



Changes to June 23 election explained

BY MATT HUGHES
 EDITOR

When Kentucky residents vote in the Democrat and Republican primaries on June 23, things are going to be quite a bit different from what voters are accustomed to, but officials still hold that the changes are only a temporary expansion to absentee voting, not a switch to vote-by-mail.

Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear signed an executive order on April 24 to outline how the

June primaries, rescheduled from May, will be handled. That executive order put into place a plan designed by Michael G. Adams, Kentucky's Republican Secretary of State and Chief Election Officer.

"Voting at the polls is a sacred right guaranteed by our state constitution," Adams said in a Youtube video that explained the changes. "Absentee voting is also in our constitution. Voters are permitted to vote absentee in case of illness or emergency."

The changes do not do away with in-person voting, but creates a system in which more people can utilize the absentee voting process.

"Before only certain people that fit the reasons could vote by absentee," said Webster County Clerk Valerie Newell. "Now everyone can."

Prior to the executive order, anyone wishing to vote by absentee had to call the county clerk's office and request an application to file an absentee ballot. The

clerk would then mail them an application, which they had to fill out and return to the clerk's office. If they qualified, a ballot would be mailed to them in advance of the election.

"We are making it easier (to vote absentee) with a secure online portal where you can confirm your ID to have a ballot mailed to you," said Adams.

He said that all registered voters should expect a postcard in the mail explaining how they can

utilize this option.

Adams said the plan was unanimously approved by both Democrats and Republicans on the State Board of Elections.

"Our county clerks of both parties, that is the people actually responsible for conducting this election, are solidly behind this plan," added Adams.

But he insists that this is not "vote-by-mail."

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What school will look like this fall still uncertain

BY MATT HUGHES
 EDITOR

When schools across Kentucky officially closed at the end of the day on Friday, March 13, few people would have believed that students wouldn't be back in the classroom before the end of the school year, but that is exactly how things played out. School is out for the year. Seniors will be handed their diplomas on Friday in a drive-through ceremony.

So what is next?

Local, state and federal education officials are already turning their eyes towards the fall semester and trying to piece together exactly what at least the near future of education will look like. There is no doubt it won't just be business as usual, but for the moment, the path forward is uncertain.

Students in the Wuhan and Hubei provinces of China, ground zero for the COVID-19 outbreak, returned to class last Wednesday after a four month hiatus. Chinese students wore face masks, sat in desks spaced 3.5 feet apart and had their temperatures taken multiple times per day. The state-run 'China Daily' newspaper said some schools arranged staggered arrival times for teachers and students.

Most students in China attended classes virtually during the shutdown, while here in the US, the approach to distance learning varied from district to district and state to state. In Kentucky, schools took advantage of Non-Traditional Instruction (NTI) days authorized by state legislators.

Even those NTI days varied from county to county, largely due to the amount of internet access that was available to students. Some districts were able to utilize both school and student owned computers and tablets to provide classroom materials online. Others had to rely on pen and paper.

That inconsistency in instruction is one issue that the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) is taking very seriously as they consider how and when schools will return to session this fall.

Kelly Foster, the associate commissioner in KDE's Office of Continuous Improvement and Support, said the agency is working to develop guidance for schools and districts that will help them address possible academic gaps and mental health concerns that might result from the COVID-19 emergency as they prepare to reopen.

"We have been working with different offices across the agency as we try to put a plan together for what districts need to think about when they go back to school," Foster said.

Diane Berry, chairwoman of the Nelson County Board of Education, said she fears students will have fallen behind academically after months of NTI.

"I'm really concerned about it," Berry said. "NTI doesn't take the place of regular school."

Foster and Amanda Ellis, associate commissioner in KDE's Office of Teaching and Learning, said that's a concern for the KDE staff as well.

"It's absolutely at the top of our mind," Ellis said. "That is our top priority and it is the No. 1 concern we're hearing from

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PROVIDENCE-AREA SENIORS HONORED

Jack Snyder hangs a senior banner for Daniel Baynham in uptown Providence on Tuesday. The city purchased around 40-such banners to honor seniors from Providence graduating from four different high schools in the area.

Photo by Matt Hughes



2020 graduation set for Friday

BY MATT HUGHES
 EDITOR

Webster County High School will honor the class of 2020 with to different events on Friday, an in-person Senior Community Salute Parade and a Virtual Graduation Ceremony.

The Senior Community Salute Parade, inspired by the annual senior walk tradition that takes seniors back to their elementary school to do a walk through, by be held Friday, May 15 at 6 p.m.

Each senior, dressed in their cap and gown, should be a front-seat passenger in their family's vehicle. They will ride to the front of WCHS, pick up their diploma cover, pose for a picture, have their name announced and then proceed in a parade line to their elementary school.

Once the last senior from that school community has passed in front of the school, a first responder will escort each parade line through Dixon and then to their community for a drive-by of their elementary school. If a student has transferred in from another district, they will join the school line where they currently live.

Residents are asked to cheer seniors on as the parade makes its way to the elementary school.

The drive through graduation will be broadcast live beginning at 6 p.m. on 104.9 Nash Icon.

There are some guidelines we have to follow in order for this opportunity to occur:

- Only one family vehicle per senior will be allowed on the Dixon campus. Seniors may decorate their family vehicle. The senior will be a front seat passenger in the vehicle.
- Other family members and friends will not be allowed to park

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Austin named 2nd Region 'Female Athlete of the Year'

She letters in four sports for senior year

BY MATT HUGHES
 EDITOR

Webster Count senior Marissa Austin was recognized last week by the 2nd Region Athletic Directors Association (ADA), which named her the "Female Athlete of the Year." The award includes a \$500 scholarship.

Austin beat out every female athlete in every sport from the 2nd Region's 15 high schools to take top honors, capping off a senior year that began with her playing in all 18 of Webster County High School's girls' soccer matches this season. During that season she posted 26 goals and assisted on 9 others to break the school's career scoring record.

In four seasons with the Lady Trojans, Austin played in 73 matches, and scored 90 goals.

But she was more than just a one-sport standout.

Austin also led her Lady Trojans' basketball squad to

a 17-11 record in the 2019-20 school year. As a senior, she scored 616 points in 28 games, averaging 22 points and 6.6 three-pointers per game. During a five year career with the high school's varsity team, she played in 151 games and scored 1,706 points.

While lettering in two sports is quite the accomplishment, Austin wasn't done there. She was also one of the top Lady Trojans' tennis players and was expected to compete for a spot in the 2020 state tennis tournament, which was canceled along with all other high school sports due to COVID-19.

During the 2019 season, Austin competed in the first round of the state tournament.

Prior to COVID-19, Austin also made the decision to join the Lady Trojans' softball program for her senior year. Although she never played a game before the season was canceled, Athletic Director Matt Bell said that Austin was being allowed to letter in softball as well, stating that all spring sport coaches were consulted, and any athlete who was expected to



Photo by Matt Hughes

During the 2019 season, Marissa Austin posted 26 goals and assisted on nine others to break the school's career scoring record.

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