace and to pursue postsecondary options. Discussions about district priorities, strengths and weaknesses, and internal and external communication led to the development of the Top 10 lists.

The learning essentials were reviewed during teacher professional development days prior to the start of school this year. Elementary Instructional Supervisor Tonya Driver said the learning essentials have been made part of school walk-throughs. "Classroom teachers are going with it," she said.

Even at the elementary school level, children are being

encouraged to pursue postsecondary options, such as a recent Community College Day at Crittenden County Elementary. "We're getting to start them young," Principal Melissa Tabor said.

The role of stakeholders

The 2020 Vision approach leans heavily on communication internally and externally.

The district holds biannual Council of Councils meetings that include school councils, student councils, the board, PTO groups, and school- and district-level administrators.

The initiative is unusual in that it seeks out a lot of input from students, Cook said.

"The students actually had a significant voice in the development of this vision," he said.

Student council leaders met with Yarbrough prior to this summer's district retreat, and were encouraged to share their vision for their education.

Student input also is gleaned during the board's three yearly meetings at schools – students give board members a tour of their building and "share what's on their mind," Cook said.

To reach parents and the general community, the district has begun holding open sessions in four communities, bringing board members, district representatives and school staff into the field to answer questions and get input.

The 2020 Vision has opened lines of communication with parents and other community members, said board member Pam Collins.

"I feel they have a new level of confidence in us and they feel like we care about them more personally. They feel they have a stake in it," she said.

The outreach to the business community that began with the earlier forum has continued. Yarbrough attends chamber of commerce meetings and this year began hosting Learning Lunches, inviting business owners, government officials, bankers and community college staff to get the latest news about the schools over a midday meal.

"It's given us a much better understanding of our school system. The luncheon has brought the community together to see what is going on in the schools and how we can be a part of it," said Crystal Capps, director of finance and materials at Tyler Manufacturing/Par4 Plastics.

In it for the long term

Though 2020 Vision has been fleshed out under Yarbrough's watch, it can stand

Top right: Crystal Capps, director of finance and materials at Tyler Manufacturing/Par4 Plastics and the plant's manager, Ryan McDaniel, listen to Crittenden County Superintendent Rachel Yarbrough's update during the school district's October Learning Lunch with community stakeholders.

Right: Cheyenne Whitney and Douglas Conger are deep in concentration at the computer in their second-grade class at Crittenden County Elementary.



Crittenden County Schools

on its own. "It was not superintendent-dependent," Cook emphasized. "There is a culture here that has developed among so many people from so many different angles that if the leader changes, this is going to keep going."

Any district undertaking an effort like this should not expect instant results, Cook advised.

"You do have to have patience with the process," he said. "It truly has taken going through all these steps and listening to all our stakeholders to finally get to this point of having that 2020 Vision."

Holly White, the district's public information officer, noted, "When you gain input from every entity, it just takes time, and that's something that's been real important: to be sure that everyone is included."

And the circle of input may expand in the future. Yarbrough is thinking about asking a group of businesspeople and a group of parents to devise Top 10 lists. ❧



Crittenden County Board of Education Top 10 Commitments

1. Achieve a clear vision for educational excellence in Crittenden County.
2. Build a strong foundation between schools and the community.
3. Collaborate with our partners (community, industry, colleges) to improve the overall quality of educational opportunities for students.
4. Do 'whatever it takes' for students of Crittenden County Schools.
5. Work as a team with an emphasis on relationship-building.
6. Listen closely to students, teachers and community members to address needs of students.
7. Think "outside the box" for solutions to challenges.
8. Always focus on students graduating being prepared for life.
9. Stay focused on the positive improvement of educational services for children.
10. Lifelong learning.



Time for teachers to learn

By Madelynn Coldiron
Staff Writer

Some school districts are hoping that time is on their side this year. They've launched new calendars that build in time for teachers to polish their skills, collaborate and practice new initiatives. The topics, format and schedule vary from district to district, but the purpose is the same: improving student learning.

"We're hoping that our teachers gain knowledge that will help them immediately in the classroom, that will impact student achievement," said Jennifer Wright, assistant superintendent of Grant County Schools, which launched a calendar this year with six early release days.

