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Providence, Kentucky

12 pages, inserts

Schools see rise in economically disadvantaged students

BY MATT HUGHES
EDITOR

High homeless numbers and a large population of economically disadvantaged students were just two of the issues facing Webster County Schools that was revealed by the annual Kentucky Department of Education School Report Card released statewide this morning.

Although the report is normally used to compare performance results in individual schools and districts to results from schools across the state, due to COVID-19, the 2021 report card proves to be far less informative thanks to a waiver granted to the KDE by U.S. Department of Education that removes school accountability requirements.

According to the report card, Webster County Schools saw district-wide enrollment drop from 2,156 in the 2017-28 school year to 2,099 last year. No explanation for the drop in enrollment is offered by the report, but school officials reported during last school year that

a number of families had chosen to home school children rather than utilize the remote and virtual options offered early in the school year.

The largest group of students during the school year was the ninth grade, which had 196 students enrolled last year. Eighth graders made up 195 of the total student body with tenth grade reporting 186 students. The smallest grade level in the district was last year's junior class, the current seniors, which had only 137 members.

Of the entire 2,318 students in the district, 1,177 are female while 1,141 are male.

White students continue to make up the majority of the student body at 1,765, with Hispanic students being the second largest group at 394. Only 59 students in the district were classified as African American, an increase of eight students since the 2018-19 school year.

Approximately 63% of the student body, or 1,479 students, are considered economically disadvantaged,

with 488 officially being listed as homeless.

That represents an additional 89 economical disadvantaged students and 81 additional homeless students since the last report card released for the 2018-19 school year.

"We have a great staff of three Family Resource providers that focus on the economically disadvantaged," said superintendent Rhonda Callaway. "They don't just work with students but also our families. Due to the number homeless students, we hired Diane Oakley as our Homeless Coordinator a couple of years ago. Assistant Superintendent, Greg Bowles oversees Family Resource and Homeless so this group has a strong collaborative approach to meet the needs of these student populations."

Sebree Elementary is home to the largest population of financially disadvantaged and homeless students. According to the report card, 75.9% of the student body is listed as

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Matt Hughes

#1WC Employees of the Month—The September #1WC Employees of the month were recognized at Monday night's meeting of the Webster County Board of Education. Board members Tim McCormick, left, and Venita Murphy, right, pose with Kim Vaughn a middle school custodian and Tonya Wright, a fifth grade teacher at Providence.

Webster schools to begin 'Test to Stay' to prevent quarantines

Staff to get \$100 bonus for being fully vaccinated

BY MATT HUGHES
EDITOR

Webster County Schools are preparing to roll out a new "Test to Stay" program that will drastically reduce or even eliminate unnecessary quarantine days for students and staff in the event that they are exposed to the COVID-19 virus.

Individuals are considered exposed if they are unvaccinated and spend more than 15 minutes in close proximity to someone who tests positive for the coronavirus while not wearing a mask. Currently such an exposure will result in a mandatory 10-day quarantine.

Approved during the recent special called session of the state legislature, the program allows individual schools to work in partnership with the health department and healthcare professionals to develop a plan that allows students and staff that are exposed an option to test out of quarantine. This will apply to both in-school and extra-curricular activities.

Test to Stay will give students and staff an option to be tested on what would be their first day of quarantine. If they test negative, they will be allowed to return to school and other activities, but they must test each day for five days.

Failure to do so means they must complete the 10-day quarantine.

After five consecutive negative tests, they will be released from quarantine.

Students must have parental or guardian consent to be tested.

If students or staff choose not to take part in the Test to Stay program, they must following the existing 10-day quarantine rule.

