

EPSB outlines goals and legislative priorities

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NEWSPAPERS

Members of the Kentucky Education Professional Standards Board approved a list of legislative priorities and goals for the upcoming year during their meeting on Dec. 17, according to a statement from the Kentucky Department of Education.

Cassie Trueblood, policy advisor in the Kentucky Department of Education Office of Educator Licensure and Effectiveness and lead counsel for EPSB, said the goals mirror priorities the Kentucky Board of Education approved in October. Additional legislative goals include funding for teacher mentoring and induction programs, financial incentives for new and existing educators, and statutory cleanup.

She said the goals for EPSB also prioritize updating

the EPSB website to improve communication with education partners, stakeholders and the public.

Following the EPSB's approval, Trueblood said KDE will now work on a strategic plan with action items related to their priorities for consideration during the EPSB's meeting in February.

Early literacy and numeracy assessments

EPSB members voted to approve recommendations by the Early Literacy Cohort regarding Elementary and Early Childhood Education Praxis requirements.

Senate Bill 9 (2022), also known as the Read to Succeed Act, amended KRS 164.306 and requires EPSB to develop and maintain a list of approved teacher preparation tests for the effective evaluation of a potential educator's reading instruction knowledge and skills. All new

teachers seeking certification must pass an approved teacher preparation test that includes evaluation of reading instruction knowledge and skills.

The Early Literacy Cohort, made up of college and university education program representatives, makes recommendations on the assessment of reading instruction knowledge and skill.

Winn Wheeler, assistant professor of early literacy at Bellarmine University, is a member of the Early Literacy Cohort. She said the cohort recommended moving to the Elementary Education: Multiple Subjects test (Praxis 7001) and giving students a year with no cut scores to help those with different curricula within their literacy coursework. The cohort also recommended moving to a multi-state standard setting cut score for the 2025-2026 school year.

Melissa Diebel, an educa-

tion academic program manager with KDE, said this recommendation changes what the cohort originally recommended during the 2023-2024 school year, which was to add the Teaching Reading: Elementary test (Praxis 5205) to the current Praxis Elementary Education: Multiple Subjects test (Praxis 5001). "However, the additional test was found to be a challenge due to cost and time involved in taking the assessment," she said.

EPSB also approved recommendations from the Numeracy Cohort on rubrics for the evaluation of mathematics educators.

House Bill 162, also known as the Kentucky Numeracy Counts Act, created KRS 164.3061 and requires EPSB to develop and maintain a list of approved teacher preparation assessments for effective mathematics instruction. The legislation also tasks EPSB with developing an evaluation rubric for

observing teacher candidates with a focus on mathematics content and knowledge.

KDE created a Numeracy Cohort to make recommendations in a similar fashion to the Early Literacy Cohort.

Jennifer Fraley, KDE's director of mathematics education, said the cohort recommended four rubrics to be used in a pilot program with educator preparation programs: the Kentucky Mathematics Innovation Tool, the Kentucky Instructional Practice Guide, the New Teacher Project Math Observation Protocol and the Mathematics Classroom Observational Protocol for Practices.

Fraley said the pilot program will begin in the spring of 2025. Data and observations collected from the pilot program will be given to the EPSB for further discussion following the spring semester.

CHALLENGES

Continued From Page 1A

in. For the most part, when we have a fire, we have every paid guy and five to 10 volunteers."

Hazard's fire department is better staffed than many neighboring volunteer departments, Keith said.

"We're a lot more fortunate than a lot of volunteer departments because when they get a fire, you're

looking at four to five dedicated guys," he said. "They have to have 13 guys including the chief by statute, so you're looking at five to eight dedicated guys actually answering the calls."

The financial strain is another critical challenge. Volunteer departments receive approximately \$25,000 annually from state and county funds combined, an amount that Keith says doesn't stretch

far in today's economy.

"If we get a bigger fire out in the county, it will take three departments to make it work," Keith said. "We're going out into the county a little more than we used to now. Volunteer departments are struggling. The state aid they get can only be spent on certain things. They've got to do some kind of fundraising to make it. There's a lot of strain. The county also gives quarter-

ly amounts. The coal severance tax is not available now, so the county can't give as much money as they used to."

For the Hazard Fire Department, which operates on a budget of over \$1 million annually, most of the funds are allocated to upkeep and payroll.

"It takes a lot of that to pay and insure everyone," Keith said. "The upkeep of our two buildings and our trucks, which are getting some age on them, it can get costly very quickly. Just a standard pumper fire truck is \$600,000 now. It takes about three years to get one now. Once you call and order a truck, the price of materials goes up in price the entire three years."

Keith predicts that many volunteer departments in some areas will need to merge to survive.

"I think a lot of volunteer departments will start merging," he said. "I think you'll see three departments end up having to merge together to keep something, or possibly even fade away. We can't have that, especially for places far out in the county. People need to be out there to help until backup can get there. It can be life or death sometimes."

Keith said there are

financial repercussions of losing fire departments.

"You can't get homeowners insurance without a fire department," he said. "If you do, it's going to be outrageous. The better the rating the department has, the better the rate the insurance will be. So it can affect the local economy. If we weren't here, businesses couldn't afford to be here. The better the equipment we have and the better manned the department is, it all plays into order with the rest of the surrounding area. Our department is evaluated on upkeep, equipment, your water supply, your manpower and they calculate all of that up and give you a rating. We're a three. A lot of volunteer departments are a five or six."

Keith said the extensive training required for firefighters can be a barrier for new recruits.

"It's a privilege to be a volunteer firefighter and not to be taken for granted," he said. "It's demanding and takes a lot of work to get that training. A lot of evenings and weekends. Volunteer guys need 115-hour certification with 20 hours per year to stay certified. Paid guys have to have 300 hours and then 100 a year to keep their certification."

Recruiting new volunteers has been a persistent challenge, particularly among younger generations.

"There's not very much interest right now," Keith said. "We reach out and do career days, and every now and then we will get one, but it's not often. I understand why people aren't offering to volunteer as much as in the past because it takes so much to make a living now. A husband and wife have to do everything they can to make a living today. By the time they're done with their day-to-day schedule, especially those with kids, they don't have much time left."

Despite the hurdles, Keith remains optimistic about the department's mission and the dedication of those who serve.

"All in all, we're doing pretty good," he said. "The city helps us out with equipment, and we're doing a lot better than many other departments out there. This is not just a regional problem, this is a national problem. It's about \$5,000 to outfit each firefighter, so even if you do have people who want to join, you have to be able to afford the gear to grow. It's a double-edged sword."



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