



KENTUCKY SCHOOL ADVOCATE

A publication of the Kentucky School Boards Association ■ March 2010

**Full-service
preschool**

Growth spurt

LOW PERFORMERS MAKING LEMONADE

Energy-saving opportunity



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FEATURES

THE FUNDING CLIFF

Besides plugging budget holes, Kentucky school districts have used federal stimulus funding in a variety of ways, many of them aimed at addressing weaknesses of all kinds, from struggling readers to aging technology. Though the funding is temporary, educators hope the effects are lasting ... Page 8

UNEXPECTED OVERFLOW

Sometimes, you just can't predict demographic trends. The administrators at Southgate Independent will attest to that, after they found themselves scrambling to accommodate almost double the prior-year enrollment by January ... Page 10

THE WHOLE APPROACH

Owensboro Independent's Hager Preschool takes a whole-child approach that brings the community on board as well as students' families. It's not surprising that it has been named an Early Childhood Center of Excellence, only the second one in Kentucky ... Page 12

LEMONS TO LEMONADE

While being put on the state education department's list of persistently low-achieving schools might have created an image problem, leaders of some of those districts say there have been some unexpected bright spots ... Page 14

ENERGIZED

Some Kentucky school districts will be able to hire energy managers, thanks to federal stimulus-funded grants. The two-year program will be administered by KSBA in partnership with the Kentucky Department for Energy Development and Independence ... Page 18



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On the cover



Destiny Winstead slides through a "tunnel" on the Hager Preschool playground. The Owensboro Independent preschool recently was named a Kentucky Early Childhood Center of Excellence. See article on Page 12.

TAKE NOTE

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Honorable mentions

Pulaski County Schools' Literacy Bell program was singled out in an article in the January/February issue of the *American Libraries* magazine. The article details the program's beginnings and development, part of a local effort to improve literacy.

Students in Pulaski County schools get to ring the bell in the Pulaski County Public Library's bell tower when they are able to read aloud their first book. Both the public library and local Wal-Mart are partners with the district in the program.

And KSBA's Policy Service got a mention in an article about the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children that appeared in the January/February issue of the Council of State Government's *Capitol Ideas* magazine. The article noted that KSBA updated member school districts' policies to reflect the compact's rules.

Kudos

Barren County school board and KSBA board member Tim England was inducted recently into the district's Hall of Distinguished Alumni. England was one of seven new inductees honored by the Barren County Alumni Association.

He was chosen for the honor based on his reputation, community contributions, support of the school system and career success.

England, a pharmacist, graduated

from Barren County High School in 1979. His volunteer and community service includes work with the Salvation Army, school Beta Clubs, Junior Achievement and his church youth group. He is also a Little League coach.

Besides his service as a director-at-large on KSBA's board, England is co-chair of the KIDS First political action committee.

Kudos, part 2

Hopkins County Superintendent James Stevens has received the Madisonville-Hopkins County Chamber of Commerce's K-12 Educator of the Year award. Stevens has headed the district since 2000. The chamber cited his record of overseeing the renovation of two schools and planning for a new career and technology center, along with implementation of full-day kindergarten.

And kudos, part 3

Russell Independent Schools superintendent Dr. Susan Compton has been honored for her support of district music programs. Compton received the Kentucky Music Educators Association Outstanding Administrator Award for 2009-2010. Compton began her education career in 1978 as a music teacher. During Compton's tenure, the district's orchestra won both the Governor's Award in the Arts in the education category and KSBA's Public Education Achieves in Kentucky Award. ❧



Kennedy



Lynch



Narramore



Porter

They're back

Four directors-at-large on the KSBA Board of Directors were chosen by the membership at the January annual conference for a second three-year term. They are: Ann Porter of Mason County, Durward Narramore of Jenkins Independent, Allen Kennedy of Hancock County and Darryl Lynch of Christian County. Both Kennedy and Lynch had been serving unexpired terms.

Not chump change

Regardless of what else you may think about President Barack Obama's education efforts, no one can say he doesn't put his money where his mouth is. The fiscal year 2011 education budget, released in January, is one more indication of the ambitious and dramatically different direction this administration wants to take on American education. When coupled with the efforts already under way through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, it's hard to question the importance this president places on education.

The numbers are mind-numbing, especially for someone as mathematically challenged as me. In the area of K-12 education, the budget includes almost \$50 billion for the department's discretionary programs alone – an increase of \$3.5 billion over 2010. Some of the areas seeing increased funding were also priorities in the Race to the Top grants. These include the emphasis on great teachers and leaders (more money for recruitment, preparation, and pay for performance) and turning around the lowest-performing schools through increases in charter schools and by placing the best teachers and principals in the buildings where they're needed most. Education Secretary Arne Duncan has elaborated on the charter option, saying that he favors expanding charter schools but only if "we grow the good charter schools and shut down the bad ones."

Although the FY11 budget continues the Bush administration's emphasis on science, math and engineering, it also highlights the need for a well-rounded education by providing more funding for the arts, foreign languages and financial literacy.

The proposed budget also includes the biggest investment in higher education since the G.I. bill. In what the administration labels "a massive investment in college access," the budget includes \$173 billion in loans, grants, tax credits and work-study programs. According to the federal education department, there's enough funding in the budget to provide some form of federal assistance to 15 million college students – that amounts to three out of five currently enrolled students.

Although the Obama administration acknowledges the role that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) played in expos-



Bill Scott
KSBA Executive Director

ing achievement gaps among students, it criticizes NCLB for encouraging states to lower their standards and teachers to narrow their curriculums. Duncan has also stated that NCLB relied too much on simplistic tests that didn't accurately measure individual student learning and that mislabeled schools as failures even when they continued to show progress on important measures.

Without offering specifics, the administration promises to give local educators more flexibility. Duncan has said the federal government should provide a common definition of success, but not a prescription for success. The centerpiece of that definition, according to the education secretary, will be new accountability systems that measure student growth, progress in closing achievement gaps, proficiency toward college and career-ready standards, and high school graduation and college enrollment rates.

Another major difference in this administration's approach to funding is its shift from formula grants – where everybody gets a little money – toward competitive grants where the government can support the schools and districts that are doing the best work. In recent remarks to an NSBA audience, Duncan stated that the federal government wants to "use its scarce resources to leverage dramatic change, change that will accelerate progress for decades to come." He used the Race to the Top grants as an example of how competition can change the way educators do business. How this shift to competitive grants will affect a relatively poor state like Kentucky remains to be seen. If this shift places a priority on the services of experienced grant writers, a state with an abundance of small, rural districts may be at a distinct disadvantage.

Duncan's most direct reference to the importance that Obama places on education came in his remarks on the administration's efforts to rebuild the American economy. He said America's new economy would be built on a new foundation and that the administration intends to make public education "the cornerstone of that new foundation."

The president, he said, "believes we must educate our way to a better economy. The country that out-educates us today will be the one that out-competes us tomorrow." ❧

"Without offering specifics, the administration promises to give local educators more flexibility. (Secretary of Education Arne) Duncan has said the federal government should provide a common definition of success, but not a prescription for success."

Quotes on education from Kentucky and elsewhere



Photo provided by Fayette County Schools

“Before, we would touch on a math concept, get the kids comfortable with it and then move on to something else. We went so fast that sometimes it could be frustrating. But (now) we might spend a couple of months on just one concept. The students really understand it before we move on. I know I’m teaching math at a much higher level now than I ever taught it before, and the students are grasping it more quickly.” Liberty Elementary School teacher Polly Ann Cox on her impressions of the “Singapore Math” pilot being used in several Fayette County schools to focus more deeply on fewer math concepts. From the *Lexington Herald-Leader*.

math scores. From the *Eminence Henry County Local*.

