

A young girl with blonde hair, wearing a blue and grey jacket, is climbing a yellow play structure. She has a determined expression. In the background, other children are playing on the same structure, and a school building is visible under a clear sky.

KENTUCKY SCHOOL ADVOCATE

A publication of the Kentucky School Boards Association ■ June 2011

Partners in climb

Resource centers: money worries cloud anniversary

LEAVING BEHIND LETTER GRADES

New rules go down, school meal prices go up

2010 TELL Kentucky school workplace conditions survey



Kentucky's first-ever survey of certified personnel about working conditions in the nearly 1,400 schools drew an 80 percent response rate (42,025).

- 89 percent responding were teachers; 3 percent principals; 2 percent assistant principals; 7 percent other certified staff
- 57 percent have been an educator more than a decade
- 33 percent have been in their current school more than a decade

FINDINGS*

94 percent feel the school leadership supports using data to improve student learning

93 percent believe they work in a safe environment

92 percent said teachers are encouraged to try new approaches to improve instruction

86 percent said their school council makes decisions that positively impact instruction

84 percent agree that their school is a good place to work and learn

83 percent indicate they intend to continue teaching at their current school

81 percent said teachers have adequate access to technology

80 percent agree the faculty and leadership have a shared vision

68 percent feel teachers are protected from duties that interfere with educating students

64 percent want more training to effectively close the achievement gaps among students

63 percent agree teachers have sufficient instructional time for the needs of all students

63 percent said they are getting an appropriate amount of time for training

64 percent see parents/guardians as influential decision-makers in their schools

62 percent feel teachers have an appropriate level of influence on school decision making

58 percent said class sizes are reasonable and allow time to meet all students' needs

56 percent believe training they received was evaluated and communicated back to them

51 percent agree that efforts are made to minimize routine paperwork teachers must do

41 percent said teachers have a moderate to large role in hiring new teachers in their school

33 percent feel teachers have a moderate to large role in managing the school budget

**Statistics are based on adding "agree" and "strongly agree" responses with the remaining percent responding "disagree" and "strongly disagree"*

For statewide, district and individual school results (schools with at least 50 percent of the eligible staff responding), visit www.tellkentucky.org/reports/

KSBA will begin offering board of education training on using TELLKentucky data this summer.

FEATURES

NATURAL PARTNERS

Students at one Barren County elementary school are benefiting from a unique partnership with a state park in their area. They absorb lessons from nature hikes, fishing, archery and other activities while they're having fun ... Page 8

FOOD FLIGHT

New federal rules for the school nutrition program are going to affect meal prices at a minimum and, some food service directors fear, may affect participation in the program itself. Some Kentucky school boards have already gotten a taste of these changes ... Page 10

DWINDLING RESOURCES

Family resource and youth services centers – inarguably one of the stars of Kentucky education reform – are celebrating their 20-year mark. But alongside the celebrations are worries about the effect of state budget cuts on their ability to help students and families ... Page 12

NOT BY THE LETTER

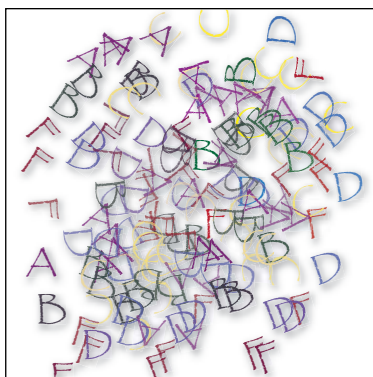
Erlanger-Elsmere Independent's elementary school experiment in standards-based grading is paying off. Jettisoning letter grades in favor of gauging students by a set of standards has produced dramatic changes for the better ... Page 14

SETTING THE STANDARD

The theme of this year's Summer Leadership Institute is the school board's role in implementing new academic standards. But headaches will be averted, because the aim of the training is to demystify the upcoming changes and narrow the focus for boards ... Page 18



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Losing the letter jumble, Page 14



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On the cover



Austin Tracy Elementary (Barren County) fifth-grader Teryane Humphrey pauses on her way up a climbing wall on a playground at Barren River State Resort Park. Her school is able to use the park to enhance after-school programs ... Page 8

TAKE NOTE

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Snow more

One more school district has earned instructional credit for nontraditional learning that took place while school buildings were closed due to snow. The Powell County school system was among a handful of districts to pilot a program designed to reduce the impact of snow days. The state education department recently awarded the district five nontraditional instructional days. Owsley County Schools earlier earned six instructional days. A third district, Letcher County Schools, also has requested credit for two nontraditional instructional days. Nontraditional learning can be accomplished by a combination of methods, including computer-based lessons, homework packets and other supports.

Most important meal

Three Kentucky school districts were recognized for their participation in a Spirit Contest to celebrate National School Breakfast Week.

The Estill, Owsley and Warren county school districts were awarded plaques by Education Commissioner Terry Holliday, whose agency hosted

the event. The entries were displayed in the lobby of the Capital Plaza Tower in Frankfort, and KDE employees and visitors voted for the entries they believed best depicted the spirit of National School Breakfast Week.

Fair to middling

Two Kentucky middle schools have made the list of Schools to Watch for the first time, while three others have repeated that honor. The national recognition program, developed by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, honors academic excellence, responsiveness to the needs and interests of middle-grades students and commitment to helping all students achieve at high levels.

In Kentucky, Monroe Middle School in the Monroe County system and North Middle School in Henderson County Schools received the recognition this year for the first time. Belfry Middle School in Pike County and Benton Middle School in Marshall County are repeat honorees, while Olmstead School in the Logan County school district has been recognized for a third time.

Ninety-eight schools in 16 states were named Schools to Watch this year. ☘

Top special ed coordinator

The special education coordinator for Owensboro Independent Schools has been named the nation's Outstanding Special Education Administrator of the Year. The award was presented to Kim Johnson April 26 in Washington, D.C., by the Council of Administrators of Special Education.

The award recognizes significant professional contributions to leadership behavior and field practice in the administration of programs for students with disabilities and/or who are gifted.

Johnson has been the Owensboro district's special education chief since July 2003. She has designed and implemented innovative programs for instruction, interagency collaboration, compliance with regulations and teacher training.

Superintendent Dr. Larry Vick praised Johnson's "collaborative leadership."

"Kim has an extraordinary compassion and concern for people and has developed a warm, caring environment in our district for students as well as staff and parents," Vick said.

Outside school, Johnson has been a local volunteer coordinator for Special Olympics for 20 years.

Owensboro Public Schools' Special Education Coordinator Kim Johnson, center, is congratulated by Owensboro Board of Education member John Blaney and his wife, Joanna Blaney, during a reception celebrating Johnson's selection as national Outstanding Special Education Administrator of the Year by the Council of Administrators of Special Education.



Photo provided by Owensboro Independent

The worth of a school board member

Editor's note: This is the second in a two-part column series

In my last column, I discussed two of the four ideas on which I place a great value. The other two, discussed here, are compensation and appreciation.

Compensation

Compensation for an elected school board member may come in the form of personal satisfaction in the quality of service rendered to the public. That satisfaction may be in observing progress made in areas such as student programs, facilities, and graduation and drop-out rates. Currently, there is little monetary compensation for board members.

Let's do a real-world math problem: The two major governing bodies in most counties are the school board and fiscal court. Both of these groups are elected from divisions within the county and are elected to four-year terms. Similarly, independent school boards have four-year terms, though they are not elected by division. All, however, play a vital role in public service.

