

KENTUCKY SCHOOL ADVOCATE

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TOUGH DECISIONS

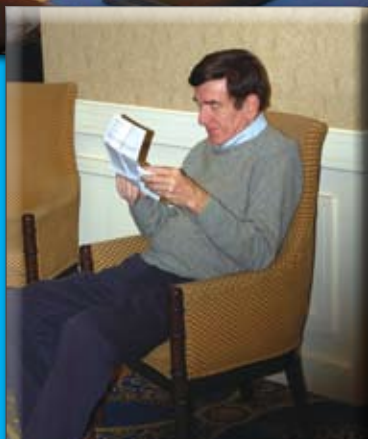
BUDGET BARRAGE:

Districts raiding reserves
Stinson on the big crunch

Preschool: short on money, not support

ANNUAL CONFERENCE PREVIEW

Scenes from the KSBA and KASS winter conferences



(Photos on this side of the page are from KSBA's Winter Conference. Photos from top to bottom) Rockcastle County Superintendent Larry Hammond and new board member Brandy Brock catch up during a break between sessions. Brock is one of 137 first-term local board members who take office this month.

Lincoln County board member Tom Blankenship studies before going to one of the winter conference breakout sessions. Blankenship has been nominated to become KSBA's president elect, if members approve his selection at the association's annual business meeting at the end of this month in Louisville.

Bruce Wilkinson of Workplace Consultants, Inc. addresses conference goers at the opening session.



(Photos on this side of the page are from the winter conference of the Kentucky Association of School Superintendents. Photos from top to bottom) Wayne Young (left), executive director of the Kentucky Association of School Administrators presents the 2009 KASA Superintendent of the Year award to Fayette County's Stu Silberman. It marks the third time Silberman has been the recipient of the state's two top superintendent honors, including KSBA's Dupree Outstanding Superintendent Award.

KSBA staffers were all over the KASS winter conference. Here Legal Services Director Steve Kirby discusses the ins and outs of school staff reductions if a state funding cut forced such actions. In another session, Risk Management/Insurance Services Director Myron Thompson shared information about steps districts may take to reduce student athlete injuries while lessen legal liability risks.

A panel of education and investment experts provided superintendent with a detailed review of proposed public employee pension reform measures as well as how the incoming administration of President elect Barack Obama may address the issue on the national level.

FEATURES

Preserve reserve

The slicing and dicing of Kentucky school budgets is cutting to the bone in many districts, focusing more attention – and perhaps more reliance – on contingency funds ... Pages 8, 10

The deciders

School board members are the original deciders, facing issues from routine to gut-wrenching. During School Board Recognition Month, eight members of KSBA's own board share what have been their toughest decisions, and why ... Page 12

Little money for little ones

The big push from multiple stakeholders to expand preschool in Kentucky is coming up against the big wall of the economic crisis: there is a scarcity of funds to make it happen ... Page 16

Preschool picture

The quality of preschool programs varies widely among states, including some that are moving toward universal preschool. National proponents are hoping for help from the Obama administration ... Page 16

In with the new

A total of 137 new school board members are taking their seats this month on 102 school boards. Only a handful of boards will see new majorities, and one board will be able to save on mailing costs to two of its members ... Page 21



Early learning, Page 16



Tough times, Page 8



Helping kids? Easy decision, Page 12

DEPARTMENTS

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On the cover



Jessamine County school board member Gene Peel stands at the back of the classroom with Principal Janet Granada while observing a U.S. History class at East Jessamine High School. Juniors Andrew Wells and Jessica Yi, seated, watched as a classmate answered a question on the electronic whiteboard at the front of the class. As part of this month's School Board Recognition celebration, the *Kentucky School Advocate* spoke with members of the KSBA Board of Directors about the toughest decisions they have made as school board members. See article on page 12.

TAKE NOTE

Kentucky School Boards Association

260 Democrat Dr.
Frankfort, KY 40601
800-372-2962
www.ksba.org

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

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Lincoln board member on deck
A retired educator is in line to become KSBA's next president. Lincoln County school board Vice Chairman Tom Blankenship has been nominated as president elect. The election will take place at the Jan. 31 business meeting during KSBA's annual conference. Whitley County board member Delmar Mahan, who will take over as president at that session, currently holds the office.

Blankenship, who was chosen by a nominating committee, currently is serving as a director-at-large on the KSBA board. He previously served two terms as Central District regional chairperson, from 1983-85 and from 2003-05. Blankenship was a teacher and principal in the Lincoln County system and also served as a central office administrator in Garrard County Schools.

His local school board service stretches over two stints – from 1971-1993 and from 2001 to the present.

Directors-at-large will also be nominated for election during the business meeting:

- Linda Duncan, Jefferson County, for a second and final three-year term.
- Eugene Peel, Jessamine County, for a final three-year term. (He currently is completing an unexpired term.)
- Tim England, Barren County, for a three-year term.
- Bill White, Pulaski County, for a three-year term.

Front and Center

School resource centers in three districts have been honored for providing exemplary service to families.

The centers received the 2008 Harry

J. Cowherd, M.D., Awards for Center Excellence, presented by the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services' Division of Family Resource and Youth Services Centers.

The winners are:

- Family Resource Center: The Family Place of Adair County, which serves an elementary and an intermediate school.
- Youth Services Center: Stuart Pepper Middle School YSC in Meade County.
- Family Resource and Youth Services Center: Connections FRYSC of Webster County, which serves two elementary schools.

Nearly 100 centers were nominated for the 2008 awards, named for the late Harry Cowherd, former state human resources cabinet secretary and advocate for the family resource and youth services centers concept.

We're all Freds

Central office staff at the Science Hill Independent district (below) dressed up during a recent holiday event as "Fred," the main character in the book *The Fred Factor*. Superintendent Rick Walker led a book study with all employees at the start of the school year, using *The Fred Factor*. The book, by Mark Sanborn, is widely used as a customer service training tool. ☘



Photo provided by Science Hill Ind.

T-shirt unity

Madison County school board members demonstrate they not only walk their talk, but they wear it, too. During a board meeting just prior to American Education Week in November, members donned T-shirts with the district's motto, "Every Student Counts."

The slogan was initiated by Superintendent Tommy Floyd when he became the district's chief in March 2008. The T-shirts were meant to show the district's students and staff that each individual is important, but that everyone makes up one team. The district purchased the T-shirts for all full- and part-time employees, delivered with a note that read, "The Madison County Board of Education and Superintendent Tommy Floyd would like to thank you for everything you do to make EVERY STUDENT COUNT!"

All employees wore their shirts on Nov. 17 during American Education Week.



Two years well spent

The last two years have passed by more quickly than I ever could have imagined. It is hard to believe that this is my last *Kentucky School Advocate* article as president of KSBA. It has been a thrill to serve as your president.

I have learned so much from so many people. With mentors like Joe Brothers, Bill Lovell, Wilson Stone, Brenda Jackson, Margie Bradford and Delmar Mahan, I was well prepared for the experience. I only hope that I can provide the same leadership to the future officers of KSBA as was provided to me.

I also would be remiss if I did not credit the incredible staff of KSBA. With people like Bill Scott, Robin Whitaker and David Baird, I look good even when I don't look good. All of the staff at KSBA have been supportive of me and I will forever be grateful.

I also want to send my appreciation to each and every board member of KSBA. This board has become more engaged than any board I have ever served on. I can honestly say that the agenda of this board is to serve the children of Kentucky. All discussions have always centered on what will work best for students. I can assure all board members in the Commonwealth that your KSBA Board of Directors has the passion for education I have repeatedly talked about during my term as president.

As we begin a new year, I want to reflect on 2008. We began the year with a new governor and we ended the year with an historic national presidential election. Our state and nation have experienced many highs and lows, including the worst economy since the Great Depression, but despite that, Kentucky's schools continue to thrive. I think that is due in part to the work of this association.

