

Grant County Schools hosts 2026 Town Hall

BY BETSY SMITH
EDITOR

For the third year in a row, Grant County Schools hosted a town hall meeting. On Tuesday, Sept. 22, Superintendent Todd Moody opened the meeting at the high school auditorium with an announcement that a new survey is out that, for the first time, is specific to different groups: 6th to 12th grade students, teachers and staff, school leaders, families and community members.

Moody reminded attendees that the inaugural town hall in July 2024 was the first step in the development of the district's strategic plan, which ends in 2028. The resulting plan was written in clear, simple language and included four goals, the first of which is that all students achieve.

To that end, Moody said, "We have built-in systems of supports that we can provide increasing measures of intervention to help address whatever gaps exist in the learning." Behavior has been a focus, and three of the four elementary schools now have "highly structured classrooms" to help.

High quality instructional tools are helping by making sure all the schools in the district "speak the same language" in terms of math and reading. Attendance teams help make sure barriers are lifted and students are in school regularly.

The percentage of college and career ready students at the high school has climbed from 69% two years ago to around 88% this year. The graduation rate is also high, he said.

"That's what that kind of intentionality produces."

Grant County is now a member of a "Vibrant Learning Professional Community of Practice." Vibrant learning "basically, is



Grant County Schools
Jenny Compton, associate principal of Grant County High School, speaks about the available career pathways for high school students.

learning that students care about, are engaged in, is relevant and something that matters to them," he explained.

The second goal, attracting and retaining high quality staff, has been tackled by providing "significant salary increases for two consecutive years," and a grant has increased staff and administration professional learning opportunities eleven

times over.

He noted the district has an SRO on each campus and is close to having one in every school building.

Also in the plus column for retaining teachers is the district's support for teachers dealing with students "that are struggling to adapt to the school environment."

Staff celebrations and encouraging recognitions, such as the

Spirit of Excellence Award at presented at school board meetings and the Excellence in Education Award given at the end of the year by the Education Foundation bolster faculty. The district also has (and is looking to engage more) community partners offering incentives for teachers and staff members.

He showed slides demonstrating the significantly decreasing number of new hires required at each school and highlighted the decrease in emergency certified hires. At the first town hall, the reported number of emergency certified teachers districtwide was 23. "This year we have four."

The third goal was to provide "transparent, accountable and consistent communication." A "playbook" now exists governing which school leaders communicate information via which channels, aiding in faster, more efficient information dissemination.

A district-wide communication app is also available and Moody began a podcast, called "Leading to Succeed." Board meetings are now recorded and posted on the website. A financial report is also on the website.

Goal four was having a valued partnership with the community. In the sports arena, Moody noted the new turf field and tennis courts and the addition of a full-time athletic director. Also, the district is covering travel costs for "in region and postseason opportunities" for extracurriculars.

He said there will be a co-op, intern and community partner breakfast in October to gauge what is needed from the school system.

Jenny Compton, associate principal of Grant County High School, talked about the opportunities for students at the Career & Technical Center (CTE). Nineteen pathways are now available,

the newest being EKG technician.

Of Grant County High School's 901 students, Compton said 815 are enrolled in a CTE or JROTC class.

All pathways have to have a student organization associated with them, such as FFA, FBIA or HOSA. Over the summer, some students from these groups traveled to competitions nationwide at no cost to them.

To help plan the future direction of the CTE, students in grades 7 through 11 were surveyed regarding their interest, either in existing pathways or potential pathways. Welding, health sciences and agriculture led the list.

The pathway students most wanted to see added was law/criminal justice. Also on the wish list were travel/tourism/hospitality and phlebotomy.

She indicated 60 were interested in cosmetology, explained it is not an option. In order to add it as a pathway there must be some sort of attainable industry certification or an assessment at the secondary level "and then go on to the postsecondary level."

Compton said middle school students now have a chance to explore cosmetology, along with many other careers, thanks to the school's brand new Paxton Laboratory.

Compton noted the emphasis put on graduating students who have a plan for their future. The survey revealed 284 were undecided as to what they want to do, a number that scares her. "Our goal is for them all to leave here with a plan."

Moody ended the town hall by displaying the QR code to take the 2026 survey. You can find a link to the survey at grant.kyschools.us.

