

# Mt. Juliet

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# NEWS

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# WCS to phase in traditional learning

## Pre-K through 3rd grade pupils to return full-time beginning Monday

BY MIKE ALEXIEFF  
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The Wilson County Schools Board of Education voted Sept. 8 to send pre-K through third-graders back to school on a full-time traditional schedule beginning Monday.

Two women spoke at the beginning of the meeting — one a grandmother caring for her grandchildren and the other a single working mother of three — both of whom urged the board to return to traditional, full-time, face-to-face education as soon as possible.

Cindy Harel of Lebanon said that the hybrid and virtual models are not working for many, especially non-traditional families. Many children don't have tremendous support and home, she said, and those children

are falling further and further behind.

"Working grandparents don't have time to be a teacher," she said.

Other districts around the state have gone back to traditional education, that's the model that Wilson County parents have said they wanted and prep sports has returned, she said to applause from the audience.

Andrea Stoepler of Mt. Juliet said keeping up with her three children's school work was nearly impossible, noting she is deal-

ing with 18 different teachers, each of whom has a different way they want things done.

"The hybrid model is just not working," she said, adding later, "I want you guys to understand, we are struggling."

Her comments also drew applause.

Director of Schools Donna Wright acknowledged the difficult start to the school year, saying, "This has been a struggle for all of us."

But she also pointed out the difficulties the district has faced

— the tornado of March 3 that destroyed Stoner Creek Elementary School and West Wilson Middle School, followed weeks later by the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic that saw students sent home to complete the year remotely. And she praised the work of the staff across the district.

Wright, who was given the authority by the board to determine whether the district would be using a hybrid model, in

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Ethan Steinqwest/Lebanon Democrat

Abby Austin chases down a calf during the 3rd Annual FCA Rodeo's cattle roping competition.

# FCA Rodeo sees largest turnout yet in third year

BY ETHAN STEINQUEST  
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Competitors from across the country squared off with some of the toughest bulls and steers in the business at the 3rd Annual Fellowship of Christian Athletes Rodeo, held Friday and Saturday on the Wilson County Fairgrounds.

The event is likely to bring in thousands of dollars for FCA, but a total is unavailable at press time. Ed Barber of Mending Fences Cowboy Church, which organizes the rodeo, said it was their largest turnout to date and that a dollar estimate could solidify on Tuesday.

"We're really appreciative of our partnership with the local churches in Wilson County, and just the faithfulness of people in our county as well," Wilson County FCA Area Director Tim Bryant said. "I'm also really appreciative of Ed Barber and the Mending Fences Cowboy Church. In today's time with the conflicts and social unrest, and everything with Black and White, it's just refreshing for us to be able to reach across the aisle with each other."

FCA has a presence in 24 schools across Wilson County and provides a variety of sports and leadership camps for students. Proceeds from fundrais-

ers like the rodeo and its two annual banquets help with scholarship assistance for those programs.

According to Bryant, FCA receives 60% of the revenue from the rodeo and uses the money for both day-to-day operations and scholarships. The remaining 40% covers costs associated with holding the event, which is officially sanctioned by the International Professional Rodeo Association.

"Our schools are very active in our summer camps, and again at those camps the focus is to build the mind, body and spirit," Bryant said. "Each day there's competition, and each evening there's a time of chapel which lasts roughly an hour in which different speakers come in. There's singing and skits, and students are allowed to have a part in it as well, so it's really a lot of team bonding."

FCA also offers scholarships for its leadership camps, which are individual experiences meant to build skills and offer networking opportunities.

"At the end of the day, if a kid goes to sports camp with FCA and can't afford it, there are scholarships so you can go for free," Barber said. "The way I always put it, for every \$200 we raise we send a kid to sports camp. The bottom line is that no kid gets turned away."

Student volunteers helped out with the program as well, checking temperatures to prevent COVID-19 from spreading at the event. Masks were encouraged but not required, and hand-sanitizing stations were spread throughout the fairgrounds.

"We meet every Friday morning to learn God's word and fellowship," Mt. Juliet Christian Academy student and event volunteer Jessica Whicker said. "I'm just glad that we're able to be there, and it's given me a chance to grow my relationship with my peers."

