

Sharp Middle aces safety assessment exam

By **Burton Cole**

BUTLER—The School Safety Assessment for Sharp Middle School came back as outstanding, Superintendent Joe Buerkle said during last week's monthly Pendleton County Schools Board of Education meeting.

"I've been involved in a lot of safety assessments over the last 20 years, and I've never seen one as good as this," the superintendent told board members.

The district invited the Kentucky Center for School Safety to spend a day at Sharp. The inspectors were there before the school days started and stayed until it was over, watching the daily routine, interviewing staff, students and parents, and inspecting the grounds and buildings.

The critiques in the report show just how hard the safety assessors had to work to find areas of concern, Buerkle said. The assessment listed 13 commendations against four areas of concern, he said. The concerns were relatively minor and have already been fixed, he said.

Among commendations for promoting a sense

of safety is that office staff requires proper ID for entry into the building even when they know they person; that student support services such as a nurse, counselors and school resource officers (police officers) are present; that there is a lack of behavioral problems; and that no drugs, guns or alcohol were detected or reported.

Also, there had been a noticeable decrease in vaping; that safety drills were conducted regularly; and that communication was strong between staff, students and parents, the report noted.

A sense of safety promotes an environment of learning, the report noted.

One of the student comments recorded was, "Nobody is really worried about anything happening."

Areas of concern included a lack of signs directing car and bus traffic; that signs showing escape routes in case of emergency were posted in different areas of various classrooms; that a storage closet was cluttered; and that items stored on top of some cabinets were too close to the ceiling.

"Everything on that list

has been addressed except for painting outside (and that's because of winter weather)," Buerkle said.

In other business, the board:

- Acknowledged middle school students James Kirst and Brock Helton, who had their artwork showcased in the 2025 Student Traveling Exhibition, sponsored by Arts for All Kentucky.

- Approved a draft budget of more than \$20 million for the 2025-26 school year.

While that's twice as much as the funding that will be available for the general operating fund, the draft budget is more of a "wish list" than a budget based in reality.

The draft budget includes step pay increases for employees, "and all needs requested, as if it can all be done at once, which is not reality," Buerkle said.

Commonwealth law mandates that school districts produce a draft budget by Jan. 30, the superintendent said. All departments submit what they would like to do in the next school year, from new equipment to building repairs, if money wasn't a consideration.



Two Sharp Middle School students were recognized by the Pendleton County Schools Board of Education last week for having their artwork showcased in the 2025 Student Traveling Exhibition, sponsored by Arts for All Kentucky. From left are board members Derek Brown, Amber Beebe, Laura Schack and Cheryl Griffin, and student artists James Kirst and Brock Helton. Photo by Burton Cole.

This year, the "wish list" total showed a \$10.4 million general fund deficit. Last January, that draft budget came out to a \$10.7 million deficit, "so we're getting better at it," Buerkle quipped.

The money available for the general operating fund usually is around \$10 million.

A tentative budget based on projected revenue will be drawn up by May, and

in September, the board will be presented the working balanced budget, he said.

- The superintendent presented board members with Pendleton County jackets as a token of appreciation for the work the board has done in the past year. "I can't do this without a strong board," Buerkle said.

Board President Cheryl Griffin said, "With every

phone call we get, we learn something new. Another thing that makes me super proud to be on this board is there's no gray," she said with a nod toward Buerkle's leadership. "If it's right, it's right."

- Re-elected Griffin as board president, and Laura Schack as vice president for 2025.

- Adjourned into closed session for the Buerkle's job evaluation.

Butler City Council talks removal of snow piled along roadways

By **Nila Harris**

BUTLER — Snow removal has been the priority for the City of Butler the past two weeks following the extreme amount of snow received in the community.

Mayor Mason Taylor instructed the maintenance department prior to the snow to make sure that all equipment was running and ready to go. Unfortunately, numerous issues occurred in addition to the 8-plus inches of snow dumped on the town.

The brakes went out on the city truck, a hydraulic pump went down, the backhoe battery is dead and needs new tires, and there was no salt in the spreader.

Pile that on top of running out of salt, the heat going out in the fire house, and the hot water heater needing to be replaced, caused a very chaotic couple of weeks.

Councilwoman Alice Smith was concerned about

driveways being blocked and mounds of snow.

The mayor explained that due to cars being parked on the street, and the large amount of unprecedented snow, these things happen.

But out of the turmoil, good things abounded. The streets got plowed, people (for the most part) seemed to be appreciative, neighbors were seen helping neighbors and Northern Pendleton Fire Department and the Butler Police Department were able to keep the city running.

