

# KENTUCKY SCHOOL ADVOCATE

A publication of the Kentucky School Boards Association ■ January 2011

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75th Annual Conference preview

**BRACING FOR GRADUATION RATE DIP**

ADVICE FOR NEW SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS



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**FEATURES**

**RATE DECREASE?**

Along with a new assessment system and standards, Kentucky school districts are bracing for a change in the way graduation rates are calculated. That change is a couple of years away but it could mean a dip in current rates, so boards are being encouraged to begin preparing now ... Page 8

**HEADS UP**

January is School Board Member Recognition Month and it also marks the first time 116 newly elected school board members are taking their seats. Board members who've just completed their first term are sharing some advice and pointers with them ... Page 12

**DIAMOND ANNIVERSARY**

This year's KSBA annual conference marks the association's 75th year of serving school boards ... Page 15

**COLLEGE PREP**

Some students at 70 Kentucky high schools are getting more than encouragement to go on to college: They're getting tutoring to bring up their grades, help with financial aid forms and shepherding through the application process, thanks to a corps of special coaches ... Page 16

**eMEETING EXPANSION**

It's not only school boards that are enjoying paperless board meetings. Kentucky's school councils are getting in on the act, as KSBA branches out in offering its eMeeting service to school councils ... Page 17

**AND THE SURVEY SAYS...**

Bowling Green Independent Schools has moved beyond one-time, one-issue stakeholder polling. With the help of KSBA, the district just completed its fourth employee survey, allowing school leaders to address issues that concern their staff ... Page 18



Looking everywhere for energy savings, Page 10



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Paperless meetings for councils, Page 11

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**On the cover**



College coach Lindsey Hill works on an algebra lesson with Shelby County High School senior Dustin Bynum. Hill is one of 65 "near peers" helping students who need an extra boost to go on to college. The Kentucky College Coaches program is funded by the federal government through AmeriCorps ... Article on Page 16.



## TAKE NOTE

### Kentucky School Boards Association

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#### SROs front and center

Kentucky's school resource officers were featured in the winter 2010 issue of *Kentucky Law Enforcement* magazine, published by the Kentucky Justice and Public Safety Cabinet. Titled "Protecting our most valuable resource," the article highlights the benefits and role of SROs in Kentucky schools and communities. Officers who serve schools in Warren, Boone, Jessamine and Hopkins county districts were interviewed, along with Lee Ann Morrison, training coordinator for the Kentucky Center for School Safety.

#### Excelling in equity

The LaRue County school district has been honored for its work to improve instructional equity. The Kentucky Board of Education presented the district with the second annual Dr. Johnnie Grissom Strive for Achievement through Instructional Equity Award in December.

"Two areas of recognition should be noted in regard to the work that the district has done with students with

disabilities," said Kentucky Board of Education Chair David Karem. "One is the progress made in the increase of students with disabilities scoring proficient/distinguished on state assessments, and the other is the degree of implementation of the 'least restrictive environment' for these students."

The district was nominated by the chairwoman of the LaRue County Board of Education, Anita Cruse. The award was established to honor the late longtime Kentucky Department of Education employee Johnnie Grissom.

#### Co-op honors superintendent

Corbin Independent Superintendent Ed McNeel received the Kentucky Educational Development Corporation's Outstanding Superintendent Award for the current school year. The co-op cited the district's state-of-the-art primary school design and the district's growing enrollment and academic achievement in presenting the award. Steve Trimble, Johnson County Schools superintendent, was the co-recipient. ☞

#### A superintendent's superintendent

Daviess County Schools Superintendent Tom Shelton, who took an unconventional route to the district's top job, is the Kentucky Association of School Administrators' 2011 Superintendent of the Year.

Shelton segued from the private-sector financial industry to lead the district's business and operations, and then was hired as superintendent in 2004 after serving as assistant superintendent. "All my years in industry I wondered if what I did really mattered, but once I got into the assistant superintendent role, I knew that what we did every day mattered and that we could make a big difference in kids' lives," Shelton said.

Shelton is president of the Council for Better Education, a group representing most Kentucky school districts that has worked for adequate state funding for K-12, and chairman of the Local Superintendents Advisory Council to the state Department of Education. He also has provided school finance training to new superin-



tendents and statewide education organizations.

**Daviess County Schools Superintendent Tom Shelton, center, shares the moment with his mother, Jo Shelton and last year's Superintendent of the Year winner, Kenton County's Tim Hanner.**

# When Districts Cooperate, Students Benefit

At the recent *PEAK (Public Education Achieves in Kentucky) Award* presentation in western Kentucky, I witnessed an example of what happens when school districts cooperate and become partners.

The Fulton Independent, Fulton County, Carlisle County and Hickman County districts joined to form a combination scholarship and college- and career-ready program for the students in their districts. The districts combined their respective resources and personnel for the betterment of children.

This reflects what can happen when districts focus on children and not on differences that crop up due to sports, boundaries or political problems.

A school district is primarily responsible for the children enrolled within its boundaries, but we all must be cognizant of our neighbors. Ultimately, when they graduate, all students either will continue their education journey with students from other districts or start their employment with neighbors from surrounding areas.

School districts shouldn't be any different than other public agencies that work together for the greater good of their constituents or communities. A recent chamber of commerce meeting I attended stressed the importance of cities and counties coming together as regional alliances to promote business development.

I believe schools, without losing their separate identities, can partner with surrounding districts and look at innovative new programs for the children of Kentucky, just as these western Kentucky districts did.

The Kentucky School Energy Managers Project, administered by KSBA, is another recent example of school district alliances. Groups of districts have partnered to share the services of the project's energy managers. The result? After just six months, the schools together have realized energy cost avoidance at an annual rate topping \$1 million. This is money that can be retained in the general fund of those districts for the benefit of students.

I am grateful to have been inspired by these examples as my term as KSBA's president comes to an end at our annual conference in Louisville Feb. 4-6. I would like to leave you with a request to continue to focus on and support two areas that are important if school districts are to remain the driving force for the future of Kentucky and this nation.

First, continue to put your full support into ensuring that public education remains the No. 1 priority when our leaders are considering funding and deciding what is most vital for this state and country.

State Rep. Rocky Adkins remarked at our Winter Symposium that public education is the great equalizer, and he is



KSBA President Delmar Mahan talks with Carlisle County High School students about their college plans, which have been enhanced by the dual credits they have earned through the Four Rivers Scholarship Program. The program, a cooperative project among four school districts, won the KSBA *PEAK* Award.

absolutely right. Public education has given all of us and our children a chance to live out our dreams and to become contributing members of society. Please continue your support and, when needed, be a voice for public education.

Second, maintain your support for an organization whose sole purpose is to make us the best board members that we can be: the Kentucky School Boards Association!

During the last two years, the professionalism and dedication of the team members at the association has never ceased to impress me. KSBA's main purposes are to further public education, to assist and support board members and to be a voice for our children. Thanks, KSBA!

I have made so many wonderful friendships in the past two years and had the opportunity to see the dedication of so many school board members. So, thank you as well to you, my fellow board members across the state, for allowing me to serve as the president of what I consider the greatest group of individuals I've known. And thank you above all for your service to the children of your school district. ☘

— Delmar Mahan is KSBA president and chairman of the Whitley County Board of Education



Quotes on education from Kentucky and elsewhere

Photo provided by Danville Independent Schools



**characters and objects that have roles in that narrative.”** University of Kentucky Assistant Professor Dr. Gerry Swann on one of the computer learning experiences that 80 Danville Independent students took part in during this year’s Danville Kids University. From the *Danville Advocate-Messenger*.