To have an impact on the learning of every child, teachers can no longer work in isolation, said James Flynn, superintendent of Simpson County Schools, which implemented an innovative calendar this year.

"We're having to deliver instruction very differently to meet children's needs in very different ways," he said. "And so to do that with any kind of proficiency and effectiveness is going to take time, and it can't be one person trying to figure out how to solve it – we've got to collaborate."

Form and function

Simpson County's calendar incorporates seven full "Learning Community Days," rather than partial early release sessions. That was in response to several concerns, among them the belief that students don't do as well with a partial day, Flynn said.

Simpson County teachers will use the days to meet in professional learning communities, to explore new programs and to improve alignment between grades.

Grant County Schools' early release days this school year are timed to coincide with key events, such as the end of grading periods and the issuance of progress reports. Superintendent Michael Hibbett said one common thread during all those sessions will be the cooperative learning effort the district began this year.

Frankfort Independent's board signed off on a calendar this year that will dovetail with the system's new focus on professional learning communities and building relationships with families, said Superintendent Rich Crowe. The pattern will be the same for the three early release days in each quarter: the first day is used for parent-teacher conferences; the next for home visits by teachers and administrators; and the third for analysis of quarterly assessments.

Grayson County's eight yearly early release days, which began last year, also will focus on professional learning communities this year, but they have run the gamut, Superintendent Barry Anderson said.

"We've done some school-specific things and we've done some district things," he said. "We've gone across grade lines and school buildings."

Hibbett and other superintendents said they expected the first early release session of the year would focus on analyzing newly released test data.

Obstacles and accountability

Grant County schools must submit a plan to the central office two weeks prior to each early release day, Wright said. The sessions also will be evaluated at the end of the year.

Flynn, of Simpson County, said schools file their agendas prior to Learning Community Days, and also afterward, detailing what was covered. Similarly, Grayson County administrators work with principals and school

curriculum coordinators to plan sessions, Anderson said.

Child-care concerns often are raised when a board is considering early release days. Williamstown Independent Superintendent Sally Skinner said that's why her district limits its sessions to four a year.

Hibbett said Grant County compares early release days with snow days: in both cases, child care "is the parents' responsibility," he said.

Anderson said the concerns about child care in his district were resolved by working with family resource centers, which already had been providing child care.

"Our parents are working with us," he said.

Reaction

A key to easing into the new schedule is to publicize it well in advance, Hibbett said. Skinner, the Williamstown superintendent, said her district places an "all call" to parents as a reminder the night before.

Simpson County's Learning Community Days are getting great reviews from teachers, said school board Chairman David Webster.

"The first report we got, they love it," he said. "At the last board meeting we actually had a principal come from one of the schools and talk about how much they got accomplished that they couldn't get accomplished before."

Parents also appreciate the extra family time afforded by the full training days, which often bookend

weekends, Webster said.

The benefits aren't all academic, he pointed out. He said the move has cut the cost of substitute teachers that had to be paid when teachers attended professional development activities during the school day.

"By doing this, they get (training) without having to bring substitutes into the building – it saves us quite a bit of money," Webster said.

Frankfort Independent's Crowe said he's heard no complaints from teachers or parents, who "loved" the parent-teacher conferences and home visits.

"I hope we see improved participation from our par-

ents and hopefully our test scores will go up because we have had the time to work together, to plan and look at the data we have received from testing and student scores within the building," said Gala Catron, resource teacher at Second Street Elementary School and president of the Frankfort Teachers Association. ☞



Photo opposite page: Guidance counselor Krista Stanley leads a discussion among a group of Sherman Elementary School teachers studying testing data during the district's October early release day.

Left: Discussion among Sherman Elementary's teacher groups during the early release day is lively. From left to right are Jennifer Roberson, Pat Blackburn, Jamie Kinmon and Sharon Norman.



Dr. Robert Brooks, a psychiatrist from the Harvard School of Medicine, shares with attendees at last month's Safe Schools, Successful Students conference, the importance of having the right mind-set when working with students.

Mind-sets over matter

By Jennifer Wohlleb
Staff Writer

When it comes to reaching kids, especially those who may be the most difficult cases, having the right mind-set is crucial, according to the keynote speaker at this year's Safe Schools, Successful Students Conference.

