

KENTUCKY SCHOOL ADVOCATE

A publication of the Kentucky School Boards Association ■ February 2009

POINTING THE WAY FOR PRESCHOOLS

Downturn impacting local tax revenues?

Boyle anti-bullying team

Painting picture of new commissioner

Help us put KIDS First in Frankfort

Advocacy Conference and Lobbying Day
February 18-19



Photo from the LRC

Though the 2009 General Assembly is meeting in one of its “short sessions,” it will be long on implications for public schools. With that in mind, KSBA and its advocacy arm, KIDS First, will host an Advocacy Conference and Lobbying Day Wednesday and Thursday, Feb. 18-19.

The challenge to Kentucky: A big state budget shortfall, proposed CATS changes and other critical education issues.

The challenge to every local school board team: send your superintendent and at least one board member to Frankfort Feb. 18-19.

Wednesday will feature an evening legislative reception at the Capital Plaza Hotel, where school board members and superintendents can mingle informally with lawmakers.

Thursday will start with a how-to session in lobbying, a Senate Education Committee meeting and visits with legislators. Join us for an afternoon rally for public education at the Capitol Rotunda and stay to watch as the House and Senate convene.

Training credit is available for board members. Registration and cost information has been mailed or can be obtained by calling 1-800-372-2962 or by visiting www.ksba.org.

FEATURES

Revenue trickles

As if worrying about state funding cuts isn't enough, some school districts are eyeing signs that the national economic downturn is beginning to have an effect on local sources of revenue ... Page 8

Bully and bullee

Boyle County Schools uses every weapon in its arsenal to fight bullying in its schools, using multiple programs and an intensive team approach to helping not only the victim but the bully ... Page 10

Preschool pros

Calloway County Schools' preschool center is one of just a handful of programs to be designated a Kentucky Early Childhood Center of Quality. A visit to the center, which may have been the first school building in the state to be designed as a preschool, reveals why ... Page 12

Number five

The state board of education is again looking for an education commissioner, the fifth person to hold the office. The leaders of six statewide education groups sound off on what the board should be looking for at this juncture in the road to proficiency ... Page 16

Wii, Wii, Wii, Wii all the way to school

A new generation of video games has been gaining more mainstream acceptance in recent years as a way to increase physical activity levels, but a Breathitt County middle school principal has taken it one step further, as a way to get students to school ... Page 18



Empty buildings, empty wallets, Page 8



Hole in one for attendance, Page 18

Editor's Note: Next month's issue of the *Kentucky School Advocate* will be arriving a week earlier than usual to provide timely coverage of KSBA's annual conference.

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On the cover



Calloway County Preschool/Head Start Center teacher Teresa Gore encourages Courtney Hutchinson in a lesson at the interactive whiteboard. All classrooms in the center are equipped with the whiteboards and projectors, and teachers mostly use free Web sites with age-appropriate lessons like this one showing "C" for cat. Notoriously wiggly at this age, Courtney and her classmates were remarkably engaged and focused during the activity. See article on page 12.

TAKE NOTE

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Improving the superintendent's grade card

The Ohio County Board of Education is the first board to pilot KSBA's new superintendent evaluation process. The board volunteered to be trained in the new system, which has been endorsed by the state Board of Education.

The program was developed after several member districts expressed the need for a more comprehensive evaluation tool and more extensive training on its use. The training teaches boards how to set measurable goals and track their superintendent's performance throughout the year.

The Marion County board also is in line to receive the training and other districts are exploring the possibility.

The new program begins with a two- to two-and-a-half hour training session for the entire board, with follow up as needed throughout the evaluation process. In addition to the specialized training, participants receive a workbook with the evaluation instrument and a notebook of templates.

The new offering is an option for boards, but does not replace any effective superintendent evaluation plans they want to continue using. More information can be found under "superintendent search" within the services tab at www.ksba.org.

KTLC casualty

One of the largest professional development events for Kentucky educators has fallen to the budget-cutting ax. Citing "economic constraints," Education Commissioner Jon Draud canceled the 2009 Kentucky Teaching and Learning Conference, which had been scheduled for March in Louisville.

The education department will be reviewing the mission of the conference before making a decision about its future. Superintendents, principals and teachers are asked to share their ideas

about KTLC with coordinator Thelma Whiteside at thelma.whiteside@education.ky.gov.

Getting on board

The following people have been appointed by Education Commissioner Jon Draud to fill local board vacancies: Cheri Dillon and Kelly Adkins, Greenup County; Jeffrey Parker, McCreary County; Tim Cherry, Breckinridge County; Ruthanne Williamson, Lyon County; Karen Tilford, Ballard County; Suzanne Broadwater, Hardin County; and Michael Ishmael and John Hyatt, Fleming County.

Back in the U.S.

KSBA senior policy consultant Steve Wilson was back on the job Jan. 16 after a 10-month stint with his U.S. Naval Reserve unit. Wilson was stationed at Al Asad Airfield in northern Iraq, the second-largest airbase in that country. This was his second deployment – he spent nine months with his unit in 2005, much of it in Iraq.

Not lost in translation

The Kentucky education department's world language and international education consultant has been named National Foreign Language State Supervisor of the Year. Dr. Jacqueline Van Houten received the award from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Convention and World Languages. The award recognizes outstanding supervisory leadership in foreign languages at the state level. Van Houten has been instrumental in establishing Memoranda of Understanding with the governments of France, Spain and China to bring teachers to Kentucky and develop school partnerships. She also helped develop a national self-assessment, reflective learning tool for language and intercultural competencies. ☞

Long-timers

Five KSBA employees were recognized for their service during a staff holiday luncheon in December. From left, they are: Kathy Amburgey, human resources, 25 years; Steve Kirby, legal services, 25 years; Janet Jeanes, policy and procedures, five years; Jeremy Baird, risk management, five years; and Marti Goodlett, board team development, 15 years. Each employee honored received a gift basket.



Hope is not a plan

With the 2009 session of the Kentucky General Assembly under way and the inauguration of a new U.S. president, there seems to be a growing sense of cautious optimism among education groups – a silver lining in an otherwise bleak economic forecast.

At the federal level, the good news is that President Obama promised during his campaign significant increases in the federal government's investment in public education, including \$18 billion in new money for K-12 education, increased funding for special education and a \$10 billion investment in prekindergarten. The bad news is that most of these commitments were made before the economy went into a tailspin.

In a pre-inauguration outline of his American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan, Obama proposed funds for energy-efficient school repairs and new technology for schools. Even before the plan was announced, the Kentucky Department of Education was asked to share the Commonwealth's "shovel ready" school facility plans with the new administration. Of course, all of this must be tempered by the political unknowns of the 111th Congress.

The situation at the state level also elicits a mixture of pessimism and hopefulness. In late 2008, economic experts predicted a \$456 million shortfall in FY 09 revenue. In response to this gloomy forecast Gov. Beshear asked all state agencies, including KDE and local school districts, to calculate the implications of a 4 percent budget reduction – and quickly learned how devastating such a cut would be for P-12 education.

He responded by proposing a plan that would exempt SEEK from any cuts and assign a 2 percent reduction to other education funds. Of course, the catch is that this kinder, gentler budget cut is predicated on increasing state revenue through a series of actions that include a 70-cent per pack increase in the cigarette tax.

Since the governor's announcement I've been struck by the sense of relief expressed by many state and local education leaders. Based on their comments, some think the proposal's approval is a foregone conclusion. It's a leap of faith to think that the legislature will surely approve a tax increase that only a year ago they found unacceptable at a much lower level.

The sober reality is that education leaders and



Bill Scott
KSBA Executive Director

their organizations are naive if we assume that something or someone else is going to turn our wishful thinking for new revenue into a reality. Passage of the governor's budget plan will require local board members, superintendents, and other education leaders to become more involved than ever in the political arena.

