OBITUARY

Steven T. Ricketts, 79

LA GRANGE — Steven T. Ricketts, age 79 of La Grange, passed away on Tuesday, Aug.25, 2026. Born in La Grange, he spent his childhood on his family farm near Port Royal before returning to

La Grange for his adolescent years. He was a graduate of OCHS, Class of 1966, where he was a football letterman. After attending Eastern Kentucky University for a year, he was drafted into the United States Army and served in Vietnam. In 1968, he was severely wounded and received the Purple Heart. Following his recovery, he began a long career with the Naval Ordnance Station in Louisville, retiring after many years of service.

He was a loving husband, father and grandfather who cherished his family. He enjoyed Model T Fords, tinkering, UK sports, and coaching youth baseball. He was also a devoted supporter of his wife and her teaching career, always willing to build or create whatever she needed for her classroom.

He will be remembered for his service, his helping hands, his many talents and most of all, his love and devotion to his family.

Son of the late Virgil and Dorothy (Parish) Ricketts, he was preceded in death by a granddaughter, Reagan Ricketts.

He is survived by his wife, Lucy Radcliffe Ricketts; sons, Thomas Ricketts (Kristin) and Jordan Ricketts (Rebecca); grandchildren, Seth, Ella, Kathleen, Samuel and Gus; brother, David Ricketts; sister-in-law, Linda Radcliffe; and niece, Courtney Lorenz.

Memorial services were held on Monday, Aug. 31, 2026, at Prewitt New Castle Funeral Home.

SCHOOL

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During the discussion leading up to the vote, the board discussed several factors affecting the district's financials, starting with Support Education Excellence in Kentucky, or "SEEK," funding, which Director of Finance Kerri Alexander said will be decreasing by slightly over $1 million to about $41 million total.

Specifically, SEEK is a formula-driven state program used to allocate financial support to public school districts.

Though property values play a role, other factors such as attendance counts, transportation costs and the number of students with specialized needs such as those that are at-risk, exceptional or English language learners also affect the amount a district receives.

Director of Finance Kerri Alexander told the board that the county's property assessments went up more than $578 million for a total of about $40 million shy of $11 billion.

"No matter what we do — if we do the compensating rate, if we just keep the rate the same, if or if we take the 4% [revenue increase] — it does not change what happens in the SEEK calculation," Alexander said.

"If your assessments go up, your SEEK goes down. We have zero control over it."

"Unlike in other districts, the majority of our budget comes from local money because of the fact we get dinged on SEEK," said Board Member Suzanne Hundley.

Alexander also told the board that the SEEK funding specifically for transportation has decreased from $10 million for the 2023-2024 school year to $9.5 million for the 2025-2026 school year. Transportation costs, on the other hand, have increased from $7.4 million to $11.3 million, respectively.

The board also discussed the the rates from previous years. Alexander said that the rate has stayed the same since the 2022-2023 school year, when it was increased from 80 cents by a 4% revenue increase.

The board has not chosen the compensating rate since 2015-2016, when the compensating rate was the same as the previous rate, according to records presented to the board.

Alexander also presented estimations for tax increases based on home values. As of 2024, the median home in the county was worth $387,500, and homes assessed at that value both this tax year and last tax year would see a total increase on their annual tax bill of $31, according to Alexander.

"I've always been against raising taxes … but I think it's balancing understanding that the community is sensitive to any increase that we do on the tax rate [with the] responsibility to sustain all of the great things that we've been doing for the last four years," said Board Chair Carly Clem.

"With that being said, there are probably some things within our budget that we could cut back on — expenses that maybe aren't that needed," said Springer.

Superintendent Claudette Herald agreed with Springer, saying that though there have been "a lot of great incentives," she hopes to spend time this school year looking at the budget "and putting a pause on some stuff" to determine if those expenses are going to be long-term.

Clem specifically asked Alexander if the board can lower the rate from the proposed rate if "we have all these people that come out and convince us …" before their vote of final approval.

Alexander said that, though the board should set the proposed rate at what they believe will be approved at their next meeting, "I cannot imagine that anyone would take you to court if you went lower than that."

The rates will not be enacted until the board conducts a final vote — for which the board scheduled a special-called meeting at 5 p.m. on Sept. 17.

BOARD DOES NOT PLAN TO ALLOW PUBLIC COMMENTS

The Era previously reported that the board planned to conduct a public hearing during its upcoming special-called meeting on Sept. 17. The morning after the article was shared online, Superintendent Claudette Herald sent an email to the Era correcting that reporting:

"[For] non-callable rates (rates up to and including 4% plus exonerations) … no public hearing is required …" Herald wrote, quoting from guidance from the Kentucky Department of Education.

"The board simply moves to a formal vote to adopt the rates. The tax information must be read publicly and recorded in board minutes."

After the meeting had adjourned on Aug. 26, the Era asked the board directly if they were planning to host a public hearing regarding the tax rates. Clem immediately responded, "Yes," and moments later, Board Member Dominic Cedillo agreed.

