

SEBREE BANNER



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PAISLEY COOPER WAS recently named a finalist in RiverValley Behavioral Health's 2025 Youth Mental Health Art contest. On June 19, she was recognized for her accomplishment at a gathering held by the agency in Owensboro. Paisley is the daughter of Jared Cooper and Emily Cooper; she is a student at Dixon Elementary School. Paisley is pictured here with her artwork and with her finalist recognition sign.

Webster Fiscal Court Sets Salaries; Approves Resolutions

The Webster County Fiscal Court met Monday morning with a number of items on the agenda for approval.

In addition to approving transfers, purchases and claims, the court entered into a public hearing for the closing of the Western Kentucky Training Center grant project. A representative from Green River Area Development District was present to present the final numbers related to the \$814,949 project that involved a partnership among Webster County Fiscal Court, Henderson Community College, Madisonville Community College, the Department of Local Government, Delta Regional Authority and GRADD. The court approved a request to close out the project.

Other business to come before the court included approval of the Webster County Public Library's FY 2026 budget totaling \$669,310. And the hiring of Makia Holmes as a fulltime 9-1-1 employee and Autumn English, Jason Faulkner and Aleisha Howard as parttime jail employees.

The court approved salaries for the county attorney, magistrates and the coroner. The salaries include \$63,557.18 for the county attorney; \$14,462 for the coroner and \$27,697 each for magistrates..

Second reading of the county FY 2026 budget totaling \$20,917, 439 was approved as was second reading of the county's administrative code with revisions. Attorney Clint Prow noted that revisions included changes to the employee retirement incentives; language changes to the county's harassment policy and revisions to the social media policy. The court adopted the policy and changes as presented.

Two resolutions were also brought before the court for approval. Those resolutions both relate to funding applications for sewer pumps. The court authorized Judge/Executive

Steve Henry to sign the necessary documents to seek funding through the Kentucky Water Program for two pumps. Magistrates approved the resolutions.

Magistrates also voted to advertise for bids for two bridge/drainage structure projects. The first is for a bridge replacement on Slaughters-Elmwood Road for a 24 feet X 64 feet steel structure that was closed following spring flooding. The specifications call for the structure to meet KYTC standards and specs and the state's load capacity standard. Bids will be opened on July 14. Henry said he anticipates the bridge cost to be paid through FEMA funding.

The second structure is a 40 feet x 19 feet x 8 feet concrete box culvert with win walls to replace a structure on Fishtrap Derby Mine Road. The precast structure will replace a failed culvert that will be dug out and hauled off by the county. Funding for that structure will come from the Kentucky Highway Discretionary Fund at no extra costs to the county.

Before the meeting adjourned, EMA director Jeremy Moore reported that the FEMA Disaster Recovery Center that was stationed at Onton Methodist Church closed Saturday. Residents may still apply for assistance by phone or on-line or may go to another county that has a center opened and apply there. He also noted that FEMA personnel will attend Providence, Sebree and Onton Fourth of July celebrations and will take applications at those events. Moore and Henry praised Lisa Preston and residents of Onton for their support of and contributions to the recovery effort. FEMA set up their center in the basement of Onton Methodist Church.

The next meeting of the Webster County Fiscal Court is July 14, at 9:00 a.m.

Policy Changes In Effect For 2025-26 School Year

The Webster County Board of Education met in regular session on Monday night in a session that lasted almost three hours. Superintendent Aaron Harrell and all board members were present.

The majority of the meeting was spent with the superintendent updating board members on policy changes that will affect both students and staff in the school district in the upcoming year or subsequent year. Board members also conducted an executive session before presenting the superintendent's evaluation.

Following approval of the agenda, Superintendent Harrell spent almost an hour presenting a number of items to the board. He told members 13 teachers or administrators in the Webster County School System have volunteered to participate in a two year professional learning opportunity for math educators. He noted the program is a two year experience for educators in grades kindergarten through fifth. "This is a great opportunity for our staff," Harrell said. "We have teachers who are anxious to continue the development of their skills."

Board members were also presented with an insurance quote from E. M. Ford Insurance in Owensboro, Kentucky for the district's blanket coverage for the 2025-2026 school year. Harrell told the members insurance costs for the district increased 12% last year, and this year's quote shows a 15% increase. He noted that because of the natural disasters which have occurred in Western Kentucky in the past two years, the insurance costs have continued to push upward. For the coming year, the premium for the district's insurance for property, equipment floater, general liability, school leaders errors and omissions, commercial auto, umbrella and worker's compensation is \$573,970.00. The superintendent noted there are few carriers willing to provide coverage for a school district the size of Webster County. He recommended approval and payment of the quote.