**“If (students) build the game correctly, they not only apply basic principles of math and geometry as well as some computer technology in creating characters and their motions, but they also apply language arts skills. They have to think about a story, a narrative that is involved in the game and its**

**ing the new instruction strategies to where the kids are more involved in groups and are more accountable for what they’re learning.”** Caverna Independent Middle School Principal Barry Nesbitt on one of the changes in his school that he believes contributed to it making all 10 of its NCLB targets last year. From the *Glasgow Daily Times*.

**“I knew when I started talking with the students about doing this that they were very, very intelligent and competent in putting together a very good newspaper, and they far exceeded my expectations with The Connection. I’m looking forward to doing this again next year because I think the community engagement and communication is so very important.”** Clark County Schools Superintendent Elaine Farris on the district’s student-produced newspaper, winner of a communications award in a program sponsored by KSBA. From the *Winchester Sun*.

**“It really isn’t an option of removing a student from public education when they are younger than 12 years old. The court system is really the only way to remove a child. There isn’t a magic bullet that we as educators can use; we just do the best that we can with the kids that come into our schools. It is frustrating for parents and grandparents when their loved ones come home and tell about a kid acting out.”** Grayson County Schools Superintendent Barry Anderson on parents’ concerns about safety issues relating to a student with recurring behavior problems. From the *Leitchfield Grayson Record*.

County Schools Superintendent Steve Hall to a packed house of teachers and parents after the high school landed on the state’s 2011 list of persistently low-achieving schools. From the *Ashland Daily Independent*.

**“For the last several years, our teaching methods have sort of gone more toward group learning tactics, trying to get away from the individualized [teaching method]. The staff is doing a great job of adapt-**

**“The diabetes keeps us all hopping. When I became a school nurse 24 years ago, if we had a diabetic in the district, I don’t remember it.”** Laurel County Schools nurse Duff Holcomb on the increase

**“When a child is doing poorly in math, we teach math. But when a child doesn’t know how to behave, we normally discipline the child.”** Walnut Hill Elementary (Casey County) Assistant Principal Judy Phillips on implementing the School Wide Positive Behavior Support program to teach and reinforce appropriate student behavior. From the *Liberty Casey County News*.

**“Academics is what got us in the position we’re in. It’s not a simple problem but we’re going to take the responsibility. Jobs are at stake now. The board won’t have to fire me or ask me to quit.”** Greenup



Tax troubles

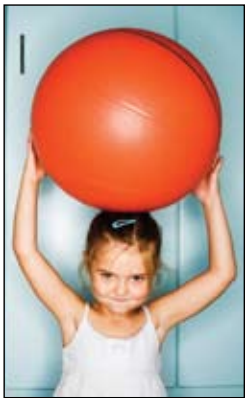
**“We have been in contact with the Board of Education, county clerk and county assessor’s office many times to reach a reasonable agreement on the assessed valuation on the manufacturing plant and the amount due the Board of Education. We have made multiple attempts to pay the undisputed amount to the board. They have also canceled several scheduled meetings to work through the situation.”** Tom Rose, division director

of Land O’Frost, a meat production company in Hopkins County, on a \$146,000 disputed “in lieu of taxes” payment. From the *Madisonville Messenger*.

**“We don’t take partial payments. We want the full payment. We’re ready to meet with them. We’re available, and we’re at 320 S. Seminary Street.”** Hopkins County school board attorney Keith Cartwright on the issue. From the *Madisonville Messenger*.

in the number of students with diabetes – 40 in the district this year – and the related challenges for school personnel. From the London *Sentinel-Echo*.

**“While it seems like it should be something that we’re doing in PE, it’s not. It’s designed for the classroom and the teachers integrate learning**



**into their 10 minutes of exercise. We really need about 60 minutes of exercise every day. Although Take10 is only 10 minutes a day, it helps to set a healthy example for**

**the students and it makes them want to get out and be more active when they’re not in school.”** Angela Starnes, physical education teacher at Crittenden County Elementary School, on daily physical activity in regular classes. From the Marion *Crittenden Press*.

**“F’ soil classification is the worst condition that it can get, and we have ‘F’ soils.”** Architect Jim Ivey on the need for \$300,000 worth of soil remediation after demolition of a former Henderson County elementary school to clear the way for a new district early childhood education center. From the Henderson *Gleaner*.

**“What really makes a big difference is behavior modifications — teaching people to turn light switches off, keep the thermostat down, possibly reduce the number of refrigerators, microwaves and coffee pots. And rather than me being the one who goes from school to school saying, ‘You need to do this; you need to**

**do that,’ we want to reach everybody through teaching the children what do and have them help with the effort.”** John Clemons, energy manager for the Jessamine and Woodford county school districts, on his work in the KSBA School Energy Managers Project. From the Nicholasville *Jessamine Journal*.

**“We’re looking really close, [asking] what were the expenses and which areas they were in. But those numbers really add up.”** Anderson County Schools Superintendent Sheila Mitchell after the district’s auditor warned the board about consequences of continuing expenditures over revenues of \$1.1 million from last fiscal year. From the Lawrenceburg *Anderson County News*.

**“I think it would be kind of weird, but just as effective.”** Carol Burks, identified as an “advertising consumer,” on the bill by Rep. Brad Montell (R-Shelbyville) to allow placement of advertising on Kentucky school buses with half of the proceeds going to districts for classroom expenses. From the Louisville *WLKY-TV News*.

**“We want a better measure than AYP. We’re pushing hard to get a comprehensive accountability model that measures not only the proficiency rates, but also closing achievement gaps, tracking every student’s growth, recognizing teachers whose students grow one or two grade levels when they were three grade levels behind to start with. We’ve been calling those folks failures. We need to praise them and tell them what a great job they’re doing.”** Education Commissioner Terry Holliday telling the KSBA Board of Directors about his intention to seek a waiver from use of the No Child Left Behind AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) measure of school progress as part of the state’s new accountability system. From the KSBA eNews Service. ☘

# Gender equity in sports

## POINT ...

**“It’s a complaint filed on the proportionality of male athletes to male students and female athletes to female students. They are using numbers from 2006 which are not the same as they are today. We are required to file the proportionality numbers annually with the Kentucky High School Athletic Association and have done so. We have more girls participating right now than we did in 2006.”** Oldham County school board attorney Anne Coorsen disputing a Title IX complaint filed against the district.

## COUNTERPOINT...

**“I think the (National Women’s Law Center) is simply following the old saying “where there’s smoke, there’s fire. They are seeing the smoke of low participation rates, and are seeking to determine whether there is a fire beneath the surface.”** Parent Dick Richards, who has challenged the school system on Title IX issues in the past, on the new complaint.

From the LaGrange *Oldham Era*.

# Districts bracing for dip in graduation rates

By Wayne Dominick

School district leaders across the Commonwealth will be paying close attention to the number of students who receive diplomas in the spring of 2013. This will be the first class reporting graduation rates based on the federally mandated cohort graduation-rate formula.

The new formula is a significant change in how graduation rates are calculated and it is almost certain that most districts will see a decline in their graduation rate.

Unlike the current method of calculating the rate, the new formula no longer allows districts to include students who take more than four years to graduate. In addition, the formula does not allow districts to count anyone who receives anything less than a standard diploma.

While state Education Commissioner Terry Holliday continues to lobby for a change in the formula, he advises school boards to start making what he referred to as “tough decisions” to improve the rate.

“I have been actively lobbying through the Council of Chief State School Officers to get the formula changed to include those students who need five or even six years to graduate,” he said. “There are students, especially those with limited English proficien-

cy and in special education, that need that extra time.

“However, that doesn’t mean that school boards should wait until 2013 and say, ‘Woe is me.’ They need to start working now to help those students graduate on time.”