Compare a school district budget with that of county government. Then consider the fiscal compensation that the elected representatives of those units receive. In my own Lincoln County, for example, my school district budget is approaching \$40 million, more than five times county government's \$7.5 million budget. In 2010, magistrates received more than eight times the salary of school board members. To me, that does not compute very well.

This is not meant to be critical of those serving in county government; rather, I am simply asking, isn't it time for some consideration to be given to the other group of elected leaders? With what is expected of school board members and the accountability demanded of them, isn't it time?

I need to emphasize:

- This is not an official KSBA position; the comments are my own and this proposal carries little or no benefit to me.
- In tough economic times, some may not readily accept this.
- I am not proposing a massive or unreasonable increase – only what is fair.
- Change may come slowly. I may well be off the scene before this becomes a reality, but perhaps I can get it into a discussion mode.



Tom Blankenship
KSBA President

I realize that some board members intentionally receive no compensation. That's commendable. Some may well be content with what they now are receiving. However, I really think an increase should be considered out of respect for the position of school board member and for those dedicated individuals who occupy that position.

We are held responsible for many things we can change and often for things over which we have no control. Believing strongly that we should no longer be considered glorified volunteers, I would defy anyone who would say board members are not worthy of a salary

that matches our responsibilities.

It can be a compelling argument to say that this effort would be a noble and honorable way to recognize that the efforts of school board members are helping others and making life better for them. That's important to me.

I would hope that someone – a benefactor, an interested party, a legislative champion – would simply acknowledge this discrepancy, consider the situation and effectively convince us one way or another whether a change is needed. If this is important to you and is a cause that has merit, I would like to hear from you.

Appreciation

I appreciate the work of all school board members. I consider myself fortunate to be associated with so many dedicated and committed people.

The public should be grateful for the role we play. I am proud to be a school board member and I am proud to share this experience with my peers across the state. I know the state's children are in good hands. The future of young people depends, in large part, on the wisdom and courage of their leaders.

School board members, in my opinion, are the epitome of good leadership. Service is our purpose and it does make a difference. Yet just as the days of our life are numbered, so are the days of our board service. Let's make this time of service all the more meaningful. We should do no less.

Keep up the good work! ☘

— Blankenship also is vice chairman of the Lincoln County Board of Education

Quotes on education from Kentucky and elsewhere



Photo provided by Ballard County Schools

“I know that if it was my house, I would want people to come together and help as much as possible.” Ballard County High School student Daphane Bommarito on the work she and classmates did filling thousands of

Athletics Association Commissioner Julian Tackett on a KHSAA change reducing from 20 percent to 10 percent the number of schools that must offer a sport to be approved for a state championship. From the Lexington *WLEX-TV News*.

“It teaches kids to slow down and really think about what they’re reading and doing. It sounds easy, but if teachers are going to teach kids how to be better thinkers, teachers have to be able to understand and talk about their own thinking. That’s not an easy thing to do.” Oldham County Schools literacy coach Donna Carden on a Denver-based teacher training initiative used in Kentucky by her district and recently shared with other districts in the Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative. From the Louisville *Courier-Journal*.

“Going to the Reality Store is like ‘wow!’ By the time you are old enough to get married and have three kids and get a car, there is no money. I know now what my parents go through.” Williamsburg Independent Schools eighth-grader Autumn Pruitt on the eye-opening Reality Store experience of matching household expenses to family income. From the Corbin *Times-Tribune*.

“There are parents who say their kids need to be learning

bags of sand to protect structures in the community from floodwaters in April. From *WPSD-TV* in Paducah.

“It sounds like Charlie Brown: ‘Wah wah wah wah wah.’ The timing is off and sound bounces. It is a mess.” Letcher County Schools Assistant Superintendent Twyla Messer on a faulty sound system in the gym of the 5-year-old high school that becomes a particular problem during graduation ceremonies. From the Whitesburg *Mountain Eagle*.

“Primarily what we’ve been doing is asking juniors to voluntarily take a test. It helps to identify those students who are really prepared for college writing. We see this as a springboard to offer them a little extra preparation.” Nancy Kersell, English Department chairperson at Northern Kentucky University, on an early college readiness program that is being expanded from three to as many as eight northern Kentucky high schools. From the Fort Mitchell *nky.com*.

“We are taking performance data from all students and placing kids in classes where their needs will be met. In the past we plugged kids into the teachers’ schedules. Now we’re plugging teachers into the students’ schedules.” Greenup County Schools Superintendent Steve Hall on one of the strategies being used, in partnership with faculty at Eastern Kentucky University, to lift his district’s

high school from the state’s persistently low-achieving list. From the Ashland *Daily Independent*.

“By lowering the number of schools required to sponsor a championship sport, we think it might actually encourage more schools to offer a sport and grow that sport at a faster pace than it otherwise might do. Any time we can pick up a new group of student-athletes who can compete at the sport they love, while giving them structure and a reason to excel in the classroom with their academic progress monitored, there is really no downside to it.” Kentucky High School

Project-based learning

“It is a genuine way to learn because it gives the student responsibility for what they learn. They start to see that there are often multiple answers to a problem and multiple paths to reaching those answers.” Danville Independent High School science teacher Danny Goodwin on a project-based learning approach being used at his school that combines English and science instruction while challenging students to answer questions that don’t have simple solutions. From the Danville *Advocate-Messenger*.



Photo provided by Danville Independent Schools

cursive, and there are others who ask why we are wasting our time with it. With keyboarding now, how much time do we really need to put into handwriting? Is there a need?"

Grandview Elementary (Bellevue Independent) Principal Candice Simpkins on the divided opinions parents have about the amount of cursive writing skills instruction their children should get in school. From the *Cincinnati Enquirer*.

“Mr. (Dale) Beasley’s words and actions were entirely unprofessional and were a direct challenge to the integrity of Mr. (Principal Les) McIntosh. It was spoken with



intent to insult. It is inconceivable how disrespect for authority cannot constitute conduct unbecoming under the circumstances. In many other professions, similar behavior directed toward a superior would undeniably lead to immediate termination.” Bullitt Circuit Judge Elise Spainhour remanding to a tribunal its decision to overturn the dismissal of elementary teacher Beasley, who also allegedly grabbed a fifth-grade student in a related incident. From the Shepherdsville *Pioneer News*.

“The bottom line will be a significant increase in both the number of students enrolled in AP math, science, and English and the number of students that achieve a qualifying score. This program can have an enormous impact on the percentage of seniors meeting the college readiness standards as the new accountability model unfolds.” Bell County Schools Superintendent George Thompson on the selection of his district’s high school as one of 20 being added to the AdvanceKentucky program of Advanced Placement courses in math, science and English. From the Middlesboro *Daily News*.

“It’s not an accurate statement that school funding has not been cut. Over the past four years we’ve lost \$633,736 in revenue, while our expenses have increased by \$1,368,533. That’s a total impact of over \$2 million. I don’t know about anyone else, but to me, schools have been impacted.” Adair County Schools Superintendent Darrell Treece on his recommendation that the district close its alternative school and cancel its summer school program as part of budget-balancing moves. From the Columbia *Adair Progress*.

“We waste ... a lot of manpower here at central office, and at our schools, trying to distribute paper checks. I do feel like that it’s probably getting time for the board to consider just going to direct deposit.” Perry County Schools Finance Officer Jody Maggard on a proposal to require all employees to be paid through direct deposit to their personal bank accounts. From the *Hazard Herald*.

