

# KENTUCKY SCHOOL ADVOCATE

A publication of the Kentucky School Boards Association ■ October 2010

## Healthy steps

*SUBTRACTING 'REMEDIAL' FROM MATH*

*Lawrence County turnaround: going 'from zero to 60'*

*Making schools safe...and healthy*

*ENERGY RATE RAVES*



# Safe and Healthy Schools and Students Conference

**November 15-16**

**Galt House East, Louisville**

You may notice a new addition to the title of this year's conference – the word “healthy.” The traditional Kentucky safe schools conference has been expanded in this, its 16th year, to encompass student and staff health issues.

The packaging of health and safety is a logical step, as both areas affect a student's ability to learn at school. It's also a step closer to addressing the needs of the “whole child.”

Though KSBA and the Kentucky Center for School Safety have added this new branch, the conference's roots are still strong, with plenty of sessions and speakers who will deal with multiple aspects of school safety.

For more information or to register online, go to [www.ksba.org](http://www.ksba.org), and look under “Featured Events” at the top of the page.



**FEATURES**

**WELL, THAT WAS FAST**

The savings found in just two districts under local Energy Manager Jon Nipple's watch has already covered his two-year salary. And that's just the savings found by studying rate data history ... Page 8

**AUTOMA- WHAT?**

When Garrard County Schools leaders zeroed in on the problem of graduates having to take remedial math courses in college, they got some help from a logical source: a university professor, who has tutored them in his math program with a hard-to-say name ... Page 10

**HEAVY LIFTING**

The new local leadership team in charge of turning around Lawrence County High School has made substantive changes in the first six months of work. The formula so far includes higher expectations for students, more data-driven assessments and professional learning communities for teachers ... Page 14

**WHOLE-CHILD SAFETY**

This year's safe schools event has a new name: the Safe and Healthy Schools and Students Conference. The word "healthy" has been added to encompass school and staff health-related topics in a whole-child approach ... Page 17

**DAY CARE SHARE**

Some Danville Independent students entering kindergarten may well have been preparing since they were in day care. It's part of the district's outreach to local child care centers, which are given information on the skills their charges need for kindergarten readiness ... Page 18



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Community effort, Page 18



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**On the cover**



The fitness center at Lotts Creek Community School in Knott County draws a crowd of both students and community members. Here, sophomore Torri Barber, left, and seventh-grader Hannah Anthony, get in a cardio workout after school. The center is just one initiative that won Lotts Creek and two other eastern Kentucky schools a bronze award from the national organization Alliance for a Healthier Generation... Article on Page 12.

## Kentucky School Boards Association

260 Democrat Dr.  
Frankfort, KY 40601  
800-372-2962  
[www.ksba.org](http://www.ksba.org)

Executive Director ..... Bill Scott  
Member Support Director ..... Brad Hughes  
*Advocate* Editor ..... Madelynn Coldiron  
Publications Coordinator ... Jennifer Wohlleb  
Account Executive ..... Mary Davis

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### Tops in tech

The National School Boards Association's Technology Leadership Network named Jefferson County Public Schools as one of four Salute Districts nationwide in recognition of its focus on technology to improve student achievement.

The network cited the Jefferson County district's embedding of technology "in all phases of district operations." The system has provided all its teachers and administrators with tablet PCs and has developed an online learning space for students and staff.

NSBA will be hosting one of its 2011 TLN site visits in partnership with the Jefferson County Public Schools, May 11-13.

### Noteworthy noggins and Redhound raves

Hardin County Schools' new system for protecting student athletes from the consequences of head injuries attracted the attention of the *American School Board Journal*.

An outline of the program appeared in the September issue, under the Talk About It section devoted to "topics worth discussing."

The district has partnered with a local hospital to test high school student athletes' memory in concussion cases. The testing program looks at athletes' brain functions before and after a concussion, to evaluate the severity of the injury and the treatment needed.

Hardin County wasn't the only Kentucky system generating positive press recently. This summer, Corbin Independent Schools also attracted media attention for its nationally recognized summer learning program.

The district's Redhound Enrichment Program was explained in a July issue of *Time* magazine in a story titled, "The case against summer vacation."

### Deadline approaching

The deadline is nearing in the process of choosing the 2011 award winners for outstanding superintendent, school board member and public school advocate, as well as recognizing overall contributions to local schools.

The F.L. Dupree Award for outstanding superintendent, the Proudfoot Award honoring a school board member, Friend of Education and the KIDS First advocacy awards will be presented at KSBA's annual conference, Feb. 4-6, 2011.

The deadline for nomination for the awards is Nov. 15. Nomination guidelines and entry forms are on KSBA's website at [www.ksba.org](http://www.ksba.org).

**Correction:** Due to a staff error, an article in last month's issue about school board races in the November general election incorrectly stated that no one had filed for one of the open seats on the Trigg County school board. All seats on the Trigg County board have candidates. ☿

### Tribute to late board member

The late Tim England, vice chairman of the Barren County school board and member of the KSBA Board of Directors, was honored posthumously at the school board's September meeting. His family was presented with a plaque and a resolution was approved noting England's contributions to education at the local and state levels, along

with his community service. His passing, it says, "marks the loss of a special friend who will be greatly missed." England, 49, passed away suddenly Aug. 17 of an apparent heart attack.



Photo provided by Barren County Schools

# Risky business

**W**e've been reading a lot lately about what happens if states like Kentucky get their common core standards set up for a rigorous new assessment system, but have little funding to implement those standards – to buy the textbooks and train the teachers, for example.

All Kentucky students will suffer if the assessment system is launched on a shoestring while they are being evaluated against higher learning standards mandated by Senate Bill 1. But one group is particularly vulnerable – those who are struggling and at risk of dropping out.

It's the job of local boards to make sure that their most vulnerable students receive the necessary attention and support to successfully adjust to the new standards and succeed.

That might have been a pretty straightforward task, say, five years ago.

But, ironically, as we move toward a more demanding assessment and accountability system, many of the funding sources that traditionally have been used to assist at-risk students have been dramatically reduced. When comparing current allocations for some of these funds to prior levels of funding, I found some disturbing results:

*Extended School Services.* This program, which provides districts with funds for more instructional time that could be used to help students meet the higher standards, has gone from almost \$32 million in 2007-08 to less than \$13 million in the current fiscal year.

*Safe Schools Funds.* Established after a series of school shootings, this primary source of funding for districts' alternative education programs has dropped from \$10 million in 2007-08 to \$4.5 million in the current fiscal year. This pot of money also funds the Kentucky Center for School Safety, which trains school personnel and school resource officers.

*Family Resource and Youth Service Centers.* In all parts of the state, these centers are reporting that the demand for their services has increased during this Great Recession. Yet the funding for the centers that help at-risk students and their families has gone in the opposite direction—from \$57 million in 2009-10 to \$54.6 million in 2010-11.

*Federal funding for safe schools (Title IV).* The picture isn't pretty here, either, for this federal money that is funneled to the state. Kentucky's share has gone from nearly \$4.6 million to just over \$3 million during a five-year span.

Although I'm optimistic that the higher standards and new assessments created by SB 1 will succeed in preparing more "career and college ready" students, I'm also



**Bill Scott**  
KSBA Executive Director

convinced that given the reduction in traditional funding sources for at-risk students, local boards will need to be more vigilant than ever to make sure that students who exhibit early warning signs of dropping out are not allowed to slip away without a fight.

Because of the high personal and societal costs of Kentucky's dropout problem, I applaud First Lady Jane Beshear for keeping the public's focus on this group of students through a series of state and regional summits titled Graduate Kentucky: A Community Approach, and also through her strong support for a bill sponsored by state Rep. Jeff Greer that would require all students to attend school to age 18.

