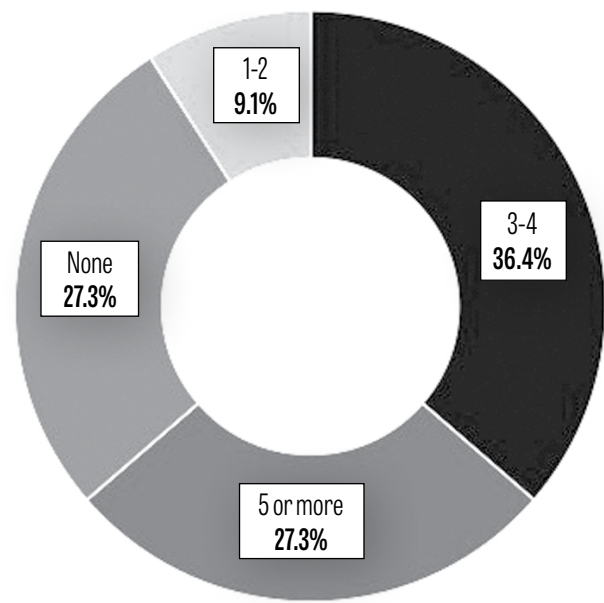


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EDITORIAL

# Spellapalooza brings community together like no other fundraiser

For nearly 15 years, the Thorn Hill Education Center's largest fundraiser has been spelled "S-P-E-L-L-A-P-A-L-O-O-Z-A" and with this year's event less than two months away, registration for teams of three spellers each are under way.

The 2024 Spellapalooza raised a record \$16,000 — the largest in the event's history — and organizers are hoping to eclipse that total this year.

Approximately 12-15 committee members — led by chair Christina Smith who took over after long-time chair Peg Harmon recently stepped down — plan the annual event. Other members of the committee include Mary Lynn Collins, Diane Dominick, Caroline Collins, Harmon, Diana Peters, Hollis Rosenstein, Lane Lewis, Andrew Kent, Sherry Sebastian, Jean Ruark, Kelley Anderson, Taisha Chandler and the Thorn Hill Education Center staff.

Spellapalooza is much more than a spelling bee. A silent auction, live auction, bake sale and beverage bar are held during the event and members of the Kiwanis Club grill hamburgers and hot dogs for dinner before Spellapalooza begins.

"This bee, since day one, is so community oriented. It's a night where you see families, you see churches, you see businesses, nonprofits. They all come together to raise this money for adult education," Collins, the Bee Keeper of the event, said.

"We have judges. You can't have a bee without a judge, so we always get real judges. We try to get two real judges. We've probably had every judge in this community one time or another. They are great fans of Spellapalooza. Several have told me how much they support Thorn Hill Education."

Teams consist of three spellers and are encouraged to have one alternate. The spelling bee, which has quickly become a community favorite, normally draws 17 or 18 teams, but can only accommodate 20 total teams. One team that will be returning is defending champion, Together Frankfort, who were the Notorious R Bee Gs and won the traveling trophy in 2024.

The cost is \$300 per team and the registration deadline is July 18. To register, call Thorn Hill Education Center at 502-875-1481. Admission is free and we encourage our readers to attend the annual and support this family-friendly fundraising event.

# 'In open records, open meetings, more is more'

On May 22, members of the Jefferson County Public Schools' Board of Education cast their final vote for a new superintendent. The selection process offered the board an opportunity to rebuild bridges between itself and the community through maximum transparency and inclusion — up to, including, and after the moment board members cast their votes.

It was a missed opportunity. Board members engaged in conduct so secretive that the Courier Journal promptly filed an open meetings complaint against them. The Courier complained that the board reached a decision or consensus during a closed session to hire the new superintendent, conducted a sham vote in open session to ratify the decision made during closed session, and withheld the identity of the successful candidate, refusing to release his name until after contract negotiations were concluded.

The public learned his name not through official channels but from a loose lipped legislator.

How the board will refute the Courier's allegations is not yet known — its three business day statutory deadline for response has not expired. It is likely to advance the same arguments advanced by Mayor Craig Greenberg several months ago in selecting a new chief of police. Kentucky's open records and open meetings laws, the argument goes, require secrecy to protect the privacy of the finalists.

But this is a convenient misconception.

The Kentucky Open Records and Open Meeting Laws establish the floor. An agency cannot conduct public business beneath that statutory minimum.

The laws do not establish a ceiling. Agencies may exceed the statutory minimums in the interest of promoting open (better) government.

