

KENTUCKY SCHOOL ADVOCATE

A publication of the Kentucky School Boards Association ■ September 2011



**At
home**

Partnerships for progress

FROM SCHOOLYARD TO TABLE

New high school models

MIDDLE SCHOOL OVERHAUL



All the bases are covered with KSBA legal, administrative training and special education services

TO READ

ADA Newsletter

KSBA's Americans With Disabilities Act Newsletter helps districts navigate the complexities of that federal law. This monthly, electronic fee-based service helps protect students, districts and schools by keeping subscribers up-to-date on ADA regulations and court decisions, including the newest provisions governing community access, service animals and personnel accommodations.

TO USE

504 Tracking

School districts must have a systematic process for tracking Section 504 service plans for students, especially since the numbers of these students are increasing. KSBA has worked with Connected Learning Network, Inc., to develop a fee-based tracking system that interfaces with Infinite Campus. This can be used by districts or individual schools.

TO ATTEND

September 14-15: Section 504/ADA Coordinator and Team Chair Training at the Hilton Lexington Downtown. New federal ADA regulations have kicked in and this two-day training will cover these and other aspects of that law and Section 504, including the changes in public access guidelines. Attendees also will hear about recent court cases and other hot-button issues.

September 23: FERPA, Open Records and Working with the Media and the Public at the Clarion Hotel in Lexington. This daylong conference covers compliance with Kentucky's Open Records Act while protecting student privacy under FERPA mandates. Sessions also focus on how to interact with the media and public to put a district or school in the best light.



For more information on these services and events, please contact Jolene Shearer at 1-800-372-2962, ext. 1107. To register for either conference, please go to KSBA's website, www.ksba.org

FEATURES

SUMMER PAYOFF

Spencer County Middle School teachers hope their summer visits help ease the transition to middle school for their students. But this program is just one part of the transformations at this school ... Page 8

HIGH SCHOOL REFORM, AGAIN

The push for college and career readiness has revived interest in innovative high school models, from career pathways to engineering programs to higher-education partnerships. Some of those models are being launched this year and others have a little more experience ... Page 10

CAREER THEME

A handful of high schools will use this year to plan for a new model devised by a national nonprofit group. Using four career-themed academies, the program is designed not just for the gifted, but for all students ... Page 11

ECONOMICS AND EFFICIENCY

KSBA is partnering with or endorsing organizations with programs that will help school districts in both tangible and intangible ways, a recognition that the association must step up to the plate to help its cash-tight members ... Page 14

PREPARING FOR LAPTOPS

As laptop use in classrooms becomes more common, districts who have led the way offer advice on getting started ... Page 18



Leading the way, Page 11



Healthy skills for a lifetime, Page 12



Laptops for students, Page 18

DEPARTMENTS

Take Note 4
 People Are Talking 6
 Ed Wellness 12
 KSBIT Corner 19
 In Conversation With 20

COMMENTARY

President's Corner 5
 Get Your Message Out 22

On the cover



Spencer County Middle School student Tabitha Martin and her mom, Michele, go over a supply list during a home visit from two of her new teachers. Home visits are just one element of the school's focus on customer service. Article on Page 8.

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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. One additional issue each year is published exclusively on KSBA's website.

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Down to the wire
All 11 Kentucky school board members in danger of removal for not meeting 2010 training hour requirements were able to squeeze in some professional development just under the wire. They had been given a July 31 deadline by Education Commissioner Terry Holliday to fulfill the requirements or be reported to the attorney general's office. The state board of education directed Holliday to take that action.

The 11 local board members, whose credit shortages ranged from a quarter of a credit hour to four hours, made up that gap with locally approved training, said KSBA Board Team Development Director Kerri Schelling.

Pinnacle power

Deborah Frazier, assistant superintendent of finance for Madison County Schools, was named a 2011 Pinnacle Award winner by the Association of School Business Officials International, a 5,000-member professional group. One of four national winners, Frazier, who is a certified public accountant and school finance officer, was recognized for her Leveraging Leadership program, which bridges the gap between classified employees and students.

Baird takes seat

KSBA Associate Executive Director David Baird has begun his six-year term on the Kentucky School Facilities Construction Commission. Baird is one of eight members on the commission, which assists local school districts with school facility construction and technology funding. It distributes state funds to eligible districts certified by the Kentucky Board of Education. Baird, a former Eminence Independent superintendent, has been KSBA's associate executive director for five years.

Early childhood race

The 26-member Early Childhood Advisory Council appointed this summer by Gov. Steve Beshear includes school board representation. Marilyn Coffey, a retired educator who is a member of the Casey County Board of Education is serving on the group, which was formed to assist the state in applying for second-round federal Race to the Top funds, which are focused on early childhood education. Beshear also appointed KSBA Executive Director Bill Scott to the council, as well as Madison County Schools Superintendent Tommy Floyd. ☞

More winners

Retired Pike County Superintendent Frank Welch was given the Distinguished Service Award by the Kentucky Association of School Administrators. The award, presented at KASA's summer conference, recognizes retired or retiring educators for their work throughout their career.

Also at that meeting, Kim Johnson, special education coordinator for Owensboro Public Schools, was named the district-level winner of the Administrator of the Year award, while Tony Patterson, Green County Intermediate School Principal, is this year's building-level winner of that award. Rick Branham, Title I homeless liaison for the Pike County district, was named the 2011 Fred Award winner, which singles out an individual for commitment and spirit of service. Louellen Turner, administrative assistant for Danville Independent Schools, received the annual award for support personnel.

KASA's 2011-12 officers also were sworn in at the conference. Mayfield Independent Superintendent Lonnie Burgett is president; Rita Muratalla, principal of Zoneton Middle School in Bullitt County, president-elect; Paul Mullins, principal of LaRue County High School, vice president; and Phyllis O'Neal, principal of Calvert Elementary School in Marshall County, immediate past president.



Lonnie Burgett, Mayfield Independent Schools superintendent and new KASA president

Ready for more reform

Before long, the 12 KSBA Fall Regional Meetings will be held at various sites throughout the state. We hope that board members and superintendents will strongly consider attending. We feel that the information shared at each region's gathering will prove to be beneficial to you as you all lead your respective districts through the challenging years ahead. Meeting new colleagues and renewing old friendships also make attendance worthwhile.

One very important issue to be discussed at the meetings is probably one of the most important pieces of education legislation to be implemented since the Kentucky Education Reform Act in 1990.

I am referring to the oft-mentioned Senate Bill 1, a result of the 2009 session of the General Assembly. It is crucial that board members be effectively informed of the important implications of this legislation.

KSBA Executive Director Bill Scott stresses the importance of this legislation as a conduit that will better prepare students throughout the Commonwealth for college and the world of work. As Scott wrote in the March issue of the *Kentucky School Advocate*, "Meeting the challenges of Senate Bill 1 will require the support and involvement of the entire school community, including local boards of education."

This not only expresses the willingness of KSBA to provide any assistance it can to any board of education, but challenges all of us to be informed and equipped to assist in the implementation of this significant legislation.

The math and English/language arts Kentucky Core Academic Standards, as the new standards are called, are to be implemented this year. This alone implies that the training that teachers, principals and district administrators receive is crucial if they are to be effectively prepared to do what is required of them.

Madison County Schools, as is probably the case with many school districts, has forged full speed ahead with the implementation of Senate Bill 1.

In a statement to KSBA, Madison County Schools Superintendent Tommy Floyd said, "Throughout the course of the past school year, our teachers have worked in school, grade and district level teams to deconstruct the Kentucky Core Academic Standards. We have completed the process of writing student-friendly learning targets or "I can" statements for all mathematics and language arts standards."

This work, according to Floyd, has given teachers the opportunity to examine and scrutinize the KCAS



Tom Blankenship
KSBA President

thoroughly over time.

