Kentucky Teacher

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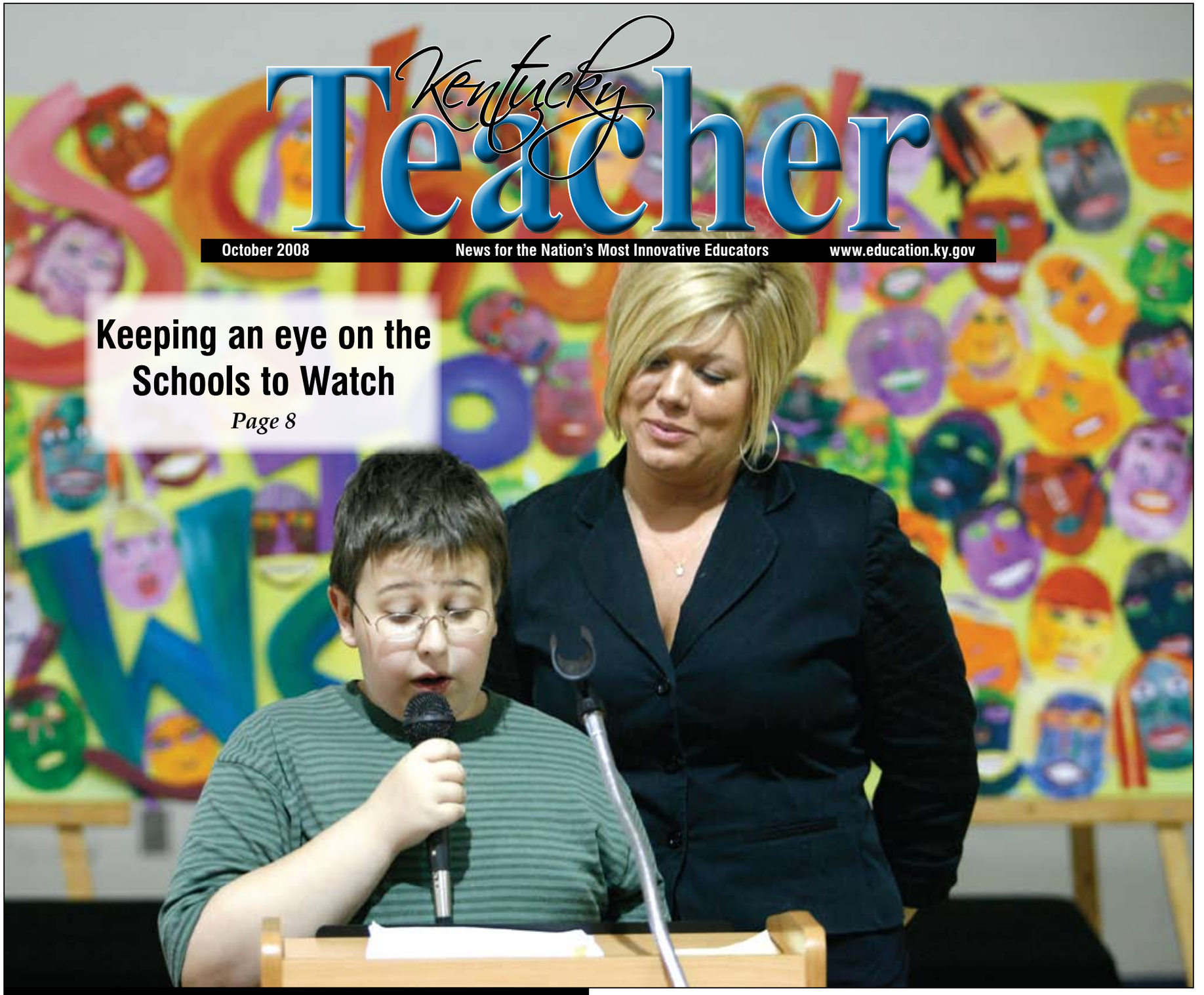

Keeping an eye on the Schools to Watch

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News for the Nation's Most Innovative Educators

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Front cover: *Michael Nicely, a 6th-grade student at the Lloyd B. McGuffey Sixth Grade Center (Lincoln County) reads an essay he wrote about why the school was named a School to Watch while his teacher, Wendy Howard, offers support. Photo by Amy Wallot*

Talk to the Experts ...

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Kentucky ACT scores move up for sixth consecutive year

The average ACT composite score for Kentucky's 2008 college-bound high school seniors gained slightly over the 2007 composite score. The 2008 composite is 20.9, compared to 2007's composite of 20.7. Nationally, the 2008 composite score was 21.1, a loss of 0.1 from 2007.

"Kentucky's ACT gains have outpaced the nation's over the past five years," said Kentucky Education Commissioner Jon E. Draud. "This is a reflection of the commitment shown by educators, legislators, parents and students to improving the high school experience. We must continue this momentum, closing achievement gaps and providing the support all students need to be successful in this critical measure."

ACT asks test-takers to report the courses they took in high school. Over the past 18 years, there has been a dramatic increase in the percentage of Kentucky students reporting that they are taking ACT's recommended core courses, with an increase of more than 12,000 students since 1990. In 2008, 65 percent of Kentucky high schoolers who took the ACT noted on surveys that they also took the recommended core courses.

In comparing Kentucky with the nation, the widest gap in performance among students was in overall mathematics scores (1.1 points) and the smallest was in reading (0 point).

Kentucky is one of the states that has implemented the Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS) from ACT and, through 2006's Senate Bill 130, administers the ACT to all public school juniors. The state assesses public school 8th graders for high school readiness using the EXPLORE test and assesses public school 10th graders for college readiness with the PLAN test.

Photo by Amy Wallot

Hands-on science

Science teacher Mary Silvers helps 6th-grade students Josh Wilson, left, Jasmine Lucas, middle, and Taylor Whitaker with a science experiment at Science Hill School (Science Hill Independent) on Aug. 21. The students were testing to see if the fat content of milk affected the rate at which food coloring traveled through the milk.

KET offers Family Health Literacy Kits

Did you know that one child in three born after 2000 will develop diabetes as a result of obesity? Alarming trends in childhood obesity show that for the first time in 100 years, children today are projected to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents.

In response to this disturbing trend, KET, through a partnership with Head Start of Kentucky, has created Family Health Literacy Kits to encourage healthy choices for children through family education. The kits utilize the multi-sensory approach of The Learning Triangle (view, read, do) and include a video, books and a set of activities to be used by families in the home and teachers in the classroom.

The key concepts of the Family Health Literacy Kits are:

- Employ a family-centered approach to understanding the importance of healthy habits for all family members — especially young children.
- Practice simple strategies to promote basic literacy skills for success in school.
- Encourage parent and child time with emphasis on responsible use of media.

The kits are available through KET for $100 (including shipping). To strengthen the value and sustainability of the kits, a CD is provided that includes all of the print materials in the kit, as well as a parent/user survey that can be reprinted as needed. Books may be replaced through Scholastic Inc. and the video through Sesame Store. The goal is to provide a resource with a "long life" for home and classroom use.

MORE INFO ...

Kathy M. Day, Ready to Learn Coordinator, KET/The Kentucky Network, (859) 258-7451; kday@KET.org.

Kentucky public school juniors ACT data also released

Results from the first administration of the ACT to all Kentucky's public school juniors also were released in early September. As mandated by KRS 158.6453, all of Kentucky's public school juniors now must take the ACT, which assesses English, reading, mathematics and science and is scored on a scale of 1 to 36. The cost of the exam is paid for with state funds.

Kentucky high school juniors took the ACT in March of this year. The breakdown of their composite scores by subject was English — 17.3; mathematics — 18.1; reading — 18.5; and science — 18.7.

The data provides a baseline for future administrations and gives districts and schools more information to meet individual students' needs. For the 42,949 Kentucky public school juniors who took the ACT assessment in the spring of 2008, 46 percent met the English benchmark; 20 percent met the mathematics benchmark; 33 percent met the reading benchmark; and 15 percent met the science benchmark.

COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS

By Jon E. Draud, Commissioner of Education

Investment in education key to continued progress in Kentucky schools

It is no secret that Kentucky faces many obstacles in the struggle to raise academic achievement for its public school students. What you may not know is that the state has made remarkable progress in the nearly 20 years since the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) was passed.

Draud

Kentucky has faced decades of educational neglect and a whole host of barriers to learning, such as poverty, but we can no longer use these obstacles as an excuse. Progress is evident in many measures of educational achievement, and Kentuckians should appreciate and build on that progress.

Investment in education – not just providing more money – is the key to our future success. Spending on P-12 education in Kentucky, as a percentage of the state's General Fund, has declined since the early 1990s. In 1994, education spending represented 48 percent of General Fund monies. In the 2008-10 biennial budget, P-12 education receives 43.8 percent of the General Fund.

A direct correlation between investment in P-12 education and our state's success can be found in data from the National Education Association and other sources, which show that Kentucky's school funding per student ranks as low as 36th in the nation and is below the national average.

Given Kentucky's relative poverty and economic struggles, a commitment to investment in P-12 education will bring about dramatic changes. Educators, legislators, businesspeople and the general public must work together to continue that momentum and guarantee that our system will serve the needs of our youngest and most important residents.

I've collected several indicators of Kentucky's educational success.