The best way to make this happen is through the establishment of a statewide grassroots network of well-informed board members and superintendents who are engaged in

an ongoing dialogue with their local media and legislators on the needs of their local schools. Whether our legislators are at the Capitol or at home, we've got to seize every opportunity to help them understand the relationship between adequate funding and higher levels of student achievement. You'll soon have an opportunity to become an integral member of this critical coalition.

KSBA Advocacy Conference offers opportunity to influence law makers

On Wednesday, Feb. 18 at 5 p.m. KSBA will host a reception for legislators, local board members and superintendents at the Capital Plaza Hotel in Frankfort. In a relaxed and friendly environment you'll have an opportunity to chat with lawmakers representing your community as well as hear from legislative leadership of both chambers. The next morning, after enjoying breakfast at the Capitol Annex with your fellow school leaders, you'll get an update on the most pressing legislative issues from KSBA's Governmental Relations staff, as well as training on how to effectively communicate with legislators.

Following the training session, board members will participate in meetings with their own legislators – scheduled in advance by KSBA staff. At 1 p.m. we will conclude our meeting with a gathering in the Capitol Rotunda, where we will again hear from education and legislative leaders. You should have already received a registration packet, but please contact David Baird or Shannon Pratt at KSBA if you have further questions about this event.

We hope this will help us establish the foundation of the statewide grassroots network I mentioned earlier. My hope is that 2009 is the year that Kentucky's education leaders abandon the expectation that someone else is going to come to our rescue and decide to turn wishful thinking into the superior education system our children deserve. ☞

Quotes on education from Kentucky and elsewhere



Photo provided by Ft. Thomas Independent Schools

“Language education at a young age is something that helps students in other subjects, and it’s easier to pick up on other languages at a younger age. In order to be competitive in the job market today, students need to know other languages.” Ben Lusk, director of curriculum for Fort Thomas Independent Schools’ elementary classroom use of a video-based program that teaches the basics of Spanish while tying in areas such as mathematics and language arts. From the Fort Mitchell *Community Press & Recorder*.

and still maintain a healthy, comfortable learning environment for our kids (is good).” Harlan Independent Board Chairman Joe Meadors on similar energy conservation efforts, including lowered classroom thermostats, to cut costs in his district. From the *Harlan Daily Enterprise*.

“However they vote, the Hardin County school board members will not be courting popularity. They will cast their votes either to raise taxes on every property owner in the district or to deny county schools the renovations and repairs they need, the facilities they need to accommodate an influx of new students, the technical center needed to provide the skills for the jobs of local business and industry, and additional state financial aid based on local effort. In a democracy, officials owe the public not their votes, but their best thinking that leads to informed, conscientious and forward-looking decisions.” Portion of an editorial supporting the Hardin County board’s ultimate decision to pass a nickel facilities tax. From the *Elizabethtown News-Enterprise*.

“The old approach was to give you four days during the summer and then you figure out how to apply it later. Now, the approach is ongoing and job-embedded.” Oldham County Assistant Superintendent Anita Davis on a proposal to build early release days for students, to be used for staff professional development, into next year’s calendar. From the *Louisville Courier-Journal*.

efficiency program. From the *Danville Advocate-Messenger*.

“I think the IRS is shooting a gnat with a cannon.” Michael Reynolds, an attorney representing the Bryan Station High School (Fayette County) baseball boosters club, on a \$61,000 penalty faced by the group following a federal tax audit covering a long-standing practice of giving monetary credits to parents for fundraising. From the *Lexington Herald-Leader*.

“Whatever the cost would be, it would not outweigh the benefit.” Ronnie Dunn, coordinator of an Optimist Club student mentoring program in the Frankfort Independent and Franklin County Schools, on Rep. Carl Rollins II (D-Woodford)’s bill to permit state employees up to 40 hours a year mentoring students in public schools. From the Fort Mitchell nky.com.

“When they come by the school and they see lights on in the middle of the night and windows left open, they don’t understand that. It doesn’t happen very often, but when you do, I guarantee it that someone calls your hand on it. Maybe some districts would laugh at \$5,000 or \$6,000 in savings for a year. But \$5,000 or \$6,000 is a lot of money to us. So whatever we can do to save

“Under the current plan, next year it’s going to cost the Henderson County school district an additional \$385,045 for the retirement system. Under (Beshear’s) 10-year phase-in plan, our increase next year would be \$264,656. So it would save our district \$120,389. We’d save even more money in the second year out. It’s probably four or five years to where it costs us more.” Henderson County Schools’

“Right now, we are just in the awareness stage, and I thought the break was a good time to get principals and central office staff to start doing some of the little things. You want to make sure computers and lights are turned off, but also things like removing unnecessary refrigerators and other electronics. These are things we’ve never looked at, but we will need to now. They will benefit us so much in the long run.” Lincoln County Superintendent Larry Woods on the district’s use of the holiday break to begin implementation of an energy-

“Kids don’t hold back, and they don’t know to filter what they say. Their comments end up being very refreshing, insightful and great entertainment.” *ESPN The Magazine* editor Neil Janowitz on a video team’s visit to Heritage Elementary in Shelby County to interview students about the University of Kentucky/University of Louisville basketball rivalry. From the *Shelbyville Sentinel-News*.



Photo provided by Shelby County Schools

Finance Director Walt Spencer on Gov. Steve Beshear's proposal to give school systems, cities and counties 10 years instead of five years to correct unfunded liabilities in government workers' pension plans. From the *Henderson Gleaner*.

“If kids start smoking in their teen years, then almost 75 percent are hooked on tobacco. Anything we can do to keep our students from picking up on the habit is a step in the right direction. I would anticipate that we will have fewer kids who get hooked on smoking. It is possible that even our workforce will miss fewer days.” LaRue County Superintendent Sam Sanders on the district's two-year old policy prohibiting use of tobacco products anywhere on school property, in district vehicles or while on school-related trips. From the Hodgenville LaRue County *Herald-News*.

“It was a lot of hard work over the years instead of trying to cram before the test.” Rowan County High School senior Leavitt Morrison on his long view about preparing to take the ACT test, on which he scored a perfect 36 after attaining a mark of 34 last year. From the Ashland *Daily Independent*.

“(Frankfort) is forcing districts to make up what the state doesn't provide on the local level, forcing you to increase taxes just to survive.” Jenkins Independent Chairman Durward Narramore on the local tax impact when state funding for schools fails to address rising costs. From the Whitesburg *Mountain Eagle*.

“We saw this program at a Growing Healthy Kids meeting. It is like an oversized Wii, and we thought, ‘Wouldn't that be a nice thing to have for our students?’ The video production can be viewed by students on an oversized screen, where every student participates simultaneously. We learned how successfully it

has been implemented in schools in North Carolina and what a positive impact it has emphasizing the importance of a healthy lifestyle.” Bell Elementary (Wayne County) physical education teacher Janet Munsey on a multimedia video program funded through a grant for use in the school's physical education classes. From the Monticello *Wayne County Outlook*.

“One day we sat in here and Mr. Webb said, ‘Well let's go, we've got to go do something.’ And we went out and we cleaned the buses. And I said, ‘This is not what a superintendent does.’ He said, ‘Well in a district like this, the superintendent has to clean the buses.’” Donald Smith, a 2009 participant in the Kentucky Minority Superintendent Internship Program, on the not-so-routine duties he's done working with Burgin Independent Superintendent Dick Webb. From the Kentucky Department of Education publication, *Kentucky Teacher*.

“I can't stomach the idea of a big boy, who this is going to be the only meal of the day, just getting a sandwich and a drink and then going home to nothing. There is real poverty here in this community, and I can't go along with this.” Lincoln County board member Eddie Whittemore in voting against an alternative meals proposal as part of the district's efforts to reduce \$60,000 to \$80,000 in unpaid student cafeteria charges. From the Danville *Advocate-Messenger*.

