

KENTUCKY SCHOOL ADVOCATE

A publication of the Kentucky School Boards Association ■ September 2010

Grading above the curve

LAPTOPS: THE NEW TEXTBOOKS

Middle colleges on the move

Autism initiative launched

KINDERGARTEN SUMMER PREP



Training for Section 504 Coordinators and 504 Team Chairs

Sept. 30 - Oct. 1
Park Inn Louisville East

New federal ADA regulations for state and local governments have been released

For more information or to register online, go to www.ksba.org, and click on *Section 504 Coordinator* and *Section 504 Team Chair* under "Featured Events" at the top of the page.

Learn information that all coordinators, new and experienced, need to know.

Hear about current court cases and hot topic issues.

We will cover school district responsibilities for accommodating students, staff and the public under Section 504.



FEATURES

AUTISM INITIATIVE

The staggering increase in the number of Kentucky students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders explains why a new statewide initiative is training teachers in the strategies proven to help these children ... Page 8

ABOVE AVERAGE

Unlike the fictional Lake Woebegon where every child is above average, Eminence Independent Schools is striving to be the real thing. The middle and high schools have a grading system with nothing below a B, a strategy to encourage student accountability ... Page 10

IN THE MIDDLE

The middle college concept, fallow for years in Kentucky, appears to be picking up steam and supporters. The question is, will these programs be sustainable during tough budgetary times for school districts ... Page 12

BOARD ELECTION TRENDS

The short version of this year's school board election filings: Slightly more incumbent board members want to stick around in contrast to the last comparable election, while more challengers would like to derail those plans. Then there's the matter of the two candidates who were previously removed from office but filed to run again... Page 16

ACROSS THE BOARD

Experience in education and human services are the hallmarks of the new crop of state school board members who took their seats last month next to two reappointees. Their interests include improving teaching and learning and implementing the new common core standards ... Page 18



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On the cover



Dianne Floyd, a substitute teacher, helps William Nethery (foreground) and William Upton, in Eminence High School's computer lab. Eminence has tightened its grading policy, making As and Bs the only passing grades in its middle and high schools... Article on Page 10.

TAKE NOTE

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The *Kentucky School Advocate* is published 10 times a year by the Kentucky School Boards Association. Copies are mailed to KSBA members as part of their association membership. Two additional issues each year are published exclusively on KSBA's Web site.

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Curriculum corps

Superintendents and school board members have new representation on the School Curriculum, Assessment and Accountability Council. Gov. Steve Beshear appointed the following to serve terms expiring April 30, 2012:

- Phyllis E. Young, a member of the Scott County school board
- Lu Settles Young, Jessamine County Schools superintendent
- Sara B. Call, a Franklin County school board member
- Sheldon H. Berman, superintendent of Jefferson County Schools.

Also appointed was Carl H. Wicklund, plant manager at Wagstaff, Inc. to represent the state's employers. He is a member of the Kenton County Schools and KSBA boards.

In the alternative

Eleven alternative education programs have been selected as best practice sites. The designation is given by the state education department to highlight exemplary practices in alternative programs and sites that serve state agency children. Each program selected receives \$1,000 for instructional support.

The programs were nominated in three categories and sites were chosen on the basis of one or more of them. Of the 11, five were named 2010 best practice sites in all three categories; those with asterisks were similarly designated last year. They are:

- Ramey-Estep High School, a residen-

tial treatment center in Boyd County*
• Calloway County Schools Alternative Education Center, along with the district's Day Treatment Center*

- Bellewood Presbyterian Home for Children in Jefferson County
- The Providence School, operated by Jessamine County Schools*
- Buckhorn Children's Center School-Buckhorn Alternative School in Perry County

The nummy ninety

The number of schools in Kentucky participating in the federal Fruit and Vegetable Program continues to increase.

For the new school year, 90 elementary schools in 33 districts will be part of the program, which provides schools with a variety of free fresh fruits and vegetables during the school day, for the upcoming school year. That compares with 65 elementary schools eligible in 30 districts last school year.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is providing the state \$1.84 million for the program, which encourages creative ways to introduce fresh fruits and vegetables as healthy snack options. School selection was based on applications from elementary schools that operate the National School Lunch Program and that have 50 percent or more of their students eligible for free/reduced-price meals. Priority was given to schools with the highest percentage of free- and reduced-eligible students. ☞

Top school cop

A Madison County school resource officer is the nation's 2010 top school resource officer. James "Doty" Harris was announced as the Floyd Ledbetter National School Resource Officer of the Year at the annual meeting of the National Association of School Resource Officers in August.

Harris, pictured with student Jordan Puckett, is a Berea police officer who works at Madison Southern High School, whose principal cited his rapport with both students and teachers. Harris has worked to prevent underage drinking and driving and played a key role in Madison County being named an International Safe Community by the World Health Organization. He earlier was named Kentucky's school resource officer of the year.

Three of the last four national honorees have been Kentucky SROs. Also recognized by the national organization with a regional exceptional service award was Erlanger police officer Todd Brendel, the school resource officer for Erlanger-Elsmere Independent Schools.



Photo by Brian Smith/Richmond Register

We are family

Fall is a time for homecomings in our schools and it's no different for KSBA and school board members across the state.

When it comes to folks reuniting and coming together in solidarity at this time of year, we have our own version: Fall Regional Meetings. This year's focus is on dropout prevention and increasing the graduation rate.

As I think about this series of meetings and I recall the times over the past three years that I have had the opportunity to visit all areas of our state, the feeling of coming back home to visit kinfolk washes over me.

Regional meetings offer the opportunity to visit with fellow board members and friends you may only see once a year or maybe every other year.

No matter what the size or location, our districts face many of the same problems – the effect of budget cuts, to cite just one example, is a great leveling force, and not for the better.

The topic of the fall meetings this year is another commonality. But also on a personal level, we board members share common problems. You realize as you are venting to a board member from another district that they know exactly where you are coming from.

If you're having trouble dealing with angry parents or similar touchy situations, a board member from outside your district can give you some perspective and perhaps some advice.

These meetings also provide board members with the opportunity to defuse tensions that sometimes develop among districts, especially neighboring ones.

This is not just because we're all together in one room but also because the atmosphere reminds us that our primary purpose is the same: to educate and offer the best for the children in our districts.

The fall gatherings give board members a chance to meet members of another family — KSBA's staff — putting faces to the names of people who may



Delmar Mahan
KSBA President and
Whitley County Board of
Education member

have provided them with information via telephone, e-mail, written correspondence or publications.

But the opportunity to share and support goes beyond the feel-good. The Fall Regional Meetings offer a chance to share our districts' successes and solutions, both in programs and strategies. These gatherings, like our Summer Leadership Institute, Winter Symposium and especially our Annual Conference, are incubators for ideas we can take back to our own districts.

In this case, we'll be hearing from board members, policy makers, students and others, who will be examining all aspects of what's now called in education circles "persistence to graduation."

Those attending will learn about effective strategies and promising practices to reduce the dropout rate and increase the graduation rate.

As you enjoy the welcoming atmosphere and acceptance you feel at the regional meetings this month and next, think about how those qualities make you want to attend the meeting, how the support of others who are interested in your work makes you feel positive and valued.

It strikes me that these are the same feelings and attitudes we need to engender in our at-risk students so they are motivated to go to school and eventually graduate.

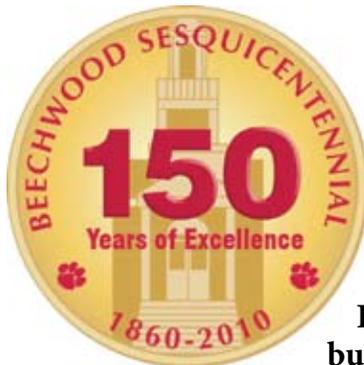
Note: Thanks to folks in the host districts in each region who have been preparing for many months for this series of fall meetings.

