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Franklin County schools see major improvement

System makes strides nearly across the board on state report card

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

It's report card time for Alabama schools once again, and Franklin County Schools superintendent of education Greg Hamilton looks like a proud parent after seeing major improvements in most of his schools over the last year.

The Alabama Department of Education's 2017-18 report cards were released last week. Each school system in Alabama was graded on the same criteria. The overall system received a letter grade from A-F, and each school received its own letter grade.

For high schools, grading criteria included: Academic achievement (20%); Academic growth (25%);

Graduation Rate (30%); College and career readiness (10%); Chronic absenteeism (10%) and Progress in English Language Proficiency (5%).

"I am very happy with the improved scores throughout the county," Hamilton said. "Every school improved significantly. I praise the hard work of the teachers, administration and students as we strive to be the best we can be in all our schools."

Schools without a grade 12 had a different set of criteria, which included: Academic achievement (40%); Academic growth (50%); Chronic absenteeism (10%) and Progress in English Language Proficiency.

Alabama Act No. 2012-402 requires the Alabama

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Overall score for RCS climbs three points from a year ago

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Russellville City Schools saw an improvement in its overall score in the recently released Alabama Department of Education report card for academic year 2017-18.

The system scored an overall B with an 88, well above the state average and an improvement of three points from last year's 85.

With a new scoring criteria this year for progress made in English language proficiency, you might think that Russellville City Schools would see a scoring spike as a result of so many non-English speaking students enrolled in the system, but a D-66.67 score in that category actually hurt the overall score.

"Considering the unique challenges we face in our district, what we've achieved is an amazing accomplishment," said RCS superintendent Heath Grimes. "When 40 percent of your student body is ELL or former ELL, and you still receive these kinds of scores, it shows that our teachers are doing an amazing job and all of our students have access to a high quality of education at Russellville City Schools."

"Considering the unique challenges we face in our district, what we've achieved is an amazing accomplishment," said RCS superintendent Heath Grimes. "When 40 percent of your student body is ELL or former ELL, and you still receive these kinds of scores, it shows that our teachers are doing an amazing job and that all of our

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Virgle Hugh-B Baker, Phil Campbell, age 77

Died Tuesday, January 1, 2019. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel in Russellville. Interment in Blue Springs Cemetery.

Sherry Jane Davis, Russellville, age 56

Died Tuesday, January 1, 2019. Funeral held at Phil Campbell High School Gymnasium. Interment in Knights of Pythias Cemetery. Spry Memorial Chapel of Russellville assisted the family.

Cal Hamilton, Russellville, age 71

Died Saturday, December 29, 2018. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel. Interment in Luketown Cemetery.

Bobby Gene Scott and Virginia M. Scott, Phil Campbell

Died Sunday, December 23, 2018 and Tuesday, December 25, 2018, respectively. Funeral service held at Temple Baptist Church in Phil Campbell. Interment in Liberty Hill Cemetery. Pinkard Funeral Home of Russellville assisted the family.

Robert E. Wallace, Russellville, age 89

Mr. Robert E. Wallace, age 89, of Russellville, AL passed away at Mitchell Hollingsworth, Florence, AL, on Sunday, January 6, 2019. A native of Madison County, AL, he had lived in Russellville for more than 33 years. An Auburn graduate and a retired electrical engineer, he was a member of North Highlands Church of Christ in Russellville. In addition, he was a veteran and served during the Korean War. Visitation with family and friends was to be held Tuesday, January 8, 2019 from 12 p.m. noon until 1 p.m. at Pinkard Funeral Home, Russellville. Funeral services will begin at 1 p.m. in the funeral home chapel with Marlon Rutherford officiating. Burial will be in Knights of Pythias Cemetery, Russellville.

Mr. Wallace is survived by his son, Chris Wallace and wife Cheri Wallace; and two grandchildren, Slate Wallace and Julianna Wallace.

Nieces and nephews also survive him.

Preceding him in death were his wife, Theresa Hargett Wallace; and parents, Albert Wheeler and Mamie Broadway Wallace.

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Hitt steps down as Franklin EMA director

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Jody Hitt has never known a home other than Franklin County.

That's one reason he and his wife Amanda wanted to take time to consider their options before Hitt decided to accept a job offer as Colbert County Emergency Management Agency deputy director.

If he accepted the job, the Colbert County Commission wanted Hitt to move to Colbert County.

After much thought and prayer, Hitt decided to accept the position, and he submitted his resignation as Franklin County EMA director to the Franklin County Commission.

At a special called meeting last Friday, commissioners accepted Hitt's resignation and voted to advertise for a full-time EMA director. The job posting will run in two local newspapers January 9 and 16, and the application deadline will be 12 p.m. on January 17.

Franklin County probate judge Barry Moore said he hopes to have a hiring recommendation to submit at a special called meeting later this month.

Franklin County EMA deputy director Ken Dobbs will serve as interim director until a replacement for Hitt is hired.

Hitt begins his new position in Colbert County on January 16.

Moments before Friday's special called meeting, Hitt reflected on some of his accomplishments since being hired in December of 2014.

"We almost have the AlertSense application ready to go. That should be within the next month or so," Hitt said, referring to a new free app that Franklin County residents can download to receive notifications about severe weather, Amber Alerts, dangerous spills, road closures and other emergency notifications. "Through grant funding, we also closed out ten storm shelters and brought them up to ADA compliant status. We added two weather sirens [on Strickland Road and in the Bethsaida community]. Along with Michael Hughes, we worked to determine the remaining spots that need weather sirens in the county, and we are within about six storm shelters of covering the entire county."

Most of those projects come from Hazard Mitigation grant funding. Hitt also helped secure Homeland Security grant funding for new security



PHOTO BY JOHN PILATI

Franklin County EMA director Jody Hitt (center) with (from left) commissioner Jason Miller, commissioner David Hester, probate judge Barry Moore and commissioner Rayburn Massey. (Commissioner Chris Wallace was not in attendance at last Friday's meeting due to an illness in the family.) The County Commission voted to approve the resignation of Hitt, who has accepted an offer to become the Colbert County EMA deputy director. Commissioners and Moore praised Hitt for his contributions to Franklin County.

cameras for the Franklin County Water Authority and 20 new radios for the Russellville Police Department.

Hitt said he would miss working with the county commission and the office staff, along with local law enforcement and first responders.

"I was really blessed here, and maybe that will keep going in my new job. I have been fortunate to work with some really great people," Hitt said.

As they reluctantly voted to approve his resignation letter, commissioners and Moore praised Hitt for his contributions to Franklin County.

"We thank you for your service. You have done an outstanding job, and we hate to see you go, and wish you well in your future endeavors,"

Moore said. "You always kept us up-to-date during weather emergencies, and you worked some long hours."

Commissioner Rayburn Massey said many residents aren't aware of the behind-the-scenes work of the county's EMA director.

"We appreciate all the time and energy you put into this job, keeping Franklin County aware of issues and news we needed to know," Massey said.