“I was an optimist about all that could be saved, and the rest of my team humored me by hauling it away for clean up, yet most knew full well the rescue effort had little hope of being successful. At that time it helped me to believe we could save everything. It took me a couple of days to fully accept the loss and devastation we had to deal with as a school district.” Metcalfe County Schools Superintendent Pat Hurt looking back one year after floodwaters destroyed the district’s central office in April 2010. From the *Glasgow Daily Times*.

“Playtime is kind of a lost art. Within the recess, we have a lot of teachable moments.” Helmswood Heights (Elizabethtown Independent) Principal Michelle Hart on how recess can be a valuable break in the school day to help students work out issues among themselves and learn interaction skills. From the *Elizabethtown News-Enterprise*. ☞

Annexation and employee taxation

POINT...

“I think it’s a win-win situation. They’ll get better policing and fire protection, and cheaper water and sewer.” Stanford City Councilman Mike Southerland on the city’s non-re-callable annexation of three Lincoln County schools to apply an occupational tax to more than 300 district employees.

COUNTERPOINT...

“My concern is what benefit is this going to be for our personnel and the school district. So far, it’s kind of hard to figure out where the benefits are going to be. I’d like to see them put it off so we could have a reasonable discussion. Not to stir up any trouble, but just to have some questions answered.” Lincoln County Board of Education Chairman Jim Kelley, whose questions included why district officials learned of the planned annexation only from a newspaper article, and not from city officials.

From the Danville *Advocate-Messenger*

Partnership is a walk in the park

Jan Turner, recreation director at Barren River State Resort Park, gave instructions on the day's activity to students from Austin Tracy Elementary School. Turner said she likes to choose activities that are educational, fun and give the students a glimpse of what the park has to offer.



By Wayne Dominick

If experience really is the best teacher, students at Austin Tracy Elementary School in Barren County have a great faculty just down the road.

Thanks to a federal grant and a partnership with Barren River State Resort Park, Austin Tracy students are able to have a variety of outdoor experiences they might not otherwise get.

"I can't begin to tell you how many things our kids have gotten to do thanks to the people at the park," said Austin Tracy Principal Scott Harper. "We've been able to go fishing, do archery and even had some lessons from the golf pro at the park. I know a lot of these kids would never have had the opportunity to do all that on their own."

"There's lots of neat stuff to see and do here," agreed fourth-grader Christina Miller as she sat under a park picnic shelter decorating a flowerpot and tie-dying a shirt after a planned hike was rained out.

Harper said the partnership with the park was a major factor in the school securing federal 21st Century Community Learning Center funds when it applied for that grant three years ago.

"People at the state who reviewed the grants told us that partnering with a state park was a unique opportunity and they were very interested to see how it would work out," he said. The 21st Century grants require partnerships so the programs can continue as grant funding dwindles.

Harper said working with the park has allowed the school to use the grant funds for other costs.

"The biggest problem we faced starting the program was transportation. Our students are spread out over a pretty big area and we need at least two bus runs in order to keep the rides to a reasonable time," he said.

Because the park is close and provides some of the programs, Harper said he is able to use more funds for snacks and transportation.

Lisa Davis, Barren River State Resort Park's manager, said the partnership helps the park as well as the school. Although she was not at the park when the partnership was proposed, she sees its value goes beyond helping students.

"This partnership not only gives the students invaluable experiences, it allows us to further our mission. Hopefully, these children will see how important it is to be good stewards of the land and preserve our natural resources and make them available to all the people in the Commonwealth."

As part of that stewardship, Davis hopes to get the students at Austin Tracy to start an anti-litter campaign in Barren County.

Park Recreation Director Jan Turner said she was surprised

by how many of the students had never been to the park.

"I think one of the best parts of this program is that it not only exposes kids to the park, it gets them interested in activities they can participate in the rest of their lives. Some of these kids have never been fishing and they discovered they really liked it," she said.

The partnership also gets more students involved in the entire 21st Century program, something co-coordinators Sherry Wheeler and Linda Mae Woodcock, both retired teachers, see as a big plus.

Woodcock said trips to the park are only a portion of what the grant provides for the school.

"What the grant does is provide funds for us to have a quality after-school program that gives students a variety of things to do. We provide them with a good, healthy snack, help with homework and different activities," she said.

Wheeler added that several students who came only for trips to the park are now regulars in the program. "We don't go to the park every day and some of the kids who just came when we did had such a good time, they started coming every day. That means they're getting help with homework and getting involved in physical activity," she said.

While funding and partnerships are important to school and park officials, they really don't matter to the students.

"I love coming to the park," said fifth-grader Tegan White. "No matter what we do it's more fun at the park. I think maybe because the scenery is so beautiful."

First grader Hannah Pedigo agreed. "I like coming to the park because it's pretty here and we get to do a lot of fun stuff like archery and jump rope."

Harper hopes the partnership will continue even if the funding does not.

"We might have to look into different ways to fund the program and might have to cut back on the number of days, but I think we all agree that it's a program worth continuing," he said. "It's good for the school, good for the park and, most of all, good for the kids."

The elementary school's program isn't the only such partnership in Barren County Schools. Its middle school has a similar arrangement with Mammoth Cave National Park. ❧

— Dominick is a writer from Frankfort



During a trip to Barren River State Resort Park Austin Tracy Elementary kindergarten student Randi Riley kept a close eye on primary teacher Lacey Mahaney as she applied color to her tie-die shirt. Since the park provides programs for Austin Tracy's after-school program, the school can use more grant money to compensate staff and keep a low teacher-to-student ratio.

New federal rules serving up changes in school cafeterias

By Madelynn Coldiron
Staff Writer

School meal prices in Kentucky are on the uptick and Kentucky school boards, which must approve those charges, are on the spot.

The pressure, aside from any market-driven increases, is coming on two fronts, both prompted by the new federal Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, approved by Congress last year. While the final rules are still being tweaked, school food service officials know some significant changes are afoot. The most immediate change focuses on price adjustments for “equity,” while other increases are expected in 2012-13, when new nutritional guidelines kick in.

Some school boards already have approved higher school lunch prices as a result of a provision in the Act that is aimed at keeping schools from low-balling the price for paid lunches. The USDA maintains that charging less than the cost of producing those lunches, “effectively increases federal subsidies for higher-income children because federal funds intended for free- and reduced-price lunches are being used to help fill in the gap between what a

paid lunch costs and what the school receives for it.”

To address this, the government has devised a formula that will require many school boards to raise the price of paid lunches. In some cases, that will be a substantial amount, though it can be phased in over multiple years.

The Kenton County school board recently raised the paid lunch price by 25 cents, partway to the 70-cent increase needed to comply with the new rule.

“Needless to say, we are disappointed we have to raise meal prices,” board Chairwoman Karen Collins said.

That adds up for families with several kids, said Superintendent Tim Hanner.

“As a school district, we’ve dropped our school fees; we’ve done everything we can to try to help our families and then this happens,” he said.

Other effects

Kenton County’s food service director, Ginger Gray, who also is president of the Kentucky School Nutrition Association, said she fears that the increase on paying students will have far-reaching effects on the finances of the food service program.

“The biggest problem is simply when you raise price, not only does it impact our families, but it can cause participation in the program to go down because families will perceive that they can’t afford to pay for the meals,” she explained.

Nutritionally, this also could backfire, with more children bringing their lunch from home, said Paula Maddox, food service director for Trigg County Schools, which is looking at an eventual increase of 96 cents for paid lunches.

“It’s not going to be the Healthy and Hunger-Free Kids Act,” said Maddox, immediate past president of the state nutrition group. “It’s not going to be healthy at all, because these children are going to be bringing things from home that we would not serve.”