The National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University underscores the validity of school-community collaboration by including it in its list of the most effective dropout prevention strategies. The center's research indicates that volunteers and funding are just two of the ways that communities can keep students on track for graduation.

As the community's elected leaders for public education, local boards can and should play a major role in this community approach. Starting with the simple act of acknowledging individual volunteers and partner organizations at their monthly meetings, boards can lead the way in establishing community ownership for student success. This outreach could help make up for some loss of funding for at-risk students by attracting more volunteers and mentors, or even in-kind and monetary donations.

The KSBA Board of Directors recognized the critical role that local boards can play in helping every student graduate when they established the topic for this year's Fall Regional Meetings. Built around the theme Getting to Graduation: The School Board's Role, these meetings will take a hard look at who's dropping out and why, the most effective interventions, and what the school board can do.

Preparing students for college is necessary for the future economic health of the Commonwealth, but we can't forget that Kentucky still has a tragically large group of students who aren't even completing high school. Between 2005 and 2009 more than 30,000 Kentucky students dropped out of school and into a marginal existence of unemployment, underemployment and poverty.

By making graduation for every student a district and community priority, local boards can help put an end to this sad cycle of lost opportunity. ☞

Quotes on education from Kentucky and elsewhere

**“What we have shown you is what we try at every incident. We try to remove the vehicle from the person, instead of the person from the vehicle. That minimizes injury.”** Princeton Fire Chief Brent Francis to a group of Caldwell County Schools bus drivers during a training session in which a surplus bus was partially taken apart to demonstrate how to remove windows, seats and other structural elements from a vehicle after an accident. From the Princeton *Times-Leader*.



Photo provided by Caldwell County Schools

**“I saw some areas that need attention. I saw a lot of things that, in some ways, are somewhat normal for schools.”** Hopkins County school board member Charlie Hoskins after visiting an elementary school where the physical condition has been the target of parent complaints. From the Madisonville *Messenger*.

**“We’re being more consistent, not only from school to school but within the school on what kind of items they’re asking for. We feel like there’s been a big improvement there, but we’re going to try to work on that even more.”** Kenton County Schools Superintendent Tim Hanner on changes made to the school supply lists as a result of parent input to a committee that studied the issue. From the Fort Mitchell *Kentucky Enquirer*.

**“We belong to the community. A lot of people need to be interested in our school system.”** Bullitt County Schools Superintendent Keith Davis following the system’s first District Assembly for staff and the public. From the Shepherdsville *Pioneer News*.

**“I will give you my e-mail and phone number. If you need to call me at 8 p.m. because you need**

**help, call me. I want to make sure you know this material — that’s my business this year ... I want to come to your college graduation.”** Covington Independent eighth-grade teacher Darla Payne to her students, exemplifying the attitude that guides the district’s new five-year strategic plan. From the Fort Mitchell *nky.com*

**“No. 1, to make sure we are structured to run as efficiently and effectively as possible, and No. 2, to make sure we have the right number of staff running those operations.”** Nelson County Schools Superintendent Anthony Orr, explaining the reasons the district is considering requesting a management audit, which he said also would assure taxpayers they’re getting their

money’s worth from the district. From the Bardstown *Kentucky Standard*.

**“All of us understood that in so many, many ways Bob was the Prichard Committee. He animated all of the efforts we made. He was absolutely the voice of the committee ... No one can underestimate how much he meant to the success of Kentucky Education Reform.”** Former journalist and Prichard Committee founding member Al Smith on the death of Robert F. Sexton, who was the committee’s longtime executive director. From the Louisville *Courier-Journal*.

**“It is not a good way to start a Tuesday morning after a holiday.”** Hancock County Schools Superintendent Scott Lewis after a semi truck ran through the district’s central office, doing major damage but not injuring any employees. From the Hancock *Clarion*.

**“Our school did not purchase any of the commercial programs that are currently being marketed; instead our teachers worked together to create their own resources to use in classrooms. Our teachers do an excellent job of keeping the focus on instruction and student learning and finding ways to give our students the very best education possible.”** Russell County High School Curriculum Specialist Beckie Wade explaining the home-grown steps the school took to significantly boost its composite ACT score. From the Russell Springs *Time-Journal*.

Living history

**“To last as long as it has, it’s genius.”** Greenup County High School senior Brad Fyffe expressing his newfound respect for the U.S. Constitution as he and other students in an advanced placement government class convened a mock constitutional convention. From the Ashland *Daily Independent*.



**“I do understand what you’ve said here tonight and in many ways I feel the same way. But I’ve given 14 years as much service as I could to this school district to make it a better place for our kids, and I want to leave it better than I found it. I think I’ve done that in**



**my process ... This is just something I feel is the right thing to do in my heart.”** Metcalfe County school board Chairman Steve Thompson following a public hearing and subsequent board meeting in which the board approved a tax increase, despite some negative public comment, that will help build a new elementary school. From the *Glasgow Daily Times*.

**“This is one of the most unselfish things that all of us could have done. This is not an electable move.”** Perry County school board member Debbie Hignite McIntosh following the board’s unanimous vote to approve a nickel tax, generating revenues for construction in a district with one Category 5 school and four Category 4 schools. From the *Hazard Herald*.

**“ (There was) a belief again that we can make a difference, that we can change education. People were focused on the future, talking about what we can do, not what we haven’t done. ... This was a pretty intense two hours-plus, and the room was not comfortable for everyone, but very few people left. That demonstrated the level of involvement and community interest.”** Former state school board chairwoman Helen Mountjoy following one of 10 forums held around the state by the Transforming Education in Kentucky task force. From the *Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer*.

**“The Court does not find the justification of ‘eliminating political influence in schools’ sufficiently important to justify the abridgment of individuals’ associational rights.”** U.S. District Judge Danny Reeves in a ruling that suspended the \$100 per individual campaign donation limit for school board members. From the *Louisville Courier Journal*.

**“Without these tuition students, those are 12 teachers that would not be here, and we would be maxing class sizes without that money. I want everyone to understand that the tuition students are a positive thing for the district.”** Fort Thomas Independent Superintendent John Williamson explaining the effect of tuition-paying students, who will generate \$675,000 this year for the district’s programs. From the *Fort Mitchell nky.com*.

**“I know that we have found specimens in a school. We just wanted to make people aware that there are bedbugs in Russell County.”** Patty Meece, Russell County school nurse on the discovery of the resurgent insects in a district elementary school, where steps are being taken to control the spread. From the *Russell Springs Times-Journal*.

**“The Family Resource and Youth Service Centers of Kentucky are in their 20th year and this is the first of many celebrations to be held throughout the state. In the last 20 years they have redefined ‘collaboration’ and have changed the way that agencies conduct business. I think it is safe to say that we are all more family-centered because of the work of the FRYSCs.”** Mike Denney, director of the state Division of Family Resource/Youth Service Centers, during an anniversary celebration for the centers in Floyd County attended by five state lawmakers. From the *Prestonsburg Floyd County Times*. ☘

# The value of Race to the Top money

## POINT ...

**“We’re very hopeful there will be a Phase 3 of Race to the Top and have requested \$1.35 billion dollars in next year’s budget.”** U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan in a statement that may provide a ray of hope to disappointed Kentucky educators after the state’s bid for Phase 2 funds was the lowest-ranked among 19 applicants. From the *Lexington Herald-Leader*.

## COUNTERPOINT...

**“To me, dangling money out there like a carrot to get you to implement policy is in my mind, almost blackmail. I think real change has to take place when our communities and our public step up and say, ‘This is what we expect from our schools.’”** Daviess County Schools Superintendent Tom Shelton, who is less than positive about the Race to the Top program. From the *Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer*.