“We still have a large minority of students that we can’t even get the parents to call us back and ask ‘Why does my child have charges?’ (The cheese sandwiches) are for the ones we can’t seem to get through to any other way. You can’t send a child to detention because of not having the money to pay for lunch.” Sabrina Jewell, Henderson County Schools’ director of child nutrition and child care, on the growing problem for many districts of unpaid student cafeteria charges. From the *Henderson Gleaner*.

“Some districts – but I would say not very many – probably have too large of a reserve and need to spend some of that on education in their districts. But I think because not all districts are alike, it would be very dangerous for us to try to say some districts should spend it and others shouldn’t.” State Rep. Harry Moberly (D-Richmond) on the renewed discussion of using school districts’ contin-

“We, as local school systems, don’t have paid lobbyists. But now we have a lobbying team and we take turns going to Frankfort while the legislature is in session. We have met with the governor and the leaders in education in both the Senate and the House. Years ago it was about having a general presence, but now it’s about going to Frankfort with a purpose. We’re about protecting funding because we’re about protecting education.” Kenton County Schools Superintendent Tim Hanner on the formation of the Northern Kentucky Education Action Team, a coalition of superintendents who meet with state leaders on legislative and regulatory issues. From the *NKY.com*.



kids go from novice to proficient or distinguished. It’s our job as educators to get our students to understand this test means something to them personally.” Henry County Superintendent Tim Abrams on a side effect of his high school’s implementation of a preliminary student academic assessment system in an effort to improve

Helping Students Love Learning

“One of the key things we insist upon ... is that they get to know the community and their clientele and establish relationships with parents. Teachers are encouraged to communicate with parents by e-mail every week. It takes much more than just a teacher or administrator to make sure kids get a good education. That’s where parents will see the most improvement in their kids is when they take initiative to make sure they know the school, the teacher, expectations and get involved.” Dr. Fred Carter, director of Teacher Services and School Relations at Western Kentucky University, about ongoing teacher training on encouraging greater parent involvement in their children’s schooling. From the *Bowling Green Daily News*.



“We have a lot of kids that have scored novice on that predictive assessment, but when we’ve told them it’s going to cause them to have to get extra help ... and they’re going to have to bypass something they might want to be doing ... we see



“It has to be someone who is dedicated. They have to be willing to stick with these kids, because they depend on us to be here when we say we’re going to be here and we can’t let them down.” Scott County school board member and mentor Phyllis Young on the non-teaching role adult mentors play in encouraging a love of learning in the students they work with. From the *Georgetown News-Graphic*.



“By removing this officer, we feel we have lost a sense of security and well-being at the school. Just the presence of a police car at the door and a police officer in the school might deter anyone from coming in to cause trouble or harm our student body. I realize that you don’t have the power to schedule the officers. But the students at MHS want an explanation as to

why this officer was removed.” Middlesboro High School Senior Class President Ronnie Johnson appealing to the city council after an assigned officer was removed from the school due to understaffing of the police department. From the Middlesboro *Daily News*.

agency funds as an option to balance the biennial budget being developed by the 2010 General Assembly. From the Louisville *Courier-Journal*.

“It concerns me because it’s not extra money, it’s money we hope not to have to use. But it’s real money. On one hand, we want to be good stewards. On the other hand, it could be unrewarding (for maintaining a strong reserve).” Lawrence County Schools Superintendent Mike Armstrong with his own concerns about the possibility of a legislative raid on contingency funds. From the Ashland *Daily Independent*.

“I feel uncomfortable evaluating anybody in public but I certainly will follow the letter of the law. But I wouldn’t want to be evaluated in public. I have heard everyone on this board express the same thing. Donald, just know that this is a first for us.” Marion County school board Chairwoman Kay Carlew about the board’s public review of first-year Superintendent Donald Smith in keeping with an Attorney General’s opinion. From the Lebanon *Enterprise*.

“If they don’t do something about Teacher Retirement by 2025, it will just go away. They (the

legislature) have borrowed so much from the retirement fund to pay insurance, about \$512 million.” Jenkins Independent school board Chairman Durward Narramore on the growing concerns about how to ensure fiscal solvency of the Kentucky Teachers Retirement System. From the Whitesburg *Mountain Eagle*.

“Overwhelmingly we heard, ‘Don’t do it. We want a new building.’ Taxpayers wouldn’t find any sense in spending money renovating an old building. Taxpayers want a state-of-the-art teaching facility.” Spencer County school board member Mary Ann Carden on a citizen’s proposal to build a two-story addition to the current Taylorsville Elementary as opposed to tearing down the historic 1938 structure. From the Taylorsville *Spencer Magnet*.

“The good news is that there’s 93 percent of kids that aren’t getting in trouble. There are a lot of kids out there doing what they need to do.” Jon Akers, executive director of the Kentucky Center for School Safety, summing up a frequently overlooked finding in the agency’s 10th annual safe schools data report. From the Hopkinsville *Kentucky New Era*. ☞

Non-resident student contracts

POINT ...

“A verbal civil war has broken out in our community. We come up here not to speak negatively about any student or teacher. We’ve had many people say ‘I take this personally,’ specifically the teachers of Knox County. I can assure you — we take this personally, too.” Melissa Shackelford, parent and spokesperson of “Knox Parents for Corbin Schools” on the Knox County school board’s rejection of continuing a non-resident student enrollment agreement with Corbin Independent Schools.

COUNTERPOINT...

“It’s really a business decision, because you’ve seen how much we’re losing, and we don’t know from year to year how much more we’re going to lose. I hate it for the parents who send their kids over (to Corbin), but I feel it’s the best decision for Knox County school system.” Knox County school board member Sam Watts on the decision from his district’s viewpoint.

From the Corbin *News-Journal*.

On the edge of a cliff



Photo by Brianna Hashiz/Corbin Independent Schools

Corbin High School math teacher Andrew Roark checks the work of Blake Philpot and Ashley Strunk. They were working on simplifying rational expressions. Federal stimulus funds allowed the district to hire Roark.

By Madelynn Coldiron
Staff Writer

When their districts fall off the federal stimulus “funding cliff” in the fall of 2011, Kentucky school leaders are hoping that one way or another, the effects of the cash boost will live on.

Regena Pollard, director of elementary education for Hopkins County Schools, says she hopes the seven full-time curriculum consultants that are working with her district’s elementary school teachers will have a lasting impact even if the positions have to be scaled back when the Title I stimulus funding expires.

“Even if it does have to be reduced when the stimulus money is gone, we will have had that time to at least build some capacity in the instructional staff, so it will have had an impact,” she said.

Those positions had been upgraded from part-time posts with the stimulus money, which also covered creation of middle school reading specialist positions.

Hopkins County Schools used its special education stimulus funding to both retain more than a half-dozen jobs and add about as many new positions, including special education coaches at each of the two high schools and other teacher consultants.

Like Pollard, special education director Jennifer Luttrell is hoping for lasting gains.

“When our building coaches, our consultants go in, they’re not only working with students, they’re modeling those good strategies for the teachers,” she said.

Zeroing in

Hopkins County administrators looked at student achievement data in deciding where to target the federal money, and the district isn’t alone in that.

In Corbin Independent, a district team analyzed data and got recommendations from an Eastern Kentucky University educator in deciding to focus Title I stimulus money on increasing student achievement in math.

The district has been training teachers in addressing the math weaknesses that were identified, but it also hired two new math teachers to split their time among three schools, Assistant Superintendent Brenda Hammons said.