Looking ahead, Delmar Mahan of Whitley County will assume the presidency of your association at the 2009 KSBA annual conference. I am certain that he will lead this association to the next level. It has often been said that education is continuous. Leadership is also continuous and Delmar will lead this association into the future. We will face many challenges, including the economic hardships that many districts are already experiencing. The



Ed Massey
KSBA President
and Boone County Board of
Education member

leadership of KSBA's officers and board members will be put to the test. However, if we continue to work together, we will succeed. I want to encourage all board members to support your association's work. The leaders of this organization appreciate the opportunity to serve, but they depend on the feedback and encouragement of local board members.

As we move forward, several of your leaders of the past will be leaving their posts. I especially want to thank Immediate Past President Brenda Jackson. Brenda, who was just re-elected

to the Shelby County school board, will be rotating off the KSBA board, but the imprint she has left on this association and on the hearts of us who know her and love her will continue.

As for me, I will continue to serve as immediate past president, and as Kentucky's representative to the Central Region of the National School Boards Association. I will continue to promote KSBA statewide and on a national level. I will still need your support and encouragement.

Shortly, our lobbying team will be working diligently on behalf of educational interests by promoting the 2009 KSBA legislative agenda that was just recently approved by the board of directors (see back inside cover of this magazine).

Now, more than ever, your grassroots efforts are needed to assure that education does not take a step backward. There are many ways for you to be involved: Contacting your local legislator, writing editorials, speaking at meetings or contributing to KIDS First Political Action Committee. At the national level, immediately following the annual conference, many of KSBA's leaders and local board members will go to Washington, D.C., to attend the NSBA annual Federal Relations Network conference. Board members from all 50 states will go to Capitol Hill Feb. 3 to make their voices heard on issues concerning public education. It is truly an exercise in democracy.

The success of our education system and the success of our nation begins with board members. Thank you all for your support. ☘

Quotes on education from Kentucky and elsewhere



“The challenge is that saving significant energy dollars requires the consistent execution of hundreds of energy-saving actions by hundreds of staff members and educators every minute of every day. Yet every day our people are doing what most people struggle to do for even one day in their own homes.” Pulaski County Superintendent Tim Eaton on the district’s 11-year energy efficiency

campaign that earned a national award and has saved more than \$5 million. From the Somerset *Commonwealth-Journal*.

“We have to take our defeats as maybe an opportunity for the future.” Marion County board Chairwoman Sister Kay Carlew as the board begins to prioritize its facilities plan in the wake of the November defeat of a nickel tax referendum. From the *Lebanon Enterprise*.

“People accused us of not being forthright with all the facts and being timely, (but) we’ve been talking about this for 18 months, we literally tried to stay ahead of the boulder. When I get phone calls from people saying, ‘How come you’re not going to have the field trip, we’ve gone to the zoo every year?’ It’s like, ‘That’s what we’ve been telling you for 18 months, it is that bad.’ So, once again, for anybody who doesn’t get it, it is that bad and it’s getting even worse.” Franklin County board member Doug Crowe on the double whammy of failure to pass a nickel tax due to public opposition and cuts in state funding. From the *Frankfort State Journal*.

“Each month it’s delayed we get further and further behind. We’re paying interest on our loan and losing interest we should have been gaining by having the tax money. We’re losing in both directions. It’s just a matter of circumstance, and we’re caught in the middle.” Dayton Independent Superintendent Gary Rye on the ongoing impact of a delay in

Campbell County property tax collections following a recall petition of a fiscal court-approved tax rate. From the *Fort Mitchell Community Press*.

“It’s been said that a new school superintendent should keep at least one bag packed. Even under the best of circumstances it is a challenging job to meet the oft-conflicting demands of parents, faculty, students, alumni, federal and state governments and the community — with diminishing resources to allocate. But it shouldn’t take an expert in pedagogy or school administration to realize the impact such frequent turnover could have on a district. You can bet that educators in other districts are aware and watching, wondering what’s going on in Elizabethtown. And you can bet that students working on their teaching certificates are wondering, too.”

Portion of an editorial following the fourth superintendent change (including interims) in three years for the Elizabethtown Independent Schools. From the *Elizabethtown News-Enterprise*.

“It would be a good investment if we could stop our children from smoking.” Greenup County board Chairwoman Elinda Boyles on spending \$5,000 to install smoke detection/administrator alert technology in student restrooms at the district’s high school. From the *Ashland Daily Independent*.

“People don’t realize what goes into the cost of providing for LEP students. I know I wouldn’t think about it either if I didn’t work with it every day.” Molly Wilson, who oversees Limited English Proficiency programs for Warren County Schools on the district’s mounting \$500,000 cost



of educating more than 800 LEP students who speak nearly three dozen languages among them. From the *Bowling Green Daily News*.

“Is there a perfect schedule? No, not by any means. It’s a compromise between the 60- and 90-minute classes. The trimesters keep the classes on the same pacing.” Anderson County High School Principal Ray

“We started thinking, ‘What would be a great way to use that money?’ Then we thought about a running club, because we knew it wouldn’t be too expensive. All you need is a pair of shoes, really. It’s not only impacting our kids but their families as well. We have two mothers who walk during practice and a grandfather who runs with us.”

Photo provided by Marshall County Schools



Benton Elementary (Marshall County) fourth-grade teacher Ashley Jones on how she and colleague Jessica Watkins turned a \$1,000 award into a student running club at the school. From the *Paducah Sun*.

Woodyard explaining plans to move the school from a schedule that had different class lengths in the morning and afternoon to a 75-minute class schedule of three 12-week semesters. From the Lawrenceburg *Anderson News*.

“One of the big challenges is truly distinguishing what is a felony and what may be just a schoolyard scuffle. We have always taken violent acts seriously, but we will now err on the side of caution about reporting. Whenever it is questionable, we will contact law enforcement and the commonwealth’s attorney, just to be sure.” Danville Independent Schools’ Director of Pupil Personnel Chuck Stallard on one of the challenges in implementing Kentucky’s new anti-bullying law. From the Danville *Advocate-Messenger*.

“We have analyzed ourselves to death. Now it’s time to do it. This is the next step in the evolution of trying to get to the bottom of our achievement gap. I think that’s going to be the great piece of this puzzle that was not working.” Clark County Superintendent Ed Musgrove on optimism about a new Kentucky Department of Education initiative called ASSIST (Assist and Support for School Improvement and Success Team) that is designed to help struggling schools and districts improve test scores. From the *Winchester Sun*.

“We need to stop this texting and, if necessary, we will enact any policy needed.” Logan County High School Principal Casey Jaynes on how student text messaging had spread rumors about fights and hit lists, contributing to 200 students staying out of school one day. From the Russellville *News-Democrat & Leader*.

“When aggressive alert dogs become excited, they may scratch or paw at a location. They’re not trained to reach up and scratch. The reason we deal with aggressive (dogs) rather than passive is it is harder to read or see the signs of something passive alert dogs are alerting on something they smell or see signs of.” Kentucky State Police Lt. Kevin Nally on how a drug-sniffing dog caused an esti-

mated \$4,000 in damages to a student’s truck during a search at Rowan County High School. From the *Morehead News*.

“It was fun, but I didn’t want to say ‘I love you.’ I thought I was going to faint.” Freedom Elementary (Bullitt County) second-grader Lauren Ogle on playing the part of Helena in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* as part of the Kentucky Shakespeare Festival’s Bard Buddies Program. From the Louisville *Courier-Journal*.

“If they’re behind, we want to give them what they need to get on track. And our superintendent tells us that some kids are not trying, and



we want to get their attention and show them what’s at stake and keep them from guessing.” Muhlenberg County board member Allen Tucker on a

proposal to require students who don’t meet state achievement goals on the CATS test to take and pass an additional exit exam. From the Owensboro *Messenger-Inquirer*.

“They are walking around hugging them. They are excited.” Todd County Schools Chief Information Officer Rory Fundora on the reaction by district teachers after receiving laptop computers, part of a \$1.2 million district-funded effort that eventually also will put the technology in the hands of every high school student. From the Hopkinsville *Kentucky New Era*.