In an email to the Era on Aug. 28, Clem said: "It is a public hearing meaning it is open to the public, but because it is a special called meeting it will not have public expression.

In other words, the board is not planning on including time for the public to speak at a meeting about the tax increase before the final vote on Sept. 17.

The agenda for local school board meetings in Kentucky is largely developed by the superintendent and the board chair. Per state law, only the board chair themselves or the superintendent — at the request of three board members — can call for a special-called meeting.

Though Kentucky law forces school boards to have a "public comment period" during regularly-scheduled meetings, it does not prohibit school boards from including a period to hear from the public at any special-called meeting.

One of the requirements in hosting a special-called meeting is notifying media members that have previously requested such notice 24 hours in advance, which includes an agenda that the meeting cannot stray from.

Thus, the absolute latest the board could make changes to the agenda, to either include or exclude public comment, is Sept. 16 at 5 p.m., unless the board decides to host the meeting at a later date than Sept. 17.

NEW STATE LAW

The process that local school boards must follow in approving tax rates was altered by Kentucky House Bill 757, which came into effect on April 14. In the past, school boards simply voted on the tax rate at a board meeting. Now, the process is much more specific:

After receiving their tax payers' property assessments, establishing the compensating as well as the rate that will produce no more than 4% more revenue than the prior year, and receiving approval of those potential rates from the Kentucky Board of Education, the board must choose a proposed rate.

That proposed rate and information about it then must be made public in one of two ways:

1. By publishing the information in the local newspaper of largest circulation in the county, on the home page of the district's website and on the district's social media platforms for two consecutive weeks.

2. By sending a notice with all necessary information by first-class mail to each person owning real property.

If the proposed rate is estimated to produce 4% more revenue than last year, excluding revenue from new properties, then the district then must hold a public hearing on the rate before making a final vote on the rate.

"All persons desiring to be heard shall be given an opportunity to present oral testimony," the law reads. It also says that the board has the authority to "set reasonable time limits" for each testimony.

Furthermore, a more than 4% revenue increase "shall be subject to a recall vote or reconsideration by the local board of education," and requires further advertisement after the vote.

Look for updates in future editions of the Era.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Era previously reported online that the new state law required a public hearing for any tax rate increases above the compensating rate. That is incorrect. The new law only requires a public hearing for rates that will produce more than a 4% increase in revenue, not including revenue from new properties.

LAWSUITS

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Day's complaint states that Hundley was present at the district's central office on the day of the interview "and was in a position to see the sign-in sheet reflecting that [Day] had met with the OEA investigator and the purpose of that meeting."

The complaint later states that SOMS Principal Kindra Witak, who had also been interviewed by Collins, asked Day for information about what she told the investigator.

In response, Day told Witak what she divulged, including that she agreed to provide copies of the PTO checks Hundley had signed for evidence.

"Almost immediately after [Day's] protected disclosure, and for the first time in her decades-long career, [the Oldham County Board of Education] began building a case to remove her," the complaint reads.

According to the complaint, Day was called into a meeting five days later, where she was told she had coded certain invoices incorrectly. Two of Day's higher-ups told her that the errors could be corrected.

"The coding matters at issue were routine," the complaint reads, further stating that Day had sought and followed guidance from the district's finance department on the at least some of the invoices prior to the meeting.

Another five days later, Day was called into Principal Witak's office and was issued a "Memorandum of Concern," that stated Day failed to properly code, track and manage funds in three accounts and asserted Day had made coding errors more than 58 times.

According to the complaint, the memorandum required a review and correction of all of the errors within ten days and directed Day to seek training "to effectively carry out [her] responsibilities moving forward."

The memo also said the matter was being forwarded to Superintendent Claudette Herald "for review for disciplinary action" that could include "suspension, demotion, or termination."

The complaint says that Witak gave Day until 9 a.m. the next day to respond in writing — though the memorandum stated the deadline was one day later.

"At no time during the school year, including at the monthly [Site-Based Decision Making] report meetings, had Principal Witak previously raised any suggestion that [Day] has miscoded invoices …" the complaint reads.

"[The district] did not permit [Day] to make the very corrections its own staff had said were possible. Instead, it terminated her employment nine days before the May 29, 2026 correction deadline …"

Only one day after submitting a written response to the memorandum, Day was summoned to another meeting and given a "Notice of Termination" that referenced "neglect of duty, incompetency, inefficiency, and insubordination," the complaint says.

Not only did the notice have an error as to when the Memorandum of Concern was issued, but it also contradicted a "Notice of Placement on Paid Administrative Leave" signed by Herald on the same day, which stated Day was being placed on paid leave from May 21 through June 1 pending an ongoing investigation.

According to the complaint, staff members present at the meeting "pressured" Day to retire rather than accept the termination, "telling her, in substance, that if she was terminated, she would lose her retirement benefits …"

When Day allegedly asked Director of Personnel Katie Garrett directly if she would lose all of her benefits if she were terminated, Garrett answered in the affirmative and directed Day to decide whether she would retire by the following afternoon.