Jessamine County School Superintendent Lu Young, who chairs the School Curriculum Assessment and Accountability Council, has been working with her board to understand the new formula and how to deal with the impending negative aspects of it.

“Unfortunately, there is no way for us to go back and calculate what our rate would have been had we been using this new formula before. We’re stuck with comparing apples to oranges,” she said.

Young agreed with Holliday that some students need more time to complete their education.

“We should be celebrating those 19- and 20-year-olds who come back and get a diploma and rewarding those schools that work with them so they do,” she said. “At the same time, we have to look at ways to keep students in school and graduating on time.”

## Tackling the problem

One way that both Holliday and Young mentioned for keeping students in school is better and more effective alternative programs.

“Alternative programs need to be clearly defined and fully supported to be successful,” with improved

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## Important dates

**2005** – Governors of all 50 states sign the Graduation Counts Compact making an unprecedented commitment to a common formula for calculating high school graduation rates. Special education and recent immigrants with limited English proficiency can be assigned to different cohorts to allow them more time to graduate.

**October, 2008** – The US Department of Education releases new regulations on how states must calculate high school graduation rates to meet requirements for these data under NCLB. On federally mandated state, district and school report cards and for determining AYP at the high school level, all states must now use the adjusted four-year cohort rate adopted by through the Compact with two significant differences. The new federal regulations do not allow for cohort reassignment or modified diplomas.

**2011** – States are to begin reporting graduation rates using the new formula. Kentucky is granted a waiver because of an inadequate data reporting system

**2014** – Kentucky will begin reporting graduation rates using the cohort system.



## THE CURRENT GRADUATION RATE FORMULA:

*Number of 2009 graduates with standard, four-year diplomas plus 2009 graduates with standard, more-than-four-year diplomas as specified by their IEPS*

*DIVIDED BY*

*Number of 2009 completers (all students with standard diplomas plus those with certificates of attainment) plus 2009 12th-grade dropouts plus 2008 11th-grade dropouts plus 2007 10th-grade dropouts plus 2006 9th-grade dropouts*

## NEW FORMULA:

*Graduation rate = Students graduating within four years with a standard diploma*

*DIVIDED BY*

*first-time entering ninth graders four years earlier*

*Source: National Governor's Association*

and innovative delivery, Holliday said.

The support of alternative programs includes proper funding, which will require boards to make some tough choices, because funding no longer automatically comes with new programs or initiatives, the commissioner noted.

Jessamine County school board member Eugene Peel said school boards will have to prioritize.

"You have to make sure the funding is there for programs that give extra help to the students who need it," he said. "That has to come before a lot of other things."

Young, whose district's alternative school has been designated a state model, said that in addition to proper funding, alternative programs have to be considered necessary and important, with buy-in from district staff and the community.

"It used to be that if you had some money left after funding other programs you would find some space no one was using and have a self-contained classroom. That isn't fair to those students who need a different way to learn," she said.

Young added that another important aspect of a successful alternative program is early intervention. "You can't wait until a student is in 10th or 11th grade and behind and put them into a program and expect them to succeed."

To that end, Jessamine County's program takes students starting in sixth grade. "Finding ways to help them be successful in sixth, seventh and eighth grade is our best shot at getting them to graduate on time," Young said.

However, alternative programs alone will not be enough to improve graduation rates, she pointed out. For one thing,

alternative programs are costly. Effective early childhood education programs can reduce those costs by curbing the need for alternative placement, she said.

"Quality early childhood education," Young said, "will have a residual effect that will carry on to middle and high school."

Another way Holliday sees to improve graduation rates is to raise the dropout age to 18.

"I was very disappointed that more superintendents didn't support this initiative during the last legislative session," he said. Keeping students in school longer gives schools more chances to reach them and get them on the track to graduation, he explained.

The Kentucky Board of Education has made raising the dropout age to 17 in 2011-12 and then to 18 in 2012-13 a priority and has included this item on its legislative agenda for the upcoming 2011 session.

Holliday said that while there are no easy answers as to how to raise graduation rates, KDE will continue to help districts develop programs to keep students in school and be successful.

"We know there is a lot of work to be done, especially in improving alternative ways of delivering instruction. We need to make our online programs better so those kids who spend two or three hours a day playing video games will spend that time learning," he said. "It will take a lot of effort, but we don't have a choice. We owe to these kids." ❧

— Dominick is a writer from Frankfort



# Walking the energy walk

KSBA puts its building through same process as districts participating in energy program

By Jennifer Wohlleb  
Staff Writer

With 144 Kentucky school districts receiving services through its federally funded School Energy Managers Project, KSBA decided it was time to put its facilities under the same microscope and see where it could find its own energy savings.

“We’re out there preaching every day about energy efficiency and we decided we needed to get our own house in order,” said John Noel, SEMP central region project coordinator.

After analyzing a year’s worth of KSBA’s energy usage, two engineers from the Kentucky Pollution Prevention Center did a walk-through of the facilities – inside and out – looking at everything from thermostats to the lighting in the parking lot and even in the emergency exit signs.

“The very first step for us is to look at your energy rates,” said Lane Freiberger, a KPPC engineer. “Your electric use is pretty consistent and gas use follows climate conditions ... this building is pretty typical for a one-shift building.”

And with the building sitting empty more than half the day, Freiberger said

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**Engineers with the Kentucky Pollution Prevention Center examine the energy efficiency of equipment in one of KSBA’s mechanical rooms.**



KSBA could reap significant energy savings by replacing the standard thermostats on its 10 heating/cooling units with programmable models.

“They are a real asset because you can program them to bring up the temperature a few hours before people get here and start taking it back down a few hours before the end of the day so that people won’t notice,” he said.

Engineer Eric DeLodder said these types of tools not only save energy and money, but increase awareness of energy usage.

“The low-hanging fruit (for energy savings) is the programmable thermostats,” DeLodder said. “The payback on those could be under six months.”

That is not the case with switching out the existing light fixtures for ones more energy efficient. Most of the building’s lights are standard fluorescent tube fixtures using T12 bulbs.

“Your relatively low energy rates are an impediment to paybacks,” Freiberger said

KSBA Facility Manager Jeff Million said that information helped KSBA decide not to install new fixtures.

“It would not be cost effective to change them out, but we are switching to a more efficient lightbulb in the existing fixtures,” he said. “There will be a 5 year payback on the bulbs.”

SEMP Director Ron Willhite said this is an important lesson for everyone.

“The SEMP is off to a great start because districts have recognized that cost savings measures through implementation of wise energy practices can both provide extra programming funds and improve the comfort level of the classroom,” he said. “Because those same opportunities exist at KSBA it is important that KSBA be just as diligent in examining and implementing energy savings alternatives as the school districts it serves.”

DeLodder also encouraged continued staff education, in addition to facility-level changes.

“Is there an awareness or policy of turning computers off or putting them in hibernation mode at night?” he asked. He also encouraged employees to turn off lights when they leave their offices or rooms that will otherwise be empty for awhile.

As it awaits KPPC’s final report and recommendations, KSBA will continue to collect data to see if further changes are warranted.

“KPPC gave us two sensors to put in our upper and lower conference rooms to collect data to see if we should install motion detectors to operate the lights,” Million said. “Those will be in place for a month.”

In the future, everyone who enters the KSBA building will also be able to see how energy is being used.

“Trane is going to put an energy dashboard in the front hallway to show electric and gas use in real time,” he said. ☞



Engineer Lane Freiberger looks at one of the 10 heating/cooling units at KSBA. At left is Engineer Eric DeLodder. The engineers from the Kentucky Pollution Control Center walked through both the inside and outside of KSBA’s Frankfort office to see where energy savings could be found.

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**R S A**


RSA is recognized today in the financial industry as a premier regional provider of Financial Advisory services to School Districts. Our client list has grown from 15 Districts in 1989 to 130 out of 174 in 2009.

