

Education

LCHS Auditorium to receive further upgrades

BY VICTORIA COX
EDITOR

Upgrades will continue at LaRue County High School following the Board of Education's approval to advertise bidding for two separate projects at the Tuesday, Feb. 20 meeting.

The first project will build upon the recently finished upgrades to the Auditorium. Previously untouched for nearly 30 years, the room now boasts new and improved seating, carpeting and staging. The next phase includes the labor and equipment to install audio, house lighting and projection.

The second project will be more visible to the community, as it includes having the cracks repaired, a seal coat applied and restriped to the high school parking lots.

Both bid advertisements may be found on page B6 of today's edition.

In other business, the board received a Fiscal Agent Report from Chip Sutherland, Managing Director at Baird, an international financial services firm. Sutherland informed that the district has roughly \$14 million in bonding capacity. He noted approximately \$12 million is lacking to fulfill the District Facility Plan, an executive summary of construction priorities, and that its amounts are not up to date with interest and pricing rates.

When asked by board mem-

bers how they can increase their bonding capacity, Sutherland informed them they are "doing all they can," and will not see an increase unless the local tax rate is expanded; their present funds only allow for the maintenance of what is currently in place.

Assistant Superintendent Amanda Reed announced that the district had once again participated in the Education Recovery Scorecard. The first opportunity to compare learning loss and ensuing recovery at the district level across the country, it was discovered last year that the average student in grades three through eight had lost the equivalent of half a grade level in math achievement and a third of a grade level in reading. The first full year of post-pandemic recovery is described in the latest report.

Reading performance is a strength of LaRue County Schools, both pre- and post-pandemic. Beginning with students in grades three through eight, on average, testing 0.5 higher than their grade level equivalent, the number dropped to those same students being only 0.14 higher in 2022. Within one year, however, the performance has increased by 0.29 points, to a remaining loss of only 0.06 grade-level equivalents. The school system began and continues to remain at a higher performance equivalent than Kentucky and districts in KY with

similar socioeconomic status, demographics and size.

Math performance, on the other hand, has a larger hill to climb. In 2019, students performed at -0.10 lower than their grade level. A -0.44 drop was seen between 2019 and 2022, and a 0.14 increase was seen in 2022-23; this still leaves students testing at -0.31 lower than their grade level equivalent. Although the performance has not rebounded to pre-pandemic amounts, it is once again notable that LaRue began and remains at a higher equivalent than KY and its similar districts.

Information about the recovery scorecard and the position of all KY districts are available at educationrecovery.org.

The 2023-24 ExCEL and FRED Award nominees were also announced at Tuesday's meeting.

A partnership between WHAS11, LG&E and KU, the ExCEL award seeks to honor a teacher from each local school district who exemplifies "teaching excellence using innovation, excitement, and enthusiasm in their teaching methodology; who maintain meaningful personal relationships with students, parents, colleagues and community members; are role models of professionalism and citizenry; and are personally committed to continued professional development and

enhancement." Nominees are considered from Abraham Lincoln Elementary, Hodgenville Elementary, LaRue County Middle and LaRue County High Schools. The 2022-23 winner was Brandi Piper with LCMS.

The 2023-24 candidates are Ben Schell, Tara Holbert, Meredith Richardson and Madison Johnson.

Inspired by well-known author Mark Sanborn, and presented by the Kentucky Association of School Administrators, the prestigious FRED Award honors a classified (support) staff who "chooses to make a positive difference each day, has a heart for people, changes ordinary moments into memorable ones and leads by example." The 2023 winner was Marty Smith.

The 2023-24 candidates are Mary Cecil (ALES), Marie Richardson (HES), Shawn McCoy (LCMS), Wendi Edwards (LCMS), Donna Przybylek (Preschool of College Street), Paul Cottrell (Department of Student Transportation), Micheal Jones (Dept. of Facilities Maintenance), Elizabeth Gross (Dept. of Technology), Eva Sims (Dept. of Food and Nutrition), Ashley Gardner (Central Office) and Kathy Ross (Community Volunteer).

The ExCEL and FRED Award winners are expected to be announced at the beginning of March.

Two students, Faith Grimes

and Alec Silva, were also recognized for receiving the Kentucky School Board Association's 2023-24 Career and Technical Education Student Grants.

