

# KENTUCKY SCHOOL ADVOCATE

A publication of the Kentucky School Boards Association ■ July 2009

## **EDUCATING FOR THE 21ST CENTURY IN A 1920S BUILDING**

**Taking aim at 'easy' senior years**

**MID-YEAR CUTS. WHAT ELSE IS NEW?**

*Tackling the achievement gap early*

# From toddlers



# to teamwork

## KSBA's 2009 Summer Leadership Institute

July 10-11  
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Looking for ways to improve the teamwork on your school board? Seeking new ideas for your district's early childhood programs? This year's Summer Leadership Institute can help you find answers to both questions, and in a new, compact format.

This year's institute will offer the same number of training opportunities, but in two days instead of three, saving board members money and time away from their districts.

For more information or to register, go to [www.ksba.org](http://www.ksba.org) and click on "Summer Leadership Institute" under *Featured Events* at the top of the page.





**FEATURES**

**CHALLENGING YEAR**

Too many high school seniors are graduating and entering college only to find themselves in remedial math and English courses. Warren County Schools is piloting a program to get seniors to challenge themselves during their final year, saving time and money when they get to college ... Page 8

**CUTTING EDGE**

Of necessity – certainly not of choice – school districts are getting used to mid-year budget cutting. But superintendents say the near-constant uncertainty over their budgets is taking a toll on local decision making ... Page 10

**BAND-AID APPROACH**

Metcalfe and Fleming county districts are coping as best they can with buildings that are 50-80 years old. Step inside two of these schools and see why districts with these kinds of facilities are fighting an uphill battle ... Pages 12-16

**EQUITY AND ADEQUACY?**

Only 16 Kentucky schools are listed as category 5, the classification reserved for buildings in the worst condition. The reasons they haven't been replaced or shut down are complex, but in some cases their existence points up what some believe is a continuing inequity in facilities funding ... Page 12

**EARLY INTERVENTION**

It's never too early to start closing the achievement gap. That was the message of a keynote speaker at the 23rd annual Early Childhood Summer Institute ... Page 18



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**On the cover**



The 1925 coal-fired boiler at Ewing Elementary School in Fleming County battles to warm the entire school on cold days. Dust creates a problem for students with allergies and on very cold nights, the district has to have someone come in throughout the night to keep the fires burning and rooms as warm as possible. Read about Kentucky's category 5 facilities beginning on Page 12.

# TAKE NOTE

## Kentucky School Boards Association

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### Estill volunteer honored

An Estill County Schools volunteer has received national recognition for her work to encourage students to read.



Elrene "Elke" Davis was named one of three recipients of the 2009 Anne Hazard Richardson Volunteer of the Year Award from the oldest and largest nonprofit literacy organization in America, Reading is Fundamental. Davis has been a school volunteer for the program for 15 years, making sure Estill County children have books at home to read. She has also obtained Reading is Fundamental grants for reading activities and to train local volunteers in the program.

"Being honored for something you really value is neat," Davis said.

RIF officials from Washington, D.C., visited Estill County to present the award and to visit district elementary schools to observe reading programs.

### Nominations open for youth safety award

KSBA and the Kentucky Center for School Safety are accepting nominations for the 2009 Steve Kimberling Youth Leadership in School Safety Award.

The award is presented annually to youth who have taken an innovative leadership role in school safety in partnership with adults within a school. Nominations are open to public schools students in all grade levels.

The deadline for nominations is Aug. 31. Forms and guidelines are available at [www.ksba.org](http://www.ksba.org) or [www.kysafeschools.org](http://www.kysafeschools.org).

### Superintendents click on Link

Christian County Schools Superintendent Brady Link (pictured below) is now leading the Kentucky Association of School Superintendents. Link assumed the office at KASS' summer conference after serving as president elect. He takes the reins from Fleming County Schools Superintendent Kelley Crain.



Pikeville Independent Superintendent Jerry Green was elected to be the association's vice president. Fayette County Superintendent Stu Silberman is now the organization's president elect.

Link is a former superintendent in the Graves and Owen county districts and was selected in 2005 as the Kentucky Association of School Administrators' Administrator of the Year. ☞

### Familiar face on state board

Former state Sen. David Karem has taken his seat as the newest member of the Kentucky Board of Education. Karem was appointed by Gov. Steve Beshear to replace Steve Neal of Louisville, who was not reappointed when his term ended.

Karem is president of the Waterfront Development Corporation in Louisville. He was a member of the Kentucky General Assembly, serving in several party leadership positions, from 1972 until 2004.

Karem is widely recognized as a chief author of the 1990 Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) and also was instrumental in passing legislation that reformed the state-wide school accountability tests.

During his legislative career, he was a member the Senate Education Committee and the Education Reform Task Force, chaired the Legislative Advisory Council of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) and served as that group's treasurer.



# Promoting physical and academic wellness

High school graduation has always been one of the more enjoyable experiences for me as a school board member. It is deeply rewarding to see students reach that key milestone and great accomplishment in their life.

I find it gratifying to see the proud look of achievement on each face with every well-earned diploma presented.

At the close of all graduation ceremonies students take part in the age-old tradition of turning the tassel and tossing their caps into the air; friends and classmates embrace, but the happiness slowly fades into the somber realization that their journey together has come to an end.

This bittersweet conclusion of one chapter of their lives only leads the way to a new and exciting journey with opportunities galore to further their academic career or to enter a vocation and become a contributor to society. At this point, school board members tend to ask the question, "Did we provide the proper tools needed by each student to be successful in their future endeavors?"

In order to keep our school districts properly focused this question needs to be asked about each graduate and the results reviewed with school personnel.

As school board members we have an obligation not only to provide a positive and happy academic experience for our students, but to stress the importance of their health and wellness.

Statistics indicate that Kentucky's students need to focus more intently on their physical condition and overall well-being, especially in diet and exercise. In order for our students to achieve their maximum potential in the classroom, we must make available for them a curriculum that adequately covers nutritional guidelines, nutrition education and physical activity as well as providing school-based physical activities.

A key person to address health and wellness issues in any district is the school food service director. A highly committed food service director who has the district's full



**Delmar Mahan**  
KSBA President and Whitley County  
Board of Education member

support can set the example for cafeteria managers to provide healthier choices for our students, something that is very important in their formative years.

Equally important is nutritional education at an early age. Nutrition and fitness should not be taught separately from the academic curriculum but should be considered just as vital for the overall success of our students.

A child who understands the effect that food has on metabolism can begin at an early age to implement a healthy lifestyle.

In recent years, the physical activity factor has been somewhat controversial for Kentucky's public schools as a result of legislation dictating that local boards

of education provide physical education at varying levels.

Schools often are hard-pressed to work the mandated minutes of physical activity into daily lesson plans while still meeting instructional time requirements. Decisions on providing physical activity for students should continue to be made at the district level.

Over the years, several board members have been outspoken advocates of local boards of education making decisions for their district about student physical activity. Bardstown Independent board member Margie Bradford has been especially dedicated to this principle.

During the current state budget crisis, we must be certain that health and wellness are not regarded as options, but – for the sake of our students – as a key part of the curriculum.

While working on this article I realized that I, too, could use some improvement on my own personal fitness plan, not only for my own health and well-being, but so I may be a more energetic advocate for fitness of Kentucky's students. My personal fitness goal is to drop 30 pounds by next year's KSBA Annual Conference in January by improving my diet considerably and intensifying my exercise regimen.