As Financial Advisor, we will assist School Districts with numerous services before, during, and after the financing portion is completed. In addition to serving as Financial Advisor for bond construction projects, RSA provides many additional ongoing services.

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# A LOT TO LEARN

## School board members completing their first term share tips with those taking office in January

By Madelynn Coldiron  
Staff Writer

Here's one thing the training and guidebook for new school board members won't mention: You probably need to allow for more time as you wheel your cart through Kroger or Sav-A-Lot.

"Sometimes you'll find yourself being in the grocery for two hours," being buttonholed by constituents, said Knox County school board member Carla Jordan.

Jordan offered that experience to the 116 new school board members who will take office in January 2011. The job, she said, takes more time than she realized when she ran for the office – something that may come as a surprise to those who are just starting.

"I thought you go to a board meeting once a month," she said. "I really didn't realize the amount of time it would take, not only for training and board meetings, but for issues that pop up all the time."

New board members have a lot to learn, agrees Cumberland County board member Benjamin Sells.

"There's a lot more to it than I really imagined," he said. "I guess they need to do a good job so they can stay in office more than four years because there's no way you can learn what you need to know in just four years."

The most important thing for new board members to learn quickly is the basics of the job, Jackson Independent school board member Greg Lemons advised.

"I'd say the responsibilities of being a board member, what's required of you, the laws governing your district, the evaluation process of

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**Hancock County board member Allen Kennedy, right at KSBA's winter symposium, said listening is an important skill for all board members.**

the superintendent and first and foremost, your teachers and your children, your responsibilities to them," he said.

Another one of those basics is parliamentary procedure, Sells noted, though, "that comes about pretty fast."

Breckinridge County school board member Kenneth Hager was among the second-term board members who stressed the value of attending KSBA training.

"Get that as early as you can get it and get the training for new board members first," he advised, while Hancock County board member Allan Kennedy recommended gleaning information not only from KSBA but "from any resource you can."

### Tutoring

Finance is one of the more difficult areas to take in, several board members starting their second term warned. Elizabethtown Independent board member Paul Godfrey suggested new board members should work with someone in the central office – a mentor – as he did, "who can help you one-on-one with some of the financial duties and responsibilities regarding policy and district finance."

Those types of "tutoring" sessions worked for Campbellsville Independent board vice chairwoman Suzanne Wilson.

"I recommend that (new board members) take time first to



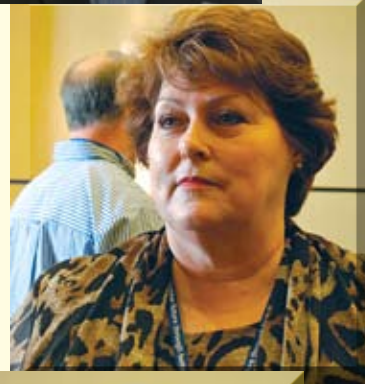


# What's at the top of the 'to do' list for new school board members



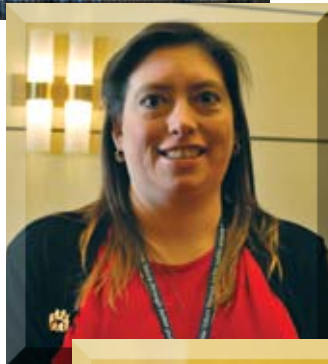
**Greg Smith,  
Cumberland County**

**Find out how to influence teacher accountability to improve teaching**



**Brenda Hill,  
Whitley County**

**Get acquainted with the school system beyond what she knows as a parent**



**James Sargent,  
Anderson County**

**Make sure the district is up to date with new technology**





*“I guess they (newly elected board members) need to do a good job so they can stay in office more than four years because there’s no way you can learn what you need to know in just four years.”*

— Cumberland County board member Benjamin Sells

meet with the board chairman and superintendent to get as up to date as possible on what’s going on in the district and what immediate matters the board is currently dealing with,” she said.

Wilson also met with central office staff, including the finance officer.

Knox County’s Jordan said she benefited from a board retreat that included her and another new incoming board member.

“That helped me a lot, not only getting to know my other board members but they provided a day of training specifically for our board and issues that we were facing at the time.”

#### **Teamwork**

New board members don’t always realize they have to function as a board, Jordan said. “I think a lot of new people coming on maybe don’t realize that you’re a body instead of one person and have to function as a body.”

As part of the team, new board members, like any board member, should “try as best as you can to keep a collegial and friendly tone among the board, which our board has, even though we can disagree on things,” said Somerset Independent school board member Sharon Brown.

Try your best to understand other members’ points of view, she said, rather than “planting yourself” and being inflexible.

Brown said remembering the big-picture helps. “The goal should always be to do the best thing for children. Unfortunately, in some cases human nature and politics can enter into it, but this is one place where it really has no business at

all,” she said.

#### **Intangibles**

School board members also must feel their way through relationships with their peers and their constituents, which can be challenging at first.

Brown said she learned the hard way to gather the facts and hear both sides of the story when a constituent calls about an issue.

“You want to make sure that you understand the whole story, because sometimes you’re hearing just one side and you kind of get on board, if you will, with their concern and when you check into it, like so many things in life, there are other factors involved that you haven’t heard about yet,” she said.

It’s important for new board members to realize the value of listening, said Hancock’s Kennedy, a former human resources manager.

In that job, he said, employees would come to his office “burning my ears.”

“But before the conversation was done – and it may have been an hour later – I was just listening to their problems. It doesn’t matter if you’re in industry in human resources or if you’re involved in the school board: It’s all about that,” said Kennedy, who sits on the KSBA Board of Directors.

Godfrey, of Elizabethtown, advised new board members to be patient and take a long view.

“Do not expect change right away,” he said. “Things happen slowly on the board and change is hard for some people. That would be my main advice.” ☘

## **Kentucky Superintendent Vacancy**

### **Montgomery County Schools**

4,900 (PS-12) [www.montgomery.kyschools.us](http://www.montgomery.kyschools.us)

The Montgomery County Board of Education is seeking an individual who has evidence of being a proven instructional leader. The successful candidate should have administrative experience, good oral communication skills, evidence of good fiscal management, and should be an effective motivator for the 650 staff members. Along with

excellent people skills, the candidate must display a willingness to be visible and involved with the community. Experience with budgeting and building projects is a plus.

The salary is negotiable, with contract to begin July 1, 2011. Candidates must hold or be eligible for a Kentucky superintendent’s certification.

To apply, send seven copies of all of the following: a cover letter/introduction, resume, application form, responses to eight questions, certification, three (3) letters of recommendation, and one video (optional) to: Montgomery County Superintendent Search, Kentucky School Boards Association, 260 Democrat Drive, Frankfort, KY 40601. Find application form, video information and questions at: [www.ksba.org](http://www.ksba.org); go to Employment Opportunities. *Application deadline is March 4, 2011.*



# KSBA CELEBRATES 75 YEARS OF SERVICE TO SCHOOL BOARDS

By Jennifer Wohlleb  
Staff Writer

Attendees at this year's annual KSBA conference will visit the past, present and future – no time machine required.

As the association celebrates its 75th anniversary, it will acknowledge its beginning while providing school board members and superintendents with the training they need to help students be successful in the future.