After some discussion about whether to advertise for a part-time or full-time EMA director, the commission voted to hire a new full-time director.

"In order to really do this job effectively, I believe it needs to be a full-time position," Massey said.

My take Get off that fence & on this... chase your dreams!

Growing up on a small farm, I can remember hearing the expression "straddling the fence." I also knew that one side of the fence could be a safe place and the other side could be a danger zone.

For instance, my daddy had two cows among his herd that would chase my brother and me when we climbed over the fence. It was almost as if those two cows just watched and waited on us and would then inform the other cows to watch while they made us kids run.

As soon as we saw those cows coming full-speed toward us, we'd turn and run for our lives, hoping to cross the fence before those horns were stuck into our little bodies. [Hey, it may seem a little over-dramatic here, but I was a child

with a big imagination. And, besides, this is my story, so I can tell it the way I want, right?] We would always manage to get back to safety, but there were times it was a little too close for comfort.

Later in my teen years is when I realized that expression had taken on a whole new meaning. Anyone who was told they couldn't "straddle the fence" forever knew it wasn't about those pasture fences anymore. It meant there were important decisions to be made and choices from which you have to make those decisions.

If you happen to be one of those people who



Gail Notes

See 'FENCE,' page 11

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The Honey Do List: Time to get to work

Well, this is it. After this year the 2000's will no longer be a teenager. What a crazy ride this century has been in it's formative years. It seems that everything is changing, exponentially. (That's my new word for the year.)

But it's January in Alabama, and that means cold, ice and (maybe) snow. Oh yeah, it also means warm days, rain and (maybe) a little sunshine. This is Alabama after all.

Just because it's well into January and we haven't really seen any ice yet, don't get too relaxed. With February still to come, there are several things every homeowner should take care of now.

If the temps stay 60 degrees or above for several days, open your foundation vents. This will help dry out your crawl space and could eliminate potential mold growth. Just don't forget to close them back should the temps take a plunge.

Check insulated pipes and areas that may allow cold air to get to them. Weather, pets and varmints can sometimes knock things around

and create air gaps that will freeze when the cold weather arrives. Don't forget hydrants and exterior faucets that should be covered.



Get outside and take a walk around the yard. Recent storms have naturally pruned a lot of trees, and the limbs need to be picked up before mowing starts in a few weeks.

While you are walking the yard, take notice of where water is standing or where the ground is really soft. These are areas that may need a little filling or draining come Spring.

Now is a great time to clean out your bird boxes. The new tenants will be arriving shortly.

Time marches on, and in a few months we will all have "2020" vision. (Remember, you saw that here first.)

Don't forget, help is just around the corner at your local hardware store.

OUR HOUSE by Ree Shannon



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The *Franklin Free Press* is published by hometown people, for hometown people. We urge contributions of all kinds, including guest columns, picture submissions, cartoons or letters to the editor. Send any letters to our office via U.S. Postal Service or e-mail, and we will gladly publish them. Letters must be signed and contain the hometown and phone number of the author. The *Franklin Free Press* reserves the right to edit letters for style, length and content.

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Give yourself a raise in 2019

Everyone starts out a new year with the best intentions. We're going to lose weight or eat better or work out more. I don't know about you, but I'm as guilty as anyone when it comes to shelling out a bunch of money for a workout class and then quitting by Valentine's Day.

One of the biggest areas where people miss an opportunity to be intentional is in their personal finances. Seventy-eight percent of Americans aren't getting ahead because they live paycheck to paycheck. Money problems remain a top reason that married couples fight. And one in five of you reading this aren't putting any money into savings.

Instead, Americans are maxing out credit cards, making hefty car payments and are up to their eyeballs in debt. It's the same story year after year. So why not make 2019 the year you start winning with money? Here are five ways to give yourself a raise this year:

1. Cut back on your monthly subscriptions. Take a look at your online subscriptions. Is there anything you need to cancel? Maybe an online fitness class you only use once every three months? That cash could be an extra something in your pocket! Or can you go down a level to save money? For example, Hulu has three price points—in the cheaper version, you'll just see a few more ads.

2. Make the "unsubscribe" button your new BFF. Set aside 30 minutes to sift through your email inbox. Open up all those promotional emails tempting you with sales and special offers, scroll to the bottom and click "unsubscribe." Once you stop getting the emails, you won't be tempted to spend so much money on things you weren't even looking for to begin with.

3. Create monthly financial resolutions. This may sound overwhelming, but quick wins are important. Write down 12 financial goals you'd like to achieve by the end of 2019, and assign one to each month. Maybe you want to pay off a credit card by May, or save \$500 by September. You'll be more likely to reach your goals if you keep them simple, make them tangible and believe you can do it.

4. Transition your traditional IRA to a Roth IRA. The traditional IRA works on the "save money now, pay later" system. In this system, you don't pay taxes on the money you contribute now, but you will have to pay taxes when you take the money out. A better choice is the Roth IRA. With this retirement savings account, you pay taxes up front. That way, you're not taxed when you withdraw in retirement. Translation: A Roth IRA lets you grow your money tax-free, saving you thousands in the long run.

5. Create sinking funds. Life happens. Come up with a list of things you might need extra cash for—things like holidays, birthdays, weddings, new tires, home repairs and more. Save for those things using sinking funds.

For example, let's say you want to save \$400 to travel to your friend's June wedding. Divide \$400 by the number of months you have left to save: \$400 divided by six months is \$67. You'll need to save \$67 per month in order to dance the night away at that wedding. If you're looking for an easy-to-use, free budgeting app, I recommend EveryDollar. This app will help you make a plan



Rachel
Cruze



Worried about mom

Dear Dave,
My mom is 75, and I'm the executor of her estate. She has \$500,000 in retirement accounts, and the only debt she has is around \$70,000 on her mortgage. Most of her money is in the stock market, with only \$20,000 in a money market account, and this worries me. She lives well within her means, so am I wrong to be concerned? Also, do you think she should go ahead and pay off her mortgage?

Keith

Dear Keith,
Yes, I would recommend she go ahead and pay off the mortgage. If she can do that at age 75 and still have \$430,000 left, that's the way to go. Now, being in the stock market at her age sounds like a shock to you. I don't think it's a bad thing at all. It's not what the typical financial planner tells you to do. For the most part, they'll tell you to get super conservative with your money as you get older. But from what you've said, she's not going to use this money. She's going to use the income from this money. So, the money's going to be left alone. If she's in good mutual funds, and not single stocks, I'm not worried about her.

Let's pay off the mortgage, and then she can start taking her income off the remainder. With the house payment out of the way, she won't need as much in terms of income, because she won't be sending money to the bank to pay the note on the house anymore. I'm comfortable with that. I'm 58, and I'm 100 percent into stocks through mutual funds. I don't have anything else, and I really don't ever plan on changing that!

Dave

Changing jobs and retirement savings

Dear Dave,
What happens to my Roth 401(k) when I change jobs and go to a company that doesn't offer this type of investment savings account? How should you proceed in this situation?