Please keep me motivated by checking up on my progress at this year's Fall Regional Meetings! ☘

*"During the current state budget crisis, we must be certain that health and wellness are not regarded as options, but – for the sake of our students – as a key part of the curriculum."*



Quotes on education from Kentucky and elsewhere



Photo by Paul Schrauburg/Graves County Schools

custodian Eddie Elder (pictured above eating lunch with students), a finalist for the Kentucky Association of School Administrators' Fred Award. Also in the running are Montgomery County bus driver Brenda Sorrell and Cumberland County Middle School teacher Sherry Radford. From the *Paducah Sun*.

**“He’s not just the trash emptier or the floor mopper. He’s not a certified teacher, but he is a teacher here. He turns everything he does into a teachable moment.”** Graves Central Elementary fourth-grade teacher Vicki Lamb on the special efforts of head

like we are bringing a community college back to the urban center in the same place it was 50 years ago. Who says ‘Back to the Future’ was just a movie?” Gateway Community and Technical College President Ed Hughes on his institution’s agreement to occupy Covington Independent’s just-closed elementary school as part of its new downtown campus. From the *Covington Kentucky Post.com*.

**“It has to start well before high school. One thing we’re putting a great emphasis on at the elementary, middle and high school level is literacy. If a student is struggling to read, by the time they’re in the eighth, ninth or 10th grade, if they are still struggling to read, the bottom line is high school is not going to be very enjoyable. If students can enter high school reading on grade level or beyond, it greatly increases the chances their high school experience will be successful.”** Bowling Green Independent Superintendent Joe Tinius on a part of his district’s dropout prevention efforts. From the *Bowling Green Daily News*.



**“I couldn’t be saying that we would potentially be off the (KDE) watch list if we were still paying \$4 a gallon for diesel.”** Wayne County Superintendent John Dalton on how a cost beyond district control played a critical role in his system’s improving financial situation. From the *Monticello Wayne County Outlook*.

on July 1. From the *Danville Advocate-Messenger*.

**“Thanks to Infinite Campus, our average daily attendance was only 4,301, which is 48.4 less than last year. So we’re not seeing a big increase in SEEK due to this.”** Barren County Schools Finance Officer Sarah Vincent on the budgetary impact of the state’s new student data system that showed an enrollment decline even though the district contends enrollment has actually risen. From the *Glasgow Daily Times*.

**“The irony is that the UK extension center in northern Kentucky operated in the Two Rivers School during the evenings. It looks**

**“We are not trying to play games here by doing this. A cut is a cut and a raise is a raise. If you look at salaries for 2009-10, it is important**



**across the board because it would affect classified and certified employees. We cannot spend 80 percent of our money on personnel and have anything left over to provide the other things that are needed to provide a quality education, such as technology, transportation and fuel.”** Mercer County Interim Superintendent Sonny Fentress on the district’s unique solution to the state budget’s pay raise mandate – a 1 percent salary reduction on June 30 followed by a 1 percent pay increase

**“At the end of the day, the only evidence I have in front of me is that you went to three homes. Maybe it’s crossing the line, but the**



**“Anytime you have a school on a john boat, you’re in trouble.”** Belfry Middle School (Pike County) Principal James Hurley recalling his immediate assessment of May flooding that hit several eastern Kentucky counties and their schools. From WYMT-TV News in Hazard.

evidence is not there. I just don't ... feel as though the commonwealth has provided evidence that will rise to the standard of a probable cause case." District Judge Brandy Oliver Brown in dismissing charges that ex-Clark County board member Minnie Spangler and teacher and former college roommate Julie Baumgardner violated election laws in Spangler's unsuccessful re-election bid. From the *Winchester Sun*.

**"As students, it's a bonus because we feed off each other. It's great to sit in a classroom surrounded by students who have the same interests and goals as you do. I think we all feel really fortunate that we were able to enter the program in its first year. We've been able to mentor the younger students and help shape the program."** Dylan Elder, a graduate of the Kenton County Schools' Success Academy, a cooperative program with Kentucky National Guard for the district's high school students who are interested in learning about the military and considering the military after high school or college. From the Fort Mitchell *Kentucky Enquirer*.

**"I often tell people I stand on the shoulders of giants because of the great leaders we've had in this school district over the years. Of those giants, there is none more special than Pete Royse. Not only was Pete one of Kentucky's leading experts in the area of school finance and construction, but he was the kind of person who wanted to teach others and mentor them along the way. I'm so blessed to have worked with him for 11 years, and I only wish I had at least 11 more to spend at his side."** Jessamine County Superintendent Lu Young on the passing of Royse, a 43-year district staff member whose service included stints as teacher, coach, finance officer, assistant superintendent and interim superintendent. Shortly before his death, the Jessamine County board renamed the central office build-



Pete Royse

ing in his honor. From the Nicholasville *Jessamine Journal*.

**"(I)t's unbelievable that all three would work so hard. To me, my children are amazing. I have always told them that education better yourself. It really cannot be taken away from you."** Lisa Williamson after her daughter Betty Jane became the third sibling to earn valedictorian honors at Hancock County High School, following sister Tabitha in 2004 and brother P. J. in 2007. From the Hawesville *Hancock Clarion*.

**"I would hate to think about what this district would be like without the music programs. It has kind of been one of our influences – you know, you can play ball and we struggle right now, we don't have a lot of athletes and we get our brains beat out – but you can still do well academically and you can still do well in the music programs, and that's what has kind of carried us."** Harlan Independent school board Chairman Joe Meadows on the board's decision to create a full-time music teacher position to increase elementary music classes. From the *Harlan Daily Enterprise*.

**"(C)losing achievement gaps is kind of like sweeping water uphill. It's something you have to stay after all the time. I'd put my teachers up against anybody across the state. It's a team effort from the very top all the way down."** Kirksville Elementary (Madison County) Principal Ann Burns on her school being one of 18 in Kentucky selected for the "What Parents Want" designation by SchoolMatch, a national school research and consulting firm. From the *Richmond Register*.

**"I t's really nice to have the live data from Leitchfield at 4:30 in the morning when trying to make the decision to call off school. When the temperature outside is 33 degrees and drizzling, you know it is not going to be icy like it would be if the temperature were 26 degrees."** Grayson County Superintendent Barry Anderson on one advantage of having one of Western Kentucky University's 25 Mesonet weather monitoring stations at Lawler Elementary School. From the *Leitchfield Grayson County News-Gazette*. ☘

# School resource officers

## POINT ...

**"W e're no longer Mayberry. Things happen. This year, we've had a few more fights than we normally have. Every fight we've had this year has been the result of some type of text message. The threats start off campus, and then when they get to school, that's the first place they meet. The SRO would work in the classrooms and extend into the community. It's another resource we could have."** Washington County High School Principal Leon Smith on a proposal with the Springfield police chief to place a school resource officer at the school.

## COUNTERPOINT...

**"I don't think we need officers in our school building. I think the dress code should be changed. I think we need to look at the use of cell phones. Personally, I see the community with a patrolman in our school system as a fear tactic. I've been at the school and we have good kids up there, but we've got kids up there with their underwear showing. When you dress up and have nice clean clothes on, you feel good, you feel better about yourself."** Washington County school board member Michael McCain on his opposition to the proposal, which was defeated on a 3-2 vote.