"In this way, teachers have had opportunities to reflect upon the intent of the standards, how they differ from the core content, and best practices for assessing and teaching these standards," he said.

Ken Bicknell, principal of the Michael Caudill Middle School, was among the educators quoted in material the district shared with me.

"Involving all teachers in the process of deconstruction has made us a stronger instructional team. The leadership that occurred in our school and in our district from classroom teachers who will be implementing these standards is outstanding," he said.

First-grade teacher Jessica Phillips said, "I found that through this experience, I am aware of exactly what my students are to learn ... and feel confident in my knowledge and ability to teach the new standards next school year."

The high school teachers in Madison County also have included the College Readiness Standards into their deconstruction work of the KCAS.

Another teacher who commented, Jamie Tipton at Madison Central High School, said, "All the work that has been done ... really helped me to understand what is in the KCAS, but it was when we began to examine the College Readiness Standards and the document that aligns the two that I really began to understand what I need to teach."

According to Superintendent Floyd, "The Madison County School deconstruction process has given participants a thorough understanding of the Kentucky Core Academic Standards. As a result, they have greater confidence in their ability for making the complicated instructional decisions that lie ahead."

The experience in Madison County shows that being knowledgeable about and being prepared for this important effort also is a challenge for local school board members.

Note: In a number of our regional meetings, elections will be held to select new regional chairpersons and secretaries. These regions are Second, Fourth, Middle Cumberland, Upper Cumberland, Northern Kentucky and Eastern Kentucky South regions.

This will give all the members in their region a wonderful opportunity to attend and actively participate in these important elections, either as a candidate or as a participant. ☘

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

Quotes on education from Kentucky and elsewhere



Photo by Jeff Phillips/Harlan County Schools

“For your child to be given the chance to get a jump on college is an extraordinary opportunity that you can’t place a value on. They are able to pursue this level of course work within their high school classroom with instructors with whom

they are familiar. In other words, your children are not just a number on a roster at a big college.” Harlan County High School Guidance Counselor Stephanie Reynolds on her district’s dual-credit partnership with the regional community and technical college. Pictured is dual-credit English Teacher Tami McHargue. From the *Harlan Daily Enterprise*.

“The only group that comes here who has those restrictions are us taxpayers, who pay for all of this.” Nelson County resident Don Goodin, after urging the school board not to raise taxes, on his criticism of a board practice limiting speakers to three minutes during the meeting public comment period. From the *Bardstown Kentucky Standard*.

“We’re in a really tough spot. I would like to do this, but we can’t afford to go too deep into the hole. We can’t guarantee it wouldn’t create a \$50,000 gap and the school system just cannot handle that right now. I don’t want people to think it is all about money, but look at it from a budget point of view. We can’t pay out more than we are taking in, and right now we are doing that under the old system. This new system it may cost more; we need to see how it works first.” Powell County Schools Food Services Director Laura Young expressing a common concern among many of her colleagues statewide about the federal government’s Community Eligibility Option to provide “free” meals to all students. From the *Stanton Clay City Times*.

“The biggest factor that causes a district like Jessamine to

not fare well under average freshman graduation rate (AFGR) is transience, and we know that we’re one of the most transient districts in Kentucky. That’s because we’re in mobile central Kentucky, a lot of people in and out of Jessamine to Fayette to Woodford to Garrard to Madison, a lot of inter-district mobility here. I would contend at this point that this doesn’t mean that more kids have dropped out of school in Jessamine County, because we know that’s not the case. It just means that the numbers fluctuate pretty significantly for us in this district, and so AFGR is not the best reflection of our graduation rate.” Jessamine County

Schools Superintendent Lu Young on some of the unintended consequences of Kentucky’s two-year transitional calculation of high school graduation rates. From the Nicholasville *Jessamine Journal*.

“In this economy, it is becoming increasingly difficult for some families to buy their children clothes they normally wear plus clothes that fit the school’s dress code. We just felt that some of the rules prohibited things that wouldn’t be distracting to the educational process, so there wasn’t a good reason to keep those guidelines.” Fort Thomas Independent Schools administrator Mary Adams on why the middle school council changed its 10-year-old student dress code. From the Fort Mitchell *Nky.com*.

“We expected more bids, but it seems as if the bidding climate has cooled. We’re down as cheap as we can, unless we make it smaller.” School design firm owner Stan Klaus-ing after construction proposals for new athletic fields at Trimble County High School came in \$600,000 higher than projected. From the Bedford *Trimble Banner*.

“You have such a population that there are other careers that don’t take a four-year degree. What we’re hoping to do is provide a

Back to school

“There’s nothing magical about Aug. 1. We do start very early in August and when we looked at the calendar and saw the first was a Monday, it just seemed like a good time to start.” Lawrence County Schools Superintendent Mike Lawrence on the sometimes simple reasons for choosing an opening date for the school year. From the Ashland *Daily Independent*.

“For students, this is kind of like a summer snow week.” Lincoln County Schools Superintendent Karen Hatter on the decision to delay the start of classes by one week due to multiple problems in several buildings. From the Danville *Advocate-Messenger*.



trained work force and help with economic development. That's something we've been working on for years. We need that here. We're hoping that attracts industry and will move our kids forward and put them a little higher up the pole when it comes time to apply for quality jobs." Muhlenberg County Schools Superintendent Dale Todd on the importance of the career aspect of Kentucky's college and career readiness push for high school graduates. From the Owensboro *Messenger-Inquirer*.

"Teachers, bus drivers, custodians, cafeteria workers, they see those people and look up to them. This is the time to do it." Murray Independent Board of Education Chairman Dr. Richard Crouch



on his board's decision to adopt a ban on use of all tobacco products by staff and visitors anywhere on the district's facilities, buses, field trips and sporting events. From the Paducah *WPSD-TV*.

"I've been through snow years with banked time and I've been through snow years without the banked time. I'm definitely a fan of banked time. I also think it's nice to have some of that time built in. I know I've heard of some of the principals beg for that time." Spencer County Board of Education member Mary Ann Carden on her support for extending the daily class time this year to create three instructional days. From the Taylorsville *Spencer Magnet*.

"Everyone here is in shock. What happened to our sign? It's the school system's identification. We were told we could

have the site in perpetuity in July 2004. Everybody saw the Cavalier when they came into town. I still believe the school is the center of the community." Jenkins Independent Board of Education Chairman Durward Narramore complaining to the city council after one of its members painted over a school mural at the town's entrance. The mayor subsequently agreed to have the painting restored. From the Whitesburg *Mountain Eagle*.

"You'll never get a better deal out there anywhere and it takes all the excuse of saying, 'I don't have the money to sign up for these right now.' A lot of students have gotten enough credits their first year (in Falcon Academy) to be able to jump in their sophomore year as they start off college." Hickman County Schools Assistant Superintendent Casey Henderson on how funding by the school board, local businesses and foundations are covering all expenses of high school students taking college credit courses at the school. From the Clinton *Hickman County Gazette*.

"We've had all kinds (of incidents), from pre-K to high school. We've had some individuals arrested until they make bond. I feel like it's my job...my duty." Rowan County Attorney Cecil Watkins on his prosecution of five parents in the past year on misdemeanor charges of abuse of a teacher. From the Lexington *WLEX-TV*.

"We will be the first high school in the state to give iPads to every student and every teacher. My vision is that eventually kids can walk around the high school with iPads and no books." Hancock County Schools Superintendent Scott Lewis on his school board's vote to spend \$265,000 to lease the portable technology units for three years. From the Hawesville *Hancock Clarion*. ☞

Tight budgets, academics and athletics

POINT...

"When it comes down to teaching 40 young men on proper technique of tackling, blocking, of getting tackled, you're talking about a contact sport and it's physical. It can be dangerous. One person cannot do that well." Magoffin County High School Football Coach Chester McCoy asking the school board for help after district layoffs included staff who had also been his assistant coaches.