Jamie

Dear Jamie,
Anytime you leave one company for another, you should always roll your 401(k) from your former employer into an IRA (Individual Retirement Account). If it's a traditional IRA, you roll it to a traditional IRA. If it's a Roth IRA, you roll it to a Roth IRA. You would choose your own mutual funds, and you would manage your own accounts, with the help of a financial advisor of your choosing.

When it comes to choosing a financial advisor, my advice is to find someone with the heart of a teacher. A good financial advisor will help you make informed decisions about your money, and they will explain all aspects of your investments until you fully understand everything. In short, a quality advisor will *never* encourage you to invest in something you don't understand.

Also, look for someone with the ability to assess your *overall* retirement picture. You need someone who will help you map out a complete retirement plan, and your advisor should be able to explain the big picture *and* provide a comprehensive, easy-to-understand strategy for achieving your retirement goals.

Dave

**Dave Ramsey is CEO of Ramsey Solutions. He has authored seven best-selling books, including The Total Money Makeover. The Dave Ramsey Show is heard by more than 14 million listeners each week on 600 radio stations and multiple digital platforms. Follow Dave on the web at daveramsey.com and on Twitter at @DaveRamsey.*

'RAISE,' from page 4

for your money. And they have a fund feature built right into the app!

If you're serious about making a fresh start with your money, these tips will get you set up financially for 2019. This time next year, you could be in an entirely different situation. So make 2019 the year you start winning with money!

About Rachel Cruze

As a #1 New York Times best-selling author and seasoned communicator, Rachel Cruze helps Americans learn the proper ways to handle money and stay out of debt. She's authored three best-selling books, including Love Your Life, Not Theirs and Smart Money Smart Kids, which she co-wrote with her father, Dave Ramsey. You can follow Cruze on Twitter and Instagram at @RachelCruze and online at rachelcruze.com, youtube.com/rachelcruze or facebook.com/rachelramseycruze.

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 Russellville Masonic Lodge 371 will be selling Boston butts during Super Bowl weekend. Butts are \$30 and may be pre-ordered by calling 256-810-1970. Pick-up will be Saturday, February 2 from 8-10 a.m. at the Masonic Lodge on Coffee Street.


 The next meeting for American Legion Post 64 will be this Thursday, January 10 at 7 p.m. at the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce. Dinner will be at 6:30 p.m.


 The Kerry Gilbert Band will perform a benefit concert with special guest Jacob Lovell at the Roxy Theatre in Russellville this Saturday, January 12 at 7 p.m. General admission seating. Doors open at 6 p.m. Tickets are \$10 for adults, \$5 for children ages 6-12, and free for children under 6. Call 256-335-4356. The KGB will be the featured act at a show sponsored by the Franklin County Arts Council at the Roxy on the second Saturday of each month.


 Russellville FUMC will host a men's and a women's Step Study on Sundays from 3-5 p.m. A step study guides you through a process of discovery and recovery over your hurts, hang-ups and habits. Everyone is welcome!


  For anyone with the courage to be honest about life's hurts, habits and hang-ups, First United Methodist Church of Russellville will host *Celebrate Recovery!* on Tuesday nights with supper at 6 p.m., large group at 6:30 and small groups at 7:30. Free childcare provided. Church is located at 311 North Jackson Avenue. Come and join us!


 A historical novel entitled *The Store*, by T. S. Stribling, will be discussed at the Wednesday, January 16, 10 a.m. meeting of "The Readers of the Lost Ark" Book Club. The club meets at Coldwater Books, 105 West Sixth Street, Tusculumbia. For more info, email nancy537481@yahoo.com.


 A Book Swap hosted by the "Readers of the Lost Ark" Book Club will be held at Helen Keller Public Library on Wednesday, January 30 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Text questions to 256-412-2920.


 Spruce Pine Historical Society meets on the first Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at the Spruce Pine Community Center in Spruce Pine. Next meeting will be February 5. All members and friends are urged to attend.


 If you are interested in the study of the Civil War and have an ancestor who was in the Confederate Army, join the Sons of Confederate Veterans. Meetings are held the first Thursday of each month (except January and July) at 6 p.m. at the Russellville Rec Center. Next meeting will be February 7. The SCV is the direct heir of the United Confederate Veterans and the oldest hereditary organization for male descendants of Confederate soldiers. Organized at Richmond, VA in 1896, the SCV continues to serve as a historical, patriotic and non-political organization dedicated to ensuring that a true history of the period from 1861-1865 is preserved. Membership in the SCV is open to all male descendants of any veteran who served honorably in the Confederate Armed Forces. Membership can be obtained through either direct or collateral family lines, and kinship to a veteran must be documented genealogically. Join us for the celebration of our heritage! The minimum age for membership is 12. Call 1-800-MYDIXIE or 256-324-2317.


 The NACOLG SenioRx Medication Assistance Program supplies free and low-cost medications for anyone in Alabama with a disability or a chronic illness, regardless of age, that requires daily medication. Medicare recipients may also be eligible. For more information, contact NACOLG SenioRx today. There is no charge for this service. Call 1-800-AGELINE (1-800-243-5463) or 256-389-0530. This program is in partnership with the state of Alabama and Alabama Department of Senior Services.

 Mountain Valley Hee Haw features live music every Saturday night. Show time is 6 p.m. Free admission. No alcohol or drugs. From Russellville, take 243 to Hwy. 79, turn right, go 1/4 mile, third building on left. For more information, please call 256-332-5479 or 256-810-4840.

 New Life Ministries invites you to join them for Sunday School at 10 a.m. on Sunday mornings and for worship services on Sundays at 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. and Wednesday nights at 7 p.m. On the first Sunday of each month, there will be a fellowship lunch after morning services. You and your family are invited to come worship and fellowship with the Lord of Hosts and his children. New Life Ministries is located on Hwy. 24 west toward Red Bay, behind Tompkins Feed.

 TOPS (Take Off Pounds Sensibly) weight loss support group meets each Monday evening at 6 p.m. at the Russellville Recreation Center. Weigh-ins begin at 5:30 p.m. Everyone is welcome to drop in for a free meeting visit. Call 256-446-5962 or 256-412-2855 for more information.

 Village Square Apartments in Russellville host George's Country Boys each Monday from 6-8 p.m. for some Gospel and Country singing!

 The Newburg Masonic Lodge #388 meets the first Thursday of every month. The Russellville Masonic Lodge #371 meets the first and third Tuesday of every month. The Franklin County Shrine Club meets the second Tuesday of each month. The Order of the Eastern Star Chapter 256 meets every second and fourth Tuesday of each month at the Russellville Masonic Lodge. Spruce Pine Masonic Lodge #608 meets the second and fourth Thursday of each month. Phil Campbell Masonic Lodge #880 meets the first and third Thursday of each month. Burleson Lodge #143 meets the second and fourth Monday of each month. Belgreen Lodge #428 meets the first and third Monday of each month. All meetings start at 7 p.m.

