

# SEBREE BANNER



## Residents Continue To Question Board Action

Webster County Board of Education met in regular session Monday night, and despite having voted last month to non-renew superintendent Aaron Harrell's contract, about sixty county residents showed up for the meeting with several once again expressing their displeasure with the board's decisions.

Jason Rakestraw, who has addressed the board multiple times expressing his concerns about the board's decision, first shared his support of and love for Webster County and the school district before directly questioning board members Melony Hobgood and Amanda Coomes, asking both about the vision they have for the school district and how it differs from Mr. Harrell's, and asking about the qualities they seek in a superintendent.

Rakestraw called on Hobgood first asking what she would like to see from a different superintendent. Her reply was "accountability." He asked for specifics and she gave Sebree school as an example and while Hobgood acknowledged she is the Dixon district representative and that Dixon has issues too, she said "I represent the whole county." Dixon principal Eric Wheatley stepped into the room and asked exactly what issues she was referring to and noted he would be glad to address those. Dixon's secretary then spoke up and said she has worked there 30 years and has only heard positive things about Dixon Elementary.

Another individual added that she has heard com-

plaints not about the school itself, but about a board member walking the halls at the school.

When Rakestraw directed questions to Coomes, she chose not to respond. Coomes also failed to respond to Rakestraw's question regarding the qualities she wants to see in the next superintendent. The speaker expressed his "shock" as to "why you (the board) did what you did," adding "I would like for Mr. Harrell to get one or two more years on a contract. I thought Ms. Melody (Hobgood) would vote to do that." At the conclusion of his remarks, Rakestraw said he would like to serve on the superintendent selection committee, and read a statement saying why he would like to serve.

Marsha Rakestraw spoke briefly at the meeting asking Coomes how many Slaughter's voices she heard from. Coomes said ten reached out to her prior to her vote.

Linda Shadrick, a former employee of the district, added that she's never heard a single complaint about Harrell, and Kayla Shelton read a prepared statement questioning the board's reasoning on their decision. She expressed her gratitude to Harrell for his dedication and service to the district and presented him a certificate for his leadership.

Amy Wright, a former ELA teacher at Clay, said if their decision to non-renew Harrell was about curriculum and religion, the board needed to understand that lessons were not taught about religion, rather, there were lessons taught about other cultures and how chil-

dren in other countries don't have the opportunities or resources American children have. She recalled a story that is used called Secret School, noting that story is about children in some cultures not having what they need to thrive. "We need to promote tolerance of other cultures," Wright said.

With no other individuals wishing to comment, the meeting moved to Brandi Burnett's financial report. Burnett also said that at their next meeting near the end of April, the board will make a decision on bond of depository.

At 5:12, the board temporarily adjourned their regular meeting and went into a special session of the district finance corporation to discuss and approve a resolution to issue refunding revenue bonds and elect corporation officers. A representative from Ross-Sinclair, who oversees the board's bonding needs was present to conduct that meeting. The resolution passed during the finance corporation meeting gives the bonding agent the authority to refinance the board's 2013 bond which could potentially save the district \$59,000. Although the bonds won't be sold immediately, the board's action allows the bonding agent to watch the market and when the interest drops to the appropriate rate, move quickly to refund the revenue bonds. The meeting adjourned at 5:19 and the regular meeting reconvened.

In the reconvened regular session, Quinn Sutton a representative of the Kentucky School Boards Asso-

ciation addressed the board regarding the selection of a new superintendent. Sutton walked the board through the process for selecting a search committee and the board and the committee's role in the selection process. See the related story on that process in this week's Sebree Banner. At the conclusion of Monday night's meeting the board of education voted to hire KSBA as a third-party facilitator for the superintendent search.

Board member David Asher was then called on to discuss the hiring of an assistant principal at Sebree Elementary School. Asher told fellow board members "Sebree desperately needs an assistant principal. It is the largest (elementary) school in the county. I will keep pushing for that position," Sebree Banner coverage of the the board's November 24, 2025, meeting, report that Superintendent Harrell proposed to the board that an assistant principal position be added at Sebree to help address discipline issues and allow time for the principal to take care of other school business. He suggested the position be established for the spring 2026 semester to give the principal more time to focus on other matters. At the board's December 15, meeting Harrell once again approached the board for input on creating an assistant principal position at Sebree. Not a single board member offered input to Harrell's proposal and no action was taken by the board on the matter.

In his report on Monday night, Harrell noted that

the budget and staff updates would be sent to school principals soon so they can begin identifying their needs for the 2026-27 school year. The superintendent also shared staffing guidelines with the board. He reported that the guidelines for certified positions call for the number of positions to be rounded up if there is fraction of a position. However, classified positions are rounded to the nearest whole. He proposed with the support of Kim Saalwaechter that the guidelines be changed to allow for a uniform process. At the conclusion of Monday night's meeting the board voted to make the process uniform by round up on both employee classifications.