“An institution that will be all things for all people will fail. Public schools started to teach basic skills and transmit white, Protestant American culture. Then we wanted them to be work force development. In the last 20 years, the school has become a hospital. The nurse's office has become an emergency room and we haven't added one day to the school calendar in seven decades.” Iowa attorney and business owner (and former KSBA conference speaker) Jamie Vollmer during a communitywide education summit designed to increase involvement in the Christian County Schools. From the Hopkinsville *Kentucky New Era*.

Kentucky's new age of sexual consent law

POINT ...

“He was not around to force her or coerce her or use any sort of authority to get her to leave school.” Defense attorney Andrew Coiner in challenging whether Kentucky's new law raising the age of consent for sex from 16 to 18 applies to his client, a former McCracken County high school teacher accused of an off-campus sexual abuse incident involving a student he did not teach.

COUNTERPOINT...

“I would have to believe every teacher at that school has some kind of authority over every student at that school.” Assistant McCracken County Commonwealth's Attorney Raymond McGee in support of application of the statute.

From the *Paducah Sun*.

Districts keeping wary eye on local tax revenues

By Madelynn Coldiron
Staff Writer

The national recession is advancing into the backyards of Kentucky school districts, eating away at local revenue in tandem with more-publicized state funding cuts.

The local revenue sources include levies on real and personal property, occupational taxes and the utility gross receipts tax.

The first on that list brings in the most money, but Kentucky is more fortunate than many states in that real property values have not gone into freefall. “Kentucky wasn’t in the boom, so they’re not in the bust,” said University of Louisville economics professor Paul Coomes.

David Gordon, executive director of the state Revenue Cabinet’s Office of Property Valuation, said while houses are staying on the market longer, “We’re finding that property values have not yet dropped below the current assessments as far as sales prices.” He wasn’t sure if that would change.

Coomes said districts will probably be fine this year because assessments were done last winter. “There might be some worries the following year,” he said, “because we’re starting to see some softness in housing prices in Kentucky, which means the assessments won’t necessarily go up the old 4 percent like they have been.”

Montgomery County Schools Superintendent Dr. Daniel Freeman said he’s been told property values have not changed much in his county, “but you would think it would have to flatten out a bit.

“It seems logical that you’re not going to continue to make this growth in assessments. I don’t see how you can go out and reassess houses and tell them they went up 10 percent in value when you are slow selling them,” he said.

Anderson County Schools, a growth district, is seeing the impact of the housing slowdown. Until last year, the school system had been expanding steadily at

a rate of 65-70 students per year.

“Last school year it was zero. We completely flat-lined. This school year we grew by 20,” Superintendent Kim Shaw said.

His counterpart in Boone County, Randy Poe, said his district is still growing, but is concerned about a slowdown. Poe had served on the county’s planning and zoning board before becoming superintendent in 2007.

“Two or three years ago we used to have a meeting every week. Now they’re down to meeting monthly,” he said.

Coomes warned that school boards that are used to being able to lower their property tax rate because of the growth in assessments and tax base may be faced with the public relations dilemma of raising the rate to maintain local revenues or increase them to the 4 percent cap allowed without the threat of voter recall.

As if that weren’t enough, local property valuation administrators have voiced concern that state cut-backs will hinder their ability to reassess and add new property to the tax rolls, said Gordon, who added his office also is concerned. “But right now, we believe they’ll be able to continue on and file their assessment work timely so that property taxes can continue to be collected on a timely basis,” he said.

Personal and utility taxes

While the amount districts collect from the personal property tax is dwarfed by real property and state revenues, it also may be impacted. A new vehicle nets more in personal property taxes than existing models that have depreciated in value every year. Bill May, executive director of the Kentucky County Clerk’s Association, said the consensus at a recent gathering of 70-some county clerks and their deputies is that “most of them have seen a huge drop-off in their customer base in vehicle transactions.” Counties that have new car dealerships in particular could see a significant drop, he said.

To make matters worse, the value of used vehicles also is expected to be diminished with a new standard

set by the National Automobile Dealers Association. The association, which sets values on used vehicles, has added a new category of used-car valuation that is expected to negatively impact tax receipts.

Most school districts levy a 3 percent utility gross receipts tax. The closing of manufacturing plants, traditionally big energy users, would impact the utility tax received by the school districts in those locations, said Valeria Cummings Swope, communications director for the state Revenue Cabinet, which collects those taxes and redistributes the receipts to school districts.

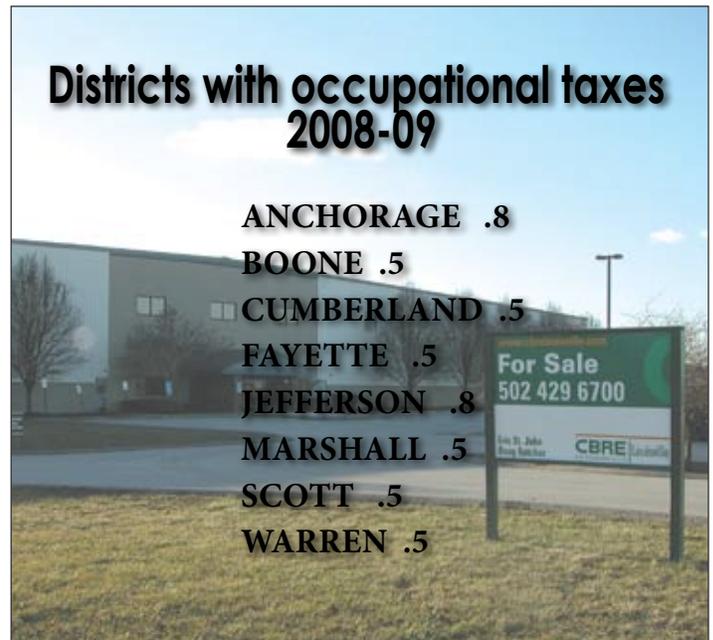
“However, it’s hard to say how each school district will be impacted as it depends on the residential and commercial utility usage in each school district,” Swope said.

Occupational taxes

The situation is different for the eight Kentucky school districts that levy an occupational tax (see chart). “They should be seeing problems starting now because we’re starting to see problems in the occupational taxes in local government, and it’s the same tax base,” Coomes, the economist, said.

Jefferson County Schools officials blamed the district’s recent budget cut on both reduced state funds and a shortfall in occupational tax revenues. Scott County Schools’ finance director recently warned the school board of tough times ahead. Scott County-based Toyota Motor Manufacturing announced layoffs in its temporary workforce and the county’s unemployment rate rose to 5.7 percent in November, 1.8 percent higher than a year ago.

Jill Morris, finance officer for Marshall County Schools, which has a .5 percent occupational tax, said November 2008 collections were comparable to the same period the prior year,



but she’s heard talk of the potential for layoffs in the community.

“It could be a different story in a couple of months,” she said.

Likewise, Fayette County had not seen a significant change in its occupational tax receipts as recently as December, “but we’re also fortunate enough to not be in an area where we have had the kind of unemployment that some other areas have,” said Chief Operating Officer Mary Browning Wright. “That doesn’t mean we won’t see it in the upcoming six months.” ❧

Living with uncertainty

By Madelynn Coldiron
Staff Writer

Superintendents and school finance directors are extending their economic antennae, watching revenue streams, looking at their district’s historical trends and being hyperaware of local market conditions. Given the national economic uncertainty, that’s about all they can do.

“How clear is your crystal ball?” asked Mary Browning Wright, chief operating officer for Fayette County Schools. “It’s too hard to tell right now because there’s so much going on out there that we certainly don’t feel we’re insulated from what’s happening in the global economy. We just have to be very much aware of what’s happening in our business community.”

Wright said the district is keeping its eye on trend data for all its funding sources and changes in current eco-

nomic conditions that might impact the system. This information is then taken into account as the 2009-10 budget is being built.

The Montgomery County school district routinely tracks historical trends and budgets for average growth, said Superintendent Dr. Daniel Freeman.