Dr. Robert Brooks, a psychologist at Harvard University's School of Medicine and a former teacher and principal, said he saw the power of mind-sets in action years ago when he began counseling an angry ninth-grade student. Brooks met with a group of the boy's teachers and asked them each to describe the student so he could use that information to better work with him.

"One teacher jumped right in and said, 'He's one of the most abrasive, obnoxious, defiant, oppositional kids we have in this school,'" Brooks said. "... Out of the corner of my eye I could see another teacher raise her eyebrows. I turned to her and asked her to describe the kid and she said ... 'I think he's really struggling with learning. I think every day when he comes into this building he feels very vulnerable. I think as a staff we better find a better way to teach him because what we're doing now is a prescription for failure.'"

Brooks said he wasn't surprised later

when the student described the first teacher in terms similar to the ones she had used to describe him. He said it was also amazing to see how the student's whole body relaxed when he talked about the second teacher, who had earned his respect and loyalty by talking to him on the first day of school.

"She pulled him aside on the first day and said, 'Before you go into my class, I want you to know why I became a teacher ... I think all students are capable of learning and I know you've had some difficulties. But with us working together closely, I know this can be the most successful school year you've ever had.'"

Brooks said that the mind-sets of those two teachers contributed directly to how that student worked and achieved in their classrooms.

He said the presence of a charismatic adult in the life of a child is important, especially to one who grows up under the weight of poverty, racism and other daunting circumstances.

"When you ask resilient adults, what do you think the most important thing in your childhood was to make you a resilient adult – no matter where you ask that in the world – the answer is always that there was at least one person in their life who believed in them," Brooks said.

He encouraged conference attendees to become that charismatic adult and to never

write off any student.

“Too often we punish suffering children,” he said. “Maybe when we find ways for kids to feel dignified, they’ll rise to the occasion.”

Brooks said charismatic adults should practice empathy and consider how they would like to be described by their students and how they would actually be described. He encouraged educators to get feedback from students about how they are doing. He said in schools and classrooms that did that, achievement went up and discipline problems went down.

Brooks said educators can create motivating environments, which nurture learning and increase safety, by making children feel welcome in their presence, allowing them self determination and autonomy, and making them feel competent.

“They need to have a sense of ownership,” Brooks said.

A good way to do this, he said, is to include students in the creation of classroom rules.

“When schools do this, the kids come up with rules similar to those of the adults, but they are more willing to follow them because they understand how they were created,” he said.

Brooks said educators need to provide students with opportunities to contribute and make a positive difference, while learning that making mistakes is just another way that everyone learns. He encouraged teachers to share some of their own mistakes with students to show they are a normal part of life.

“Do you foster the attitude that mistakes are experiences from which to learn?” he asked. “I think some kids act out in school because they are afraid of making mistakes and being humiliated. I know kids and you know kids who would rather get into trouble than to be humiliated.” ❧



Public
Kentucky's
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**KSBA's 74th
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Virtually real



Yes, we know that's an oxymoron. But the new online version of the *Kentucky School Advocate* is so real you may want to wet your finger and try to turn the computer screen.

The technology used to create the *Kentucky School Advocate* online exactly replicates the magazine as it appears in print – right down to turning the pages.

The tool bar at the top of the screen offers a way to go a step further. Just click on “full screen” and the toolbar and other features fade and all you've got is the *Kentucky School Advocate*. Just don't dampen your computer screen.

Check it out at
www.ksba.org/advocate

Susan Perkins Weston

on creating a transition index



In Conversation With... features an interview between a leader or figure involved in public education and a staff member of the Kentucky School Advocate.

This month's conversation is with Susan Perkins Weston, former executive director of the Kentucky Association of School Councils, who was commissioned by KASC, the Council for Better Education and the Prichard Committee to create a transition index for CATS scores to provide overall school testing results as the state moves away from CATS and toward a new testing system as mandated by Senate Bill 1.

Q. Why was the transition index created?

A. Senate Bill 1 provided that the state would continue to test reading, math, science, social studies and writing and produce the scores for individual students and of those, what percent reached each performance level. But it said the Department of Education couldn't calculate an index.