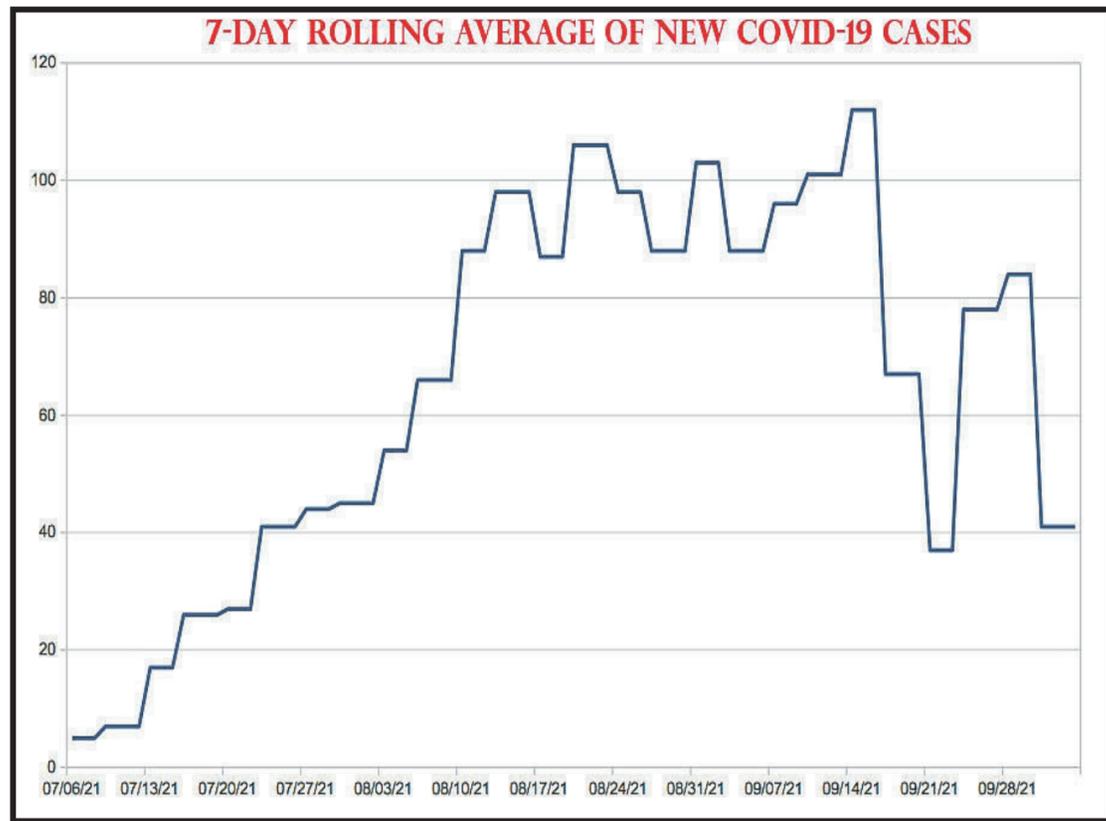
According to superintendent Rhonda Callaway, Webster County Schools is working with Louisville-based Pearl Diagnostics. An official start date to the program has yet to be announced, but is expected to be soon.

The district is not financially responsible for the program, which will be funded by the state. The school is only required to provide a testing location, which will most likely be at the Clark Clark Athletic Complex in Dixon.

The program will also offer surveillance testing to students or staff and any member of their household in the event they are exposed. This testing is not open to the general public.

In order to be eligible for Test to Stay, schools must have a mask order in effect. During Monday's

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Journal-Enterprise graphic

The 7-Day rolling average of new COVID-19 cases since July 4 shows a downward trend since peaking two weeks ago.

Officials see slight downward trend in new COVID-19 cases

BY MATT HUGHES
EDITOR

Although Webster County remains firmly within the "red" according to the state-wide COVID-19 scoring metric, officials are starting to see a downward trend in the number of new cases being reported.

The Green River District Health Department reported 45 new confirmed cases of COVID-19 on Tuesday, bringing the total to 2,303 since the pandemic began last March. During that time there have been 33

deaths associated with the virus.

But despite continuing high numbers, officials have reported a visible downward trend in the number of new cases in the county since most recently peaking two weeks ago with a 7-day average of 112 new cases.

The highest 7-day average since the pandemic began came on December 9 when that number reached 125.

Following a report of 35 news cases of the virus on September 21, the 7-day rolling average of new

cases dropped to just 37 cases, the lowest number the county has seen since July 23. Although that average went back up to 78 cases on Friday following a report of 43 cases on Friday, the numbers still represent a downward trend that officials hope to see continue.

A reduction in new cases of COVID-19 is particularly of note to healthcare officials following an announcement by Governor Andy Beshear last week that Kentucky

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Local fall events planned for this week

BY MATT HUGHES
EDITOR

Organizers in Clay and Providence are looking forward to sunny skies and relatively mild temperatures this week as both Clay Days and the Providence

Uptown Fall Festival get underway as Webster County officially celebrates fall.

Clay Days starts first with the annual city-wide church service tonight at 7 p.m.

Rides and vendors will open

to the public at 5 p.m. on Thursday and Friday, and at 2 p.m. on Saturday.

A nightly lineup of events will include:

Thursday

Parade—6 p.m.

Miss Clay Days—7 p.m.

Jr. Miss Clay Days—7:30 p.m.

Friday

Balloon Guy—6-9 p.m.
Busted Flat (music)—7-9 p.m.

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