In Trigg County, the district spent most of its Title I allocation on intervention programs and teacher training; special education funds were used to pay for equipment, training and an accessible school bus so students with disabili-

STIMULATING OVERVIEW

The biggest pots of stimulus money Kentucky school districts received were in Title I, special education and State Fiscal Stabilization Funds, which were passed through the governor’s office by formula.

The SFS funds were used mainly to make up for what the districts were losing from the basic SEEK program, said Larry Stinson, deputy commissioner of the Bureau of Learning and Results Services in the state education department.

“It was funding the districts had already counted on receiving. There was a little bit of innovation with the SFS but for the most part it was retaining jobs, not creating jobs.”

The variety of positions saved with the SFSF allocation ranged from core-subject and arts, music and drama teachers to counselors, nursing staff, technology specialists, instructional aides and academic support jobs, said Debbie Hendricks, a policy advisor with the Kentucky Department of Education.

“A lot of it was just making sure they had sufficient funds to be able to not lay off teachers and other personnel,” she said. Many of those jobs were positions that are usually threatened during a budget crunch, Hendricks added.

The Title I and special education funds were more likely to be used for enhancements or innovation, Stinson said.

In the Title I plans they submitted for the department’s approval, districts said they would be “retaining staff, extending services beyond the school day, upgrading their classrooms to intelligent classrooms, offering more interventions for students,” to name a few, said KDE’s Debbie Hicks, director of the Division of Federal Programs and Instructional Equity.

Still to come is the second phase of SFSF through the governor’s office, as well as a separate Title I School Improvement grant program. The state education department will apply for the latter, and school districts will then have to apply for a share. ☿

Total number of ARRA jobs created in KDE-administered programs*

First quarter: 7,108 full-time equivalent

Second quarter: 7,201 FTE

Third quarter: 7,374 FTE

Total for all quarters: 21,684 FTE (rounded up)

*Includes SFSF, IDEA, Title I Part A, and programs for homeless children's education, education technology and food service equipment

— Figures as reported to the federal government by the Kentucky Department of Education

ties could join other pupils on field trips and similar activities.

The interventions are “a tool box full of things” to help students and provide related training for their teachers, said Beth Sumner, the district's assistant superintendent for instruction.

“What we're trying to do is build our staff capacity and equip them with tools that are going to carry forward for the next several years,” she said.

Trigg County leaders decided not to create jobs with their extra funding, “because it's short-lived,” Superintendent Tim McGinnis said.

Like Trigg County and many other districts, Paris Independent used State Fiscal Stabilization funds to hang onto positions it had expected to have to cut, Superintendent Janice Cox Blackburn said. Among those positions were an alternative classroom teacher, elementary counselor, career education class teacher, and a liaison for families of English-language learners, a population that has doubled in the past year.

“Most of these positions we sometimes consider as not required, because they're not a math or language arts class or something like that – but we do need them,” Blackburn said.

Paris Independent and Boyd County Schools both used Title I money for early childhood education – Paris to keep alive full-day kindergarten and Boyd County to bring back full-day preschool after budget constraints forced the district to cut it back to half-day several years ago.

“What we've seen with the data out there is that kids do so much better if they have a chance to go all day instead of half a day,” Boyd County school board Chairman Bob Green said. “We thought this was the most bang for our buck.”

Eminence Independent Schools is using its stimulus money to create a different kind of lasting impact by addressing its most pressing need: rebuilding and modernizing its nearly 10-year old technology infrastructure.

“We were doing fine with what we had but there was no way to move ahead with the tools that are required for students to learn to their fullest extent in the classroom,” Technology Director Kim Dawson said. “This is going to last us probably 10 to 15 years.”

Outcomes

Hopkins County's Luttrell said the district is already seeing results with the special education building coaches and consultants, including a decrease in discipline issues and the dropout rate and an increase in achievement among special education students.

“Our superintendent has asked us to monitor and evaluate the significance and impact of those positions,” she said. “We're doing a lot of record-keeping and data collection so we can go to our board and say these are vital positions and ask

them to be retained after the two years. Of course, there are no promises, but that's the hope anyway.”

Boyd County school leaders don't want to have to cut back preschool again. “That's our whole thought: If we can get it for a couple of years and then try to build it into the budget to where we can just keep right on rolling with it,” Green said.

Corbin Independent also will be watching its data with fingers crossed. “We just kind of made a commitment that we're going to find the funds some way to continue the program if the data is there,” Hammons said.

Blackburn said she expects to be back looking for areas to cut when the federal stimulus funds end, “if our state government doesn't do something to either restructure our tax system or find a way to where we're not facing this crisis every year or two.” ❧

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GROWING PROBLEM

Southgate Independent Schools tackle issues surrounding larger-than-expected growth in student population

“These kinds of problems are a blessing to us. For us to have this type of challenge compared to what we had to do in the past, it was exciting for us.”

— Scott Clark,
Southgate Independent
Board of Education
chairman

By Mary Branham

When the school year began in August, Southgate Independent Superintendent Jim Palm expected a small enrollment bump because of a new apartment complex in the district.

That would be good news for Southgate School, which has seen its student numbers fall or rise only slightly each year since 1997.

What Palm actually saw, though, was an enrollment of 215 students – that’s an 80-student jump for the school that serves students in preschool through eighth grade. And it brought nearly 41 percent more average daily attendance funding for the 107-year-old school. By late January, the school had an enrollment of 251 students, its highest number since the 1996-97 school year when 245 students were enrolled.

“Nobody had any indication, especially with the economy the way it was,” Palm said of the increase. “When people lease apartments, you never know if they’re going to have children.”

The district did anticipate additional students from the 230-unit Canterbury House apartments off Moock Road in Southgate. But the additional 120 students caught school officials off guard.

“It was quite a task to get the school year started,” Palm said.

He credits the extra hours put in by the school board, school council and teachers for having the school ready.

“We had classes that were overflowing and we had to work as quickly as we could to make the changes,” said Kendra Abner, the school’s music teacher and member of



Madison Shaw works on a computer in the expanded media center at Southgate School. A middle bank of computers was added to address the needs of the additional 80 or so students who enrolled at the school this year.



Southgate Independent Schools Superintendent Jim Palm stands in front of the mobile classrooms added at the school in northern Kentucky to house third grade students. The school, which had seen its enrollment decline in recent years, had an additional 80 or so students added this year because of a new apartment complex (pictured at left) in town. Third grade and kindergarten saw large increases in students and school officials split what had been a single classroom in those grades into two classes.

the school council.

And everything wasn't in place until January when a modular unit with two classrooms was added behind the school. Those rooms house the third grade, which saw a jump from 24 students last year to 33 this year. Kindergarten had a similar increase in students.

Kelly Widener, one of two third-grade teachers, was hired in October and spent two months team-teaching the 33 students in a room designed for half as many students.

"It was impossible," she said of the early months. "Now, with 16 kids in a room, I can actually walk around and talk with them. I can get to know the kids."

The mobile classrooms aren't a permanent thing. Palm said the district is working on adding to the school building.

The additional students only highlighted the need for more space in the building. The school added a second kindergarten class and had to cram the health center and school nurse into a small room. The entire schedule for physical education, music and art was revamped, as was the lunchroom schedule.

The district had to buy additional equipment for the cafeteria to accommodate the extra students. New desks and computers were needed in the media center. Laptops that were previously offered for check-out during the school day are now kept in the media center for the overflow of students in the new larger classrooms.

"We had to look very closely to meet all the needs for all our students," Palm said.

That meant additional teachers and aides to cover all the bases. Principal Kim Simpson said the school council had a lot of late nights in interviewing and planning for the changes. The school hired six additional staff members.

Simpson is in her first year as principal and eagerly took on the challenge. "What you don't know, you don't know," she said. "It's been a good challenge."