And don't forget there will be elections for KSBA regional chairpersons at the sessions in the Upper Kentucky River, Central Kentucky, Eastern Kentucky North, Fifth, Third and First regions. If you are interested in serving in any of these regions, please contact your regional chairperson by Sept. 15. ☞

— For more information about the Fall Regional Meetings, or for a schedule of dates and locations, please look on the inside back cover of this magazine.

"No matter what the size or location, our districts face many of the same problems – the effect of budget cuts, to cite just one example, is a great leveling force, and not for the better."

Quotes on education from Kentucky and elsewhere



“When I was in high school, there were 20 in my class and 18 went to college. It wasn’t, ‘If you go to college,’ it was, ‘Where are you going to college?’ My best friends are still the people I went to school with. I think that small town feel is still there, which is really neat. If you drive down Dixie Highway during football season, all the businesses have signs out supporting the football team.” Carol Stenken Beime, co-chair-

person of this month’s 150th anniversary celebration of Beechwood Independent Schools, on some of the reasons for the long-held tradition of community support for the 1,100-student district. From the Fort Mitchell *nky.com*.

“We want our students to stay eligible and remain active in school activities, teams, and clubs. At the same time, we want to send a clear message to all students that poor attendance is unacceptable.” Calloway County High School Principal Brian Wilmurth on his school’s new policy tying students’ low attendance and/or unexcused tardiness to loss of privileges such as playing sports, attending dances, going on field trips and even participating in graduation. From the *Murray Ledger & Times*.

“Instead of teaching the symbol (for 8, for instance), we will be teaching what is 8. So 8 may be 5 and 3, or 2 away from 10. If I hold up 8 dots, they automatically see 8 instead of having to count. The whole focus is on having a very strong foundation in number sense and what those numbers mean and being able to apply those to situations in math or in everyday life for that matter.” Beth Watson, a Niagara Elementary (Henderson County) math teacher, on implementing the “Singapore math” concept in the district’s curriculum. From the *Henderson Gleaner*.

“Per year, we use 27 pallets of paper, each pallet holds 40 boxes, which hold eight reams, and

there are 500 sheets per ream.” Fleming County Schools Superintendent Tony Roth on his district’s push to dramatically reduce paper use, an effort that includes online resources for parents and electronic school board meetings. From the *Flemingsburg Gazette*.

“If you use it correctly, it also gives you some good enrichment time. When we have those three-week breaks, if we use the first week of each to differentiate the kids that are

struggling, it helps us. We also feel like the shortened summer helps retention. The kids don’t lose as much as they would if they had a 12- or 13-week summer break.” Frankfort Independent Schools Superintendent Rich Crowe on the district’s alternative calendar that began the school year on Aug. 2. From the *Lexington Herald-Leader*.

“It’s going to allow us to take data and look at what’s really working for our kids. We’re making sure every child gets the education they need to be successful at the next level. These kids are going to have to be lifelong learners. What we’re looking at is getting our kids more prepared for college.” Logan County High School Principal Casey Jaynes on the inclusion of eight staff-only Mondays in this year’s innovative calendar for teachers’ professional development and student data study. From the *Russellville News-Democrat & Leader*.

“We’ve lost 60 kids in terms of attendance every day in the two previous years. It wasn’t expected. Over the course of the last 20 years, we’ve had slow, steady growth. We’ve lost around 100 over the last two years in terms of actual kids.” Grant County

Sports challenges

“Kevin makes the call and I tell him he’s not going to make me mad. Safety’s first. We’re going to do whatever we have to do to make sure our kids are safe.” Graves County football coach Lance Gregory on how athletic trainer Kevin Hansen’s use of a hand-held heat monitor dictates when hot-weather practices are modified or halted. From the *Mayfield West Kentucky Star.com*.



“We had to evacuate the whole end of the school and throw out all of our stuff because of bacteria. Most places don’t have (shoulder pads) in stock. We’ve told them the sizes that we need, it’s just when they’re going to be able to ship it. It’s been a challenge for sure.” Berea Independent high school football coach Kenan McWhorter after floodwaters got into the school’s locker room, ruining most of the team’s equipment. Garrard County High School lent Berea some shoulder pads for practices until the new equipment arrived. From the *Richmond Register*.

Schools Assistant Superintendent Matt Morgan on the primary factor that led to the elimination of five teacher positions and one administrator's job this year. From the Williamstown *Grant County News*.

“You’re focusing on two buildings that have been different in the past and you’ve got to find a



way to merge the two that is effective across four grade levels. The only thing that’s really going to change for students is they will have consistency from the sixth grade to seventh

grade, where before they had a different set of rules, a different set of administrators. Their lives changed quite a bit.” George Powell, principal of the recently merged Owensboro Independent Middle School and 5-6 Center on what he hopes will be a boost to student transition. From the Owensboro *Messenger-Inquirer*.

“Don’t get me wrong, I love sports. But all sports teams have booster clubs to help assist with their financial needs, so the foundation focuses totally on the academic side. I want the full purpose and integrity of the foundation to be the same 20 years from now as it is today, and that is we are an academic-based foundation.” Becky Holt, executive director of the Mercer County Foundation for Education, on the focus of the group’s fundraising, which recently topped \$95,000 in just two years. From the Danville *Advocate-Messenger*.

“Sending students to school without textbooks is like sending a carpenter to work without a hammer. This is another way to help give the students the tools they need.” Frank Knapke Jr. of the Bellevue High School Alumni Association, on the creation of a Memorial Book Fund

to help the school offset textbook costs following state funding cuts for that expense. From the Fort Mitchell *Community Press & Recorder*.

“It’s not like traditional school. It’s all the things kids like to do ... there are no textbooks at all. We field trip at least three days a week.”

Karen West, Corbin Independent Schools special projects curriculum supervisor, on the district’s Redhound Enrichment Program, an initiative designed to help students retain and build on academic skills during the summer break. From the Corbin/Williamsburg *News-Journal*.

“The dual-credit program is a good opportunity for a lot of students to get college credit in a familiar environment...because we are teachers they are comfortable with. Your first year of college, you’re acclimating to a total culture change. You’re changing from a high school to a college, with new teachers, new buildings. You are also adjusting to college-level work. This way they can adjust to college-level work without the added stress of a new environment.” Pat Pate, who teaches both regular history and college-credit history courses at Harlan County High School, on his excitement about the school’s increase to 15 dual-credit courses in partnership with Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College. From the *Harlan Daily Enterprise*.

“It’s wonderful and inspiring. The designation means we’re a school where all students can learn and we put a lot of effort into ensuring their success.” West Carter Middle School Principal Sherry Horsley on the five-year transformation of her school from “low-performing” to recognition as a national School to Watch, a designation that earned her and Superintendent Darlene Gee a trip to Washington, D.C., for a major speech on school reform by U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan. From the Ashland *Daily Independent*. ☞

Furloughing public employees

POINT ...

“Kentucky has implemented a furlough program that will save the state \$24 million over six days. Each employee will be losing on average \$1,338.24 annually because of furloughs. While the furlough days do not offer a long-term solution to the state budget issues, the decision should be applauded as an effort to do whatever must be done to maintain services and jobs.” Portion of editorial in the Elizabethtown *News-Enterprise*.

COUNTERPOINT...

“Relying on furloughs is an imprecise and unsustainable way to manage personnel costs rather than making tough choices to see where costs can be cut permanently through layoffs or consolidation. It’s a short route to savings that avoids looking at whether the state employee work force is at a size best suited to provide services to residents efficiently and effectively.” Portion of an editorial from the Owensboro *Messenger-Inquirer*.