Williamstown Board of Education passes working budget

BY LILY FABELA
NEWS REPORTER

The Williamstown Board of Education approved its 2026-2027 working budget during its Sept. 22 meeting, with district officials discussing rising expenses and a beginning balance that continues to decline.

Director of Districtwide Programs Dean Faulkner told board members the district's beginning balance has been decreasing each year, despite efforts to control costs.

"Our beginning balance is going down. It's going down every year," Faulkner said. "We are doing as much as we can to stop that from decreasing. But it's something that we need to be aware of."

Faulkner said it could eventually become necessary for the district to consider a tax rate above the 4% increase allowed without being subject to recall in order to stop the decline.

"It may come to the point where we need to do a tax rate above 4% to eventually stop the loss," he said.

Board member Chris Lawrence asked what was contributing to the decline.

Faulkner pointed primarily to rising expenses, including insurance costs, and said he did not attribute the loss to employee raises. He said the district has reduced or combined staff positions where possible and does not have positions he considers unnecessary.

He also discussed the relationship between local tax revenue and state Support Education Excellence in Kentucky (SEEK) funding. As local property assessments and tax revenue increase, the district's SEEK funding can decrease.

"I don't think the state's keeping up with these rising

expenses," Faulkner said.

Despite those concerns, Faulkner said the district was able to navigate a lower beginning balance without drawing from its contingency funds. The working budget maintains a 6% contingency, which Faulkner said is three times the amount required by the Kentucky Department of Education. About 45% of expenditures are budgeted for instruction.

Board members also discussed whether additional savings could be found in areas such as energy use. Faulkner said he recently met with a company that evaluates energy efficiency and said the district is looking at potential projects that could help reduce costs.

Board member Roy Osborne recalled an earlier district energy audit that identified savings through measures such as changes to meters and lighting. Superintendent John Slone also discussed lighting, HVAC controls and other areas where efficiencies could potentially be found.

"Costs just keep going up," Slone said.

Faulkner also explained new financial reporting requirements that took effect this year. The district's website now includes a financial disclosure section with reports including vendor invoices, year-to-date vendor spending and reconciled checks. Budgets, the district's annual financial report and the superintendent's contract will also be posted.

CONSTRUCTION UPDATE

Weather delays have pushed back the completion date for Williamstown's Head Start/preschool/multipurpose building.

Slone said following the meeting that summer weather delays shifted the

target substantial completion date from July 20, 2027, to Aug. 19, 2027.

The foundation pour was completed Sept. 23, allowing additional subcontractors to begin moving onto the site.

"Marrillia Construction will coordinate with trade partners to recapture lost time, and we will reassess any potential impacts in December to determine any changes to the start of school for 27-28," Slone said.

The board also approved pay application No. 2 for the project to Marrillia Design and Construction in the amount of \$94,820.47.

OTHER ACTIONS

The board approved the 2026-2027 Head Start/Preschool Policy Council bylaws and dispute resolution, as well as the program's Governance and Leadership Capacity Screening.

The board also approved an updated continuation agreement with Grant County Schools for a shared English Language Learner teacher during the 2026-2027 school year.

Faulkner said Williamstown has the teacher one day per week while Grant County has the teacher four days per week. He said Williamstown does not currently have enough students requiring the service to warrant additional days.

The board approved final BG-5 closeout documents for MEP Renovations Phase II, paving and the gym floor projects.

Also approved was a 2026-2027 memorandum of understanding between New Horizons Academy, operating under the Kentucky Educational Development Corporation, and Williamstown Independent School District.

Humphrey abstaining.

Dills appointed David Jason Litz to serve on the Grant County Ambulance Taxing District for a term lasting from Oct. 1, 2026, to Sept. 30, 2028. This was approved.

The court approved Resolution 2026-08 regarding \$201,577 awarded by the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet of Rural and Municipal Aid for resurfacing

Sherman-Newtown Road. This will take care of three miles of the road; money for the remaining mile of road will be requested through LARP funds next year, Dills clarified.

The next meeting of the Grant County Fiscal Court will be Tuesday, Oct. 6, at 6 p.m. at the courthouse, 101 North Main Street, Williamstown, KY.

Stage Right announces auditions for 'Cinderella'

JOHN SIEDENBERG II
STAGE RIGHT MUSICAL
THEATRE COMPANY

Stage Right Musical Theatre Company is thrilled to announce auditions for their semi-professional winter production of Rodgers & Hammerstein's Cinderella, running Jan. 29-Feb. 7, 2027 at the Williamstown Performing Arts Center. All Roles are available, with evening rehearsals beginning Dec. 29, 2026.