Nutrition changes

In 2012-13, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act also will increase nutritional standards for school breakfast and lunch, aimed at reducing childhood obesity. The proposed changes will add more fruits, vegetables and whole grains while reducing sodium content and starchy vegetables.

The USDA will provide a 6-cent per meal increase to offset the cost of the



new standards, but Gray said that's "a drop in the bucket."

The National School Boards Association estimates the actual increased cost to comply with the new rules will range from 11 cents to 25 cents for lunches.

Gray and Maddox have zeroed in on provisions that they believe will be most problematic. These include a requirement to serve 100 percent whole-grain foods within two years of implementation; drastically reduce the sodium content of foods; increase the serving of fresh fruit; and severely limit the use of starchy vegetables to 1 cup per week, including white potatoes, green peas and corn.

The proposed standards, Maddox said, were "obviously not done by people who feed children every day."

Food manufacturers currently aren't meeting the sodium requirements and will have to reformulate their products, as will the cafeteria cooks with their recipes, Gray and Maddox said.

"And food has to taste good or children won't eat it," Gray added.

Maddox said schools in some parts of the state will have a hard time getting more fresh produce. "Not only that," she said, "but most of the produce grown in Kentucky is coming in the summer months when we're not even in school."

Gray said the changes are likely to produce

more wasted food. For example, cafeterias offer fresh fruit, which can be offered again if it's not taken, but if fruit is required to be placed on every tray, whatever isn't eaten will have to be discarded.

At the cafeteria level

On the front lines, Michelle Beetem, food service manager at White's Tower Elementary in Kenton County, said kids simply are not going to eat what they don't want.

"Nine times out of 10 if you make them take something, they're just going to cry and walk off and they won't take anything," she said. "Eventually they'll start bringing their lunch – I've seen it before. I work in an elementary school and that's the way it is."

Beetem said her school teaches children to take healthy servings. "I think that's the important thing – healthy servings," she said.

Gray said the best way to get kids to try new, healthy foods is through "tastings" in the classroom where all students try the foods.

Slow it down

Hanner, the Kenton County superintendent, echoed comments by the National School Boards Association and national School Nutrition Association, which are asking that the law be phased in more slowly.

"Our biggest concern is what's being proposed is a whole lot at once," he said. "It's

See "Nutrition" continued on Page 19

THE NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION'S CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The new rules should be cost-neutral; many districts already are in dire economic straits
- Implementation should be phased in to be sensitive to school district budgets
- The rule should clearly reflect that the standards are voluntary
- The federal Office of Budget and Management should conduct a new cost-benefit analysis on the rule's impact on school districts
- The cost of the new rules should be aligned with federal reimbursement
- Districts should not have to subsidize meal programs at the expense of academic programs and operations
- The government should address school district concerns at every stage of development and implementation of the new standards



TABLES TURNED: Resource centers looking for resources

The mission of Family Resource and Youth Services Centers

To enhance students' ability to succeed in school by developing and sustaining partnerships that promote:

- Early learning and successful transition to school;
- academic achievement and well-being; and
- graduation and transition into adult life.

By Madelynn Coldiron
Staff Writer

The operative word for Kentucky's family resource and youth services centers is: creativity. Center coordinators say they expect to exercise a lot of it over the next few years as state funding shrinks.

"I have had to get more creative; I am having to ask community partners for help," said Sandy Dick, Science Hill Independent's family resource/youth services center coordinator. "It requires a lot of resourcefulness because there are a lot of programs that you don't want to lose and if you don't have the money, you've lost them."

The centers took a state funding cut of \$2.5 million in 2010-11 and a cut of just over \$3 million this fiscal year, out of a budget that hovers around \$54 million.

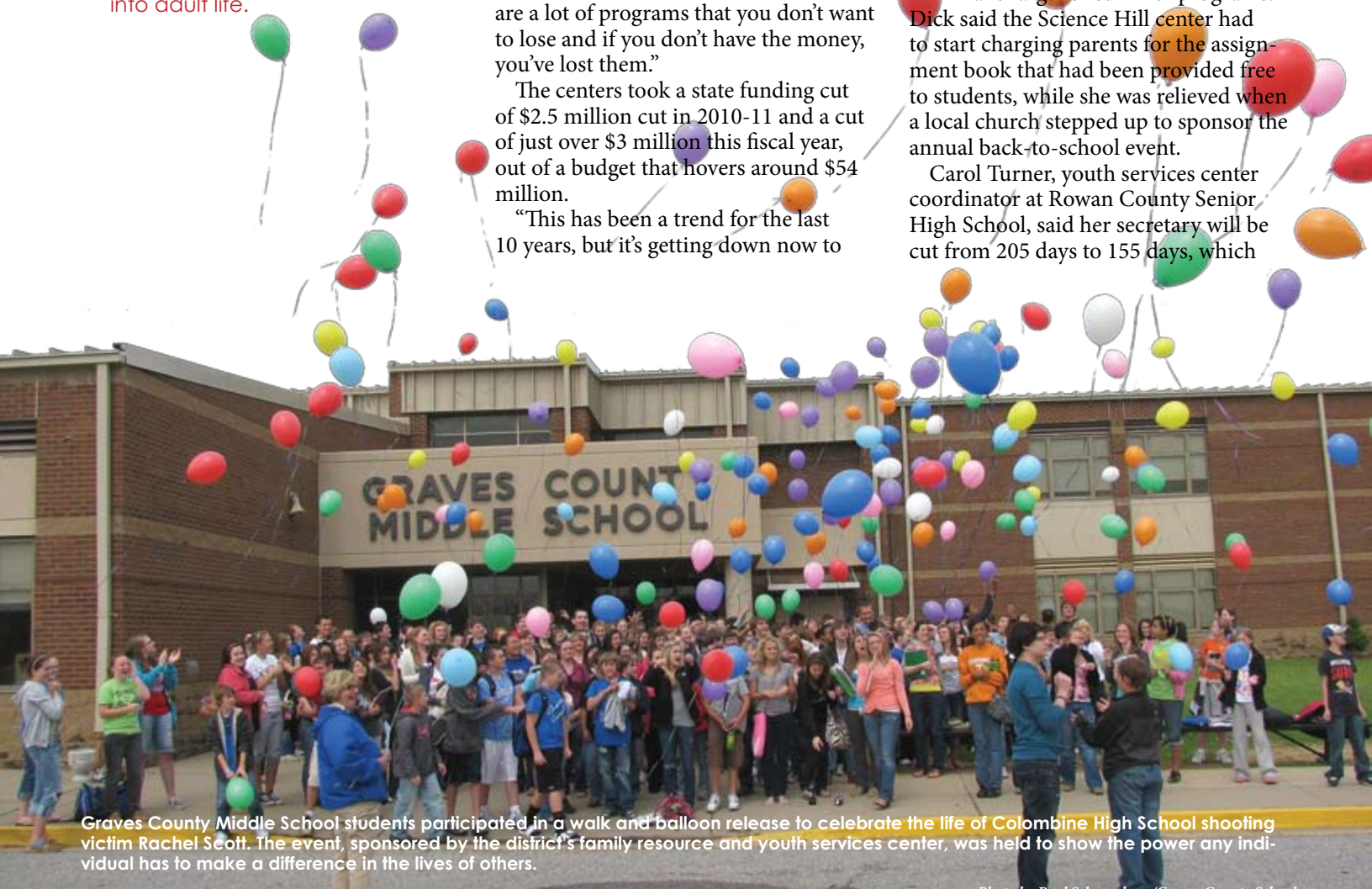
"This has been a trend for the last 10 years, but it's getting down now to

where they're cutting to the bone," said Deborah Clemons, a FRYSC regional program manager in the eastern part of the state.