- An October 2007 study by the Kentucky Long Term Policy Research Center said, "The state's overall profile is one of steady, measurable and broadly recognized improvement."
  - Based on the center's National Education Index, Kentucky's ranking has gone from 43rd in 1992 to 34th in 2005.
  - The study concludes, "Kentucky's gains have come in spite of considerable and broadly recognized liability of educating children who are at a profound economic disadvantage."
  - The center also notes that Kentucky ranks as high as eighth nationally for cost-effective educational spending, although we rank 36th in the area of per-pupil funding.
- For its 12th annual "Quality Counts" report in 2008, *Education Week* provided grades for states' efforts to enhance the teaching profession. Kentucky's overall grade in that area was 80.9 out of 100 possible points, which was a B-. Kentucky was ranked ninth among the 50 states and the District of Columbia.
- In early 2008, the 11th annual *Technology Counts* report by *Education Week* gave Kentucky favorable marks. Overall, Kentucky was tied for third place nationally, up from fourth place overall last year.
- According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, or the "Nation's Report Card"), Kentucky children are performing better than they ever have before in comparison to their peers nationally.
  - The 2007 NAEP in reading and mathematics showed that Kentucky's 4th- and 8th-graders have made gains. In reading, students scored just above the national average. In mathematics, the scale scores are just shy of the national average.
  - A June 2008 study by the Center on Education Policy indicated that Kentucky was one of four states to show consistent moderate-to-large gains in NAEP scores at all levels since 2002.
- For the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, in the 2007-08 school year, data indicated that 70.9 percent made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) despite significantly higher goals in reading and mathematics. In 2008, fewer schools were subject to consequences than in 2007.
- According to the National Institute for Early Education Research's 2007 *State Preschool Yearbook*, Kentucky was one of seven states that met eight of 10 benchmarks for high-quality preschool programs.
- The average composite ACT score in Kentucky has improved one full point since KERA took effect (19.9 in 1990 vs. 20.9 in 2008). During that time the national average has increased only a half-point.
- According to state test results, students at all grade levels have shown progress since the inception of KERA, with performance trends going up in all subjects. Elementary, middle and high schools have reduced the percentage of novice-level learners every year.
  - The number of students scoring proficient or higher in reading and mathematics on the KCCT improved significantly from 1999-2006. In reading, the percentage increased by 14 points at the elementary level, 13 points in middle school and 16 points at the high school level. In mathematics, there was a 29-point increase at the elementary level, 11 points in middle school and 13 points in high school.
  - The performance of students in various demographic groups has risen since 1999. At the elementary, middle and high school level, African American students, students with disabilities and those who qualify for free and reduced-price meals have posted double-digit gains in their overall average scores.
- Kentucky's public school nonacademic measures also have improved since the early 1990s.
  - The dropout rate in Kentucky has declined from more than 5 percent (5.06 percent) in 1993 to slightly above 3 percent (3.17 percent) in 2007.
  - We've seen the graduation rate increase. In 2001, it stood at 79.72 percent. In 2007, it climbed to 83.72 percent.
  - Of those who do graduate, more are pursuing some sort of postsecondary education. Fifty-five percent of our high school graduates are opting for college. Another five percent are pursuing vocational or technical education.
- Kentucky has seen improvements in teacher quality as well. The Education Professional Standards Board (EPSB) reports that the number of highly qualified teachers increased in recent years, while the number of emergency certifications is down, especially in the area of special education. More than 250 Kentucky teachers earned National Board certification in 2007, and Kentucky now ranks eighth nationwide in the total number of National Board Certified Teachers with 1,376.
- According to the SREB *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education Report, Kentucky has made some progress in reforming school leadership and is considered a "pacesetter" state in providing support for aspiring and newly appointed principals.

These are just a few of the indicators that show we've made progress. The credit for these accolades goes to you – without your hard work and dedication, Kentucky's public school students would not have the guidance they need to make these strides.

To comment on these topics, contact Commissioner Draud at jon.draud@education.ky.gov.

Photo by Amy Wallot

Building homes for fish

Western Hills High School (Franklin County) junior and FFA treasurer Hawk Mangan puts together new fish tanks for the aquaculture class. Agriculture teacher J.R. Zimmer bought the tanks used from a local pet store that was closing, and the store donated other materials, including filters and pumps. More than 20 schools across the state offer aquaculture classes to high school students.

Two Social Security provisions cut teachers' retirement money

Officials say retirement system better anyway

By Matthew Tungate
matthew.tungate@eduation.ky.gov

Two little-known provisions of Social Security are leaving teachers with less retirement income than they expect. However, an official with the Kentucky Teachers' Retirement System (KTRS) says his group's members may not want to protest too vehemently.

According to the Social Security Administration, workers not covered under Social Security, including Kentucky public school teachers and some federal, state and local government employees, will receive reduced Social Security benefits because of their pensions.

The first provision, called the Government Pension Offset (GPO), applies to workers who receive a government pension and are eligible for Social Security benefits as a spouse, widow or widower. Under this provision, the Social Security benefit may be reduced by two-thirds of the amount of the worker's government pension.

The other provision, called the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP), affects how a worker's Social Security retirement or disability benefit is calculated if he or she also receives a pension from work not covered by Social Security.

Bob Wagoner, executive director of Kentucky Retired Teachers Association, said his organization averages a call a day about the two provisions, though most concern the GPO. The WEP and GPO are such big issues that Wagoner writes about them every quarter in his organization's publication.

"It's fairly significant from a retired teacher's perspective," he said.

Teachers hit hardest are those who don't receive full retirement from the teachers' retirement system and who don't receive full Social Security benefits.

"Someone that spends a full career in KTRS is fine," Wagoner said. "Where it gets problematic is for people that we are recruiting at mid-career to become teachers, and there's not going to be an opportunity for them to spend a full 27 years under KTRS.

"It's grossly unfair that anyone caught with half a career under Social Security and half a career under KTRS is penalized. For someone who spends a career under KTRS, quite frankly, the retired teacher's pension is substantially better than Social Security."

Mark Whelan, KTRS chief financial officer, will be affected by the two provisions. He worked in private accounting for 10 years before joining KTRS.

"There's no question you would rather have KTRS than Social Security," he said.

For example, a person at full retirement age, with average monthly earnings of $4,000 and retiring after 27 years this year, would receive about $1,400 per month from Social Security. That same person, retiring at 55 years old or older with 27 years of service who averaged $4,000 per month in the highest three years, would receive $2,664 plus medical benefits under KTRS.

"The money is not in the Social Security benefit. The money is in the retirement side," Whelan said.

Who knew?

Many teachers' irritation comes because they don't realize the provisions affect them, Wagoner said. Though Congress passed the Government Pension Offset in 1977, and in 1986 passed the Windfall Elimination Provision, it's only been in the last 10 or 12 years that retiring teachers are seeing the effects, he said.

"It's compounded by the fact that it's only been in the last three years that the federal government has made any real attempt to communicate to people that have a pension from a retirement program outside of Social Security that if they also qualified for Social Security benefits, they would be penalized," he said.

Wagoner, a former superintendent, said he wasn't really aware of the two provisions until he took the job at the Kentucky Retired Teachers Association. Some superintendents are making an effort to alert incoming teachers, but he's not sure there is a "full understanding across the whole gamut."

Whelan said, despite being an accountant, he also was unaware of the WEP and GPO when he joined the teachers' retirement system. But the Social Security Administration now requires new employees hired into KTRS to sign a disclosure statement that they know they are affected by the WEP and GPO.

(Continued on page 15)

Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP)

From the Social Security Administration:

"Under the windfall elimination provision, we figure your benefit under a modified formula in which the 90 percent factor is reduced to 40 percent. There are exceptions to this rule. For example, the 90 percent factor is not reduced if you have 30 or more years of 'substantial' earnings in a job where you paid Social Security taxes. If you have 21 to 29 years of substantial earnings, the 90 percent factor is reduced to somewhere between 45 and 85 percent.

"The Windfall Elimination Provision does not apply to survivors benefits. It also does not apply if the only work you did where you did not pay Social Security taxes was before 1957 or you have 30 or more years of substantial earnings under Social Security.

"If you get a relatively low pension, you are protected. The reduction in your Social Security benefit cannot be more than one-half of the amount of your pension that is based on earnings after 1956 on which you did not pay Social Security taxes."

Bob Wagoner, executive director of Kentucky Retired Teachers Association, said many teachers will do outside work over the course of their careers – "Being a summer painter is common. There's a high percentage of teachers who are pretty good painters." – and they pay into Social Security. Over the course of their career, they may qualify for some benefits.

	%	Average Indexed Monthly Earnings*
Tier 1	40-90 (see figure 2)	$0-$711
Tier 2	32	$711.01-$3,577
Tier 3	15	$3,577.01-up

* Based on 2008 formula

Figure 1

Social Security

From the Social Security Administration:

"Social Security benefits are based on a worker's average monthly earnings adjusted for inflation. When we figure your benefits, we separate your average earnings into three amounts and multiply the figures using three factors."

"Social Security benefits are intended to replace only a percentage of a worker's pre-retirement earnings. The way Social Security benefit amounts are figured, lower-paid workers get a higher return than highly paid workers. For example, lower-paid workers could get a Social Security benefit that equals about 55 percent of their pre-retirement earnings. The average replacement rate for highly paid workers is about 25 percent."

Mark Whelan, Kentucky Teachers' Retirement System chief financial officer, said an employee has to have 10 years (equal to 40 quarters) for an average of about $900 per quarter to receive a benefit.

Social Security adjusts all earnings for today's dollars to the age 60-level salary. "That's a good thing that they do," he said

Then they take the highest 35 years and divide by 420 months to get an average index monthly (AIM) amount. "The majority of a person's Social Security benefits are in that middle tier. What you'll see is how someone gets less (percentage) the more they earn," Whelan said.

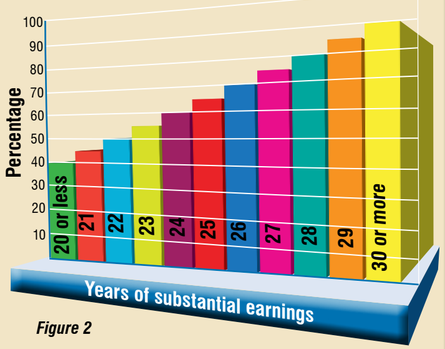

Figure 2

Meet new board members Billy Harper, Brigitte Ramsey

Last May, Gov. Steve Beshear appointed five members to the Kentucky Board of Education. Four appointments replaced members whose terms had expired, and one person was appointed to replace a member who resigned.

To give educators throughout the state the opportunity to learn more about the men and women who serve on the state board, *Kentucky Teacher* is continuing its series of question-and-answer sessions with board members. In this issue, we introduce you to Billy Harper and Brigitte Ramsey.

Teachers need to accept 'new and different methods,' Harper says

Harper, of Paducah, represents members-at-large. He is the president and chief executive officer of Harper Industries and a former member of the McCracken County Board of Education. He is a former candidate for governor. Harper will serve for a term expiring April 14, 2012.

What do you think are some of the unique aspects about education in Kentucky?

We are slowly making progress, even though the majority of the population in Kentucky does not appreciate education. Our governance changes in 1990 improved the operation of our schools and now act as a model throughout the nation.

Why is what you do as a board member important to students today?

The board and the legislature must work together to set the expectations for students. It is the board's responsibility to develop the education expectations and methods, and then work with the legislature for funding.

What long-term goals do you have as a member of the board?

My long-term plans are to work with all members of the board and to raise education standards so that Kentucky leads the nation and is competitive on a global scale.

Is there an event in your past that helped you decide to become involved in education?

In the '70s, I realized if my community was to grow, and we were going to have good future employees, education was the only answer. That interest spread to not only local communities, but statewide.