COUNTERPOINT...

"It's about using your extracurricular activities to improve academics. We want them there...but the board should not be in the position of saying we are going to shut down the football program. It's up to Mr. (Principal Tony) Skaggs and McCoy to find those coaches." Magoffin County Schools Superintendent Joe Hunley saying the district can't afford to add jobs at the school for people who also are certified as coaches.

From the Salyersville Independent

Home is where the teacher is

Spencer
County
Middle School's
home visit initiative is one
prong in schoolwide customer
service approach

By Jennifer Wohlleb
Staff Writer

Incoming sixth-grader Tabitha Martin was ready when two of her Spencer County Middle School teachers dropped by her house in early August for a summer home visit.

"I have a list of questions," she said, holding a paper with 16 questions carefully written down, a pen at the ready to jot down their answers.

The home visits are just one part of the school's customer service efforts that Ed Downs began when he was hired at the school.

"When I came here as principal four years ago, school visits were something that I thought we needed," he said. "It was really a customer service culture that this place did not have."

The big picture

Downs said he began his efforts by first focusing on the children and setting expectations for them, then moving on to the staff.

"The first year I was here I had about 300 lost days, suspensions," he said. "The kids were out of control and teachers weren't really doing things that would keep the kids from not doing those things."

He enlisted the help of the Kentucky Center for Instructional Discipline, which helped him and the staff teach the students the proper way to behave in school.

"And four years later, I think we had 37-38 days of suspension last year," Downs said. "The first year, 800 discipline referrals. Last year, 200 maybe. It wasn't a lot for a school our size, with 650 kids."

And the improvement in discipline has been followed by an improvement in academics.

"Our scores have gone up four years in a row," he said. "It's because our kids are in class, and teachers are focused on what they're doing."

Changing the school culture

Downs said he worked with Mason County Schools Assistant Superintendent Kelly Middleton, whose district has led the way in creating a customer-service focused school district.

"I did an in-depth read of his book and then I made all of my teachers read it with



From left, Spencer County Middle School teachers Ashley McGaughey and Beth Stilton drop by the home of incoming sixth-grader Josh Brown and his mom Tammi. Home visits are just one aspect of the school's customer service outreach.

me," Downs said. "I said that I think we'll have much better relationships throughout the community if we can do some simple things."

He started in his own office by replacing the receptionist.

"My old one would argue with everyone who came through the door," he said. "Now when you come through the door, you have a nice, sweet, cheery voice greeting you. That's where it starts."

Downs said he also let the rest of his staff know that if they couldn't support these changes, they should find work elsewhere.

"I told my superintendent that sometimes I'm going to have to pull some weeds before I can plant new growth," he said. And as a result, "Every teacher who was here last year is here this year. I haven't had to hire anyone, except my assistant principal who left to become a principal."

In the field

Sixth-grade teachers Ashley McGaughey and Beth Stilton praised the school environment, saying the customer-service focus – particularly the home visits – not only allows them to get to know their students better, but helps create a bond among teachers.

"Last year I had one student in first period who didn't really behave bad, other than forgetting things," McGaughey said. "Beth had him in fifth period and it was a totally different situation. I had done a home visit to him, so when we had to schedule a meeting, even though I wasn't having problems with him, the Mom knew who I was and she trusted

me, so I made sure I was part of the meeting."

Clifton said that support took what might have been a hostile meeting with a parent and allowed them to focus on discovering why the child was acting out and working together on a solution.

"This really gets the teachers to support each other and work together," Clifton said.

McGaughey said the home visits also can improve the parents' view of the school and of education.

"Some of the parents had bad experiences when they were in school and they carry that over to their kids," she said. "By meeting with them this way, we try to heal a lot of those old wounds."

Downs said the home visits have created an unanticipated positive side effect

"That has allowed us to get through a lot of procedural things before school starts that we used to do on the first day of school," he said. "It's really shocking by how third period on the first day of school, teachers are teaching. It really emphasizes to the kids that the school year has started and we're not going to spend the first two or three days getting to know each other again and maybe it will start next week. School starts the first day of school."

The home visits also help allay the concerns of students making the transition from elementary to middle school.

After getting her 16 questions answered by McGaughey and Stilton, Tabitha was all smiles when they asked if she was as nervous about starting middle school. And so was her Mom. ☘

HIGH SCHOOL INNOVATION: IT'S ALL IN THE TIMING

Stories by Madelynn Coldiron • Staff Writer

The pot is beginning to boil on high school reform in Kentucky after simmering for the past five years since the issue first came to the fore.

More districts are now in the early years of new high school models or launching innovative ways to approach high school education.

The uptick in innovation rests with 2009's package of education reforms in Senate Bill 1, which emphasizes getting Kentucky students college and career ready.

With that, "along came a lot of strategies for our high school graduates and that's where all these new initiatives and strategies are coming from," said Carole Frakes, a consultant who works in the state education department's college and career readiness branch.

The pledge that districts signed com-

mitting them to increase the number of college- and career-ready students by 50 percent by 2015 has contributed to the push, Frakes said.

The high schools that have implemented new models over the past year or two "have been at the forefront" of the expected changes, she said.

For Bullitt County school board Chairwoman Delores Ashby, launching a math and science academy last year was just part of the business of improving student achievement.

"I think everybody on the board was really excited about the opportunity to expose our gifted students to some of those deeper-thinking connections they can make," she said.

The Bullitt County approach is not unusual. "Most of the innovative strategies that are out there are having to do with pathways, whether they're on an IB (International Baccalaureate) track

or early college, those kinds of things," Frakes said.

Advance Kentucky, which aims to increase AP class enrollment and performance, also is playing a big role, she said, as are models from national sources like Project Lead the Way. All these dovetail with the state's own school turnaround program, academic career advising tool and other measures.

Examples of this year's inaugural programs: accelerated academies for high-achieving students in Shelby County, emphasizing advanced placement and science, technology, engineering and math courses; an early college program in Boyle County that partners with two universities and a tech school but uses its own teachers; another early college program in Washington County for juniors and seniors; and a redesign of Covington Independent's high school into career clusters as part of its turnaround plan.

BOYD COUNTY: YEAR 1

Boyd County High School's science and technology program launched this year with a full-blown, project-based STEM curriculum in the morning and regular

electives in the afternoon for 24 carefully selected students.

But this high school program has not been designed solely for what Principal Rhonda Salisbury calls "brainchildren."

While the students must meet a grade minimum, "We felt the commitment and the desire to learn and succeed and make a future for themselves (was important); we saw that hunger in these students," she said. "You just can't accommodate the elite."

Science teacher Gary Coffman, who is coordinating the program, said even though the students are at different levels of learning, "We're going to push them all to the honors level" so they have greater technological and engineering literacy.

Seventy students applied to the program. Parents were part of the student interviews, so they would understand what was involved, since the course work is demanding, Salisbury said.

The high school's STEM program is beginning with five core courses integrated with the state's core content and heavy on engineering. It combines self-paced interactive computer-based learning with project-based classroom activities.

"It's based on the premise that engineering, period, is an excellent framework or springboard for a better understanding of the other components of STEM,"



Boyd County High School teachers Mary Leigh Lewis and C.J. Perkins attended training this summer to prepare for the school's new STEM program. Blake Greisinger, in the background, from The STEM Academy conducted the training.

See "Boyd County" on Page 19



Photo by John Roberts/Bullitt County Schools

Bullitt Advanced Math and Science program student Marty Brand studies an anatomical model during an open house.

What started as an experimental high school program last year in Bullitt County has snowballed. “It’s no longer experimental,” said Superintendent Keith Davis.

In fact, educators from Shelby, Spencer, Oldham and Nelson county districts visited the Bullitt Advanced Math and Science program last year, said Kelly Cleavinger, who teaches and oversees the program.