The cuts are taking the form of reduction in staff time and discretionary money for programs, such as contracts with health departments for on-site services, said Mike Denney, director of the state Division of Family Resource and Youth Services Centers.

Clemons said some centers are at the point of having to cut back on the days they are open and may have to levy a minimal charge for summer programs. Dick said the Science Hill center had to start charging parents for the assignment book that had been provided free to students, while she was relieved when a local church stepped up to sponsor the annual back-to-school event.

Carol Turner, youth services center coordinator at Rowan County Senior High School, said her secretary will be cut from 205 days to 155 days, which



Graves County Middle School students participated in a walk and balloon release to celebrate the life of Columbine High School shooting victim Rachel Scott. The event, sponsored by the district's family resource and youth services center, was held to show the power any individual has to make a difference in the lives of others.

Photo by Paul Schaumburg/Graves County Schools

means she in turn will have to cut back on what she calls “kid” time.

“She frees me up so much to do things with kids or things I have to do to network,” Turner said.

McLean County school board member Joyce Sutton, who also sits on the board of the district’s family resource/youth services center, said the staff there had their salaries reduced.

“I think it’s a dire situation, honestly,” Sutton said.

The 2011-12 cut might be the steepest ever, Denney said. Only a few school districts contribute local dollars to their centers, he added. Considered groundbreaking at the time, the centers were established as part of the state’s 1990 education reform as a way to remove barriers to learning.

The timing of the cutbacks dovetails with an increase in need from students and their families, Denney said.

“We’re seeing a lot more foot traffic, a lot more people coming in,” he said. “The people who have been donors in the past, who have brought gently used clothing and food and things like that and helped with holiday assistance and a thousand other things – some of those people are now people who are having to draw on the services.”

Creative partnering

In some cases, all the FRYSCs in a district are banding together to provide programs for students. In Graves County, the seven centers pooled funding to bring in Rachel’s Challenge, which emphasizes positive change, said Tana Jones, family resource center coordinator at Wingo Elementary.

Centers also lean heavily on outside partners for help on specific projects, including civic groups, businesses and the faith community, and expect to do even more of that now.

“I have about seven or eight small churches right in my town that really buy into our school and what we’re trying to do for our kids,” Jones said. “It’s benefited us quite a bit.”

Turner works with the Salvation Army; local task forces that provide educational programs for students on topics like child abuse and domestic violence; and with Morehead State University, whose nursing students run the center’s annual health fair.

Turner said her center also reaps benefits from the programs of other nonprofits. The local food pantry, for example, helps supply a weekend feeding program and local stores turn in slightly



Photo by Catherine Rogers/Rowan County Schools

damaged clothing that has been returned.

Dick said while her community has been generous, she is concerned that businesses will have to cut off the flow of donations at some point.

“The thing is that all of us are needing help, so all of us are asking more or less the same people,” she said.

It’s important to network and form connections in the community, the coordinators said.

“We are asked to serve on various committees and organizations and planning committees and things,” Turner explained. “So there, over the past 19 years, I’ve met a lot of people that I can give a ring to that can give me ideas or help me out.”

Jones, in Graves County, said getting donations is most effective when she cites a specific need.

“People like to be told what you need the help with,” she said. “When you spell those things out for people, I think they’re more agreeable to come and be a part of it.” ❧



Photo by Paul Schaumburg/Graves County Schools

Top photo: Rowan County Senior High School’s Youth Services Center sponsors an annual community health fair in partnership with St. Claire Regional Medical Center, Gateway District Health Department and the Morehead State University Nursing Program.

Graves County High School students cleaned and painted a fence at Mayfield’s Kiwanis Park as part of their school’s Second Annual Day of Service, another project of the district’s family resource and youth services centers.

RAISING their standards

Erlanger school ditches old grades for standards-based system

By Jennifer Wohlleb
Staff Writer

Ask students at Miles Elementary how they are doing in school and you'll hear details about the skills they've mastered and what they still need to work on rather than a recitation of the As, Bs and Cs that have been the norm for generations.

Two years ago, the Erlanger-Elsmere Independent school dropped traditional letter grades and implemented a standards-based grading system. It not only gives teachers, students and parents a better understanding of what students need to learn, but it also increases student achievement levels.

"I had always felt like letter grades had never adequately conveyed to parents what their students needed to improve upon," said fourth-grade teacher Kimberly Asbrock. "Often they would focus on the grade and how they could bring up the grade and not on how they could master the standard or improve reading or math."

In the beginning

Principal Bryant Gillis said he realized about five years ago that the school needed to do something different to really improve academic achievement. He sent all faculty members to conferences and professional development events across the country, led by different education experts.

That was followed by the creation of Assessing the Curriculum and Teach-

ing the Standards (ACTS) teams, as well as grade-level teams, who created the standards.

"We developed our standards using the Kentucky Core Content and we got on the Internet and looked up different national standards," Gillis said. "We came up with what we considered a set of standards that would provide our students with a chance to compete. I guess we raised the rigor."

The school now has its own standards for each grade as well as comprehensive report cards to match.

"We start out with nonmastery, partial mastery, mastery and exceeds mastery," for each standard, Gillis said. "Then we have a definition and rubric for each one of those. We do no extra credit and behavior is not included. You're getting an absolute grade when you get that report card home. You know where your child is on each skill."

Students

Gillis said the changes in students have been drastic.

"Not only do they understand the report cards, they can explain them better than the parents and they know what they need to do to get to that next level," Gillis said.

Fourth-grade teacher Della Kemper said the best example of the effectiveness of standards-based grading is a student who had made progress under the old grading system but could never get past 65 percent.

"No matter how hard she tried, she



KSBA celebrates Letcher's PEAK Achievement

KSBA celebrated Letcher County Schools last month when it presented the district with the *Public Education Achieves in Kentucky Award* for its districtwide piano program. The piano program, offered at all seven Letcher elementary schools, is credited with increasing math scores, improving behavior and reducing absenteeism.

Left, teacher Theresa Holonich leads students at Letcher Elementary School in a piano lesson, demonstrating the program to district dignitaries and KSBA representatives.



Below, Letcher County officials are presented with the *PEAK Award*. From left are KSBA Immediate Past President Delmar Mahan, KSBA President Tom Blankenship, KSBA President-Elect Durward Narramore, KSBA Executive Director Bill Scott, Letcher County Schools Superintendent Anna Craft, Letcher County Board of Education Chairman William Smith and board member John Spicer.

The KSBA *PEAK Award* was established in 1997 to focus statewide attention on outstanding public school efforts aimed specifically at enhancing student learning skills and, in doing so, to promote the positive impact of public elementary and secondary education in this Commonwealth.

The deadline for entering the next cycle of the *PEAK Award* is Oct. 7. For more information about the program, go to www.ksba.org/peak.

would improve, but none of the grades she received ever reflected that, because a zero on the old grading scale was the same as a 65 percent – it was failing,” she said. “The biggest improvement in the new grading system is that we’re able to reflect on the growth. They can still grow, they can still succeed and I think that was one of the big motivators.”

Gillis said a better understanding of students’ learning levels also provides better placement.

“We move the kids around to where they need to be,” he said. “If they need to be in the third grade for reading, we put them in the third grade. If they need to be in the second grade for reading, we put them in the second grade. We have an environment where students are more interested in mastering their skills rather than worrying about what grade they’re in. We’ve involved our students a lot in their learning and goal setting.”