The index piece is what makes it easy for parents, teachers, district leaders and taxpayers in general to look at it and say, "Here's how much the school moved overall." It's a one-number way to get the big picture, a way to see the forest rather than the trees. And the legislation says the department couldn't do that.

So a whole set of people started saying, "How can we see a trend and how quickly a school is moving toward getting all the students to proficiency?" These folks kept talking and said, "Can't a version of the index be calculated?" There was interest at the Prichard Committee, there was interest at KASC. I spend a lot of time with those numbers, so they asked me if it was possible and I said, "Definitely." And after a discussion with the Council for Better Education, we thought it would be helpful to do it statewide.

There were a number of districts that said they were going to try to do it and this saved everyone some time by having it done once where everybody could see it.

Q. Did any schools request that an index be created?

A. There were a couple of superintendents who I knew had been talking to each other about how could it be done, what would you have to do to the formula, where would you get the data? I think everyone was asking how we would get a sense of what the statewide picture was, to know if their district was moving quickly. And that's why doing it for the whole state was important, so everyone could get a benchmark sense of what's happening.

Q. How did you create the transition index?

A. The starting data came from the department. It's the numbers that show up in the official department report that say, "This percentage of students is novice in reading; this percent is apprentice."

For this project, we had to apply a big formula and it came from taking the formula the state had used since 1999 and asking what's the smallest change we can make, which involves redistributing the weights that before went into arts and humanities, practical/vocational and into the writing portfolios, because those aren't being tested now. It was a matter of taking old weights and readjusting them so they got back on the 0-40 scale that people were used to, which meant handing out the value of the old subjects to the ones that survived. And we tried to keep it as simple and as familiar as possible.

The effect is that at the elementary level, reading and math are valued a lot more than the other subjects, and at the high school level, they are just about equal. That part had to be tinkered and there was a big discussion

back and forth among all the groups sponsoring this. And what we ended up with was, “What’s the simplest thing to show people?” We thought about something fancier, but realized that fancier wasn’t best.

Q. How should school districts use this data from the transition index? Should they present it in the same light as they did the CATS data?

A. It’s important to say this is a voluntary process and it’s not the same as the old academic index. But then you want to say, how close can we come to talking about are we still on track for reaching proficiency by 2014? This is a pretty good and consistent method for talking about that continuously. The reason we went back and did the ’07 and ’08 numbers was so it would be an apples-to-apples comparison with the new scores. This allows schools to say, for the subjects that are still tested, we’ve reached 100, or for the subjects that are still tested, we’re on track to reach 100 by 2014. Or some of them will have to say we’re improving, but it’s too slow.

We set it up so schools could see that and talk about that, and also so parents and citizens could see that if they want to look through the reports and ask, “Are we still headed toward the same goals we set before?”

A reason that’s valuable is because Senate Bill 1 is going to set higher standards. So if a school is not on track to reach the old standards, then that’s a sign that they’re going to find the new ones pretty painful.

To me, the real goal is that we need to move our kids up to where they need to be. This is benchmarking against our old standards, which is the best thing we’ve got. But as a parent, I want schools that are at least on track to hit the old goals on time, as a signal of when we get to

the new standards – which are tightly aligned to kids being ready for college and to compete worldwide – that they’re going to be OK.

If schools are behind, I think it’s a sign to them to find some new efforts and some new energy for 2010 and 2011, so we get a good start on the next system.

Q. How should schools use this transition index data when we get into the new system?

A. When we get into the new system, it’s not likely that we’ll have numbers that are easy to compare. It is likely that even a school that had 100 percent of students at proficient in reading under the old standards will find that the new test will come back and say, no, it’s 90 percent, because these standards are going to be higher, and harder. We’re really trying to rev our kids up for how competitive the world is now.

I would also say that even if you have a school at 100, you know that the old standards are looking like they weren’t demanding enough, so districts that have gotten great scores should be saying, “Can we push them higher because our students would be better off if we could take them to an even stronger level.”

