

Grant County Board of Education holds special meeting

BY BETSY SMITH
EDITOR

The Grant County Board of Education held a special called meeting Aug. 27 at which the proposed tax rates were approved.

The general fund tax levy will be 55.5 cents on real property and 55.5 cents on personal property, including .01 allowable exonerations.

Superintendent Todd Moody noted the rate had decreased from last year, "a rare occurrence."

Working budget presented

Finance Director Brian Linder presented the working budget.

New state regulations are in place for budget preparation and presentation timelines this year. The working budget must be formally presented in an open school board meeting two weeks before a second public meeting adopting it. The budget must be submitted to the Kentucky Board of Education for final approval by Sept. 30.

The working budget is the third and final of three budgets prepared for the new school year. The draft budget and tentative budget were presented in January and May, respectively.

Linder said only one piece of the puzzle is missing, the final SEEK funding amount.

He said revenue, projected at \$31 million, is a little higher than the initial spring figure.

In addition to the tax rates just passed, Linder said the working budget reflects:

- The salary tables with the 3% increase in the step increase that you passed last spring
- \$350,000 for storm damage
- An increase in the general fund allocations for preschool and special education
- An increase for gas and diesel
- An increase for some repairs to the high school library

The contingency fund is 5.06%, which is right around the stated target goal of 5%. It was noted the state only mandates districts maintain a contingency fund of 2%.

Linder said he had attended a Kentucky finance meeting that same day. "There are some districts who ... are flat on any movement in salary tables. There are some that had decrease their staffing to make sure they need that they can stay within their budget.

"And so it's not a pretty picture out there for everybody, but I think over the years, you've been pretty good at being conservative ... we've always been able to grow, maybe not as much as others at some time, but now that others are having to decrease or be flat in their salary, we're still able to grow. I think that's being healthy and wise."

OTHER ACTIONS

- The board approved a second change order for the high school's turf field and site improvements.

Grant County High School teacher Connor O'Brien was presented a Spirit of Excellence award at the beginning of the meeting.

He was nominated by



Grant County Schools

Grant County High School teacher Connor O'Brien was presented the Spirit of Excellence Award at the Aug. 27 school board meeting.

Jenny Compton, associate principal at Grant County High School. Citing O'Brien's passion for teaching in her nomination, Compton also praised his willingness to go the extra mile for students, including staying after school to help his AP Government and Civics students.

The 52 students in Mr. O'Brien's AP classes who took the test achieved an impressive 82% pass rate this year.

Several students were recognized for summer achievements.

GOVERNOR'S SCHOLARS PROGRAM

- Emmerson Walters
- FBLA National Conference**
- Ian McComas
- Agribusiness
- Carter Rogers - Insurance & Risk Management
- Crue Williams - Networking Infrastructures
- William Zephua

These students also all completed the A*S*K Fundamentals of Ethics Industrial Certification Exam

SkillsUSA National Conference

Taylor Wittich, Emma Mullins, Hayden Hughett, Clairra Strange, Cali Jones, Devin King, Aubrey Lamson, Crue Williams and Jayden Dunn

- Information Technology Service - Crue Williams
- Culinary - Jayden Dunn

HOSA

International Conference

- Karma Ferguson-Anatomy & Physiology
- Riley Hartloff- Healthy Living
- Emmerson Walters-Career Development
- Regan Kenner- Foundations of Medical Terminology
- Saretta Harrison and Payton Pelfrey- Dynamic Decisions

FCCLA National Conference

- Lillian Neiderlehder - Baking & Pastry Level 3
- Athletes who qualified for state and competed during the summer included:

- Bass Fishing - Hunter Lilly, Kyle Lilly, Brian Hamm and Raymond Hamm
- Track and Field - Ellee Lane and Hiatt White
- Tennis - Mallie Bates