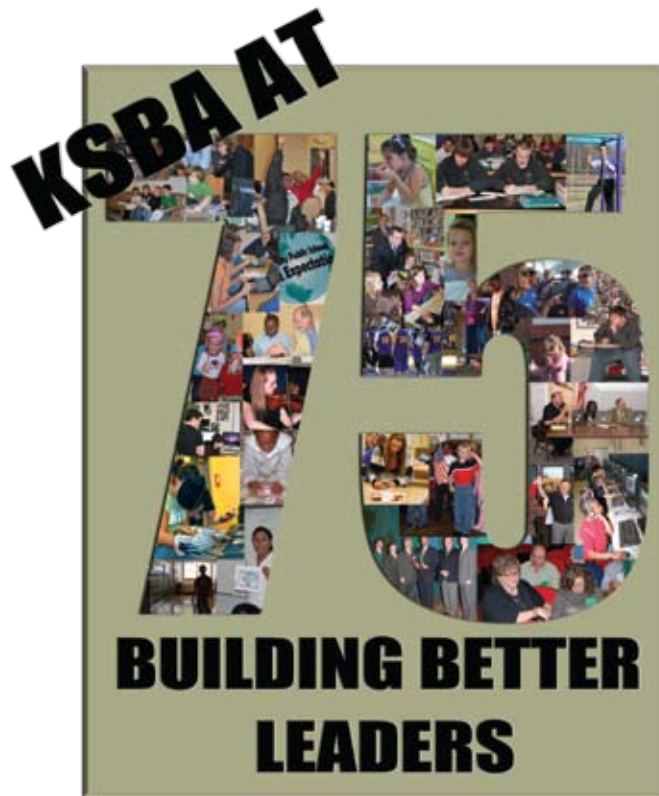
"There will be an emphasis on our history, but we'll also be on the cutting edge, moving forward, making sure today's board members are ready for the future," said Kerri Schelling, KSBA director of Board Team Development.

KSBA Executive Director Bill Scott said KSBA members are facing many of the same challenges they did 75 years ago.

"In 1936, Kentucky, as well as the rest of the nation, was bogged down in the worst economy in memory. With soaring unemployment rates and plunging tax revenues, many boards were wondering how they were going to keep their local schools afloat," he said. "One distinct difference between our first state conference and our 75th anniversary event is that America is facing a much more competitive marketplace in 2011 than we were in 1936."

With that in mind, the agenda for this year's conference will have an emphasis on preparing students for postsecondary success. Each of the four clinic sessions will feature a workshop on helping school boards implement Senate Bill 1.

"The motivation for this legislation was not just the personal success of our students but also the survival of our current standard of living," Scott said. "With emerging nations like China and India graduating unprecedented numbers of college graduates, America can no longer claim the world's most educated workforce. Higher learning standards, improved professional development for teachers and administrators, and the preparation of more college- and career-ready graduates are all topics related to Senate Bill 1 and the challenges facing America's public schools. For this reason, I hope board members will take full advantage of these sessions as they strive to prepare students for the realities of today's economy."



KSBA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

FEB. 4.-6

GALT HOUSE HOTEL, LOUISVILLE

Futurist David Zach, the plenary session keynote speaker, will give board members a glimpse of what may come while also taking a look back.

"He will be looking at the history of education, and the progress that education has made, what we need to remember from the past and why you don't always want to throw those things out," Shelling said.

Satirist and radio personality Gary Burbank, better known to many as his on-air alter ego, "Earl Pitts, Uhmerikun," will open the conference.

Closing speaker Dr. Debra Peppers will send attendees home with her personal story about the powerful role school board members can play in the life of a child.

"She is really going to speak about board members to board members," Schelling said. "She even comes to conference early and spends some time talking to board members to find out the needs specific to Kentucky. She puts a lot of effort into the preparation of her talks."

Gov. Steve Beshear and Senate President David Williams also have been invited to speak at conference.

Schelling said the conference format will be similar to previous years and will offer learning opportunities in a variety of areas.

"There are going to be lots of perennial topics that are always good for board members, whether they are new or have served for a long time," she said. "But we have also worked very hard to bring in some of the latest, cutting-edge sorts of topics. We are continuing to feature districts that do new and innovative things. Learning from each other continues to be important."

And there will be birthday cake, as part of a small celebration during the Saturday luncheon.

"We'll be hearing from past presidents. We'll be hearing from the people who helped make us what we are today," Schelling said. "We'll have a focus on where we came from, where we are now and how we will continue to be that driving force for school boards."

— To register online, go to [www.ksba.org](http://www.ksba.org), and click on the annual conference link under *Important Events* at the top of the page. Registration materials have also been mailed.

# Coaching for college

By Madelynn Coldiron  
Staff Writer

Shelby County High School senior Dustin Bynum wants to enroll in college, get a business degree, and then go into the landscaping business.

Lindsey Hill, a 2005 graduate of Shelby County High, is helping him get there.

Hill is a Kentucky college coach, part of a team of 65 “near peers” working with students statewide who would be the first in their family to attend college, or who need some extra help to get there.

“I think a lot of them thought about college before,” but didn’t know where to begin or find information, said Hill, an Eastern Michigan University graduate who doesn’t look much older than the students she’s coaching.

Gayle Hilleke, who heads Kentucky Campus Compact, one of Kentucky College Coaches’ lead agencies, describes them as “the middle students who get lost in the shuffle.”

“They don’t get help in thinking about going to college, or what courses to take in high school so they’re ready to go to college, and how to navigate that whole high school experience so they can enter college prepared and be successful,” she said.

The college coaches program, which began in November 2010, is funded by a three-year federal AmeriCorps grant that provides \$908,000 in each year. The full-time college coaches, who become AmeriCorps members, have been assigned to more than 70 high schools and area technology centers, where they each will mentor 50 students and aim them toward college. Nineteen part-time coaches are helping some of them. Those who are assigned to the tech centers work in multiple high schools.



Lindsey Hill, a college coach based at Shelby County Area Technology Center, tutors Shelby County High School senior Dustin Bynum in algebra.

The grant pays the coaches, but some local matching money is required for other expenses. In some cases, school boards have helped fill in the gaps.

At any high school, there are kids who want to go to college but are unsure of the process, said Spencer County school board vice chairman Scott Travis.

“It’s up to us to provide for their need and provide someone to give that information, and this was a way to get that accomplished,” said Travis, whose board is picking up some expenses for a

coach who works at its high school.

Coaches work with their students, who are selected by the school principal, individually and in small groups. They also serve the general student body by talking to classes about college, and helping at career fairs and similar events.

Hill, who is based at the Shelby County Area Technology Center and mainly serves students at Shelby County’s two high schools, said one of the most common needs she addresses is tutoring, mostly in math. Many students have after-school jobs and can’t keep up with their class work. “Grades are the biggest obstacle right now,” she said.

Hill also provides students with college information and help with everything from how to fill out federal financial aid forms and write an application essay to making college visits.

“They don’t know how to get the information or have a computer at home to get it,” Hill said.

She’d like to plan some group college visits but, “the money

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## Same program, many partners

The Kentucky College Coaches program involves a conglomeration of agencies, including Berea College, which spearheaded the AmeriCorps grant application and is training the coaches, and Northern Kentucky University, which is acting as fiscal agent on behalf of Kentucky Campus Compact. Others involved in the program and providing some of the local matching money are GEAR Up Kentucky, the college readiness program for low-income students; the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority; the state’s workforce development cabinet; and the seven colleges and universities that make up the compact.



thing is the big issue.” The Shelby County Area Technology Center doesn’t have the funds for this, but Hill is trying to get sponsors and persuade the colleges they’d be visiting to help.

Hilleke said the coaching idea is modeled after similar programs around the country. However, it dovetails with Kentucky’s push to increase its college-going rate and echoes a recommendation of the governor’s Higher Education Work Group, she said.

The program’s emphasis on having young coaches is one element that makes it successful, Hilleke said.

“We really encourage AmeriCorps members who are first-generation college students so that they know the struggle of perhaps not having the support from someone in the family or someone in the family who knows how to navigate the process,” she said.