Superintendent Harrell turned his attention to several policy changes and updates which will be implemented across the district. The first of those is the payment of \$3,000 to school organizations or athletic teams that complete in state or national events. "We have adjusted what the district will and will not pay," Harrell said. He told members the \$3,000 stipend is intended to cover travel and lodging costs. The district will not longer be responsible for meals for participants. Those costs, Harrell said, will be paid for booster organizations.

Another policy change for 2025-2026 will allow the district to employ substitute teachers will less than 64 college credit hours. Harrell also noted a change in employment policy will protect service members' positions if they are called to active duty. "This protects these people from financial harm," the superintendent said.

Discussion then turned to Senate Bill 181, which Harrell called "a hot button issue." Simply stated, Senate Bill 181 prohibits a school employee from communicating with a students using a social media platform that is not provided and supported by the school district. In Webster County, that platform is "Parent Square".

"There will be growing pains with this," Harrell said. "We have to stop communications by district employ-

ees using other social media." Calling athletics the biggest challenge for the new directive, Harrell noted, "Teachers will have to know what to communicate and when to communicate it."

Board Attorney Roy Massey told the board members, "The district will have to define traceable forms of communication 10 days before the first day of school. He also said school district communication needs to come from a district-approved platform. Harrell added, "We want to control the best we can communications between adults and students. It is a time to be more conservative. We do not want to be the test case."

The language for the policy changes was drafted by the Kentucky School Boards Association, and according to Massey, it is in the best interest of the Webster County School District to adopt those policies as they are written.

Other changes coming in the new school year include the opportunity for students to recite the Pledge of Allegiance each morning if they choose. No student will be required to do so. A mandatory period of silence and reflection will also be implemented in students' first class of the day. That period of silence will be at least one minute in length, but not more than two minutes. District employees will notify parents of the opportunity for the moment of silence and encourage them to instruct their child as to the intent of that time.

Also in the new school year, both prescription and over the counter medications will not be distributed by district personnel without parental consent and a doctor's order. In another change, students will no longer be able to use communication devices during instructional time.

According to Superintendent Harrell, staff members will receive significant instruction concerning the policy changes prior to the beginning of the 2025-2026 school year.

In other business, board members approved several consent items including board minutes, field trips, agreements and contracts, the superintendent's out of district travel for June, monthly reports, and a family medical leave act request for an employee.

The board also approved eight action items. That items included a stipend for the interim principal at Clay Elementary School; approval of the insurance quote from E. M. Ford Insurance; approval of the contract with the board attorney; approval of the 2025-2026 student fee schedule; approval of the treasurer's process of needed documents required for 2024-2025 year end closing; approval to purchase a field paint robot; approval of the emergency reading of KSBA board policies related to electronic media; and the approval of the superintendent's contract. All of those items were passed on a 5-0 vote with the exception of the electronic media policy, which was passed 4-1. Board member Amanda Coomes cast the dissenting vote.

No further business came before the board, and the meeting adjourned after an almost three hour session.

The next regular meeting of the Webster County Board of Education will be Monday, July 21, 4:30 P.M. Beginning with the July meeting, all board meetings – work sessions and regular meetings – will be held at 4:30 P.M.

Webster County Superintendent Receives High Marks In Annual Evaluation

The Webster County Board of Education spent just over an hour-74 minutes- in closed session Monday night completing their annual evaluation of superintendent Aaron Harrell.

At the board's work session two weeks ago, Harrell

spent about 45 minutes reviewing the seven standards he, as a superintendent is expected to meet. The superintendent explained each of the standards, provided documentation showing how he is meeting each standard, and reflected on the goals

he has for Webster County Schools, the employees and the students.

The standards include strategic leadership, instructional leadership, cultural leadership, human resource leadership, managerial leadership, collaborative leader-

ship and influential leadership. Boards can rate their superintendent as exemplary (the highest mark), accomplished, developing or growth required.

Board Chairman Tim McCormick opened the evaluation process with the follow-

ing statement: "The Webster County Board of Education has completed its annual evaluation of the superintendent for the 2024-2025 school year. The superintendent was assessed on seven key standards: strategic, instructional,

Continued on Page 5