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'RCS' from page 1

students have access to a high quality of education at Russellville City Schools."

Alabama Act No. 2012-402 required the Alabama Superintendent of Education to develop a school grading system reflective of school and district performance.

For high schools with a 12th grade, the scoring criteria is as follows: Academic achievement (20%); Academic growth (25%); Graduation rate (30%); College and career readiness (10%); Chronic absenteeism (10%) and Progress in English Proficiency (5%).

For schools without a 12th grade, the scoring criteria includes only four categories: Academic achievement (40%); Academic growth (40%); Chronic absenteeism (10%) and Progress in English Proficiency (5%).

Schools without at least 20 students classified as non-English speaking are not scored in the English proficiency category and that five percent is added to academic achievement.

While pleased with the overall improvement shown by his system, Grimes remains displeased with the state's scoring criteria.

"Our district has the second highest ELL percentage in the state, and our poverty rate is approximately 70 percent. The report is like comparing apples to oranges," Grimes said. "In my opinion, it measures demographics more than it measures system effectiveness.

"Our teachers are more effective, and all of our students are learning more than this state report card reflects, and I am extremely proud of their accomplishments."

Overall, Russellville City Schools received A grades in academic growth, graduation rate and college and career readiness. The system scored a B in chronic absenteeism and Ds in academic achievement and progress in English language proficiency.

A breakdown by individual schools within Russellville City School is as follows,

in descending order of overall grade.

•Russellville High School, B-89. First, the bad. The school's D grade of 63.92 in academic achievement is an improvement from 2016-17 but still below the state average. This number is based on the amount of proficient students in the areas of reading and math utilizing assessments in tested grades.

"Our district has the second highest ELL percentage in the state, and our poverty rate is approximately 70 percent. The report is like comparing apples to oranges," Grimes said. "In my opinion, it measures demographics more than it measures system effectiveness. Our teachers are more effective, and all of our students are learning more than this state report card reflects, and I am extremely proud of their accomplishments."

RHS scored A's in academic growth (97.49), graduation rate (95) and college and career readiness (92.86) and a B grade of 10.19 in chronic absenteeism.

Based on not having at least 20 non-English proficient students, RHS was not scored on its progress in English proficiency as most students who were non-English proficient mastered the language before reaching the high school level.

•Russellville Middle School, B-82. For RMS, the four scores were feast or famine. The school received a perfect 100 in academic growth and a strong A score, 9.12, in chronic absenteeism. Absenteeism is based on the percentage of students having more than 15 absences in a given school year.

RMS received D grades in academic achievement (63.16) and progress in English language proficiency (63.64).

•Russellville Elementary School, B-81. The story was similar for RES as for the middle school, as the school received two A grades and two D grades.

RES scored a strong 96.98 in academic growth, based on the number of individual students who showed improvement in reading and math from the previous year. Chronic absenteeism (A-10) was also a high mark for RES.

The school earned a D-64.23 in academic achievement and a D-68.55 in progress in English language proficiency. Although the scores were Ds, they both were above the state average in those categories.

•West Elementary School, B-81. West received its lone A grade in academic growth, with a 96.98, and a B-13.93 in chronic absenteeism.

West earned D grades in academic achievement, 64.23, and progress in English language proficiency, 68.55.

Grimes will meet this week with other superintendents whose systems face similar demographic challenges like Russellville, particularly those with high ELL percentages. He also plans to meet with officials at the state level to share his concerns about scoring criteria in certain areas.

Scores for every Alabama public school system and individual public school are available online at www.alsde.edu.

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Three local eateries earn satisfactory ratings

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Three of the four of the Franklin County establishments that received health ratings during the week of December 24-28 had scores that fall into the "satisfactory compliance" range.

Health ratings are required to be prominently posted in all food/lodging establishments. Scores are graded by the Alabama Department of Public Health inspectors on a 100-point scale.

Establishments with scores of 85 to 100 are considered to be in "satisfactory compliance" and are routinely inspected. Establishments scoring between 70 and 84 will be inspected again in 60 days, and those scoring between 60 and 69 will have another follow-up within 48 hours. Any

establishment scoring below 60 will be immediately closed.

Areas of inspection by ADPH include management and personnel; food storage, preparation and service; equipment; utensils; linen cleanliness; plumbing and waste; poisonous or toxic material storage; and an inspection of the physical facility or property.

Three of the four Franklin County businesses listed in the most recent food and lodging establishment ratings scored 91 or above, within the satisfactory compliance range.

The highest score was 97, received by McDonald's #23035, 606 4th Avenue SE, Red Bay.

Inspections of Franklin County businesses, with critical item violations noted, resulted in the follow-

ing scores:

•Subway, 504 4th St. SW, Red Bay, 84. (Mold in Sprite fountain head, no FERA papers available, hand sink blocked).

•Wicked Marinara, 502 4th Ave. SE, Red Bay, 91. (Sprayer fell below sink flood rim).

•Detailed Subs and Sandwiches, 1106 4th St. NW, Red Bay, 93. (Rodent presence under cabinet).

Of the eight inspections done in Colbert County from December 24-28 all received scores falling in the range of satisfactory. The high score of 99 was received by Cypress Cove, 200 Alabama Street, Muscle Shoals.

Health ratings are available at www.foodscores.state.al.us and may be viewed by city or county.

'COUNTY,' from page 1

Superintendent of Education to develop a school grading system reflective of school and district performance. The act requires the school profile be based on a combination of student achievement scores, achievement gap, college and career readiness, learning gains and other indicators selected by the Alabama Superintendent of Education.

Franklin County Schools received an overall system grade of B and a numeric score of 81. This favorably compares to last year's overall score of 78, which was a C.

In the area of academic achievement, Franklin County Schools received a score of 58.20, an improvement of five points from 2016-17. This is based on the percentage of proficient students in the areas of reading and math utilizing assessments in tested grades. The system's score fell below the state average.

Franklin County Schools received a score of 95.51 in academic growth, based on individual students who demonstrate improvement in reading and math from one year to the next using multiple years of data. The system's score scored above the state average of 91.58.

In the category of graduation rate, Franklin County Schools scored 90, above the state average of 89. This score reflects the percentage of high school students who graduate within four or five years from entering the ninth grade.

College and career readiness is scored based on the percentage of high school students who meet at least one of the college and career-ready indicators. Franklin County's score of 75.47 is above the state average of 71.46.

In the area of chronic absenteeism, where the lower the number the better you score, Franklin County Schools earned a 15.80, better than the state average of 18.28. The score is the percentage of students having 15 or more absences in a given school year.

A new category, progress in English Language proficiency, is scored for all schools with at least 20 students classified as English Language learners. For schools with fewer than 20 ELL students, academic growth receives an additional five percent in the scoring.

Franklin County received a failing score for this category, with a 52.48, although that failing score was above the state average of 42.54.