Who was your favorite teacher and why?

The professor that taught my Internal Combustion Engines class was my favorite teacher because he had a unique way to make the course interesting and fun.

What will teachers need most from the board?

Teachers need to know that they must be open to new and different methods of teaching. They have much more material to cover than in the past.

Harper

What are the biggest obstacles facing Kentucky children?

Students must catch up to and pass what is average in the U.S. This will not be an easy task.

What are the greatest successes you have seen in Kentucky schools?

We are seeing some schools exceed their benchmarks by wide margins. Many schools are challenging their students to stretch far beyond what they thought they could do.

What lies beyond "proficiency" in 2014?

That is only the beginning. We must develop new world-class standard goals and continue the journey of improvement.

What do you want Kentucky's past and current teachers to know about you?

What they know about me is not important. What is important is that we cannot fail; we must improve education and quickly.

Support for education 'trickles down,' Ramsey says

Ramsey, of Falmouth, represents members-at-large. She is a public policy analyst for the United Way of Greater Cincinnati and a former member of the Pendleton County Board of Education. Ramsey will serve for a term expiring April 14, 2012.

In your opinion, what makes Kentucky schools tick?

Kentucky is a place where many people enjoy the close proximity of family members and lifelong friends. This sense of community benefits Kentucky's schools and our school children and could prove to be one of our greatest assets if we learn to harness its power. For many children, school is literally home away from home, and the support is invaluable. Unfortunately, because this has long been a way of life for Kentuckians, we are shy when it comes to fully embracing people and ideas that come from outside. Kentucky schools that tick have learned to fully embrace all members of their communities in their quest for success.

Where is education in Kentucky headed?

I absolutely believe that education in Kentucky is only getting better. There is great momentum in the state at all levels of education: early childhood, K-12 and post-secondary. We are learning and getting better at working together and aligning our efforts to truly serve the betterment of all residents with a nearly seamless education system.

What impact do you hope to bring to the board in the immediate future?

I applaud the fact that Kentucky set high expectations for student learning and expect to continually focus on our collective responsibility to provide equally strong support to those doing the work. Real support of education trickles down; the legislature must provide the funding for the Department of Education to effectively work with schools; schools must be willing to work together in their districts to automate best practices; teachers must be given the tools to engage all students and take them to the next level; and parents must have their children prepared for school each and every day. I hope that maintaining this focus in decision-making will prove to positively impact Kentucky schools.

Ramsey

Other than parents and teachers, who – or what – has made the biggest effect on our students' educations in the last few years in your opinion?

Without a doubt, the unprecedented effort by Kentucky to radically reform, and allow an evolution of, its education system – guided by belief that every child can succeed at high levels – has had the greatest impact on education in Kentucky.

Who is your hero?

People who go about their everyday lives with a genuine love for others, a commitment to the work at hand and persistence to achieve the seemingly unachievable are all heroes in my mind – and you find them everywhere if you're looking.

Who was your favorite teacher and why?

My 5th-grade teacher, Mrs. Purdy, was my favorite teacher. She was one of those teachers who you dreaded because she was tough and never played favorites. I quickly found that I had a great deal of respect and admiration for Mrs. Purdy because she expected a lot out of me – out of all of us, without fail. I can think of no better way for a teacher to truly love her students.

What will teachers need most from the board?

Teachers need our support! The board needs to continually ensure that teachers, through outreach to the districts, are provided with the resources they need to support students. The board needs to do all it can do to ensure that all district administrative teams are prepared to be the educational leaders that their schools, their teachers and their students need. Teachers have an incredibly tough job, and I believe they all want to be the best teacher in the building. Unfortunately, we ask so much of them and provided them with limited resources to achieve the goals we have set for them.

Make Plans to Attend the 2009 Kentucky Teaching and Learning Conference

Building to Proficiency and Beyond: Sharing Success from Kentucky Schools

KTLC

Presenter application deadline: October 31, 2008

http://kentuckytlc.org/KTLC

March 5-6, Louisville, Ky.
Kentucky International Convention Center

In the classroom, blogs are the new bulletin boards

By Matthew Tungate
matthew.tungate@education.ky.gov

Harrison County public school teachers are using blogs to better communicate with students and parents. It's not most of the teachers, not even some of the teachers – all of the teachers.

One hundred percent of teachers, as well as administrators and central office staff, have blogs on the district's Web site. Teachers use the blogs to post information about their classrooms, homework assignments, surveys and open-response questions, according to Melissa Shepard, chief information officer and district technology coordinator.

And some teachers are being really innovative. Tonya Perrin Wagoner, French and German teacher at Harrison County High School, uses her blog so she and her students can interact with a sister school in France.

"On the blog, students can leave a message and start a discussion with someone in France," she said. Her counterpart at the school "teaches her students her content using a connection to our state. Her students ask questions in English about Kentucky for her assignments, and my students practice French."

DeDe Shirley, Westside Elementary 5th-grade teacher, is a prodigious blogger herself, and she is impressed by Wagoner's use of the technology.

"My daughter has been a student in her classroom for three years now, and I know that she uses her blog as a teaching tool in her lessons on a daily basis," Shirley said. "My daughter often talks about her blog and the sites they visit during her French class."

Shirley, on the other hand, uses her blogs (one as a teacher, one as cheerleading sponsor) more as communication tools. Last year, she won a multimedia projector for her classroom when her name was chosen in a drawing for teachers who met the district's mandatory one blog entry per week.

"While prizes are nice incentives to encourage my blogging, I will have to say that having parents comment on how they have, and increasingly are using, my blog to keep up with their kids is more of what drives me to continue to blog," she said.

Alyssa Canupp, gifted and talented resource teacher and district coordinator, used her blog to successfully manage a student doing independent study last year. She is doing the same thing this year with another student.

"His parents were able to see what he was doing that hour of his school day, the principals were able to see how he was spending his time, and I was able to monitor his progress as well," she said. "We also communicated through his school e-mail account, but his postings were for everyone to see his progress."

In addition, Canupp said she posts notes, forms, documents, outlines or any other materials she wants parents to have. It also is good for mass publications of pictures and news and information that she comes across about gifted and talented education.

"I like that the students can check to see what their homework assignment was if they forgot, and they don't need to tell or ask their parent about it," she said. "It is good that parents can see what is going on in the classroom even though the child may always give the traditional answer of 'nothing' to the question, 'What did you do today?'"

Photo by Amy Wallot

Harrison County School District teachers Tonya Wagoner, left, DeDe Shirley, middle, and Alyssa Canupp use blogging to keep students and parents informed about classroom activities.

That is a benefit for Shirley, too. "Many times when I would ask my teenage son how his day was or what he did at school that day, all too often I would get the same typical response: 'Nothing' or 'It was the same as yesterday,'" she said. "Of course, I knew that wasn't true and, with the ability for me to pull up his teachers' blogs, then I could be more specific in my questioning about his classes, allowing me to get more information out of him about his day."

Wagoner said blogs are good personal organizers for both teacher and student. When she posts homework assignments, she keeps herself organized and gives students a quick-click reference to what she said in class.

"I think that keeping track of homework assignments on the Web site is much more convenient than just writing these things down in a plan book," she said.

And Wagoner said she thinks blogging improves student performance by giving them a "virtual classroom."

"For example, if someone is absent, he or she could check the blog in order to stay current with the lessons missed. Blogging also improves student performance by giving students a listing of learning links for the student to use at his or her leisure to more deeply delve into the subject being taught. My links provide a wealth of practice options in both French and in German."

The school system is getting these benefits for free. Shepard, the CIO, said the blogs grew from some teachers wanting a classroom Web site. She was taking a class at Eastern Kentucky University, and the professor required students to have a blog.

"Once he told me that we could host the blogs on our own server and that it would handle multiple blogs, I knew this was my answer," she said. "Once I understood how it all worked, my tech and I worked to install the needed files on our existing Web server. This was at no cost to our district due to utilization of our existing server and the free program WordPress."

About 70 bloggers volunteered in the 2005-06 school year, and it worked so well that the school district now requires each teacher to manage a blog, Shepard said. The blog page is the most popular on the school's Web site, outside of the home page, receiving 2,000 views each week during the school year.

Hosting the blogs on the district's server enables teachers to manage the comments that get posted, Shepard said. Each teacher moderates the page to ensure nothing inappropriate is placed on the blogs, she said.

Shepard can see a big future for the blogs. "I would really like for these to develop into more that just the communication tools with which we started. I want them to be valuable instructional tools as well," she said. "Yes, I do believe that they have helped student achievement, just for the fact that parents and students are able to use them to keep up with classroom happenings, homework assignments, etc. I would love them to be used for more classroom instruction as well. I feel we are heading in that direction."

MORE INFO...

www.harrison.kyschools.us/cblogs.htm

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Fall 2007 survey results from Harrison County

Statements	Parents	Students	Teachers	Board Members
The blogs help me stay up-to-date with school/classroom happenings.	96% agree	80% agree		100% agree
The blogs help me to keep my students up-to-date with school/classroom happenings.			100% agree	
The blogs benefit students and parents.	100% agree	76% agree	100% agree	100% agree
The blogs have a positive impact on student achievement.	96% agree	77% agree	96% agree	100% agree

Writing portfolios go digital

By Matthew Tungate
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Doris Blair, the 10th- and 12th-grade English teacher at Raceland-Worthington (Independent) High School, has seen the moment of enlightenment for many students in her 23 years of teaching. But, beginning only last year, she began to see that happen at any time on any day.

"I've sat on the sofa at 11 o'clock at night and just laughed out loud because I was able to see a student have an epiphany," Blair said. "I was there, and it happened then, not two days later when I could get through 150 papers."

Penny Holmes, a 7th- and 9th-grade English teacher at Raceland, invited Blair and her students to participate in an electronic writing portfolio project. The project allows teachers and students to exchange and review each other's writing electronically through shared folders on a computer network and then publish some of the work on the Web.

The Kentucky Program of Studies expects teachers to work with students in all grades on writing. At the end of 4th, 7th and 12th grades, students must produce writing pieces for an accountability portfolio. Teachers historically have had students write, revise and rewrite using pencil and paper, with teachers reviewing each draft. The "digital notebook" part of the electronic portfolio, where writers can revise and give each other comments, has saved untold amounts of paper, Blair said, and it allows students more immediate feedback from her and their peers.

The electronic writing portfolios are the result of graduate studies by Holmes and Lee Ann Hager, the Department of Education's high school writing consultant. Each separately attended the prestigious Bread Loaf School of English at Middlebury College in Vermont. The Raceland students use the college's teacher network, called BreadNet, to save, comment on and revise their portfolio pieces.