Q. It’s going to be very eye-opening when these new standards go into effect.

A. I am very pleased that there are multiple states in on creating the new system; national testing experts are looking at what other countries are doing. I think it’s a stronger process; we’re saying when we get to math and science we’re going to try to match that quality as an in-state thing. And having looked at how big the national common core standards project is for reading and math, the department has taken on a big, important thing. I hope they get

some foundation help or federal help to do that part because it’s so big to actually look at how they are doing it in Hong Kong, how they’re doing in Singapore, how they’re doing it in Finland.

I think it will give us a much stronger sense of what the standards mean, which is, we’ll be able to say things about how it compares to the standards being used in many other states; and this is how these standards compare to world’s strongest countries on academics. That’s going to be great, but it means that what we vaguely knew about needing to raise standards is going to get very concrete and very local. I think we should be ready for that. I hope everyone registers that this was a statewide problem and a national problem and doesn’t see it entirely as the local schools missed the point. But we should all be ready very cheerfully to say, we must work harder for our children. That’s an OK thing to decide. We could probably do this feeling good about one another and decide to do this as a partnership rather than a blame discussion.

Q. Schools obviously have a lot on their plates, but they shouldn’t feel discouraged under the new system if their scores are not as high as they were previously?

A. I’d say offhand that if everyone’s scores are close to matching in the new system, then we did the new system wrong. All of the talk is, the standards need to be higher, the standards are going to be higher. This is going to require a different level of effort than what we’ve been doing.

If it all comes back comfortable, then we didn’t make the step up we said we were going to.

The crucial thing for the transition index is for schools to keep a real sharp focus on whether they are improving and improving on a real sharp pace. ☘

“The index piece is what makes it easy for parents, teachers, district leaders and taxpayers in general to look at it and say, ‘Here’s how much the school moved overall.’ It’s a one-number way to get the big picture, a way to see the forest rather than the trees.”

— Susan Perkins Weston, explaining the transition index for state testing scores

Infinite possibilities

By Jennifer Wohlleb
Staff Writer

No one could have anticipated when Infinite Campus was first adopted by the state that it would have so many uses, including as a weapon in the fight against the flu.

All Kentucky districts have been on the new student-data collection system since late March, when the last district – Caldwell County – was put online.

Kay Kennedy, director of the Department of Education's Division of District Operations, said it was nice to end last school year and start this school year with everyone on the same system.

"Everyone completed their end-of-year reports on Infinite Campus, which was a learning experience, but everyone was a trooper, rolled up their sleeves and got after it," she said. "Being able to start the school year fresh on Infinite Campus and not having to worry about conversion issues has allowed a smoother process for getting school started."

So smooth that districts are exploring more of the system's features beyond the basics.

"The electronic transfer of records has been marvelous," said Melissa Earnest, Caldwell County's student information system coordinator. "If a child is coming to us from another school in Kentucky, because we're all on the same system now, it will pop up and we can make a records request."

Before, the request was done by phone, fax or mail, which could take days or weeks, forcing the school to wait to permanently place the child.

"Infinite Campus automatically finds the school they were enrolled in and alerts them to send the records," Earnest said. "They hit a button to release the records and there's their records. Even special ed records are being transferred ... you don't have to find someone, you don't have to phone, you don't have to fax, you can put them in the right classes right at the beginning. That has been a real plus."

Kennedy said districts that are using the Parent Portal option in the system are getting positive feedback.

"The Parent Portal is a way for the school to communicate with parents," she said. "The school has the ability to go into the system and mark which elements they want to publish to the portal. Typically, most schools choose grades and attendance."

She said in the case of multiple siblings, parents can go to one site to access all of their children's information, rather than having to log out and back in for each child.

Earnest said that same feature is also a plus for district personnel.

"In the previous system, if you wanted to go from one school to the next, you actually had to log out of one school and log into the second school," she said. "So you were back and forth, waiting for it to log you in and out. Now I can look at 'All schools' if I'm looking for a particular student and I'm not

Infinite Campus statistics across Kentucky

- 467,274 Campus user accounts (includes district staff, parents, and students)
- 124 Districts using Parent Portal
- 28.1 percent - Average parent users accessing Portal

— Provided by the Kentucky Department of Education

sure what school they're in. That's really helped, having everything consolidated into one spot."

There is also a Student Portal.