“But we’re going to cut that back a little bit next year; we just don’t know how much. If we usually grow 3 or 4 percent then we’re going to cut it down probably half of that to be a little cautious in the budget,” he said. “But we don’t really have good data to support that. It’s kind of a lick your finger and hold it up in the wind estimate.”

Boone County Superintendent Randy Poe said the district is being extra vigilant this year to monitor the district’s revenue streams, trying to spot any trends.

“We always monitor our cash flow on a monthly basis with our board, but

there is more of a concern this year, given the economy, on making sure that you carefully monitor your incoming revenue,” he said.

Wright said the district cultivates good relationships with the local chamber of commerce and generally stays abreast of what’s going on in Fayette County’s business community. And the head of the district’s planning committee also is president of the local home builders’ association.

“We have folks who fortunately will let us know, will flag for us if there’s something unusual that’s coming down,” Wright said.

Poe said there is a downside to all this vigilance for superintendents: more time is being spent on monitoring the budget and less on instruction.

“As superintendent, you would be spending more time on the instructional core if the budget wasn’t consuming at this time more of your time,” he said. ❧

Team tackles bullying from all angles

By Mary Branham

The sixth-grade boy was a target of constant bullying.

At times, his reaction to the bully made it look like he was a bully himself. That's when Pam Tamme stepped in. Tamme, district counselor for Boyle County Schools, met with the middle schooler to talk with him about handling the bully.

She told him: "You can only control your behavior. You cannot control another person's behavior." And I said I was going to give him tools that would help make choices in how you respond."

The boy wasn't buying it. He argued with Tamme and was convinced her suggestions wouldn't work.

But the next year, the boy was not on Tamme's radar. So she called him into her office.

"He said 'Well, I didn't like what you said to me, but I decided to try it anyway and it worked,'" Tamme recalled.

That success came through the "Bullies to Buddies" curriculum Boyle County schools use in one-on-one counseling sessions with students who are targets of bullies or the bullies themselves.

"There are students from time to time who need bullyingproofing direct instruction one-on-one," Tamme said.

That instruction, she said, gives bully targets the tools to cope. It includes 10 lessons taught online in consultation with Tamme, who said the first three lessons are the most intense. She said more than anything else, the lessons help students learn why they're being targeted repeatedly. Then, they have to decide that what the bully is saying doesn't really matter.

"Instead of being a sponge, and letting the words soak into you, you've become more like a duck and let the bullying roll off of you," she said. "They have to decide, 'I don't like that person. That person is not of value to me.'"

The third lesson, she said, is to understand the bullying will get worse before it gets better.

The efforts pay off. In his eighth-grade year, the



Boyle County Schools Superintendent Steve Burkich, seated, said the team of district counselor Pam Tamme, left, operations director Mike Pittman, and LuAnne Littlefield, district behavior consultant has helped to improve the culture of each school in the district through various programs to help deal with things such as bullying.

student who doubted Tamme's suggestions talked with another student in a similar position. "He was able to say to that child – and it was so much more effective than me saying it – 'Now, you're not going to believe it when you hear what we're going to tell you ...'" Tamme said. "There's no better person to market that than somebody who's been through it."

Bullies to Buddies is just one component of a curriculum the Boyle County district is using to improve school culture, according to LuAnne Littlefield, district behavior consultant.

"Our focus is what they (students) need and we put our money where our mouth is," Littlefield said.

That's evident in the positions Tamme and Littlefield hold; not many school districts have a district counselor and district behavior consultant. The pair has worked hard with school counselors to improve the culture of classrooms.

In addition to the individualized counseling, Tamme works with the Change of Heart Club at Boyle County High School. Club members are invited to train as a bully prevention buddy. After they learn the characteristics of a bully and a persistent target, the students visit fifth-grade

“Instead of being a sponge, and letting the words soak into you, you’ve become more like a duck and let the bullying roll off of you. They have to decide, ‘I don’t like that person. That person is not of value to me.’”

— Pam Tamme, district counselor for Boyle County Schools, describes a method used in the “Bullies to Buddies” program

classrooms at the county’s three elementary schools. The elementary schools also use the “Bullyproofing Your School” curriculum, and the middle and high schools have presented lessons on cyberbullying.

Addressing the bullying problem is important for the long-term success of students, the Boyle County administrators believe. Tamme said studies show that 60 percent of second-graders who are identified as a bully are arrested for a felony by the time they are 24.

“You want to look at why they’re bullying. Their behavior is telling you something,” Littlefield said. “You have to figure out what that behavior is telling you.”

There are added expenses to targeting the problem, but Superintendent Steve Burkich said the investment is worth it.

“That is impacting the climate and is paying dividends in establishing the type of culture we all want to live in,” he said.

Alene Mills, vice chairman of the Boyle County Board of Education, couldn’t agree more.

“We really feel like these are lifelong learning opportuni-

ties. It was worth putting money into the positions and in the programs to help our kids be in a position where, if they need help learning those (communication and relationship) skills, that somebody is there to help them do that,” she said.

The results of the efforts—now in the fifth year—are starting to show. Office referrals and suspensions are down, and the dropout rate has been reduced, Littlefield said.

She pointed out that in many districts struggling with test scores, “their climate and culture is very poor. That’s one of the first things they have to work on.”

Burkich and Mills said the benefits go beyond school and into the realm of “soft skills” that employers look for in the workplace.

“When you look at the statistics around employability skills, on both ends of the spectrum, whether looking at the bully or kid being bullied, if you carry that in the work world, you’ve got problems,” Mills said. ☞

— Branham is a contributing writer who lives in Frankfort.

Web site of the month



If information is a commodity, then Owensboro High School’s Web site is wealthy.

Want to know who might be teaching your child science? Just click on the staff tab at the top and e-mail addresses and phone numbers for each staff

member pop up along with photos of most.

Concerned that your junior may not be adequately preparing for the next step after high school? Click on the “Guidance” tab and you will not only learn which guidance counselor works with which grades, but the page also contains check lists for sophomores and juniors as well as notes for seniors.

Among its many features, the site also hosts an alumni database that allows someone to enter his or her personal information or to search for fellow graduates.

To view the site, go to www.owensboro.kyschools.us/ohs/.



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Preschool Pros



Preschool center a full partner in Calloway County Schools

By Madelynn Coldiron
Staff Writer

This Calloway County school's classrooms are all equipped with interactive whiteboards.

School board members meet in the building and tour it once a year.

A parent meeting there typically draws crowds of up to 400-500 people.

It provides wraparound child care.

There is a family resource center, social worker and speech pathologist on site.

This school is a preschool.

The Calloway County Preschool/Head Start Center has a surprising number of features that might be found in a big, well-funded elementary school and some aspects that might make it the envy of any school.

The freestanding building opened in 1994, constructed specifically for use as a preschool center. It consolidated the preschool classes from the district's three elementary schools.

The operation illustrates the district's commitment to early childhood education.

"Instead of just being the preschool program, we're a legitimate part of the school district. We're a benefit to the school district and I think we're viewed that way," said Jason Scarbrough, building administrator and the district's child care director. "We have a school improvement plan, we have quality professional development that's relevant to what we're doing. We truly do everything the other schools do."

The program blends district preschool with Head Start – staff positions funded from each source work side by side. While juggling the federal requirements with the state's preschool guidelines may seem daunting, Scarbrough said it's working seamlessly. "We're able to serve more children that way and it kind of makes the money go further," he said.

Like the majority of Kentucky preschools, the Calloway County center serves 3- and 4-year-olds with disabili-

Facing page: Youngsters line up for their turn at a ball-tossing game in the multi-purpose room at Calloway County Preschool/Head Start Center, which is outfitted with multiple physical activity centers on a padded floor. From right to left are Sophie Lax, Dylan Slayden, Raymond Wood, Kiera Stanley and Lincoln English.

Right: Students gather around teacher Patricia Waid while she reads them a story.

ties and 4-year-olds from families within 150 percent of the federal poverty level.