Parents

That student involvement has led to

a major shift in parent-teacher conferences, especially for older students.

“Our students lead them and they explain everything to parents,” Kemper said. “My students are able to articulate to parents, ‘This is an area that I’ve already mastered, and I know how to do this, this and this, but I haven’t gotten to this point yet.’ I’ve had almost 100 percent attendance since we’ve started these.”

Parents, who had their own advisory group during the transition to the new grading system, have embraced the changes for the most part.

“I do two parent academies at the beginning of the year,” Gillis said. “Parents help with the presentation to the parents. We hand out a vocabulary list to help them understand. We give out a rubric on what we’re grading on and a definition of our four categories for grading. Parents know how to get online to check their children’s work.”

See “Standards” continued on Page 19

“We have an environment where students are more interested in mastering their skills rather than worrying about what grade they’re in. We’ve involved our students a lot in their learning and goal setting.”

— Bryant Gillis,
Miles Elementary
School principal



Exercising good judgment

Second Street Elementary employees model healthy behavior for students

By Jennifer Wohlleb
Staff Writer

At Frankfort Independent's Second Street School, efforts to improve student health begin with healthier staff members.

The school opened an on-site wellness center five years ago, giving employees a place to exercise and fitness buddies to do it with.

"A lot of getting into a workout routine is having a partner, and if you've got a workplace that's promoting it, you've got people around you. It's easy to join in," said Family Resource and Youth Services Center Director Jill Sutton. "If I sent an e-mail out today and said, 'Does anyone want to walk this afternoon?' I'd probably have three or four partners. If I said I wanted to run, someone would want to run, or lift weights."

Running is how the emphasis on fitness began at Second Street School, with then-Principal Rich Crowe, who is now Frankfort's superintendent, and other staff members training for a 5K race.

"A group of us had started running after school and we talked about how wellness made us feel, and all the benefits it had," he said.

It was such a success that they pooled some resources at the school to open the wellness center so employees would have somewhere to work out before or after school. Crowe said any employee in the district can use it.

"It's very important for kids to see any adult involved in fitness activities, particularly teachers who talk about health and PE in the classroom," Crowe said.

In addition to the workout equipment, Second Street also offers Zumba fitness classes twice a week, as well as the occasional yoga class. Sometimes a local personal trainer will lead fitness boot camps and other activities with employees for a small fee.

"I think most staff members participate in some kind of wellness activity," Sutton said. "Of 50 staff members, at least 30 are members of the wellness center, which asks for a \$12 donation per quarter, which is used for equipment. We have a teacher who will lead yoga classes and we'll just shoot out an e-mail that says, 'Hey, who wants to do yoga Thursday

Second Street Elementary teachers Julie Gosney, in blue, and Stephanie Starkey get in a workout at the wellness center at the Frankfort Independent school.

afternoon?’ The trainer will do weight sessions.”

The wellness center – which is in an empty classroom – is outfitted with elliptical machines, treadmills, free weights, other workout equipment and a sound system.

Kindergarten teacher Julie Gosney likes to use the cardio equipment when she’s not running outdoors.

“I don’t like yoga, but I like to run on the treadmill, work out on the elliptical, lift weights,” she said. “Some people would rather Zumba or yoga. We have something for everyone.”

Gosney said their students are learning another lesson when they see teachers exercise.

“Teachers are good role models for their students,” she said. “When we run, we run downtown, which is our district, our neighborhood, and our kids see us out there.”

Increased attention to wellness is spreading across the district, Crowe said. Frankfort High School now has a fitness center open to teachers and students and he sees increasing numbers of employees getting active.

“Just a little while ago as I was walking back to my office from a meeting at the high school, there were three teachers coming out the door to go running at 3:30 p.m. They were going out to do a 3-mile run,” he said. “Those are the kinds of things that happen now that didn’t happen in the past.”

Exercise isn’t the only focus of wellness. The Second Street cafeteria staff also has gotten into the act.

“They sponsored a contest to get students to plan a healthy menu,” Sutton said. “They gave students guidelines to follow. The winner had their meals prepared for a week.” ☞

Tips for staying motivated

DO YOU LIKE TO SOCIALIZE?

- Join a walking club or play a round of golf with friends.
- Take an aerobics, boot camp or spinning class.
- Go dancing, skating or bowling.

WOULD YOU PREFER TO GO SOLO?

- Solitary walking, jogging or swimming will protect your peace and quiet.

ARE YOU A SELF-STARTER?

- Train on a treadmill, a stationary bike or lift weights.

DO YOU ENJOY MENTAL FOCUS?

- Racquet sports, martial arts, yoga, and Pilates require concentration.

ARE YOU GOAL ORIENTED?

- Plan to run in a race or book a fitness vacation that requires you to be in shape.
- Challenge yourself with distance, time and weight goals.

DO YOU WANT EXCITEMENT, SPONTANEITY, OR SURPRISES?

- Mountain biking, outdoor hiking, and cross-country skiing are unpredictable and fun.

IS TECHNOLOGY YOUR IDEA OF A GOOD TIME?

- Computer fitness games played on your TV screen will get you off the couch.

DO YOU HAVE A STRONG WORK ETHIC?

- Rake leaves, spread mulch, wash and wax your car, paint a room, clean house at a brisk pace.

— Excerpted from *School/Community Relations Today*



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KSBA Summer Leadership Institute

Summer training for board members aims to demystify the new standards



How to Win an Unfair Fight

Summer Leadership Institute keynote speaker Garrison Wynn

KSBA SUMMER LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE
Marriott Griffin Gate
Resort, Lexington
July 8-9

By Jennifer Wohlleb
Staff Writer

KSBAs annual Summer Leadership Institute, July 8-9, will make a complicated issue for school board members more straightforward, preparing them for new academic standards under Senate Bill 1.

“It’s hard, it’s complex, but boards have to get their arms around Senate Bill 1,” said Kerri Schelling, KSBA’s director of Board Team Development. “We think we’re putting it together in a way that is very manageable, very digestible.”

The Friday opening session, *Unbridled Learning: Kentucky’s College and Career Readiness Agenda*, will be presented by Kentucky Education Commissioner Terry Holliday and other Department of Education officials.

“We have the people who are creating it presenting it Friday night, so it’s not filtered through any third party,” Schelling said. “We’re going to get the big picture as well as information on how core standards are being implemented, the leadership network and the accountability models as well as help for struggling schools.”

Schelling said board members may feel overwhelmed by the size and significance of this legislation, but emphasized that this learning opportunity will focus only on those areas that impact school boards.

“We knew that we couldn’t explain all of Senate Bill 1, and there is so much of it that school boards will not have to touch,” she said. “We’re trying to bring those pieces that have governance issues to our Summer Leadership Institute.”

This session, held at the Marriott Griffin Gate Resort in Lexington, also will serve as the leadoff event for

KSBA’s annual Fall Regional Meetings, which will continue preparing board members for implementing SB 1 in their districts.

The opening session will be fun as well as informative. Students from Boyd County’s Summit Elementary will provide a rousing start to the evening with a performance of their Japanese-style Taiko drums.

The Institute will offer a wider variety of learning opportunities on Saturday. Keynote speaker Garrison Wynn will kick off the day with a high-impact presentation on *How to Win an Unfair Fight*. This business-relationship expert will help board members answer two questions: How do you get people to do what you want them to do? And how can you handle the difficult people you encounter along the way?