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

Initiative uses training network to help students with autism

By Madelynn Coldiron
Staff Writer

Kentucky's students with autism will benefit from cutting-edge classroom strategies as the state begins rolling out a new training system for teachers and other school personnel.

Kentucky is one of three states chosen by national autism experts to put into practice the research-based techniques and instructional strategies proven to work with children with autism and other developmental disabilities. Those strategies will filter down to the classroom level – both regular and special education – via regional training networks.

The need is pressing. The number of Kentucky children identified by the state education department with autism spectrum disorders has risen to 3,535 at last count, up from 1,032 in 2000, mirroring a national trend. Using the federal incidence rate, the number of Kentucky children with ASD is much higher – at 9,164. Autism spectrum disorders are a group of developmental disabilities that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges.

Laura McCullough, a program consultant with the state education department's Division of Exceptional Children Services, said schools "have a challenge on our hands. And in many ways we're not up to date about the characteristics, needs and interventions for this population spectrum.

"We are becoming more and more aware that these students are going to require that everybody in schools have at least a basic understanding of their characteristics, needs and interventions."

The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders, which selected Kentucky for the project, has provided the state with basic training and proven resources for helping students with ASD. The Kentucky Autism Training Center at the University of Louisville has adapted that information and partnered with Kentucky Department of Education to provide training for the state's 11 regional special education cooperatives. The co-ops, in turn, currently are training cadres made up of teachers – some special education and some not – and others from school districts. They will take the lessons learned back to their districts and plan training for other educators.

Finally, model classroom sites will be established in each region over the next four years, where teachers can see the strategies in use. Special education regional co-ops will continue to be a resource during that time, and McCullough said districts will be encouraged to form problem-solving teams to serve their schools.

"Our goal is to build local capacity within all schools to support students with autism," said Rob Pennington, assistant director of training for the Kentucky Autism Training Center. "With appropriate supports and instruction techniques, students with autism can learn and lead more independent lives."

Most teachers don't have training in this area, said Kathy Meredith, complex needs consultant for the Ashland-based Big East Special Education Cooperative.

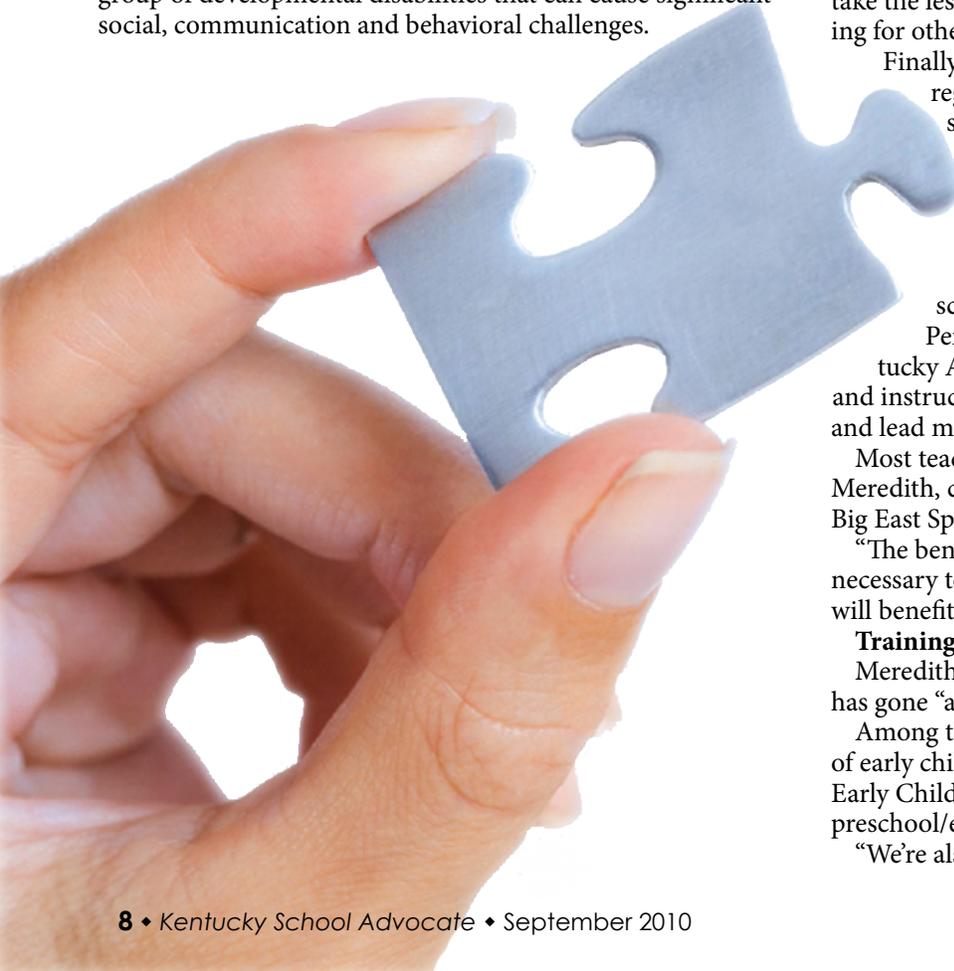
"The benefits of providing each district with the knowledge necessary to teach our students with autism spectrum disorder will benefit every child," she said.

Training shows promise

Meredith said the training of her region's 60-member cadre has gone "amazingly well."

Among the cadre members in that region are representatives of early childhood education groups, including First Steps, Early Childhood Regional Training Centers and a private preschool/early childhood program.

"We're also trying to select a key parent in each school dis-



Puzzle pieces

• The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that an average of one in 110 children in the U.S. has an autism spectrum disorder, though another recent study puts it at one in 100.

• ASDs are “spectrum disorders.” That means ASDs affect each person in different ways, ranging from very mild to severe. People with ASDs share some similar symptoms, but there are differences in when the symptoms start, how severe they are, and the exact nature of the symptoms

• Individuals with an ASD had average medical expenditures that exceeded those without an ASD by \$4,110–\$6,200 per year. On average, medical expenditures for individuals with an ASD were 4.1–6.2 times greater than for those without an ASD.

Source: The CDC website

“We have students who have important needs and these kids are capable of becoming not only productive, but some of them brilliant contributors to the good of society, if they are given the kind of educational support that they need to be able to realize their potential. However, without some support and education and intervention, many of these students are joining this group that are not productive and require adult care for the rest of their lives to the tune of \$3.2 million per child.”

— Laura McCullough, Kentucky Department of Education

trict so that they can be an advocate in that area and get information to parents if need be,” Meredith said.

At the local level, the initiative has started off strong in Lewis County, even before widespread training of district teachers, said Lori O’Keefe, the school district’s behavior interventionist who is part of the regional cadre in her area.

“Initially when we first went in we just wanted to raise awareness and we wanted people to understand that autism affects everyone in some way,” she said.

With that in mind, the county’s first Autism Awareness Walk was organized – 50 people were expected to participate, but 300 turned out, O’Keefe said.

“I heard lots of talk around the community about the walk,” Lewis County school board member Robert Kennard said.

O’Keefe also has launched a peer mentoring group to pair students with autism spectrum disorders with a classmate.

“Our youth have really been phenomenal,” she said.

While full-scale teacher training has not begun in Lewis or most other districts, O’Keefe said some teachers who anticipate having children with ASD in their classroom asked her for help.

Teachers say they’ve long needed this training and have been receptive, she said – and parents agree.

“I think the biggest thing I have found is the parents are so pleased that people are going outside their box and trying. We offer help to them, too, and we want to give them some strategies as well,” O’Keefe said.

Angela Aebersold, whose son, Alec, is an eighth-grader at one of the ASD model sites in Jefferson County, praised the setup and structure of the program, and its effect on her son.

“It’s the first time he’s actually been able to learn,” she said. “I guess all the information was going in, but it wasn’t coming out until

he got in the model program. For the first time, he’s made A-B honor roll.”