The center is one of four Kentucky Early Childhood Centers of Quality and is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

For several years the program was full-day but "underfunding caught up with us," Superintendent Steve Hoskins said, and the district went to split sessions instead. A fee-based wrap-around child care program for the center's students operates in the building year-round, even when school is not in session.

The district provides transportation for the preschool. It also earmarks some of its Title I funding to help bridge the gap for at-risk students who fall short of qualifying for extra services through other programs.

School board member Leeann Myers said she believes it's money well spent to get as many children into early childhood education as possible.

"We just head off future problems a whole lot quicker and

Calloway County Preschool/Head Start Center

- Two sessions of three-and-a-half hours
- Seven preschool classrooms
 - 61 3-year-olds
 - 127 4-year-olds
 - 67 special education students



Continued on next page

when they're a lot easier to manage, too," she said. "I saw the eagerness in those little guys and how much they want to learn and how quickly they learn."

The preschool has its own family resource center to help families with financial needs, provide parent training, do community outreach and generally remove barriers to learning. A Head Start-funded social worker helps at-risk and special education students and their families, while a full-time speech pathologist has a caseload that averages 50 students.

A part-time Title I parent liaison also has an office in the building. The school has a parent-teacher group, as required by Head Start. Scarbrough said meetings are held bimonthly with dinner and guest speakers to talk to families. "We'll have 400-500 parents here on a regular basis," he said.

Those sessions help remove the intimidation factor for parents, Hoskins said. "Then they don't feel bad about coming back on their own if they need something," he said.

The center also benefits from nearby resources, such as the region's early childhood training center and early childhood council.

The most recent innovation at the center focuses on technology. This fall all seven classrooms were equipped with interactive whiteboards and projectors, using state preschool funds. The Calloway County school board watched a demonstration of the technology when it held its December meeting at the

school.

"Those kids loved it and we loved it as board members watching the demonstration," Myers said.

Teachers mostly use free Web sites for the interactive learning. Debbie Plummer, the district's special education director and preschool coordinator, said the interactive whiteboards get preschoolers familiar with technology before they enter kindergarten.

"What we see happening in our world is, it's touch-screens and Web sites and those kind of interactive learning modalities," she said.

The district goes out of its way to ease the transition between preschool and kindergarten. Preschoolers and their parents get a chance to visit kindergartens and the district has produced a DVD showing a day in a kindergarten classroom. Preschool staff and faculty also go to the kindergarten classrooms during the first days of class so their former students have a familiar face to help them adjust.

Hoskins said the district is working to set up a system to analyze and track the performance of students once they leave preschool. Anecdotally, kindergarten teachers say they see a "tremendous difference" between the children who have been to preschool and those who haven't, he said. "They can tell those kids have had this background when they get there." ❧

Two new faces on KSBA Board of Directors

Advocate Staff Report

Two new members have been appointed to fill vacancies on the KSBA Board of Directors. Marshall Jenkins of the Morgan County school board will fill a regional chair vacancy created when Vearl Pennington of Bath County did not seek re-election as a school board member. Hancock County school board member Allen E. Kennedy will fill the unexpired term of at-large board member Jeanie Shaffter of Union County, who was not re-elected to her local board seat. The appointments were made by KSBA President Ed Massey. Jenkins will serve until fall regional elections are held in 2010, while Kennedy will serve until at-large elections are held at KSBA's 2010 annual conference.

Eastern Kentucky North Region

Marshall Jenkins, Elkfork

Board Service: Morgan County Board of Education since 2003; current chairman.



Education: Graduate, Morgan County High School; associate, bachelor's and master's degrees from Morehead State University.

Occupation: Radiology instructor, Bluegrass Community and Technical College.

Activities: Member and current chair, East Valley/West Liberty Family Resource Council; member, Morgan County Economic Development

Committee; KIDS First board member; past vice president East Valley Parent-Teacher Organization.

At-large

Allen E. Kennedy, Lewisport

Board service: Hancock County Board of Education since 2007.



Education: Graduate, Hancock County High School; Owensboro Community and Technical College, industrial electricity; certification in professional human resources, Western Kentucky University; training certification from the Kentucky Department for Workforce Development's New Teachers Institute; coursework in human resources from multiple universities.

Occupation: Human resources manager, Aleris Rolled Products.

Activities: Chairman, regional Workforce Investment Board; member, Green River Area Development District; co-chairman, Hancock County Repair Affair; vice president, Hancock County Gideons International; deacon, Blackford Baptist Church.

Honors: Commonwealth Industries Inc. 2003 Excellence Award; Commonwealth Aluminum 1988 Commitment to Excellence Award; Organization/Management Development 1981 All-Star Team; Indiana University Labor Study tour of England, Sweden and Germany. ❧

Minimizing damage from extreme cold

Q. How can we keep our buildings from damage during the frigid snaps we've experienced this winter?

A. If the weather reports are correct, this winter could end up being one of the coldest we have seen in several years. Sprinkler pipe breakage from water freeze-ups may cause major water damage to buildings, contents and equipment; business interruption due to clean up; and impaired automatic sprinkler system, leaving a major portion of your facility without fire protection. A fire during this situation may result in a major loss. The following are a few precautions that can head off costly repairs during cold weather:

- Building temperature should be maintained at 40 de-

grees or higher, and monitored.

- Key personnel should perform freeze-protection inspections and be trained in shutdown procedures.
- Each location should have a working contingency plan.
- Establish a snow removal plan.
- Service regularly all boilers, furnaces, heaters and flues.
- Post a 24-hour watch on buildings.
- No smoking policy should be strictly enforced; safeguard any flammable or combustible liquids.

For a copy of the complete Cold Weather Checklist recommended by KSBIT, contact one of our risk control and safety specialists at 800-372-2962.

— *KSBIT is KSBA's insurance and risk management service.* ☚

Kentucky superintendent vacancies

Morgan County Board of Education

(K-12) 2,115 www.morgan.kyschools.us

The Morgan County Board of Education is seeking an outstanding educational leader who is student centered with the ability to continue to move the district forward.

To lead this district of 2,115 students, a candidate needs to be motivational and possess integrity and a high level of fairness. The successful candidate should have administrative experience and be able to relate to all constituencies. A competitive and negotiable salary will be offered for a July 1, 2009 contract start.

To apply and receive further information, send seven copies of a letter of application, application form, resume and references to: Morgan County Superintendent Search, Kentucky School Boards Association, 260 Democrat Drive, Frankfort, KY 40601. Find application form at: www.ksba.org, and go to "Employment Opportunities." Applications will be accepted until the position is filled. Screening Committee's first meeting is **Feb. 25, 2009**.

Marion County Board of Education

(K-12) 3,225 www.marion.kyschools.us

The Marion County Schools seeks as its next superintendent an innovative and highly motivated candidate who is eager to take the district to the highest levels of achievement in all areas.

The successful candidate should demonstrate a distinguished level of skill in obtaining high-quality academic achievement for all students, in communicating internally with staff and externally to the public, and in planning and organizing. Along with strong leadership and excellent people skills, he/she will be expected to be visible throughout the school district and community. The salary will be competitive and negotiable. Candidates should have administra-

tive experience and must hold or be eligible for a Kentucky superintendent's certification to apply.

To apply and receive further information, send seven copies of a letter of application, application form, resume and references to: Marion County Superintendent Search, Kentucky School Boards Association, 260 Democrat Drive, Frankfort, KY 40601. Find application form at: www.ksba.org and go to "Employment Opportunities." **Application deadline is Feb. 23, 2009.**

Williamstown Independent Schools

(K-12) 887 www.williamstown.kyschools.us

The Williamstown Board of Education seeks as its next superintendent a qualified and highly motivated candidate who is eager to continue moving the district to even higher levels of achievement in all areas.

The successful candidate should be an experienced, visionary administrator with a proven record of being proactive with the ability to effectively communicate the district's vision. Community involvement and experience with budgeting and finances are also high priorities. Candidates must hold or be eligible for a Kentucky superintendent's certification to apply. The salary will be competitive and commensurate with experience.