# Williamstown Independent scores early 'slam dunk' in energy savings

By Madelynn Coldiron  
Staff Writer

When Energy Manager Jon Nipple started pouring over two years' worth of Williamstown Independent Schools' utility bills, he got some help with the analysis from one of the district's school bus drivers.

In one of those small-town coincidences, the driver, Mike Shoemaker, just happens to be the retired superintendent of the Williamstown Electric Department.

Shoemaker reviewed the data the district had pulled together and suggested the school system could save money by switching a major meter on the single-campus district from a general service rate to a demand rate.

Nipple did more analysis and determined the switch would net the district a projected \$30,000-per-year savings. That, in turn, will generate another \$4,000 annual savings in the power adjustment, which is based on use.

"That was really a slam dunk for us," school board Chairman Chris Lawrence said.

This kind of quickly realized savings isn't unusual, said Nipple.

"It's really been like that in every district that I work in," he said. "It's not for lack of effort or energy by people.

I think it's just that there's no one that has had a real focus on it. And once you start looking at it, there are just a whole lot of opportunities in all these districts."

Nipple's services are shared by Williamstown Independent and Grant, Owen, Carroll and Gallatin county school districts as part of the Kentucky School Energy Managers Project overseen by KSBA and the Kentucky Department for Energy Development and Independence, and funded with a federal Economic Stimulus grant.

He's already more than paid for his salary. In addition to the savings that turned up in Williamstown, he discovered that Grant County High School was being charged sales tax on its electric bill even though it is tax exempt. The eventual rebate is expected to be about \$127,000, plus the \$1,200 per month the district will save going forward.

Lawrence said the Williamstown board hasn't yet discussed specifics on how to redirect the anticipated savings. But he said he would expect "to plow it into the students first and the faculty second. Once we do start realizing the savings of it it's definitely going to open up some potential aide positions or program upgrades or whatever else we need at the time."

Williamstown Superintendent Sally Skinner said the board is revisiting



## Consumed energy per student in one partnership's districts

District	MBTUs*
Carroll	11.7
Gallatin	8.8
Grant	10.4
Owen	9.2
Williamstown	9.1

The goal of the Kentucky School Energy Managers Project is to reduce energy costs in participating schools by 25 percent.

\* BTU or MBTU is a measure of the energy content of fuels



the district's strategic plan and will be considering some new goals that could become a reality with the money realized through energy savings. The ideas she has, she said, "are all student-centered."

The district also is looking at using some of those freed-up funds to buy software that will enable the campus to save even more energy.

"I think it could snowball into even more savings," Skinner said.

#### Other work

The timing of Nipple's arrival could not be better on another count: The school board is looking at the next phase of a campus renovation project and the energy manager "will be involved" in discussions about how to make it more energy efficient, said Molly McComas, the district's pre-school director and dean of students who is acting as the point person for the energy program.

Other changes are under way or on their way, including adjusting thermostat settings, paring down the number of refrigerators and microwave ovens in individual classrooms, and forming a district energy team to develop an overall energy plan. McComas notes that no one has even noticed the temperature setting change that's already been made.

"We're easing into (the changes)," Nipple said. "It's not like it all has to be done right now. It's all going to be done; we'll just do it a little step at a time."

Skinner said while the refrigerator-microwave oven issue may be touchy, the fact that it's being recommended by the energy manager as part of a statewide program will take some of the heat off the local administrators.

#### Spreading the word

Nipple's territory has formed a partnership made up of the point people on the project from each district. The group meets bimonthly to compare notes and share information.

The progress made in Williamstown is fairly typical of where the other districts stand with the project, Nipple said, though they are coming from diverse starting points. Carroll County already had a district energy team, for example. Grant County has both Energy Star-rated schools and schools that are among the highest energy consumers.

"What I'm trying to do is move everyone together at a certain rate," Nipple said.

With his two years of billing history, Nipple is "digging underneath" to figure out what causes the difference in energy consumption among his region's schools and to establish baselines going forward.

While a couple of regions have hired curriculum coordinators to assist in the academic end of the school energy project, Nipple, an engineer who worked in the worldwide training and development group at Lexmark for nine years, is wearing both hats. He's offered to talk to classes and illustrate the practical applications of math or science.

"We've got a wonderful workshop – schools can use case studies from their own buildings," he said. ☼



Jon Nipple, energy manager with the School Energy Managers Project, and Molly McComas, the point person for the project in Williamstown Independent Schools, check a main meter on the district's campus. Changing the type of rate on that meter will save the district \$30,000 per year.

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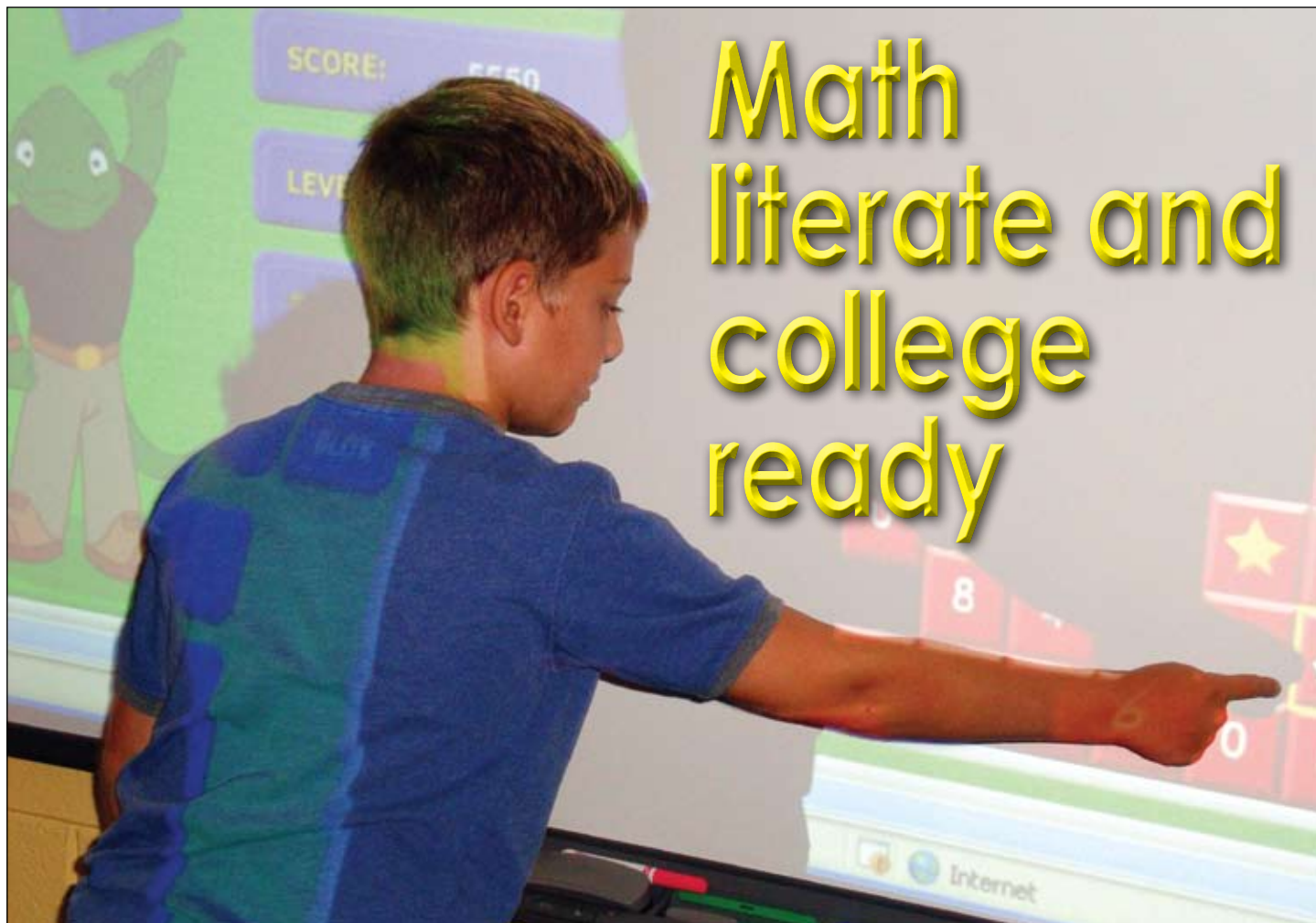
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Our School District division contact information is as follows:

Joe Nance  
Ross, Sinclair & Associates, LLC  
325 W. Main Street, Ste. 300  
Lexington, Kentucky 40507  
(800) 255-0795  
[jnance@rsamuni.com](mailto:jnance@rsamuni.com)



SIPC FINRA



# Math literate and college ready

Teachers at Paint Lick Elementary incorporate all the tools at their disposal to reinforce the math facts learned through automaticity. Here third-grader Beau Schneider uses a program on an electronic white board to do the same type of problems in automaticity.

By Wayne Dominick

Garrard County School Board member Joe Brown was worrying about a math problem. “We just had way too many kids having to take remedial math classes when they went off to college,” he explained. “Our job as school board members is to see that when kids graduate from our schools, they’re ready for a job or college or whatever they choose.”

With the shrinking number of manufacturing jobs and a national recession, he said, college is the option that gives Garrard County graduates the best chance for a good-paying job.

Brown, who has served on the board for 24 years, also felt bad for the parents.

“These kids go off to college and have to take a remedial class they don’t get credit for and that their parents have to pay for.”

Superintendent Don Aldridge had another concern about the students taking remedial classes. “Studies show that 50 percent of the students who have to take remedial classes don’t finish college,” he said.

Brown and Aldridge, along with the rest of the board and administration, set out to do something – with help from one of the state’s major universities.

But the first step was to help the incoming senior class. Using scores from the ACT test that all Kentucky juniors are required to take, Garrard County Principal Kevin Stull and his staff targeted a group of students to take the same kind of remedial course they would likely have to take if they enrolled at Eastern Kentucky University.

Then-Instructional Coordinator Mary Davis worked with ECU professor Dr. Robert Thomas to provide materials for the class, called Math 095. Math teacher Susan McLaren also incorporated Thomas’ “automaticity” program into the course. According to McLaren, the combination enables close to 80 percent of the students to pass the course.

Both Davis and Aldridge knew, however, that to really solve the problem, they had to keep students from needing Math 095 in the first place.

“This was just a band-aid fix,” Aldridge said. “We had to do something across the district to get our kids ready.”

Once again, the district turned to Thomas and his math program. Davis and Aldridge agreed the only way to make it effective would be to use it in every school.

### Unusual name, effective program

Automaticity is the ability to rapidly, consistently



Marshia Hawkins reviews automaticity work sheets with her students at Paint Lick Elementary School. Hawkins uses the results of the assessments to design individual plans for her fourth-graders.

recall math facts from memory. Automaticity combines knowing number concepts with quick recall of math facts.

McLaren said this type of math knowledge is essential to being able to solve the higher-level concepts of college algebra.

“Trying to solve complex equations without the basics would be like trying to write a sentence without knowing what the words mean,” she said.

Just like making the leap from words to complete sentences, going from simple math to quadratic equations takes practice.

The program started last year at the elementary level, where many of the teachers saw automaticity as an extension of what was already going on in the classroom. Paint Lick Elementary second-grade teacher Carolyn Noe said what students learn from automaticity is essential to further student success.

“If students don’t learn these basic facts, it makes it harder to do higher-order skills later on. Then they get frustrated and give up, thinking that they just can’t do math,” she said.

Fourth-grade teacher Marshia Hawkins said one of the keys to making the program work is having instructional aides in the classroom who have also been trained in the system.

“We do worksheets and the aides work with the students who aren’t keeping up.” The worksheets are done regularly along with periodic tests that Thomas has provided to measure

student progress and level of automaticity proficiency.

Amy Griffin, who teaches third grade at Paint Lick, said the students have had no problem doing the work. “The hardest part for some of them was getting used to saying ‘automaticity,’” she said.

Automaticity is important, third-grader Beau Schneider said, because, “if you don’t learn the easy stuff you’ll never be able to do the hard problems.” Fourth-grader Elizabeth Wix described success as “looking at a problem and knowing the answer without thinking about it.”

However, introducing the program at the secondary level was more challenging.

“Some of the teachers at the middle and high school level didn’t see the reason they should be using class time to do worksheets with basic math problems,” Davis said.

To convince them, Davis, who is now retired, appealed to their coaching instincts.

“In many ways, teaching is like coaching,” she said. “I talked to them about how coaches at the highest levels still devote practice time to working on basics.”

The strategy worked and teachers throughout the district are beginning to see the results of the 10 minutes a day automaticity takes.

And that means Joe Brown has one less thing to worry about. ☘

— Dominick is a writer from Frankfort

# 'BRONZE' AGE OF BETTER HEALTH

Three eastern  
Kentucky schools  
usher in new era  
of healthier living

By Jennifer Wohlleb  
Staff Writer

**E**at better, move more.

It's a prescription for healthier living and one that three eastern Kentucky schools put into action to improve student and staff well-being.

It also won those schools – Lotts Creek Community School (also called Cordia High School in Knott County), Owsley Elementary School and Perry Central High School – Bronze awards from the national Alliance for a Healthier Generation for making significant changes in healthy eating, physical activity and staff wellness. They were among 179 schools recognized nationwide.

"We know that diabetes, obesity, heart disease are endemic around here, which is kind of new, because in the past it would have been black lung," said Alice Whitaker, director of Lotts Creek. "Now, sedentary lives are leading to ill health.

"We're trying to strengthen our community program. We hope what we do here with the kids at school will carry over into their homes, maybe even change a little bit of the lifestyle at home."

Lotts Creek, a one-of-a-kind settlement school-public school hybrid, added a fitness center to its school last year through a three-year federal Health Services Agency grant. The use of the fitness center is free to both students and the community as part of its overall wellness program, which includes fitness classes, low-or no-cost medical and dental services, and career and mental health counseling.

#### Changing tastes

To meet the Alliance's requirements, Lotts Creek Wellness Coordinator Jeff Combs said the school made policy changes, one of which made its food standards more stringent than even those required by the state.

"All bread has to be whole wheat," he said. "We already had no pop. No fundraisers can be food related; there can't be any type of pizza parties, popcorn parties."

The rules about what foods can be sold in elementary schools is so strict that Owsley Elementary's vending machines now offer just water – which students are buying in high numbers.

"The kids aren't complaining about any of it," said Sue Brunk, Owsley County Schools' district health coordinator. "They missed their flavored water when it went out, but they adjusted and now just drink milk or water."

Offering healthier food was one of the big changes Perry County Central High School made, according to Principal Estill Neace.

"We have put healthier options in our vending machines, based on the Alliance guidelines, which are stricter than Kentucky's. You think the one's pretty stringent, but the other is even more so," he said.

The food service program also introduced more nutritious offerings at lunch that exceeded state guidelines.

Neace said most cafeteria items are now baked rather than fried, with a focus on reducing fat and sugar content. "We've also worked on getting additional servings of fruits and vegetables every day, not just on our full salad bar days," he said.

For the most part, food also is off the menu for rewards and celebrations.