Training in ASD strategies is important for teachers, especially behavioral training, she said. ☘



Photo provided by Lewis County Schools

Lewis County students took part in the community’s first-ever Autism Awareness Walk April 10. A group of kindergartners even walked in honor of one of their peers.

No D, F ... or C students?



Eminence takes tougher approach to prepare students for college

By Madelynn Coldiron
Staff Writer

Eminence Middle and High School Principal Steven Frommeyer has some painful memories that illustrate why his students now must get an A or B to pass a course.

They are memories of the parents who were upset because their child, an Eminence graduate, couldn't make it through the first year of college.

"They looked at us like, 'I thought if they graduated from your school that they could do those things,'" he said.

Experiences like this explain in part why the Eminence Independent middle and high schools began incrementally raising the academic bar, using the grading system as leverage.

The roots of the effort took hold 20 or so years ago when Frommeyer became the district's middle school principal; the need for children to pass all their classes became one of the school's tenets, since social promotion was common at the time, he said.



Top: As the 2009-10 school year drew to a close, a group of Eminence High School students worked on college admissions standards and expectations.

Counselor Donna McClamroch discusses transferring community college credits to a four-year institution in a senior seminar class at Eminence High School.

But it became apparent that students were able to perform passing D-level work but still could not perform well on state testing, he said. So in the late 90s, the middle school eliminated Ds as well as Fs.

Cs, too?

A few years later, Frommeyer became the combined middle school-high school principal and carried over the no Fs and Ds policy to the upper grades. But it didn't stop there as he and his

team began examining test data.

“Together we decided middle and high school, that even Cs were problematic,” Frommeyer said. “It still meant only partial mastery of material. Plus, we got to thinking about what’s of value to the kids, long-term in their life. How many employers go out and try to hire a bunch of average people? A bunch of C people?”

The no-Cs policy was phased in using two-point increments, with the floor for passing a class moving from 74 to 80. The phase in was completed with the 2008-09 school year.

“We trained the teachers that an 80 in fact needed to be proficiency – that it wasn’t just a watered-down 74. That would defeat the whole purpose,” Frommeyer explained.

King of retakes

Frommeyer attributes the system’s success in part to the student accountability it engenders.

“Kids will rise to the standard. We have kids that transfer in with Ds and Fs. It does not take them long to see, ‘OK, I’ve got to get my butt in gear,’” English teacher Cara Puckett said.

An approach called mastery learning serves as a foundation. Course material is “chunked,” and teachers don’t move forward until every student has mastered those chunks. Those who don’t master the material retake the test, which acts as an incentive to score well the first time.

“We’re the king of retakes. It’s do it until you get it right,” Frommeyer said.

“We have to re-test and re-test and re-teach and re-teach but I think it’s better,” teacher Kristan Lively said.

Puckett said the top score on a retake is 80, so students who pass the first time aren’t penalized.

Last year, the schools began the SAVE program – Student Achievement Through Virtual Education – which essentially is self-paced, computer-based remedial learning for those struggling to score an 80.

This year, Frommeyer said, the schools will begin building in extra time for mastery in each unit – not only for struggling students but for other students, who will get “extension activities” to further deepen their knowledge and understanding.

Challenges

The system places a “safety net” under special education and English as a second language students, along with what Frommeyer calls “statistically identifiable slow learners.” There was concern that if too much pressure was put on that latter group of students, he said, they might give up and drop out.

A committee looks at each of these students on a case-by-case basis. The safety net allows attitude and effort to be factored into whether a student is promoted from a class.

Parent members of the school council “really fought for that safety net,” Frommeyer said. “It was a great idea and it really worked.”

Stakeholder buy-in

Frommeyer said there was “very little” resistance from teachers to the changes. Keeping them involved was the key, he added.

“We worked as a team to discuss the issues, come up with the solutions, ways to implement it that would be practical and that teachers could handle,” he said.

Professional development and early release time was focused on this system, the principal said.

In the long run, it has improved the teaching environment because students aren’t coasting, Frommeyer added, and because they’re working harder, they cause fewer discipline problems.

“You have to be on top of things at all times,” said senior Trey Lindsay. His classmate, Byron Foree, said the grading system “pushes you to succeed.”

Parents, Puckett said, “like when their kids get As and Bs.” It also makes them more competitive for scholarships, she pointed out.

“The families, the parents, the students and staff have bought into it,” school board Chairwoman Brenda Chism said. Very few parents objected to the extent that they enrolled their children elsewhere, she said.

Results

The schools monitor state assessment scores, comparing them with grades as a backstop to ensure that the As and Bs they achieve are a true gauge of what they know, Frommeyer said. The result of the new grade level system “has been staggering.”

“Our state test scores were in the top 10 of the state for the high school this year... And we’re achieving these scores with an at-risk population. And we’re also, at the middle and high school level, achieving it with little or no money.

“I’m not saying all of it corresponds to just this one policy. A lot of factors go into successful schools, like tremendous staff.”

There has been a slight increase in retention at the middle-school level and in the high-school dropout rate – which is why the SAVE program was created.

“Here’s the question: Would you chose to deny having all these kids prepared for college because it might slightly increase your dropout rate?” Frommeyer asked. ☘



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Kentucky catching MIDDLE COLLEGE trend



Social studies teacher Ralph Prince instructs Stephen Weisenberger about the voting process during last May's primary election for state offices.

By Mary Branham

Every high school has them. They're the students who come to class every day – they don't act up; they make decent grades.

But they may not have the family history or the prompts to ensure that college is a part of their future. They may be prospective first-generation college students just looking for a little more from high school.

These are the types of students Principal Donna Wear was looking for when she filled her first class of juniors at Commonwealth Middle College in Paducah last year.

"Many of them will go on to college and some of them will not go on to college," she said of the students chosen for the inaugural year of the middle college. "We just felt like if we can get them started and get them in the right direction they're going to finish. They're going to get an associate's degree and

possibly get a four-year degree."

When the concept of the middle college was introduced two years ago, Wear and middle college counselor Donna Mattingly talked with every sophomore at Marshall County High School and the three high schools in McCracken County.

They explained the concept of the middle college: Students would attend all their classes on the campus of West Kentucky Community and Technical College in Paducah. Coursework would include the math, science, social studies and English classes they'd normally take as high school juniors. In addition, they'd take three college classes each semester, which would count as electives toward high school graduation requirements.

The middle college's inaugural class was 50 students, 20 from Marshall County High School and 30 from McCracken County. Those students continue this year as seniors, joined by a new crop of 50 juniors.

The middle college concept is developing a higher profile in Kentucky. Language in the state's 2010-12 budget bill allows the state education department to work with several districts considering early college and middle college projects, and opens the door to potential federal and foundation grants for them. Middle colleges also have a cheerleader in Education Commissioner Terry Holliday, based on his previous experience in North Carolina.

ment to work with several districts considering early college and middle college projects, and opens the door to potential federal and foundation grants for them. Middle colleges also have a cheerleader in Education Commissioner Terry Holliday, based on his previous experience in North Carolina.

Early results

If the first class is any indication, the western Kentucky program is well on its way to success.

The students maintained an average 3.07 GPA in their first year, compared with the average 2.3 GPA for Western Kentucky Community and Technical College freshmen, according to Wear.

But not everyone did as well as they could have. Nine students in the initial class ended the year with a GPA between 1.8 and 2.5, according to Wear.

"Those would have been the students who would have gone to college one semester, dropped out and never came back,"

Photos by Leight Wright/ Commonwealth Middle College

she said. “We’re not going to let that happen. They’re going to stick with it and we’re going to make sure they stick with it.”