To apply and receive further information, send seven collated copies of a letter of application, application form, resume and three letters of recommendation to: Williamstown Superintendent Search, Kentucky School Boards Association, 260 Democrat Drive, Frankfort, KY 40601. Find application form at: www.ksba.org and go to "Employment Opportunities." **Application deadline: Feb. 23, 2009.**

Upcoming Search for 2009:

Mercer County Schools

PICTURE THIS: Kentucky's next education commissioner

By Madelynn Coldiron
Staff Writer

The duties of Kentucky's education commissioner should be pretty straightforward, but what qualities should the state school board be looking for in a successor to Jon Draud?

The complexity of that question is exemplified by Kentucky Association of School Superintendents President Kelley Crain, who found it impossible to pin it down to a single most important qualification.

"There are really four that are key and that cannot stand alone," said Crain, superintendent of Fleming County Schools.

"The next commissioner must have experience with Kentucky's culture and KERA, be a strong advocate for adequate funding of Kentucky public education to ensure our educators have adequate resources to prepare our students to compete globally, know how to produce positive results and have a deep-rooted student-first philosophy," Crain said, in summing up her list.

Like Crain, other state education leaders cited familiarity with Kentucky's education system and its history as necessities. There's no time for a steep learning curve, said Gary Rye, president of the Kentucky Association of School Administrators and superintendent of Dayton Independent Schools. The next commissioner needs the working knowledge of Kentucky education "when they hit the door," he said.

But that historical perspective also needs to be coupled with a willingness to change, said Tom Shelton, president of the Council on Better Education and

Key school leaders paint a picture of what qualities they would like to see in the Commonwealth's next education chief



"... stands by decisions knowing it's not going to be popular but is what meets the needs for the majority."

— Gary Rye, president of the Kentucky Association of School Administrators



"... someone who would be very willing to seek input from school employees on issues and listens to their opinions and values their opinions."

— Sharon Oxendine, president of the Kentucky Education Association



"The next commissioner must have experience with Kentucky's culture and KERA ..."

— Kelly Crain, president of the Kentucky Association of School Superintendents



“We need someone who is willing to serve long term.”

— Tom Shelton, president of the Council on Better Education



“With the upcoming reauthorization of No Child Left Behind, Kentucky needs a credible voice in its next commissioner who can be an active player in the dialogue that occurs.”

— Amy Ramage, president of the Kentucky Association of School Councils



“... needs to be one that is out in the schools talking with not just staff, teachers and principals but to students and parents.”

— Rose Babiak, president of the Kentucky PTA

superintendent of Daviess County Schools.

“We need someone who understands where we’ve been with KERA, but who can look forward to the future,” he said, noting that the next commissioner will have to plan for what comes after the proficiency goal of 2014.

A thorough grasp of national education issues also is necessary in addition to Kentucky knowledge, pointed out Amy Ramage, president of the Kentucky Association of School Councils.

“Since all schools and districts are affected by state and national mandates, such knowledge is a necessity,” said Ramage, secondary instructional supervisor for Todd County Schools. “With the upcoming reauthorization of No Child Left Behind, Kentucky needs a credible voice in its next commissioner who can be an active player in the dialogue that occurs.”

Not surprisingly, the three superintendents cited the need for the next commissioner to be able to address school funding issues.

“I think at this point we have to have someone who has a good understanding of education funding issues and legal and legislative issues around that because we’ve continued to see a decline in education funding from the state,” Shelton said. “The governor has seen that and we need a commissioner who can help in that effort.”

There are important, less tangible qualities needed as well, such as being a people person, Rye said. He defines this as someone who is approachable and who “stands by decisions knowing it’s not going to be popular but is what meets the needs for the majority.”

Crain said the next commissioner should be committed to helping low-performing schools, “and to be able to inspire and build consensus among stakeholder groups.”

Because so much is at stake, agreed Ramage, it’s essential to hire a commissioner “who can inspire and

motivate schools and the general public to support what it takes to provide every child a quality education.”

Similarly, Sharon Oxendine, president of the Kentucky Education Association, thinks teachers “want someone who would be very willing to seek input from school employees on issues and listens to their opinions and values their opinions.”

When KERA came about, many teachers were involved in the reform process and felt they had a role representing those in the trenches, she noted. The next commissioner should be willing to involve school employees to that degree again, Oxendine said.

Rose Babiak, president of the Kentucky PTA, also wants Draud’s successor to stress involvement – with parents.

Parental involvement “is the missing piece of the proficiency puzzle,” she said, citing a 2007 report with that title by the Parents Advisory Council under former education commissioner Gene Wilhoit. The report contained a series of recommendations for involving families and community in improving student achievement.

“I also think the new commissioner needs to be one that is out in the schools talking with not just staff, teachers and principals but to students and parents,” Babiak said.

Draud, who stepped down for health reasons Jan 31, served just over a year in the job. With no reflection on Draud for his decision, Shelton said the state school board needs a commitment of at least seven to 10 years from the next commissioner.

“I personally believe you’ve got to have someone who doesn’t look at this as a sprint, but as a marathon. We need someone who is willing to serve long term,” he said.

The job is difficult, he acknowledged, “but any change in education takes a long term to take hold.” ☞

‘Wii’ too much fun

Breathitt school uses video games to improve attendance

By Jennifer Wohlleb
Staff Writer

Sebastian Middle School student Zach Combs is so excited to get to school in the mornings he usually arrives at least a half hour early – and he’s not alone.

Combs and a number of his fellow Breathitt County students are lining up early most school days for a chance to play on the school’s two Nintendo Wii video-gaming systems.

Principal Reggie Hamilton purchased them at the start of the school year as part of a districtwide initiative to reduce tardies and improve attendance, and so far the effort has been successful.

“During the first two months of the school year, we increased attendance 1.6 percent over last year,” he said. “It doesn’t sound like a lot, but when you’re talking about attendance, that’s a lot. Currently, we are switching from STI to Infinite Campus and could not retrieve tardy records



Top photo: Sebastian Middle School eighth-graders Courtney Lucas and Kara Costello play a bobsledding game on one of the school’s Nintendo Wii gaming systems. The school sets them up in the gym in the morning as a way to encourage attendance and to reduce tardiness.

Right: As eighth-grader Kendra Roberts and seventh-grader Chandler Baker match skills on the Wii, a number of students gather in the gym in the mornings to watch and socialize.



Photos provided by Sebastian Middle School

from last year, but our attendance clerk said there was no doubt in her mind that there had been a substantial decrease in the number of tardies we're having daily compared to this time last year."

Combs admitted that the video game is an important part of his day.

"It's one of the reasons I get up every morning," he said. "I wake up on Monday morning and say, 'Hey, I get to go play the Wii.'"

Fellow seventh-grader Chandler Baker is similarly motivated.

"I haven't been late to school at all since we got the Wiis," he said. "I haven't missed a day, either."

For the most part, students play games from the Wii's sports package. The baseball, bowling, golf, boxing and tennis games require students to imitate the movements as if they were playing actual games instead of video games. The school also owns a game that allows students to play Olympics sports.

Hamilton said the interactive value of the gaming system seems to be the draw for students.

"It's not just pushing a button," Hamilton said. "You have to get up, swing your arms."

Playing at school with their friends instead of at home alone is also a draw.

"It was kind of slow to catch on at first," Hamilton said.

"Some of the kids were reluctant to get up in front of others

with some of the games that have movement in them. Now, there doesn't seem to be any hesitation about getting up in front of their peers and letting loose and playing."

Eighth-grader Kendra Roberts likes having something to do at school in the mornings.

"I do come to school earlier because of it and I get to spend time with my friends," she said.

With the two machines, up to four students can play at a time. Each morning the games are set up as a tournament so as many as 15-20 students get to play. And spectating is now part of the morning routine, as well.