"We planned lots of special days around physical activity," Brunk said. "We try to do a healthy reward day. We try to do non-food rewards, physical activity rewards."

#### Getting physical

Perry Central students were able to have a say in improving their health through a \$500 "Students take Charge" grant from the Kentucky affiliate of Alliance for a Healthier Generation.

### Alliance for a Healthier Generation award requirements

To earn a Healthy Schools Program National Recognition Award, schools must meet the requisite number of best practice criteria in each of the following eight content areas that address school health improvement:

- Policy/systems
- School meals programs
- Competitive foods and beverages
- Health education
- Physical activity
- School employee wellness
- Physical education
- Before and afterschool programs

“I had a group of seniors last year who came to me with a proposal – the health department was having a 5K race in the spring – and they wanted to promote that among our students and staff to train to be a part of the race,” Neace said. “The \$500 was for promotion and to pay the entry fee for our students and staff who ran.”

The students also organized after-school running sessions for students who wanted to train for the 5K. Neace said it was a success, with 40 students participating, as well as he and five other staff members. Another group of students and staff walked the race.

Perry Central also turned an unused teachers’ lounge into a staff wellness center equipped with treadmills, an elliptical trainer and weights.

“I allow staff, if they want to use part of their planning period, to go work out, or stay after school and work out,” Neace said. “A lot of our elementary schools picked up on that and put staff wellness rooms in their schools. It’s been a real positive thing.”

He said the examples the teachers are creating may be making the biggest impact on students.

“A lot of kids are seeing those teachers stay three days a week to exercise, and they are all shapes and sizes, they’re not all the skinny ones,” he said. “It’s not the coaches who are doing this; they are doing their thing with their sports. This is not the student athlete, this is the traditional student who is participating in (these activities).”

Owsley Elementary also has ways for students to get physical activity, including at least 60 minutes of physical education per week at every grade level. The walking track the school added last year makes exercise easier, especially for its Walk Across America participation.

“Last year we went from California to Maine in Walk Across America,” Brunk, the health coordinator said. “Every year we plot a different route. We target different cities and put up a poster about that city.”

The exercise program also is incorporated into the curriculum.

“They do reports on the places we walk across,” she said. “For example, when we walked across Illinois last year, they cut out a shape of the state and decorated it with things that were of that state ... Health should not be a separate issue from learning.” ❧

— For more information about the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, go to [www.healthiergeneration.org](http://www.healthiergeneration.org).



Freshman Dylan Jent opts to get his lunch from the salad bar in Perry County Central High School’s cafeteria. It is one of several steps the school has taken to improve student and staff health.



Lotts Creek Community School sophomore Misty Conley works out her upper body using equipment in the school’s fitness center.

# LIFTING LAWRENCE COUNTY HIGH FROM THE 'LOW-ACHIEVING' LIST

By Brad Hughes  
Staff Writer

**L**awrence County High School knows about dramatic turnarounds. The 2008 football team finished 0-11. Last year's team won 12 straight games, reaching the state championship quarterfinals.

But turning around other numbers – 53, 80 and 67 – is the school's goal this year. They're the percentages of students scoring below proficient in reading, math and science on the 2009 Kentucky Core Content Test. And this spring those numbers put Lawrence County High on the state's first list of Persistently Low-Achieving schools. The U.S. Department of Education and Kentucky House Bill 176 require the state Department of Education to identify these schools each year.

When Mike Armstrong became superintendent Jan. 1, he knew the school had challenges, but the list “made things go from zero to 60.”

Five weeks into his first year as principal, J. R. Cook said the school must “move ginormous rocks in a short period of time. We're not looking at a three-year turnaround. We need to see things happen immediately.”

Schools on the list are eligible for federal turnaround funding, which lasts three years.

As Lawrence County High's new leadership team moves its “rocks” – culture, attitude, ownership – school board Chairwoman Barbara Robinson said the public is noticing.

“You go in the grocery and people are talking very positive about what's going on at the high school,” Robinson said.



Lawrence County High School engineering teacher Brad West examines sophomore Jesse Pack's bridge trestle in an experiment to measure weight, pressure and stress.

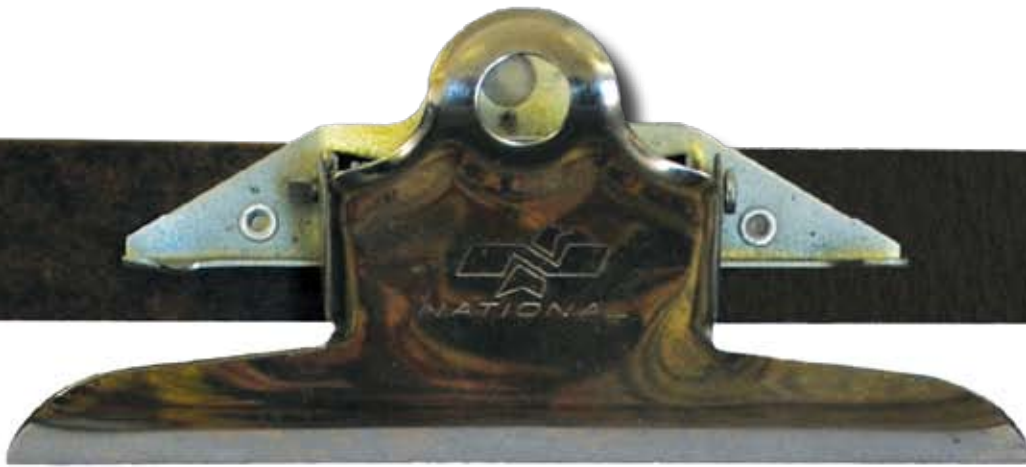
“Teachers are excited. Parents say they can see a difference.”

## **Familiar faces, first steps**

A native who worked in the district 18 years before taking education jobs in Frankfort and overseas, Armstrong studied the state's district and school audits. They called for changes atop the school's administration, including removal of the school council, with the district taking the lead.

That gave Armstrong something superintendents have sought since passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act in 1990: the ability to hire a principal with a greater central office role in a struggling school's direction. He settled on Cook, the school's former assistant principal who also had left his hometown to work in education elsewhere. Cook sought the job to help give his alma mater “a fresh start.”

Continued on Page 16



## Why is my school listed as persistently low-achieving?

**Q. In late September, KDE issues its second list of persistently low-achieving (PLA) schools. Why?**

**A.** The U.S. Department of Education and state law (House Bill 176, adopted in January) require KDE to identify PLAs each year.

**Q. What factors determine which schools receive this designation?**

**A.** The performance measurement for the following definitions is an average of the percentage of proficient or higher in reading and mathematics on the state assessments.

PLAs include:

- A Title I school in the lowest 5 percent or lowest five schools, whichever is greater, that failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) for three consecutive years.
- A non-Title I school of grades 7-12 in the lowest 5 percent or lowest five schools of the group of non-Title I schools having at least 35 percent or greater poverty among its students and failing to make AYP for three consecutive years.
- Any high school with a graduation rate of 60 percent or less for three consecutive years.
- All Title I schools identified in any school improvement category under NCLB and not included in the definitions under NCLB Tier I consequences.

**Q. What types of assistance do PLA schools receive and for how long?**

**A.** Schools identified as Tier I and Tier II for the 2009-10 year are eligible to receive federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds to implement an intervention model. Tier III schools are eligible to receive SIG funds to implement an improvement plan. Initial funding is for the 2010-11 year. KDE has received a waiver to extend the grant period to Sept. 30, 2013. KDE must annually determine if schools have met their goals and are making progress to continue funding for each year in the grant period. In addition, each PLA school is assisted by three staff members – an educational recovery leader to mentor the principal, and educational recovery specialists for English/language arts and math to work with teachers in these two critical areas.