Seven of Franklin County's eight schools improved their overall scores in 2017-18 compared to one year earlier, with the exception being Red Bay High School, which scored an 86 this

year and last year.

"I am very happy with the improved scores throughout the county," Hamilton said. "Every school improved significantly. I praise the hard work of the teachers, administration and students as we strive to be the best we can be in all our schools."

East Franklin Junior High School saw its overall score increase dramatically, from a D-66 one year ago to a B-81 this year. This year's scores were the first for a year in which Hamilton served as superintendent the entire school year.

"To see tremendous growth and improvement in my first year makes me very proud of each and every one and the part they played," Hamilton said. "Improving to an overall B and being above the state average of 80 is to be commended. East Franklin is to be applauded for the monumental growth. Mr. Jonathan King [EFJH principal] and his staff and students deserve recognition."

Hamilton still takes issue with some of the state scoring criteria and doesn't believe they accurately measure the progress of his system.

"There are still issues I don't feel are favorable in the report card, including ELL scoring and chronic absenteeism," Hamilton said. "Imagine where we would be if it really was scored on a level playing field."

"But we only control what we do as a system, and I am excited to see the growth because I know how hard the teachers, administration and students are working."

Franklin County Schools' scores, in descending order, were as follows:

•Phil Campbell Elementary School, B-86. PCES scored above the state average in all three criteria for schools without a 12th grade. The school scored a perfect 100 on academic growth.

•Red Bay High School, B-86. Red Bay scored above the state average in four of the five criteria, falling just below the academic achievement state score. Red Bay scored A scores in academic growth and graduation rate.

•Belgreen High School, B-83. Belgreen's outstanding score of 98.83 on academic growth helped the school improve overall from a 76 to an 83. The school has a failing academic achievement score of 55.86, well below the state average.



Letters to the Editor

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•Vina High School, B-82. Vina received an A score on academic growth, and B scores on three of the remaining four categories. The exception was in academic achievement, with the school receiving a below-state average failing score of 56.12.

•East Franklin Junior High School, B-81. East Franklin's dramatic overall increase is attributed to a perfect 100 in academic growth and one of the state's best scores in chronic absenteeism, also well into the A grade. As for academic achievement, East Franklin received a below-state average failing score of 56.3.

•Tharptown Elementary School, B-80. The school improved its overall grade three points from 2016-17, in large part due to a strong academic growth score of 98.01. The school was the only one in the county not to receive a failing score in academic achievement, with a D grade of 61.56.

•Tharptown High School, C-74. THS, still with the county's lowest individual grade, improved from a D-69 in 2016-17. THS received a low failing score of 39.79 in academic achievement, C grades in college and career readiness and chronic absenteeism and B grades in academic growth and graduation rate.

For more information on Franklin County Schools as well as access to report cards for every Alabama school, log onto www.alsde.edu and search AL report cards.



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JOB OPPORTUNITY
 The Franklin County Commission will accept applications for the following position: Accountant/Payable Clerk for the Franklin County Commission Office until 5:00 PM on Wednesday, January 23, 2019.
 This position requires the applicant to possess an accounting degree. An application and job description may be picked up at the Franklin County Commission Office, located at 405 N. Jackson Ave., Russellville, AL 35653, Monday - Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Franklin County is an equal opportunity employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability in the employment or the provision of services.

JOB OPPORTUNITY
 The Franklin County Commission will accept applications for the following position: A Full-Time EMA Director for Franklin County until 12:00 PM on Thursday, January 17, 2019.
 An application and job description may be picked up at the Franklin County Commission Office, located at 405 N. Jackson Ave., Russellville, AL 35653, Monday - Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Franklin County is an equal opportunity employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability in the employment or the provision of services.

JOB OPPORTUNITY
 The Franklin County Commission will accept applications for the following position: Corrections Officer/Dispatcher for the Franklin County Sheriff's Office until 5:00 PM on Friday, January 11, 2019.
 An application and job description may be picked up at the Franklin County Commission Office, located at 405 N. Jackson Ave., Russellville, AL 35653, Monday - Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM.
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JOB OPPORTUNITY
 The Franklin County Commission will accept applications for the following two positions: Solid Waste Technician for the Franklin County Solid Waste Department until 5:00 PM on Friday, January 11, 2019.
 An application and job description may be picked up at the Franklin County Commission Office, located at 405 N. Jackson Ave., Russellville, AL 35653, Monday - Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM.
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JOB OPPORTUNITY
 The Franklin County Commission will accept applications for the following two positions: Sheriff Deputy for the Franklin County Sheriff's Office until 5:00 PM on Friday, January 11, 2019.
 An application and job description may be picked up at the Franklin County Commission Office, located at 405 N. Jackson Ave., Russellville, AL 35653, Monday - Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM.
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'FENCES,' from page 3

have such a fear of failure that you have just sat back because you were so afraid of making the wrong decision, I'd like to give you something to consider.

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to it as the "fence of life."

....Everyone who reaches for their dreams and goals in life has failed at one time or another—and some more than others. So get off that fence and chase your dreams!

On second thought, I believe I'll go stand on the fence, check out both sides and look over the horizon. I'm not staying on it, though, because there happen to still be dreams I need to work on.

Until later....



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The Franklin County Junior High Tournament tipped off this past Saturday at Vina High School with eight games in four different divisions. See inside today's Sports Section for full coverage.



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Boyd a finalist for 5A Back of the Year honor

Staff reports

On the heels of a record-setting senior season, Russellville tailback Zaye Boyd has been named one of three finalists for Class 5A Back of the Year.

Back at RHS after one year in Moulton, Boyd set a new single-season school rushing record in 2018 with 2,084 yards (an average of 189.5 per game) on his way to earning first-team All-State honors from the ASWA. Remarkably, the 6'1, 210-pound senior became the first back in Golden Tiger history to surpass the 2,000-yard mark despite carrying the ball—on average—less than 18 times per game. He was incredibly explosive and efficient, averaging a staggering 10.7 yards per attempt on the season.

"Zaye had a phenomenal year," Russellville coach John Ritter said. "I don't know how many 2,000-yard backs there were in 5A or in the whole state. He was a guy who was very coachable and worked very hard. He had a phenomenal year, and his stats back that up."

Of Boyd's 30 rushing touchdowns this season, seven covered at least 60 yards, two more covered at least 50 yards and four more covered at least 40 yards. A true home run hitter, Boyd averaged an astonishing 54.6 yards on his 16 touchdown runs of 30-plus yards.

"He had great vision," Ritter said. "He did a

See 'BOYD,' Page 17



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

HOME RUN THREAT - Of Boyd's 30 rushing touchdowns in 2018, more than half of them (16) covered at least 30 yards.

Buckhalter beats buzzer as Golden Tigers out-gun Central for shootout win

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

RUSSELLVILLE - Devin Buckhalter hit a game-winning three-pointer at the buzzer on Saturday, helping Russellville overcome a monster game by Central's Lane McKay and snap a two-game skid with a thrilling 89-86 victory over the Wildcats.