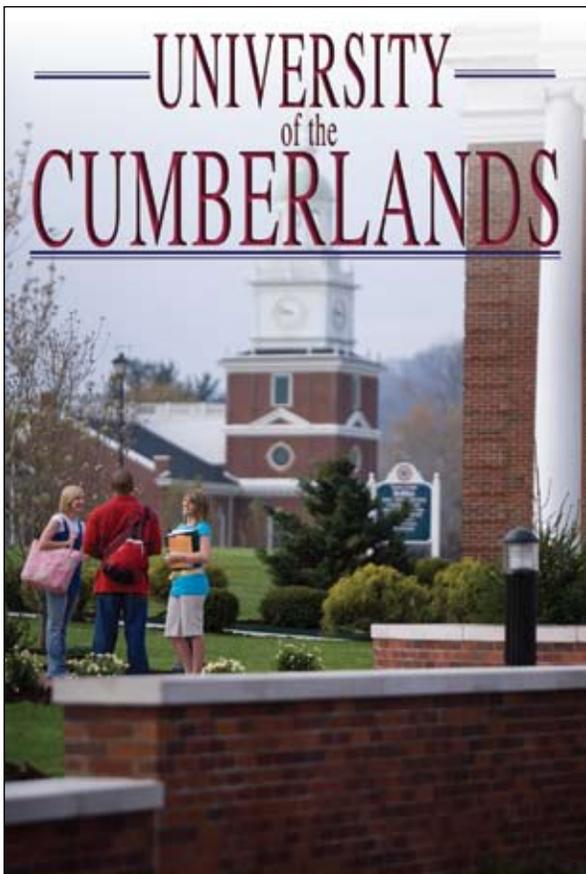
"They run through a projector that displays the game on the wall, and that way the other kids get to watch and we can make it a game for everyone," Hamilton said.

Media specialist Tami Neace is responsible for getting the Wiis up and running, between 7:25 a.m. and 8 a.m., when class begins.

"I usually have students waiting on me in the mornings to unlock the library doors to let them in to get the Wii. They've not been that interested in getting in the library before," she said, laughing.

Superintendent Arch Turner said Sebastian Middle's success with the Wiis showed him it could be a tool at all of the district's schools.

"I'm going to try to get our other schools engaged in this," he said. "The kids love it and it creates an interest in being here." ❧



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Jim Collogan on trends in education foundations

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 Jim Collogan, interim director of the National School Foundation Association. He discusses whether the current national economy is having an effect on school foundations and if now is a good time for districts to start one.

Q. Given the cutbacks schools across the country are experiencing, do you see a renewed interest from schools for creating foundations?

A. Sure, there's interest. Let me give you a real-life story of a district I just helped, a small school district. One thing you have to understand, you don't have to set up a full foundation; you can set up an operating board and then get your IRS not-for profit tax status through another foundation. And one of the best to partner with is your community foundations.

So in the initial stages you can get set up pretty quickly by partnering with a community or regional or county-wide foundation in your area. That's one point.

But with this school, that's how I helped them get started. This school district graduates about 35-40 kids a year in a poorer part of our state (Iowa). They needed at least \$10,000 to open an account with that local foundation. That's a rule that foundation has; most don't.

That night I challenged everyone at that meeting that everyone needed to be a donor, whether it's \$1 or a \$1,000, so that when you ask others to donate you can look them in the eye and say everyone on the board is a donor. Long story short, a person at that meeting wrote a check for \$10,000. Immediately they were set up, and they're not a wealthy district.

This was a non-school member who was brought to renewed interest in the schools because he had a chance to sit on a board. These foundation boards are usually twice as big as school boards and they're not encumbered with all of the politics. So there's another point, bringing community members onto the board.

About six months into it, that school foundation is slogging along and they send me an e-mail saying a graduate sent them a \$50,000 check.

My point is this, government funding has reached caps, but private funding has not reached any caps. And the majority of the school districts have not talked with and told good stories to their alumni. They have not brought

on board members from their community to make this happen. Once it's happening, people will respond. Will they get \$10,000 or \$50,000 in one night? Basically, no. But if you're not trying, if you're not throwing a line in the water, you're not getting anything.

On the opposite side of the state, in another district that is slightly bigger, the superintendent had a foundation in place and had a real energetic person in charge and they dreamed big. They thought it would be nice if they had an auditorium for their kids to perform in. Long story short, they started working with a community college in the region which said it would like to have a place to teach in that community, while a county museum was in search of a new building, and the community was interested in a playhouse for the summer. You know the story: they were able to combine their efforts and put up a \$7 million building.

It is right next to the school, so the students are able to go to the museum that is housed there. It's a beautiful place that's drawing a lot of people from the community. They have a 700-seat auditorium that the school uses during the school year and the community uses during the summer for plays and other events. They built two state-of-the-art electronic wired classrooms that the community college teaches in.

Q. Are these tough economic times actually a good opportunity for schools to take advantage of starting a foundation?

A. They should be taking advantage of it any time in history. Here is the key phrase that we ask people to repeat: All we're doing is giving the community – and your community includes all of your graduates who can be all over the world, so your community is much bigger than you think, and it includes all former teachers as well – all we're doing is giving the community an opportunity to support a resource and that's the education of their children. All you're doing is offering an opportunity. If you're not offering an opportunity, you're not going to get anything.

So whether it's good times or bad, there are always donors. In tough times, it's major donors. They have money and they know they have to step up and support the charity they've been supporting because they know the middle dollar people aren't there. Small-dollar people will stay there during tough times, \$1, \$5 and \$15 gifts. It's the \$100, \$200, \$300 gifts that disappear during tough times.

One of the things our organization does is offer a wealth analytics program so you can find the wealth in your community. It's where you supply a software company with a database of names and they will do a wealth analytics program and come back with a printout of who has the money and who doesn't. Often-times the people who dress like (Walmart founder) Sam Walton and drove an old Ford pickup have the most money. The people dressed in the nice suits and driving a Lexus or a Cadillac don't have the money; they're up their ears in debt.

Let's go back to that key phrase about offering an opportunity. We're not bucking up against the church or children with cancer. We know there are some great needs out there, but we offer an opportunity and people bite on that.

There was a little old lady in a community about 40 miles from where I'm sitting, and the school foundation just advertised a little corner ad in the local newspaper every week. It just said if you want to leave a gift and support the kids in this community, call this attorney who worked with the school district. About a year ago the attorney got a call saying the school was going to receive a \$1.5 million gift from a little lady who was in a nursing home and she probably only had six months to live and wanted to do something for the kids in the community. She wasn't a graduate of the school; she ended up retiring in that area because of a relative. I've seen that happen three times.

The point I'm making is that whether it's \$10 or \$10 million, if you're not fishing, you're not doing a database, not

offering an opportunity, you're not going to get anything.

And remember, you don't have to set it up completely yourself, you can partner with another foundation.

Q. It sounds like partnering up is a good way to go.

A. It's a good way to start, but remember it's not your own. It's kind of like living in your parents' basement when you first get married: it sounds good but after a while you say, 'We need our own place.'

It's good to keep an account with the foundation because often major donors show up on their doorstep and say, 'Hey, we'd like to do something for the community. What do you have going for kids?' And they can say, 'Nothing, really.' Or they can say, 'The local school district has a foundation and you can do something with them.'

Q. What is the key to getting people to donate to a foundation when the economy is down?

A. The same as anytime – you have to have a good case. The case is basically a written reason of why you're doing what you do. That leads us to our next point: You have to be doing something that resonates with your community. So if you're in a high-tech community, it's probably going to be a high-tech classroom or programs. If you're in a farming community, it might be helping kids find jobs, helping them prepare to take over family farms. You have to match what you're doing to the community.

Q. Are there any trends you are seeing in school foundations across the country?

A. They're bigger, asking for more, learning to be better. The model is the colleges and universities. The

University of Kentucky probably takes in \$150 million a year or more in gifts. Are they a state-supported educational institution? Yeah, and you'll give to them without batting an eye. But if someone walks up to you and says, 'I'm from the K-12 foundation down the street,' then you go, 'Well, why would I want to support that? They're supported by taxes.'