**Q. Can a school improve its way off the PLA list?**

**A.** Title I schools must make adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years in order to no longer be in consequences.

**Q. Is it possible for a school that is actually improving to make the list, because it is not improving fast enough to meet its progress marks?**

**A.** In reality that could happen, depending on how many students were initially identified as not being proficient.

**Q. What are some things that school boards should know about assisting PLA schools?**

**A.** School boards should review their policies and procedures to eliminate barriers to schools' efforts to implement an intervention model or an improvement plan. Schools pursuing an intervention model must provide extended learning time and may provide stipends/incentives for teachers. School boards should review data – at a minimum, quarterly – and determine if adequate assistance is being provided to support the school. Implementing a sound, effective, research-based improvement plan takes time and cannot be accomplished in one year. However, schools implementing best practices should see immediate results.

— From the Kentucky Department of Education

Lawrence County High School 10th-graders (left to right) Megan Osborne, Breanna Hatfield and Hunter Boggs compare notes in their pre-engineering class. The course emphasizes higher level mathematics skills and techniques as part of the school's push for stronger academics.



Continued from Page 14

"I was tested right off the bat. 'I want this. I want that.' I've had to say 'No' 10 times for every time I've been able to say 'Yes,'" he said. "I've had crucial talks with parents that 'Your child needs an education. I'm going to hold teachers responsible (but) I'm going to hold you and your child to a higher level than we've ever expected.'"

The district opted for the transformation model – one of four intervention options the federal Department of Education requires schools on the list to choose from – avoiding a major upheaval of faculty. However, that option requires a huge commitment of time and resources to professional development.

A three-person state team started before opening day, working with teachers to create "professional learning communities, mastery levels for all students and data-driven assessments," said Cassandra Webb, the district's chief academic officer.

"Our teachers are nothing less than hungry, receptive and willing," said Webb, who spends much of her time at the high school.

"I just left a meeting where teachers were discussing what's going on in their classrooms," she said. "One of them said, 'Here's how I teach. I think you do a better job. Let me come and watch you.'"

"I've been here a lot of years and I've not seen those types of discussions before," Webb said.

#### **Student buy-in**

If job No. 1 at Lawrence County High is better instruction, job No. 1-A is more focused learning.

Cook points to a 5 percent improvement in attendance. He acted quickly to get students' attention on a broader scale.

"The school had a no cell phone policy – anywhere. There were more than 1,000 write-ups over violations last year," Cook said. "Now we allow them to have their phones in the halls and cafeteria, just not during instructional time. That one rule has changed the culture; (it) let them know that I was serious about change on both sides."

"I said, 'I need you to understand that Lawrence County High is at the bottom in academics.' I've asked them to 'control your attitude and your effort.' If they control those two things and give me 100 percent, these students can be successful," he said.

Armstrong said students are getting the message that the focus has shifted from adults to them.

"The second week of school, a mother told me that her son said, 'Mom, I don't know what it is, but it's like they really want us to learn this year,'" he said.

#### **New targets for all**

Pointing toward the spring assessment period, Armstrong said school leaders want to "ensure that our students are prepared to sit down and show that they are as good as students anywhere in the Commonwealth."

"We want our kids to compete, not just those who are going to be doctors and lawyers (but also those) who are going to be self-employed, who are going to drive trucks hauling coal or be mechanics," the superintendent said.

And it began with the mixed blessing of being on the persistently low-achieving schools list.

"The bad news was being on the list. The good news was getting \$1.5 million over the next three years to invest in getting better," Armstrong said. "That's what this community wants – for its children to be able to compete on a worldwide stage." ❧



# 2010 Safe and Healthy Schools and Students Conference: New name, whole child

Advocate Staff Report

If school leaders across Kentucky don't know what's good for them before they attend this year's Safe and Healthy Schools and Students Conference, they will by the time they leave.

The title of the Nov. 15-16 event at Louisville's Galt House provides a clue as to why. The conference has always focused on school safety, but now has been expanded to encompass school health – that includes both students and staff.

"Many of the reasons we hear for the barrier to having healthier activities for kids in school, like the exercise during the day and incorporating physical activity, has to do with the staff themselves not sharing that interest," said conference organizer Kerri Schelling, KSBA's director of Board Team Development. "By encouraging adults to lead by example and be healthier, that's probably the easiest tool schools have to help kids become healthier."

Monday's luncheon speaker will be Dr. Ellen Essick, health education consultant for Alliance for a Healthier Generation, who will highlight staff wellness in a presentation on the three key steps to becoming healthier. On Tuesday, pediatrician Lisa Simpson, director of the Child Policy Research Center at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, will discuss what strategies work for schools in improving children's health and well-being, and how those strategies don't have to be "onerous" for educators, Schelling said.

"Dr. Simpson also has solid data about the state of children's health in Kentucky," she said. "I think it will be very eye-opening."

The introduction of school health topics does not mean the lineup of school safety-related sessions has been neglected. And the Kentucky Center for School Safety continues to co-sponsor the event with KSBA.

"Blending the two pieces really starts to address the whole-child needs," Schelling explained. "If a child is so unhealthy... it doesn't really matter how wonderful an environment a school

## A clinic session sampler

Collaborative partnerships for helping the whole child

Eat this, not that!

Academic success: resources linking school health to student learning

Energy drinks: a health hazard?

Lockdowns – a procedural review

Strategies to reduce relational aggression

creates. You still have to have healthy kids to fully participate and take advantage of the opportunities of an education."

The two general session speakers who will kick off the conference Monday morning will focus on school culture and climate. Dr. Robert D. Barr, a national authority on at-risk youth, school improvement, and alternative education; and Dr. William H. Parrett, director of the Center for School Improvement and Policy Studies at Boise State University, will present, "The kids left behind: 12 secrets to success."

The event's trade show is being expanded to include health and wellness vendors. The University of Louisville will set up its Health Pavilion, offering basic health checks and information.

School health was added to the safe schools conference as part of KSBA's continued interest in school wellness. The association has picked up some pointers from other state school boards associations, including a successful health initiative by the California School Boards Association.

"We felt like we hadn't been offering as much as we should be around the health and wellness piece," Schelling said. "We want to make sure boards are getting all of this information."

The event has been drawing an increasing number of school board members in recent years, in addition to the school safety officials, resource officers and school administrators who make up the bulk of attendance. But Schelling said she hopes to attract more school board members, who will receive training credit, with this new format.

"We know that the policy and budget implications for a lot of health and wellness activities and strategies are huge," she said. "The board has to understand and have the desire to make it happen." ❧

— For more information or to register online, go to [www.ksba.org](http://www.ksba.org), and look under "Featured Events" at the top of the page.





# IN IT TOGETHER

## Danville Independent involves child-care providers to help ensure kindergarteners are ready to learn

By Jennifer Wohlleb  
Staff Writer

**C**hild-care providers not only offer a safe place for children when they are away from their parents, but they also serve as a source of learning. So it only made sense to Danville Independent school leaders to include them in the process of trying to make sure kindergarteners come to school prepared to learn.

“These people are either working with or taking care of children before they come into our school district,” said Sandy Embree, Danville’s director of elementary education, “so if they know what the expectations are of what we are looking for when the kids come into school, it just helps the kids move ahead faster.”

Embree and other school officials visited local child-care providers this past spring to share information with them and to get their feedback. As a part of this effort to have incoming kindergarteners ready to learn, the students now undergo a common, districtwide learning inventory so teachers know what skills the kids have and which they need to work on. These results are also shared with child-care providers so they know which areas to work on with the children in their care.