Hager received a fellowship to the Bread Loaf School of English in 2004 while she was a teacher at Mercer County High School, and she began looking into electronic portfolios. She returned to her school and began working with her students on electronic exchanges, where students from different schools would exchange e-mails to conference on writing pieces. She used the Bread Loaf teacher network online community to facilitate the exchanges.

Hager was the writing cluster leader for the school at the time, so she managed the writing portfolios. She began looking into how she could combine the electronic documents used in the exchange with the portfolio.

But her set-up was not nearly as advanced as Raceland's, she said. She asked her students to e-mail their pieces, and she would use the features of Microsoft Word to give comments.

"Penny and Doris are the pioneers of this type of work in Kentucky," Hager said.

Holmes first learned about electronic portfolios in 2006 during a fellowship at the Bread Loaf School.

"Of course, being a Kentucky 7th-grade writing teacher, the first thought in my mind was that this electronic portfolio format would just be ideal to highlight some of the excellent student writing from which pieces were selected to make up the state writing portfolio," she said.

When Holmes returned to teach in the fall, she created a practical application of what she had learned as part of her graduate school duties and set up all of her students with electronic accounts on BreadNet. She then chose 12 to publish their finished pieces online.

Holmes invited her colleague to participate in the project the following year. Holmes sett up accounts for Blair and her students, and taught them how to use the technological tools.

Blair and Holmes agree that the new way of doing the portfolios adds excitement for their students. Blair, who has been a cluster leader since 1993, wanted the portfolios to become more relevant to the students.

"They're already digital natives. We were asking them to write in a language that wasn't their own," Blair said. "We thought if we could bring that into it, the boredom, the tedium, the groaning that might go along with having to go through the process might be gone. It would be more relevant."

When students get an assignment at school, they go to a computer lab or the teachers use a mobile lab. Students may access their portfolios from home as well.

Blair and Holmes, who also is a cluster leader, broke down the subdomains of the writing portfolio scoring rubric and taught those expectations to the students.

Blair said the two teachers made sure students had a working knowledge of the subdomains. "So they could sit with their laptops in groups and ask the kinds of questions that really caused cognitive growth," she said.

Holmes said both teachers use the school's laptop cart and computer projectors to show students what BreadNet looks like to train them in how to use the electronic portfolio. Students see the different types of writing, the digital images and audio readings of the authors. The teachers also model each style of writing for the students, including letting them look at previous students' work.

"It is as simple as having them access the electronic portfolio on their laptops and pushing a button and letting the original authors read their work through the audio component," Holmes said.

She also thinks it is exciting to allow students to use Windows Movie Maker to create interpretations of their writing. All of the middle school electronic portfolio students created films to accompany their writing, she said.

Another benefit of the electronic portfolios is that Holmes and Blair have been able to publish their students' writing on the Web. Members of the community can read the students' pieces by clicking a link on the school's home page.

Holmes said all of the students in her and Blair's classes go through the process of using the electronic portfolio. But the teachers publish online only about 15 of the 75 students' work in each grade. Holmes said the teachers select students late in the year when they have been able to determine "how much of the writing bug they have been consumed by."

Photo by Amy Wallot

Penny Holmes helps freshman Bryan Caudill with his writing portfolio during English class at Raceland-Worthington (Independent) High School.

"It's never been about highlighting my best writers. My best writers are going to succeed no matter what I do," she said. "I try to pick students who have a real need to use writing to figure out their world.

"I select students who may even be reluctant writers. But they get that spark and figure out what writing can do for them. These are the kids who are real writers; they're not just writing for an assignment."

Hager sees numerous other benefits. Students are supposed to keep physical folders of their writing from grade to grade, even though the department suggests purging the physical folders at logical points such as during the transition from elementary to middle school. Students may purge their folders along the way, keeping only the pieces they perceive as their best across the types of writing and across the grade levels, she said. Even with purging, folders can become quite large, Hager said.

"You can imagine these filing cabinets in this big warehouse for a small district," she said. "If you're doing the work online, you can store it digitally, and you don't have to have all of the filing cabinets."

Hager visited Raceland to see the students present their work. One 7th grader read his poem, which the Kentucky Department of Education selected as the strong student example for poetry in the state.

"This was really the kind of student we have in every school in Kentucky. If we can engage them like this – because we're speaking their language now, we're working digitally – then we could get a lot more student engagement and writing improvement," she said.

MORE INFO ...

www.raceland.k12.ky.us/RWHS/index.htm, then choose "Electronic Portfolio" and "2008 Electronic Portfolio"

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Nine schools selected as prestigious Schools to Watch

By Matthew Tungate
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The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, an alliance of more than 60 national associations and organizations, created a vision and criteria for high-performing middle-grades schools in 1997. Schools that meet those criteria are designated Schools to Watch.

Seventeen schools applied to be selected as 2008 Schools to Watch in Kentucky, according to Fran Salyers, director of Eastern Kentucky University's Center for Middle School Academic Achievement and a representative for the Kentucky Forum, the state version of the National Forum. Schools had to perform a self-study and complete a lengthy application, she said. A 46-person review committee of retired Kentucky educators, teachers, administrators, parents and professional educators reviewed the applications. Schools are judged on four areas: academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, social equity and organizational support.

Twelve schools received a site visit, and nine – James E. Bazzell Middle (Allen County), Belfry Middle (Pike County), Benton Middle (Marshall County), F.T. Burns Middle (Daviess County), Eastside Middle (Bullitt County), McGuffey Sixth Grade Center (Lincoln County), Northern Middle (Pulaski County), Olmstead Elementary (Logan County) and Oldham County Middle – received recognition as 2008 Schools to Watch in Kentucky.

The schools are different in many ways: some are urban, others rural; some are diverse, others homogeneous; some are large, others small. But the schools share many commonalities for their students: high expectations, balanced academic excellence and developmental responsiveness, and a staff that is focused on student learning and uses a variety of teaching and assessment strategies.

The following summarizes what makes each of them great.

Photos by Amy Wallot

Teacher Deborah Wheat helps 8th-grade student Amy Vance with her math assignment at Bazzell Middle (Allen County) on May 8. The school was recognized as a 2008 School to Watch.

James E. Bazzell Middle School

"Bazzell Middle School is data-driven and is constantly studying the latest research for ways to improve. An Academic Code of Conduct has been established, and the staff has implemented and sustained a zero-tolerance policy. Common assessments, guiding questions, and 'I Can' statements are used routinely. Showcases are held as a way for students to show their parents and/or families what they are learning and as a means for inviting parents and families into the school," Salyers said.

Principal Ricky Fisher credits Thoughtful Education concepts and the school's overall teamwork approach for helping his school excel. "We are constantly looking for areas for student growth and make adjustments in our schedule to work on these needs," he said. "We use teacher-made formative assessments, Think Link, GRADE and G-MADE to assess progress and determine needs."

School Characteristics & Replicable Practices

Academic Excellence
- All students have writing folders and a writing file in every class.
- Teachers regularly participate in a "sharing craft knowledge" protocol to review common assessments and units of study.
- Teams analyze student work and plan for integrated instruction.

Developmental Responsiveness
- A team structure is fully implemented.
- The Renaissance program is used to reward grades and attendance.
- Morning review activities are provided through ActiveBoard documents that are shared in a Teacher Shared Folder on the school network.

Social Equity
- Exceptional-children teachers are assigned to teams and are truly part of the team.
- There is full collaboration, even without a resource room.
- Community members and teachers work with the Science Olympiad program.

Organizational Support
- Teachers maintain a notebook of their own exemplary work.
- Experienced teachers mentor first-year teachers.
- Staff meets each year and establishes goal for the year.

www.allen.kyschools.us

Belfry Middle School

"Belfry Middle School truly lives its mission statement, 'to be Kentucky's best,' that was developed by its students. Everyone in the Belfry community shares the vision, and this has created a cohesive educational community for students. Students continue to provide leadership in this school through the Student Leadership Team. Gender-based science labs and reading classes have been implemented, and the staff is positive about them. A process has been established and implemented for ongoing development and revising of Individual Learning Plans," Salyers said.

Principal James Hurley said he is particularly proud of the togetherness of the school, following a consolidation four years ago.

"Our academic enrichment period is our strongest educational program that yields the biggest student-performance results. It is a gender-grouped setting where our teachers give no grade, but we get the most results. Our kids love it, and most call it their favorite part of the day. We focus on core content in various subject areas in a stress-free environment where teachers focus on building positive relationships."

School Characteristics & Replicable Practices

Academic Excellence
- The school developed its own lesson plan format.
- Cross-curriculum collaboration meetings are held.
- All students are taught the same curriculum.

Developmental Responsiveness
- Reading for Life units are implemented.
- The basement hallway is decorated with student murals that are redone each year.

Seventh-grade students Hailei Nunley, left, and Lauren Caston get help from science teacher Jill Mastin during science lab at Belfry Middle (Pike County) on May 15. The students were comparing their CO_2 emissions from using a personal vehicle to those from taking the bus.

Students prepare for a balloon release at the Schools to Watch celebration at Benton Middle (Marshall County)on May 7.

Social Equity
- The school uses a Successful Student document.
- Accommodations are made for religious/cultural beliefs/practices.
- "Get to Know Me" projects are common.

Organizational Support
- Programs are implemented in response to the needs of students and evaluated for effectiveness.
- Teachers are supported and respected by administration.
- The School Based Decision Making Council reflects shared leadership.

http://go.pike.kyschools.us/belfrymiddle/

Benton Middle School

"Benton Middle School has created a positive learning environment for all students and adults in the building. Teacher Learning Clubs provide a structure for adult learning. Through the use of Thoughtful Education practices, a full inclusion program and a silent mentor program, the needs of all students are recognized and addressed. A parade through town recognizes students who do well on the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System test, and other recognition programs recognize other achievements of students on a regular basis," Salyers said.

Sixth-grade student Jonathan Whittaker holds a sign for the Jump Start program during the Schools to Watch celebration at Burns Middle (Daviess County) on May 7.

Principal Kem Cothran said her teachers focus on not only students' academics but their social and emotional development as well. "Our students and faculty developed a simple mission statement, 'extreme character, achievement and pride for all,' and we use this as our guide to all that takes place in the school," she said.

School Characteristics & Replicable Practices

Academic Excellence
- Teachers maintain "Teacher Instructional Manuals" that are checked randomly by the principal.
- Early release days provide time for teachers to focus on instruction and curriculum.
- Portfolio partners and a schoolwide writing plan have been implemented.