One of the big things we have to do is change the mindset, change the perception, let them know it's OK to support their local school district through gifting.

So the trends are bigger, better, more professional people. I see people from colleges and universities being hired by school districts to set up the fundraising. There are foundations around the country that have 10, 12, 15 staff members and are raising multiple millions a year

Q. How many school foundations are there across the country?

A. Probably between 6,500 and 7,000.

Q. Has that number grown significantly in the past few years?

A. They started in the '80s and grew a fair amount, slowed back down and now in these tough economic times (the push for school foundations) can be kind of like the stock market where for some reason people like to buy high and sell low. Now is not the time to back away from (starting a foundation), it's time to gain ground. People kind of do things backwards psychologically sometimes. My guess is that the people who know what to do are moving ahead. The ones who don't are retreating.

— *The fourth annual National School Foundation Association conference will be March 25-27 in Dallas, Texas. For more information about it or the foundation, go to www.schoolfoundations.org.*

“The University of Kentucky probably takes in \$150 million a year or more in gifts. Are they a state-supported educational institution? Yeah, and you'll give to them without batting an eye ... one of the big things we have to do is change the mindset, change the perception, let them know it's OK to support their local school district through gifting.”

Why can't our district get good press like others do?

It's one of those questions that pops up all the time, as it did during a recent communications seminar for school board members.

"Why can't our district get positive coverage (in the newspaper, on the radio or TV) like other districts do?"

Sometimes the query is due to local competition in a community shared by two or more school systems. Other times, it's tied to a media outlet with a regional reach but seems interested only in hometown schools. As readership of KSBA's eNews Service grows, recipients are showing a corresponding interest in how and why some districts get covered – period – while others seem to operate beneath the media's radar screen.

And, of course, there frequently is the underlying suspicion that the reason is because the media focuses just on negative or sensational stories about "our" districts.

There is no guaranteed avenue to positive press coverage for public schools. But there are a few steps that can pave the way to more frequent "good" news.

Work at it or forget it

A district doesn't have to have a full-time communications staff to generate positive media coverage. But districts must have a full-time communications effort, from the classroom to the boardroom, to get the good stories.

Ask a veteran Kentucky School Public Relations Association member or pose the same question to an experienced reporter, editor or news director and I'll bet you'll find one major link between good things happening and good news coverage: someone made a practice of getting information from the district to the media.

It's less about press releases and news conferences. It's more about returned phone calls and accessibility. In short, it's about relationships, built and maintained.

For example, a reporter who shows up at a board meeting is going to write about something. I recently witnessed a school communications staff member walk an inexperienced reporter through the agenda for the meeting that was about to begin. The resulting two stories might have been positive anyway, but the school person's effort surely didn't hurt.

As with any relationship, there will be good times and bad ones between school leaders and reporters. No board members or superintendents will appreciate negative stories they feel shouldn't be told. Nor will reporters give extra credit (good news stories) when administrators or board members stiff their inquiries on the less-than-pleasant articles.

Public service invites questions and critics, and frequently



Brad Hughes
KSBA Member
Support Services Director

(but not always) those become news. But having a reputation for being willing to discuss the negative as well as to pitch the positive is the foundation for a working relationship.

Some pitches just won't fly

Whether your news release or story idea gets picked up involves all sorts of intangibles: timing, competition, values and biases.

If the paper's next edition is laid out, your story probably isn't going to get the play you want. Better to get a full story

in a future paper than a buried brief today.

If your event takes place the day a local bank is robbed, the news crew headed to your school likely will be reasigned. Look for a different angle to create a follow-up story possibility.

If you see a \$25,000 grant net a story for a neighboring district, don't automatically expect a similar grant for your district to gain coverage automatically. Frequently, it's not the money as much as it is how well you can tell how the cash will be used.

And, yes, there are some folks in charge of media outlets who usually don't care what goes on in your district unless it involves scandal, sex or slumping scores. You should still pitch the good stuff to these outlets. It's part of building that relationship.

The Last Word

Regular readers of this space know that I believe in working with, but not depending on, the news media to tell the district's story. Leaders who use press coverage as their singular venue to inform the public will be disappointed as often as not. From the board meetings and key communicator e-mail blasts to Rotary Club presentations and inviting Web sites, districts have many more opportunities to educate than Page 1 of the newspaper or the lead story in the noon newscast.

Yet, public schools always will make news because they involve children and tax dollars, two pretty powerful motivators for common interest in any community.

So cultivate a working relationship with media outlets. Pitch story ideas and don't feel limited by the news release format; a phone call takes only a few minutes. Understand that "No" today doesn't mean "No forever." Be ready and willing to talk about the things you wish would go away. Maybe they will. And maybe in doing so, you can create more opportunities for the kind of media coverage that paints an accurate picture of progress by your students, staff and leaders.

And that's a message worth getting out. ☚



These school districts were “King of the Hill” in 2008

Will your outstanding education program wear the crown in 2009 by winning the **PUBLIC EDUCATION ACHIEVES IN KENTUCKY (PEAK) AWARD?**

The program, established in 1997, recognizes outstanding public school efforts that enhance student learning, and in doing so, promote the positive impact of public elementary and secondary education in the Commonwealth.

Honorees can be districtwide initiatives or individual school efforts.

For entry rules and other information, please go to the Member Services/ Communications page of KSBA's Web site, www.ksba.org or contact Brad Hughes or Jenny Wohlleb at 1-800-372-2962.

The deadline for the spring 2009 PEAK Award is March 13.



Photo provided by Carlisle County Schools

Carlisle County Schools PALS (Preschool Assistants to Learning) program, fall PEAK Award winner.

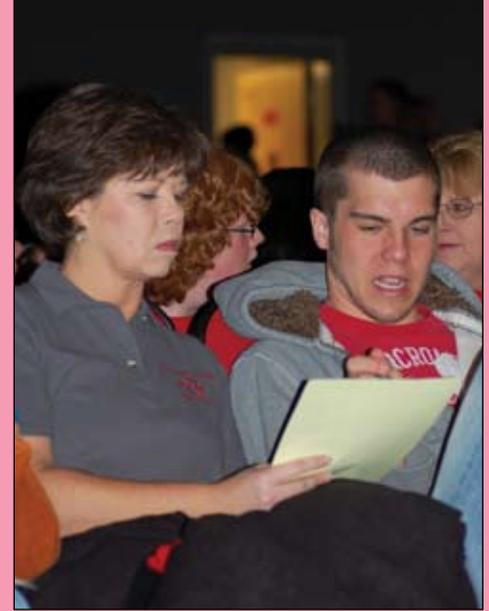


Photo provided by Russellville Independent Schools

Russellville Independent Performance-Based Education, spring PEAK Award winner.



Tech Triumph in Todd



“We’re making a little history today and we’re going to change the face of Todd County,” Superintendent Mike Kenner told a packed Todd Central High School gym on a misty January Saturday afternoon. The event was the district’s launching of a project to give each of the school’s 560 students their own laptop computer. “This isn’t about test scores. It’s about giving our students the tools to go out and compete in the 21st Century,” Kenner said.

Upper Left: Business education teacher Michelle Rager helps senior Ashley Dalrymple and junior Robert Sargent log in and begin using their new MacBook laptops.

Upper Right: Board member Deana Power and son Aaron go over the use agreement and insurance forms required for each student to receive their laptops. Families pay a \$40 insurance fee but the board covered most of the \$1.2 million cost of the project.

Lower Right: The project is getting quite a bit of statewide attention, as evidenced by the high-level delegation that attended the kick-off. From left are Bruce Lindsey of the Department of Education’s Office of Education Technology, state board Chairman Joe Brothers, and Kentucky Board of Education members C.B. Akins and Austin Moss.



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