PERSONNEL ACTIONS - CERTIFIED

- Kimberly Warren, GCMS - teacher

- Hannah Osborne, GCHS - MSD teacher
- Grant Grubbs, GCHS - teacher
- Braden Boh, GCHS - teacher
- Dakota Hurston, GCHS - teacher
- Kelly Savicki, MCE - guidance counselor
- Michael Spratt, MCE - principal
- Sarah Webster, GCMS - teacher
- Mitchell Pieper, GCHS - teacher
- Timothy Gibson, GCMS - teacher
- Taylor Raby, DO - school psychologist
- Claire Perry, GCHS - teacher
- Sarah Scheper, CMZ - teacher
- Madison Stecht, SES - teacher
- Ethan Maynard, GCHS - teacher
- Jordyn Johnson, CMZ - teacher
- Kennadi Mayer, CMZ - teacher
- Shannon Oaks, MCE - SPED teacher

Transfers

- Kelli Lewis, GCMS - MSD teacher to teacher
- Rex Benson, guidance counselor to behavior specialist
- Tyler Cardin, DRE to MCE - teacher

Resignations

- Stephanie East-Martinez, GCHS - teacher, effective July 20
- Amanda Flescher, GCMS - teacher, effective July 23
- Alexis Peterson, CMZ - teacher, effective July 24
- Rex Ray, MCE - teacher, effective July 24
- Taylor Littrell, GCHS - teacher, effective July 27
- Retirement**
- Edwin Cook, GCHS - ROTC, effective June 30

PERSONNEL ACTIONS - CLASSIFIED

- Stephen Fluck, T & M - bus driver
- Leslie McQueen, T & M - bus driver
- Trisha Church, CMZ - food service assistant to preschool instructional assistant II
- Timothy Jackson, T & M - sub bus monitor to cafe custodian
- Nicole Graham, DRE - custodian, second shift
- Sarah Mann, GCHS - career development liaison
- Serenity Noonchester, DRE - instructional

SEE **BOARD/PAGE B8**

Kentucky students outpace national assessment averages

BY LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH
COMMISSION

Kentucky students outpaced national trends on the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), with fourth-grade reading and math scores and eighth-grade math scores improving between 2022 and 2024, lawmakers learned Tuesday during a meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Education.

Jennifer Stafford, associate commissioner in the Kentucky Department of Education's Office of Assessment and Accountability, told committee members the NAEP, commonly known as the nation's report card, provides states with a national benchmark and allows them to measure student performance over time.

"The NAEP is given to a sample of students, so not all students nor all schools participate," Stafford said.

The 2026 NAEP assessment was administered during the winter, but results have not yet been released.

According to Stafford, Kentucky's fourth-grade reading score increased from 217 in 2022 to 218 in 2024, while fourth-grade math rose from 234 to 238. Both gains exceeded national trends, with the national fourth-grade reading score falling two points to 214.

Stafford said the



David Michael Hargis | LRC

Sen. Stephen West, R-Paris, speaks Tuesday during a meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Education. Legislators received an overview of the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

improvement in fourth-grade reading represented a statistically significant increase.

"That's to be celebrated because that's a meaningful difference," she said.

Kentucky's eighth-grade reading score remained unchanged between 2022 and 2024, while eighth-grade math increased from 269 to 271. National scores declined in both eighth-grade reading and math during the same period.

Committee Co-Chair Sen. Stephen West, R-Paris, credited recent education initiatives for the gains, saying funding has been used effectively.

"I want to give you some positive feedback," West said. "I think your imple-

mentation on Read to Succeed and numeracy has been very effective. When we first did that, honestly, I didn't expect much results for four or five years, and I think you're way ahead of schedule."

Committee Co-Chair Rep. James Tipton, R-Taylorsville, said legislative efforts require successful implementation to produce results. He noted that education conferences this summer have highlighted what has been called the "Mississippi miracle."

"There is a new term out there. It's called the 'southern surge' because states in the South have followed Mississippi, and we're seeing the benefit of that," Tipton said.

Legislative committee hears from rural health experts

LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH
COMMISSION

FRANKFORT — Several experts provided an overview of the state of rural health care during Tuesday's meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Health Services, highlighting hospital closures, workforce shortages and financial challenges facing rural communities.