The coaches also help overworked high school guidance counselors.

“They have so many students that they need to help through the process, but they can’t give the individual attention even if they wanted to because they have too many students,” Hilleke said.

Some of the program’s college information also eventually will be linked to the students’ other academic work.

Its training director is creating a sample curriculum to incorporate filling out a college financial aid form in a math lesson, or using a college application essay as a writing assignment in English class, Hilleke said.

The project’s goal this year is an 80 percent graduation rate for its students, which is higher than the state average, with 50 percent of the students enrolling in college, bettering the 44 percent state rate for college enrollment. Hilleke hopes for bigger gains in the second year.

So far, she said, the feedback from participating high schools “is tremendous.”

The partner agencies will apply again for federal funding once the three years is over, she said, but they’ll also talk with other funding agencies about partnering with the program and providing some funding.

“Our ultimate goal is to get a college coach in every high school in Kentucky,” Hilleke said. “That will take a lot of resources.” ☘



## SERVICE CALL

# SCHOOL COUNCIL MEETINGS JOIN PAPERLESS REVOLUTION

By Jennifer Wohlleb  
Staff Writer

**W**ith 57 boards of education across Kentucky using KSBA’s paperless eMeeting service, making it available to school councils is the next natural step.

“We had several inquiries from school-district users about the possibility of eMeeting for councils,” said Katrina Kinman, KSBA eMeeting trainer. “Because school councils are subject to the same requirements of the Open Meetings and Open Records Act as school boards, we thought it was a great opportunity to provide the same service to councils.”

KSBA’s eMeeting is a service that eliminates unnecessary paperwork, increases efficiency and reduces costs by allowing meeting agendas and related attachments to be developed and shared entirely online.

Kinman and other KSBA staff members observed the council meetings at three schools that agreed to be pilot sites for the program.

“We wanted to see what programming changes might need to be made, because there are some differences in the way boards and councils take action,” Kinman said. “For example, a principal is a voting member, but a superintendent is not. Councils can also take action by consensus whereas by law, individual votes must be recorded for board of education meetings.”

Trigg County High School was one of the pilot sites for the program, and Principal Neal Cummins said the paper savings alone has made it worthwhile.

“For our council members not to have that big binder with all of our policies to carry around has been very, very good,” he said.

Preparing for meetings also is simpler for the secretary, who now does everything online, attaching the pertinent policies and committee reports and posting them online, he said.

“Our council members really like it, being able to go to our website instead of having to look through lots of papers,” Cummins said. “It’s all right there on the website. The website is so easy to maneuver through. We didn’t have to have a whole lot of training. Our council members have picked it up and become really comfortable with it.”

KSBA eMeeting trainer Kim Barker said this service allows for greater transparency for councils, just as it does for school boards.

Barker also noted that with eMeeting programming done in-house, as well as training and support, the program is easy and convenient.

“Support is offered after hours for eMeeting emergencies,” she said. “We have had a few calls over the years, but it is a very easy program to use. And because it’s Web-based, districts don’t have to purchase special hardware or software.”

Beginning this month, councils in districts where the school board is already an eMeeting subscriber will be given priority in setting up the program.

–For eMeeting pricing and additional information, contact Kinman (ext. 1219) or Barker (ext. 1223) at 1-800-372-2962, or via e-mail at [katrina.kinman@ksba.org](mailto:katrina.kinman@ksba.org) or [kim.barker@ksba.org](mailto:kim.barker@ksba.org), or go to [www.ksba.org/policy/emeeting](http://www.ksba.org/policy/emeeting).

# SURVEY SAVVY

## Regular employee input spurs changes

By Madelynn Coldiron  
Staff Writer

When Bowling Green Independent Superintendent Joe Tinius and the school board revisit the district's salary schedule in 2011, the case for bolstering pay will be – as educators are fond of saying – “data driven.”

That data will come from the district's 2010 biennial employee survey, in which the percentage of employees who agreed that their salary is fair for the work they do plunged from 81 percent in 2008 to 71 percent. Salaries have been flat for two years, Tinius noted, and the board had a discussion in 2010 about the need to address the issue with the next budget cycle.

The response to the salary question “is kind of timely,” he said, and will provide perspective when he discusses the budget with the board in the spring. The survey also showed that despite the salary issue, overall employee satisfaction is high.

The fall 2010 employee survey was the fourth one for the district, which has been assisted in the operation by KSBA, which collects, tabulates and analyzes them. Except for back-to-back years during the transition between superintendents, the survey has been done every two years.

“We just feel like continuing to get that kind of information every other year helps us make better decisions at the district level, know how our employees are feeling and the things they are telling us that are important to them,” Tinius said. “It has reinforced the importance of listening.”

Besides providing context during budget-making this year, the results from this year's survey and past surveys will help the Bowling Green board when it begins working on its new strategic plan down the road, he said.

The superintendent also reviews the results, which are broken down by school and by certified and classified employees, with each principal, and the information is revisited during their evaluation.

Changes have been made based on the survey findings. For example, the 2008 survey revealed that employees were concerned about not getting information on school board decisions. Because of that, public relations director Leslie Peek e-mails all employees the day after the board meets with a summary of board action.

“Things do happen when the survey results come in,” Peek said.

The district also now makes a greater effort to recognize faculty and staff for their accomplishments, based on input from the survey, Tinius said.

After four surveys, district leaders now can see patterns “that let us know if we're going in the direction we need to go,” the superintendent said.

### The origin

Bowling Green school board member Deborah Williams first proposed the employee survey, based on her experience with similar surveys in the banking industry.

There was “no drama” in the district that prompted her to think about applying the concept to the system's employees, she said, but there were a lot of new employees coming aboard, mixing with seasoned staffers.

“And I felt like sometimes there tended to be the appearance of a disconnect between certified and classified employees,” Williams said. “I didn't know if we were getting a good feeling for how satisfied they were or if there was anything we could do better.”

The outcome was an increase in “dialogue between staff and the board and the central office,” she said. “We've gotten some real good, positive feedback from this.”

### The process

Employee surveys aren't dif-



**Bowling Green High School Principal Gary Fields studies the results of the district's latest employee survey with other members of the survey committee; l-r, Parker-Bennett-Curry Elementary Principal Cheri Smith, technology resource teacher Allen Martin and DeVagus Jackson, assistant principal at the district's junior high.**



# PEAK applause for four districts



With four school districts sharing KSBA's *Public Education Achieves in Kentucky Award*, it was not surprising that the Dec. 1 celebration was one of the biggest in the award's history. Fulton Independent, Carlisle County, Fulton County and Hickman County schools brought together elements of its Four Rivers Scholarship Program in the Fulton Independent gym to demonstrate everything from the teaching of Spanish to elementary students to paying for dual credit courses at the high school level.

In the last two years, the Four Rivers Scholarship Foundation has provided scholarships for 50 students, given away more than 1,000 books, is currently paying for nearly 1,000 hours of dual credit, is helping prepare students to become certified as emergency medical technicians as soon as they turn 18, as well as supporting a number of other initiatives.

(Above left) Fulton Independent High School junior Adam Hamrick leads elementary students through a Spanish lesson as part of the Bilingual Buddies program.

(Above right) Fulton Independent alumni and program benefactor Robbie Rudolph receives a thank you card from Fulton County students who received free books as part of the Rudolph's Readers program. Also pictured is Kentucky Sen. Ken Winters, and Fulton County Elementary teacher Carol Coulson.



(Left) From left, Fulton County Superintendent Dennis Bledsoe, KSBA Executive Director Bill Scott, Fulton Independent Superintendent Dianne Owen, Four Rivers Foundation board member Robbie Rudolph, Hickman County Superintendent Kenny Wilson, KSBA President Delmar Mahan and Carlisle County Superintendent Keith Shoulders with the *PEAK Award*.

difficult to do, as long as the district understands their purpose, said Kerri Schelling, KSBA's Board Team Development director, who works with the program.