“I love it,” said Sue Wilson, operator of Tendercare in Danville. “I want children to have all of the resources they need

before going to school, so any resource the schools can give me, I will use.”

Learning inventories are not new to Danville, but under second-year Superintendent Carmen Coleman, the district’s elementary schools are now using the same one.

“We started that in Fayette County a few years ago, which is where I had been, and they actually got the idea from Daviess County where they did a learning inventory with the incoming kindergarteners just to allow teachers to get a real jump start in teaching in a way that would be customized for each child,” she said. “We really tried to get that information out to our community. It helps everybody when we communicate what we expect them to have as a foundation when they come to us.”

Board of Education Chairwoman Jean Crowley went on two child-care center visits and said the response was excellent.

“We understand the importance of early education, so as a district we wanted to try to level the playing field when children first enter kindergarten,” she said. “We’ve seen through those common assessments that achievement gaps are present when they enter kindergarten and we hope that this initiative will eliminate those achievement gaps.”

Parents, child care providers, and doctor’s offices have all been given Danville’s “Kindergarten Here We Come!” brochure, which outlines the different skills kindergarteners should have and how adults can work on them with students.

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### Learning inventories

The following are several skills incoming kindergarteners should have and activities that help them learn them, as outlined by Danville Independent educators and provided to parents and child-care providers.

#### SKILLS:

Playing cooperatively with others



Providing opportunities for child to make friends

Writing numbers 1 to 10



Playing board games that require counting

Identifying body parts, such as head and nose



Making a game of buttoning and zipping clothing

Recognizing own name in print



Encouraging child to draw and write

These skills, which children should acquire through play-based learning, include motor and social skills, as well as literacy and math skills.

“We think if we tell the child-care providers the things we are looking for when the children come in, it’s going to help us to move children ahead who have had some of these experiences,” Embree said. “And this will allow us to zero in on the ones who are going to start where they are and try to move them forward.”

Teresa Payne, who runs a day-care center in her home, said she has always worked on these skills with her children, but said it is helpful to have guidelines.

“We work on manners, respect, sharing and the importance of being able to sit with each other,” said Payne, who used to be a teachers aide in Danville. “It’s slightly structured, but mostly I work with teachable moments.”

Coleman said having everyone working together enables teachers in the school system to maximize students’ learning time.

“We’re really committed to ensuring that every child experiences a year’s worth of academic growth in reading and math, every year,” she said. “The inventories really give us a nice start-



Teresa Payne shares a smile with one of the children she takes care of at her home-based day care. Payne, a former Danville Independent Schools’ teachers aide, is doing her part to help prepare children to learn when they enter kindergarten.

ing point. Sometimes you think things they should know, they don’t, and things you wouldn’t dream that they could do, they can. You just find that you can’t make any assumptions.” ❧

Does  
your  
district  
have a  
program  
that  
is a  
local  
treasure?

## Nominate it for a KSBA PEAK Award

*(Public Education Achieves in Kentucky)*

The KSBA *PEAK Award* was created to focus statewide attention on outstanding public school efforts aimed at enhancing student learning skills and, in doing so, promoting the positive impact of public elementary and secondary education in the Commonwealth.

**The deadline for entering your program is Oct. 10.**

For more details about this program or for how to enter, go to [www.ksba.org/peak](http://www.ksba.org/peak). For questions, contact Jenny Wohlleb at 1-800-372-2962.



# David Karem

Kentucky Board of Education Chairman

*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 David Karem of Louisville, who on Aug. 5 was elected chairman of the Kentucky Board of Education. Karem was appointed to the board by Gov. Steve Beshear in April 2009. He served 33 years in the state House of Representatives and Senate and was a key player in passing the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990.*



*“If you are one of those 90,000 people (who work in education in Kentucky), you should be examining every day, ‘What are the people I’m supporting doing to move education forward? Be they Republican, Democrat, rural or urban.’*

*“If you could harness only 45,000 of those people, you could turn this state around, and make the General Assembly and the elected officials understand that the future of the Commonwealth depends on the quality of the people we educate.”*

**Q. You have a lot of public service in your background. What led you to accept appointment to the state board of education?**

**A.** I grew up in a family of educators. My parents were teachers, my wife was a teacher. In my time in the legislature, I served on the education committees for 32 of those years. I think if there’s anything that the General Assembly or state government does that’s critical, it’s public education. I think the foundation of the Commonwealth is clearly based in public schools.

When Steve Beshear was first elected, I was asked about being on the state board. I said, “I really need a rest,” and I didn’t accept an appointment initially. But when (former KBE member and ex-Gov. Ernie Fletcher appointee) Steve Neal wasn’t confirmed, I was contacted by quite a number of people, suggesting I take the position. And I’m very happy I did.

**Q. So you’ve gone from “needing a rest” to being willing to take up the role of chairing the state board. What led you to accept those additional responsibilities?**

**A.** The governor’s office asked me. Quite a number of the board members asked me to consider it. Because of the large number of new people appointed to the board, some of the board members felt that my experience would be beneficial in a kind of transition period.

The other thing is that I’m very impressed with (Education Commissioner) Terry Holliday, and in whatever way the state board can be helpful to him to fulfill his mission for the kids of Kentucky, it seemed like the right thing to do. I’m impressed that in a terrible economic time Steve Beshear is trying to do the best he can for education. And I’m a major fan of Jane Beshear. She understands the need for quality public education. I want to do whatever I can to help them.

**Q. A predecessor once likened chairing the state board to navigating a ship. You don’t sail it, you don’t run the engines, but you chart the**

**course. How do you as chairman ensure that Kentucky's education system is on a cruise to success rather than a repeat of the Titanic?**

**A.** I think the (board) understands that it is the sole responsibility of the General Assembly to create, implement and monitor this whole system of education. The state board is there to be, as you say, the people seeing, with the staff, that the ship is sailing in the right direction. You do that by counseling with the commissioner and the department staff, and by being sure that the department is going in the right direction.

On the other hand, I feel very strongly that the state board is not a micromanager. It is not the business of the state board to try to run schools or school districts.

What you are to do is to give that oversight that asks, "Are schools and districts doing what is in the best interest of the kids and moving education forward in Kentucky?" I think you do that in broad policies, but not by micromanaging.

**Q. As the new state board chair, have you thought about a set of priorities?**

**A.** My top priority is that, since the state board has hired Terry Holliday and asked him to keep education moving forward, as a chairman and board member, my priority is to be there shoulder-to-shoulder with him to advance his priorities forward.

My personal priority is that every child in Kentucky – regardless of geographic location, family resources, race, color or creed – gets a quality education. I believe strongly that every child can learn and that most can learn at a high level. It angers me that there are still voices in the Commonwealth who say, 'Well, these kids can't do it because of....' I come to that from a very personal situation of having a younger sister who had special needs.

As a child, my parents were told she would never be able to take care of herself. My parents never accepted that.

If you were to meet my sister today, you would scratch your head that anyone would have ever said that. She is a wonderful young woman who works and volunteers. So it angers me that there are people who say that because of a child's home situation, rural situation, inner city problem situation, they can't succeed.

**Q. How would you summarize the challenges Kentucky faces to implement Senate Bill 1 now that we're not going to get the Race to the Top funds?**

**A.** I think the commissioner has answered this very artfully: We're not going to give up but implementation is going to be slower than we might have liked and more difficult. But you cannot back away from the need. One of

the things that inspires me about Terry Holliday is that he is extremely good as a resource manager. If you get money to do a job, I also think you do the job with the money you get.

**Q. As you said earlier, the state board has changed dramatically. There are four of the 11 members who have school and district experience, and that's the lowest in a number of years. But there's a much broader range of experience among the remaining board members. How do you see that mix playing out in the decision making that directly affects classrooms and districts?**

**A.** I guess my reaction is that the broad experience that people bring to the state board doesn't have to be from folks who have had a direct relationship in a local school district. I've been very impressed with the people on the state board. Their commitment to kids is very strong.