Auditions are open to kids 8-17 and adults 18 and older.

"Cinderella" is one of the most beloved fairytales of all time—a dazzling celebration of magic, romance, and hope. This version is inspired by the iconic 1997 television event starring Brandy and Whitney Houston. With fairy godmothers, princes in disguise, and a message that kindness and courage can change the world, this Rodgers & Hammerstein favorite invites audiences of all ages to believe in the impossible.

PERFORMANCE INFORMATION:

Rehearsal dates: Sundays - Fridays, Dec. 29—Jan 28. Stage Right values the time of its artists and works with the production team to make sure actors are only called if they are working.

Show dates: Jan. 29—Feb. 7, 2027 (Weekend performances, with student shows Feb. 2 and Feb. 4)

AUDITION INFORMATION:

Auditions will be held: -Oct. 23 from 6-9 p.m. at First Love Community Fellowship (930 Curry Ln Dry Ridge, KY 41035) -Oct. 24 from 2-7 p.m. at Footlighters Inc. (802 York St Newport, KY 41071)

WHAT TO PREPARE:

-A current resume and headshot
-A 32-bar cut of a musical theatre song in the

style of the show. An accompanist will be provided.

-Properly marked sheet music for accompaniment (A capella auditions will not be considered.)

A dance audition and cold readings will also take place following your singing audition.

To request an audition slot visit: <https://www.stagerightmtc.org/auditions>

This show is a semi-professional production. Compensation is determined based on previous professional credits and experience. Not all roles are compensated. This production, as part of our "community company" series, gives an opportunity for less experienced performers to work in a professional environment and gain credit before entering a professional theater experience.

Stage Right Musical Theatre Company welcomes and encourages people of all backgrounds, identities and ethnicities to audition. Your unique perspective makes our company stronger.

ROLES:

(Unless specifically noted below, all roles are open to people of all races and gender identities.)

CINDERELLA (Female, ages 20–30): Strong actor, soprano, and capable musical theatre dancer. Please note: this role requires on-stage intimacy.

HER FAIRY GODMOTHER (Female, ages 30–60): Strong mover and actor. An enchanting, motherly figure with a hint of mischief in her eye.

HER STEPMOTHER (Female, ages 35–60): Excellent comedic actor, strong singer, and capable mover.

GRACE (Female, ages 20–30): The older of Cinderella's two stepsisters.

JOY (Female, ages 20–30): The younger of Cinderella's two stepsis-

ters. Not always quick on the uptake, often sullen, and equipped with a piercing, high-pitched, supremely obnoxious laugh.

CHRISTOPHER (Male, ages 20–30): A charming young prince searching for his purpose and an identity beyond the expectations attached to his title. Please note: this role requires on-stage intimacy.

LIONEL (Male, ages 20–45): The Prince's royal steward and confidant. Dry, witty, intelligent, and possessing a great command of the stage.

QUEEN CONSTANTINA (Female, ages 40–65): The Prince's mother; strong actor, singer, and capable mover. The Queen is loving but firmly rooted in the traditions and expectations of royalty.

KING MAXIMILLIAN (Male, ages 40–65): The Prince's father; strong actor, singer, and capable mover. A warm royal presence who, like the Queen, inhabits a world built around tradition, appearances, and established expectations.

CHARLES: A cat who is magically transformed into Cinderella's Coachman. Part of the Fairy Godmother's transformation of Cinderella's imagination into reality; strong physical characterization and committed storytelling are essential.

4 WHITE MICE (any age): Cinderella's tiny companions who are magically transformed into Horses.

A DOVE: Magically transformed into Cinderella's Footman. Strong movement and physical characterization are encouraged.

ENSEMBLE (any age): Villagers, Merchants, Maidens, Palace Guests, and others who populate Cinderella's world. Strong singers, movers, actors, and storytellers who are excited to create distinct characters are encouraged to audition.

from Oct. 1, 2026, to Sept. 30, 2028. This was approved.

Ashley Brinker was reappointed by Dills to serve on the Grant County Ambulance Taxing District for a term lasting from Oct. 1, 2026, to Sept. 30, 2028. This was approved, with