“I can do my vertical lines one color and do my horizontal lines a color and show them (how it’s done). I can use different types of lines that were in the drawing program to demonstrate what the lines are supposed to do and different things like that. That really helped.” Metcalfe County High School art teacher Jack Shive on how his attitude has changed about the usefulness of electronic white board technology in art classes. From the *Glasgow Daily Times*.

Fall breaks with or without intersessions

POINT ...

“Fall break is not a bad thing. I understand from my constituents that numerous positive things happen that week for families. But, it is a bittersweet vote because the initial idea was a good one and the lack of participation on the part of students and staff has brought us to this point where we are having fall break. It is just sad that the idea didn’t last any more years than it did.” Jessamine County board member JoAnn Rohrback on the decision to keep a full week of fall break in the 2009-10 calendar but without educational intersession classes.

COUNTERPOINT...

“This is not a permanent vacation. My promise to the board is going to be that when we can make fall intersession a reality again we will take advantage of that. My pessimism says the money won’t be there for 2010, but I can’t help but think that we made so many gains with extended school services that it is going to come back.” Jessamine County Superintendent Lu Young on the same subject.

From the Nicholasville
Jessamine Journal.

Lifeline or cushion, district contingency funds critical to school management

By Brad Hughes
Staff Writer

When Gov. Steve Beshear was looking for ways to reduce Kentucky's projected \$456 million revenue shortfall, his budget analysts put district reserve accounts – estimated last fall by the Department of Education at \$646 million – under the microscope.

Ultimately, Acting State Budget Director John Hicks said, “It was considered, but we recommended that we not go that route. As the governor said, ‘Education is our top priority.’”

Contingency funds have historically been a point of criticism from some taxpayers and legislators. But local education leaders believe a district with insufficient financial reserves is a fiscal accident waiting to happen.

“With the uncertainty of the economy, if you don’t have a contingency fund, when things like doubling diesel fuel prices come up, what are you going to do?” asked Powell County board member Diann Meadows.

Meadows knows a thing or two about money management in her day job as vice president of a local bank.

“When the state can just call you up and say, ‘Hey, we’re going to cut you another \$100,000,’ what are you going to do if you don’t have a healthy contingency fund?” she said.

Anchorage Independent board member Stephen Kottkamp, an investment counselor by trade, said 2008 validated the importance of contingency funds.

“The economy is depressing real estate prices and our major revenue source is property taxes. It’s my feeling that we may be in a period of stagnant, if not declining, property values,” Kottkamp said. “Without a healthy contingency, the school budget would be very bleak, at least in the near term.”

Madison County Superintendent Tommy Floyd isn’t bashful about his district’s reserves.

“Our contingency fund is strong, thanks to years of careful planning by our past superintendents (Mike Caudill and Glen Marshall) and the board,” Floyd said. “There are some districts that won’t be in such good shape because their contingency funds aren’t as solid as what we have here.”

In fact, one of the original budget-balancing options – a 4 percent across-the-board cut in state funding – would have wiped out the contingency funds of at least 17 districts and placed another 28 below the 2 percent threshold in state law.

Numbers not the whole story

According to an August Department of Education report, district contingency funds for 2008-09 ranged from a handful below \$150,000 to 10 that top \$10 million. While most Fund 1 balances hovered around the state’s recommended 5 percent



floor, eight topped 30 percent of their budgets.

Superintendents like Dr. Pam Stephens of West Point Independent are quick to point out that such numbers – just under 38 percent for her district – are short-term aberrations.

“We don’t have a contingency fund that large. (That account) was expanded by almost \$2 million in Urgent Needs funding for a new wing to our building,” Stephens said.

West Point’s enrollment numbers are down this year, reducing state funding, but the community is on the verge of major growth as military families relocate to nearby Fort Knox.

“We’re at a low point right now but are looking at the opportunity to grow,” she said. “That’s why we pushed ahead with the new wing.”

In Carroll County, home of 2008’s highest budgeted contingency fund at 42 percent, first-year Superintendent Lisa James also cited facility money as inflating the balance.

“It was the vision of the prior superintendent and finance officer and of our board to build the contingency fund because we don’t have enough bonding potential to remodel and renovate a 1950s elementary school,” James said. “And the board wanted a larger contingency fund for that project rather than placing a nickel tax on the whole community.”

Insurance against the unexpected

The most frequent justification for a more-than-minimum contingency fund is simple: stuff happens and when it does, it’s usually expensive. Estill County Superintendent Bert Hensley has a perfect example.

“The coal-burning heating system in our board office in the old high school failed (in late November),” Hensley said. “When emergencies show up, you have to have the money or you’re in trouble.”

James said facility needs hit district budgets just like home repairs hit the family bank account – but with larger numbers.

"Anytime you do anything to a building, it's not just a \$10,000 issue – you're looking at \$200,000 to \$300,000," she said.

Contingency funds also shield districts from interruptions in revenue streams, locally and elsewhere, according to McCreary County Finance Officer and Kentucky Association of School Business Officials President Jane Broyles.

"In hard economic times like right now, we're not collecting all of our taxes," Broyles said. "We have a lot of delinquent taxes, so the contingency fund helps in areas like that.

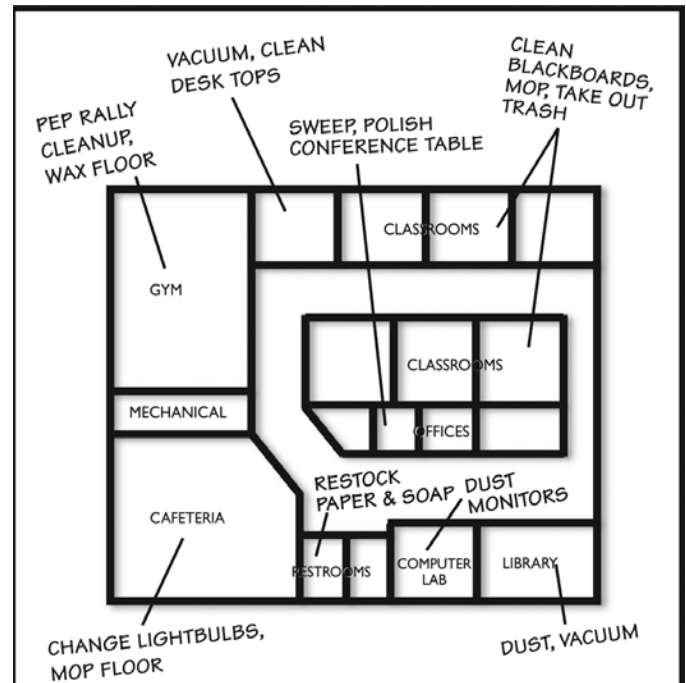
"When you have a healthy fund, you can plan on hiring an additional two to three teachers for the next three years to help improve testing in math and science," she added.

Hensley also sees improving learning as another basis for a solid contingency fund.

"We're trying to get instruction to a high level here, and you don't want to disrupt learning by cutting staff in the middle of the year," he said. "The contingency fund allows you not to have to worry so much about the unknown."

Powell County's Meadows hopes anyone questioning contingency funds will get the facts before knocking local leaders.

"After this past year, I don't think I'd have a hard time explaining (the value of contingency funds) to the taxpayer," she said. "It's the same when you thought you had everything figured out in your household budget, and all of a sudden, you have to start paying \$4 for a gallon of gas, especially when you have services you have to provide, regardless of what happens to prices." ❧



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“Our Success is Building”

Dr. Larry Stinson on possible budget cuts facing education

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 Dr. Larry Stinson, associate commissioner of District Support Services for the state Department of Education and a former Ft. Thomas Independent Schools superintendent. The interview was conducted just days after the announcement of Gov. Steve Beshear's proposal that would increase state revenue with a cigarette tax increase that would help school districts avoid an earlier proposal of a 4 percent SEEK cut.

Photo: Dr. Larry Stinson looks over the shoulder of Executive Secretary Elisabeth Goldey



Q. The governor has proposed a .70-cent cigarette tax increase as one way to offset the state's revenue shortfall rather than a 4 percent cut in SEEK funds, which was originally suggested. What does this mean for schools if it passes, for both this year and next?