In all, each student earned at least 10 high school credits and at least 18 college credit hours for the year. Wear said the middle college needs to ensure every student has enough credits to graduate, not an easy task since each participating high school has different graduation credit requirements, ranging from 22 at Lone Oak to 28 at Marshall County.

Sustainability

Wear said cost is one reason middle colleges, which have been around since the 1970s, are a relatively recent advent in Kentucky.

Marshall County School Board member Rocky Hudson said the concept and plan for the middle college came after the commitment of \$620,000 from the St. Louis-based Lay Family Foundation, which was looking for an education initiative to support in western Kentucky.

The foundation funding pays for tuition for the college classes. McCracken and Marshall county school districts chipped in funds for college textbooks as well as the high school teachers and transportation to and from the college campus, according to Wear. Students and their families pay nothing.

The challenge now is to find money to keep it going – the Lay Foundation gift will stretch for another two years.

“That’s the tough part right now,” Hudson said. “We are faced with paying the college tuition for these students.”

“Everything has been super positive,” he said. “With the success rate that Ms. Wear has had, I can see this going on for a long time if we can secure the funding. As board members, we’re going to have to go out seeking that funding.”

Neil Archer, chairman of the McCracken County Board of Education, said the two boards started looking for continuation funding as soon as the middle college opened. It’s too good a program to let founder, he said.

He predicts more school districts will want to participate in the middle college concept.

“It’s a very doable thing,” Archer said. “We just have to get the money that’s out there going to programs that may not be as beneficial ... and try to make the buck go as far as it can. I think in this program it really does.” ❧

— *Branham is a writer from Frankfort.*



Physics teacher Carol Ballimore demonstrates a lesson to last year’s juniors.

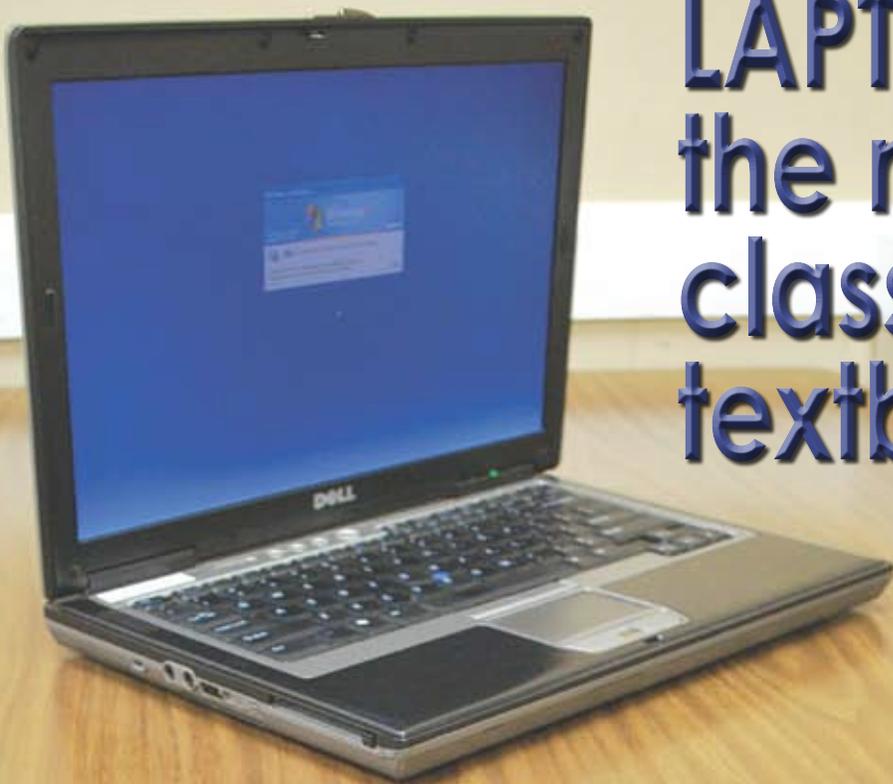
Middle college programs in Kentucky

Opportunity Middle College
Partnership between Fayette County Schools and Bluegrass Community and Technical College

Gatton Academy of Mathematics and Science
Residential academy based at Western Kentucky University with statewide admissions

Discover College
Owensboro Community and Technical College offers both high school-based and campus-based college classes for high school students in the region

Source: Kentucky Department of Education



LAPTOPS: the new classroom textbook

By Jennifer Wohlleb
Staff Writer

Kentucky school districts that supply students with take-home laptop computers say now is the time to adopt what the future will inevitably bring.

“Our school board wanted to look at a learning initiative that would be beneficial to all students,” said LaRue County Schools Superintendent Sam Sanders, whose district will provide its high school students with laptops this year. “The more we looked at this one we saw that it benefited your special needs students as well as gifted and talented and everyone in between. It made a lot of sense to us.”

In October, LaRue will join a small group of Kentucky districts that provide their high school students with laptops. Todd, McCracken and Daviess counties and Erlanger-Elsmere Independent are the other districts participating in a one-to-one laptop program, according to the state department of education.

Sanders said after studying the idea for two years, visiting Todd and Daviess counties and talking to officials in a laptop-providing Virginia district, he realized today’s students are “the true digital natives.”

“The one thing that really sticks out is engagement,” he said. “That’s the one thing I saw when we went to Todd County and Daviess County – students were engaged. When we look at the students who go through our schools, they’ve been immersed in technology their entire lives. They don’t know any other way. We’re just trying to meet the kids where they are.”

Heath Cartwright, assistant superintendent for curricu-

lum and instruction at McCracken County Schools, said the district views the laptops as a true instructional tool.

“If we’re going to create digital learning opportunities in and out of the class, we want to make sure regardless of the place or setting that students have the same high learning opportunities,” he said. “We wanted to expand and extend the classroom beyond the four walls.”

Academics

Todd County Schools Superintendent Mike Kenner said the first year of its program was a success and has had a profound impact on academic achievement by enabling more students to take dual-credit, online courses in partnership with Hopkinsville Community College.

“Where we are located, it is hard to send our students over there,” he said. “In the past we had worked out a few classes where they would send a teacher over here. (Laptops) eliminate that problem. We were able to hire someone to be a facilitator in that class, where they don’t have planning responsibility.”

Kenner said just a few years ago, only 12-15 students were taking dual-credit courses. “Now I know we have at least 30 students with some dual credit, but it’s probably closer to 50. I expect that to continue to rise.”

McCracken Superintendent Nancy Waldrop said while the district can’t attribute academic data directly to the laptops, district ACT scores did increase this year.

“The goal of the program is purely instructional,” she said. “It’s not about the technology. The technology is just a vehicle for instructional strategies that we think count.”

Kenner said in addition to training students what constitutes acceptable use of this tool, teachers – who also receive

laptops – also have to change their thinking.

“Because one reaction is, ‘I’m going to take away their laptop because they’re misusing it.’ My response is, ‘Do you take away their textbook if they misuse it?’” Kenner asked. “We have to get everyone to understand that these are not toys; they’re teaching tools just like a textbook or reference book is a tool, and you don’t deny them access to them when they mess up.

“If they mark in their book, you might have some type of discipline, but you don’t take their book away from them because that’s what they are using to learn.”

Economics

Sanders said one of the most important questions districts need to answer before adopting this program is sustainability: can they afford it over a period of years?

“That was probably my main concern,” he said. “We’ve saved for this initiative for several years. We have \$1.25 million saved right now. And when we put pencil to paper, in this district it costs a little over \$1.5 million to sustain the program over eight years. The first four-year cycle was a little over \$800,000 and the next four years was a little over \$700,000.”

He said technology costs may drop further in the next few

years, but the district didn’t want to wait.

“We really felt like this is something we needed to do, and we needed to do it now because it was just a wasted opportunity if we didn’t,” Sanders said. “I think you’ll see most high schools will utilize laptops or some sort of technology, iPad, some tool, in the next five years.”