"They need to make sure that their employees understand the intent behind the survey," she said. "I think a district can have great success if they're willing to listen to what their employees are telling them through the survey, and making a commitment that they will consider those responses and do something about the pieces they can."

The work, a KSBA fee service, begins with an initial meeting between Schelling and a district committee with representatives from a variety of work stations within the district, including both classified and certified staff. The group formulates questions with her assistance. Questions, Schelling said, should "stand the test of time" so district leaders can track trends in responses through the years. The committee has the flexibility to add, delete or modify questions to reflect changes within the district.

Once formulated, the first survey becomes the baseline for

future polling. The surveys are housed on a secure server at KSBA to ensure total anonymity for respondents; employees are sent a link that allows them to submit their responses online. Paper surveys are optional and are mailed to KSBA for manual entry into the database. Though districts may have similar questions, there is no boilerplate survey, Schelling noted.

Schelling tabulates and analyzes the results, sharing a draft report with the survey committee for the finishing touches prior to its presentation to the school board. The district never sees the raw data and it is not broken down to the level of individual respondents, further ensuring employee anonymity.

That's important, Williams said. "They've got to be secure enough to answer the questions, so the process must be secure and anonymous," she said.

And, Williams emphasized, boards need to be prepared to respond to the results.

"You've got to do something when you get it," she said. ☞

# Shannon Pratt Stiglitz

KSBA Director of Governmental relations



*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 Shannon Pratt Stiglitz, KSBA's Governmental Relations director, who will discuss the upcoming legislative session. She will outline some of the association's legislative priorities and discuss expectations for the short session.*

**Q. This is a non-budget session, but do you expect budget issues to pop up?**

**A.** There may be some issues related to Medicaid, just for the simple fact that they have a larger shortfall due to not receiving the full federal funding that the state budgeted for. In other ways, I think they will avoid opening up the budget at all costs because that will lead to a lot more problems. So I think the budget will remain closed, but Medicaid will likely have to be addressed at some point in time this session.

**Q. Do you expect legislators to deal in any way with the state's projected deficits?**

**A.** The projected Medicaid deficit is because of lack of federal funding. But on the other hand, we have seen growth in state revenues for the last two quarters, contrary to what had been forecast, which means the budget is in better shape than projected. So while we're not going to have a lot more money or a huge windfall, it will take the pressure off of other places where potential shortfalls may have been projected.

**Q. What are some interesting pre-filed bills that could have an impact on education?**

**A.** There is a bill that says the state cannot pass on any unfunded mandates to local school districts, which I think from our perspective is a great piece of legislation. We often hear from board members and superintendents that the state passes legislation and budgets that do not have full funding for a program but they are required to implement it, so therefore the school district has to use local funds. It creates a burden on the local level to create more revenue.

Two prefiled bills would allow commercial advertising on

school buses, although prohibiting specific types of advertising, such as political, gaming, alcohol, tobacco. In one bill, school districts would have the ability to spend half of the money generated at their discretion, the other half on transportation. In the other, districts would have free rein to spend that revenue as they see fit. Transportation as a budget item has not been adequately funded in years, so it could help offset the expenses of buying new buses and increased fuel costs.

**Q. Is it going to be a busy session?**

**A.** Even though this is only a 30-day session there are already a large number of pre-filed bills that could have education implications. Some of them are holdovers from the last session, including one raising the compulsory attendance to the age of 18. Currently, a student can dropout at 16, but this bill would require they remain in school and strongly encourage graduation.

The Response To Intervention bill from last year will be introduced again, requiring schools to have an early intervention system in place to identify struggling or disabled students earlier in their school career.

A bill to address childhood obesity would require 45 minutes of physical activity per week for half-day kindergarten students and 90 minutes per week for all others in K-5.

Legislation to support the career and technical education programs in secondary schools will be introduced again. This is aimed at creating more support and interest for students who may have a strong interest in this area.

Then there is the neighborhood schools bill prefiled by Sen.



Dan Seum and co-sponsored by Sen. David Williams. It would allow parents to enroll their children in the school closest to them. Our position on that is that we always firmly support local control. Attendance is a matter for school boards and we support keeping it that way.

In response to the neighborhood schools bill, there is another prefiled bill to provide state funds to local districts to offset costs of implementing any Kentucky revised statutes that result in changes to the local district assignment plan. Basically, it says if the state is going to legislate neighborhood schools and affect the attendance areas at the state level, then the state needs to provide the funds for it.

Also while currently there are not any current pre-filed bills, there may be some additional legislation with charter schools, and the tweaking of Senate Bill 1 and House Bill 176.

**Q. Is there anything expected in the area of assessment and achievement that could impact school boards and districts?**

**A.** House Education Committee Chairman Carl Rollins spoke at our annual winter symposium and said he would be sponsoring two particular bills this session. One is about teacher evaluations, requiring and developing more of a statewide system that would be for teacher and leader. It would include student growth measures and student performance measures. It won't be the only measure of the evaluation, but it would be included in it.

He is also going to file a bill that would allow local school districts to apply to the Kentucky Department of Education to ask for a waiver from certain statutes in order to implement innovative school models, such as those that charter schools are able to implement. If laws are stifling innovation at the district level, then let local schools can get out from under those laws – with permission – to see if we can really get some innovation that will work for Kentucky students.

**Q. What are KSBA's top issues this legislative session?**

**A.** Our biggest concern is making sure that we don't get any legislation as far as unfunded mandates. If we can, we want to do that and make sure that school districts hold onto the funds they have because their resources are so precious right now. That will be a huge success for us.

I do think there may be some legislation filed that would allow districts to purchase health insurance for school board members if they choose. They would have to pay for it out of their budgets if they want to offer that as a benefit to school board members.

We are supporting the compulsory attendance legislation that has been filed. Along with that, we have asked, as far

as the teacher evaluation piece, for at least 40 percent of the evaluation to come from student-performance measures.

One thing we added to our legislative agenda this year is to request the General Assembly to re-evaluate the teacher tenure system to make sure tenure is earned and is a meaningful milestone in a teacher's career. The path to tenure should include performance events and student measures.

It takes five years for a teacher to get tenure, so school districts, principals, board members, all of us need to be more mindful of a teacher's path toward tenure to make sure they are getting the supports they need to be a great teacher. It also means making sure that teaching is the appropriate path and profession for these individuals. If it's found that after all of the professional development we've given them and it's still not working for them, then they need an avenue to move on, and tenure shouldn't be something that is automatic.

**Q. Any other issues on our agenda?**

**A.** School calendars are a perennial issue. We have endorsed legislation allowing local districts to have more control over their own calendar so they can take into consideration their community's needs when developing them.

We believe calendar legislation similar to that which was filed last session will be filed this session to give local school districts more control over their own calendars so they can make sure they are meeting the needs of their students independent of the department of education requiring everyone to do calendars a certain way.

**Q. What kind of legislative actions do you expect in relation to Senate Bill 1?**

**A.** We always have on our agenda to provide funding for implementing Senate Bill 1. It was included this year because we knew professional development would be an issue, as far as making sure schools have the money they need to implement it effectively.

If we're going to have an effective accountability system, we have to make sure that we have the resources to ensure we are implementing the principles of Senate Bill 1 as we envisioned.