McKay, a sophomore guard, poured in 38 points and hit eight threes, the last of which came in the final half-minute and gave Central an 86-83 lead. Lucas McNutt, who led the Golden Tigers (11-5) with 28 points, answered with his fourth triple of the night, tying the game 86-86 and setting the stage for Buckhalter's late heroics.

The Wildcats had the first crack to win the game in regulation. They called timeout after McNutt's tying three and got the ball inbounds to McKay, who had come out on fire with 14 first-quarter points and stayed hot the rest of the night.

Defended well by 6'1 sophomore Chandler Dyas, McKay was forced to give the ball up, and teammate Jaden Carter was called for traveling with 2.4 seconds remaining.

The Golden Tigers called timeout and then inbounded the ball to midcourt, where they immediately called another timeout (their final one of regulation).

With 1.4 seconds on the clock, Buckhalter raced around a screen near the top of the key and curled toward the left wing, receiving the inbounds pass from fellow senior Caden Parker. Buckhalter took one dribble to his left to create space and then beat the buzzer with his first and only three of the night, setting off a mad celebration during which he was mobbed by teammates and embraced by his smiling head coach, Patrick Odom.

"We did a good job of executing a sideline inbounds play, but



PHOTOS BY KYLE GLASGOW

McKay (above, 12) poured in 38 points for Central, but Buckhalter (at right) capped off a late Russellville rally with a game-winning three.

even when you execute really well, you still have to make the shot," Odom said. "There are multiple options on that play. They didn't guard the inbounder, which sort of led Caden to Devin's option. Caden read it right and made a great pass, and then Devin hit a big shot.

"We had reminded our guys that with 1.4 seconds on the clock, they had time to catch, take a dribble, gather and shoot. Devin took advantage of that and then knocked it down. Number three [Buckhalter] and

See 'BUCKHALTER,' Page 18



Red Bay, PC boys advance to county final

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

VINA - Cody Carnes scored 15 points for Red Bay's seventh-and-eighth-grade boys on Saturday afternoon, helping the Tigers avenge a pair of previous losses to Belgreen with a 47-29 win over the Bulldogs in the semifinals of the Franklin County Junior High Tournament.

Ethan McCoy added 12 points for Red Bay (11-11), which earned a date with Phil Campbell in this Saturday's county final at 3:30 p.m. at Vina High School.

The Tigers got six points from Carnes and four from Gage Edgmon in the first quarter, jumping out to an early 10-5 lead. McCoy and Brady Bolton both connected from beyond the arc in the second quarter, helping Red Bay out-score the Bulldogs 14-5 to take a 24-10 lead into the locker room.

Carnes poured in nine third-quarter points as the Tigers out-scored Belgreen 16-7 to open up a 40-17 lead. McCoy then shot 5-for-6 from the foul line in the fourth quarter to help seal the deal and punch Red Bay's ticket to the finals.

Edgmon finished with seven points, and Holden Inman added four. Bolton scored three, and Will West and Carsten Hollander each had two. Lawson Glover and Eli Farris chipped in with one point apiece.

Austin James led Belgreen with 10 points, and Jordan Wright added nine.

In other seventh-and-eighth-grade boys action on Saturday:

Phil Campbell 38 East Franklin 22

The Bobcats dominated the third quarter, out-scoring East Franklin 15-2 to turn a one-point game into a rout on their way to clinching a spot in this Saturday's county final.

Jacob Barnwell knocked down a pair of threes in the big third quarter and finished with 10 points to lead Phil Campbell. Clayton Demartin added eight points, and Braxton Goodson scored six. Malachi Gholston finished with five, and Brennon Misner scored three points on 3-for-4 shooting from the line.

J.J. Quillen and Tyler Pounders each had two points, and Noah Raper and Jake Morgan added one apiece. The Bobcats shot 7-for-10 from the line as a team.

Josh Molina hit two threes and finished with eight points to lead the Rebels. Gage Baker also scored eight points. Kevin Jimenez finished with four, and Clay Morgan added two.

Phil Campbell 35 Tharptown 17

Malachi Gholston scored 14 points in Phil Campbell's first game on Saturday, helping the Bobcats pull away from Tharptown and advance.

Phil Campbell led by just four at halftime, 15-11, before out-scoring the Wildcats 10-6 in the third quarter. Gholston hit two threes in the third, and the Bobcats then out-scored Tharptown 10-0 in the fourth to finish off a dominant second half and win going away.

Clayton Demartin had 11 points for Phil Campbell, and J.J. Quillen added four. Jacob Barnwell, Brennon Misner and Noah Raper each

scored two.

Edwin Vela, Dawson Higgins, Dylan Valdez and Jackson Clement scored four points apiece to lead the Wildcats. Hunter Motes added one.

Red Bay 61 Vina 33

The Tigers came out hot in their first game on Saturday, hitting six first-half threes (including four by Brady Bolton) and cruising to a big win over Vina.

The Red Devils grabbed an early 5-4 lead on a three-pointer by Hunter Griffith, but Ethan McCoy answered with a three to spark a 16-3 run by Red Bay to close the first quarter. Bolton and Cody Carnes capped the run with back-to-back threes to give the Tigers a 20-8 lead at the end of one.

Bolton buried three more threes in the second quarter, helping Red Bay out-score Vina 17-3 to take a 37-11 lead into the locker room. Gage Edgmon had a pair of baskets early in the third quarter as the lead swelled to 32 points, and the Tigers never looked back.

Bolton finished with 14 points to lead Red Bay. Carsten Hollander added eight, and McCoy scored seven. Edgmon had six points, and Carnes finished with five. Will West, Canaan Hollander, Caden Keeton and Holden Inman scored four points apiece. Lawson Glover scored two points, and Eli Farris had one.

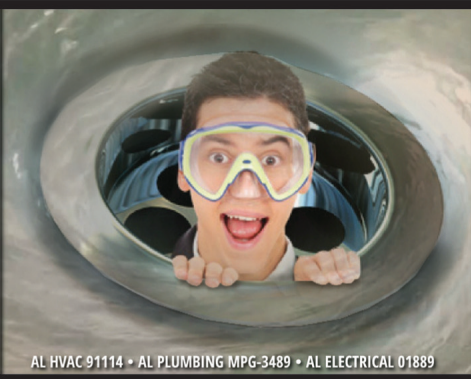
Conner Davidson made three threes for Vina and finished with 11 points. Griffith scored nine points, and Nate Stidham added seven. Cayden Colburn finished with four points, and Bradan Davis added two.



PHOTOS BY KYLE GLASGOW
Malachi Gholston (at left, 30) scored 14 points to lead Phil Campbell past Jackson Clement (1) and Tharptown. Meanwhile, Eli Farris (2) and Red Bay beat Vina and Belgreen to earn a date with the Bobcats in Saturday's final.