A. I think it's probably a good plan. When you consider the health issues related to it, teens taking up smoking and so on, I think it's a good plan. However, when you look at the projected revenue, it's only \$81.5 million for this year. I don't know how much is projected for the future. If it turns out to be a good plan for improved health, that means there's going to be a reduction in the use of tobacco products, which is a revenue source that would be reduced. There's talk about there being reduced health-care costs, but that is long-term.

I think any enhancement to revenue is good and moving in the right direction, but there needs to be significantly more than that.

Q. So you don't think this is going to be enough to keep schools from having to make cuts down the road?

A. No, I don't. Even for the rest of this year, we're talking about SEEK being protected, but the 2 percent cut to the remaining allocation for education is significant. There will be some reductions.

Q. Flex Focus Funds?

A. We don't know yet what we're going to do. The department of education is still going to be asked to trim about \$8 million. We haven't had a chance yet to discuss how that might take place.

It's better than the \$132 million we originally thought it was going to be. We knew with that, it would have had to impact SEEK to arrive at that kind of reduction.

Q. If the state is able to avoid cutting SEEK, do you think districts for the most part will be able to avoid layoffs in the near future when at one point they had looked like virtual certainty?

A. It's going to depend on what kind of contingency fund they have, what kind of ending balance they had last year, what they think they will end with this year. Each one will have to

make that determination based on those specific factors.

Another thing to keep in mind is that the governor's plan is not guaranteed to happen.

Q. That's true. There already promises to be opposition to the governor's plan to increase the tax. What happens to schools if this tax does not increase?

A. I guess we're all going to wait and see what the legislature thinks needs to be done. If they don't adopt the governor's plan, then what plan do they want to bring forward? If the revenues are going to be short to fund the state's budget, then what do they suggest we do? I don't know how to predict that.

Q. Even with this proposed tax increase, or perhaps a smaller cigarette tax increase, do you think it's likely more school districts are going to wind up on the state's financial watch list?

A. It's all based on the individual decisions districts make, but logic would say there may well be more. There obviously shouldn't be as many as when we were looking at 4 percent

across-the-board cuts. But there will likely be a few more added to the list.

One of the things that I think will help mitigate that a little bit is that we've known now for more than a year that things are tight. I think most of our districts have been taking steps to deal with that situation. The fact that they've been somewhat proactive will help, but it still means that we're losing existing services in the classroom, one way or another.

Q. What would you like to see happen?

A. I don't have any concrete answers, but I do have some concepts that bother me. I think everyone realizes the importance of education and particularly the foundation that needs to be laid by the elementary and secondary programs. Obviously, postsecondary education is important as well, but if we don't have the elementary and secondary foundation in place, it's a little harder for postsecondary to get its work accomplished.

It bothers me that there are people who want to say, 'But those people are public employees, they are funded by tax dollars so we can manipulate their budgets, we can cut their salaries, we can limit things; they're public servants and everything's going to be all right.' But that work is so important. It bothers me that that attribute gets applied.

Those two thoughts are contradictory: having a quality public education system and the thought that these are just public servants working in these systems and we don't have to treat them fairly; we don't have to keep them well-compensated; they'll be fine. It bothers me.

So, a partial answer to your question would be that I would like to see a change in that contradictory attitude. I would like to see our state policy makers step up to the plate and provide sufficient revenues consistent with the importance public schools (and other public services for that matter) play in the future of the Commonwealth.

Q. In your time as an educator, can you remember such a bleak financial situation?

A. I'm going to sound like a lot of other people who are being quoted and say, 'This is the worst that I recall.' I was a superintendent for 25 years before coming to the depart-

ment and prior to that I was a business manager for a couple of years, part of the time in Indiana. I was a superintendent here for 13 years and we never had anything like this.

The reality of this situation is that 75 to 80 percent of the school budget is in personnel, between salaries and benefits. Then you have what's required: what you allocate to school councils; then you have the amounts you have to pay for utilities and operating costs; your transportation systems; and you have to have certain levels of insurance coverage. By the time you do all of those things and take out your minimum of 2 percent contingency, you're at 2 or 3 percent of the budget where you have discretion.

So when it gets tight like this, the only place you can really make an impact on your expenditures is with your personnel. That's the biggest chunk of your budget, that's where you're going to get your biggest savings. Those other things I mentioned are not optional: you have to pay the electric bill; you have to drive the buses and be insured; you have to have the contingency.

Q. Is any thought being given to decreasing the 2 percent contingency the state requires districts to hold?

A. State law requires the budget to contain no less than a 2 percent contingency, but it doesn't specifically say you must end the year with that. When you end the year, you no longer have a contingency; you have your ending balance. But each year going forward, the law requires each budget to have a 2 percent contingency.

We haven't had any official conversations on if we would reduce that expected carryover. The department has adopted that stance for several years, that you should end the year with at least the 2 percent because that's what you need to get started. In fact, we recommend 4 to 5 percent, which is a more useful target.

It has been mentioned on several occasions that decreasing it is something we need to do. At first, it may seem attractive, but then it becomes even more critical for us to work with districts that are below the 2 percent; they really need to protect themselves against going into deficit.

It's more important than ever to make

sure we're working together with districts to stay as healthy as possible and the downside to that (not reducing the required ending balance) is we have to have sufficient staff to provide that assistance. Generally, we have used contract employees and part-time employees to provide some of that and I don't know if we'll have the resources to provide that assistance as we go forward.

And if we have more districts going into deficit, you have a state statute that says they're not allowed to do that and if they do, it better be because of an emergency and the state board generally does declare it to be an emergency. At that point, a district is not allowed to enter into a contract or make expenditures without approval from the commissioner.

So once again, by statute we have to provide more assistance and we have to have people who can go out there and work with the districts, review those expenditures and contract arrangements.

Q. How big of a bullet will schools dodge if this tax increase is passed?

A. It's difficult to project that because we're talking about something that could have a very long-term impact. Anything that's done to lessen the negative forces that are coming to play has to be a major help. It's one of those situations that compounds. The more lean budgets are for a longer period of time, the worse the decisions that leaves us, so anything that can keep it from being so lean will help. I don't know how you apply a formula to that to do a long-term impact.

Q. Any final thoughts?

A. It truly is one of those times when these revenue shortfalls are impacting everyone. It's not just a school or a district, or just the department. In fact, it's not just Kentucky. I don't know if it will provide much comfort, the idea that misery loves company, but it is a time when everyone is going to have to pull together and there's going to be a greater call for even greater professionalism. The main thing is we have to have good things continue to happen in the classroom for our students. ☞

Decisions, decisions

Knotty issues reveal complexities of being a school board member

By Madelynn Coldiron
Staff Writer

There are the consent agendas, routine field trips to approve and presentations to hear from school councils and other groups.

Then there are the other issues to decide, the ones that keep school board members awake at night and that get them verbally accosted in the grocery store or post office. For School Board Recognition Month this year, the Kentucky School Advocate posed this question to some members of KSBA's own board of directors: What has been your most difficult decision on your local board, and why?

The answers from this school board microcosm are diverse – not surprising perhaps, given the range of issues boards must deal with – but they also provide a more personal glimpse into the ups and downs of being a school board member.

'No regret'



John Ed Dunn

Daviess County Board of Education

18 years of service

The vote to close small community schools and consolidate them into a larger school. We've done that for two or three schools. I have sympathy for those folks. The whole consolidation business started in the 60s. Now they don't have a post office or a school. The last vestige left of a small community is their public school, where parents and grandparents have gone, and they saw the closing and going to a larger school as not good. We as a board saw that it represented better opportunities for their children. But they saw it as taking away their child from their protection in a community where they knew and were known by everyone and forcing them to some nondescript structure four or five miles away.

I feel hurt for the people, but no regret. The educational opportunities were far better for their children – we were able to have guidance counselors, physical education teachers, libraries that were staffed every day.

Jackie Pope-Tarrence

Bowling Green Independent Board of Education

10 years of service

One of the more frustrating decisions for me has been our inability to reward our teachers and staff with increased pay raises year after year. As a board member for 10 years, I've seen our board confronted each year with the fact that we have fewer funds with which to reward our teachers and staff.