And while we don't want to delay the implementation of Senate Bill 1 as a whole, we think that for the state to take advantage of the work of the Council of Chief State School Officers and the common core standards group, that the deadline for adopting those standards in subject areas not yet completed be adjusted to be in line with the National Common Core Standards Initiative. ☞

*“If laws are stifling innovation at the district level, then let local schools get out from under those laws – with permission – to see if we can really get some innovation that will work for Kentucky students.”*

# Anonymous online critics: Ignore or respond, but best to prove 'em wrong

**L**et me get this out of the way first. No, I don't believe that everyone who goes online and anonymously criticizes a teacher, coach, superintendent, board member or any other person is a coward.

Some folks don't understand that they don't have to create online names that hide their identities.

Others may sincerely feel they need the mask of anonymity to protect their jobs while ensuring they can offer their opinions online.

But all the others – yep, they are nothing less than cowards. They purposely hide who they are with made-up online tags. From there, they post whatever they want to post – factually accurate, informed opinion or totally fabricated lies – like some sort of Wizard of Oz man-behind-the-curtain. Except these writers are not benevolent online orators of wisdom. They crawl out, spew their venom, even feed on each other over what they've posted. In short, they're cowards.

Wow, Hughes, don't candy coat it. Tell us what you really think. Well, since a local school board member did pose that question, I think several things.

First, these folks have every right to their opinions, right, wrong or honestly confused. Second, they are availing themselves of Web-based options created by social media or news media. Third, all too many of the creators of these "online talk shows" pay little attention to what's being posted.

Finally, I think that the options for school leaders are the same as they would use in dealing with any critics. Ignore them. Respond and meet them head-on. Or take the approach that involves more effort but offers a better payback in the long run – maintain an organized effort to tell your story so effectively that the public at large views closeted commentators with a wary eye.

## Unsocial media

If the critics are using a private Facebook or MySpace page or other Web-based site, just stop looking at it. For the most part, these places will have a limited number of regular viewers. And don't waste your time trying to refute statements on these sites: That only gives them the credibility they desire.

If your district has a social media page and critics use it, post clear rules that welcome commentary, even criticism, as long as it doesn't get personal. Warn any posters on a first violation. And as for those who persist in failure to follow the guidelines, you can block them from the privilege of posting to the page.



Brad Hughes  
KSBA Member  
Support Services Director

## Press pages

A growing number of TV and radio station websites are giving online readers the option to post immediate reaction to the texts of their news stories, and with limited censorship. This is a financial step, pure and simple. The reader posts add up to page views, which are used to attract online advertising dollars. Fine.

But newspapers that would never print a letter to the editor without a name, or broadcast media that wouldn't air an accuser's attacks without fact

checking do the opposite by allowing these anonymous criticisms, and rarely see the ethical inconsistency. One Kentucky newspaper publisher did become so concerned about the tenor of the attacks that he ended his paper's Web-posting option.

For the rest of these sites, you have the same basic choice: ignore or respond. If the criticisms are unfair, refute them with facts. But understand that this approach frequently just pours gasoline on the flames and spurs the critics to fire off another assault.

## Tell your story

The best solution to unwarranted criticism is to maintain an open image and an active program of information from the schools to the public. Sure, having a cable TV program, a printed or electronic newsletter or even a Facebook page may itself spur disapproval by some citizens. But it's far better to take heat for telling the facts, the challenges and the success stories than to get flak for giving an open invitation to the world's cheap-shot artists.

By creating avenues for regular communications with the community, school leaders have options not limited to the news media or someone else's online presence as a means to put the truth before the public.

## The Last Word

Of course, when you run for school board or sign a contract as superintendent, you've opened the door for the critics. Can anyone name a leader whose every decision is met with universal praise? Second guessing goes with the territory. So does making the wrong call. It's called real life.

The Internet has evolved with a new collection of outlets for discussion and discord. School leaders have a choice: ignore, respond, or make it your goal to tell your district's stories, warts and all, and by doing so, demonstrate your one unassailable goal: quality learning opportunities for your students.

And that's a message worth getting out. ☚



**Don't look here  
for next  
month's  
issue ...**

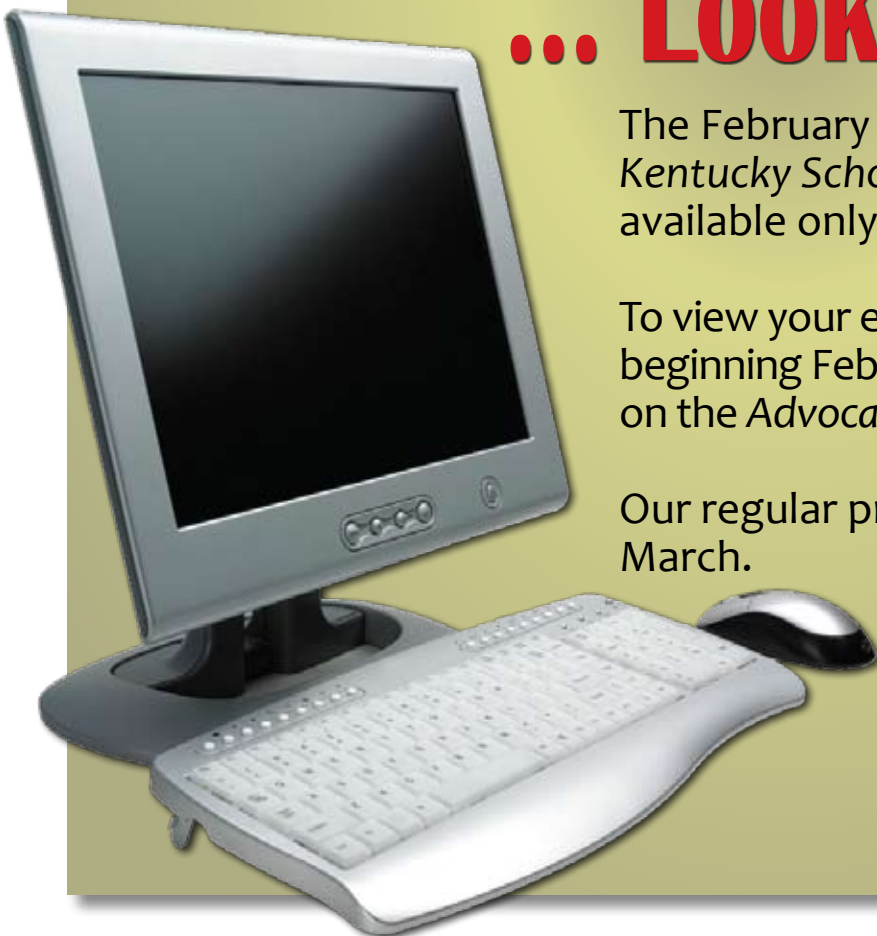


**... Look here**

The February edition of the *Kentucky School Advocate* will be available only online next month.

To view your edition of the *Advocate* beginning Feb.1, go to [www.ksba.org](http://www.ksba.org) and click on the *Advocate* cover on the home page.

Our regular print edition will return in March.



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## Winter learning and fun



Last month's KSBA Winter Symposium offered nearly 250 board members and superintendents opportunities to pick up new skills and information at a leisurely pace over the course of a day-and-a-half in Louisville.

Above: Education Commissioner Terry Holliday met with the KSBA Board of Directors during the conference to discuss issues ranging from Senate Bill 1 and the new accountability system to the upcoming legislative session. Pictured listening are KSBA President Delmar Mahan of Whitley County, director Durward Narramore of Jenkins Independent and director Bill White of Pulaski County.

Above right: Elliott County board member Jack McDaniel and daughter Maleigh test their basketball skills on a Pop-A-Shot machine during a tailgating party for symposium attendees and their families. The event was sponsored by KSBIT.

Right: New Grayson County school board member Charlotte Gower, appointed in October to fill a vacancy, attends her first KSBA training session alongside board chairwoman Carolyn Thomason. The session included the use of electronic "clickers."

