

# Fiscal Court Hears Reports, Approves FY27 Jail Budget

Webster County Fiscal Court met in regular session Monday with a lengthy agenda before them. Magistrates heard reports from deputy judge/executive Ryan Hammack, a tax roll update from PVA Jeff Kelley and set the jail budget for fiscal year 2027.

Following the call to order and the passage of minutes from the previous meeting, magistrates approved transfers, purchase orders as corrected, and claims before hearing a report from Hammack, who filled the new position of deputy judge/executive the first of March. Hammack told the court that over the past two weeks he has attended a number of meetings related to county government and the IDA. According to Hammack he has met with Webster County Water District superin-

tendent Trevor Baldwin, attended a solid waste meeting and attended to park related matters and meetings. Also on his schedule were assisting animal control with an issue that arose in that department and meeting with the extension service and attending their farmer appreciation dinner. He has also met with GRADD officials, and the Kenergy board. Hammack also noted that he is involved in county leadership meetings.

In other business, the court approved a rate change for Zachary West in the sheriff's department. And okayed hiring Abby Clements part-time at the 9-1-1 dispatch center.

PVA Jeff Kelley addressed the court to update them on the 2026 taxable assessment. The numbers show that total real estate in the

county including residential, farm land and commercial property has a taxable value of \$624,894,889, with \$2.3 million in new property. Kelly told the court that the \$2.3 million in growth helps keep property taxes down for county residents.

In financial related business, the court approved two interfund transfers: \$75,000 to the jail fund and \$15,000 to the sanitation fund.

In other jail related matters, magistrates reviewed and approved the fiscal year 2027 budget for that agency. The total budget is set at \$3,031,511, about \$250,000 more than the previous year. Of that amount, the county will receive approximately \$470,500 for housing Union County inmates; \$585,000 for Class D inmates, \$525,175 for community custody and \$570,011 for

state prisoners. In his comments regarding the jail budget Judge/Executive Steve Henry told the court that the legislators are presently discussing jail funding and are considering an increase to the daily rate they pay to county jails for housing inmates.

First reading of a \$226,421.66 budget amendment was approved by the court. An agenda item to call for bids for the construction of restrooms at Canaan Ridge Park was struck from the agenda. Magistrates approved \$5445.28 in incentive training pay for jailer Greg Sauls, and agreed to allow Henry to execute an interlocal agreement with Hopkins County to use Frank Wallace as the county's building inspector. A road use agreement with Nextera Solar was also approved by the court.

In their final action of the day, magistrates opted to table taking action on a request from the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet to remove Rich Road East from the county road list. According to officials, the road is no longer used and is just an overgrown road bed. Henry told the court the road is not maintained and the state is asking it be removed from the county list to save road aid dollars. Attorney Clint Prow had a copy of the written request from the state but indicated the county does not have to take action. Henry added that he feels the court needs additional information before taking action. The matter was tabled.

The next meeting of the Webster County Fiscal Court is April 13, 2026 at 9:00 a.m.

## WC Schools Leadership Alliance Meetings Conclude

The Webster County Schools Leadership Alliance, a program that provided parents, community members and business people to learn more about the school system concluded on Thursday with a program that involved learning more about special education, English learners, statistics related to attendance, homelessness, economically disadvantaged students, migrant students and those with disabilities.

Superintendent Aaron Harrell opened the meeting thanking participants for their attendance and sharing topics they would cover based on requests and suggestion that came following the previous two sessions.

Harrell noted that the local district has about 60.10 percent economically disadvantaged students, slightly below the state average of 60.80 percent. 13.20 percent of the student population in Webster County are English learners compared to 18-30 percent at the state level. This district has 18.10 percent of its students listed as having disabilities while the state average is 18.70 percent. The percentage of county children listed as homeless is 12.20 percent, just below the state average of 13.30 percent. The district's migrant population is at 6.30 percent above the state average of 6.00 percent.