Board members of all experience levels also will have a number of learning opportunities to choose from among Saturday’s workshop sessions.

In conjunction with the Summer Leadership Institute, KSBA’s Governmental Relations Service will again host a Legislative Issues Group meeting beginning at 11:30 a.m. July 8. It will focus on the 2012 legislative session, which will be critical for local school districts as the legislature will begin work on a new biennial budget.

The Kentucky Organization of Superintendents Administrative Assistants also will hold its annual summer meeting July 8. It will begin at 8:30 a.m. ☞

— To register online for Summer Leadership, KOSAA or the Legislative Issues Group, go to www.ksba.org and look for the link at the top of the page. Registration materials will be in the mail later this month.

Contractors on Site: Tips to Build a Safe Environment

Flood damage repair, building a new gymnasium, fixing dry-weather cracks – these are just a few of the reasons you may have construction workers on school property.

Construction on campus during the school year or the summer requires some thought to scheduling issues, housekeeping and student and staff safety. To make for the best possible situation and keep concerns to a minimum here are some common-sense suggestions:

Before work begins:

- Require a background check on all workers. Make sure background-check language is included in all contractor and subcontractor documents. Ask to review the results of the check.
- Meet with the general contractor. Explain your expectations and listen to the contractor's plans and needs. Review the school calendar and coordinate the work. Discuss your plans to frequently visit the job site.
- For jobs during the school year, encourage after-hours scheduling. Working when the school day is over may make the contractor more productive and reduce utility costs. Inter-

ference from traffic, classroom disruption and interaction with students all will be reduced.

During construction:

- You own the job site. Make frequent walk-through visits to ensure safety barriers are in place and worker-student interactions are kept to a minimum.
- Segregation. Maintain a strict segregation between students and the work crew. Keep a faculty or staff presence to monitor stragglers and keep "gawking" to a minimum.
- Lights and signs. Make sure the construction site is well lit and proper signage is in place.
- Work site security. Insist the contractor properly secure the work site. This will not only reduce material loss and missing tools but will prevent injuries and reduce vandalism.

For information on any loss control or safety-related issue contact your local Kentucky School Boards Insurance Trust (KSBIT) representative at 1-800-876-4552.

— by *Marty Nemes, insurance marketing agent, Kentucky League of Cities Insurance Services and the Kentucky School Boards Insurance Trust.*

NUTRITION

Continued from Page 11

like flipping off a switch: The big fear is that kids will just chose not to eat and it will also continue to raise the price if it's done all at once instead of phased in."

Gray said the proposed rules are frustrating for food service directors who are all for more nutritional foods.

"The worst part about this is many of us are big advocates of nutrition and you feel like when you're objecting to these rules that you don't want it perceived that you're not in favor of it," she said.

Gray and Maddox are concerned that, taken together, the changes eventually will create a two-tiered system in school cafeterias.

"It's basically going to mean we're going to have a free lunch line because the only kids who are going to be participating are going to be the ones who are getting the free meal," Maddox said.

The USDA says it will work with schools to help improve meals that are consistent with dietary standards.

"We understand that these improved meal standards may present challenges for some school districts, but the new law provides important new resources, technical assistance and flexibility to help schools raise the bar for kids," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. ☞

STANDARDS

Continued from Page 15

Kindergarten teacher Gina Danks said parents know all of the essential skills their students are expected to learn.

"Parents should not be surprised on the report card as to what the child has mastered because they've been informed all along and been a part of that process and helping practice these skills at home," she said.

The new report cards probably have been the hardest part of the change because teachers spend 35-40 minutes to complete each one. But Kemper said it is worth it.

"It is time consuming, but it helps us know our students much better," she said.

New standards

As the state begins implementation of new national standards in English/language arts and math, as well as Senate Bill 1, leaders at Miles Elementary feel their standards-based grading system

has put them ahead of the game. Gillis said they will have to adjust a few of their common standards to reflect the national standards, particularly in the third and fifth grades, where they have seen the biggest changes.

"We have started to go back and look at where the gaps are in what we've already done and we don't think we'll have to go back and make a lot of change," he said. "We will do student-friendly language this summer for the new common core standards."

Kemper said for the most part, the school has already done the hard work.

"Cadres have been set up for the new standards, and what we did in ours was to just go through gaps in the old standards vs. the new standards," she said. "I think it's going to be simple for us to just go in and make the changes." ☞

Will Nash

executive director of Teach For America-Appalachia

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 Will Nash, founding executive director of Teach For America-Appalachia, which will be providing at least 30 teachers in four eastern Kentucky school districts this fall. This is the 20-year-old program's first time in Kentucky. Teach For America recruits, trains and supports outstanding recent graduates and professionals who commit to teach for two years in under-resourced schools. Nash, a Glasgow native, joined the program in Louisiana after graduating from the University of Kentucky.



Q. What is Teach for America?

A. Teach for America is a nationwide nonprofit focused on closing the achievement gap between students in low-income areas and their more affluent peers. We recruit, select, train and professionally develop recent college graduates and young professionals who commit to teach for two years in low-income communities. In Appalachia, our initial focus will be on helping districts find qualified candidates for historically hard-to-fill positions.

Q. Teach for America has been around for 20 years and this is its first time moving into Kentucky. Why is the timing right, now, for this program to be in the state?

A. Over the last few years, we have been engaging with school superintendents, principals and school councils and, through that engagement, it's clear that they face challenges recruiting and retaining the level of talent they seek for their students. This isn't the case for all subjects and grade levels but it's certainly the case for some. This factor, coupled with the fact that these challenges exist more so in low-income communities than middle- and higher-income communities led us to consider Appalachia as an expansion region.

Q. Is it the areas of math, science, foreign languages that Teach For America will focus on filling?

A. We're focused on all subject areas and I think we'll want to have teachers in all subject areas and all grade levels because we see the achievement gap as being present in every subject and every grade level. But the immediate, short-term goal is to help principals find qualified talent for the critical shortage areas, or any other areas they deem as hard to fill.

Q. Which districts will you be serving and how were they selected?

A. We will be in Floyd, Martin, Knox and Whitley counties.

We've cast a wide net over the districts we've reached out to. In fact, there are a number of districts that we are having ongoing conversations with that could be included on that list for 2011-12. But these four specific districts have multiple openings for next year, they have the capacity to hire our teachers and to cluster our teachers so we're not just putting one teacher in a school or community by themselves. They will have a support system there to enable their success. And these superintendents are really visionary leaders who see this as an opportunity and another way to positively impact

student achievement.

Q. The program will start off with 30 educators in classrooms this fall?

A. Our goal is to have 30 educators on the first day of school in August. After that, we hope to bring in 30 a year for at least the first three years. But I actually think there's growth potential beyond that based on the conversations I've had with some school leaders and district administrators.

Once we are in the region and are working on this project and are having some success, I think we'll have to re-evaluate what our growth strategy is at that point. There is potential that we could expand beyond Kentucky and truly serve several parts of Appalachia, as well.

Q. So this is the first foray into Appalachia?

A. Yes. We've been looking for that right entry point for some time because our organization is passionate about serving low-income students.

Q. How does the program work once you get these teachers into the districts?

A. Once they get into the districts, we will have a staff in eastern Kentucky, based in Hazard, of two program directors. Both have been master teachers in their subject areas and each one of them will support about 15 teachers in their first year.

In a perfect world, principals would be in their teachers' classrooms every single day, observing them and giving them feedback about what's going well and what they can improve upon. They would be going over data with teachers to understand where their students are starting and where we want them to end up and what progress to that goal looks like. Principals would be going over lesson plans, videotaping teachers so they can diagnose what's happening in the classroom and what's not.