Cartwright said a one-to-one program may cost less than expected.

“We were able to take hundreds of computers from our high schools and move them to our middle and elementary schools,” he said. “Because we have a refresh cycle of computers across the district, we were going to need to upgrade computers in our middle and elementary schools, so we don’t have to buy those.”

He said the district has also seen energy savings, with hundreds of computers no longer running all day, as well as savings in printing costs and a reduced need for printers districtwide.

“And while we are not ready to walk away from textbooks entirely,” Cartwright said, “we are already experiencing a significant decrease in the cost of textbooks that we incur at the high school.” ❧

Learning in Louisville



In late July, KSBA hosted more than 60 school boards association leaders from nine states for the NSBA Central Region annual meeting in Louisville. Participants spent two-and-a-half days on issues ranging from the new core content standards to an update of reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind law.

Left: NSBA President Earl Rickman III of Mount Clemens, Mich., and his guest, Sheila Miller, paused — and posed — during a group visit to the Churchill Downs Museum. Participants also toured the Muhammad Ali Center.

Below left: KSBA Board Team Development Director Kerri Schelling passes out ballots during the meeting’s annual business session. Participants — state association officers and executive directors — selected their representatives to serve on NSBA committees for the coming year.

Below right: KSBA President Delmar Mahan of Whitley County presided over the meeting, which also featured presentations by former Kentucky Education Commissioner Gene Wilhoit, who now heads the Council of Chief State School Officers, and NSBA Executive Director Anne Bryant.



November school board elections — with a twist

By Madelynn Coldiron
Staff Writer

A slightly larger percentage of incumbent school board members – 84 percent— filed for re-election last month compared with the last time those seats were decided four years ago. More significantly, perhaps, 35 percent of those incumbents running drew opposition, compared with 29 percent the last time around.

But the more memorable aspect of this election may be found outside the data: two of the challengers seeking school board seats in the Nov. 2 election are former board members who were removed from that office earlier.

In the Breathitt County district, Kelly Noble Jr. is one of three people vying for an open seat. Noble had served on that board for 23 years before he was removed in April by the Kentucky Board of Education on charges stemming from his indictment as a state employee.

Noble is scheduled for trial Oct. 11 in Franklin Circuit Court on charges of first-degree official misconduct, unauthorized use of a motor vehicle and 27 counts of first-degree forgery.

In the Covington Independent school district, former school board member Paul Mullins, who vacated his seat in 2009 because of an eligibility issue, has again filed for that office.

Mullins was a school bus driver for the district at the time of his election in November 2006. Though he quit his job prior to being sworn in to office, holding the position on election day led to his eventual removal after two years of legal proceedings. Both the state Office of Education Accountability and the courts ruled Mullins was not eligible to serve because of that timing.

Kentucky state law (KRS 160.180) states that anyone who has been removed from a school board seat “for cause” is ineligible to run again.

Statewide roundup

In general, three seats are to be decided in independent

districts in this election, with two seats decided in county districts. Deviation from that pattern occurs when an unexpired term is on the ballot due to an earlier resignation. Of the 428 seats involved statewide, there will be 78 open seats, including a handful of current vacancies.

There will be no change in the makeup of 52 school boards in the state, as incumbents in those districts have filed without opposition. At the other extreme, no incumbents at all filed in Anchorage Independent and Estill, Adair and Grant counties.

Several districts will have four seats on the ballot: Erlanger-Elsmere, Fairview, Paris, Jackson and Raceland-Worthington independents and Greenup, Lyon and Jefferson counties.

In the majority of cases, most open seats drew just one candidate; a smattering drew two or three. There were exceptions: seven newcomers, plus one incumbent, filed for two seats on the Russell Independent school board; five people filed for an open seat in Christian County; six people, including one incumbent are vying for two seats on the Pikeville board.

No one filed for seats in seven districts – Trimble, Trigg, Lawrence, Todd and Grant counties and Southgate and Frankfort independents, though the Grant County case came about because of a misunderstanding about term lengths. The Southgate and Trimble districts were in the same situation four years ago.

Several districts will be losing a lot of experience with the retirement of board members with more than 20 years of service – including the second-longest serving board member in the state. Stepping down after Dec. 31 will be Walt Ryan, Walton-Verona Independent, with 47 years of service; Jenny Sewell, Dawson Springs Independent, 23 years; and Verlon Prewitt, Estill County, 20 years.

Finally, voters in the Glasgow Independent district may think their ballot contains a misprint, but two brothers – Leigh and Barret Lessenberry – are among the six candidates for three seats. ☚

INCUMBENTS FILING FOR RE-ELECTION

(two county seat, three independent seat cycle)

2010 – 84 percent

2006 – 81 percent

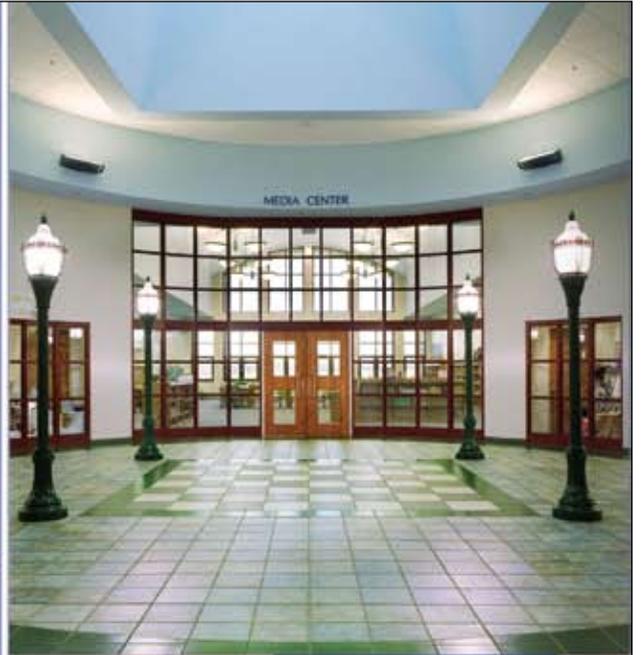
2002 – 84 percent

1998 – 78 percent

INNOVATIVE "FIRSTS" FOR KENTUCKY'S ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS



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FIRST IN...

- ENERGY SAVINGS | 2 MOST EFFICIENT SCHOOLS
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- ENERGY EFFICIENT KITCHENS | HEALTHY FOOD
- SAFE SCHOOLS | SECURED ENTRANCES

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State board gains five new members

Advocate Staff Report

The new crop of state Board of Education members are heavy in experience both in education and human services, with jobs ranging from leading a school district to in-the-trenches social work.

Their interests, however, are a little more diverse: Improving teaching and learning for not only students, but educators; implementing the new common core standards; helping students with learning disabilities; and strengthening college and career readiness.

The five were sworn in during the state board's August meeting, replacing Joe Brothers of Elizabethtown, Doug Hubbard of Bardstown, Jeanne Ferguson of Louisville, Katheryn Baird of Pikeville and Austin Moss of Hopkinsville.

MARTHA JONES

Boyd County

Occupation: Homemaker

Education: Converse College, Spartanburg, N.C.; degree in sociology, University of Kentucky.

Experience in public education: Has worked in Boyd County as a continuing education counselor.

Noteworthy: Former social worker, Cabinet for Health and Family Services in Boyle, Jessamine, and Boyd Counties

Area of interest: "Students with learning disabilities. I know from personal experience that if a student's learning disability is identified early, that these wonderful students have a better opportunity to overcome any disability."



MARY GWEN WHEELER

Louisville

Occupation: Senior policy advisor on education and youth for Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson

Education: Bachelor's degree, master's degree in public and private management from Yale University

Experience in public education: Early in career, worked in job training programs in New York City and taught English as a Second Language in Hong Kong. More recently, former vice president for strategy and development with the Louisville-based National Center for Family Literacy; secretary of Abramson's Cabinet for Health and Family Services during his first administration.