Developmental Responsiveness
- A 6th-grade COOL (Continually Organizing Our Lives) class focuses on organizational skills, transitions and lifelong skills.
- Identified students get secret mentors who make sure the students have their needs met.
- All faculty participate in a "Silent Mentor" program.

Social Equity
- Regular education students are partnered with special needs students to assist them in the classroom.
- Students are taught an awareness of and appreciation for diversity even though there is little diversity in the community or school.
- All students complete Individual Learning Plans.

Penny Schmitz, a 7th-grade student at Eastside Middle (Bullitt County), works with charcoal during Angela Hobbs' class before the Schools to Watch celebration on May 16.

Organizational Support
- Teacher learning clubs are popular.
- Abundant support is available for new teachers.
- All faculty participate in three "one-to-one" conferences with the principal to discuss assessments, curriculum, professional development needs and goal setting.
- The district curriculum document, SNAP, contains faculty-developed artifacts.

www.marshall.k12.ky.us/bms

F.T. Burns Middle School

"Burns Middle School uses schoolwide activities to expand and reinforce its curriculum (e.g., Science Expo, Math Marathon, Social Student Quest, Lunches and Learn, One School/One Book, Cultural Fest, Practical Arts Review, Portfolio Pow-Wows.) The JumpStart Program addresses the needs of incoming 6th-grade students, helping them to become acquainted with staff and the school before school starts. PRIDE cards, a Pyramid of Discipline, and the CHAMPS program are all pieces of the behavior-management system of the school," Salyers said.

SUCCESS Coordinator Yvonne Austin said she is proud expectations are high for students, in and out of the classroom, at the school, which also was designated a School to Watch in 2005.

"Our mission is to meet every student where they are and to help them reach their fullest potential, not only academically, but also emotionally, physically and socially. At the same time, we feel very strongly that it is our responsibility to make middle school a positive experience and to help our students create positive memories during this important developmental stage of their lives," she said.

School Characteristics & Replicable Practices

Academic Excellence
- The plan for writing across the grade levels includes systematic documentation and reporting.
- Fox-Binders are created by teachers to target students with Annual Yearly Progress gaps.
- The first period of day is "Skill Development," an enrichment and remediation time.

Developmental Responsiveness
- School fitness center is used by physical education classes and staff.
- Programs and activities are aimed at encouraging a healthy lifestyle.
- Students are allowed to improve and resubmit assignments.

Social Equity
- A special needs buddy system is in place.
- The principal sends out an electronic "Week at a Glance" to all parents and families, with a hard copy to those without e-mail.

Organizational Support
- With shared leadership, teachers have strong voices.
- Everyone has a voice in professional development and completes a professional growth plan.
- All teachers serve on at least one school committee.

www.bms.dcps.org

Eastside Middle School

"A relatively new school, Eastside Middle School (EMS), as a result of intense planning and a shared vision, quickly became a high-performing middle school. Professional Learning Communities and peer observations support the professional growth of teachers, while the Eastside Academy provides academic interventions for students needing additional assistance with their learning. The teaming structure is at the heart of this school, housed in a building that was designed to be conducive to the middle school concept," Salyers said.

Principal Bonita Franklin said students have excelled in part due to scheduling a built-in period for interventions called "Seminar." Teachers have the flexibility to move students when they need more instruction or more extensions of their learning.

"For example, if you are a student struggling with the current math concepts that are being emphasized in class, then you will receive a second math class to double the time and instruction you have to master those skills," she said. "If

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you are a struggling reader, then you have the time to receive reading instruction that is designed just for you during your second language arts class."

School Characteristics & Replicable Practices

Academic Excellence

- Teachers use curriculum maps and benchmark testing to assess student progress.
- Curriculum, instruction, assessment and interventions are aligned with the high school that EMS students attend.
- Students are encouraged to produce evidence/progress of learning through a means of their own choosing.

Developmental Responsiveness

- Teachers provide multiple opportunities for student choice in assignments.
- Students present "book talks" on the school's podcast.
- Every 8th-grade student is required to create and develop a service-learning project.

Social Equity

- The Principal's Advisory League provides a platform for student involvement in the decision-making.
- All students interested in participating on the school's academic team are included.

Organizational Support

- Technology (e.g., SMART board, projector systems, stationary and mobile computer labs) is available and used.
- Teachers are regularly given release time and provided coverage of classes to observe colleagues.

www.bullitt.kyschools.us/ems

Photo by Amy Wallot

Sixth-grade students Morgan Cooper, left, Maggie Taylor and Jordan Smith look at a jar of plants, fish and snails as they study ecosystems during Tina Lasure's class at the Lloyd B. McGuffey Sixth Grade Center (Lincoln County) on May 9.

Seventh-grade students Mason Stevens, left, and Lyle Morton play a song during teacher Scott Sexton's piano lab at Northern Middle School (Pulaski County) on Aug. 21.

Lloyd B. McGuffey Sixth Grade Center

"McGuffey Sixth Grade Center is a unique school in that it houses only 6th-grade students; however, the school reflects the practices of a middle school with a more typical grade arrangement. The school has a creative schedule that features two mathematics periods and several split staff positions, half-time in a teaching role and half-time in a leadership role. A day camp is held for the incoming students to help them in their transition to a new school, and the Lunch Bunch is a key feature of the school's ESS program," Salyers said.

Principal Michele Reynolds said staff and administrators are constantly analyzing the school, identifying which parts are working and then trying to refine and improve their practices.

"When scores come in and they are good, it creates a pressure, but it also creates a complacency of, 'We are doing things right, so let's just keep on doing what we've been doing,'" she said. "And that's true, but it's also important for schools to analyze why things are going well and what exactly they are doing that is making things work."

School Characteristics & Replicable Practices

Academic Excellence

- Teachers implement a common schoolwide lesson plan structure based on current educational research.
- Common assessments are used and analyzed for instructional implications.
- An assessment coordinator and academic coordinator provide direction and support for teachers.
- Time has been scheduled both during and after school for teacher dialogue focused on improving student learning.

Developmental Responsiveness

- An assessment calendar is maintained so students will not have multiple assessments on the same day.
- An interdisciplinary team structure is used.

Social Equity

- Art and music curriculum are based on multi-cultural thematic units.
- High school students present cultural awareness lessons.

Organizational Support

- Master schedule allows for both interdisciplinary team and department planning time within the school day.
- Faculty meetings are designed to provide ongoing professional development and to support school initiatives.
- A discipline coordinator works with students and teachers to provide behavioral interventions.

www.lincoln.kyschools.us/lloydmcguffey

Northern Middle School

"The Renaissance Program at Northern Middle School recognizes students for their academic, behavior and attendance achievement. Three years ago when Northern was first named a School to Watch, this program was a key feature at this school, and, three years later, it continues to have a positive impact. The teaming structure is embraced and emphasized at this school with the administration meeting with teams weekly. Academic Academies are held at the end of each grading period to help all students be successful," Salyers said.

Principal Angela Murphy said her school has a "whatever it takes" attitude to attain its high goals, including a willingness to embrace change. "Over the past few years this is evident in every aspect of our school," she said. "Some of the large initiatives that have taken place include: joining with Kentucky Center for Instructional Discipline to develop positive behavior interventions, facilitating a three-tiered mentoring program, implementing Systematic Supervision strategies throughout the building and developing a thorough Response to Intervention Program."

School Characteristics & Replicable Practices

Academic Excellence

- A full-time curriculum specialist is available to assist teachers.
- Lesson plans are reviewed weekly by the administration with immediate feedback.
- Instruction is designed to provide for student movement during class.

Developmental Responsiveness

- Every teacher sends home a positive postcard each week.
- Ninety-nine percent of students participate in a district random drug testing program with parent approval/request.
- A full-time school resource officer and a gifted-and-talented teacher are on staff.

Social Equity

- Special education teachers send school videos to incoming special needs students so they may see the school before they actually enter the building for the first time.
- Response to Intervention Committee provides interventions individualized for each student.
- Teachers make home visits prior to first day of school for identified at-risk students.

Organizational Support

- The principal has a desk located in the central lobby as well as in her office.
- A flexible schedule provides freedom to teams.

http://nms.pulaski.net/

Oldham County Middle School

"Oldham County Middle School has instituted a new wellness program aimed at developing students' physical and emotional health. Daily, during a planned time, students participate in planned physical activities or complete character education activities. An Intervention Continuum has reduced office referrals, and stronger, more meaningful relationships with students and their families have been built as a result of an administrative

(Continued on page 12)

Oldham County Middle School Principal Chris Kraft celebrates his school being chosen one of Kentucky's Schools to Watch during a ceremony on May 16 in Buckner, Ky.

Ghosts and spooks haunt Kentucky schools

By Susan Riddell
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photo illustration by John Boone

Did you see that?

Behind you.

It's OK. You can put down your *Kentucky Teacher* and look. But just for a second.

Over there. Behind the pencil sharpener.

Oh, well. Maybe it was just the wind.

Then again, maybe not. Maybe it's not an "it," but a "someone."

Kentucky public schools are haunted, you know.

It's true.

Kentucky Teacher recently obtained a list containing 48 current and former schools that are considered haunted. Most hauntings pertain to scary events taking place after school hours. Some involve creepy things, many involve ghosts of students and faculty past. Stories are rooted in gymnasium locker rooms, boiler rooms and band rooms.

Doors slam without explanation. Water drips where there are no pipes or faucets.

There are believers out there, but Hickman County Elementary Principal Janet Johnson isn't one of them.

In western Kentucky, there are claims the school was built on top of a cemetery, but that's news to Johnson, a Clinton native. There are also claims of former students locked in bathrooms and that doors often shut by themselves.

Johnson says she's never experienced anything out of the ordinary in her two years as principal at Hickman County.

Even if the school was haunted, Johnson said her school stands out because faculty care about students. "The depth of caring and concern for each child makes Hickman County Elementary School a great place," Johnson said. "Also, the dedication of the teachers and staff to provide instruction that will enable each child to excel is strong. We are constantly analyzing what we do and adapting so that we meet the needs of all children."

Eddie Roberts, on the other hand, thinks the old Hickman County Elementary School was haunted. The old school, built in 1937, burned down in 1998 at the hands of an arsonist. When Roberts graduated in 1957, the school was K-12. The new building is partially built where the previous school burned down.

"I know for a fact in 1957, it was haunted by some real mean teachers," Roberts, himself a retired industrial education and science teacher at Hickman County High School, joked before saying he doesn't actually believe the school was haunted.