From the *Springfield Sun*



# Warren tries to put brakes on 'easy' senior year

Reducing remedial math and English classes goal of district's pilot college readiness program

By Jennifer Wohlleb  
Staff Writer

Just as a number of juniors are preparing to coast into their senior year at Warren East High School, the district is trying to move them back into the academic fast lane.

A pilot program at the school is aimed at improving college readiness, encouraging students to take more challenging classes in their senior year, educating parents of the importance of this and collaborating with postsecondary institutions on districtwide initiatives to improve math and reading skills.

And if that doesn't work, school officials are hitting students in the pocketbook to get their attention.

"At Western Kentucky University this fall, every semester hour costs \$300," Superintendent Dale Brown told a group of juniors in May. "If you have to take two remedial classes, that's \$1,800 – for no credit."

The large number of students needing remedial math and English upon entering college was the impetus for the program.

"This is not just our school issue, district issue or state issue: this is a national issue and we're in line with numbers you see across the country, but we think it can change," said Brown, who devised the effort.

And that is why on a sunny May afternoon, instead of day-dreaming about the approaching summer vacation, Warren East juniors were meeting in small groups in the school library with Brown – and they were paying attention.

During the half-hour sessions, students answered questions using an electronic clicker system, which provided immediate feedback.

One of the more startling revelations was when Brown asked students if they thought they would have to take remedial math. In one group, 52 percent said they thought they would. As high as that projection was, the actual number was even higher.

"According to the information we have, 80 percent of the students here will be taking it," Brown told the group, citing their ACT test results.

WKU requires an ACT math score of at least 22 to avoid remedial math classes.

"I think some of those numbers blow them away," Brown said.

It did Preston Willis, who called the presentation "shocking." "To have to pay and get no credit ..." he said, letting that thought trail off.

Jared Moran, who was already planning to take three or four Advanced Placement classes this fall, also called it shocking.

"That was pretty scary," he said, adding that he thought it definitely had gotten the attention of his classmates.

Between the questions, Brown peppered his presentation with information to drive home the message of college readi-





ness. He showed them a county-by-county breakdown of education level and income. Predictably, those counties with a higher level of educational attainment had a higher level of average income.

"You must plan now," Brown said. "Don't waste time."

Brown also held a meeting with parents, sharing similar information. Warren East High School Principal Cindy Beals said at least 70 parents attended and seemed to take to heart the message of students being challenged.

"I think parents really want their kids to get all A's, and they're not looking at the challenging part," she said. "I have two girls and I would much rather them make a B or even a C if they are challenged and are working hard and have to think."

All Warren County's seniors will also be able to participate in two initiatives this year, a summer reading program and a pre-college math course during the school year, in conjunction with WKU and the community and technical college system, respectively.

"The literacy initiative is going to offer rising seniors an opportunity to be involved in a program this summer that will help improve their rate of reading because one of the issues they find (at WKU) is that they can't keep up with the level of reading in their first year of college," said Winnie Cohron, Warren County's secondary instructional supervisor.

The math initiative is aimed at seniors in all three high schools who scored between 17 and 21 in math on the ACT.

"A math teacher from the community college is partnering with teachers at the high school who will be using the Pearson Math Excel program and integrating elements of pre-college algebra into their curriculum," Cohron said. "By the end of the year, students will be better prepared to take the math placement exam."

She said students who participate in an intervention program to improve their test scores can take the ACT again at the state's expense. The state pays for all juniors to take the test the first time.

Beals said they are asking students to shift their mind set, a message she said can carry more weight when the superintendent personally comes to speak to them.

"We are asking them tough questions, we're making them think," she said.


Beals said the school has made changes to encourage a tougher academic schedule, including dropping study hall for everyone but those academically behind and not allowing students to take more than one non-academic course at a time. For example, students can take PE II, but not at the same time as weightlifting. The school is also increasing its offering of AP classes.

"If you start raising expectations, you get more results," she said. "We have to keep pushing and pushing and raising the bar."

And that was Brown's message to juniors (and all students): "Don't be afraid to take tougher courses, and that should be your message to incoming freshmen," he said. ☞




Warren East High School juniors use electronic clickers to answer questions about how they perceive their college readiness.



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Opposite page: A group of Warren East High School juniors meets with Superintendent Dale Brown, standing at left, and Assistant Superintendent Tim Murley, seated at right, as part of the district's pilot program to increase college readiness and decrease the number of students taking remedial courses in college.

# STATE OF FLUX?

## Year-round budgeting: adjusting fiscal plans becomes the norm for Kentucky schools



Crittenden County Superintendent Rachel Yarbrough, Marion County Superintendent Donald Smith (center) and Simpson County Superintendent Jim Flynn listen as Gov. Steve Beshear talks about his budget balancing plans during a speech at the Kentucky Association of School Superintendents summer conference in Bowling Green.

By Brad Hughes  
Staff Writer

As he has for 10 years, Fulton County Schools Superintendent Dr. Charles Holliday began the new fiscal year with a district budget – an income and spending plan reflecting untold hours of the best projections, conjectures and decisions that he, his administrative team and board of education could produce.

But after three years of state revenue shortfalls, Holliday knows that his budget of July 1 likely will bear little resemblance to the district's financial balance sheet 12 months from now.

"It just seems we are not going any period of time when we are not needing to make adjustments in the present budget or needing to diagnose what we may need to do in future budgets," said Holliday.

Indeed, a random sampling of superintendents on budget building found a recurring theme: that uncertain state funding is having a growing, negative impact on local decision making.

"In these budgetary conditions, every allocation and every position has to be closely analyzed with the question:

'Is this truly making an impact on student achievement?'" said Pikeville Independent Superintendent Jerry Green. "And sad to say, some things that impact student achievement have had to go because this is the third consecutive year (of cuts in state funding)."

For example, Green has given nonrenewal letters to teachers and other staff for the past three years due to the combination of the May 15 deadline for employment notice and the May 30 deadline for the board to adopt a tentative working budget – a budget now regularly developed without firm funding figures from Frankfort.

"The sad part is, when you send those things out just to be on the safe side, that doesn't build a lot of good will and trust among staff. This year, for the first time, we've made staff cuts," said Green.

### **Slicing and dicing never ends**

Rockcastle County Superintendent Larry Hammond said the recurrence of significant mid-year cuts "is new territory for anyone building a budget."

For Hammond, that has meant delaying bus replacements and examining such unpleasant options as increasing the pupil-teacher ratio.

"We've invested most of our funding toward people," he



said. "We have very limited programs such as math and reading (because) we felt we couldn't sustain those. So we've hired and trained good people with good results so far. But we are fearful that we are looking at staffing in the future."

Williamsburg Independent Superintendent Dennis Byrd said recent experience is forcing conservative budgeting.

"Last year, we had \$22,000 set aside to buy textbooks and then we get a notice at the end of the year that they are cutting it by \$6,400. We'd already ordered the textbooks and used them for a year, so we had to use our General Fund," he said.

Like several of his counterparts, Byrd cited the past three years as proof of the importance of strong Fund I and contingency fund balances. But he fears that such bank accounts can be misinterpreted.

"The downside is that legislators don't realize that districts build their contingency so they could do some remodeling and other improvements. I've got a chiller to replace in one school. That's \$40,000," he said. "But because a district has a large contingency fund, legislators feel, 'Oh, man, schools have all kinds of money.'"