The highly selective, four-year program began its first year with 20 freshmen; this year 25 more students will be added – out of 116 applicants – along with a second teacher. BAMS began when administrators hit on the idea of establishing a program like the residential Gatton Academy of Mathematics and Science at Western Kentucky University, but would allow students to stay in their community.

“I think we finally realized we were underserving our gifted and talented kids a great deal,” Cleavinger said.

Students are accepted based on the kind of rigorous application process used by private universities, including requisite test scores, teacher recommendations, interview and essay. Once accepted, they find the course work is equally tough, Cleavinger said.

“Some have never worked that hard,” he said.

The program uses the same computer-based program as the Kentucky Virtual High School, along with classroom lessons and hands-on projects. Students do advanced research in astronomy through partnerships with University of Louisville and the University of Queensland, Australia. BAMS works with Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest, for which students

See “Bullitt” on Page 19

Kentucky launching high school academy models

A handful of Kentucky high schools will be using this year to plan for a career academies model.

The Kentucky Department of Education has partnered with the nonprofit National Academy Foundation, which devised the model that combines career-themed curricula and project-based learning, along with help from real-world businesses and industries.

As many as seven or eight schools in Kentucky could be on board this year, during which they will prepare for implementation in the 2012-13 school year. Ten schools will be added each year up until 2015, said Carole Frakes, a consultant in the state education department’s college and career branch. That’s the deadline for districts to meet the goal of increasing their college- and career-ready numbers by 50 percent.

One aspect of this program that stands out is that it is not selective. It is open to all students, Frakes said.

“We want the students who are at risk, who probably are not given that opportunity and now (with this program) they are,” she said.

The career academies developed by the foundation are built around four themes: finance, hospitality and tourism, information technology and engineering. Participating schools can choose all four schoolwide academies, pick just some of the themes or cherry-pick courses from each theme, Frakes said.

Besides core academic courses, students take specialized classes within their academies and also learn from work activities, which is where business partnerships come in.

The National Academy Foundation works with Project Lead the Way and the STEM Academy, two other engineering-heavy national programs that are being used by some Kentucky high schools. The foundation lends its expertise to districts with those programs as well.

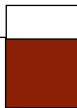
Harrison County Schools is one of the systems approved for the inaugural year of the career academy program.

“We look for anything that will enhance the learning process for our children,” Superintendent Andy Dotson said.

Harrison County High School uses Project Lead the Way but decided to apply to make that successful program even better, said Jenny Lynn Hatter, secondary instruction supervisor.

“We thought it would be a good way to give students another set of opportunities in our engineering program,” she said. “It’s another opportunity for our kids to see how things work in the world and to put in practice what they’re learning in school.”

Education Commissioner Terry Holliday solicited applications for the program in his weekly e-mail to superintendents earlier this year, saying that after the planning year, KDE and the foundation would explore other academy themes. ☞



Eat your vegetable

Greenup County garden project promotes old skills to new audience



es — after you grow them first!

By Jennifer Wohlleb
Staff Writer

When Greenup County High School's horticulture program planted a garden this spring, it was with hopes of harvesting more than just fresh vegetables.

"This is an old art," said Food Services Director Diana McCabe. "We're hoping to teach students how to provide nutritional food for themselves."

The program started with Greenup matching an \$800 grant the Rolling Hills Folk Center — a community organization that collaborates with nonprofits, businesses, community members and school districts — obtained through the Foundation for the Tri-State Community. In addition to the grant, Rolling Hills provided much of the labor over the summer, pulling weeds, making sure the plants were getting enough water and harvesting the vegetables. Those vegetables were used in the district's summer feeding program and will be used in the high school salad bar as long as the plants continue to produce into the school year.

"Teachers and schools are interested in having gardens, but finding creative ways to add it into the curriculum is difficult," said Bethany Deborde, Rolling Hills' program director. "In the fall we will create a garden committee to oversee it and the

plantings in the future. Our initial goal this spring was to plant a salad bar garden. In the future, I think we'll expand."

Cauliflower, peppers, cabbage, tomatoes, carrots and green peppers are the school's

first crops. The students in Sara Greene's agriculture classes at the high school started the garden.

"My students had a hand in everything, from what we would plant in it, to the size, the spacing," she said at the end of the school year. "Basically, every aspect of it. They planted it. The only thing they will not get to see is the harvest of it. We're hoping next year to do a spring garden and that way they can reap the benefits before the end of school."

A spring garden might include lettuces, radishes, onions and herbs. "That would be an early crop that doesn't take long to mature," Green said.

She said this project is an important tool in teaching students that food doesn't come from the grocery store.

"It starts at home in the garden or the farm," she said. "My students actually started the vegetables from seeds. We planted the seeds in the classroom in early February and we kept them alive under grow lights. We then took them to the greenhouse and let them mature even more and then we planted them."

"As a teacher, I wanted to make sure they could see the whole process from start to finish and then transplant them into the garden and grow those things themselves."

Greene said Greenup County High School's first garden also demonstrates that it doesn't have to be a huge undertaking.

"Our gardens are 4-foot-by-4-foot raised beds. It's not a big space and it's something they could do in their yards," she said. "It can be a few little pots here and there."

Greene said students went with raised beds this year because it provided better water drainage, and they weren't sure what the drainage would be like in the area next to greenhouse.

"This time it was a very small amount," Greene said. "Next year we plan to continue and not use the raised beds. We'll probably just till up a large area beside our greenhouse where the beds are now."

Horticulture student Garth Wireman, who graduated this year, grew up on a 400-acre farm. He said it was interesting to see this process on a small scale. He said his fellow students who had never done this before enjoyed the work.

"When we started the plants, you'd be amazed at the number of students who took an interest in them and watering them every day," he said. "And when they started coming up, it just brightened their futures. They're seeing the cycle of life." ❧



Above left: A small head of cauliflower harvested from Greenup County High School's garden.

Left: Rolling Hills Folk Center Program Director Bethany Deborde demonstrates how to remove suckers from tomato plants to promote better growth. Deborde's organization helped Greenup County start its vegetable garden this spring by providing an \$800 grant — and labor during the summer months.

NEW RESOURCES FOR NEW AGE OF AUSTERITY

Five new ways for a school district to maximize its money

Stories by Madelynn Coldiron • Staff Writer



School administrators who think they've wrung every last cent out of their tight budgets should think again. Five new programs have been launched with KSBA's backing that will give districts new ways to maximize their resources, from reducing natural gas costs to saving administrative time spent on some employee insurance programs.

They've come about through KSBA partnerships or endorsements that will benefit school systems. The new developments are:

- A program that gives groups of school districts the best deal on natural gas supplies.
- A partnership that will help meet districts' growing facilities needs and improve their staff's training.
- An option for school employee insurance that will cut down on central office paperwork and another that will boost morale, but not the bottom line.
- Low-cost financing for projects to make school buildings more energy efficient.

KSBA Executive Director Bill Scott said the developments are aimed at giving districts "the most bang for their buck" during a time of economic pressure. The savings on energy and facility costs alone potentially can reduce layoffs of valuable staff that work in those areas, he said.

The endorsements and partnerships also are in line with the association's mission to help local boards maximize the success of every student, Scott added.

"Research has consistently shown that the most successful schools and districts are those that recruit and retain the best teachers as well as provide safe and supportive learning environments," he said. "Each of these partnerships is designed to help our members meet one or both of these goals in the most efficient way possible. Furthermore, we strongly believe that every dollar we can help our members save on facilities and employee benefits can be channeled back into the classroom on behalf of student learning." ❧

Boosting morale through benefits

Budget cutting and microscopic cost-of-living increases are taking a toll on school employee morale, but some districts have turned to a benefits program to offer a little extra for their staff.