By the time the second semester started in January, Simpson said everything was ready to go. "Everyone was on board and in their place and hit the ground running," she said.

Abner believes the changes in the school will be good for all the students. "We've been so long with 15 kids in one class ... in the same class together year after year after year."

With the new students, she said, "they've met a lot of new people and are getting to know new people and are breaking out of their comfort zone."

Board chairman Scott Clark, in his eighth year on the Southgate school board, said the growth is something the district hasn't had to deal with in a long time.

"These kinds of problems are a blessing to us," Clark said. "For us to have this type of challenge compared to what we had to do in the past, it was exciting for us."

Clark said the district has been in a "hold harmless" status since 1991. That meant it received no increase in funding for each student. The enrollment increase removed Southgate from that status, making it eligible for more funding.

"Now that we're no longer hold harmless, our increase per student went up dramatically for us, which overall is going to help everybody out, not just the new students that came in," he said.

Palm said the apartment complex is reportedly around 70 percent occupancy. That could mean more students for Southgate. And as families move in and out of the complex, the student grade levels could also change.

"We don't have enough history to look at trends so next year is going to be challenging too," he said.

But Clark is confident the school family will be able to meet that challenge.

"Our topmost priority is student achievement," he said. ☘

— *Branham is a writer from Frankfort*

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Building a better preschool

Owensboro Independent's Hager Preschool is a full-service program



Though their building blocks toppled, the “building blocks” of learning continue at Hager Preschool for Kaelyn Baldwin, Assante Dockery and Mikel Wimberly.

By Madelynn Coldiron
Staff Writer

A school nurse, two full-time speech pathologists, a special education resource consultant, a curriculum facilitator and five full-time family advocates: It's a roster that would be the envy of any elementary school, or any level of school, period.

You might not expect to find such a lineup at a preschool, however.

But the whole-child approach evidenced by the staff is one of the reasons Owensboro Independent's Hager Preschool has become only the second preschool in the state to be designated an Early Childhood Center of Excellence.

Working with these children early on “is basically like laying a really, really good foundation and taking care of some things that need to be dealt with in order for a child to have everything they need to learn appropriately,” said one of the bricks in that foundation, Hager speech pathologist Jenny Likens.

The preschool is a blended program with Head Start, which employs some of the resource staff; teachers and aides are on the Owensboro payroll.

In addition to the staff specialists, the preschool also draws on the contracted services of a behavioral health therapist, as well as the occupational and physical therapists that serve the district.

The team

The five family advocates are paid through Audubon Area Head Start, whose director, Aubrey Nehring, said they provide support and referrals to the families of the preschoolers.

“They work with the families and provide educational services such as parenting training, organizing parent involvement activities,” he said. “Probably the most important thing they do is establish a family partnership plan with each of the families to set goals for the family.”

The other specialists complete the picture:

- School nurse Mary Beth Hurley conducts students' hearing tests, blood pressure checks and measures body mass index,

devising a nutrition program and working with the family if necessary. She also helps parents arrange eye and dental exams – sometimes doing the driving to appointments – and gives presentations to parents on nutrition and exercise, safety and special education services. “If their health needs are met, they’re certainly going to be more successful in the classroom,” Hurley said.

- Speech pathologists work with other team members to develop individual education plans for children who’ve been identified with a communication disorder. “It’s very much a collaborative community effort,” Likens said.

- This is the first year for the position of special education consultant. Lura Locher trains teachers and also works with students in the classroom. “I’ve seen them make some great progress already, typically making gains you’d see when a child came to you upon completion of their first year in a regular elementary setting from a special ed classroom,” she said.

- Curriculum facilitator Paula Nicely works with preschool teachers to make sure their lesson plans are in line with the curriculum, and, she said, “to make sure they are in line with where we would like them to be when they approach kindergarten.” A former kindergarten teacher, she also works with students to help close learning gaps.

Community approach

The preschool’s community outreach and the work it does with the families of its students “make our program so unique,” said Hager Preschool Coordinator Sherry Baber.

The family advocates work to remove barriers for families, such as finding resources to help with utility bills and food. Head Start provides a vehicle to transport family members. If students need a serious dental procedure, the school nurse often drives them and their families to the hospital.

Hager personnel also reach out to the local spouse abuse and homeless shelters as well as the housing authority.

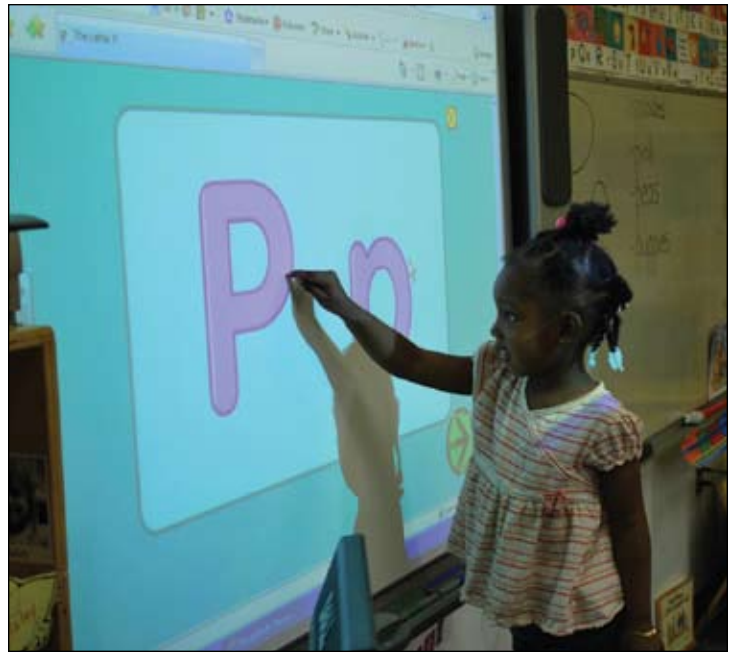
“When we need something for a family they’re very willing to help us because they see that we help our families that come and go from there,” Baber said. “We have such a positive relationship with all of those people that they’re willing to do for us because we are so willing to do for them. We couldn’t do without all those partners, and they realize that. So it is a very mutual relationship and a very strong partnership.”

Earning the designation as an Early Childhood Center of Excellence was a two-year process with stringent requirements and massive paperwork. But it was worth it, Baber said.

“I just think it gives your program the recognition and the quality. I don’t think preschool gets recognized as a quality program the way K-12 does,” she said.

Hager Preschool has come a long way since Superintendent Larry Vick arrived in the district in 2001, when the school, established in 1990, was having a hard time retaining its teachers because they were part-time positions. Vick and the school board addressed that issue by creating two half-day sessions so the jobs would be full-time. The expansion also enabled the preschool to accommodate more kids. Today, enrollment is up to 325.

Vick says this latest achievement provides a boost to both the school and its staff. “It’s a lot of hard work on the part of the staff, but I think they feel a sense of accomplishment that they’ve achieved the recognition,” he said. “It boosts morale and it raises expectations.” ❧



Top photo: Amiyah Easterling works at a classroom electronic whiteboard.

Bottom: Sharing a ride on the Hager playground are Christopher Gillispie and Unique Johnson.

Making lemonade

Improvement efforts continue uninterrupted in schools deemed 'low achieving'

By Jennifer Wohlleb
Staff Writer

The public relations damage of being called one of the state's persistently low-achieving schools may be more than offset by the motivation it provides, according to some district leaders responsible for improving those schools.

Caverna Independent Superintendent Sam Dick said after the news came out that his high school was on the list, Principal Debbi Lindsey visited each classroom in the school to explain what had happened.