At Whitley County Middle School, near the Kentucky-Tennessee border, there have been reports of a ghostly girl wearing a yellow dress. She is heard singing quietly to herself. Later, after school hours, she runs down the hallway screaming.

While Principal Richard Prewitt couldn't confirm an actual spotting of the little girl, he doesn't deny strange things have happened in his school. Prewitt and Family Resources and Youth Services Center Director Lans Lay each claim the other has experienced questionable events.

"I have heard of (the spooky stories) but I'm not really sure where the stories stem from," Lay said. "I never did investigate. I guess to be a true believer you must experience something strange and have a vivid imagination."

One thing is for certain. These two schools are more concerned about their students' well being and learning than they are about being potentially haunted.

"We are a Reading First School," Johnson said of Hickman County Elementary, which has met Average Yearly Progress five years in a row. "Our primary teachers receive a great deal of professional development, which enhances and develops their instructional practices. This enables us to provide children with a strong foundation in reading. This foundation in reading allows our children to be successful in all academic areas."

Commonwealth Accountability Testing System test scores at Whitley County Middle have increased each of the last seven years.

Ghosts, unexplained happenings and the notion of haunted buildings — in this case schools — have gone hand in hand for centuries. Why are there so many believers?

LiveScience.com chronicles the daily advances and innovations made in science and technology. According to the Web site, it takes on the misconceptions that often pop up around scientific discoveries. LiveScience.com says that people who study these supposed paranormal events believe most people just can't help themselves when it comes to ghosts.

"Many people quite simply just want to believe," Brian Cronk, a professor of psychology at Missouri Western State University said in an interview with LiveScience. "The human brain is always trying to determine why things happen, and when the reason is not clear, we tend to make up some pretty bizarre explanations."

"While it is difficult to know for certain, the tendency to believe in the paranormal appears to be there from the beginning," added Christopher Bader, a Baylor University sociologist. "What changes is the content of the paranormal. For example, very few people believe in faeries and elves these days. But as belief in faeries faded, other beliefs, such as belief in UFOs, emerged to take their place."

Even with the high number of paranormal believers, it's complicated as to why they believe.

"It is an artifact of our brain's desire to find cause and effect," Cronk, the psychology professor, said in an e-mail interview. "That ability to predict the future is what makes humans 'smart' but it also has side effects like superstitions (and) belief in the paranormal."

"Humans first started believing in the supernatural because they were trying to understand things they couldn't explain," says Benjamin Radford, a book author, paranormal investigator and managing editor of Skeptical Inquirer magazine.

Have a great, ghostly time this October from the staff of *Kentucky Teacher*. Information for this story about the haunted Kentucky schools comes from The Shadowlands Web site. The link provided has information on Kentucky school "hauntings" as well as other occurrences throughout the state. Special thanks go to Hickman County Elementary and Whitley County Middle School for their participation in this story.

MORE INFO...
http://theshadowlands.net/places/kentucky.htm

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team looping with 7th- and 8th-graders. Colonel Service Day gets students out in the community and involved in service-learning activities," Salyers said.

Principal Chris Kraft said Oldham County Middle School parents, students, teachers and support staff, believe there is no problem they collectively cannot solve. The belief that every child is important drives the process of constant monitoring and modification.

"The single-biggest procedural change that has contributed to our success has been the full implementation of professional learning communities across all grade levels and curricula," he said. "The provision of dedicated time during the school day for teachers to talk about student learning and share thoughts and strategies has shown great benefits."

School Characteristics & Replicable Practices

Academic Excellence

- Professional learning communities are used for reflecting on instruction and developing common assessments.
- Teachers help students make connections between the curriculum and real life.
- A literacy coach provides teachers with engaging activities that promote literacy across the curriculum.

Developmental Responsiveness

- The school offers an intramural sports program.
- Students have voice through the Student Council, suggestion box and Principal Lunch.

Social Equity

- Exceptional Child Education students are expected to perform to the same standards as other students but with some accommodations and modifications.
- The Festival of Arts is held every spring with all students participating.

Organizational Support

- Extended media center hours provide students with additional time to use technology/media and work on projects.
- Time is scheduled each week for professional learning community team meetings.

www.oldham.kyschools.us/ocms

Olmstead Elementary

"Olmstead School is a P-8 school, but the staff has made a concentrated effort to provide their young adolescent students with a program geared to their age group. Instruction is varied, challenging and engaging. Hands-on and arts-infused activities involve all students and enhance learning. Muffins with Moms, Donuts with Dad, Autumn Delight, Celebration Success, parent workshops and a fall musical theatre are just some of the activities hosted by the school to encourage parents and families to come to school and to be involved," Salyers said.

Principal Ben Kemplin said the relationships his teachers build with their students and how they go beyond expectations to see that students' needs are being met is what makes his school special. It also was named a School to Watch in 2005.

"I think relationships are the most important, but you also have to challenge your students to be their best, and that is where the rigor comes in," he said. "You also have to make the things you are teaching them be relevant to them and real-world experiences. When these three things are achieved, you will have success."

School Characteristics & Replicable Practices

Academic Excellence

- "I Can" statements are posted throughout the school and in classrooms.
- Teachers are encouraged and provided time to visit other schools in the district.
- Curriculum maps, curriculum audit documents and yearly curriculum pacing guides are provided for each content area.

Developmental Responsiveness

- Ram-bassadors provide students an opportunity to participate in the real-life experience of preparing an application and interviewing for a job.
- A T-shirt is designed annually and given to students at the beginning of the year.
- The Character Counts program is implemented.

Social Equity

- Teachers flex the schedule as needed to accommodate classroom activities.
- An interpreter for Spanish-speaking students is available daily for English as a Second Language students.

Organizational Support

- Students are dismissed early on Fridays to provide time for teachers to meet and plan.
- The district offers a Professional Growth Academy for new teachers.

www.olmstead.logan.k12.ky.us/

Photo by Amy Wallot

Sixth-grade students Matt Richardson, left, Elijah Abston, center, and Austin Brinkley work on a sign in Leslie Smith's class for the Schools to Watch celebration at Olmstead Elementary (Logan County) on May 8.

Kentucky Core Content Test scores released

Results from the 2008 administration of the Kentucky Core Content Tests (KCCT) show improvement in most scores for all grade levels and subject areas, and fewer schools are in need of assistance as a result of their performance over the 2007-08 testing cycle.

Every two years, schools are classified as Meets Goal, Progressing or In Assistance, depending whether they have met their unique goals for the biennium. The ultimate goal is for all schools to reach proficiency – 100 on a 140-point scale – by the year 2014. More than 431,000 students in grades 3-12 participated in the 2008 assessments, which covered seven subject areas: reading, mathematics, science, social studies, arts and humanities, practical living/vocational studies and writing.

Highlights of the results include:

- 91 schools have reached or exceeded 100 on their 2007-08 combined indices, which all schools are supposed to reach by 2014.
- The median two-year score for all Kentucky schools is 82 in 2008, up from 78.3 in 2006.
- 2.2 percent of Kentucky schools (26 of 1,174) will receive state assistance as a result of their performance during this accountability cycle.

Student performance is categorized with four levels: novice, apprentice, proficient and distinguished. The lowest percentages of novices by subject area are in the writing portfolio at the elementary level (1.22 percent), middle school level (4.30 percent) and high school level (4.13 percent).

The highest percentages of proficient and above scores, by subject area, are in the writing portfolio at the elementary level (75.3 percent); reading at the middle school level (66.8 percent); and arts and humanities at the high school level (63.73 percent).

MORE INFO ...

www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Administrative+Resources/Testing+and+Reporting+/Reports/CATS+Briefing+Packets/2008+CATS+Briefing+Packet.htm

Photo by Amy Wallot

Learning about Lincoln

Rangeland Elementary (Jefferson County) 4th-grade students Tyrelle Foree, left, Kendrick Paige, middle, and Montaye Keltee ask questions to Abraham Lincoln presenter Stanley Wernz at the Kentucky State Fair in Louisville, on Aug. 15. The students were visiting the fair with their teacher Tonya Arnold.

LEADERSHIP LETTER

Compiled by Susan Riddell, susan.riddell@education.ky.gov

Prichard Committee heads into 26th year with 'Top 20 by 2020' report

The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence heads into its 26th year with the same goal it started with when it began — to improve education for all Kentuckians.

The Prichard Committee is an independent, nonpartisan group of volunteers dedicated to improving education in Kentucky at all levels. Founded in 1980 as a 30-member citizen panel to plan for the future of higher education in Kentucky, members of this group, three years later, reorganized into a new, independent organization and dedicated themselves to advocating for improved education for all Kentuckians.

Several recent endeavors launched by the committee take big steps in that direction.

To commemorate its recent 25th anniversary celebration, the Prichard Committee announced the following five-year plan:

- to guarantee that every 3- and 4-year-old Kentucky child has access to a voluntary, high-quality preschool experience
- to ensure that every Kentucky student has a highly qualified, well-supported and well-trained teacher
- to create a modernized, differentiated teacher-pay system that attracts and retains the best teachers and funnels them toward the specific schools and subjects that need them most
- to increase the high school graduation rate and assure that all students are prepared for postsecondary education and the workplace
- to increase college-going rates
- to sustain and expand parents' involvement in schools (The Prichard Committee would help directly by expanding its highly successful program the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership.)

The Prichard Committee also recently released a report called "Kentucky's Schools: Achieving the Top 20 by 2020." This report acknowledges the progress the state has made over recent years, but says that commitment must continue. The report lists adequate school funding, leadership, rigorous and strong accountability, and community, business and parental involvement as the foundational elements in Kentucky's effort toward reaching this goal.

The key objectives the report lists as necessities to be in the Top 20 by 2020 are:

- offer every child a strong preschool experience and a state-funded, full-day kindergarten
- provide highly qualified and well-supported teachers for every student
- eliminate achievement gaps based on ethnicity, income and disabilities
- improve our high schools to increase graduation rates, ensuring that a diploma indicates readiness for college and workplace success
- increase the number of students who start college and the number who graduate
- improve mathematics, science and technology achievement at all levels, including university degrees in those fields

According to the committee, should Kentucky reach this goal of being in the Top 20 in school performance by 2020, it will accomplish a feat never matched by bottom-tier schools. None has ever climbed from the bottom to the top level among the 50 states.

The 20 categories in the Prichard Committee's report that have states ranked by performance cover a wide range of topics, from percentage of high school graduates going to college to 4th- and 8th-grade scores in reading, mathematics, science and writing.