During previous meetings attendees asked for information on the district's special education program. Kim Saalwaechter addressed some of those issues, defining how the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) identifies children eligible for the program. Saalwaechter emphasized that every child enters school as a "regular" student and it is through observation, recognition of issues, planning and meetings with parents and teachers that children are identified as needing extra help. IDEA identifies at least 14 categories that may shape the type of education a child's needs. Webster County Schools provides four speech therapists, three school psychologists, one occupational therapist and one physical therapist on staff along with special education teachers and instructional assistants to insure those children are educated.

Harrell noted that "this group of kids (over 350 local children are enrolled in special education), deserve the same educational opportunities as all other children. We want them to have the best resources and the best experiences we can give them." The district has also set up a special autism unit at Clay to provide for children with that disability, Saalwaechter said, something he called "a blessing for those students and their

families."

Another topic covered on Thursday was the district's English Learner Program at Sebree Elementary, the middle school and the high school. That program encompasses 14 different languages managed by four teachers, five instructional assistants four of whom are bilingual as well as online language support software, after school tutoring for migrant/English learners, peer tutoring and summer camps. Dawn Forker told the group that the certified personnel that work with English learners have a tremendous attendance in their afterschool and summer programs.

The groups also reviewed school attendance and learned that in the Webster County District, the attendance rate has improved over the last three years. Greg Bowles also shared information related to how daily attendance is calculated, the most typical reasons for student absences and how the district manages "chronic absenteeism." Over the last three years, chronic absenteeism has made a steady decline, Bowles said, dropping from 30.70 percent in 2022-23 to 24.70 percent in 24-25. Chronic absenteeism applies to students who average missing two days of school time a month (ten percent) throughout the school year.

Harrell added that the district has worked to boost attendance through a number of resources including the Second Chance Bus, seeking grants, making college and career readiness trips, providing parent and student resources including calendar magnets, kindergarten bags, using student mailers, providing book marks and other materials, and using Character Counts resources in all schools.

Thursday's meeting also addressed ways they provide meaningful family and community engagement and work to improve the quality of school life through learning choices for students. Those programs include STEM, arts and humanities, fine arts, media and communications, leadership and public service, health and wellness and global learning. Both the high school and the technology center principals shared information regarding the programs and pathways provided in their buildings.

Harrell concluded the meeting emphasizing that Webster County Schools work daily to provide all students opportunities to participate in a broad spectrum of activities so they can make informed decisions about their career choices.

In total about 25 individuals took part in the three sessions of Leadership Alliance activities.



AARON HARRELL, SUPERINTENDENT of the Webster County Schools, and Kim Saalwaechter are pictured as they spoke during the Leadership Alliance meeting held last week.



WEBSTER COUNTY HIGH School principal Jarrod Hankins is pictured here as he spoke during the leadership alliance meeting last week. He told those in attendance that Webster County Schools work daily to provide opportunities for all students in the district. Last week's meeting was the last of the leadership alliance gatherings.

## Webster County Jailer's Report

Webster County Jailer Greg Sauls reports inmates worked a total of 1886 hours between March 15 and March 21, 2026. Hours worked include 520 hours at the detention center; 280 hours at the RCC; 80 hours mowing; 360 hours for

Union County; 40 hours for the city of Clay; 80 hours for the city of Dixon; 160 hours for the city of Providence; 40 hours for the road department shop; 40 hours for recycling; 40 hours for the dog warden and 16 hours for Landon's Hope.

The total jail population is 160 with 30 county inmates, 30 Union County inmates and 100 state prisoners.

Thirty-three inmates participated in the Moral Recognition Therapy program; 25 attended Anger Management; 18 attended

Thinking for Good; 18 Untangling Relationships with one graduating and 11 attended GED classes with one test taken.

Incarcerated during the same period were Pacen Alvey Heaven Bratcher Isaac Coomes Dana Fowler

Jeremiah Garib Charles Humphrey Daniel Jackson Austin Kautzman Austin Lovell Melanie McBride Christina Murray Tiffanie Payne Makenzie Powell Brandy Stone Joshua Taylor Amy Wilson