"One district set it up where students could actually log in and put in their schedule requests and those requests went directly into the system," Kennedy said. "When it comes time to do the schedule, the counselor or the clerk isn't typing in those requests and doing all the manual work; the student has taken the initiative and gone through the catalog and selected the courses they want to take and then it's ready to run the schedule."

"One district said it was worth the price of admission right there."

Infinite Campus has also proved to be flexible, allowing KDE to partner with the Kentucky Department of Public Health to collect data on flu absences.

"The Department of Public Health came to us and asked if we could partner and get some data relative to student absences," Kennedy said. "I explained what we have and it certainly wasn't the detail they were interested in. We don't code absences by type of illness at the state level. But we do have the ability at the district level to map a state code. We worked together to utilize Infinite Campus to push out specific attendance codes to every district for influenza-like illness; different categories that they actually code that we can then provide to the Department of Public Health, which is tracking on a geographic basis where those outbreaks are. We're just a facilitator; we don't actually use the data, but their statisticians are tracking and making a predictive model about the outbreaks themselves."

She said they were able to push out the new codes in about three weeks.

Kennedy said her division is also working on a new module with family resource and youth services centers that will allow them to monitor and better track the services they are providing.

"Not only can they track services for a student, but also any siblings in that same family that may or may not be in the school system," she said. "So services provided to a student in the sixth grade who also has a 2- or 3-year-old sibling at home can be tracked through the system and give a much more comprehensive picture of the family in terms of what services may be given." ❧

RISK MANAGEMENT PAYS

Q. When KSBIT folks talk about insurance, they always mention risk management. Why do you stress that so heavily?



Jeremy Baird: With ever-rising insurance costs, lawsuits, and workers' compensation claims, Kentucky school districts must begin to take ownership for their rising cost of doing business. Risk management is the active process of identifying, assessing, communicating and managing the

risks facing an organization to ensure that the organization meets its desired objectives.

The first step must be systematic. A risk management plan must be adopted with support from all levels of management, including the board of education, identifying roles and responsibilities. Next, an all-hazards approach identifying risk

exposures within the district should be conducted, so that appropriate risk-reduction techniques can be considered.

When beginning these initial steps, consider contacting your local KSBIT risk management specialist, who is qualified to help you develop and implement your district's risk management plan.

Once the plan is in place, who will oversee it? For decades, school districts have been the largest employer in most counties as well as managing the most property within these counties; however, less than 5 percent of all school districts in the state employ a risk manager. Most might ask, "How can we afford another position within the district, especially when it is not mandated?" I say, "How can you not afford to employ these professionals?"

— Baird is senior risk control specialist for the Kentucky School Boards Insurance Trust, KSBA's insurance and risk management service. ☘

It started with a Winter Symposium

Advocate Staff Report

School board members expect to learn a lot of specialized skills on the job, like reading a balance sheet, deciphering test scores and understanding how kids learn.

Less heralded are the qualities they develop while serving, like leadership, patience, teamwork, being a good listener – qualities that will carry over into their everyday lives.

This year's KSBA Winter Symposium kicks off a series that will highlight those abilities that have prepared current and former school board members for their real-world occupations and activities. Kentucky Board of Education Chairman Joe Brothers, a former Elizabethtown board member, will give the inaugural talk in the occasional series, called It Started With a School Board. Brothers will be the luncheon speaker at the December 12 symposium at the Marriott Downtown in Louisville.

"We want to raise awareness of what it takes to be a school board member," said Kerri Schelling, KSBA's director of Board Team Development. "So from time to time we're going to feature current and former board members who have taken what they've learned as a local board member and applied it to some higher calling or other job. Who better to present a message of leadership than someone who's been a board member in Kentucky who really understands and knows what it's like, who can

say, 'Here's what I learned from my time there.'"

Following the lead of this year's Summer Leadership Institute, which compressed what had been a three-day event into two days, the Winter Symposium will pack its traditional finance and facilities sessions into a single day instead of two days.

"It's the same content in a tighter package," Schelling said. "We're still trying to find ways to save districts money and at the same time try to find that optimal length of time people need at an event to have a high-quality professional development experience. We're really just fine tuning it."

Though compressed, the day will still feature all four finance courses from KSBA's Academy of Studies. Workshops will include courses from all levels of the academy, including Levels 4 and 5—not the usual offering for the winter training, which normally hosts a large number of newly elected school board members. However, this is not an election year.