We have teachers who come to us because they want to teach in our district. As such, we are fortunate to have good teachers and quality staff in our schools. I often receive comments from folks within the community and across the state about the great job we are doing in our district. I know that we have a group of hardworking people who strive to help our students succeed. As a board member, I would certainly like to see us in a position to reward folks with a little bit more for a job well done. I know that they are deserving of more.

Jackie Pope-Tarrence with Zakoria Hill, a student she mentors

'Deserving of more'



Photo provided

Ann Porter

Mason County Board of Education

Four years of service

Porter said expulsions are the most difficult, but coming in second was buying property:

Buying a piece of property that you knew was a really good value and probably a good deal but it was something that I wasn't real sure the taxpayers in my area were wanting us to actually buy. That was kind of hard for me to decide, but when I thought about what my actual job was – to represent the students, and it was going to be better for the students to have this property – then it was not such a hard decision anymore.

That's when I first got on the board and people were kind of hassling me about don't raise taxes and don't spend money and here we were buying this property. And it's been needed and it's been used and it's paid for now. It's worked out really good. But when that's your very first decision when you're just getting on the board, that was hard.

Ann Porter at an NSBA conference in San Francisco.

'To represent the students'

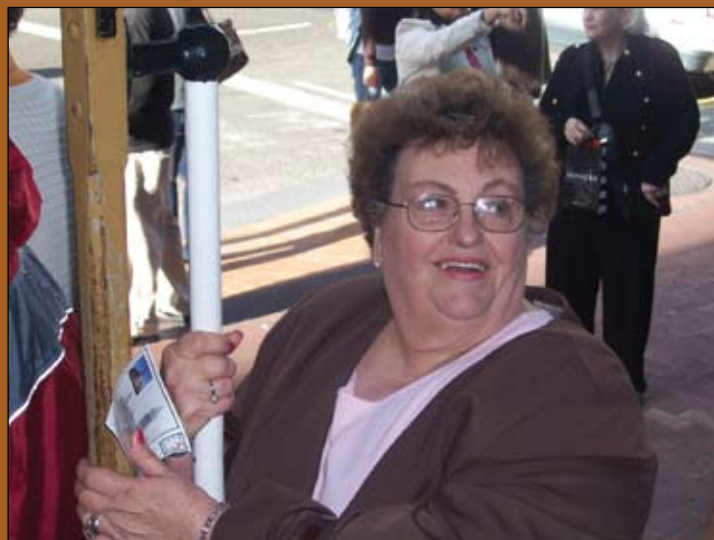


Photo provided

'The unpopular thing'



Photo provided

Durward Narramore

Chairman, Jenkins Independent Board of Education

16 years of service

Expulsions, because they end up dealing with kids and their lives. We've had some hard ones. Because you get kids that sometimes really don't know what they're doing, but you have to follow the board's policies and the laws of the land. And some kids don't realize that some things you just don't do the first time. But as a board member you just have to deal with the problems and hope that you're doing the right thing and still hope that they can go on with their education at some point.

You just go into it and sort of know that night when you get the documentation what you have to do. And a lot of times, especially in small districts, you're dealing with people that you know and work with and are around every day and you're dealing with their kids. You have to do the unpopular thing, but the right thing, what you feel is right.

Narramore is pictured second from right with his board.

Lisa Hawley

Chairwoman, Cloverport Independent Board of Education

Five years of service

Generally speaking, any decision that involves funding and/or budgetary issues is always difficult. When budget constraints make it necessary to decrease monies to a particular program or realizing a position cannot be supported, it is invariably complicated. Determining the best and most resourceful budget is most challenging. And, many times, it proves to be the most disheartening.

Generally, we try to look first and foremost how it will directly affect our students – at least for me, and I know for the rest of our board because we have a fairly single-thinking group. We don't always agree, of course, but we all want the best for the students. So generally we will look and see how a cut will affect them directly. And then from there, is it something that is necessary?

We're a small district – we really don't have a lot of playing around room with our money. We just have to be very, very careful.

'The best for the students'



Photo provided

Continued on the next page

'Depending on you'

William Owens

*Chairman, Lee County Board of Education
18 years of service*

Having to cut teachers because of all these unfunded mandates, with enrollment going down and funding being cut. That has been the hardest thing for me. We did some this past year, and we're running lean. We're still within the state guidelines for pupil-teacher ratio, we're above that, but we've had to come way down from where we were. It's more (an issue of) money than enrollment, but our enrollment has been down, too.

It's sort of like the jobs here with the mission I run. Whenever you're responsible for people's lives, there's that. You're concerned whether they are going to be able to get a job. I know we have to keep the system going and everything but you hate to see that because that's a family or an individual depending on you.

I hope we don't have to do more.

Owens is pictured at left at a KSBA regional meeting.



'Advocate for kids'

Gene Peel

*Jessamine County Board of Education
24 years of service*

Several years ago we went through the process of deciding whether we wanted what would have been one of the largest high schools in the state of Kentucky or did we want two smaller high schools. (The latter was chosen.) We heard parents, had meetings with parents with comments like, 'You will destroy our athletic program because you'll split it up' and so forth, arguments why not to do this. But we have so much more opportunity for kids - you have two football teams, a lot more kids get to participate. And two smaller schools would be more personal - the bigger you get, the more you become a number in today's world, and not a first name.

In cutting through that emotion to make the decision, I think about kids. I think as a school board member, you have to be an advocate for kids, you have to be their voice. You have to make sure everybody's doing the right thing for kids. That's our business.

Gene Peel with his grandson Adam Drury.

Mike Combs

*Campbell County Board of Education
Six years of service*

The most difficult decision here in Campbell County that I have had to deal with was three years ago when we attempted to go above the 4 percent on our annual growth on our tax levy and had to deal with the repercussions of standing up for kids. And it faced a recall vote (which failed). I was called a liberal, a tax-and-spender and everything else. It got very personal.

You find out who your friends are. How I coped with it, what I personally said was, I'm arrogant enough to want, and naïve enough to believe, that when it comes to things that benefit our kids that

'Willing to stand up'

we want the best for them and we'll

do our best for them. And if that means spending more money for them, I'm willing to stand up and be counted and say we should do that.

Mike Combs presenting an award to teacher Juanita Nelson.



Photo provided

PEAK of Pride in Carlisle County



Emotion mixed with pride last month when a delegation from KSBA traveled to Carlisle County High School to honor the district's PALS (Preschool Assistants to Learning) drop-out prevention/preschool support program with the association's PEAK (Public Education Achieves in Kentucky) Award.

Top Left: Senior Shelbi Belcher talked about her experience working with preschool students through a mentoring-type arrangement. The PALS program began as an effort to emphasize the value of a high school education to students at risk of dropping out. It has expanded to more than 50 high school students.

Upper Right: Carlisle County High School Principal Kelli Edging presides over a question-and-answer session among PALS members and the event's guests, including Senate Education Committee Chairman Ken Winters, state Rep. Steven Rudy, KSBA President elect Delmar Mahan of Whitley County and KSBA First Region Chairman Ronnie Holmes of Graves County.

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Web site of the month

Navigating Calloway County Schools' Web site couldn't be easier. The site menu, found down the left side of each page, remains the same regardless of which page a user clicks on. If you go to the calendar page, there's no need to hit 'back,' or a 'Home' button to get back to the main menu or choose another area to visit.

The menu is brief but encompassing,

To see the site, go to www.calloway.k12.ky.us/.



Preschool education in Kentucky: momentum without money

By Madelynn Coldiron
Staff Writer

When it comes to expanding Kentucky's preschool program, the spirit appears to be willing but the coffers aren't able.

Pre-K and early childhood care in Kentucky have garnered a higher profile on several fronts. Consider that within the past year or so:

- KSBA has received funding through Pew Charitable Trusts to promote the importance of preschool among the state's school board members.
- The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence has launched a movement to invest more in quality early care and education.
- Gov. Steve Beshear is expected to announce a statewide task force with the intent of better connecting all early child-

hood education efforts, including preschool.