"Each class got quiet and in just about every classroom, someone said, 'I guess we should have tried,'" Dick said.

The preliminary list of 12 persistently low-achieving schools – now pared to 10 – was inadvertently released during January discussions around the legislature's passage of House Bill 176 (see chart below), which outlines steps Kentucky will take to turn

around low-performing schools. It's intended to boost the state's chances of receiving a federal Race to the Top grant.

The schools are being identified according to a complicated formula that arrives at the bottom-scoring 5 percent tagged for improvement if that grant comes through.

Leslie County Schools Superintendent Larry Sparks, whose district's high school made the list, said his staff is trying to use this as a motivational tool for students.

"We're telling our kids now that what's in it for them is that we don't want to be in the lowest 5 percent after the next test cycle, so let's get out there and put our best foot forward," he said. "I don't believe that our test scores are honestly reflecting the ability of our students ... We're not in the bottom 5 percent when looking at ACT scores. We weren't high in the list, but we weren't in the bottom 5 percent."

Continued on next page

4 options for improvement

Schools identified as low-achieving by House Bill 176 must choose one of these four intervention options:

- external management option – requires that the day-to-day management of the school be transferred to an education management organization that may be a for-profit or nonprofit organization that has been selected by a local board of education from a list of management organizations.
- restaffing option -- requires the replacement of the principal and the existing school-based decision making council unless audit reports recommended otherwise; screening of existing faculty and staff with the retention of no more than 50 percent of the faculty and staff at the school; and development and implementation of a plan of action that uses research-based school improvement initiatives designed to turn around student performance.
- school closure option – requires the closure of an existing school and the transfer of its students to other schools within the district that are meeting their accountability measures and reassignment of the school's faculty and staff to available positions within the district.
- transformation option – includes replacing the school principal who led the school prior to commencement of the transformation option; replacing the school council members unless audit reports recommended otherwise; and instituting an extensive set of specified strategies designed to turn around the identified school. ☞

NOW OR LATER?

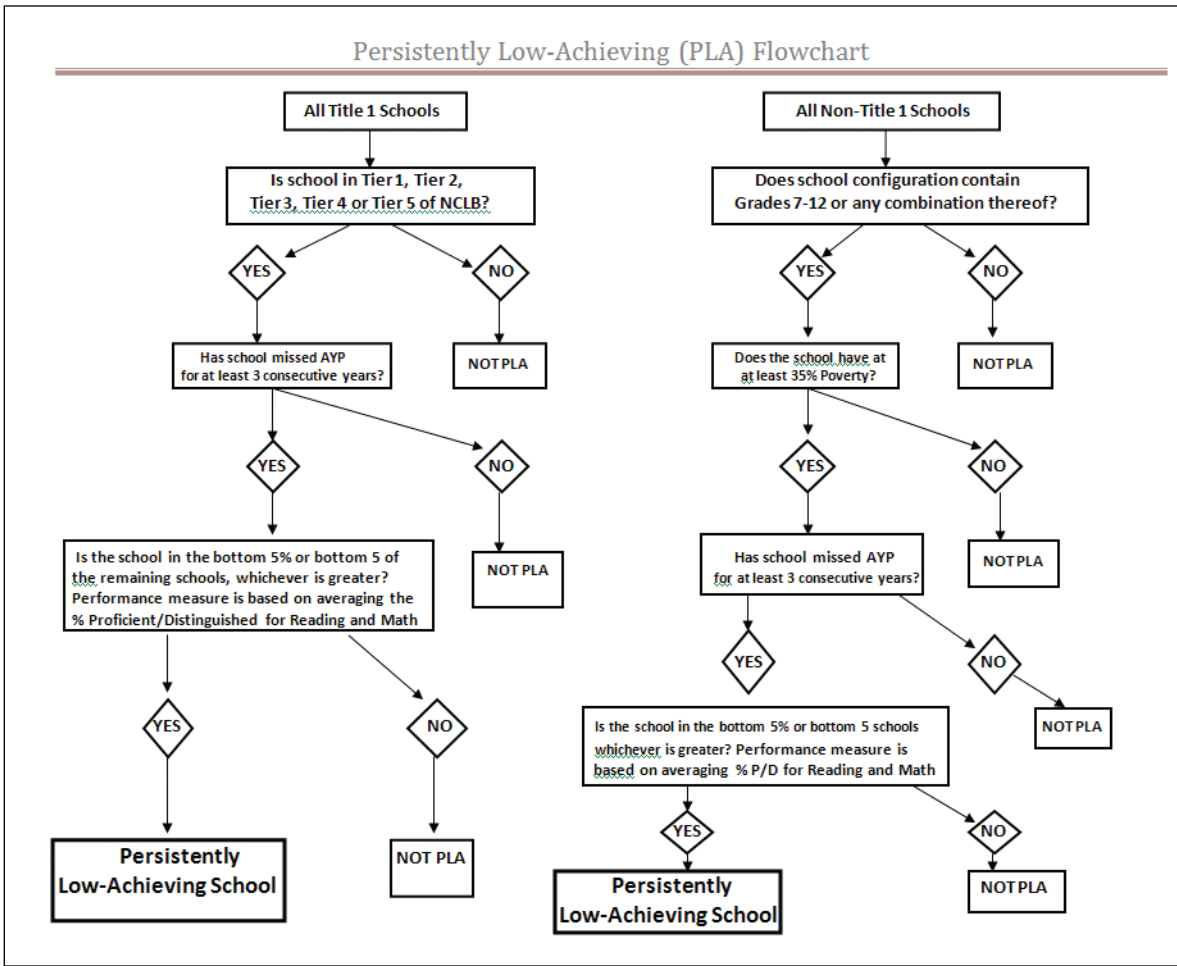
Kentucky's list of the 10 persistently low-achieving schools as identified by House Bill 176 will not be finalized until after the 2010 test scores are released. However, according to the Kentucky Department of Education's David Cook, a policy advisor in Office of Leadership and School Improvement, the 10 schools that were prematurely identified as being on the list are eligible now for federal School Improvement Grants (SIG).

"Money has to be spent on low performing schools and because that (SIG) money was allocated by the federal government for this current year, they are actually requesting that we make this money available to these 10 schools if they want it now," he said. "We will reallocate money again in the fall" to other schools that move onto the lowest-performing list.

Cook said these schools don't have to take this grant money and can wait until the test scores are released later this year to find out if they are still in the bottom 10.

"We are having discussions with these school districts right now ... you don't have to do this, but if you would like money now, you can start this process of choosing an intervention option over the course of the summer, rather than waiting until the fall," he said. "And you still get this money even if you come off the list this year. Those schools can take advantage of the SIG money or wait and see if they are re-identified later this year. We're talking about \$1.5 million per school over the course of three years." ☞

Persistently Low-Achieving (PLA) Flowchart



From the Kentucky Department of Education

How House Bill 176 determines which schools are persistently low-achieving and are eligible for assistance

Transform or close

Schools identified as persistently low-achieving by HB 176 must choose from among four intervention options prescribed by the U.S. education department, the most dramatic of which is school closure. In a one-high school district – and there were four on the list – it’s an alarming, if unlikely prospect.

“Our high school is the only high school in our county and it has been identified as being among the lowest 5 percent,” said Sparks. “It’s caused, not major panic, but we have a lot of people who are really, really concerned, obviously, when they hear that their school could be closed.”

David Cook, the state education department’s Race to the Top project manager, said the closure intervention is not an option for one-high school districts. Most will likely choose the transformation option, he said, which could mean replacing the principal and school council and implementing other improvement strategies.

“There will be a leadership capacity assessment, similar to the scholastic audit,” Cook said. “Each of the 10 will go through this in the school and the district. It will determine if the school leadership is OK to continue in that school.”