#### **Creativity counts**

Conservative budgeting will only get you so far, leading some superintendents to become more inventive in their 2009-10 budgets.

Pendleton County Superintendent Bob Yost had to cut three school nurse positions due to funding. A partnership produced a money and service-saving solution.

"We struck a deal with the Three Rivers Health Department to hire those nurses and assign them to the same schools,

providing pretty much the same services. But as Three Rivers' employees, the health department will be reimbursed (by Medicaid or other insurance) for the billable services they provide," Yost said. "That's about a \$90,000 difference that's now not in my budget, but I anticipate still getting the same level of service."

Crittenden County Superintendent Rachel Yarbrough opted to build a budget that anticipated that the amount of state funds she was told to expect wouldn't be forthcoming.

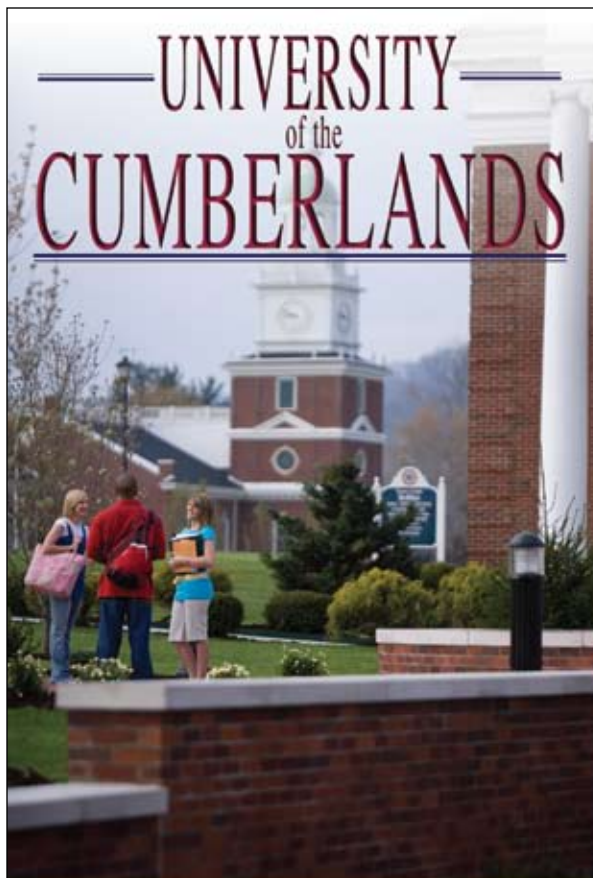
"We started the school year in July 2008 assuming that we would get a 3 percent cut during the year," she said. "At the end of this year, had we budgeted on the SEEK forecast, we would have been in the hole by \$130,000.

"This year, it's tough to have SEEK at the same \$3,866 (per student) level with a 1 percent pay increase. That's a little over \$100,000 we will have to find (in district revenues as the state is not funding the mandate)," Yarbrough said. "And my fear is beginning to build for fiscal 2011.

"The common pot of funds that you have locally to keep a district going is limited. We're looking at everything but there's not a lot left to trim."

Almost to a person, the superintendents praised Gov. Steve Beshear and the General Assembly for addressing the shortfall in June, and not waiting until January's regular legislative session – midway through the school year. But by the same token, many of the superintendents are wary of what lies ahead in those coming months.

"You just hope you've got enough in your contingency," said Williamsburg's Byrd. "It's a game, I'll be honest with you." ❧



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# DETERIORATING SCHOOL BUILDING

Tiles in many of the older schools in Metcalfe County often have to be replaced, according to facilities director Herby Bunch. He said the tiles require special abatement because they contain asbestos.



# 'Band-Aids' not enough in Metcalfe County

By Mary Branham

Steve Thompson ran for the Metcalfe County Board of Education in 1999 because a barn door hinge hung on the door of a rural elementary school in the district. "I just made up my mind that if this was all we could give our kids, we were in bad shape," Thompson, now the board chairman, said.

The district has put "Band-Aids," as Thompson calls them, on some of the problems at its aging schools – two of which are rated as category 5 schools, the lowest rating, by the Kentucky Department of Education. But there are still a lot of problems, Thompson and district officials said.

Though the state includes only Summer Shade and North Metcalfe elementary schools in the official list of category 5 schools, Superintendent Pat Hurt said four of the district's five school buildings actually fit that category. Edmonton Elementary and Metcalfe County Middle School are also in dire need of replacement, she said.

The problems begin with what you can't see. The insulation

in the buildings is not good, roofs are worn, floor tiles come up, and the plumbing, electrical, and heating and air conditioning systems are old and inefficient.

Herby Bunch, district facilities director, said the district has upgraded the electrical systems in the buildings to match the district's needs, but the plumbing hasn't been touched. The older buildings – built in the 1950s – have cast-iron pipes exposed to "years of acids and drain cleaners poured into them.

"We've actually experienced some of those pipes, the bottoms rusting out of them and you have to tear a floor out to get to them," he said.

Neither Summer Shade nor North Metcalfe elementaries is on city sewer service, according to Bunch. He said one school is on the septic system, while the other is on a wetlands system – a system that pretreats wastewater by filtration, settling and bacterial decomposition in a natural-looking lined marsh.

"That's a major problem," Bunch said.

See "Band-aids" continued on Page 16

## INGS: LIST IS SHORTER – FOR NOW

By Madelynn Coldiron  
Staff Writer

The Kentucky schools in the worst physical condition got that way for any of three reasons: lack of funds, poor planning or lax preventive maintenance.

Sometimes it's all of the above.

"Most districts ended up with them because they had a combination of the three," said Mark Ryles, longtime head of the facilities division in the state education department. "You have to look at each case, I think."

In terms of revenue, districts with buildings in good shape tend to have a local tax rate for facilities beyond the base 5 cents, Ryles said.

The department rates school buildings on a 1 to 5 scale, with those in category 5 being the worst. It lists 16 of those schools spread among 12 districts – in all but one case, their condition is such that districts can't spend money for major work on them without state approval.

There also are 140 schools in category 4, some of which could slide into the bottom tier. The ratings are not static.

"As schools age, they get older and get dilapidated. There will always be some category 5 schools unless we get our revenue stream fixed," said Dr. Robert Tarvin, who heads the Kentucky School Facilities Construction Commission.

Things could be much worse. In 1994, 34 percent of the state's schools were rated category 4 or 5; today, that percentage has dropped to less than 13 percent, Ryles said.

### Form and function

Category 5 schools have a functional age over 40 years and they've had no major renovation. Some might not look bad at first blush but are limited in their ability to meet Kentucky building code, which wasn't in place until the late 1970s. There are issues of handicapped accessibility, indoor air quality, wood construction, fire separation in stairwells and between floors, and earthquake resistance.

The state fire marshal's code applies

to all existing buildings, so those old schools still must have safety features such as audio/visual fire alarm systems. The schools meet the minimum safety standards and have been structurally evaluated by engineers and architects, Ryles said.

"On the other hand, is a building that's in service that's a category 5 as safe as a modern building? The answer would be no. There are more risks for everything from fire safety should the building be wood construction, to potential liability for lawsuits for accessibility," he said.

The old buildings also were not designed for visitor control and school safety and likely have higher utility costs than modern schools. In category 4 and 5 schools, the quality of science labs, vocational programs and special needs classrooms can also be problematic, Ryles said.