- An older-adults group, Generations United, is pushing for preschool expansion in Kentucky.
- Kentucky's Early Childhood Development Authority is launching two school district pilot projects to demonstrate collaborative early education models.

It sounds as if the state is moving in the right direction, but as a report from the national group Pre-K Now pointed out in the fall, the money has not followed the momentum. Its state-by-state analysis identified Kentucky as one of a minority of states that did not increase pre-K funding this fiscal year. The flat funding of preschool programs "will force programs to either reduce access or cut corners on quality," the group said.

"We did sort of have a cut because we served more children," pointed out Annette Bridges, director early childhood

Preschool varies widely among states

By Mary Branham

Preschool is the gift that keeps on giving. That's the way Patte Barth, director of the Center for Public Education sees it. "Children with good quality pre-K are more likely to go on to postsecondary education," she said.

When children are in good quality programs, "school districts benefit by having better-prepared kids coming in," Barth said. "They actually save dollars on lower remediation rates, lower retention rates ... (the children) are more likely to graduate from high school."

But when it comes to preschool, not all states are created equal. The National Institute for Early Education Research ranks each state annually on a variety of indicators, including access, quality and spending. Kentucky ranks fairly well in terms of access—it's 11th in the nation on access for 4-year-olds and fifth in the nation for 3-year-olds, according to NIEER's "The State of Preschool 2007," the latest information available.

Steve Barnett, executive director of NIEER, said Kentucky

preschools serve just under 30 percent of 4-year-olds, but it's been stuck at that level since 2005.

And with the current state of the economy, the prospects aren't good for preschool in any state.

"Now all you hear are warnings that things might have to be cut back," Barnett said. "Preschool education is certainly more vulnerable than other parts of state budgets."

Most states have a separate funding formula for preschool, and that can take a hit during tough economic times. In Oklahoma, however, preschool is tied to the K-12 funding system, "so unless education generally is cut back, your per-child funding is not going to suffer," Barnett said.

He has high praise for Oklahoma's preschool system because of its stable funding and high quality. North Carolina and Alabama also have high standards for preschool, but Barnett said those states don't serve a very high percentage of youngsters.

"Alabama serves a very tiny percentage of children," Barnett said. "North Carolina serves about half as many 3-year-olds as Kentucky. In some respects, Kentucky is doing a pretty good job."

But other states are doing better. Illinois, for instance, has

See "Preschool," continued on Page 18

development in the state education department.

Kentucky had been ahead of other states in preschool after KERA was enacted nearly 20 years ago. In its analysis, Pre-K Now noted that the state at one point was close to becoming a national leader.

“We’re now starting to get behind,” said Cindy Heine, associate executive director of the Prichard Committee, which founded the Strong Start Kentucky initiative. “We have been working to try to garner support for expanding pre-K. The challenge, of course – and we think we have good support for it and we know we have the governor’s support – is there is no money.”

Preschool expansion to encompass children in families within 200 percent of the federal poverty level is a legislative priority of KSBA, the Prichard group and the Kentucky Board of Education. The state board put a \$13.5 million price tag on the expansion for 4-year olds, while a 2007 Prichard preschool report pegged the cost of covering both age groups at \$72 million. Currently, Kentucky preschool programs serve 4-year-olds living at 150 percent of the poverty level and all 3- and 4-year-olds with disabilities. Only about five school districts go beyond that to offer preschool for all 4-year-olds, some charging tuition, Bridges said.

Combined with federally funded Head Start, about 37 percent of the state’s 3- and 4-year-olds benefit from preschool, according to the Prichard report.

But with the state facing grim fiscal times, “The challenge is working to be sure that when there are any dollars available that we are ready for expanding quality programs,” Heine said.

Other challenges

Aside from funding, Kentucky faces other barriers in early childhood education. Collaboration among child care providers, federal Head Start and school district preschools is a big issue, something the Strong Start initiative and the governor’s task force want to address. “For years we’ve operated in silos,” Bridges said.

She said high-quality programming for child care centers is a weak link in the early childhood chain. The National Association of Child Care Resources & Referral Agencies ranked Kentucky’s standards for child care providers dead last among the states, with a 22nd-place ranking for oversight. The state’s voluntary child care rating system has helped, Bridges said, “but we keep seeing the same results: that poor children, children on subsidies, are in lower-quality child care programs.”

Private child care providers also fear competition if school



district preschools are expanded, she added.

The state’s Early Childhood Development Authority is about to see what a seamless early childhood system might look like when it bestows \$100,000 two-year grants to two school districts that will pilot a collaborative early childhood care and education model. The idea is to ensure that children get what they need at each stage to be fully prepared for kindergarten and beyond.

In addition to cementing a seamless relationship among early childhood care and education providers, the infrastructure necessary to support that collaboration still has to follow.

That’s one reason advocates for voluntary universal preschool are dropping back to an incremental approach – namely the serving of children within 200 percent of poverty level.

“We do have good programs at the universities that are preparing bachelor’s level early childhood-certified teachers but we don’t have enough of those teachers today to serve all the children in Kentucky,” Heine said, adding that once the infrastructure is there, “we can begin to provide more and more slots for children.”

Whatever the obstacles, an understanding of the potential of expanded preschool does not seem to be one of them.

“We think that the public and most policy makers see the value of quality preschool for our children and are supportive,” Heine said.

Bridges notes, “We believe that preschool is a dropout prevention program. We think it’s an economic investment.”

She thinks school board members are aware of the value of preschool education because last year boards earmarked a total of nearly \$5 million in flexible focus funds for preschool. “The other good sign is the transportation piece – they don’t have to provide transportation for preschool children, but 99 percent of them do,” she said. ☞

Preschool

Continued from Page 16

committed to serving all children beginning at age 3, according to Barnett. "They've developed a state plan that is designed to eventually provide pre-K to all children ... to integrate the development of that to services that serve children," he said.

Georgia is striving to offer universal preschool, but funding is tied to specific lottery funds. Last year, the state had a waiting list of more than 8,000 students, Barnett said. "So while the program is popular, the funding stream doesn't really make it available to all the kids and families that want into the program," he said.

Florida provides \$2,400 per child per year for preschool education, but Barnett said, "that's not going to provide much of an education. Somebody has to pick up the rest of the cost, whether it's local schools or parents."

Across the country, Barnett said, states can do better. Whether that will be stymied in the current economic climate is yet to be seen.

"2007 was the first year since we've been looking at pre-K that per-child funding actually increased instead of decreased," he said. "I think it would be terrible to see per-child funding go back down."

Barnett expects some states to make progress because they've bought into the notion that preschool is critical to the future of the country. He just hopes other states don't move backward.

"The economic downturn and the current state financial dif-

ficulties are temporary," he said. "But we do have real, serious permanent problems."

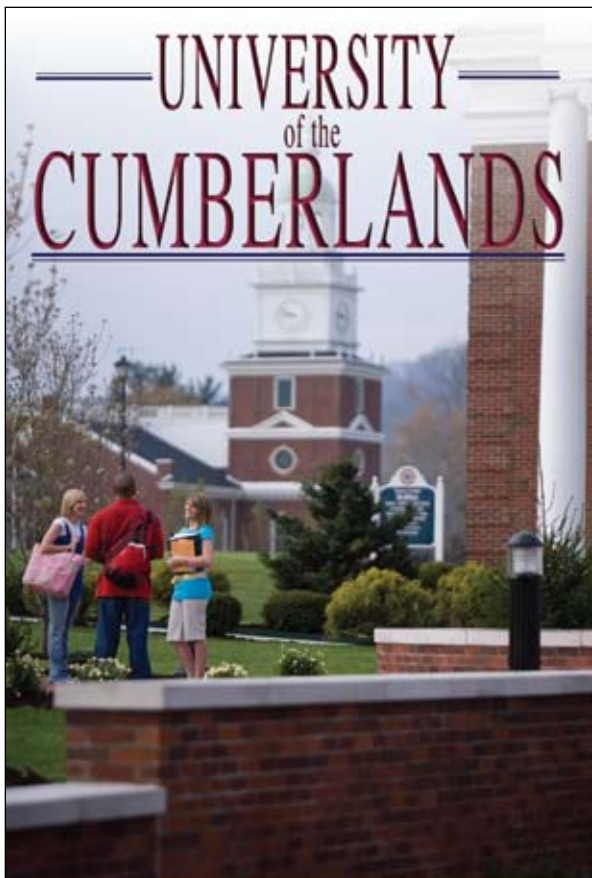
Those problems are tied to stagnant productivity and the high cost of government services when kids aren't prepared or end up in the criminal justice system. But early childhood education can be a tool to spur future economic growth in the form of jobs, wages and revenues, along with improved productivity, Barnett said.