That is good news for Sparks and the staff of Leslie County High School.

“The folks I have in place there now have been there for four months and we’ve missed 20 days because of the weather,” he said. “They’re under the gun, but I’ve been assured they will be given a reasonable amount of time to accomplish changes and turn it around . . . I think we’re laying the groundwork for improvement.”

Ideas for improvement

If the state is successful in getting that Race to the Top money to help the lowest-performing schools, superintendents in some of the districts already singled out have plenty of ideas for how to improve their schools – one of them being to make Kentucky’s testing system more meaningful for students. The state currently is in the process of designing a new system.

“Colleges don’t ask for your KCCT scores, employers don’t ask for your KCCT scores,” said Dick, the Caverna superintendent. “If I’m a student, I’m asking, ‘What’s in it for me?’ Why should I try if after I graduate, no one is ever going to ask me for this test? It’s not a gatekeeper; ACT is.”

Finding ways to attract and keep good leaders and teachers is another area these superintendents said was vital to improvement.

“I’ve had a districtwide math coach posted for

Continued on next page

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three years because I knew my problem was math, but I can't find a highly qualified teacher with five years of experience to come in here and help my district," said Metcalfe County Schools Superintendent Pat Hurt, whose high school is on the list.

She also encouraged the General Assembly to reconsider a bill that died last year that would have given districts the option to offer differentiated pay to teachers in sought-after subject areas, such as math and science.

"We need incentives to attract high-quality teachers to our district," Hurt said.

Henry County Schools Superintendent Tim Abrams, whose high school was taken off the list when it was reduced from 12 to 10, said low achievement in math has also been a weakness there.

"We have known for the past several years that our math scores have not improved like we would have liked for them to, and a big area that we have struggled in a rural area is attracting high-quality math teachers," he said. "We've had very few applicants for vacancies that have come open, and sometimes in the past few years when we've hired people, it hasn't worked out."

Proactive

In the meantime, none of these superintendents has been sitting around waiting for outside help.

"Transformation is really the only option, which is really what we've been working on for years," Hurt said. "We have been trying to transform, and if the state wants to help us with that, I'm happy to accept it, but I didn't want the label or the negative press to get it."

Prior to being named to the list, the district hired a consultant at the cost of \$25,000 to help steer its efforts in the right direction.

These districts have also been using the Web-based Carnegie mathematics program to help improve student achievement in this area, as well as implementing many other programs and initiatives over the years to increase student achievement and change school culture.

"We've got excellent students. Like everyone else, we've got different levels and everyone falls into one place or another," Sparks said. "Our goal is to improve education for everyone, to get them to achieve as high as they can and I think we're moving in the right direction." ❧



Top photo: Caverna High School students Jacob Meador, left, and Dakota Calvert stay focused on their lesson.

Bottom photo: Metcalfe County Schools Superintendent Pat Hurt and Caverna Independent Schools Superintendent Sam Dick discuss how their high schools ended up on the state's persistently lowest-performing schools list. While questioning whether their schools truly belong on the list, both leaders say their districts have been committed for the last few years to improve student achievement — with or without the specter of House Bill 176 hanging over their heads.

Boone County board member looks to make NSBA history



“To me, receiving the nomination is an endorsement of servant leadership. I believe that as educational leaders we must serve those on the forefront of education.”

—Ed Massey, Boone County Schools board member, and nominee to the position of secretary/treasurer of NSBA

Advocate Staff Report

A former KSBA president and Boone County board member is in line to become the first Kentuckian to head the National School Boards Association.

Ed Massey, a 14-year member of the Boone County Board of Education and KSBA's immediate past president, has been recommended for election to the position of secretary/treasurer of NSBA. Election to the post would put him in line for the president elect's office in 2011, ascending to the presidency of the national association in 2012.

Massey was chosen by the NSBA's nominating committee in early February. He was among four candidates to be interviewed for the secretary/treasurer's office. Afterward, the panel voted to forward his name as the endorsed candidate to the association's 150-member Delegate Assembly for election during the NSBA annual conference in Chicago in April.

“I was relieved and excited after getting the national nominating committee's recommendation,” Massey said. “I told the committee that I felt I had been preparing for this my whole life. I have learned from my parents, both educators; from my experiences as a substitute teacher for five years in Boone County Schools and Covington schools; from my years on the Boone County board, my 10-plus years

of being involved with KSBA and in my last two years as an NSBA director. I am happy to have the support of my family, my law firm, my local board of education, KSBA, NSBA central region, and now the NSBA national nominating committee. I will need their support even more moving forward.

“To me, receiving the nomination is an endorsement of servant leadership,” Massey said. “I believe that as educational leaders we must serve those on the forefront of education. My goal as an educational leader is to promote what is best for all children in the educational environment. Education is the key to our country's future. I want to continue learning in my role as a NSBA officer. I hope I can share with others my enthusiasm and passion for the importance of education and its impact on America's children.”

Massey currently sits on the 25-member NSBA Board of Directors as Central Region director, representing school boards and their state associations in Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Ohio, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin. He has been a member of the Boone County school board since 1997.

Founded in 1940, NSBA is a non-profit organization representing state associations of school boards and their 95,000 local school board members, virtually all of whom are elected. These local officials govern 14,500-plus local school districts serving the nation's 50 million public school students. ❧

Curbing energy costs in schools: a full-time job

By Madelynn Coldiron
Staff Writer

Energy efficiency in Kentucky schools is getting a jolt from a \$5.1 million federal economic stimulus grant to hire district energy managers to lead conservation efforts.

Partnering with the Kentucky Department for Energy Development and Independence, KSBA will administer the Kentucky Energy Efficiency Program for Schools Energy Managers project, which will help pay for 40 to 50 energy manager positions throughout the state.

“The energy managers funded through this partnership with DEDI will support local boards in addressing two of their most critical responsibilities: the oversight of the district’s budget and the maintenance of safe and efficient school facilities,” said KSBA Executive Director Bill Scott.

The federal funds will underwrite the operation of the program, based at KSBA, and pay 75 percent of a district energy manager’s salary up to \$55,000 for the first year, with a 50-50 split between the program and the district in the second year.

“We’re doing this primarily to allow districts to phase into their budgets the cost of this person, because in the third year the districts will be expected to determine whether they want to keep the person, and if so, then they will pay the entire cost,” explained KSBA Associate Executive Director David Baird.

The idea is that these managers will reduce district energy costs enough to support their position – and then some.

“This isn’t a two-year project,” said Ron Alsup, energy manager for KEEPS. “It’s a project that really goes beyond that in making a significant impact on the bottom line in terms of the energy expenditures that go through the schools. That will be how the success of the project is measured.”

Several Kentucky school systems have been ahead of the curve in hiring energy managers, and already have proved that point. Bullitt County Schools, which provided the setting for Gov. Steve Beshear’s official announcement of the energy managers program, saves \$300,000 per year, more than enough to offset the \$75,000 cost of its energy efficiency effort.

Alsup said the project is shooting for a 25 percent to 30 percent reduction in energy costs in participating districts.

Interested districts will apply to KSBA for the funding. Alsup said KSBA was chosen as the partner for the program because of its “broad relationship with school districts.”

Since these are American Recovery and Reinvestment funds, they must be spent by April 2012 – which means a quick turnaround. Baird said the goal is to advertise the program beginning this month,

after state officials have signed off on the parameters of the request for proposals. With that timetable, successful districts should be able to interview candidates in May and June for a July 1 start date, he said.