Those weekly meetings are known as huddles to FCA members and take place at every school the program works with. Students are encouraged to lead the huddles themselves and drive the conversation.

"That way they're fed spiritually once a week, and a lot of the kids in the schools don't attend church," Bryant said. "A lot of times, that's the only church or spiritual guidance, so to speak, that many of them receive."

Barber said the rodeo's first year raised money for Summer County, but the change in focus to Wilson County allows it to directly benefit area students. The rodeo has also grown from year to year and has attracted several

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# New Leash on Life funding passes budget committee

BY ETHAN STEINQUEST  
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The Wilson County Budget Committee approved an extension on an agreement that would provide \$50,000 in annual funding for New Leash on Life's spay and neuter services at its meeting Thursday.

County Attorney Mike Jennings introduced the resolution, which is meant to allow the Wilson County Commission to continue that funding despite its policy against charitable donations tied to county services outside of its budget process.

"COVID-19 hit, the comptroller said let's get your budget done, we went through with the status quo, we didn't have anybody come in and make their dog and pony show pitch about how they ought to get money," Jennings said. "In this situation, New Leash on Life couldn't come in. They're not waiting until now because they wanted to, they couldn't come in during the budget time."

Jennings said those circumstances should keep from setting a precedent for other organizations if New Leash on Life's funding is approved.

"The intent is to continue appropriating \$50,000 in future years ... unless this commission takes action not to," he said. "So in other words, it would be \$50,000 pretty much by contract."

New Leash on Life Director Angela Chapman said the shelter currently spays or neuters an estimated

4,000 animals per year on a \$250,000 budget, numbers that are expected to grow alongside the county's population.

The resolution would credit them with \$50 per cat and \$75 per dog from the county's general fund up to \$50,000, with any remaining funds returned to the county's fund balance each fiscal year. New Leash on Life plans to share that information with the county in its quarterly reports.

"We didn't have this type of agreement before, so this is new territory," Wilson County Finance Director Aaron Maynard said. "The agreement that we had before was very simply, \$50,000 a year for three years. There was no attachment as far as X dollars per animal."

Chapman said the shelter is usually able to extend the \$50,000's value — both because of copay agreements and a higher number of cats needing to be fixed.

"We really just try to split up the amount into a quarterly, and then our focus is that we do a lot more cats than dogs trying to stretch dollars as far as we can," she said. "Thankfully, part of that is that we started really heavy with dogs. We've seen a decline in animals going into Animal Control, cats are what we keep hearing about as a major concern so we've shifted our focus."

The Wilson County Commission's next meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Sept. 21, in the Wilson County Courthouse.

# Tennessee Department of Education now tracking COVID-19 cases by school

## New dashboard to be updated weekly with positive tests

BY ETHAN STEINQUEST  
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The Tennessee Department of Education launched a database tracking COVID-19 cases in

schools last week after an initial delay in data processing.

That decision comes after weeks of pressure from parents across the state as children head back to school amid the pandemic. The dashboard will update once a week with positive case numbers among students and staff and can be sorted by county, region or school district. "Tennessee has led the

way in supporting districts for a safe return to school, opening classrooms for the new school year, and now providing the public with information around how COVID-19 may be impacting their school communities through a district-populated dashboard," TDOE Commissioner Penny Schwinn said in a press release. "This dashboard strikes an important balance in protecting

student privacy while providing parents, educators and community members with information they need to make the best possible decisions for their families."

Parents and families can view the dashboard at <https://districtinformation.tnedu.gov/covid-information/search/-1>. Some districts have not reported their numbers yet, but both Wilson County Schools and

the Lebanon Special School District submitted case counts.

According to the data released Wednesday, WCS had 14 students and less than five staff test positive for the virus last week, while LSSD had six students and 0 staff test positive over the same period. School-level data will be listed if the numbers rise above five for a single building.

"I know there's been a push for some transparency, and I was informed the past week that we needed to start sending TDOE the positive test numbers," Wilson County Schools Health Services Supervisor Chuck Whitlock said. "There's a portal where I will be doing that every week."

Whitlock said the district has seen 57 positive cases

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