"One of the best ways is to invest in their early education to head off school failure and start them on the path of school success," he said, pointing to research that shows early childhood education increases achievement, educational attainment and adult productivity.

Holly Higgins, media relations director for the advocacy group Pre-K Now, is optimistic the federal government will invest in early childhood education in Barack Obama's administration. Obama promised during his campaign to commit \$10 billion for early childhood education programs. "He clearly understands how critical public investment in early education is – as much because of our current financial crisis as despite it," she said.

"Anyone who tells you that we can't invest in young children because we need to focus on the economy just doesn't get it," Higgins said. "Not funding pre-K is sabotaging our economic recovery." ❧

— Mary Branham is a contributing writer from Frankfort



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Economic crisis doesn't have to affect district insurance

Q. What kind of impact will the nation's economic crisis have on school district insurance?

A. Severe swings in gas prices, high unemployment, stock market woes and an insurance crisis. Thirty years ago this was the scenario facing America and Kentucky's public schools.

While currently there is not an insurance crisis, 2008 has shown signs that the soft insurance market of recent years may be coming to an abrupt end. School districts that have enjoyed cheap insurance may very well find themselves with significant rate increases, coverage restrictions or cancellations.

On the heels of government intervention with the world's largest insurance company, it is time for school districts to

evaluate their insurance program to assure they are prepared for changes in the market place. As the governor looks to plug a \$456 million shortfall in the state budget, all Kentucky school districts will be forced to do more with less.

When making tough budget decisions, school leaders should not compromise protection over price. Downturns in the economy mean an increase in claims activity, especially for governmental entities.

Dollars saved on insurance will be insignificant when compared with inferior coverage and uncovered losses. The staff of the Kentucky School Boards Insurance Trust can evaluate district policies for appropriate protection.

— 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 seek 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 student 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 administrative

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

New conference look offers same great learning opportunities

Advocate Staff Report

KSBA's 73rd annual conference, Jan. 30 - Feb. 1, will offer the same great learning opportunities, but with a slightly different approach.

The traditional Friday schedule will remain the same but Saturday's has been changed to better meet school board members' needs.

"On Saturday, the first break out session is at 8 a.m., an hour earlier than in the past," said Kerri Schelling, KSBA's director of Board Team Development. "We made that change in response to a number of board members who wrote on past conference evaluation forms that they're used to starting their day early, so why not just jump into it?"

In addition to that change, Saturday now offers a mid-morning general session with featured speaker Eric Chester, making the luncheon session more of a social time for conference goers. Chester will speak about what makes the students of Generation Y tick and how to best educate them and prepare them for the workforce.

"This change gives board members time to concentrate and focus on the speaker without having to juggle lunch," Schelling said. "The luncheon session will still feature student performances and annual KSBA awards, but we also left time in the luncheon session for them to talk with their tablemates, to network and to visit the exhibitors."

Schelling said conference planners hope that another schedule change will encourage more board members to participate in the governing of KSBA.

"The annual KSBA business session has been moved up to right after lunch," she said. "We moved this from the end of the day because we know people are in sessions all day and are tired and we want to make it easier for them to be involved in the association. We want them to know what is going on and to exercise their opportunity to vote for association officers."

In addition to schedule changes, this year's conference also features another first: the first annual Joe England Safety Seminar is being offered as part of Friday's pre-conference sessions. England was a member of the Harrison County Board of Education and a member of KSBA's Board of Directors who passed away last February.

"Not only was Joe on our board, but he was also on the board of the Kentucky Center for School Safety and he had a real passion for a lot of things that helped children," Schelling said. "Because he had a career in law enforcement, he had a special place for safety issues, and the culture and climate of schools, so this was really the best



way we could think of to honor his memory."

The final day of conference will offer a special treat, Schelling said, with an appearance by "President Abe Lincoln."

"Lincoln re-enactor Jim Sayre will perform 'I, too, am a Kentuckian,' for us before flying to Washington D.C. the next day, where he was selected to perform at the nation's celebration of Lincoln's 200th birthday," she said.

This conference will also be more user-friendly, making it easier than ever for board members to meet their professional development requirements.

"The new Academy of Studies is in place and all conference sessions have been tied to it," Schelling said. "We've identified if the session is a required course or an elective in order to help our board members determine which of them best suit their professional development needs this year."

Schelling encouraged board members to take advantage of this opportunity, which is being offered at the same cost as last year.

"It is important for board members to get professional development, especially outside of the district," she said. "It provides them with the chance to network with their peers and hear a different perspective from across the state and the country."

— For more information or to register online, go to www.ksba.org and look for the annual conference under 'Featured Links' at the top of the page. ☞

2008 school board elections: statistically unremarkable, with a quirk or two

By Madelynn Coldiron
Staff Writer

A husband and wife have been elected and will serve together on a northern Kentucky school board, in what is a rarity — if not a first — in modern times.

The election of Chris and Janean Parsons to the Newport Independent Board of Education is probably the most unusual outcome in local school board races around the state in November, which saw the election of 137 new board members, a slight increase from the previous comparable election cycle in 2004.

Though both Parsons were on the ballot, they did not run against each other — Chris Parsons won an unexpired term held by an appointee, while his wife won a regular four-year term. It was the first time either had sought public office.

Both ran because, “We both really felt the need for a voice from a parents’ side of things in our district,” Janean Parsons said. “We thought people would respond to both of us.”

They also have useful “skill sets” to contribute, she noted — she works for an advertising agency with a media background and he is sales director for U.S. Bank Arena.

The couple campaigned together and shared campaign handouts, she said, but on the advice of the state Board of Elections, they split the expenses down the middle, to be shared equally by the two campaign funds. Nothing in state law prohibits couples from running for the same school board.

Janean Parsons noted that the couple, who have three young children — two of them school-age, are at different ends of the general political spectrum so they don’t always agree.

“This just gives us more of an opportunity to really look at the issues our district is facing and see different points of view on them within our own house,” she said.

Besides Newport, 101 other school boards will seat new members in January, up slightly from 2004. Seventy-two boards will see no changes in membership. Statewide, a

School board elections by the numbers

| | 2008 | 2004 |
|----------------------------------|------|------|
| Percentage of incumbents running | 82% | 86% |
| Total incumbents unopposed | 246 | 299 |
| Incumbents won total | 340 | 370 |
| Total challenged incumbents | 152 | 122 |
| Incumbents lost | 58 | 51 |
| Total new board members | 137 | 124 |
| Total boards with new members | 102 | 94 |
| Total boards with no changes | 72 | n/a |
| Total seats w/ no candidate | 8 | 9 |

little over one-third of incumbents drew opposition, a bit more than in the comparable last election cycle. But 38 percent were defeated, which is slightly less than the percentage of those who lost seats the last time around.

New majorities were seated on only a handful of school boards. Two incumbents on the Henderson County board were defeated, while one did not run, resulting in the seating of three new members. In McCreary County, where four seats were on the ballot and all incumbents sought re-election, only one incumbent was returned. And in Ohio County, three new board members take office in January, replacing two incumbents who did not run and one who was defeated.

All five seats were decided on the Bullitt County school board —

three for regular terms and two for unexpired terms. Three of the races were contested. But despite the potential for change, no incumbent lost and only one new board member will be seated.

There were several recanvasses due to close votes; one seat, in Raceland-Worthington Independent, was decided via a coin toss because of a tie vote. In McCracken County, where high school consolidation has been a hot issue, a write-in contest was waged over the seat held by Chairman Neil Archer. He finished with 64 percent of the vote.

