

## NEWS HEADLINES

**Source:** Associated Press, Aug. 21, 2011

### **Ky. Schools Revamping Wide Range of Courses**

By Janet Cappiello

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — When 5-year-old Finn Thompson steps into her public school kindergarten classroom for the first time this week, she'll see crayons, No. 2 pencils, construction paper and glue sticks. What she won't notice is the transformation going on throughout Kentucky public education aimed at making her school career significantly different from that of her two older brothers.

“The incoming kindergarten class is truly going to be the measurement” said Finn’s mother, Louisville resident Myrdin Thompson, who also has two sons in Jefferson County Public Schools — eighth-grader Seth, 13, and fifth-grader Jonah, 10. “We are going to be able to watch them as they go ... to see how that will all play out.”

Educators say the 2011-2012 school year will be one of transition for Kentucky’s 1,221 public schools, which are opening this month amid a flurry of changes that mark the most significant reforms in more than 20 years.

“This is the next generation of teaching, learning and leading for Kentucky schools,” said Terry Holliday, head of the state Department of Education. “Our focus has moved from a focus on minimum proficiency to a focus on ensuring all Kentucky graduates are prepared for college and career.”

From English to math, literacy to social studies, science to arts and humanities, school districts are revamping every detail in a process that will go on all year, and likely beyond. It’s the result of Senate Bill 1, the 2009 education reform bill that mandates every student must leave Kentucky’s schools completely ready for college or the workplace.

Now called “Unbridled Learning: College/Career Readiness for All,” the reforms are being put into place gradually, beginning with this school year. Educators say students and parents will likely start noticing that classes are more demanding. In math, for example, fourth-graders are going to start learning concepts this year that in the past have been taught in fifth grade, said Marian Sowders, assistant superintendent for the Knox County school district in southeastern Kentucky.

“I think the rigor has definitely increased,” Sowders said, adding that his rural, Appalachian school district began implementing some of the changes last year to give students a jump start.

“It’s a lot of work, and our teachers feel that,” he said.

One key message educators want to get out to parents this year is to explain Kentucky’s adoption of the Common Core State Standards for English/language arts and mathematics. Kentucky was the first state in the nation to formally adopt the standards for grades K-12 as part of an effort to ensure a uniform public education from state-to-state.

Thompson, a PTA vice president in Jefferson County, the state’s largest school district, is one of several PTA parents who plan to devote volunteer hours to an ambitious effort aimed at educating parents about the changes. The 15th District was the only PTA in Kentucky to receive a grant from the National PTA that will provide members with training to help them spread the word.

Thompson said she has studied not only the standards, but new proposed curricula, and she is enthusiastic about changes she considers to be already more than a decade too late as the state strives to educate the “21st century student.”

“I often worry that in education, it’s ‘This is first grade and this is what you get.’ Boom. ‘And this is second grade and this is what you get.’ Boom. ... There doesn’t seem to be a cohesiveness to it, a flow,” she said.

But the new standards will require teachers to work more as a team, Thompson said, something she said has been missing.

“I think that may be the bigger challenge, rethinking education in the sense of, ‘Yes, you may be a third-grade teacher, but you are not a third-grade teacher: You are a K through 5 teacher.’”

Lisa Gross, a spokeswoman for the Department of Education, said many of the changes will not be seen until the end of the school year, “when testing occurs, and then later, when the data is reported.”

Thompson said she fully expects that to be the case.

“We want to make sure that we are all messaging and communicating the same thing so that everyone understands what’s going on. I truly expect to be doing this work ... well into 2012-2013,” she said.