Noteworthy: Serves on the board of directors of the Jefferson County Public Education Foundation and the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence.

Area of interest: "Working with the mayor I've been a key project leader on the signing of our Greater Louisville Education Commitment, which brought together university presidents, the superintendents in a regional basis, along with business and community leaders, to make that commitment to increase our education attainment here in terms of bachelor's degrees and associate's degrees in keeping with the state's goals to double the numbers. If you think about increasing education attainment as the overall goal, obviously for K-12, college and career readiness is the critical outcome we're looking for. So I think the focus area, given that background and interest, is on really implementing the common core standards and developing the most appropriate assessments for those standards – I think that will be our quickest way to improve college and career readiness."



JONATHAN "JAY" PARRENT

Princeton



Occupation: Dean of student affairs at Madisonville Community College

Education: Bachelor's degree, Kentucky Wesleyan College; master's degree in history, Murray State University; master's degree in higher education administration, University of Louisville; currently enrolled in educational leadership doctoral program, University of Kentucky.

Experience in public education: Nearly 12 years' experience in higher education at a private, liberal arts college and a community college.

Noteworthy: Throughout his career, he's worked closely with several school districts to address the issues of college and career readiness.

Area of interest: "Kentucky students have been increasingly underprepared for college over the past decade and have invested too much time and resources toward developmental education. This must improve. The implementation of the new common core standards and the requisite assessment and accountability plan will be a major area of interest of mine as well. I am still very much in the process of reviewing the new standards but have no reason to believe they will not better prepare our students. I think we are certainly on the right track and will continue to improve."

WILLIAM L. "BILL" TWYMAN

Glasgow

Occupation: Consultant with Educational Directions



Education: Bachelor's degree from Campbellsville University; master's degree and Rank 1 from Western Kentucky University.

Experience in public education: Taught math and science in grades 6-12 and has been a principal; at

the district level, served as instructional supervisor/assistant superintendent. Twyman worked in the Metcalfe County and the Glasgow and Campbellsville independent systems.

Noteworthy: Milken Educator Award winner.

Area of interest: "My focus for Kentucky students: I want to develop policies to improve teaching and learning that would shape Kentucky students, that would give them the ability to be productive citizens anywhere in the world."

ROGER L. MARCUM

Bardstown

Occupation: Executive vice president, St. Catharine College, Springfield

Education: Bachelor's degree from Berea College; master's degree, Rank 1 and superintendent's certification from Eastern Kentucky University.

Experience in public education: Former Marion County Schools superintendent; worked as an assistant superintendent, principal and teacher in the Laurel County and Corbin Independent systems.

Noteworthy: F.L. Dupree Superintendent of the Year Award (KSBA); Milken Educator Award winner; member, Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence and Kentucky Science and Technology Corp. board; former president of Kentucky Association of School Administrators, Kentucky Association of School Superintendents, Kentucky Association of School Councils and Council for Better Education.



Area of interest: "I am most interested in efforts to improve teaching and learning for all educators and students. Why? High-quality teaching and continuous improvement of student learning should be the core business of every Kentucky school district and school. Support services like transportation, food service, facilities, etc. are important in support of quality teaching and learning, but we must maintain focus on our mission ... all of Kentucky's children need and deserve a quality education. When educators grow in their professional knowledge and skill, student learning will also improve. Schools must be learning communities for children and adults."

... all of Kentucky's children need and deserve a quality education. When educators grow in their professional knowledge and skill, student learning will also improve. Schools must be learning communities for children and adults."



Roger Cook

Taylor County Schools superintendent on his district's approach to dropout prevention

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 Taylor County Schools Superintendent Roger Cook, who discusses the approaches his district used to achieve a zero dropout rate during the 2009-10 school year.

KSBA's annual Fall Regional Meetings, which begin this month, will focus on ways districts can reduce their dropout numbers and increase the number of students who graduate.

For more information about these meetings or a schedule of dates and locations, please look on the inside back cover of this magazine.

“Whatever your interests might be, I’m going to try to work it into the educational setting to keep you in school. At a district I was at previously, I had somebody who wanted to be a farmer, and I kept him with all of the ag teachers to do math, science, everything, as it relates to farming.”

Q. Taylor County had no dropouts this past year. How were you able to accomplish that?

A. The rule in this county is when someone comes to the counselor at the high school, which is where they normally drop out, the counselor brings them to me. We then set up an appointment with the parents or guardian of these children before we allow them to drop out. We have a video that we show them that shows how much less you earn without a high school diploma.

I sit and talk with the parents and kids and find out why they are dropping out, in detail. It varies from boredom to they don't feel like they are being treated fairly at the school to pregnancy to different things.

Then I say, 'I don't want you to drop out, what if we do this or we do that.' I talk to the parents and ask about them in a different setting. I started the Taylor County Virtual Charter School last year. In our charter school we have everyone from students who have fallen behind in classes, students who are bored; we have advanced/gifted students. We have something for everybody in our virtual charter school. We let them do some computer-based learning, some teacher learning.

Out of the eight who wanted to drop out last year, five we put into the virtual charter school doing some online computer-based learning. We also had two pregnancies, who ended up working from home. One already had computer and Internet access. The other didn't, so I set her up with a computer and Internet access. They were able to access our virtual charter school from home, have the child and work from there for a number of weeks before coming back. That kept them from dropping out.

And then I had one who wanted to drop out to be an auto mechanic. He was a sophomore, just turned 16 and all he cared about was auto mechanics. I made an arrangement with the vocational school principal to place him at the vocational school full time to let him get his reading, math, social studies, as it relates to automobiles.

Whatever your interests might be, I'm going to try to work it into the educa-

tional setting to keep you in school. At a district I was at previously, I had somebody who wanted to be a farmer, and I kept him with all of the ag teachers to do math, science, everything, as it relates to farming.

I feel like we have two choices: one, all right, they want to drop out, we'll let them go; or two, we can do everything we possibly can to find out what they're interested in and get them into that and try to work their core courses into that.

Last year was the first year we had zero dropouts. I'm not going to say that works out every year. Last year I was able to meet and satisfy all eight's needs and they stayed in school. At least I'm going to give them a good try to do that every year.

Q. What is the average dropout rate?

A. In Taylor County, between four and eight students a year. It's not a huge number. But it's a no brainer to me (to do this). I know a lot of folks say, 'How can you do that?' But the bottom line is, if we don't do something extraordinary they're going to be standing around on a street corner, they could possibly be selling drugs, breaking into someone's home. Who knows what they're going to be doing if they're not in school? This is a better alternative.

We know what it means to us when they don't earn a high school diploma, in the way of welfare, income, taxes and everything else.

Q. What has the parent response been?

A. Generally it's very positive. Most parents do not want their child to drop out of school. However, a lot of parents are not strong willed enough to be able to dictate that ... and if I can help that parent and say, 'I want to help keep your child in school, let's find out what it will take,' I don't care what it is. Whatever their interest may be, I'm going to try to work their core subjects into that and keep them here.

Q. What are the most common reasons students in the past have given for not taking you up on your offer?

A. Periodically, you're going to have a student who doesn't want to get out of bed, who doesn't want to do anything. You are periodically going to get a student who has no interests, other than lying in bed and sleeping all day. You can offer them the moon and they won't take you up on it.

What you have to hope for in that case is that the parent will be strong enough to say, 'Yes, you are going to try this, you are going to do this.' If a kid won't get out of bed until 10 o'clock, but he can start at 10 o'clock at home on the computer and access our virtual charter school and work until 10 p.m., so be it. He's at least doing the subjects at home. That's better than not doing anything.