You've got some really sharp, strong members on there who come with their special resources. I think people who have local experience are very beneficial, but having a diversity of experiences does nothing but make the tapestry richer.

When I went on the board and most had been appointed by Gov. Fletcher, I was impressed that every one of them had a great interest in moving kids forward. If there is a message to local school folks, it is that you've got 11 people on that state board who care deeply about improving education in the state of Kentucky.

**Q. Finally, what does the state board need from local school board members and superintendents to help move education forward in Kentucky?**

**A.** Early in my time on the state board (I asked), "How many people are involved in education in Kentucky on a daily basis?" I was told there are 90,000 people directly involved as teachers, school board members, cafeteria workers.

If I could harness 90,000 Kentuckians and say to the General Assembly and to our Congressional delegation, "Our No. 1 priority is quality education for the kids," nobody could turn their backs politically on that.

To some degree, it's frustrating that they are not all engaged. This has nothing to do with Republican or Democrat, it has to do with supporting public education.

If you are one of those 90,000 people, you should be examining every day, "What are the people I'm supporting doing to move education forward? Be they Republican, Democrat, rural or urban."

If you could harness only 45,000 of those people, you could turn this state around, and make the General Assembly and the elected officials understand that the future of the Commonwealth depends on the quality of the people we educate. There's no turning back. ☘

# Will school board members face an anti-incumbent message on Nov. 2?

This year's "off-year" election will send Kentucky voters to the polls Nov. 2 to choose among three candidates for U.S. senator, 16 seeking to become congressmen, 196 who want to serve in the General Assembly and 5,077 hopefuls to be mayors, judges, clerks, constables, magistrates and city councilors. And, oh, yes, there are 625 school board candidates on the ballot, too.

Even infrequent viewers of network newscasts, readers of national media and followers of the political punditry on Internet blogs have heard a constant drumbeat that this year's election comes amid an anti-incumbent mood.

On the federal level, an anti-incumbent outcome would certainly buck the recent trend. Since 1996, there hasn't been an election in which fewer than nine out of 10 congressional incumbents have failed to win re-election. But it's obvious that there are plenty of people – running and writing – who see chances for major change this year in Washington, D.C.

But does that voter attitude of "Throw the bums out" translate to the local level? And does this anti-incumbent air threaten the eight out of 10 school board members asking to serve another four years?

## An expert's viewpoint

When the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) wanted someone to comment on this year's U.S. campaigns – particularly in light of the U.S. Senate race between Democrat Jack Conway and Republican/Tea Party candidate Rand Paul – it sent a crew to Frankfort to interview Al Cross.

Cross, director of the University of Kentucky's Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues, is best known for his 26 years as reporter and ultimately chief political writer for *The Courier-Journal*. Prior to that time, he was a reporter and editor for a radio station and newspapers in Albany, Leitchfield, Monticello and Russellville.

In other words, Cross knows a thing or two about elections at the national, state and local levels, including those of boards of education.

"I think the voter unhappiness with incumbents stems largely from economic and fiscal matters, which don't really relate to school boards," Cross told me recently. "I think there are some voters – who I would call relatively low-information voters – who may have developed an attitude, 'I'm not going to vote for anybody who's in now' or 'I'm going to vote for anybody who's running against an incumbent.' But I think that that will be a really small number of voters and the effect on school board elections will likely be marginal."

One reason Cross feels any anti-incumbent sentiment won't apply in school board races is because Kentuckians see their school board members differently than they see other



Brad Hughes  
KSBA Member  
Support Services Director

elected officials.

"They have a responsibility for something that is very close to many voters, which is the education of children," he said. "There's a more personal connection. They understand that school board members have very different kinds of jobs than they are being asked to vote for otherwise."

However, incumbent school board members do have one issue in common with legislators and members of Congress: taxes. The unfortunate timing of Kentucky law forces school boards – as well as city councils and fiscal courts – to set tax rates

for the coming year in August and September, right on the heels of the candidate filing deadline.

As of the *Kentucky School Advocate's* publication date, just under half of the school tax rate decisions covered by local media were for a full, 4 percent revenue increase for the coming year. Turnout at mandatory public hearings often was unusually high, with more than the normal number of speakers coming out to oppose higher taxes.

"I think what's going on (in tax rates) is that the economy has reduced property values, which is forcing school boards to take that 4 percent. It's a small increase, but any increase at this juncture is likely to rile up a public that's pretty frustrated about lots of things," Cross said. "It will draw some of the voter anger down to the school board level. It cannot help but have a marginal effect."

But, back to his earlier comment about "low information voters," Cross doesn't see taxes as a huge influence on next month's school board races.

"In a mid-term election like this, where turnout is lower, you get more highly motivated people going to the polls," he said. "There may be people motivated to vote against all incumbents and don't understand the difference, but I think that's going to be a relatively small number of people because school boards are really close to the voters."

## The Last Word

The late speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Thomas "Tip" O'Neill, is credited with the assessment that "All politics is local." For school board members seeking another term in office, O'Neill's opinion represents a double-edged sword.

Leadership decisions about budgets, buildings, policies and progress probably will play a larger role in the outcomes Nov. 2 than whether voters feel their incumbent education leaders have been around too long. Of greater importance may be how effectively board members communicate what they've done for students and the teaching and learning process in the past four years.

And that's a message worth getting out. ☘



# 2010 KSBA Fall Regional Meeting Schedule

## Persistence to Graduation

Join us at this year's Fall Regional Meetings aimed at helping school districts increase their graduation rates and decrease the number of dropouts. This yearlong effort is a partnership among KSBA, the Kentucky Department of Education and local school districts.

Presentations and testimonies from board members, policy makers, practitioners and students will address:

- Consequences of low graduation rates
- Implications of changes in the definition of graduation rate
- Role of local school boards
- Effective strategies and promising practices

**MAKE PLANS NOW  
TO ATTEND**

### REMAINING MEETINGS

DATE	REGION	LOCATION
Oct. 5	Eastern Kentucky*	Morehead State University, Button Auditorium
Oct. 7	Fifth*	General Butler State Resort Park, Carrollton
Oct. 12	Middle Cumberland	Lindsey Wilson College, Columbia
Oct. 14	Northern Kentucky	Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights
Oct. 19	Second	Moonlite Bar-B-Q Inn, Owensboro
Oct. 21	Fourth	Historic State Theater Complex, Elizabethtown
Oct. 26	Third*	James E. Bazzell Middle School (Allen County Schools)
Oct. 28	First*	Paducah Tilghman High School

\* Denotes regional Chairperson election

For more information about specific times and locations, please go to [www.ksba.org](http://www.ksba.org) and look under "Featured Events" at the top of the page. Board members unsure of which district they are in can click on any of these meetings and find a link to that information.



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# Honoring a lifetime of service to students

Recently retired Henry County Board of Education member John Smith has been honored with the dedication of the high school's renovated auditorium to mark his 34 years on the board. Smith, a past KSBA president, was feted at a community reception in August.

Far right: Smith was all smiles as local well-wishers sought a few moments of personal time to share their thanks for his work for children and education.

Right: Smith's wife, Henrietta, (right) and daughter, Pam, pose next to a dedicatory plaque honoring the long time school advocate. It now hangs outside the hall.

Below: A crowd estimated at more than 100 turned out for the event, including past KSBA Presidents Bill Lovell of McLean County and Brenda Jackson of Shelby County, KSBA Executive Director Bill Scott and Associate Executive Director David Baird.