Several teachers will take their place on local boards: In Franklin County, a Uniserv director for the Kentucky Education Association will take office, while a private-school teacher won election to the Clark County school board. Retired educator Olivia Minton, wife of former Pulaski County Schools Superintendent Bert Minton, will take a seat on that district’s board.

Nine school boards will be losing some institutional memory as well as experience. Ten board members with 20 or more years of experience will not return in January, either by choice or by failing to win re-election. ☞

Travel, training will need a little more talking in 2009

Travel was in the news a lot during this past Thanksgiving weekend but not the “over the river and through the woods to Grandmother’s house we go” kind.

A Tennessee superintendent restricted conference and travel expenses for professional development as local sales tax revenues were predicted to come in \$1 million short.

A Michigan district cut travel by 50 percent as part of the superintendent’s plan to erase a \$400 million deficit.

Facing a possible 8 percent mid-year cut in state funding, an Illinois superintendent froze staff travel and cut back on the usual “gazillion” student field trips.

Among similar public school stories from Alabama, Florida, North Carolina and Vermont was one about an Indiana board imposing new rules on itself after members exceeded their \$15,000 conference travel budget – halfway through the fiscal year.

And then there was the page 1 *Courier-Journal* story headlined, “Legislators’ trips cost \$1.3 million since 2006.”

Without question, falling state and local revenues will lead to heightened scrutiny of expenditures that not everyone will deem critical. So school leaders should be talking up front, and afterward, when limited district funds are committed to travel.

Some must go, others need to

Sometimes travel, training and the related costs aren’t things educators have to fret over.

State law mandates school board members earn varying amounts of professional development hours each year. This month’s KSBA annual conference allows most board members to meet that requirement. Other training conferences in July and December provide additional options.

The Department of Education also requires training for select administrators and staff. For example, the huge new superintendent class of 2008-09 must attend seminars on strategic issues throughout the year.

But training doesn’t have to be mandated to be of critical value.

How many teachers attend the department’s annual Kentucky Teaching and Learning Conference and take home an idea for improving classroom instruction and gain an in-state resource – the presenter – who can answer more questions weeks later?

How many administrators have learned of cost-saving concepts being practiced elsewhere in Kentucky that they wouldn’t have known about if someone had not gone to a workshop?



Brad Hughes
KSBA Member
Support Services Director

And how often does a district send a small team of educators to a conference and then expand that learning into a practical training when they return to their districts?

However, whether it’s a trip to Louisville for training or traveling much farther for professional development at the NSBA national conference in San Diego, expenses such as these will be subject to more questions in tight budgetary times.

That’s why it’s a good idea to look over agendas before announcing travel plans

and pick out some sessions to talk about when the subject of approving the trip comes up for a vote. Administrators and board members, teachers and council members should all make the point of explaining why this trip and that training are worthy of the limited dollars – even if the sessions are mandated by some law or agency.

And don’t let the issue drop there. It’s equally smart to return from the training and make time on the board and/or council agenda to have each participant talk briefly about a highlight or two gleaned from the conference. The bills are going to be paid eventually. It is far better to justify the value ahead of any receipt-based analysis of a session that you bring back to benefit the school system.

The Last Word

Restricting travel just makes good sense when alternatives – or other realities – include reducing learning services to students. No matter how advantageous the training, it’s going to be difficult to counter questions about even tougher choices when state funds are cut and local revenues don’t come in as expected.

But it’s equally tough to learn from just reading an outline of an idea posted on a Web site or hearing a recording of a workshop with no chance at follow-up questions for clarification.

And one undeniable truth about mass training opportunities is that they are far more cost-effective than trying to put a group of qualified presenters on the road to 174 school systems.

The taxpaying public isn’t the only audience that will be examining school and district spending in 2009. Staff will have their own set of questions when they see cuts in one area and expenses in another that they may not see as directly supporting their work.

But someone had to go and see the advantages of electronic whiteboard technology in the classroom. Someone had to hear about energy savings when schools implement efficiency plans. Someone had to glean the first-hand experience about turning new school designs into lowered costs. Someone had to go, listen, learn and take the knowledge back home.

And that’s a message worth getting out. ☘

KSBA's 2009 Legislative Agenda: Funding Targeted Toward Success

Early Childhood Education

School board members support fully funding all-day kindergarten programs. School board members also support an increase in preschool funding for 4-year-olds at 200 percent of the poverty level and full funding for all 3-year-olds who are at risk for disabilities.

- Investments in early childhood education are a key to a child's educational success.
- A Rand Corporation study found that for every \$1 spent on preschool programs, there is a savings of \$7 in remedial education, welfare and incarceration costs.
- All-day kindergarten should become mandatory when fully funded by the state.

Funding Issues

School board members support full funding for the SEEK formula, restoring all cuts in categorical programs and eliminating any unfunded mandates. With the passage of Senate Bill 2, the legislature should fund increased participation in science and math classes.

- The SEEK formula should support all salary mandates.
- The SEEK formula should fully fund all add-on programs including transportation.
- Funding for categorical programs should be restored to ensure student services in Extended School Services (ESS) and Safe Schools programs as well as essential professional development for teachers.
- Providing funding for the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) initiative will help to encourage more children to follow a career path in the math and science fields.

Increase Revenue

School board members support increasing revenues to provide necessary programs and services to educate the children of Kentucky.

- Consideration must be given to all sources of new revenue such as raising the cigarette tax and allowing for a vote on the question of casino gaming.
- Increased revenues will strengthen academic programs to help all students reach proficiency by 2014.

Improving Learning Facilities

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

- Funding for school facilities has not kept pace with the unmet need of school construction in Kentucky.

- Elimination of Category 5 schools must be a priority.
- Additional revenues must be provided for areas of the state where student enrollment growth outpaces current allowed revenue sources for construction.

Assessment and Accountability

School board members support an assessment and accountability program that ensures the goal of requiring all students reach proficiency by 2014.

- KSBA commends the continuing work of the Assessment and Accountability Task Force and encourages the legislature to evaluate and consider any suggested changes to accelerate student achievement.
- Caution must be used in determining the necessary and adequate amount of assessment, with specific consideration of impact on instructional time involved in preparation for and administration of state-mandated assessments. KSBA supports end-of-course exams to ensure individual student accountability.

School District Autonomy

School board members support increased local autonomy to develop the necessary policies and programs to ensure student achievement.

- School boards must continue to have authority to set start and end dates of the school year based on unique community issues.
- Curriculum issues, such as mandated physical activity, must be decided by school boards, school councils and district administration.
- KRS 160.345(h) should be amended to require the superintendent's recommendation of principal applicants prior to consideration for hiring by the school council.

Success After High School

KSBA supports a K-12 education for all students that will guarantee rigor and relevance leading to successful transition from high school to work/careers, community and technical college and university opportunities.

- Incentives should be available to students and teachers for increased participation in advanced placement, dual credit and virtual academy classes.
- High school seniors should be allowed to use KEES scholarship funds to pay for dual-credit courses without losing a year of eligibility in college.
- A study should be conducted, in coordination with P-16 councils, to determine causes and solutions for the current high levels of remediation rates in transition from high school to college.



Celebrating success in Barbourville



Barbourville Independent honored 124 outstanding students and their families during a catered pre-Thanksgiving luncheon. The students were recognized for scoring proficient or distinguished in all Kentucky Core Content Testing subjects.



Smiling parents, grandparents and others watched as students received T-shirts imprinted with the slogan, "We believe, we achieve."

High achievers in the district are rewarded in "tiers," said Instructional Supervisor Kay Dixon. Other students are recognized with rewards such as field trips, movies or bowling, in which the 124 pupils also participate, Dixon said. The program "has been a really good motivation for us," she said.

From top left, Principal Paul Middleton passes out the T-shirts as Dixon (with microphone) reads each student's accomplishments. A proud parent at top right snaps pictures. At bottom left, Karen Sizemore checks out her son Joel's T-shirt.



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