How it will look on the ground

While the most common scenario for the project will be a straightforward hiring of an energy manager by a school system, the makeup of the school district could create variations on that theme. The program does not bar proposals from districts that already have an energy manager, for example, Baird and Alsup said. In those cases, a district might use the funds for an assistant position, freeing up its manager to act as a mentor to other districts.

Several smaller districts – or a county system and an independent system – might want to share a position.

“We certainly hope that’s not too much of a challenge for folks, because I think that could strengthen an application if schools are willing to partner and share a position,” Alsup said.

It’s also possible that current district employees could apply for the posts, though federal stimulus programs emphasize job creation.

Kentucky school energy resources

KEEPS Energy Managers Program is designed to help achieve the goals of Gov. Steve Beshear’s Intelligent Energy Choices for Kentucky’s Future: Kentucky’s 7-Point Energy Strategy, and will be part of the effort to meet 18 percent of Kentucky’s energy needs from efficiency improvements by 2025.

For more information please visit these Web sites:

www.energy.ky.gov

www.louisville.edu/kppc/keeps

www.louisville.edu/kppc/keeps/energy-starae

www.greenschools.ky.gov/

www.recovery.gov

Current district energy managers have come from a variety of backgrounds, but people skills also will be important, Alsop said.

“It’s not all nuts and bolts. It’s relying on an individual’s ability to be a good communicator, to establish good relationships and then help implement some behavior changes that can significantly impact their energy costs as well,” he said, calling the job “being a champion” for energy-saving within the school district.

The energy managers program dovetails with a 2008 state law that required districts to join KEEPS by Jan. 1, 2010.

The Kentucky Pollution Prevention Center at the University of Louisville has been serving as a resource and trainer for districts in KEEPS and will carry that role over into the new program. The center will train the new energy managers and share its expertise.

Baird said he is concerned about districts being able to



Bullitt County Schools Energy Manager Andrea Rock, right, shows visitors some of Roby Elementary School’s cost-cutting design functions, including geothermal heating and cooling and a state-of-the-art air filtration system. Gov. Steve Beshear used Roby Elementary to announce the Energy Manager grant partnership among the state, U of L and KSBA.

make the initial investment for an energy manager position. “If it weren’t for the economic climate we’re in currently, I think this would be a program districts would be jumping on quickly,” he said. “But again, we believe investing in the program will produce cost savings.” ❧

Kentucky Superintendent Vacancies

Nelson County Schools

(4,730 – PS-12) www.nelson.kyschools.us

As its next superintendent the Nelson County Board of Education is seeking an individual with the leadership skills and strong instructional background needed to assure the continuation of current district progress. Along with administrative experience, candidates should possess strong interpersonal skills with a strong desire to be part of the total community. The successful candidate should also demonstrate the innovative skills necessary to successfully operate a school district within the current economic climate while promoting high expectations and accountability. Candidates must hold or be eligible for Kentucky certification. Salary will be competitive and negotiable, with the contract beginning July 1. *All applications must be received by March 9.*

Eminence Independent Schools

(675 – PS-12) www.eminence.kyschools.us

As its next superintendent, the Eminence Independent Board of Education is seeking a passionate education leader capable of building upon the rich tradition and heritage of the Eminence school district. Along with administrative experience, the successful candidate also should have a proven record of instructional leadership. The board seeks a leader who respects diversity, promotes teamwork, has excellent people skills and will completely immerse himself or herself in the Eminence community. *All applications must be received by March 25.*

To apply, send seven copies of a cover letter/introduction, resume, application form, video, responses to eight questions, certification and three (3) letters of recommendation to: (Insert district name) Superintendent Search, Kentucky School Boards Association, 260 Democrat Drive, Frankfort, KY 40601. Find application form, video information and questions at www.ksba.org, under “Employment Opportunities.”

Felicia Cummings Smith

on the adoption of Common Core Standards



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 the Kentucky Department of Education's Felicia Cummings Smith, associate commissioner for Teaching and Learning, who discusses Kentucky's adoption of the English/language arts and math Common Core Standards in February, becoming the first state to do so. Forty-eight states, including Kentucky, have signed on in support of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, which is being spearheaded by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices.

Representatives of the Kentucky Board of Education, the Council on Postsecondary Education and the Education Professional Standards Board sign a resolution to begin implementing the Common Core Standards.

Photo by Amy Wallot/KDE

Q. Kentucky became the first state to adopt the Common Core Standards for English/language arts and mathematics on Feb. 10 when the Kentucky Board of Education, Council on Postsecondary Education and the Education Professional Standards Board approved them. How was the state able to do this when not all of the draft standards have been completed?

A. We have received the college and career readiness standards and they are posted on the CCSSO (Council of Chief State School Officers) Web site. So they are already out and available to everyone.

What is still in draft form are the K-12, grade-by-grade progressions. Most recently, we received a second draft of those grade-by-grade progressions, and we are anticipating another draft, that will incorporate comments and revisions from the various states based on the review time that we've had to submit comments.

What we did was adopt the draft standards that we do have to date, and it will be a provisional adoption based on whatever the next standards set looks like. We'll adopt what we currently have, which we feel really good about.

We anticipate what we have will be a very close version of the final document. We're going to move forward with adoption knowing that if there are subsequent changes to be made, we'll bring those back to our board, as regulations require us to do so.

Q. Why did state education leaders fast track the adoption of these standards?

A. We hope it will put us in a very good position for our Race to the Top plan, as well as this is what is required by Senate Bill 1 (passed last year). We're moving forward with the requirements set forth by Senate Bill 1 to have all of our content standards revised by December 2010. These are just the English/language arts and mathematics standards that we are addressing in February.

Q. Is there any advantage to being first?

A. We hope that puts us in a really good position as it relates to Race to the Top, given that we were one of just a few states who submitted their plan during the first phase. We're on a tight, aggressive timeline and we're hoping that puts us in a good position.

Q. Why is it important to have these Common Core Standards?

A. Based on legislation in Senate Bill 1, we had to revise the content standards anyway. And given the timing of the requirements set forth, and this national movement for having common standards, it just made sense for us to participate in the Common Core Standards Initiative. The need for clear, internationally benchmarked standards has been a great need in order to transform teaching and learning in the classroom, as well as to make Kentucky students more competitive globally.

We feel like it's time to revisit our standards, and I think we're in a very good position having had that particular key legislation be the impetus for us to participate in the Common Core Standards movement.

The kind of work that it takes to really revise standards in the way that we would like to get that accomplished – having international benchmarks, national content expertise – this has been to our advantage to have such an initiative in place to revise our standards and meet the deadlines set forth in Senate Bill 1. The timing of all of this, with the resources and access to participate in this way has really placed us at an advantage, given where we are as a state, budget-wise. We've not had to expend the kind of resources we would have even anticipated in a revision of standards.

Q. Are there any Kentucky educators working on the national level to create the common core standards?

A. At the national level, we do know that Dr. Bill Bush from the University of Louisville has had some direct connection with some of that work. At the state level, once we have received the drafts of the standards, we have brought together work teams of Kentucky teachers and educators, K-12, as well as university faculty, and business and industry to take an in-depth look at the drafts to provide feedback and comments. All along, we feel like we've had work teams engaged in the process to provide critical feedback to CCSSO.

Q. What is the timetable for putting these standards into place?

A. We will begin professional development for educators on the Common Core Standards in English/language arts and mathematics as early as June. Teachers will be in a wonderful position during the next academic year to really get to know the standards. So the expectation will not be necessarily that they have to implement them this next school year, but they will have the opportunity to participate in professional growth and learning experiences around the Common Core Standards.

Students will still be assessed on the current core content in the next academic school year, so teachers are going to have to make sure that their students know the current core content for testing and accountability purposes. But they'll have a year to look at the (new)

standards to see how they overlap and connect to the core content and then they'll be ready for the full implementation the following school year.