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Morgan's putback lifts Lady 'Cats past Belgreen

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

VINA - Kyndall Morgan scored on a putback at the buzzer to cap off a big fourth quarter for Tharptown and lift the Lady Wildcats to a 27-25 win over Belgreen in seventh-and-eighth-grade girls action at the Franklin County Junior High Tournament on Saturday.

Tharptown trailed 21-14 at the end of three before out-scoring the Lady Bulldogs 13-4 down the stretch to rally for the win and earn a date with top-seeded Vina in this Saturday's semifinals at 9 a.m. at Vina High School.

Belgreen led Tharptown 25-21 with 1:15 remaining when Morgan Vandiver scored and got fouled, converting the three-point play to cut the lead to one. Morgan then came up with a steal, and Harleigh Borden went 1-for-2 at the line with 23.4 seconds left to tie the game 25-25.

After another turnover by the Lady Bulldogs, Tharptown called timeout with

less than five seconds on the clock. Out of the timeout, Borden missed a jumper from the right side, but Morgan grabbed the weak-side rebound and put it back in as time expired.

Vandiver and Morgan finished with eight points apiece to lead the Lady Wildcats. Borden added seven points, and Alyssa Abbott and Sarah Mansell each had two.

Lily Blackburn scored a game-high 12 points for Belgreen. Noelle Willingham added seven, Katie Cooper finished with four and Natalie Willingham had one.

The Lady Bulldogs trailed 7-1 after one before out-scoring Tharptown 20-7 over the next two quarters to take a seven-point lead into the fourth.

In the other seventh-and-eighth-grade girls semifinal this Saturday, Red Bay and Phil Campbell will face off at 10:15 a.m. The winner of that game will meet the Vina/Tharptown winner in the tournament finals later on Saturday at 2 p.m.

Closing 31-0 run sends PC girls to county final

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

VINA - Leading by just three early in the third quarter on Saturday, Phil Campbell's ninth-grade girls closed the game on a 31-0 run to pull away from Belgreen for a 53-19 win in the semifinals of the Franklin County Junior High Tournament at Vina High School.

Kenner Scott finished with 17 points to lead the Lady Bobcats (10-1), who will face Tharptown this Saturday at 5 p.m. in the tournament finals. Madison Branch added 13 points, and Faith Cook scored 11. Branch and Cook each went 3-for-4 from the foul line.

Belgreen trailed by just five at halftime and then pulled to within three when Dulce Donagustin opened the third quarter with a basket—the Lady Bulldogs' final bucket of the game, as it turned out. Branch answered with back-to-back jumpers for Phil Campbell, and Scott added a free throw and a three-pointer to push the lead to 30-19.

A layup by Branch and a basket by Scott made it 34-19 at the end of three, and the Lady Bobcats out-scored Belgreen 19-0 in the fourth quarter.

Jade Roberson and Allie Herring each finished with six points for Phil Campbell.

Nora Castillo led Belgreen with eight points, and Donagustin added six. Kaley Chandler knocked down a three, and Maria Estrada went 2-for-2 at the foul line to finish with two points.

In other ninth-grade girls action on Saturday:

Tharptown 36 East Franklin 20

The Lady Wildcats jumped out to an 11-1 lead at the end of the first quarter and never looked back, earning a date with Phil Campbell in this Saturday's county final.

Jaiden Gaston led Tharptown with 14 points, going 6-for-8 from the foul line. Emily Campos scored four points in the big first quarter and finished with eight. Kaitlyn Simmons nailed a three in the first quarter and later added another, finishing with six points.

Madison Vandiver added four points for the Lady Wildcats, and Taylor Cameron and Savannah Romans scored two apiece. Tharptown led 22-4 at halftime and finished the game 8-for-11 from the foul line.

Abby Garrison shot 5-for-6 from the foul line and led East Franklin with nine points. Abigail Bell added seven points.



PHOTO BY
KYLE GLASGOW
Belgreen's Maria Estrada shoots over Phil Campbell's Madison Branch (21) in Saturday's game. The Lady Bobcats won 53-19 to earn a date with Tharptown in the county final.

For updates on news and sports throughout the week, visit us on the web at www.franklinfreepress.net! Send your guest columns, letters to the editor and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.

Hot-shooting Bobcats advance to county final

Staff reports

VINA - Phil Campbell's ninth-grade boys hit nine three-pointers on Saturday afternoon, rolling past East Franklin 53-20 in the semifinals of the Franklin County Junior High Tournament at Vina High School.

Cam Habada had three threes and 13 points to lead the Bobcats, who will face the Tharptown/Belgreen winner in the county final on

Saturday at 6:30 p.m. Quentin Hyde and Sage Raper each knocked down two threes and finished with 12 points apiece.

Phil Campbell got threes from Hyde and Hunter Baker in the first quarter, jumping out to a 13-7 lead. Raper hit two threes in the second quarter, helping the Bobcats out-score East Franklin 16-4 to take a 29-11 lead into the break.

Habada and Hyde both connected from beyond the arc in the third quarter as Phil Campbell out-

scored the Rebels 16-7 to push the lead out to 27 at 45-18. Habada and Cole Pace made one three-pointer apiece in the fourth quarter.

Kyle Pace finished with eight points for the Bobcats. Baker and Cole Pace each had three, and Austin Douthitt added two.

Trey Benford led East Franklin with seven points, and Hayden McCleese scored six. Andrew Green finished with four points, Hunter Potts had two and Joshua Morgan added one.

Belgreen boys remain unbeaten in area play

Staff reports

Mason Bragwell scored 22 of his game-high 30 points in the first half last Friday night, helping Belgreen's boys build a big early lead on their way to remaining unbeaten in area play with an 83-72 win over visiting Phillips.

Scout Bragwell and Isac Willingham each added 17 points for the Bulldogs, who improved to 9-6 overall and 5-0 in Class 1A, Area 12. Brandon Green led Phillips with 28 points.

Mason Bragwell dominated the first quarter with 14 points, helping Belgreen jump out to a 23-13 lead. The 6'6 senior added eight more points in the second as the Bulldogs out-scored the Bears 24-19 to take a 47-32 lead into the locker room. Scout Bragwell also had a big second quarter, hitting two threes and scoring eight points.

Willingham, a sophomore post player, had nine points in the third quarter, helping Belgreen keep the Bears at bay by out-scoring them 26-23. Phillips closed the game on a 17-10 fourth-quarter run, but the Bulldogs held on to finish off a season sweep of the Bears.

Mason Bragwell, who scored a career-high 33 points in a win over Central the day after Christmas, might have topped that mark on Friday had he not gone just 3-for-8 from the foul line. Belgreen was just 8-for-20 from the line as a team and made five three-pointers (three by Scout Bragwell).

Brant Bragwell added eight points, and Kostner Bryant scored five. Gaven

Taylor, Koby Collins and Tanner Warhurst had two apiece.

Alex Copeland scored 16 points for Phillips. The Bears made six threes and shot 12-for-25 from the foul line.