The program, endorsed by KSBA and provided by Liberty Mutual, allows employees to buy auto, home, boat, motorcycle and RV coverage at group discount prices through payroll deductions. There is no cost to school districts for the program and it is voluntary for employees.

Liberty Mutual handles the administrative end of the program, so that burden does not fall to central office staff. The company provides marketing materials and promotes the program, and manages the enrollment process and ongoing support.

Nearly 20 Kentucky school districts have already signed up

for this program.

Eighty percent of Liberty Mutual's personal insurance coverage is provided through services like this, which are called affinity programs. They serve Kentucky school districts, universities and professional associations.

KSBA is one of 14,000 groups nationwide that sponsor Liberty Mutual's Auto and Home Voluntary Benefit Program. In addition to supporting district employees, KSBA's license agreement with the insurance company also provides the association with a royalty that will help it maintain and improve services to school board teams. ❧

— For more information on this program, contact Myron Thompson, Bill Scott or Steve Smith at KSBA, 1-800-372-2962

School facilities, school boards groups forge closer ties

With the demand for more school facilities expertise growing, a new partnership between KSBA and the Kentucky School Plant Managers Association will help both school boards and facilities personnel.

The arrangement, which takes effect Jan. 1, will eventually see KSPMA relocating office space to KSBA's Frankfort building, along with its part-time executive director, John Noel, who currently operates out of a home office.

The demand for the facilities association's services is growing because more school employees – facilities managers, custodians, maintenance personnel – are getting training or require certification within their fields, which KSPMA provides, said David Baird, KSBA's associate executive director.

"So the organization is on the move, but they don't have the infrastructure to provide all the service that is needed," he said.

Zan Rexroat, KSPMA president and director of maintenance for Scott County Schools, said his group is trying to fill in the gaps created by personnel cutbacks in the state education department's facilities management division.

"Because school boards and school administrators in general are finding out that due to cutbacks in the budget – nobody's fault but the economy – that KDE is less and less able to be helpful to them and they're more of just a mentoring agency," he said. "So you're sort of on your own unless you can talk to your neighbors and find out what they're doing."

The demand for more facilities expertise and training also is being driven by the need to build and operate "more energy-efficient and maintenance-friendly" schools, Rexroat added.

He said KSBA also will be able to draw on KSPMA's expertise, so the partnership "is something that would be good for both organizations."

Baird agreed, saying, "It will primarily benefit our members because we will have a much more structured training for facilities managers, custodians and maintenance staff, resulting in better-maintained school facilities."

He said under the agreement between the two associations, KSPMA will rent office space from KSBA, while KSBA will advise the organization on delivering training to large groups, and possibly facilitate some of that training. KSBA also will help the plant managers association negotiate arrangements for its meetings, using contacts it has built through its own events. The plant managers also will be able to use the KSBA print shop at a reduced cost compared with outside printing companies.

Baird emphasized that each organization will remain independent. "The plant managers association has its own board and officers and we don't in any way want to try to take them over," he said. "We just want a partnership that will be mutually beneficial."

Rexroat said he hopes the tie will help KSPMA increase its ability to gain membership in every part of the state.

"To me, the biggest benefit is KSBA reaches out statewide. You all have a wider net than we do. We need to get the word out statewide because all districts can benefit from sharing ideas," he said. ☞



PROGRAMS AIM TO 'BENEFIT' SCHOOL EMPLOYEES

KSBA's insurance services for school districts are well established through the Kentucky School Boards Insurance Trust, but the association now is endorsing a supplemental insurance opportunity designed to simplify that process for districts and individual employees.

Educator's Benefit Options provides school districts with a wider range of choices for supplemental insurance, including dental, vision, life and disability plans, from carriers such as Aflac, Anthem, Humana, Delta Dental and Lincoln Financial. The service also includes a Section 125 cafeteria plan that enables employees to choose from benefits that provide tax savings both to the employee and the school district.

Peel & Holland, with four offices in western Kentucky, is administering Educator's Benefit Options. The independent agency "represents multiple markets and they can get creative for the district in terms of what they're trying to do for school employees, to bring various options to the table," said Myron Thompson, KSBA's director of risk management.

Because of the different options and carriers, the service won't be one size fits all, so districts can find the plans that work best for them. With multiple companies offering plans for supplemental insurance, the competition should drive the cost down, Thompson said.

"Peel & Holland was able to give us some products at a lesser cost," and said Rodney Pearce, finance officer for Graves County Schools, the first district to use the service. "One of the things we wanted to do was make benefits a little easier. I don't have a benefits person or a personnel department."

Compliance services are available, such as cafeteria plan administration, 403B administration and COBRA administration. Pearce said that's been a big plus for Graves County. "We need professional expertise to do that. We don't need to do that by the seat of our

See "Benefits" on Page 17

Service allows districts to lock in, lower natural gas costs

W hitley County Schools spent \$119,000 on natural gas last fiscal year to fuel school kitchens and heat some buildings.

Finance Officer Leigh Burke has become pretty good at estimating how much she needs to budget for natural gas for a year, but said it's not always possible to pin down a figure with certainty because of fluctuating rates.

"If we have advance knowledge, that's always good, but we don't always have that. What I normally do is base it on historical cost figures and add in an inflationary percentage," said Burke, who is president of the Kentucky Association of School Business Officers.

Being able to lock in a price for a year would be "a wonderful idea," she said.

School boards across Kentucky are considering a program to do just that, coming from a Louisville-based national energy company that has been endorsed by KSBA.

Fellon-McCord is an independent agent that identifies and negotiates the best price on natural gas supply for each district, regardless of where the supplier is located, and then helps districts lock in a price for the contract year. That supply is then shipped to the school buildings through regular gas transmission lines. Called the Kentucky Gas Aggregation Program (KGAP), the approach can be used for single schools or groups of schools to increase buying power.

"Your utility is not going to change. What really changes is your supply and your transmission. On your bill, you'll have a third-party supplier. What you're going to see is a decrease in price," explained Fellon-McCord sales executive Jim Waldron.

Fellon-McCord worked with the Kentucky School Energy Managers Project to estimate that the state's schools are using 3 million dekatherms of natural gas annually. Based on that, the KGAP program could save schools up to \$1.5 million statewide. With four or five suppliers bidding to serve a group of districts, "the pencil gets a little sharper," Waldron said. Natural gas makes up about \$30 million of non-vehicle fuel costs to Kentucky districts annually.

There is no out-of-pocket cost to districts for the program; the company is paid through the natural gas suppliers.

There are advantages for both supplier and school

district, said Waldron. Bundling multiple contracts together and increasing the size of the load to the supplier makes the package more attractive to the supplier, while saving money for the schools in that area. Fellon-McCord is vendor-neutral and works with all natural gas providers to negotiate purchase agreements that are best suited for each district – thus providing budget certainty, Waldron said.

A school would have to use a certain amount of natural gas to qualify for a third-party supplier, but Fellon-McCord reviews districts' natural gas records to make this determination. Those records will be easier to access, Waldron said, because of the work that has been done during the past two years by local school energy managers.

Representatives from Fellon-McCord have been attending education cooperative meetings and holding webinars to share information about the Kentucky Gas Aggregation Program. Four school districts signed on with the program during the first week.

KSBA Associate Executive Director David Baird said school districts in some other states have used this approach to purchase natural gas for a long time. "This is not something that hasn't been done before," he said.

Illinois school districts have had this kind of natural gas purchasing program for about 15 years and tracked the data, said Dr. Michael Johnson, executive director of the Illinois School Boards Association.

"We know in the first 10 years that we saved the school districts over \$5 million from the program," he said. Often, he added, the district coalitions have paid 10 percent to 15 percent less than individual districts would have on their own.

Illinois districts also like being able to lock in the price, Johnson said. "From a budgeting standpoint, they're able to say, 'This is how much I know I'm going to spend for the next 12 months or 24 months for natural gas. I don't have to worry about the price going up and down,'" he said.