Of those 20 categories, Kentucky is currently ranked among the nation's top 20 in two: 4th-grade science and per-pupil total higher education funding.

In 4th-grade science, Kentucky ranks ninth in the nation, with results coming from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP).

In per-pupil total higher education funding, Kentucky is 15th nationally based on 2005-06 total revenue per pupil in full-time equivalent enrollment in public higher education, excluding medical schools, as reported in State Higher Education Finance 2006.

The category Kentucky ranks lowest in is adults 25 to 34 with a bachelor's degree or higher. Kentucky is ranked 44th nationally, with only 22 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds holding at least a bachelor's degree.

Kentucky also is struggling in mathematics, as both 4th- and 8th-graders are ranked 40th nationally, based on a scale from NAEP.

The Prichard Committee report also includes an in-depth list of 10 steps Kentucky has made in the right direction. One example indicates that from 1999 to 2006, every student group at every level improved their performance on state tests.

Ten challenges that Kentucky still struggles with also are cited, such as how the state's Advanced Placement success rate is well below the national average and how only 43 percent of Kentucky's 3- and 4-year-olds participate in public or private preschool.

To view "Kentucky's Schools: Achieving the Top 20 by 2020," go to www.prichardcommittee.org.

'Week of the Classroom Teacher'

The Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) is encouraging administrators to help celebrate teachers and their hard work the week of Oct. 5-11.

Each year, ACEI has designated the first full week of October as the "Week of the Classroom Teacher."

This celebration, which coincides with World Teachers' Day on Oct. 5, is designed to put the public spotlight on how important teachers are and to show appreciation for their dedication to educating students.

ACEI offers a detailed planning guide on its Web site for administrators who want to put together a celebration honoring their staff. The association also offers these suggestions for recognizing teachers:

- present certificates of appreciation to staff
- feature teachers in a "Hall of Excellence" display
- share success stories during a staff meeting
- hang a "thank-you" banner at your school
- hold a student concert performance for teachers
- praise teachers' work in the school newspaper
- hang teachers' stories on bulletin boards
- honor outstanding practices in your school
- organize a seminar or forum concerning challenges and opportunities of being a teacher
- hold an essay contest on "My most memorable learning experience from being a teacher" and have the winning essay published in the local newspaper

To receive Week of the Classroom Teacher/World Teachers' Day brochures, letterhead or bookmarks, contact Sheri Levin at (800) 423-3563 or slevin@acei.org.

www.acei.org

Photo by Amy Wallot

Working together

Jarin Rassman, right, helps Hannah Spada with her assignment during Michelle Perkins' 1st-grade class at Gallatin County Elementary.

Talk to Us!

Kentucky Teacher wants to know what you think, what you need from the Department of Education, what you want to see in future issues.

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Phone: (502) 564-2000
Fax: (502) 564-3049
Write: Kentucky Teacher
612 Capital Plaza Tower
500 Mero St.
Frankfort, KY 40601

BULLETIN BOARD

Compiled by Susan Riddell, susan.riddell@education.ky.gov

Photo by Amy Wallot

Gallatin County Elementary

Conferences

SACS

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) is hosting the Kentucky Improvement School Conference Nov. 13-14 in Lexington. This year's theme is "Professional Learning Communities: Fostering a Culture of Improvement." The conference will focus on building capacity to pursue excellence through high standards, continuous improvement and quality assurance. The conference is an opportunity to bring together research and resources for student, school and system improvement.

All pre-K through 12 Kentucky educators are invited to participate.

Contact: Thomas E. Jones, (859) 257-4256

'Safe Schools' online registration

How a school's culture and climate affect student achievement is often overlooked. It is hard for students to learn when they are scared. Whether they work in rural or urban schools, all staff and leadership must play close attention to the formal and informal signs that will largely determine the quality of education and the degree of safety for students and staff. The 14th annual Safe Schools-Successful Students Conference will be Oct. 6-7 in Louisville at the Galt House East. Online registration is now available.

Contacts: Tamara Tatum, tamara.tatum@ksba.org or Kerri Schelling, kerri.schelling@ksba.org, (800) 372-2962

www.kysafeschools.org

EKU writing project

The Eastern Kentucky University Writing Project has an upcoming professional development event. The annual Hot Topics in Literacy Conference will take place Oct. 11 at Madison Middle School. Registration deadline is Oct. 10.

Contact: Sally Martin, (859) 622-2992

www.ekuwritingproject.org

UCSMP

The University of Chicago School Mathematics Project (UCSMP) will host a conference for teachers and administrators who:

- teach from "UCSMP Grades 6-12" (third edition)
- are considering "UCSMP Grades 6-12" (third edition)
- use or have used earlier editions of UCSMP middle and high school materials
- use or have used UCSMP's "Everyday Mathematics"

This conference will be held on the University of Chicago campus Nov. 15-16. Participants are asked to choose several textbooks to study in-depth and can schedule a meeting with an author.

http://socialsciences.uchicago.edu/ucsmp/Nov08.html

Events

BubbleWrap design contest

Sealed Air Corporation and the National Museum of Education will host the third annual BubbleWrap Competition for Young Inventors for grades 5-8. This contest incorporates national and state academic standards in the fields of engineering design, problem-solving, entrepreneurship and all of the core curricular subjects. The deadline is Nov. 3. For more information, call (330) 376-8300.

www.nmoe.org

National Geographic Bee

The National Geographic Bee is a school competition for students in grades 4-8. Schools registered by Oct. 15 will receive contest materials in early November.

Contact: S. Kay Gandy, (270) 745-2991

www.nationalgeographic.com/geographicbee

Toyota International Teacher Program

Applications are being accepted for the third annual Toyota International Teacher Program. This year's program will travel to Costa Rica from April 18 – May 2, 2009. Full-time teachers and teacher librarians in grades 6-12 are encouraged to apply for this fully funded international professional development opportunity. The application deadline is Oct. 20.

www.iie.org/toyota

Young astronomers

This fall, National Earth Science Teachers Association (NESTA) will be collaborating with Kalmbach Publishing Company, the producers of *Astronomy* magazine, to sponsor the Young Astronomers Video Contest. Teams of up to four students will work together to produce a video, not to exceed three minutes. The grades 6-8 division will deal with the topic: "Is Pluto a planet?" High school students in grades 9-12 will describe: "What is a black hole?" Videos must be produced entirely by the students and must be received at *Astronomy* magazine by Nov. 17, 2008.

www.astronomy.com

Autism training

Several dates remain for the Kentucky Autism Training Center's Fall Regional Workshops. The next workshop is scheduled for Oct. 22 in Berea, and several more workshops are scheduled through Nov. 11.

Contact: Emily Kirkham, elhatc02@louisville.edu, (502) 852-3597

http://louisville.edu/education/kyautismtraining/KATCs%20Fall%20Workshops%202008.pdf

'A Day on the Frontier'

Fort Boonesborough State Park will present a special school program titled "A Day on the Frontier," a living history program for schools Nov. 5-7 and 10-14. Many activities will include hands-on participation. Reservations are required; space will be limited to 250 participants per day.

Contact: Bill Farmer, ftboone@bellsouth.net, (859) 527-3131, ext. 216

Mickelson Teachers Academy

The Mickelson ExxonMobil Teachers Academy will be held in July 2009. Teachers will spend five days at the Liberty Science Center in Jersey City, N.J., deepening their understanding of mathematics and science content, building expertise in facilitating student learning through problem solving and inquiry and using links between mathematics and science that support student learning and understanding in the classroom. Applications are due by Oct. 31.

www.sendmyteacher.com/teachers_and_grown_ups.htm

Resources

MathLincs for grades 5-6

MathLincs is a collaborative project for 5th- and 6th-grade math students around the world. Students share math ideas through a variety of math projects that are organized by strands. MathLincs use a variety of technologies including blogging, videos, podcasting, Google Earth and video conferencing.

http://mathlincs2.pbwiki.com

Agriculture science kit

Teachers can purchase kits to conduct experiments, investigations and activities in their classrooms offered in the Kentucky Agriculture and Environment in the Classroom's Mobile Science Activity Center. All activities are targeted for 4th and 5th grades and have been aligned to Kentucky's Core Content for Assessment. One kit can be used for classroom demonstrations. The other kit includes enough materials for 30 students to participate in activities. More information

(Continued on page 15)

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and kit prices are online.

www.kyagr.com/marketing/ageducation/mobileactivitycenter.htm

'With Malice Toward None'

The Kentucky Repertory Theatre at Horse Cave is now booking sites for its nationwide tour of "With Malice Toward None," a multimedia production that highlights Abraham Lincoln's speeches, letters and dramatic episodes set in the context of the Civil War. School and districts with auditorium space to stage the production or access to a local performing arts center can book performances at a discounted rate Feb. 10, 2009, through March 22, 2009.

Contact: Kentucky Repertory Theatre, (800) 342-2177

Education outreach performances

The Kentucky Repertory Theatre at Horse Cave offers education outreach performances scheduled for this fall:

"Abraham Lincoln," through Nov. 1
"To Kill a Mockingbird," Oct. 3-Nov. 15
"Amadeus," Oct. 24-Nov. 15
"King Lear," Nov. 21-Dec. 4

Contact: Kentucky Repertory Theatre, (800) 342-2177

Hummel Planetarium Web site updated

The Hummel Planetarium at Eastern Kentucky University in Richmond has recently updated its Web site to include connections to Kentucky's Core Content. The Web site also has updates regarding sing-a-longs, space-science links and more about the facility, such as driving directions and how to have a birthday party at the planetarium.

www.planetarium.eku.edu/school_programs.php

Training available for online portal

Kentucky teachers can receive free training in how to use the innovative resources of Thinkfinity.org through a grant announced April 1 at the National Center for Family Literacy's National Conference on Family Literacy. Thinkfinity.org is the Verizon Foundation's comprehensive online portal to more than 55,000 educational and literacy resources for teachers, parents and students. Resources include standards-based, grade-specific, K-12 lesson plans and interactive activities provided in partnership with many of the nation's leading educational and literacy organizations.

www.thinkfinity.org

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"They should know after signing that disclosure statement," he said.

The problem with that, Whelan said, is that teachers sign so many forms when they are hired that they may not pay much attention and probably forget when they retire, anyway.

No one person or agency is responsible for making the people most affected by the WEP and GPO – mid-career professionals who decide to become teachers – aware of the provisions, said Candace Souder, program coordinator for Transition to Teaching at the Kentucky Department of Education. Transition to Teaching helps mid-career professionals and recent college graduates who have not completed a teacher-preparation program succeed as teachers in high-need, high-poverty Kentucky school districts in specific subject areas.