The afternoon will feature a three-hour facilities seminar, one of the hallmarks of KSBA's winter gathering. Among the district presentations are a workshop on energy management by Kenton County Schools' energy systems coordinator and a session on how to sell a nickel tax to the community from a superintendent who's been there and done that.

Registration information has been mailed to board team members, who may also register online at www.ksba.org. ☘

Was the public served by one release of AYP/KCCT data?

When the Department of Education announced a combined release of this year's No Child Left Behind and Kentucky Core Content Test scores, my first thought was, "Whoa. Big mistake."

Usually, NCLB Adequate Yearly Progress and KCCT results went public weeks apart. But Senate Bill 1 altered the state assessment system and the ice and wind storms of 2008-09 reduced the window between last year's testing and this year's teaching. KDE got a waiver of the NCLB mandate to release scores before opening day so parents can consider transferring children from a school that repeatedly misses progress goals.

That's a ton of data, even for those who understand the crunching, charting, disaggregating, subgrouping, etc. Then those outcomes must be explained to folks whose grasp of dueling school accountability measures ranges from marginal to "Huh?"

Obviously, media coverage of anything is just one yardstick of effective communications. But as one who closely followed the coverage of Testing 2009's final round, the results were troubling.

There was plenty of solid coverage giving parents and the taxpaying public a thorough examination of how schools progressed (or didn't) from 2008 to 2009. But there also were stories that confused or mixed AYP and KCCT scores. Equally worrisome were stories that addressed only whether a school met its AYP targets. A KCCT-improving school making 11 of 12 NCLB goals is ill-served by a yearlong label reading "failed."

If the resulting picture of school progress wasn't as comprehensive as those painted in past years, who is responsible? Reporters? KDE? Districts? The rest of us for not demanding greater clarity?

Who wants what?

Education Commissioner Terry Holliday told me that "superintendents requested that the data be released at the same time since the real focus was on meeting AYP...that if we released the data separately, we would confuse everyone even more."

I asked 40 superintendents and 20 reporters about the one-versus-two release decision. I also e-mailed 200 board members with a slightly different question: were they comfortable if parents or other constituents asked them to explain both sets of numbers?

Superintendents favored the single release by a 4-1 ratio.

"It was the best thing that could have ever happened. (KDE's) original plan to release NCLB and KCCT within three days of each other would have been a disaster," said Fayette



Brad Hughes
KSBA Member
Support Services Director

County's Stu Silberman.

Not all superintendents agreed.

"I do not favor a joint release," said Sam Dick of Caverna Independent. "Our middle school had the highest scores in its history, was on track to 100 on the transition index, but failed to make AYP. The dictionary should include under the definition of confusion the release of AYP and KCCT data simultaneously to the public."

In the middle were superintendents who simply want data as soon as possible.

"We started school on Aug. 6. Scores (were) publicly released Sept. 23. We will be well

into our school year before we can use our data and change our game plan," said Gallatin County's Dorothy Perkins. "It makes no difference HOW we get our NCLB and CATS data, together or separate. WHEN is the biggest concern."

Conversely, virtually all responding reporters opposed the single release. Among their comments (solicited with assurance of anonymity for ethical reasons):

"This dual release of NCLB and KCCT scores was a NIGHTMARE. And this comes from someone who has been covering education for years."

"I resigned to writing two (NCLB) stories. It was way too much information to get into the KCCT scores. Readers would have gotten confused and ultimately given up reading the story."

"You know as well as I that the typical reader's eyes are fickle and two stories about test data on the same page would cause them to glaze and move on to the celebrity gossip."

"I simply do not have time to go through that much info. I felt that my story was inadequate as a result."

"The state should never release core content and NCLB at the same time, unless they want to confuse the public."

The Last Word

A superintendent told me, "I don't work for the news media." Fair enough. Neither do I. But what about the public and its elected representatives on school boards?

More than half of the board members responding to my inquiry felt they could adequately explain the combined data to the people who put them in office. A few praised district briefings that gave them the confidence to face reporters or parents. But only a few. I suspect more than a few weren't keen to admit being uncomfortable answering constituents' questions.