Improving the predictability and price paid for natural gas also enables districts to redirect the money saved, Waldron said.

"It lets them keep the money that they were applying to this and be able to use it for other programs that can help educate kids," he said. "That's the important thing." ❧

Bond issue paves the way for energy efficiencies

A district doesn't have to be constructing a Net Zero school to need financing for energy-efficiency improvements.

A partnership between KSBA and the Kentucky Interlocal School Transportation Association is making it possible for districts to finance smaller-scale projects, such as installing energy-efficient windows, doors, roofs and lighting, along with HVAC and kitchen upgrades.

KISTA is the association formed more than two decades ago to help districts finance the cost of new school buses. While it continues to do that, the energy-efficiency financing is a new offering in response to the work by the School Energy Managers Project. The joint KSBA-Kentucky Department of Energy Development and Independence program, funded with a federal economic stimulus grant, has hired 36 energy managers to serve 131 Kentucky school districts. For the past two years, they've identified ways in which districts can save money through energy efficiencies – some of which require upgrading buildings or equipment.

The KSBA-KISTA partnership can help districts finance some of those projects with a loan from the proceeds of a bond issue with tax-exempt interest. Ross, Sinclair & Associates, LLC, is the bond agent and Hilliard Lyons is the fiscal agent. The cost of issuance is split among participating districts.

"The program's focus is small projects up to \$500,000 that are not large enough to bond on their own," said School Energy Managers Project Director Ron Willhite.

"By lumping numerous small projects in this program, districts receive the same benefits of low interest rates and issuance costs of a typical bond issue for a large project, with flexibility in repayment term and funding type --restricted, unrestricted or guaranteed savings."

The repayment schedule can run from two to 20 years. "A key element of the program is that the repayment can be fit to the need of each district, which can vary depending on each particular project," Willhite said.

The savings generated by the energy improvements in many cases will be enough to make bond payments, similar to performance contracting. Some savings may even exceed the amount needed for repayment, Willhite said.

The main qualification for the program is having an energy-related project, and there is no requirement that projects generate a specific amount of savings to justify the work.

"For example," Willhite said, "a district may have identified on its facility plan a need to replace windows or doors which can have a long payback period, but because the new windows or doors would be more energy efficient, the energy-related requirement of the program is met."

District leaders can collaborate with their local energy managers in selecting projects to be financed, he added.

"We believe this is an opportunity for districts to install or upgrade to state-of-the-art control systems that the SEMP energy managers can utilize to facilitate significant, ongoing energy cost savings," Willhite said. ☿

BENEFITS

Continued from Page 15

pants," he said.

Peel & Holland, which specializes in insurance, employee benefits and risk consulting, "is very customer-oriented," Thompson said, in terms of meeting with teachers and staff to determine the best coverage for their situation. The agency also sets up a simplified process for school employees to meet with a certified enroller to answer questions about the various supplemental benefits and options.

Pearce said the transition to the new service was smooth. Graves County employees who had pre-existing conditions and similar concerns were able to grandfather in their previous coverage.

"As district budgets face tremendous pressure, a robust supplemental benefits program allows school boards to remain competitive employers and assist their employees at no cost," Thompson said. "If you have not looked at your benefits in a while, it's a good opportunity to sort of kick the tires, sit down with another entity and find out what's available."

— For more information about Educator's Benefit Options, contact Thompson at 800-372-2962 or Heather Elliott at Peel & Holland at 1-800-599-8621. ☿

Kentucky Superintendent Vacancy

Beechwood Independent Board of Education

(K-12) 1,143 students www.beechwood.kyschools.us

The Beechwood Independent school district seeks as its next superintendent, a qualified and highly motivated candidate with strong leadership skills who is eager to take the district to the highest levels of achievement on all fronts. The Beechwood District is a high-achieving, unique K-12, one contiguous building, public school district. The success-

ful candidate should demonstrate a distinguished level of skills in communication, organization and public relations.

Salary will be commensurate with rank and experience. Candidates should have administrative experience and knowledge of the Kentucky educational system and must hold or be eligible for a Kentucky superintendent's certification to apply. Contract start is negotiable, but target date is Jan. 1, 2012.

Application deadline is Sept. 14, 2011.

To apply and receive further information, send seven copies of a letter of application, application form, resume and references to: Beechwood Superintendent Search, Kentucky School Boards Association, 260 Democrat Drive, Frankfort, KY 40601. Find application form at: www.ksba.org/superintendentapplication2007.doc

Laptop programs: Planning for success

By Wayne Dominick

Hart County Superintendent Ricky Line says districts considering a program to give computers to students should do three things: “Plan, plan, plan.”

Before the more than 700 students in Hart County High School got a new Dell Netbook, Line and his staff spent more than a year planning.

“I really believe the reason our program was so successful is that we spent a lot of time planning,” he said. “We tried to think of every possible thing that could go wrong and have a plan how to deal with it.”

The planning started with school board members.

“After all, they are the ones paying for the program,” Line said. “In these tough economic times, it would have been easy for them to say ‘It’s just too expensive.’ Instead, they realized that tough times mean it’s even more important for our kids to have everything they need to be successful.”

With board support, the next step was getting staff support – a crucial element, according to David Couch, the state education department’s associate commissioner of education technology.

“Districts that are planning on doing this have to realize they aren’t just giving students computers; they are making a fundamental change to the dynamics of the classroom,” he said. “Once you give students computers, they expect to be using them. You’re going from a model where you go to a computer lab maybe once a week to a model where you’re using a computer every day.

“That doesn’t mean you use the computer for the entire class. There will still be lectures, but if you are using the technology to its fullest, the teacher has more opportunity to engage students and become a ‘guide at the side.’”

To achieve this goal at LaRue County High School, Principal Paul Mullins involved his staff in the planning process. “We were asking our educators to make big changes in the way they were doing things; I didn’t think it would be fair to them if they weren’t involved at every step. I think if a district is going to do this, it’s important that the instructional people be just as involved as the technology folks.”

Mullins created small teams using the “Train the Trainer” approach. This core group worked with other staff in their departments on how to incorporate the computers into instruction.

Couch said training the entire staff before students get their computers is important. “The way things are in a lot of schools, you have teachers who rarely use technology. They figure the students will learn how to use it in some other class. Now, you have to make sure that everyone knows how to use technology and the best ways to use it.”

Hart County had three days of professional development last summer focused on the computer rollout.

“We designed the sessions for the different levels of competency our staff had,” explained Assistant Superintendent Wesley Weddle, who oversees technology for the district. “We did a lot of hands-on learning so everyone would be comfortable



with the units and worked on different ways teachers could use the technology in their classrooms.”

Another step is informing and involving parents, which LaRue County handled by holding information sessions for them.

“Some were worried about being responsible for the computer and we had some who had some reservations on how improper contact could be blocked,” said Mullins. “Once they understood what we were doing and what a difference it would make in their child’s education, we had an overwhelming response.”

Both Hart and LaRue districts require a parent to sign permission slips and pay a fee to cover the cost of insurance, protecting the computer in case of accidental damage. Both also have tracking systems installed on the units to find them in the case of loss or theft.

Line said his district used an incentive to get parents to attend the information session. “We set our fee at \$50 per year, but offered a \$25 discount to families that attended the session. That not only helped the families, it got more parents into the building and informed about the program.”

Couch said districts that are hesitant to start a program should look at creative ways to fund them.

“Most high schools require parents to pay a textbook fee. As textbook publishers move online, those fees could go to technology. Schools can either provide computers or develop ways to let the students use the devices they already have,” he said. ☘

— Dominick is a writer from Frankfort

Watch out! Slip, trip and fall recommendations

For most of us, walking is a simple process of placing one foot in front of the other; we don't give it a second thought. However, the number of workers' compensation injuries resulting from slips, trips and falls might surprise you. Thirty-one percent of all workers' compensation injuries reported by Kentucky School Boards Insurance Trust members during the 2009-10 policy year were the result of slips, trips and falls. Those losses accounted for 44 percent of the total cost incurred for that policy period.