### Equity?

Kentucky school districts' local taxation includes a base 5-cent tax for

See "Facilities" continued on Page 15



## Fleming County fighting valiant but losing battle with buildings

By Mary Branham

**A** second floor classroom at Ewing Elementary School catches the late morning and early afternoon sun. The 24,000-Btu air conditioner poised on one window of the room drones continuously; it's cool, but loud.

Fleming County Superintendent Kelley Crain points out the weather outside is pleasant on this spring afternoon and not indicative of the heat that often comes in the dog days of summer or the often hot spring days. And in this classroom, on the front of the large, old school, winter days can be cold – it's the room furthest from the coal boiler.

“With the boiler-type system, you have some rooms that are very warm that are at the beginning of the pipeline ... they'll actually open their windows or turn on their air conditioners to cool down,” Crain said. Meanwhile, rooms – like this top floor location – barely reach an optimal temperature.

That lack of temperature control is just one problem in the school – one of 16 designated as category 5 buildings in the state. The school, which opened in 1925, also has major problems with its plumbing and electrical systems. While those woes are not easily visible, the building is showing its age.

Assistant Superintendent Tony Roth, who serves as facilities manager, points to the gap above a classroom door in a

frame that has settled crookedly. The door has been trimmed through the years so it will close, he said. Crain points to the conduit and wiring installed to try to keep the building up-to-date with technology.

In the kitchen, cafeteria manager Janice Flora stands near a World War II-era stove and explains the storage system that keeps her walking up and down stairs and outside the building to bring the items she needs to the kitchen. She points to a spot on the floor where new tile is needed – water gets under the tiles, which crack and crumble, exposing the weathered wood floors below.

Downstairs in the gym, Principal Dale Emmons points to the gym floor where tiles have been replaced. “Water will saturate the walls and the floor will actually float,” Emmons said. “You have to take the floor up, vacuum it up and dry it out.”

Just behind the gymnasium is the boiler room. Walls are blackened with coal dust, which is only natural since the coal storage room is a tight walk behind the boiler. When the boiler starts, there's a lot of smoke and dust, Emmons said. “If you have a child allergic to dust, it's going to definitely cause problems,” he said.

Crain said the district spends more custodial dollars at Ewing than at the district's other five schools. And even what you can't see is bad: The oil-soaked wooden floors under the tile and carpet are a fire hazard, she said.

Fleming County is home to two category 5 schools, but the range of problems is evident in these two schools on far ends of the county.

At Hillsboro Elementary School, the lighting, heating and air conditioning, plumbing and electrical systems pose similar problems as Ewing for Fleming

Continued at right



**Photos: (Above)** Since being built in 1925, Fleming County's Ewing Elementary has settled, causing gaps between doors and their frames.

**(Left)** The library storage area at Ewing Elementary also serves as the wiring closet. That creates security issues, Superintendent Kelley Crain said, because the door has to be left open so the room doesn't overheat.



# Facilities

Continued from Page 13

facilities that is equalized with state funds at the rate of 150 percent. They also are offered a percentage of funding allocated to the School Facilities Construction Commission.

Some category 5 schools were wiped off the books after the legislature established the Urgent Need School Trust Fund earlier in this decade to provide funding to replace or renovate eligible schools in the worst shape. However, the system, later called “inequitable by definition” in a 2006 Office of Education Accountability report, was not refunded in subsequent state budgets.

In addition, the legislature in the past allowed growth districts the option of adding a nickel tax for facilities, not subject to voter recall. Under a later measure, if they added a second growth nickel — again, without fear of recall — the state would equalize the first one.

Other districts had just one option: they could levy another nickel that was recallable, a politically sensitive option. This set the stage for some current inequities, Tarvin said.

“We have a real unfairness — a lack of equity, I think — in terms of the districts that have been allowed to get to that 10-cent level without recall and then so many of these districts haven’t had the opportunity to do that without recall,” Tarvin said.

Action by the 2008 General Assembly now makes the recallable nickel the only recourse for all school districts; all growth nickels were eliminated.

“We’ve really gone backwards, I think, in that area,” Tarvin said.

## What’s needed

Because infrastructure is constantly aging, a sustainable rev-



Moisture often gets under tiles in the kitchen at Fleming County’s Ewing Elementary School. Those tiles often break to expose the oiled wooden floors below.

enue stream for districts is the key to keeping up, Ryles said.

The 2006 School Facilities Task Force recommended the General Assembly amend existing law to require districts to increase the basic 5-cent equalized levy to a 10-cent equivalent tax rate, also equalized by the state.

“As long as we don’t move it up another nickel, we’re always going to have category 5s,” Tarvin said.

However, he and Ryles expect that some districts would still fall short even with a 10-cent tax. In Robertson County Schools, for example, the additional tax would net the district just \$39,000 annually, Tarvin pointed out.

This is where some form of targeted funding could come into play to help schools in that situation, they said.

“We’ve had enough experience with enough districts to know what it is we need to do to solve this equity and adequacy issue in school facilities,” Ryles said. “We know what to do — it’s a matter of getting resources.” ☞

— Mary Branham is a writer from Frankfort.

Continued from previous page

County. But the building is in better condition. Hillsboro has space problems, Principal Carol Thompson said, but it’s held up well over the years.

Lighting is insufficient in the WPA-era structure, which is heated with a coal boiler and cooled by window air conditioning units.

“They’re very noisy,” she said. Teachers “have to talk over top of them. You’re constantly asking the kids to either speak louder or read louder because you can’t hear them.”

“The maintenance on those buildings is just tremendous,” said Fleming County Board of Education Chairman Eddie

Ward. “They need so many repairs.”

In addition to the major systems, the windows in these old buildings are single pane and inefficient by today’s standard, the buildings aren’t handicap accessible and, like many old buildings, enable easier entry for rodents and bats.

“We have done some major renovations and additions to address some of the problems we’ve had in other buildings,” Crain said, “but there is inadequate money to solve all the problems we face.” ☞

— Mary Branham is a writer from Frankfort.

# Band-aids

Continued from Page 13

Keeping up with the technology today isn't easy in these old buildings. All the schools have SMART boards, the interactive white boards found in many classrooms, but projectors dangle from the ceiling in several classes – not an ideal situation, Bunch said.

“When you go to put SMART boards in old classroom, you can't just run a drop cord up there,” said Chris Huffman, director of pupil personnel. “There isn't much electricity in the ceiling so you have to run wire from a long way through conduit.”

And Bunch suspects further advancement in technology will make it difficult for Metcalfe County schools to keep up. But that's not the only area.

“The main issue we have with having a category 5 school is that it is the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) issues,” said Bunch. “The old buildings are not handicap accessible to all students, and that would take an extensive renovation to remedy that problem.”

Many of the restroom facilities, for instance, have narrow entrances and lack handicap stalls. Summer Shade and North Metcalfe both have sunken cafeterias – you have to take steps down into those lunchrooms. “There's no way, unless you take a child outside, in a wheelchair; you have to take a child outside the building and in another door to get him into the cafeteria,” Bunch said.

The different levels in several of the district's buildings have required creative solutions – such as a ramp built by the maintenance department and installation of a chair lift at Edmonton Elementary.

The problems you can see all match the aging nature of the buildings. The district does what it can to make the facilities look good. In fact, the district hired an artist to paint murals in the schools.