It's very rare that I offer that. It has to get down to, 'If that is all I can do is to let you stay home and access our virtual charter schools from 10 to 4 or 5, then let's do that.' But so far in Taylor County, I haven't had to do that, but I probably would before I'd let them drop out.

Q. Was there a lot involved in starting the virtual academy? Was there much money and equipment involved?

A. This is my fifth year of having one. I started one at Russellville while I was superintendent there and we did pretty much the same thing. It does cost money. I have a teacher in every one of the core subject areas in our virtual academy. You have to have computers and the Internet, the software packages, like NovelStar. We also use College Now (classes) for our advanced kids.

At our virtual academy, we may have a student taking an advanced college class sitting right next to a kid who is struggling in a subject area. And a lot of times, they may help each other. I try not to make our virtual academy a place where students think they are being penalized or stigmatized when they go there. You'd be surprised at how being in a school with kids taking gifted and advanced courses motivates them, and how much help they'll get and how they'll get a much better feeling about themselves.

Q. Would this approach work in a larger district?

A. I think this could definitely work in a larger school. The larger the school, the more funds you would have to have. But I think most school districts today have this type of school. Most districts offer an alternative for learning. All of them may not use it to try to keep their dropouts at a low rate, but I do. Most schools say they're either going to have an alternative school for struggling kids or for the gifted kids. Well, I just put mine together.

Q. Do you think your one-on-one approach would work in districts of all sizes?

A. We are a 3,000-student district, but if you're talking about Jefferson County with all of its high schools, then no, I don't imagine the superintendent is going to have time to get involved in that.

But I would think the director of pupil personnel could set up a committee that would bring parents and kids in. Maybe a review committee they have to come in front of before they can drop out and see if they can find something for the student.

It would have to be modified because Dr. Berman is not going to have time to meet with every high school kid in Jefferson County, or Stu Silberman in Fayette. But maybe they can have a designee who can. ☞

Pssst! Did you hear that the state board evaluated Commissioner Holliday?

Let's begin with a little historical perspective...

- Summer 2009: Kentucky Board of Education hires Dr. Terry Holliday as commissioner of education. Media reports appear on page 1 and lead the evening news.

- Fall 2009: Jefferson County school board and local media fight over the board majority's wish to continue the common practice of closed-door superintendent evaluations.

- Spring 2010: Critics disparage legislators for new law clarifying that they never intended to force public reviews of superintendents when the original evaluation law was adopted.

That brings us to Summer 2010. On Aug. 4-5, the KBE conducted an extensive, public (it's not covered by the new law) evaluation of Holliday's job performance. Here's a summary of media coverage of the first-year review of the state's top elementary and secondary education administrator:

(Cue sound effects of a single cricket chirping in the distance.)

Hmm.

Equally silent was the Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions, a "think tank" that apparently thinks it tanks if 48 hours pass without a new condemnation of public education in Kentucky. It criticizes closed session superintendent evaluations and gathers and publicizes written reviews under the Open Records law. An institute staffer blogged about the KBE meeting, but the commissioner's evaluation? Zippo.

Hmmm.

Reasonable people might ask if breaking news took reporters elsewhere those two days. Were all the editorial writers on vacation? Did the Bluegrass Institute folks nod off during the two sessions on the evaluation?

Or does this affirm district leaders' assumptions that the real objections to closed-door talks — followed by public discussions of the evaluations — were that media and critics might miss reporting or repeating anything with a negative tone?

In fact, Holliday's evaluation was so positive that KBE co-Chairperson Dorie Combs described it as "really glowing." Much of the praise touted Holliday's communications efforts, so let's take a look at what they — and others — saw in the commissioner's first year.

Reaching out

KBE members echoed Christian County Superintendent Brady Link when he introduced Holliday at this summer's Kentucky Association of School Superintendents (KASS) meeting: No one can recall a predecessor putting as much



Brad Hughes
KSSA Member
Support Services Director

emphasis as Holliday does on sharing information.

These efforts include:

- Monday Superintendent e-mail: This is a catchall of Department of Education and other resource notes, also designed to reduce the size of superintendents' electronic mailboxes.

- Fast Five on Friday e-mail: State and local school leaders receive updates on news of the week, materials from Holliday's presentations or recaps of his travels across the state.

- Weblog: Posted Friday afternoons, this generally focuses on a topic to which Holliday wants to give more attention, frequently linked to related online resources.

- Customer service surveys: For months, KDE conducted an online survey on agency responsiveness. While the results are mostly positive, areas for improvement were noted, too.

Another trait Holliday demonstrates is the art of listening, a skill evident in visits to districts, regional cooperative meetings and conferences. His Internet blogs are sprinkled with attributions from those conversations. Frequently, he's sharing not what he said, but what someone else had to say that stuck with him.

It's one thing to listen; it's something else to listen well enough to be able to recount it to others.

Suggestions?

Of course, when it comes to communications, all of us can improve. After listening to Holliday in numerous dialogues, interviews and speeches, I would offer:

- Don't overshoot the audience; that is, scrape the surface of topics presuming a level of understanding is there. At the KASS conference, Holliday referenced a concept that stopped my note taking dead in its tracks. I felt better glancing up to see two superintendents exchange questioning looks. Broad audiences don't require dumbing down, but nor are they helped by assumed comprehension.

- If you take a position, stick with it or explain when a change is necessary. This spring, Holliday said that if the General Assembly didn't pass charter legislation, "you'll never hear me talk about (charters)" again. Shortly thereafter in the May special session, he was pressing for charters to tag onto Kentucky's Race to the Top funding bid. Yes, situations change. But when you commit yourself, people don't just listen, they remember.

The Last Word

For what it's worth, count me as second to none in admiring Holliday's devotion to keeping school and state leaders well-informed on his decisions and his agency's actions and plans.

That's a characteristic that bodes well for his leadership in Year Two and beyond. And it's a message worth getting out. ☿



2010 KSBA Fall Regional Meeting Schedule

Persistence to Graduation

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

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

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

**MAKE PLANS NOW
TO ATTEND**

DATE	REGION	LOCATION
Sept. 20	Upper Kentucky River*	Lee County High School
Sept. 21	Eastern Kentucky South	Mountain Arts Center, Prestonsburg
Sept. 23	Central Kentucky*	Jessamine County Early Learning Village, Nicholasville
Sept. 27	Upper Cumberland	Pineville High School
Oct. 5	Eastern Kentucky* North	Morehead State University, Button Auditorium
Oct. 7	Fifth*	General Butler State Resort Park, Carrollton
Oct. 12	Middle Cumberland	Lindsey Wilson College, Columbia
Oct. 14	Northern Kentucky	Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights
Oct. 19	Second	Moonlite Bar-B-Q Inn, Owensboro
Oct. 21	Fourth	Historic State Theater Complex, Elizabethtown
Oct. 26	Third*	James E. Bazzell Middle School (Allen County Schools)
Oct. 28	First*	Paducah Tilghman High School

* Denotes regional Chairperson election

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



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Block to school



Robertson County Schools kicked off the school year with a new twist on the open house concept. The district combined an open house with a Community Block Party, where students and their parents could get free school supplies. The inaugural event, held on the eve of the first day of classes, Aug. 11, attracted a crowd despite blistering heat.

Community organizations, churches and merchants set up tables and tents starting from the Deming School and its grounds and extending several blocks toward the downtown Mt. Olivet area. Tables offered items ranging from notebooks and glue to bookmarks and pens.



Far left: Kathy Cuch looks on as her daughter, freshman Crystal Kerr, picks out “silly bands” among the giveaways offered by a community nonprofit, Change for a Change.



Left: Kindergartner Gracie Frederick cools off with a snow cone at a table set up outside the office of Dr. Ana Rinaldini.

Left: Parents and students stood in a long line outside Deming School to get to the first group of school-supply tables.