Other actions approved at the meeting include:

- A proposal for a contract with Trane, which proposes to upgrade the existing Building Control Unit with new Trane WEB-based System Controller at ALES. By leveraging existing equipment, BAS R'newal provides a proactive migration plan to improve the functionality and reliability of an aging system that is no longer supported/manufactured today and is more cost-effective than a comprehensive system replacement. Total project cost is \$31,340 with a completion date of July 31;
- Acceptance of a bid from C&T Design and Equipment for \$98,998.42 to purchase new cafeteria tables for POCS and LCMS. School Nutrition Funds will be utilized for the purchase;
- Request to send out the Request for Proposal for new cafeteria tables for ALES and HES;
- Acceptance of a \$1,000 donation from River Brook Realty to support the ExCEL Teacher of the Year program.

The next meeting of the LaRue County Board of Education will be at 6 p.m. on Monday, Mar. 18 in the LCMS Cafeteria.

Elementary students gain skills through collaborative gardening

BY SHELBY ROGERS

One group of elementary school students is partnering with high schoolers to sow the seeds of knowledge.

Through hands-on experience and collaboration, Jennifer Williams's Hodgenville Elementary School students are discovering the joys of nurturing life from seed to harvest, while also gaining invaluable lessons in patience, responsibility, and environmental stewardship.

"Students will be visiting the greenhouse at the LCMS and learning about different gardening systems. They will be coming up with questions and submit them to the high school students and raise a plant with their help,"

Williams said. "[They'll be] communicating with others besides their peers."

This project is part of the Profile of a Learner initiative, the district-wide plan to help bring real-world applications of subjects to students. Learner Profiles are heavily supported through Project-Based Learning (PBL). PBL is a research-backed way to give students hands-on experience regarding subjects. The goal of each PBL activity is to immerse students in what they're learning while also improving skills they'll need beyond the classroom.

Williams noted that this gardening project touches on the Collaborative Communicator, Resilient

Problem Solver, and Engaged Citizen goals of the Learner Profile.

"This [project] will help them have better communication skills with others besides their peers and they will be better at resiliently solving problems," she said.

Williams is right, gardening has been shown to have incredible benefits for students. It's a fantastic way to get hands-on with nature and learn about plants, ecosystems, and how things grow.

Gardening isn't just a great way to boost the students' time outdoors. It provides a host of mental benefits. Gardening offers relaxation to people of all ages, and students get to learn about botany in a space that

might be more calming to them than a typical classroom.

Research indicates

that gardening can actually improve focus and attention span in developing minds. It also

helps them learn about patience and persistence, which are critical for any student.

Superintendent search begins

BY VICTORIA COX
EDITOR

The search for the next LaRue County Schools Superintendent is officially underway.

The Superintendent Screening Committee and the LaRue County Board of Education met for their first joint meeting on Wednesday, Mar. 21 to outline the search process. Agenda items included Tim Eaton, Kentucky School Board Association Superintendent Search Consultant, explaining the roles, responsibilities and process of the screening committee.

Per KRS 160.352, the committee shall be composed of two teachers, one board member, one principal, one parent and one classified employee. The preceding composition may not be changed, unless the district has 8% or more minority enrollment and a minority is not represented among the six above, in which case a minority parent shall be chosen.

The Screening Committee for the 2024 LCS Superintendent Search includes teachers Todd Rogers and Jennifer Bernard, board member Joanna Hinton, parent Natalie Davis and classified employee Marsha Duncan. In place of a principal, D. W. Cruse has been chosen to represent the minority.

A statistical breakdown of the superintendent applications received by the district was also discussed at the meeting. With a deadline of Feb. 12 to apply, KSBA received 24 applicants for the position. All candidates currently reside

in the state of Kentucky, with 21 males and three females. Although no specification information, such as names or current locations of employment, was revealed, the following information was made public:

- 1 current superintendent
- 10 work for central office
- 6 current principals
- 3 from educational organizations
- 2 teachers
- 2 retired/others

Candidate criteria set by the Board includes an innovative and motivational leader with a demonstrated record of improving student achievement and an instructional leader who is committed to college and career readiness that has previous administrative experience. The candidate must have the ability to effectively communicate with staff and the community to achieve district goals; strong morals and ethics; and knowledge of budgeting, school finance, buildings and grounds, and the Kentucky Education System.

Hinton said the board and committee are pleased with the number of applicants, with original expectations of less than half of those received. The committee is now tasked with vetting the candidates and looking for the best fit for LaRue County, and will ultimately narrow the field down to three to five candidates to recommend to the board.

The next committee meeting is scheduled at 5 p.m. on Monday, Mar. 11 at LaRue County Central Office.

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