“We've painted, we've put carpet down to make them really cheering and appealing. It's to camouflage the fact that what we have is aging,” Superintendent Pat Hurt said.

Part of Metcalfe County's dilemma is that four of its five schools need to be replaced, she said. The two elementary schools the state Department of Education lists as category 5 sit on opposite ends of the county. The district hopes to consolidate those two schools and Edmonton Elementary into two new schools that would have to be built simultaneously, Hurt said. ☞

— Mary Branham is a writer from Frankfort.



Metcalfe County Middle School has built onto several times so that now it has classrooms on five different levels, facilities director Herby Bunch said. The stairwell shows three different levels, as well as the piping installed to keep the building up to date with electrical needs.

## Kentucky Department of Education 2009 category 5 schools

DISTRICT	SCHOOL
Anderson County	Early Childhood Center
Carter County	Carter Elementary
Clark County	Central Elementary Fannie Bush Elementary Pilot View Elementary
Fleming County	Ewing Elementary Hillsboro Elementary
Johnson County	Meade Memorial Elementary
Leslie County	W.B. Muncy Elementary
Letcher County	Beckham Bates Elementary
Metcalfe County*	North Metcalfe Elementary Summer Shade Elementary
Paducah Independent	Paducah Middle School
Perry County	D.C. Wooten Elementary
Pike County	Phelps Elementary
Robertson County	Deming Elementary/High School

\*District says two of its other schools also are category 5



# Superintendents' summer school



The summer conference of the Kentucky Association of School Superintendents in Bowling Green last month offered a blend of networking and learning opportunities for dozens of district leaders from around the state.

Upper left: Keynote speaker Jeff Eben, a paraplegic since a water-skiing accident at age 16, shares his “feel the love” philosophy on a life that includes his rise to principal of a California high school that earned a National Blue Ribbon School award during his tenure. Listening (left to right) are Casey County Superintendent Linda Hatter, Fleming County Superintendent and outgoing KASS President Kelley Crain and Nelson County Superintendent Jan Lantz.

Upper Right: Retired Fort Thomas Superintendent Dr. Fred Williams was honored with the KASS Distinguished Service Award for his years of work with the new superintendent’s training and superintendent mentoring programs.

Above: McLean County board member Bill Lovell (foreground) and KSBA Associate Executive Director David Baird provided a seminar on board/superintendent working relationships for members of the 2009 class of new superintendents. Also presenting at the conference were KSBA Risk Management Director Myron Thompson (on sports liability) and Member Support Services Director Brad Hughes (board meetings as community forums).

## Web site of the month



It’s summer. School’s out and chances are that the information a visitor to a district’s Web site might need is probably limited to when does the school year start in August. **Mercer County Schools** puts that information front and center on its district home page, along with the 2009-10 school calendar.

This colorful Web site features lots of photos of students along with an easy-to-use navigation bar at the top of the page taking visitors to district schools, the central office, the board of education, the foundation, and employment opportunities, just to name a few tabs.

To view the site, go to [www.mercer.k12.ky.us/index.php](http://www.mercer.k12.ky.us/index.php)

# Closing the gap early

By Jennifer Wohlleb  
Staff Writer

**W**hen school districts look at closing the achievement gap, they're almost never talking about preschool. Dr. Sue Bredekamp wants to change that. Bredekamp, research director for the Council of Early Childhood Professional Recognition in Washington, D.C., and author of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in early Childhood Programs*, was a keynote speaker at the 23rd annual Early Childhood Summer Institute in Louisville in June.

She said it is important to begin addressing learning gaps in preschool.

"We know there is a huge achievement gap at the beginning of preschool in language," she said. "That gap predicts how children will do later in school."

Bredekamp also said that the National Research Council's

Panel on Mathematics, on which she served, has linked math ability with literacy.

"Mathematics ability at the entrance to preschool not only predicts children's later math ability, it also predicts their later literacy ability," she said. "That's quite an interesting finding because literacy ability at the beginning of preschool predicts literacy ability only; it does not predict mathematics. There's something going on with the way children learn mathematics that is broader."

Bredekamp said there is a lot of math in preschool children's play and it's important for educators to give appropriate context to those activities, particularly for children from poorer families.

"When people observe the play of children from lower socioeconomic families and from middle-class families, they do not find differences in the amount of mathematical play that these children engage in," she said. "But they do find one major difference, and that is in the amount of math language that the two groups hear. Children from middle-class families hear a lot more math talk in their math play. The children from lower-economic families are having the same experience, but no one is giving them the vocabulary to go along with it... so they can't link the experience with the concept."

She said math helps students build an educational foundation.

"Math is a sequential subject ... what you get builds a foundation for the next level," she said, "and the less you get at any level, the more difficult it becomes at the next level."

Bredekamp encouraged early childhood teachers to meet their students where they are and to help them reach achievable goals. She said educators also need to accept that their field is characterized by both continuity and change.

"Some things are continuous ... yet as educators we are constantly confronted by change, and the



Dr. Sue Bredekamp, left, speaks with Donna Isaacs of Jessamine County Schools, an attendee at the 23rd annual Early Childhood Summer Institute held in Louisville last month. Bredekamp gave a keynote address on the implementation of developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood education.

Continued at right



## VERBAL JUDO

### Q. How can we help our employees better manage student behavior?



**Joe Isaacs:** Every day in Kentucky schools, classified and certified employees face challenges in managing and reacting to students' behavior. These incidents may occur anywhere within the school, on a school bus and even on school grounds. It's important for staff to know how to resolve these confrontations before they get out of hand and turn into legal matters.

Kentucky School Boards Insurance Trust (KSBIT) is working with Kentucky State

Police Sgt. Michael Todd Evans to provide member training called "Verbal Judo." The program's objectives are to:

- Promote employee and student safety by teaching staff members how to defuse potentially dangerous situations

with deflection and redirection techniques in verbally abusive confrontations.

- Enhance professionalism by giving participants the tools and skills to verbally interact in a professional manner with various types of difficult people to generate voluntary compliance.
- Reduce personal stress on the job and at home by developing communication techniques that facilitate better listening skills and delivery style.
- Learn self-control by providing attendees self-control tools for defusing tense verbal confrontations respectfully and safely.

The next training session for KSBIT members is July 23 at Kentucky Dam Village State Resort Park's conference center. Please contact Melanie Judy or Joe Isaacs at 1-800-372-2962 for more information on this program.

— *Isaacs is the Risk Control and Safety Manager for the Kentucky School Boards Insurance Trust, KSBA's insurance and risk management service.* ☘

context in which we are operating right now is a lot of change," she said. "Schools are becoming involved in early childhood education to a degree that we have never anticipated."

Bredenkamp said she never could have imagined a school board association participating in an early childhood education conference, referring to KSBA Executive Director Bill Scott, who spoke briefly at the beginning of her session.

KSBA and four other state school boards associations currently are participating in a pre-K initiative of the National School Boards Association and its Center for Public Education.

The project is funded with a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, which has made improving access to high-quality preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds a top priority. The aim of this two-year project is for school boards to raise awareness in their communities and state legislatures of the importance of early childhood education.

During an interview, Bredenkamp said school board members need to continue to work on access issues for preschoolers.

"A lot of children who need these experiences aren't eligible for Head Start," she said. "There's a group of working poor who can't afford preschool so state-funded programs are important to them."

