

SEBREE BANNER



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THE WEBSTER COUNTY retired teachers recognized the county grandparent essay contest county winner during their meeting on Monday. Lo Maung (in green), won the local contest. He is pictured with his teacher, Peyton Hartley, KRTA member Faye Martin, school counselor Tammy White, and his mother Lo, Bawi Lang and sister Kim Don.

WC Water District Releases Statement Concerning Outage

An outage at the Webster County Water District plant early Saturday, January 31, left Webster County water customers without water until early Monday morning. The issues were caused from the extreme cold that swept the area for several days, according to WCWD superintendent Trevor Baldwin.

District personnel worked continuously over the weekend in bitter cold temperatures to restore service to customers. At the same time they sent out frequent notifications via the EMA notification system and social media.

The Sebree Banner attempted to contact the district for a statement on Monday, but personnel was still working to resolve water issues and could not be reached until Tuesday. Following is a statement issued by Baldwin late Tuesday regarding the problems the district faced:

"Webster County Water District would like to sincerely thank all of our customers for the patience, understanding, and support shown during the recent county-wide water outage.

"During this extreme cold weather event, our source water temperature dropped to unusually low levels. This created a significant change in our coagulation and treatment process compared to normal operating conditions. At the same time, water demand across the county increased dramatically due to the prolonged deep freeze. Together, these factors changed the dynamics of our entire system. It was somewhat the "perfect storm".

"Surrounding counties experienced many of the same challenges, and after exhausting all available options, WCWD was forced to make a very difficult decision. This decision was not made lightly. Our priority was to place our treatment plant in the best possible condition to properly treat water and safely push it back into the system.

"Once the treatment plant was stabilized, we methodically worked through the system, ensuring each tank was restored and operating correctly. Our water system relies on one tank feeding the next, so it was critical that we placed ourselves in good shape before turning water on to each additional section of the county. This necessary process is the reason it took longer to restore service to the entire system.

"WCWD employees worked tirelessly around the clock throughout this event to restore water service to all customers, and we greatly appreciate the understanding and overwhelming outpouring of support we received from our community.

"We would also like to extend a special thank you to Webster County Emergency Management Director Jeremy Moore and Judge Executive Steve Henry for their continued support and resources, as well as the Kentucky Rural Water Association and all others who assisted during this challenging time.

"Again, thank you to our customers for your patience and trust as we worked to safely restore water service across Webster County.

— Webster County Water District

As water returned in some areas of the county and customers began using the service, it became difficult to push water to other tanks. The district sent out requests via EMA and social media asking customers to use water sparingly until all the tanks were back in service. Areas impacted included the Slaughterers/Onton areas, Dixon, Clay and outlying areas of the county. Sebree and Providence water customers were not affected since both operate their own water systems.

Public Seeks Answers To Rumors Surrounding Superintendent's Contract

For several months rumors have swirled in the community and on social media that the Webster County Board of Education will not renew Superintendent Aaron Harrell's contract when it expires in June. Monday night before the school board's work session could be called to order, Harrell announced that due to the number of people pouring into the meeting, it would have to be moved to the high school library to accommodate everyone.

Approximately 175 community members, teachers, and students, most of whom were there to support Harrell and had asked to address the board then gathered at WCHS, and the meeting was called to order.

Board chair Tim McCormick opened the meeting by reading the board policy on "community input." Initially only five individuals signed up to address the board, but the floor was opened to others who all had the same question "Why, if Harrell has received exemplary and accomplished ratings from the board on his last three evaluation would they even consider changing leadership?"

Jason Rakestraw, a product of Webster County Schools and a father of six children, five of whom attend WC schools, was the first to address the board. Rakestraw noted that "If I didn't love this school system, I wouldn't be here; If I didn't have six children, I wouldn't be here and if I weren't a product of this school, I wouldn't be here." Rakestraw told the board that for the last few months he has learned a lot including that the superintendent is evaluated every year. He then added that he knows Harrell to "be a man of character," so he began his research.

Rakestraw had researched newspaper accounts of the board's evaluations of Harrel over the last three years; he read state-

ments the board has made following those evaluations. All of those statements were positive with the board offering praise for the work the superintendent has done. Harrell's first year on the job-2023- he received all accomplished and exemplary ratings on the seven standards by which superintendents are evaluated. In 2024, the story was much the same with once again the superintendent rated accomplished to exemplary and the board praising his implementation of a unified curriculum across the county. In 2025, he was rated exemplary in four of the standards and accomplished in the other three, Rakestraw said.

"We have three evaluations," Rakestraw said, "everything he has done met the standards or exceeds them. I don't understand why we're here. If he's met or exceeded the standards, why are we here?"

Retired teacher and parent to a school age child, Amy Wright then addressed the board noting that she wants her son to be led by someone with compassion, humility, kindness and generosity. She commended Harrell on the job he has done over the past three years. She told the board "we (teachers) asked for a curriculum because we didn't have one—we got it; we asked for raises—we got raises; we asked for school resource officers—we got them. I don't know what more you (the board) want from him. All I want to know is 'WHY'. As parents, we want to what is best for our children, but we want to know "WHY." She concluded her remarks thanking the board for allowing her to speak and thanking Harrell for "being the example I want for my son."

Taylor Herzog, a teacher at Dixon Elementary and a graduate of WCHS, then addressed the board. Herzog was joined at the podium by 12 of her colleagues. She told the



JASON RAKESTRAW, A parent of Webster County school children and a graduate of WCHS, questioned the board as to why, when Harrell has had three years of exceptional evaluations, his contract would be in question.

board that "Mr. Harrell is committed to children and to education." She noted that Harrell hates the blasts on Facebook and "doesn't want to be celebrated loudly" through social media and community talk. Herzog called to question the board's lack of consistency. "This superintendent has received strong evaluations from this board that are now left with the decision to renew his contract. Not once, but every single time, those evaluations reflected confidence in his leadership, his performance and his direction for the district. If the evaluations were positive year after year, what happened? What has changed? This question is not meant to be confrontational, it is meant to be transparent. If concerns exist now, the public deserves understand what is new, what is different and what specifically has shifted since those evaluations were given?"

Herzog also addressed the fact that she views Harrell as a visible leader, one who is present in school buildings; he is a forward-thinking leader. She reminded the board that "leadership is not about perfection; it is about consistency, in-

tegrity and long-term impact. This superintendent has shown loyalty to Webster County, dedication to its schools, and the ability to lead with both heart and responsibility. Twenty years of service deserves thoughtful consideration....not a "muddy" dismissal. Our students, staff and community deserve steady leadership rooted in experience, progress and genuine care.

Person after person approached the podium, each with the same message and questions, and following each address to the board, the room echoed with applause. When Marissa Walters addressed the board, she told them she has never had a single issue with the Webster County School system. She said she has contacted board members and can't "get a single answer" as to "why Harrell should be gone." Walters added, "The only things I've heard are simply opinions which include his not living in the county and, I quote, 'he may not be the man for the job.' I reject both of those."

Former student Maddox Hibbs told Harrell "you represent us well." He also noted

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AMY WRIGHT TOLD the board that she wants a district leader who is passionate, kind, and generous. She noted that Harrell fits all those requirements and is an exceptional example for her son who attends school in the district.



TAYLOR HERZOG, SUPPORTED by some of her Dixon Elementary colleagues, addressed the board citing Harrell's positive impact on the district since becoming the superintendent in July 2022.