Several factors contribute to slips, trips and falls:

- Shoes with slick soles provide insufficient traction, while platform shoes and high heels increase vulnerability to uneven surfaces.
- Loose or irregular surfaces, such as gravel, shifting floor tiles and uneven sidewalks can make it difficult to maintain footing.
- Obstructed aisles or walkways present tripping hazards

or require frequent changes of direction, throwing people off balance.

- Liquids can make walking surfaces extremely slick. Similarly, school hallways are heavily waxed.
- Inattention and distraction interfere with awareness of all of these hazards and increase the risk of injury.

KSBIT recommends a few simple measures:

- Appropriate shoes
- "Wet floor" signs
- Approved climbing devices readily available
- Floor mats near entrances

For more safety and risk reduction information, contact one of KSBIT's loss control specialists at 1-800-876-4552. ☞

— by Zilda Henson, claims analyst and Joe Isaacs, loss control specialist, KSBIT

BULLITT

Continued from Page 11

have been monitoring stream water quality and wildlife.

The program also relies heavily on the local branch of Jefferson Community and Technical College.

"They'll walk out of here in four years as a junior in college and we will have paid for everything," Cleavinger said.

This year another specialized program is joining BAMS in the same building. Sixty incoming freshmen and sophomores will attend the Career Readiness Center, spending half-days with online learning and half days at the vocational-technical center, Davis said.

Besides learning a trade, students, who also must go through an application process, will be trained in entrepreneurship, money management and work skills.

The district also has dismantled its central alternative high school program, returning those students to their home schools and creating a Flex School in each. This arrangement allows students to work online at their own pace. They, and other regular students, can also attend JCTC classes at half-price tuition.

"There are multiple pathways – and that's what we're really trying to get at as much as we can – individualize the process so kids can decide what they want to do and get prepared for college or career by the time they get out," Davis said. ☞



Eric Rawlings, a student in the Bullitt Advanced Math and Science program, uses a Vernier LabQuest to electronically record and analyze data from an experiment.

Photo by John Roberts/Bullitt County Schools

BOYD COUNTY

Continued from Page 10

Salisbury said.

The curriculum and model were designed by a group of STEM instructors and purchased from the STEM Academy, a national nonprofit organization. It costs about \$50,000 per year and includes training and resources. The high school has cobbled together money from its annual allocation, professional development funds, local sponsorship and corporate grants to pay for the program, Salisbury said.

The STEM program dovetails nicely with the school's agreement with Morehead State University to allow students to take MSU courses without having to leave Ashland. Seventeen of Boyd County High School's teachers are certified to teach at the college level.

"These classes, eventually we're hoping to have 21 and offer any child that enters our school 70 tuition-free hours before they leave," said Superintendent Howard Osborne. "That, along with our STEM academy, has improved our educational opportunities for our students and enabled us to get more of our students college and career ready."

This program also is a precursor to what the district is planning for its new high school, scheduled to open in January 2013. The entire school will revolve around career academies – tentatively STEM, marketing/business, communications, international studies, arts and humanities and hospitality services. ☞

Thomas Ahn

on the effectiveness of incentive pay for teachers

In Conversation With...features an interview between a leader or figure involved in public education and a staff member of the Kentucky School Advocate.

This month's conversation is with Dr. Thomas Ahn, an assistant professor of economics at the University of Kentucky who co-authored a study on North Carolina's pay-for-performance teacher-bonus program. Ahn, and study co-author Jacob L. Vigdor, a professor of public policy and economics at Duke University, found that North Carolina was able to avoid the pitfalls normally associated with incentive-based pay programs. Ahn, who was traveling overseas, answered questions about the study's findings via e-mail.

Q. Briefly outline the teacher pay-for-performance system used in North Carolina.

A. Two aspects of the pay-for-performance system in North Carolina are worth noting: the emphasis on growth of test scores and payouts aimed at the school level.

The accountability system in North Carolina allows the state to track an individual student's performance from year to year. Because of the longitudinal nature of the data, the state does not have to rely on just looking at the students' performance in one given year. Instead, it can look to see how much students have improved since last year, which is a more accurate measure of the work that teachers have put in during the current year.

The bonus, which can be as large as \$1,500 per year for each teacher, is disbursed at the school level. That is, the academic improvement of the school as a whole is what determines whether a teacher will receive a bonus.

These two characteristics interact in interesting ways to reveal some surprising insights about whether pay-for-performance works and how to design a good incentive system to maximize teacher effort and student performance.

Q. Summarize the findings of your study. They appear to have gone against conventional wisdom.

A. We find that teachers respond to the bonus by exerting more effort, leading to higher academic performance by students. In fact, the bonus program seems to be very cost effective, giving good bang-for-buck, when compared to other



possible reforms, such as class-size reduction. Surprisingly, school-level incentives elicit higher effort from teachers and higher increases in test scores, (at least in the case of North Carolina) compared to individual (class-level) incentives.

The conventional wisdom is that school-level incentives should not work all that well. We find a powerful reason why they should. There is a subtle motivational problem when we have individual incentives.

Imagine a school with two teachers: one teacher finds it difficult to coax test score improvement from her class and the other teacher finds it easy to get her students to perform well. If we set a test score improvement goal at the class level with a cash bonus as the reward, the likely outcome is that neither teacher will try hard.

Why? For the first teacher, the bonus is out of reach, since she will not be able to elicit the required test score increase. She may as well take it easy, since no money is coming her way. The second teacher, on the other hand, is virtually assured of the bonus, due to her ability. Since she will get the money no matter what, her optimal response in this situation is also to take it easy.

Now, what happens when the improvement is evaluated at the school level? That is, what if we average the increase of the two teachers? Now, suddenly, the first teacher has a realistic shot at the bonus, because her numbers will be buoyed by the other teacher. The second teacher, on the other hand, is now forced to try harder, because the bonus is no longer a sure thing.

Q. How does school size factor into this?

A. School size is a concern for school-level incentives, because of the “free-rider” problem. In a large school, one teacher has limited ability to affect schoolwide performance. Whether the teacher is an outstanding educator or an indifferent one, her students’ achievements will be averaged with the performance of students from other classes. The larger the school, the smaller the portion of the schoolwide performance her students will account for. This can lead a teacher to think that she cannot make much of a difference on whether the school is rewarded or not, leading to lower effort and poor academic performance of her students.

Q. How does this system factor into teacher evaluation?

A. We can envision choosing between individual-level and school-level incentives as a tug-of-war. No system is better than the other in all cases across all dimensions. Individual incentives can eliminate free-rider problems but has the possibility of introducing the motivational problem described above. School incentives suffer from free-rider effects but do a better job of making sure that more teachers have a realistic chance at qualifying for the bonus (thus leading to higher effort). In the case of North Carolina, it turns out that school-level incentives result in higher achievement compared to individual-level incentives, but this need not be the case for Kentucky.

Q. How critical to this system is the fact that North Carolina tracks individual students longitudinally rather than group performance in a given year?

A. Tracking students from one year to the next is critical to the North Carolina system. The longitudinal nature of the data is what allows the state to measure academic growth. Without it, an accountability system which is limited to measuring proficiency emerges.

There are potentially large problems with measuring proficiency instead of growth. A school serving low-performing students that improves its test scores

dramatically (but fails to reach the proficiency goal) may never be rewarded, while a school serving high-performing students that basically treads water may receive the bonus (despite little growth in academic achievement) every year under such a system.

Q. How will the recent cases of teacher cheating on standardized tests in Atlanta and elsewhere affect the way your study is viewed and the prospects for more widespread teacher rewards based on school-level performance?