She also encouraged them to think inclusively of early childhood education.

"School board members need to see it as part of the education system and that it contributes to the success of the entire school system," she said. ☘

## Kentucky superintendent vacancies

### Washington County Schools

(1,688 – PS – 12) [www.washington.kyschoolsus](http://www.washington.kyschoolsus)

The Washington County Board of Education is seeking a proven educational leader with a strong academic background. Candidates should also have administrative experience along with a successful history of financial management. Previous experience with the supervision of building construction is a plus. Excellent people skills are expected. Contract tentatively to start Sept. 1, 2009 but is negotiable. Salary is competitive and commensurate with experience. Application deadline: July 17, 2009.

To apply and receive further information, send seven collated copies of a letter of application, application form, resume and three letters of recommendation to:

*Washington County Superintendent Search  
Kentucky School Boards Association  
260 Democrat Drive  
Frankfort, KY 40601*

**Application deadline: July 17, 2009.**

# Congressman Ben Chandler

*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 Kentucky's 6th District Congressman Ben Chandler, who discusses his 21st Century Green High-Performing Public School Facilities Act, which was recently passed by the House of Representatives in a 275-155 vote.*

**U.S. Rep. Ben Chandler reads to third graders at Powell County's Bowen Elementary School.**



Photo by Jennifer Krimm

**Q.** Tell me about the bill. What kind of projects will schools be able to do with this money?

**A.** This is mostly for the renovation and repair of schools across the country. Of course it has the green part of it, the environmentally friendly part of it, which calls for the schools to handle their renovations in an environmentally friendly manner by using certain standards that are already in the law.

It will hopefully do three things: First, it will create jobs in this country – and most importantly – jobs that can't be exported. Those are the kinds of jobs we like, you know.

It will, of course, help with the environment. Our public buildings, and of course, our schools, are generally some of the top wasters of energy just because they're not insulated properly in many cases. They obviously use a lot of energy; many are old or outdated and not very efficient. So what we're trying to do is save a lot of energy, and not only save money but also improve the environment.

The third thing that is important about this is that all of the studies you see suggest that kids learn much, much better, they perform better if they are in nicer environments. So any renovations of the schools at the end of the day will help kids perform better.

Every study that we have seen shows that our school infrastructure throughout this country has been crumbling at an alarming rate over the

past few decades and we haven't been attending to it the way we should have.

**Q.** What does it mean for Kentucky?

**A.** For Kentucky in the one we passed most recently – we've had several iterations of this – it calls for \$93.6 million for Kentucky.

It almost got in the stimulus package, it actually was in there at one point, until Sen. Susan Collins of Maine pulled it out at the last minute in exchange for her vote.

I don't know what her objection to it was, frankly, because if we were going to put money into trying to create or save jobs in a strong economic downturn, what better way to do it?

It's not like it's a case of first impression. It's not like we had never seen the federal government involved in the building of schools. It certainly happened in the Great Depression with the WPA (Works Progress Administration) projects. Many schools were built through that program.

**Q.** It seems like this would be a good way to put people to work.

**A.** And accomplish those other good things. We obviously have an energy problem and we want to help conserve energy as best we can. Not only because of the cost, but because of the environmental cost. And we want our kids to be competitive in a global economy and to perform well, and this bill helps all of those things.



**Q. How long have you been trying to get this passed?**

**A.** I would say the last two Congresses. We have passed it through the House twice and got it into the stimulus bill. And oddly enough, some of the money for it remained in the stimulus bill. When Sen. Collins decided she didn't like it being dedicated for school construction, she got the language taken out for school construction and allowed decisions makers, governors, to use the money for something else. When they have other pressing needs, they are likely to do that.

**Q. What was her objection?**

**A.** It's a mystery to me. I think what she said was that she didn't think the federal government should be in that business, that it's a state and local function. And of course, the problem is the state and local governments can't afford it right now; they have too many other needs. And again, it's not the first time it's ever happened, contrary to what I think she claimed.

**Q. How did you get involved in this topic of green schools? Why is it so important to you?**

**A.** Education is extremely important to me and always has been. My three children are still living right there in central Kentucky and they all three go to public schools. In fact, this year we had one in high school, one in middle school and one in elementary. We're covered in all three phases of the public school system in our own family and consequently public schools have always been important. They are important to me in terms of my children, but I've always believed public schools are important in terms of our society. We're

going to rise or fall depending on the quality of our public schools.

This was a niche, this was an area that not too many people had been focusing on. People focus so much on all of the other issues of public schools, and they are important: class size, all-day kindergarten, early childhood education. But this was a niche I felt had not been talked about enough and had the possibility of leading to important tangible results for our people.

**Q. Given the shift in power in Washington recently, do you think this bill has a better chance now to pass the Senate and then be signed by President Obama?**

**A.** I think so. President Obama has already demonstrated strong support for it. He was very much in favor of it when it was in the stimulus package. Of course it passed the House with great ease. The Senate, you can't ever tell what's going to happen in the Senate, but it's had pretty much complete opposition from the Republicans in the Senate. My hope is that we can either get a Republican or two to be for it or we'll have to wait until we have a greater majority. We almost have the 60 votes required to do a number of things that have been blocked up to now. If we can get those 60 votes, I think we have a really good shot of getting these things done.

**Q. Is there any indication of when the Senate could take up this bill?**

**A.** I'm afraid in the very near future it's going to be very difficult to get anyone's attention over in the Senate because they are in the middle of dealing with a war supplemental, but they are also dealing with an energy bill

which has been very controversial and will revamp the way we do energy in this country if it passes.

And the other thing they are looking at that is very significant is a complete overhaul of the health care system and that affects everything, including the education system – things like teacher pension plans and even ultimately how we compensate people who work in our public schools. It's an all-encompassing bill and hopefully we'll get something done on that. But I think they've maybe bitten off more than they can chew and they are going to have their plates utterly full for the rest of the year.

And of course, we have all of the economic issues that we continue to grapple with.

**Q. I'm sure regardless of what the Senate does this year, you will continue to push for this bill.**

**A.** We're going to get it done one of these days and we're going to keep pushing, you can be sure of that.

**Q. Are there any other education issues you are working on right now?**

**A.** Nothing that we are in the middle of right now. We have been so focused on getting this done, but I work very closely with Rep. George Miller, chairman of the education committee, and I'm always going to have my eye out for ways that I can be helpful. I am so interested in the success of public education. I don't ever want to see money diverted from it. We need to always be accountable, and everyone through the system needs to be accountable, as anyone elected needs to be accountable. But we also need to invest and continue to invest in that system. ☘

*“... all of the studies you see suggest that kids learn much, much better, they perform better if they are in nicer environments. So any renovations of the schools at the end of the day will help kids perform better.”*

— U.S. Rep. Ben Chandler

# New ed commissioner must follow summer of rumor with fall of specifics

If its timetable holds, the Kentucky Board of Education is nearing the end of its search for the state's fifth commissioner of education. Of course, maybe we should label whoever gets the job No. 6, considering the several times interim commissioner Kevin Noland has held that title.

Either way, the selection will end eight months of speculation, gossip and "I heard that..." since Dr. Jon Draud revealed his retirement plans last December.

Will it be Superintendent so-and-so or any superintendent in Kentucky? One superintendent confirmed his application and the rumor mill identified at least three more as having acknowledged interest. Others may have joined but kept their cards close to the vest.