Next fall, the big issue for Commissioner Holliday and the state's superintendents and school board members shouldn't be one release versus two, even weeks apart. It should be whether enough is done to adequately explain how schools are doing to those who enroll the kids and pay the bills.

And that's a message worth getting out. ☘

KSBA's 2010 Legislative Agenda Highlights

Early childhood education

The Board of Directors of the Kentucky School Boards Association, representing school boards across the state, supports full state funding of all-day kindergarten programs. The KSBA Board also supports an increase in preschool funding for 4-year-olds at 200 percent of the federal poverty level. All-day kindergarten should become mandatory when fully funded by the state.

In conjunction with increased funding to expand the pool of children eligible for preschool, more funding is needed for facilities to ensure school districts have the capacity to provide preschool and kindergarten.

Enriching teaching

KSBA supports a collaborative approach, including teachers and administrators, in developing differentiated compensation packages to attract and retain teachers in critical shortage areas with emphasis in the STEM subject areas and for increased responsibilities.

KSBA's board also supports:

- The creation of a system-wide teacher evaluation program with meaningful feedback from multiple sources.
- Increased professional development for teachers and administrators, along with the flexibility to implement innovative professional development.
- The redesign of teacher preparation programs to guarantee every child has access to a highly qualified teacher.

Graduate all Kentucky students

The KSBA Board of Directors supports a comprehensive plan to ensure all of Kentucky's students graduate from high school that includes the following:

- An increase in investments in local area technology centers to provide additional postsecondary opportunities aimed at encouraging at-risk high school students to stay in school.
- An increase in opportunities for extended learning programs such as summer learning or extending the school day.
- An increase in the number of guidance counselors, school psychologists and other student support staff to provide more interventions for students on the brink of dropping out.

Improving school facilities

KSBA's Board of Directors supports a change in the base school facility funding formula for the Facilities Support Program of Kentucky (FSPK) from the current 5 cents to 10 cents, which would be non-recallable and fully equalized by the state.

Elimination of Category 4 and 5 schools must be a priority. The General Assembly should consider requiring all districts with Category 4 and 5 schools to increase their FSPK to a dime.

Additional revenues must be provided for areas of the state where student enrollment growth outpaces current allowed revenue sources for construction.

School district autonomy

The KSBA Board of Directors supports increased local autonomy to develop the necessary policies and programs to ensure student achievement.

Specifically:

- School boards must continue to have authority to set start and end dates of the school year based on unique community issues.
- Issues impacting curriculum, such as mandated physical activity, must be decided by school boards, school councils and district administration.
- To hold school leaders more accountable, the General Assembly should amend KRS 160.345(h) to require the superintendent's recommendation of principal applicants prior to consideration for hiring by the school council.
- Local school board members believe the evaluation of the superintendent is a personnel matter. The option of a closed session of the board is needed for free discussion and a constructive evaluation.

Success after high school

To advance a P-12 education for all students that will guarantee rigor and relevance leading to successful transition from high school to work/careers, community and technical college and university opportunities, KSBA's Board advocates that:

- Incentives should be available to students and teachers for increased participation in advanced placement, dual credit and virtual academy classes.
- High school seniors should be allowed to use KEES scholarship funds to pay for dual-credit courses without losing a year of eligibility in college.

For more information on the legislative program, contact David Baird or Shannon Pratt Stiglitz at 1-800-372-2962.



Building early tech talent at Hazard Independent



In the fall of 2008, Hazard Independent leaders decided technology skills were too important to learning to wait for children to enter kindergarten. So the board combined preschool and district funds to create a two-room tech center for pre-kindergarten students.

Left: Preschool teacher Traci Lindon helps Jonte Clayton use whiteboard technology to "paint" fall colors. "The students are technology oriented. You wouldn't expect that from 3- and 4-year-olds, but they are," Clayton said. "Using technology maintains their interest and excitement about learning. For me, it has opened up the curriculum to endless possibilities."

Below left: Cheyanne Hoskins listens to audio instructions to complete a word-and-picture association task.



Left: Keyboards for students still building their reading skills use color-coded keys. Superintendent Sandra Johnson said, "We feel that the earlier we can introduce them to technology the more competent they will become as they advance through school."