But we all know that principals don't have that kind of time anymore because there are so many fires that they are putting out across the district, whether it's transportation issues, budget issues, or building relationships with the community or parents that they work with. So our program directors take on some of that responsibility and they're the ones that get into teachers' classrooms and intimately engage with what's happening in the classroom, in conjunction with and in order to complement what the principal's also doing.

That is the crux of our professional development. Over the course of their two years, each of our teachers can expect to be observed and given feedback and have a thought partner multiple times a school year. I think that's what really enables our success. But I do want to

underscore that it's not in addition to what a school is already doing; it's set to complement whatever a principal's strategy or goals are for their school.

Q. Where are these teachers being recruited from?

A. We've already made offers to the teachers who will be joining our Appalachian region. I'd say eight-10 of them are coming from Kentucky colleges and universities and about 20 are coming from outside the state. But some of those coming from outside the state actually grew up in Kentucky or have roots here and were looking for the opportunity to come back. Others may have had an experience with the region through an alternative spring break or some other type of service project and want to use this as a way to continue that type of work.

Q. What qualities do you look for in the teachers you recruit?

A. We have a really rigorous selection model that is built on our 20 years of service and our experience in working with highly effective teachers. We look at teachers both inside and outside of our program and ask, "What's making these teachers as successful as they are being?" We try to identify those key competencies and then we go search for them.

As an example, we look for individuals who know how to set a vision or broad goal and invest people in that vision and working toward it. We look for people who know how to overcome challenges and work with challenging people because that's what is every single day in the classroom. We look for people who will relentlessly pursue results and have a really high sense of possibility for what is possible in low-income areas.

We also look for people who have really strong teaching skills, because the act of teaching is complicated and it takes a lot of thoughtful approach in order to get the outcome we want.

Those are the main things we look for. First and foremost, a teacher's responsibility is to that school and their students, their curriculum and the assessments that take place in the school. We want to be there to support those teachers through that process, to give them resources so that they can be successful in that setting and also to be a coach and a mentor to push them to achieve at a higher level than what they might ordinarily think is possible.

I hope people read this and think: How can we get some of these teachers into my district? I'd like to emphasize that we are always willing and open to explore partnerships with other districts. ☞

— For more information about Teach For America, contact Nash at wil.nash@teachforamerica.org or go to www.teachforamerica.org.

Watching state board meetings online – interesting, mystifying, but worth the time

There are a lot of similarities between the Kentucky Board of Education and any of the state's 174 local boards of education. Adopting policies/regulations. Monitoring school/Department of Education activities. Hearing district/public appeals. Making a few people happy and a few more people mad.

There also are a lot of similarities between meetings of the state board and local school boards. The meetings are in public (mostly), involving minutes, majority votes that decide issues and reports by the professional staff of the department/school.

Both sets of meetings can take hours to complete the work. Sometimes they feature lively discussions among the members. Sometimes they feature mind-numbing activity that may appear to a first-time observer as rubber-stamping the administration.

While there are differences between these meetings – scope of impact, student presentations, angry visitors packing the meeting room – one significant similarity is that those who listen to the discussions have a greater chance of comprehending why decisions are made.

That's one reason why it's puzzling that so few people avail themselves of the live webcasts provided for virtually every state board meeting.

The April KBE meeting, for example, had a grand total of 150 sites logging on to the webcast. Andrew Liaupsin, a KDE staff member who tracks its webcast use, shared that 61 of the viewing sites were within the agency itself. Forty-three were in school districts and another 46 were "outside the network," which included me.

If you look at what was on the table in April, maybe you'll also wonder about the lack of interested viewers.

Heavy stuff, long impact

It was well-known before the April meeting that the state board would be acting on the first regulation implementing the new accountability system that will replace the CATS test. What wasn't expected was the vigorous discussion about the program review aspect of the new system, especially regarding how school art, music and related noncore content classes would be measured. The KBE went so far as to rename part of the program review process to emphasize that arts and humanities aren't going to be diminished.

But that was only part of the KBE discussions in April that merited closer attention. If you didn't watch online, you missed:

- approval of the first alternative model for a school-based decision making council with a classified employee as an official member. The proposal from a Montgomery County elementary school carried the endorsement of the school board



Brad Hughes
KSBA Member
Support Services Director

chairperson. But it wasn't a unanimous decision, and it featured interesting exchanges among some of the state board members.

- two decisions backing Education Commissioner Terry Holliday. One dealt with a Christian County school board appeal of the removal of an SBDM council at a low-achieving school. The other was a full-blown hearing in the nonresident student contract dispute between the Harlan County and Harlan Independent school systems. With other similar disagreements pending or possible, these discussions should have been telling for local leaders facing such

disputes.

- formal endorsement of two companies as educational management organizations which districts may hire to improve schools that land on the department's persistently low-achieving schools list.

Perhaps of even greater significance at KBE meetings are the presentations by KDE staff and their answers to state board members' questions. If you listened in April, you would have heard responses such as "Superintendents have no problems with this..." and "We're not getting any push back (from districts)..." on another issue. I note these points not to question whether the statements are true, but to suggest that district leaders should be aware of how their input is being shared or inferred.

The Last Word

I know, I know. If you're in a leadership position, your days already are packed. And setting aside six to eight hours any day is a challenge.

But KBE Chairman David Karem makes a strong case for why more local leaders should be tuning into the State Board Show.

"It's my belief that watching the KBE meetings can give all parties an understanding of the thought process that takes place as policies and decisions are developed," Karem said in an e-mail.

"The discussions and interchanges are often eye-opening and powerful. The board members take their work very seriously, which is demonstrated in the meetings," he said.

"What will come through is that our efforts are always guided by what members truly believe is in the best interest of the kids."

As local education leaders, you may or may not like what comes out of Frankfort. But there is so much carping and moaning about decisions made by KBE and KDE staff, it just seems that those who differ put themselves in a stronger position to disagree – and to advocate for different decisions – if they make the time to tune in and learn.

And that's a message worth getting out. ☚



Get your questions answered

Training for Directors of Special Education and Special Education Legal Update

August 18 - 19, 2011
Hilton Lexington Downtown

This conference offers information that all directors — new and experienced — need to know. Hear about current court cases, hot topic issues, budgeting and resources. Our presenters have many years of valuable experience to share with you.

If you are new, don't miss the first day, which will be particularly helpful to new directors.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO REGISTER, GO TO WWW.KSBA.ORG
AND LOOK FOR THE LINK UNDER "FEATURED EVENTS" AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE.





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NSBA brings USA to see technology-assisted learning in Jefferson County



On May 11-13, the National School Boards Association brought 100 board members, administrators, technology specialists and teachers to Louisville to see the Jefferson County Schools' use of technology in the classroom.



NSBA selects several districts of varying sizes annually to spotlight innovative strategies in effective technology.

Clockwise starting top left: Allison Byford, instructional technology coordinator for the Springdale, Ga. Schools watches Wellington Elementary students demonstrate instant-response technology that allows the teacher to monitor their writing lessons.

Fern Creek High School junior Saronte Jones designs a math tutorial on his tablet, then uploads it to a student-created website to be used as a learning tool by students at an Indiana elementary school.

Jefferson County school board member Linda Duncan, left, a member of the KSBA Board of Directors, and Rhonda Nelson, a school board member from Portage, Ind., watch a Phoenix School of Discovery demonstration of how parents are able to see same-day results of their children's tests.