"The compressed deadline applied pressure to [Day] at a moment when she had no meaningful opportunity to obtain advice about her rights or her retirement benefits," the complaint reads.

The complaint further states that Day believes the district used "this unnecessary tactic" to coerce her to retire and manufacture a reason to discredit her if she opposed the tactic later.

She also believes the "rapid, accelerated succession of events" was intended to prevent her from providing documents to the investigator, and that the allegations made in her Notice of Termination were leveled "entirely for the purpose of preemptively discrediting her" disclosures to the investigator.

Though Day submitted a retirement notice on May 22, she "did not want to retire" and only did so because "the threats of the employer to deprive her of her retirement benefits were believable."

Day also alleges that similar tactics have been used on other employees, and that her own experience "is part of a continuing pattern" engaged in recent years, where the district "singles out and targets long-tenured women employees particularly …" the complaint reads.

"More than once in recent years this pattern has involved manufacturing the same allegations of 'neglect of duty, incompetency, inefficiency, and insubordination' against senior women employees who disclose, report, confirm, and offer evidence of illegal conduct by [district] officials."

Day claims the district violated the Kentucky Whistleblower Act and the Kentucky Civil Rights Act, and is namely requesting the court to reinstate her or instead provide "front pay; back pay and lost benefits "with prejudgment interest;" both compensatory and punitive damages; legal and court costs; and a trial by jury.

Board Chair Carly Clem issued the following statement to the Era regarding the lawsuit:

"The district has been informed of the lawsuit and is working closely with legal counsel to evaluate the allegations. We respectfully disagree with the account presented regarding the circumstances surrounding Ms. Day's separation from employment.

"As this matter is now part of an ongoing legal proceeding, the district will respond through the appropriate legal channels. Out of respect for that process, we are not providing additional comments on the specific allegations at this time."

An Aug. 27 "Final Investigative Report" from the Office of Education Accountability agrees with Day's complaint on some points, concluding that Hundley "served at some point(s)" as both a PTO officer or member with check-signing authority and on the board of education.

"Such concurrent service as both a board member and PTO officer (with check-writing authority) is prohibited by the Redbook … The district is to ensure that any present or future concurrent service by Ms. Hundley or any other board member conforms to the Redbook mandates …" the report reads.

The report does not reference specific financial data or mention any investigation into the finances of the PTO.

The report also references investigations into Hundley allegedly getting personal legal advice from the board's attorney, requesting police presence at a board meeting due to personal concerns and running the SOMS School-Based Decision-Making elections, but the investigation found "no violation of law or policy" regarding those allegations.

Hundley released a statement about the report on Facebook, saying that she "couldn't find anyone willing to take over the SOMS PTO" and took it over herself "rather than see the organization dissolve" during the 2023 to 2024 school year until June 2025.

"I also understand that my role is different now that I serve on the Board of Education. Going forward, I will not serve as an officer of a PTO or PTA while I am a member of the Board …" Hundley wrote.

GALLAHUE SEEKS SEAT ON BOARD SHE'S SUING

Christeena Gallahue's lawsuit against the board largely circulates around a request for records that the school district denied, which was later deemed to be a violation of the Open Records Act by the Kentucky Office of the Attorney General.

According to her complaint filed in Oldham Circuit Court on Feb. 27, 2025, Gallahue had requested for records of emails sent to and from then-Superintendent Jason Radford and district staff members Sharla Six, Matthew Jacobson, Melissa Woosley and Jesse Alford namely including keywords like "harassment," "misconduct," "Title IX" and "wrestling," among several other keywords.

In the days that followed, the district denied the request because it "did not precisely describe the records sought," the complaint says.

After Gallahue appealed the denial to the Kentucky Office of the Attorney General, the district added that the request generated "over 14,500 hits" or an estimated "21,000 pages" of documents.

The subsequent Open Records Decision said that the district's reasoning that the request was "too imprecise" was a violation of the Open Records Act, but mentioned that an exemption in the law allows the denial of requests that cause "an unreasonable burden in producing public records."

The following January, over a month after the decision, Gallahue "informed the District that the emails must be delivered to her pursuant to the Attorney General's

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The Oldham Era
OldhamEra.com
Your News Since 1876.
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POSTMASTER: Send corrections to: The Oldham Era, 105 S. Walnut, La Grange KY 40031.
Periodicals postage paid at La Grange KY 40031 - USPS 407-700.

Subscription: The Oldham Era is published every Thursday.
Digital only subscription: $25.44
In-county print and digital subscription: $50.88
Out-of-county print and digital subscription: $85.00

LEGAL NOTICE
BIKE to BEAT CANCER
Benefiting
Norton Cancer Institute
NOTICE
Bike to Beat Cancer, benefiting Norton Cancer Institute, will be held on Saturday, Sept. 12, 2026. Part of the cycling route will go through portions of Oldham County. For more information about the event, visit BikeToBeatCancer.org.
Bike to Beat Cancer is powered by Bryant Heating & Cooling.