For example, the open meet-

ings law requires that in order to minimally satisfy the meeting minutes requirement an agency must keep "an accurate record of votes and actions" taken in open session. But an agency is free to take copious notes of both closed and open sessions. It may disclose the minutes of the closed session upon request — though under longstanding interpretation, the open records law does not require it.

As long as it satisfied the minimum legal requirements, no public agency has ever been penalized for liberally implementing these laws to enhance the public's right to know — doing more than the law narrowly requires to promote the clearest and best understanding of how policies are formed and decisions are made.

In the world of open records and open meetings, more is more.

Unfortunately, many public agency attorneys steer their clients toward the safest and most conservative (least open) course the laws allow. The prospect of liability may concern them. They may harbor ill-will toward the laws. Or the the attorneys, and the agencies they serve, may be mired in outdated thinking or prefer to operate on auto-pilot to maintain the status quo.

Who can forget Mayor Greenberg's claim that he was constrained by the open records and open meetings laws from conducting a more inclusive and transparent search for his first chief of police?

Separately, emails obtained by the Courier not long ago revealed that former members of the University of Louisville Board of Trustees violated the open meetings laws — even as they publicly professed their commitment to open government — when

they orchestrated the departure, under duress, of immediate past President Kim Schatzel and her replacement with current President Gerry Bradley.

Now, the JCPS Board of Education finds itself in legal hot water. A school district that has witnessed years of turmoil; that has a legislative target on its back; and that serves a community which demands truth and candor, chose the course of lesser openness. Each finalist's name and background was known — a significant fact that cuts both way in light of dubious privacy claims asserted on their behalf. And the legal theories on which secrecy arguments are based — that secret searches yield better outcomes — were long ago discredited.

Each of these public agencies had the opportunity to do more to advance the public's rights to know, but chose to do the minimum and, in some instances, less than the law requires, prompting the Courier's lawsuits against them. Ultimately, the courts will decide if their conduct was illegal.

Every public agency, agency counsel and agency member would do well to remember that there is a great expanse between the floor and the ceiling: what a public agency must do to adhere to the letter of the open records and open meetings laws and what a public agency may do, in keeping with the spirit and the letter of the laws, to build public trust through even greater openness than Kentucky's law requires.

*Amye Bensenhaver is a retired assistant attorney general who authored open records and open meetings decisions in that office for 25 years. She is co-founder and co-director of the Kentucky Open Government Coalition along with Jennifer P. Brown, former editor of the Kentucky New Era and currently Hoptown Chronicle editor. She can be reached at [missbhaver@gmail.com](mailto:missbhaver@gmail.com).*

## LETTERS

### ONCE-IN-A-GENERATION DECISION

Dear editor,

Time moves fast for everyone so it is easy to forget a decision affecting all of us is unfolding on U.S. 127. The proposed industrial park is not what the community wanted in surveys, public forums and in the comprehensive plan process. In fact, this development conflicts with almost every goal and objective written with public input and approved by public officials.

We can make a decision to protect one of the key entrances to our county and some of the best farmland we have, or we can choose to follow an idea which originated from a few people and grew into the only idea to pursue.

Everyone wants our county to prosper. But the use of taxpayer dollars to destroy farmland instead of following the comprehensive plan the public provided input on will, unfortunately, be an irreversible decision affecting generations to come. Please don't forget this is happening to our community. Let our city and county officials know this is not the best decision for the future of Franklin County.

Carla Hawkins  
Frankfort

### WEAR ORANGE THIS WEEKEND IN HONOR OF GUN VIOLENCE VICTIMS

Dear editor,

Fifteen-year-old Hadiya Pendleton was shot and killed in Chicago one week after performing as a majorette in President Obama's second Inaugural parade. Hadiya's friends spoke of her infectious spirit at her funeral and wore her favorite color, orange, in her honor. Since then, orange has been the color of the gun violence prevention movement.

Wearing orange is a way to honor the more than 130 people shot and killed every day in the U.S. Gun violence is the number one killer of children and teens in Kentucky; suicide the leading cause of gun-related deaths. These facts should give us all pause, and the majority of citizens in the U.S. would like to see something done to address this issue. Safely storing guns and making sure they are not easily accessible to children or people experiencing a mental health crisis would be a great way to address the issue of gun violence.

June 7-8 is Wear Orange Weekend, and on Saturday, Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America will have a BeSmart table at Capitol View Park from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. to share information about gun safety.

Judy Goddard  
Frankfort

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