The mayor had added additional officers during the snow event. He informed council that staff meetings would be held to address concerns that came up because of the snowstorm.

The fire report was given by NPFDF firefighter Tyler Trumble, who said there were 19 calls, including three to River Valley Nursing Home, with two

of these being false alarms, and there were 14 EMS calls.

Butler police Chief reported 89 calls including two injury accidents, three fire assists, two squad, two vacation checks and 71 business checks. He said that the Christmas Parade went well, despite the onset of rain during the event.

Mary McDowell as recreation director told of the winners of the Christmas home decorating contest: first place, Patricia Closson; second, Crystal and Ronnie Owens; and third, Dwayne Hale.

OTHER BUSINESS

- A first reading was held for Ordinance 450, a snow emergency plan outlining important routes, accessing the firehouse, establishing procedures for announcements during a snow emergency and making sure that vehicles are not parked on streets when roads need to be plowed.

- An auditor for the city has still not been found.

"We're one of 32 cities who couldn't find an auditor, which makes all of the cities out of compliance," the mayor said.

He said that Chris Courtney, associate director of the Northern Kentucky Area Development District, will come to council meeting to talk with council about the auditor issue and other issues facing small towns and what resources are available.

- A booklet featuring various grants available was given to the council. The mayor is looking at possible grants available for sewer projects.

- A motion was passed by the council regarding a request for qualifications for engineering services since the city's current engineer, Mark Stevens from Kentucky Engineering Group, will be taking another job. A public notice will be posted.

- Councilwoman Bonita Bonar praised NPFDF for their service to the community, especially when her mother needed their service for what the Bonars thought was a possible gas leak.

"They were gracious and accommodating and gave us peace of mind (when they solved the problem)."

Councilman Gerald McElfresh also praised the department's service.

- Bonar brought up a concern by a resident about an overabundance of garbage behind Front Gate Nursing Home. Further investigation into this problem will be addressed.

- McElfresh expressed concerns about South Street, with additional signage needed for through traffic, and CSX railroad leaving abandoned railroad ties, silver gondolas and spikes. He gave 800-232-0144, option 2, as the number to call for people to report the mess.

Councilwoman Pat Taylor stated that she didn't think the city "should be their (the railroad's) trash can."

- McElfresh asked for a key to the community center and told that he would monitor the building to make sure lights are off, and ready it prior to a rental.

- In the mayor's State of the City address, he stated that they have a clear path forward, have made tremendous strides, generated more revenue without raising taxes and changed how they do utility rates so that non-city residents/businesses pay their fair share.

He said that his goal is to write more grants, continue to provide quality emergency services, shore up relationships with other cities, and generate additional revenue.

He said that he spoke with Falmouth Mayor Luke Price about getting salt from Falmouth should Butler run out.

FBI office recruiting

LOUISVILLE — The FBI Louisville Field Office will host a special agent recruitment event 5 p.m. Thursday.

Attendees will meet with current FBI special agents and learn about qualifications and the application process.

To apply, candidates should contact louisvilleapplicants@fbi.gov, or visit www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/louisville/recruitment for more information.

Attendance will be limited to guarantee personalized attention, so applicants should apply now to secure an invitation.

Special agent applicants must meet the following:

- Be at least 23 years of age and apply before your 36th birthday (exceptions for military and prior federal law enforcement experience may apply)
- Possess a bachelor's degree and at least two years of full-time professional work experience, or have an advanced degree and at least one year of full-time professional work experience.
- Have a valid U.S. driver's license.
- Meet physical fitness requirements.

Direct questions to louisvilleapplicants@fbi.gov and follow @FBILouisville for general information.

◀◀ rewind the damage.

Austin Hill knows a thing or two about sports. As an athletic trainer at Harrison Memorial Hospital, he's seen his fair share of injuries. But what happens when the trainer himself needs medical attention for a meniscal tear in his knee? He calls in the Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine team at HMH.

Orthopaedic surgeon Dr. Jason Hunt surgically repaired Austin's knee. Physician assistants Abigail Guy, PA-C and Michael Wiles, PA-C treated Austin while his knee healed. And, our team of physical therapists developed a treatment plan to get Austin up, walking and back to what he does best — training athletes.

Best of all, we offer cutting-edge sports medicine and orthopaedic care right in your community. Don't put off that knee pain that's been limiting your quality of life. Learn more at www.harrisonmemhosp.com, or call us today at (859) 234-1707.