Before the meeting adjourned, Harrell announced that three county teachers—Jennie Hopper, Taylor Herzog and Christian Ramage—will be honored Thursday at Madisonville Community College with Excellence in Teaching Awards. They will be recognized locally at a later date.

The superintendent also reported that he continues to work with the National Guard on the health care initiative for the county, and he announced that a \$10,000 donation has been made to the district in support of the archery program and the soccer program. Archery will receive \$2000 and soccer will receive \$8000 for help with a locker room project. The donation will be added as a line item to the district budget.

The next meeting of the board of education is scheduled for April 27, at 4:30 at the central office.

## WCBOE To Begin Superintendent Search

The Webster County Board of Education on Monday night voted to hire a facilitator through the Kentucky School Board Association to aid in the search for a new superintendent of Webster County Public Schools. The move comes after the board voted 3-2 on March 23, to non-renew Superintendent Aaron Harrell's contract which expires June 30.

Quinn Sutton, former Lyon County superintendent presently working for KSBA was present at Monday night's meeting to explain the hiring process and share information related to forming a search committee, that committee's role, the board's role and the timeline for the five-meeting process. Although the board doesn't have to use a third-party facilitator, and could instead opt to have the board attorney facilitate the process, WCBOE attorney Roy Massey told the board when asked about his leading the committee that he recommends using a KSBA facilitator because of the knowledge and resources they bring to the process.

In his remarks, Sutton told the board that KSBA charges \$7000 for their services in the search which will begin with the formation of a search committee. He noted that all applications for the position go directly to the KSBA office in Frankfort where they are held with no access by local individuals until the application period expires. Those applications will then be sent to the local committee for their review.

KSBA has five meeting approach to the search with the first meeting being held to discuss a timeline for the process. In Webster County there is a time crunch, Sutton said since Harrell's contract expires at the end of June. At the first meeting the board will discuss the timelines, a hiring date, dates for the four additional meetings, develop an advertisement for KSBA's website, develop a "charge" for the screening committee and compile the characteristics of the type of superintendent they are looking for.

Sutton cautioned that the KSBA does not select the screening committee, "We advise," he said. By state statute the screening committee is comprised of six individuals—one board member appointed by the chair; one principal, selected by the principals; two certified teachers; one classified employee and one parent selected by other parents. A seventh

Continued on Page 3



ON MONDAY THE Webster County Fiscal Court signed a proclamation celebrating April as National County Government Month.

## WCFC Approves Proclamations; Hears Presentations

Webster County Fiscal Court approved four proclamations, heard two presentations and completed several other matters of business during Monday's meeting.

The court's first item of business was to hear an activity report from deputy judge/executive Ryan Hammack. Hammack told the court that he has been engaged in several projects over the past several weeks including working with Ag agent Vicki Shadrick on preparing bid specifications for a joint project. The deputy judge/executive also reported that he attended the Industrial Development Authority meetings were discussions were held regarding property acquisition and economic development projects. In addition, Hammack spent time with Judge/Executive Steve Henry and road foreman Randy Norman walking the Sebree Springs Estates property as the county prepares to begin work on that development.

Hammack also reported that he has met with mayors and community leaders and continues to

work with Zara Toal on ongoing park projects. He is also working to restructure the Chamber of Commerce into a county-wide organization.

Following Hammack's report, the court moved to the reading of four proclamations. The first of those proclamations calls for local residents to remember that April is National Child Abuse Awareness Month. Family Court Judge Brandi Rogers addressed the court regarding the importance of working to reduce child abuse rates. Rogers recognized several agencies—Beacon of West Kentucky, KASA, Family Services and others who are involved in deescalating child abuse and neglect. While promoting foster care, Rogers noted that child abuse "is never going to go away, but we need to continue to show up for these kids and continue our efforts to help them. When she concluded her remarks, Henry read the proclamation which was approved by the court. He noted that child abuse if one of the nation's most serious health problems.

The second proclamation of the day declared Monday, April 13, as Arbor Day on the national, state and local levels. The proclamation urges citizens to plant a tree to help the earth.

The court also celebrated April as National County Government Month. The proclamation stresses the pride county governments can take in assisting with the care, health, and well-being of its residents.

The court also read and approved a proclamation for county residents to recognize April 12-18 as National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week. Individuals who serve as telecommunicators community directly with law enforcement, fire fighters, emergency crews and others to keep both responders and the public safe.

At the conclusion of the reading of the proclamations, Donna Bumpus of Beacon of West Kentucky addressed the court regarding the success of the district court advocate program. She noted that the position is

Continued on Page 3