Will a current Department of Education employee rise to lead the agency as Gene Wilhoit did in 2000? With ex-deputy/interim commissioner Elaine Farris' departure to lead the Clark County Schools and the board's decision to draw Noland out of retirement, the odds seem long.

Will state board members go beyond Kentucky's borders as their predecessors did in hiring Thomas Boysen, Wilmer Cody and (albeit briefly) Barbara Erwin? That may fly in the face of several members' desires that the next commissioner have a clear understanding of the state's public education system, the Kentucky Education Reform Act and their entwined ups and downs.

Whoever starts work this fall will face myriad challenges. Funding cuts at the department, district and school levels as Gov. Beshear and legislators prepare for a biennial budget-building session with dire revenue projections. A requirement for secondary schools and higher education to get together on preparing high school grads for college course work. A complete redrawing of the state's assessment and accountability system.

It would be easy for the next commissioner to hunker down in the Capital Plaza Tower for the rest of 2009, working to get his or her hands around the operations of the agency, the mandates for immediate action and the preparations for legislative work come January.

It also would be the worst thing the new commissioner – and the state board – could do.

## Hit the road, Jack (or Jill)

Kentucky's next education commissioner needs to spend a substantial portion of his/her first months on the job on the road. Speak to regional education cooperatives and at major conferences like those KASS and KSBA will have in December. Stop by several districts to see some schools, listen in at some school board meetings, celebrate the local efforts being made.

State board members – spread out from one corner of Ken-



Brad Hughes  
KSBA Member  
Support Services Director

tucky to the other – should bring Kentucky's new education chief to their local chamber of commerce, Lions or Rotary Club meetings. Learn from smart school boards who don't just hire and then leave the new employee to go about making introductions as an unknown.

Sit down with the dwindling number of experienced education-focused journalists in the state – including those working for this publication – and talk one-on-one, giving more insights and clarification into your goals, immediate and long-term, than are going to be possible in that initial, media-frenzy coronation news conference in Frankfort.

Really go out on the edge and work with the department's communications staff to create your own Web blog or other frequent electronic communication to the elementary and secondary education community. Encourage all of the alphabet soup K-12 groups (KASA, KASC, KASS, KSBA, etc.) to distribute those communications to our members as broadly as possible.

And put some meat in your message, for gosh sakes. We all want all students to achieve at high levels. We all support a challenging curriculum that pushes the at-risk as well as the gifted-and-talented to pursue a college degree. We all want higher test scores, higher pay for teachers and higher public confidence in Kentucky's public schools. Tell us – at least in broad terms – how you want to spend your first year pursuing those dreams.

## The Last Word

Kentucky's next education commissioner will be just like the 15-18 new superintendents who took the helm in new jobs on July 1. Some people will hail the selection publicly; some may raise doubts. A number of others will offer – in hushed tones, of course – their inner concerns about experience, personality, leadership style and capabilities of being up to the huge task ahead.

A new superintendent must get out and be visible in the community, in the schools, answering questions that can be answered, offering to consider the issues that aren't ripe for solution and listening, listening, listening. A new education commissioner – regardless of whether the choice is an unknown, fresh face or an established, at least reasonably-recognized in-state leader – can't afford the luxury of weeks of Frankfort meetings, conference calls and report analysis.

Commissioner No. 5 (or No. 6) needs to spend some serious time where the action is – out in 174 public school systems that will depend on the new leader to help boost the only goal that really matters – giving every child in Kentucky's public schools a life-enhancing education.

And that's a message worth getting out. ☘



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

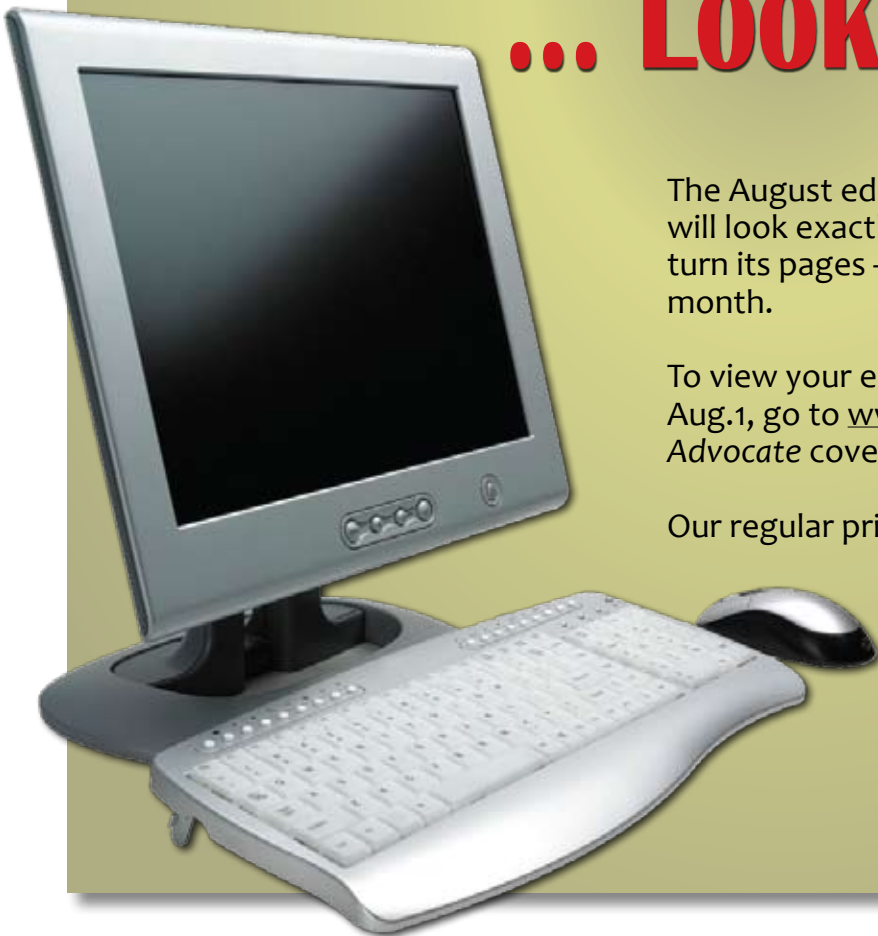


**... Look here**

The August edition of the *Kentucky School Advocate* will look exactly the same — you'll even be able to turn its pages — but it will be all-electronic next month.

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

Our regular print edition will return in September.



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Lexington, KY

## New digs, new opportunities for GRREC



This spring marked a momentous move and opportunity for the three dozen staff and the services provided by the Green River Regional Educational Cooperative.

The co-ops' new \$3 million headquarters opened in June just north of Bowling Green. The new building allows GRREC to consolidate its staff and offices from two locations on separate campuses of Western Kentucky University.

Upper Left: GRREC Associate Executive Director George Wilson (center) gave KSBA Executive Director Bill Scott (left) and Associate Executive Director David Baird a tour of the facility during the open house to show off the 14,000-square foot facility.

Upper Right: GRREC member superintendents who turned out for the open house included (left to right) John Hurt of Cumberland County, Randall Jackson of Allen County, Marshall Kemp of Logan County and Gary Seaborne of Taylor County.



Left: New distance learning labs and conference space in the GRREC facility will be used for training of teachers, superintendents and district staff.