Zil Joyce Dixon Romero, senior manager of state government for the National Rural Health Association, testified that 62 million Americans live in rural areas and that Medicaid, Medicare and the government-run health insurance marketplace disproportionately cover rural residents.

"Notably, across all states, we are starting to see some really damaging trends beginning to emerge. When looking at the rural health landscape, we see over 190-plus rural hospitals have closed since 2010, with 430 rural hospitals vulnerable to closure in the United States currently," Romero said.

Romero said Kentucky's numbers are not disproportionate to national trends in terms of hospital vulnerability and negative operating margins. However, he said Kentucky faces disproportionate challenges related to shortage-area designations for physicians.

The national physician shortage is approximately 15,000, while Kentucky needs to fill about 388 positions to bridge the gap in rural areas, Romero said.

He also said the federal One Big Beautiful Bill Act could affect Kentucky health care facilities and estimated that about 16% to 20% of state hospitals are considered financially vulnerable.

Committee co-chair Sen. Stephen Meredith, R-Leitchfield, asked Romero whether he is optimistic about the future of rural health

care.

Romero said he is optimistic for two reasons: Rural health care is a highly innovative field in which people genuinely care about their neighbors, and people who use rural facilities want to work together to find solutions that maintain coverage and care.

Meredith said he has concerns about the future of rural health care, citing nearly 40 years of experience in the health care field.

"In this space, I've always prided myself on being an optimist," Meredith said. "I'm that little boy in the room with manure that's looking for the pony. But I can tell you for this particular issue, I'm not optimistic because looking back over the last 40 years, a lot of problems we're seeing today we saw 40 years ago, just magnified."

Three representatives from the Center of Excellence in Rural Health at the University of Kentucky also testified before the committee. The center was established by the General Assembly in 1990 to address rural health disparities and challenges facing Kentucky communities.

CERH programs include community health services through Kentucky Homeplace workers, statewide rural health support, education and outreach, research and workforce innovation, and community technology and support services.

Committee co-chair Rep. Kimberly Poore Moser, R-Taylor Mill, asked about the Healthcare Worker Loan Relief Program of the Commonwealth.

"Who are the health care workers who are primarily using the loan forgiveness program?" she asked.

Matthew R. Coleman, director of the Kentucky Office of Rural Health at the CERH, said a variety

of health care workers benefit from the program, including mental health professionals. He said the types of workers using the program vary from year to year.

House Minority Caucus Chair Lindsey Burke, D-Lexington, said she has recently been asked about noncompetes clauses in provider contracts.

"Doctors and other folks in the field are telling me that that's a hindrance to them being able to continue practicing medicine, especially in rural areas," Burke said.

Coleman said he would take down the question and reach out to his counterparts and others in different states to gather information to share with Burke.

Meredith asked CERH representatives what the Legislature can do to make the organization more successful and have an impact across the state. He also said he wanted to hear from CERH staff about whether additional funding is needed to improve rural health care.

"You need to be more aggressive. You need to be more assertive and be more specific about what can we do to address these issues that have been here for ages, it seems like," Meredith said.

William Mace Baker, interim director of the CERH and director of Kentucky Homeplace, said he is confident that without the organization's work producing community health workers, physical therapists and medical providers, the state's current health situation would be worse.

Baker said he would welcome expanding programs such as Kentucky Homeplace statewide. The program pairs rural residents with health and social services through community health workers.

"We'd love to," Baker said.

Williamstown Board of Education approves tax rates

BY BETSY SMITH
EDITOR

The Williamstown Board of Education held a special called meeting Monday, Aug. 31, and approved the property tax rates for 2026-2027 proposed at the Aug. 11 meeting.

The tax rates are as follows:

- Real and personal property tax rates: 83.1 with exonerations taken in the amount of 3.3 to recoup past losses for a total tax rate of 86.4. (Faulkner noted last year's rate was 85.1.)
- Tangible tax rate proposed is 85.1 with exonerations in the amount of 3.3, resulting in a total of 88.4.
- Motor vehicle tax rate proposed at 59.1
- Utility tax rate, which also includes cable, proposed at 3.0.

SEE **TAX/PAGE B8**