A. It is human nature to be tempted into taking short cuts. Teachers are people too, and there will always be some bad apples, especially if administrators are complicit in the deception. I do not see the cheating scandals as damning indictments against the moral fiber of our teachers or school-level performance pay, but these incidents do show us that we have to exercise care in how we set up the system. If we do not pay attention to the details, at best, pay-for-performance will be an inefficient use of tax dollars, and at worst, it will encourage these types of deviant behaviors, from teaching to the test to outright fraud, as in the Atlanta case. I believe there are at least three things to consider going forward:

First, make sure the test measures what the students learn, and make sure the teachers teach what the students are supposed to learn. Addressing this issue requires leadership from the administration as well as grassroots involvement from teachers and parents. We need more efforts devoted to developing a solid curriculum, designing better standardized tests, improving communication between administration and teachers, and lining up what the public expects from our teachers to the realities of what is actually within the realm of possibility.

Second, measure growth in academic achievement, as the North Carolina system does. A teacher has no control over which students arrive in her classroom on the first day of school, but she should be held responsible (and rewarded) for how she impacts the students once they are there. Measuring growth will also make it easier to detect cheating, as anomalous growth in individual scores is easier to analyze.

Third, be aware of the motivation problem in setting the bar for bonus qualification. Making it too easy or too difficult to qualify for the bonus will only result in discouraged or indifferent teachers and wasted resources. The standard must be set such that it is challenging, but not impossible to meet.

A well-designed incentive system where teachers are fairly rewarded will go a long way to deter cheating scandals like this in the future. ☞

Market got you worried? Invest in your schools' message

In the same August week during which the Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 698 points, anyone with assets in the market – from mutual funds to retirement accounts – was looking for anything positive about investments. Anything positive. On any kind of investment.

So I took heart when the Christian County and Hopkins County school systems announced that they were investing in getting their messages out by hiring two new communications managers.

A stretch, you say? Not a bit. I've been through enough market ups and downs to understand that those who lose frequently are the ones who panic and cash in. Those with carefully planned investments take the long view and don't overreact.

My bread and butter comes from working with educators who have stories that parents and others should know about. So when two school boards and superintendents commit a slice of their limited resources to reaching out with their messages, I see that as a sign of leaders who understand that staying connected is a vital investment in the success of their districts.

After listening to superintendents at several recent regional education co-op meetings, it's clear to me that a sustained investment in district communications is vital for the 2011-12 school year and beyond. Those district CEOs had public awareness on their minds when they spoke of:

- Newly calculated high school graduation rates – most of which declined
- Expected midyear cuts in non-SEEK state funds and the related local decisions to follow
- Funding uncertainties as the 2012 General Assembly budget-writing session approaches
- New tests in a new state accountability system – so new that questions outnumber answers

And leaders in every central office across the state await word if Kentucky's waiver request from No Child Left Behind Adequate Yearly Progress targets will be granted... or if districts will have to educate parents next spring about dueling yardsticks – one state, one federal – for their children's schools.

School leaders have no choice but to invest themselves in more effective communications in the coming months.

Everyone is a resource, all have roles

School boards and superintendents, with or without a public affairs staffer to do the grunt work, have their work cut out for them this year when it comes to keeping the



Brad Hughes
KSBA Member
Support Services Director

home folks in the loop.

This fall, if school leaders set tax rates that represent any option other than a reduction, they should be ready with a sound set of talking points, not just on why they need more resources, but also what they've accomplished with the cash they've already been given.

In January, when legislators and the next governor start making spending decisions, they'd better be hearing from association members – the ones who live and vote in their districts – not just from their association lobbyists.

Next spring, when parents are reading news stories about results of the new state tests, most of them won't understand what the numbers mean unless educators – including educated school board members – are out there doing a whole lot of explaining: at board and council meetings and civic clubs, newspaper and newsletter articles, during chats with friends and wherever they can create an opportunity.

In each case, Kentucky's local education leaders will be called on to make an investment of a most precious commodity: time.

Invest your time in a clear set of reasons why taxpayers who don't have children in your schools should accept, if not champion, the tax rate necessary to keep your schools and students progressing.

Invest your time in frequent contacts with your state representatives and senators before and throughout the 2012 General Assembly when they consider bills that will advance or stymie classroom learning.

Invest your time in comprehending what results of the new tests will mean, and then grasp the good news and that which needs to get better. And when the numbers are released publicly, help your communities see not just where Frankfort says your district and schools need to be headed, but also how you're going to get them there.

The Last Word

Recently, Simpson County Schools Superintendent Jim Flynn penned a back-to-school column entitled "We need community to engage in the education process."

"We are continuously striving to improve our school system on behalf of our students and community. In order to make continuous progress, we need our community to be interested and engaged in our schools. Therefore, I am inviting you to join our mission of successfully educating every child in Simpson County Schools."

It seems to me that Flynn has his sights set on greater investments in school throughout his community.

That also seems like a message worth getting out. ☘

Autumn-like weather may not be on the horizon, but KSBA's Fall Regional Meetings will help school board members harvest new information about getting all students college and career ready



School districts have their Commonwealth Commitment to increase college and career readiness rates by 50 percent. KSBA has its own commitment — to help board teams achieve that goal by the 2015 deadline. This year's Fall Regional Meetings will be devoted to that assistance.

Join your colleagues at one of these Regional Meetings, which begin Sept. 20 and end Nov. 1. The meetings will answer these questions and more:

What is the state's plan for advancing college and career readiness of Kentucky graduates?

What does college and career readiness mean? Why is college and career readiness critical? How do boards lead this effort? What are your districts already doing to increase college and career readiness?

DATE	KSBA REGION	LOCATION	TIME
Tuesday, Sept. 20	Upper Ky. River	Hazard Community College	5:30 p.m. EST
Thursday, Sept. 22	Central	Woodford County High School	5:30 p.m. EST
Tuesday, Sept. 27	Middle Cumberland*	Central Ky. Ag./Expo Center, Liberty	5:30 p.m. EST
Monday, Oct. 3	First Region	Young Center, First United Methodist Church, Clinton	5:30 p.m. CST
Tuesday, Oct. 4	Second Region*	Owensboro Board of Education Office	5:30 p.m. CST
Thursday, Oct. 6	Northern Kentucky*	Triple Crown Country Club, Union	5:30 p.m. EST
Thursday, Oct. 13*	Fourth	Elizabethtown Community and Technical College	5:30 p.m. EST
Thursday, Oct. 20	Fifth	Bedford Elementary School	5:30 p.m. EST
Monday, Oct. 24	Upper Cumberland*	Pineville High School	6 p.m. EST
Tuesday, Oct. 25	Third	South Warren High School	5:30 p.m. CST
Monday, Oct. 31	Eastern Ky. South*	Mountain Arts Center, Prestonsburg	5:30 p.m. EST
Tuesday, Nov. 1	Eastern Ky. North	Morehead State University	5:30 p.m. EST

* Denotes regional election



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'Amazing' start to school year at Fort Thomas



Sixth-graders at Highlands Middle School in Fort Thomas had an “Amazing Race” getting to know their way around their new school before the start of the year. It was all part of the school’s Transitions program, which provided students with eight activities to complete, each one designed to take them a different part of the school, allowing them to get familiar with the building before the first day of class. Eighth-graders, in matching white shirts, acted as guides helping the new students complete each task.

Above, One group of Amazing Racers sorts trays with letters taped to them in the cafeteria in order to spell “Highlands Middle.”

Above right, Eighth-graders Haley Coffee, left, and Mariah Nuree guide sixth-graders Brett Mayes, Robbie Gabbard and Nick Biltz through logging onto the school’s website in the computer lab.



Right, Incoming student Jacob Stieritz learns how to open a locker, a new experience for most middle-schoolers.