Q. At this point, has the department been able to assess how much these new standards will differ from Kentucky's existing core content?

A. Anytime you are talking about standards, you don't expect to see anything drastically different, but there may be some instances where a particular core content expectation is at a different level than it was previously. Or, it may show up in a more rigorous way.

Our expectation is that they won't be so different that teachers and other educators won't be able to make sense of how they connect to the current core content. KDE will be providing resources and tools, such as crosswalks to help facilitate the transition phase.

Q. What is a crosswalk?

A. Usually the department sends out a tool showing the overlap or connection to the previous core content standards. So in years past, we've sent out a document that has the program of studies and then we would have the first version of core content and then the second version of core content so they can see the direct correlation across core content standards. We'll probably have some related type of tools for the districts to use.

Q. How will the new Common Core Standards benefit students?

A. Students will have the opportunity to learn deeper around particular skills and concepts. That will mean they will have a deeper understanding of content. I think it will also be beneficial for preparing them for a future of competing globally and being competitive. There is greater rigor that will be asked of students and their learning.

I think it will help us as a nation to be able to compete better and have solid, common expectations for students. I'm really excited about this movement.

Q. What else should we know about this process?

A. One of the things that I think is really critical for people to understand is that Kentucky teachers have been a part of the process. This has also been a cross-agency effort – the Council for Postsecondary Education, the Educational Professional Standards Board and KDE have worked extremely collaboratively throughout this process.

We are going to be relying on all stakeholders to be engaged in the public review process. Once we receive the draft that will be made public, our hope and goal is to get all stakeholders engaged in that process to provide feedback and input. That will require everyone to know their role in communicating the message about the standards. For state boards of education and local boards, it's going to be critical for them to understand the demands that will be placed on teachers' time to be able to dig in to these standards to help them understand them. So, professional development around the standards will be critically important. Creating that time will be important for teachers.

The other thing boards can assist us with is maintaining a focus on high levels of student learning. I think that's what you're going to see with these standards, a deeper understanding of the need for rigor for students.

It will also be critical for school boards to help ensure that schools, principals and teachers have adequate support that they need for students. They need to be thinking about the kinds of interventions and supports that need to be in place for students who may not be achieving at a particular level.

If we can focus our conversations around those things – that professional development support teachers will need, a focus on student learning and the kinds of supports – if all board conversations can be around that, we would be in an amazing place. If boards can have a really intentional focus around those areas and what their role is in creating policies for this initiative, it will be successful. Some critical decisions will need to be made at the local level. ☘

– For more information about the Common Core Standards Initiative, go to www.corestandards.org.

Making the case for doing more with...more

As the 2010 legislative session progresses, lobbyists and other key staff of KSBA, Kentucky Association of School Superintendents and Kentucky Association of School Administrators connect with a group of superintendents via Monday conference calls. These report-and-react sessions focus on advocacy positions of each group, while gleaning the superintendents' insights on K-12 school bills.

Frequently, participants strategize about ways to dissuade legislators from raiding school contingency funds or otherwise forcing districts to spend those reserves, thus freeing up state revenues to be budgeted elsewhere. One cautionary bit of advice that caught my attention has been not to let legislators think that leaving contingency funds alone would be evidence that they had "protected" public schools.

Our legislators haven't oversold the dilemma when they describe this year's budget-building task to reporters as "monumental," "daunting" and "worst ever." But there is one phrase frequently working its way into the printed quotes and soundbites that merits a challenge: "Do more with less."

Really?!?!? One can make a solid argument that Kentucky schools have been told to "do more with less" for quite some time now.

Have you ever heard a congressman or senator claim that No Child Left Behind or the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) for special needs students is fully funded?

Kentucky legislators like to point out the high percentage of the General Fund that goes to education. But when it comes to items like student transportation costs or mandated-but-unfunded school employee pay raises, "Well, there's just not enough money for everything." Yet Senate Bill 1 – considered to be an exceptional advancement for education in Kentucky – carries deadlines with no escape clauses if necessary funding doesn't materialize.

Perhaps it's time for education leaders to make a modest change in the conversation and start talking about schools "doing more with more."

Not just about dollars

When the General Assembly considers a bill requiring expenditure of public funds, an accompanying fiscal note is supposed to supply the best calculations of what it will cost to implement. But while dollars are usually involved, the idea of "doing more with more" shouldn't be limited to new revenues.

"More" can mean giving superintendents and school boards the greater flexibility they've been asking for when it comes to redirecting existing funds planned for other purposes to meet current needs. One example would be the restrictions on use of designated facility funds.

Take a district with \$2 million in its facility account. It needs



Brad Hughes
KSBA Member
Support Services Director

\$8 million to replace an outdated school, but it will take years for the district to save such an amount. Should the district be forced to reduce its instructional staff, expand its class sizes or take other steps to reduce the costs of teaching and learning now while leaving that \$2 million just sitting there with an almost zero interest rate of return?

"More" can mean a thorough examination of all state regulations that carry a price tag for schools – and eliminating all that don't meet the test of "absolutely necessary."

Take one of the arguments voiced by charter school promoters about how charters excel, in part, because they are freed of many of the bureaucratic rules that public schools must follow. As the old bromide goes, what's good for the goose should be good for the gander. If charters can do a better job improving student learning when freed from some of the dictates of Frankfort, why couldn't that have a similar impact in a public school in Science Hill, Simpson County, Southgate or Spencer County?

"More" can mean a tax break for a business that allows its staff to devote X number of hours a year to in-school tutoring of students. "More" can mean passing legislation proposed in the past allowing state employees to take an hour a week to volunteer in schools. "More" can mean making superintendents a real player in the selection of principals – a school's academic and administrative leader who should be on the same page with the top district administrator.

Some of these ideas are new, some not. But they can be the start of a conversation about how lawmakers can help schools "do more with more."

The Last Word

Anyone who minimizes the severe challenges legislators have in building the biennial budget – or their collective desire to provide the necessary resources for students and teachers to excel – does a disservice to those leaders. If a solution were as simple as waving a magic wand to make gold fall from the skies into the state's coffers, representatives and senators would climb over each other for the first swing.

Lawmakers in Frankfort and Washington have the right to demand continuously improved learning in Kentucky classrooms – with the fiscal resources that they make available. They should demand higher test scores and more successful graduates, fewer students needing college remediation and more employers happy with the latest crop of new hires.

They also should acknowledge that such improvement carries a price tag or, if you will, a "resource" tag. A mentality of "do more with less" is neither solid public service nor a sure-fire ticket to another term in office.

And that's a message worth getting out. ☚

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A “wellness craze” is sweeping Rowan County schools and it could find students jumping rope before classes begin, climbing stairs before and after school, walking for exercise and sitting on balance balls in the classroom. The stair climbing at one school, Clearfield Elementary, began when one child started the exercise for health reasons and his friends joined in support. Teachers are also getting into the act, via Zumba dance-based fitness programs in nearly every school, said Catherine Rogers, public relations and facilities use coordinator.

Above, Tilden Hogge Elementary student Jeremiah Burton comes up for air during the advanced swimming lessons fourth- and fifth-graders receive at Morehead State University’s pool every Friday. The lessons are part of a school’s PTO-sponsored program and an add-on to regular P.E.

Top right, Elizabeth Stamper works on a project while on a stability ball. Each classroom at McBrayer Elementary has one of the balls, which channels students’ need to fidget into the slight feet and leg movements required to stay balanced on the ball.

Right, McBrayer third-graders Raegan King, Mac Koett and Licia Henneberg practice their crab walk during a classroom exercise break.