"I don't know if that's something that's discussed at the school level or here," said Souder, a former teacher who had not heard of the provisions. "It's never been an issue that's been brought up."

Wagoner said there's been an ongoing effort in Congress for about 10 years trying to repeal the GPO and WEP, but the issue never received a committee hearing in both the House and Senate until last year.

However, Whelan said those who want to see the provisions eliminated had better be careful, because of what would happen if they got their wish.

"Before people go and march on Washington, what Congress might say is, 'We're going to repeal them altogether, but if we do that, everybody's going to be subject to Social Security. … The thing is, yes, the WEP and GPO are bad, but mandatory coverage totally changes the dynamic of this pension system," he said.

Teaching payroll in Kentucky is roughly $3 billion, Whelan said. Social Security tax is 6.2 percent, which every employee has to pay and each employer has to match. It would cost $186 million for the state and the same amount from individuals, totaling almost $400 million.

"So that's the cost to repeal WEP and GPO," he said. "Yes, I think these rules are somewhat unfair, but we've got a pretty good deal with the retirement system here.

"We've got to be careful not to ignite the torches and the pitchforks to the degree that they say, 'We're going to line up and take 70,000 schoolteachers and drive them to Washington and march and get them to change this thing,' and take down the retirement system and mandatory coverage at the same time," Whelan said. "Social Security provides a lot of people with a little bit of benefit. It's an essential thing, and it's a big thing in this country to have this little bit of a safety net. But do you want to exchange your retirement in place of Social Security? I don't think you want to do that."

MORE INFO …

www.ssa.gov
ktrs.ky.gov
www.krta.org

Seventy percent of Kentucky public schools make AYP

Recently released data indicates that 70.9 percent — 820 — of Kentucky's 1,157 public schools made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the 2007-08 school year under the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

In 2007, 78.7 percent of schools made AYP. A rise in reading and mathematics goals likely contributed to a lower percentage of schools making AYP in 2008 than in 2007.

However, fewer schools are subject to consequences in 2008 than in 2007, with three main reasons for the drop:

- Seven schools that were eligible for Title I funding in 2007 were not eligible in 2008; only Title I schools are subject to NCLB consequences.
- Three schools were reconfigured, meaning that their AYP status was based on their districts' status.
- Thirty-five schools made AYP for two consecutive years, meaning that they are no longer subject to consequences.

AYP results are based on the Kentucky Core Content Tests' (KCCT) items in reading and mathematics. Schools are required to have specific percentages of students reaching proficiency or above in reading and mathematics each year and to meet other criteria in order to make AYP.

According to the data, 820 Kentucky public schools met 100 percent of their NCLB goals for AYP, while 337 schools did not. Of the 337 schools that did not make AYP, 212 made 80 percent or more of their goals. Statewide, 80 percent — 20— of the 25 target goals were met.

The Kentucky Board of Education adopted the approach of establishing two, three-year plateaus of performance toward the goal of 100 percent proficiency by 2014. For the 2007-08 school year, reading goals rose an average of 9.3 points, and mathematics goals rose an average of 12 points. Of Kentucky's 175 school districts in 2007-08, 103 – 58.9 percent — met 100 percent of their target goals. Of the 72 districts that did not meet all of their goals, 65 met 80 percent or more of their goals.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) refers to the minimum improvement required of each school and district over the course of one year. It is measured at the school and district levels by measuring growth in the percentage of students scoring proficient or above in reading and mathematics; assessing improvement on the "other academic indicator"; and testing at least 95 percent of enrolled students and student populations of sufficient size.

MORE INFO …

www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Administrative+Resources/Testing+and+Reporting+/Reports/No+Child+Left+Behind+Reports/

Changed your address? Let us know

If you don't want to miss an issue of *Kentucky Teacher,* please take a few moments to learn how to let us know when your address changes.

Kentucky Teacher receives mailing addresses for all active Kentucky certified classroom teachers and administrators from the Kentucky Teachers' Retirement System. If you are a certified employee of a Kentucky public school, you can change your mailing information in one of two ways:

- Complete a change of address form that can be downloaded from the retirement system's Web site at http://ktrs.ky.gov/01_active_members/B_change_name.htm.
- Submit a written request that includes your name, old address, new address, Social Security number and your signature.

Mail the form or your written request to:
Kentucky Teachers' Retirement System
ATTN: Tammy Brown
479 Versailles Rd.
Frankfort, KY 40601

If you are not a current teacher or administrator, e-mail your change of address to kyteacher@education.ky.gov or by mail to:
Kentucky Teacher
612 Capital Plaza Tower
500 Mero St.
Frankfort, KY 40601

Archery still on the mark in Kentucky

By Susan Riddell
susan.riddell@education.ky.gov

At Boyd County Middle School, Taylor Stevens eyes the target with a steady hand.

At Elliott County High School, sophomore Kendra Harper takes aim and shoots.

Like many other Kentucky students, Stevens and Harper participate in archery, an extracurricular school activity that has come a long way the last several years.

In 2002, 22 pilot schools started archery programs. What's taken place since then comes as a complete surprise to Jennie Richardson, state coordinator for the archery program and a former classroom teacher who used archery as a mathematics teaching tool.

"(Archery programs) are in more than 750 schools in Kentucky," she said. "We've never slowed down. We hoped that, in the lifetime of our program, we would be able to get into 120 schools in our state. We were in 120 schools within the first 13 months of the program. We've been averaging about 120 new schools per year. We're so happy with the way things have turned out."

Three countries and 46 states have schools competing in archery. In Kentucky, its popularity is spread out across the state.

"In the western part of the state, they already have large numbers participating in school archery leagues and tournaments. In the hills of eastern Kentucky, archery is on the rise," said Denise Boggs, Region 12 coordinator and Isonville Elementary (Elliott County) coach. "Two years ago at the regional tournament, we had 140 archers participate from three counties. This past year, our Region 12 Tournament consisted of six counties with 275 young archers."

According to Richardson, archery is different from other school sports in that everyone can do it and see success no matter their limitations.

"It's not a ball sport, and it allows all students regardless of their athletic abilities to participate and have a great level of achievement," Richardson said. "Students in wheelchairs, and those with other disabilities, can shoot archery. We have visually impaired students, hearing impaired students or students missing a limb shooting archery.

"Our schools have found that archery levels the playing field," Richardson added. "You don't have to be an athlete. You can be the most unathletic person in the school and stand there with a bow and arrow and be the champion that day or week. With this, our schools are seeing an increase of self-esteem, peer acceptance, behavior and attendance."

All ages are competing as well. Kentucky's archery program has three levels: high school, middle school and an elementary level for students in grades 4 and 5. This is especially critical to smaller districts that need those numbers to compete against larger districts.

"Elliott County may be small in size but its archery program has grown in numbers over the past couple of years," said Boggs, whose Isonville team finished 12th nationally last May. The high school team has also performed well, led by Harper, who finished third nationally last year in the high school division for females.

"In such a short time," Boggs said, "Elliott County's small schools have even become very competitive with the much larger schools from across the state."

Aside from actual victories, being competitive on the state and national levels means participation numbers stay high. Programs in smaller districts like Elliott County can then go after better facilities when it's clear they are on solid footing.

Elliott County schools now have a uniquely designed indoor archery range planned to adhere to NASP (National Archery in the Schools Program) range set-up, according to Boggs.

Photos by Amy Wallot

Payneville Elementary (Meade County) 6th-grade student Erica Kessinger draws back a bow during the Meade County Fair on July 23. With the exception of one school, all of the schools in Meade County have archery programs for students.

Success at the archery range is also paying off for students as they head to college. Eight national tournament competitors were awarded scholarships for their May performances, with five of those students coming from Kentucky schools.

While Richardson is proud of the growth of archery in Kentucky, she is also proud that its effects are apparent back in the classroom.

"In a way, archery, not to mention physical education, has found its way into all of the curriculum and even in after-school programs," Richardson said. "What we have seen are extra lesson plans on science, physics, math and language arts that are archery-related. Language arts teachers tell me some of their best writing pieces come from students who are writing about archery. We have books that have been added to the AR (Accelerated Reader) program about archery. Students will read those to enhance their archery skills, and it's helping with reading also.

"Kids who would never stay after school before want to stay after school now to participate in archery," Richardson added.

Archery students in Elliott County must maintain a C average with strong attendance and behavior to be allowed to participate.

"I have seen students who have never participated in any type of sport and even dread going to physical education class change positively over a short period of time," Boggs said. "I have taught shy, quiet, even withdrawn students in class who suddenly, after a few archery classes, start getting involved in projects and classroom discussions.

"Just knowing that their grade is important for them to participate in the archery class, the students have become more responsible for their grades," Boggs added. "The student who once sat quietly in the back of the room, pretending to do his work and afraid to ask questions, is now raising his hand for help in order to maintain acceptable grades."

Editor's note: The following letter was written by Boyd County Middle School archery coach Sheri Schatz about student Taylor Stevens.

Taylor Stevens is one of my many archery students who makes me proud each day. Taylor practices with the team six days a week and gives 100 percent. He is depressed on snow days and elated when I sneak in extra practices.

His story needs to be told.

Taylor is a 12-year-old boy who was born 13 weeks early. He weighed 2 pounds, 2 ounces at birth and was in neonatal intensive care unit for three months. He had a brain bleed that caused his cerebral palsy. This affects his legs and balance.

Doctors predicted his condition would leave him in a wheelchair. He beat the odds. No wheelchair. He used braces until the age of 10, but now those are gone, too.

Taylor tried baseball and karate, but soon realized he couldn't keep up with the other children because of his own limitations. This was very frustrating for him. He lost self-confidence. In past years, gym class became something he wanted to avoid.

Photo Submitted

Archery coach Sheri Schatz and her archery student Taylor Stevens, both of Boyd County Middle.

Then Taylor came to Boyd County Middle School, and he approached me about joining the archery team. He soon found that his limitations disappeared. He could compete and his cerebral palsy would have no influence on his performance. He is an awesome shooter!

NASP has had a tremendous effect on Taylor. Taylor has had a tremendous effect on me. Thank you to the National Archery in the Schools Program.

Sheri Schatz
Boyd County Middle School archery coach

MORE INFO…

Jennie Richardson, NASP Archery Coordinator for Kentucky, (606) 549-9918, rich4641@accesshsd.net

http://fw.ky.gov/navigation.asp?cid=577&NavPath=C100C366&lid=649

www.archeryintheschools.org