Belgreen was set to return to action Tuesday night at Phil Campbell.

Varsity girls

Phillips 64 Belgreen 42

Ally McCollum scored 11 of her game-high 18 points in the decisive third quarter last Friday night, helping Phillips pull away from Belgreen and remain unbeaten in area play.

Phillips (10-6, 4-0 in Class 1A, Area 12) led 32-22 at halftime before out-scoring the Lady Bulldogs 25-12 in the third to open up a 57-34 lead. Baily Bishop scored seven third-quarter points, and Lexie Dishner knocked down one of her three threes on the night.

Dishner finished with 16 points, and Gracie Hallman added 14. Phillips hit six threes and shot 6-for-12 from the foul line.

Gabbie Moore led Belgreen (12-3, 3-2) with 12 points, including a pair of threes. Emma Dempsey scored nine points, and Ansley Tate added eight. Autumn Bragwell finished with five, and Katie Dempsey chipped in with four. Gracie Dempsey and Megan Smith had two points apiece.

The Lady Bulldogs hit four threes and shot 6-for-10 from the foul line. Two of their three losses this season (through Sunday) had come to Phillips.

Belgreen was back in action Tuesday night at Phil Campbell.

Late lead slips away from RHS boys in area loss

Mike Self

Franklin Free Press

RUSSELLVILLE - If Russellville's boys miss out on hosting the Class 5A, Area 14 tournament in February, they'll undoubtedly look back on the first Friday night in January as a major missed opportunity.

Spurred by a 23-0 mid-game run, the Golden Tigers had a 12-point lead over visiting West Point early in the third quarter. That lead was still at eight points midway through the fourth, but the Warriors closed the game on a 16-7 run and stole a 70-69 win when sophomore guard Kobe Bowers capped off a 25-point night with a go-ahead three in the final 15 seconds.

"The reality is, like I just told our guys, that's a game we're gonna look back at and wish we had back," said head coach Patrick Odom, whose team dropped to 10-5 overall and 2-1 in area play, tied with Hamilton atop the area standings. "Because area losses like that, when you feel like you control a game, haunt you when the [area] tournament meeting comes around.

"Now it's about response. High school basketball is crazy. There's nothing we can do to get anything back tonight. We have to move forward and respond, and, honestly, we have to play better. The game was the way it was due to the fact that we didn't defend at a level that allows us to be successful. The stretch where we dominate, the game is a transition game because we're getting defensive stops. The rest of the game is a half-court game, and they've got a lot of size and

length that gives you problems. That's what wound up happening."

Trailing 12-8 early, West Point (9-10, 1-2) went on an 11-0 run to go in front 19-12. The Warriors stretched the lead to 24-13 midway through the second quarter, but Russellville responded with 20 unanswered points to close out the half and take a 33-24 lead into the locker room.

After the game, Odom pointed to his team's slow start as the primary cause for the loss.

"The reality is, like I just told our guys, that's a game we're gonna look back at and wish we had back," said head coach Patrick Odom, whose team dropped to 2-1 in area play, tied with Hamilton atop the area standings. "Because area losses like that, when you feel like you control a game, haunt you when the [area] tournament meeting comes around."

"When you lose a close one like this at the end, everybody wants to talk about what happened at the end of the game," he said. "But a lot of times the way you start the game is just as important. We didn't start the game well, and, again, I don't know why. We fell behind by twelve or thirteen points early in the game. I never panicked, but when you do that to yourself...it makes for an odd night.

"Once that [20-0] run took place, I felt like we had control. We led most of the game. They hit a flurry of threes at the end, and, honestly, we didn't defend very well the last two minutes. Our defense wasn't good enough to win, because their shots were open shots. They were beating us off the

bounce and getting us in rotation. They had a couple different guys from off the scouting report make some big shots. Credit their guys."

Bowers and 6'2 senior guard Kolton Sapp spearheaded the second-half rally by West Point, combining to score 37 points after the break. They scored 10 points apiece in the third quarter, helping the Warriors rally from 12 down to lead by one going to the fourth.

With Russellville leading 50-45 in the final half-minute of the third, West Point's Rylan Jones (a 6'4, 225-pound senior who essentially runs the point for the Warriors) came up with a steal and scored a transition basket over Golden Tiger senior Devin Buckhalter. After the ball went through the net, Jones and Buckhalter exchanged words in a brief altercation that ended with Buckhalter firing the ball at Jones and subsequently earning himself a technical foul.

Tyler White made one of the two technical free throws, and then Sapp drilled a three just before the buzzer to complete a six-point possession and a 14-2 run that sent West Point to the fourth quarter with a 51-50 lead.

"I've coached Devin a long time, and I've never seen him react that way," Odom said of Buckhalter, who would respond by scoring nine of his team-high 19 points in the fourth quarter. "I'll just say there was a lot of mouthing taking place. Based on what Devin said, certain words were used that triggered his response. I'm always gonna first protect my guy; I love my guys, and if that was the case then I understand the response.

See 'SLIPS,' page 19

Vina beats Waterloo for fifth straight win

Staff reports

Vina's girls dominated the second quarter at Waterloo last Thursday night on their way to a fifth straight win, 45-29 over the Lady Cougars.

Vina (11-4 through Sunday) led by two at the end of one quarter before out-scoring Waterloo 17-5 in the second. The Lady Red Devils got two threes from Hailey Cantrell and four points apiece from Rayleigh Guin and Kaitlyn King, opening up a 32-18 halftime lead.

Vina held Waterloo to just two points in the third quarter and cruised to the win.

Guin finished with 13 points, eight assists and six steals. Sara Scott had nine points and 12 rebounds, including six offensive boards. King also scored nine points and pulled down five rebounds.

Cantrell finished with six points, and Emma Humphres chipped in with four points, 10 rebounds and four assists. Abbie Petree had two points and eight boards, and Annabelle Humphres also scored two. The Lady Red Devils hit three threes and shot 10-for-15 from the foul line.

Last Thursday's win came on the heels of Vina's championship performance at the Waterloo Christmas Tournament, where the Lady Devils won three games in a single day.

"It was remarkable what our girls did, winning three games in one day to win the Waterloo Tournament," head coach Richie Hester said. "We had several girls cheering at the Citrus Bowl in Orlando, and they had to leave on the second day of the tournament. Waterloo let us play all our games in one day, and we had to play the last two back-to-back. We got behind 10-0 [to Whitesburg] in the last game, but the girls reached back and pulled it out to win the championship."

The Lady Devils (2-2 in area play) were set to return to action this week with area games at Hackleburg on Tuesday and at home against Belgreen on Thursday.

Tigers hold off Sulligent

Staff reports

Red Bay's boys survived their worst offensive half of the season last Friday night, edging Sulligent 42-39 to remain unbeaten in area play.

The Tigers (14-4 overall through Sunday, 4-0 in Class 2A, Area 13) knocked down five threes in a red-hot second quarter, out-scoring Sulligent 21-8 to take a 33-18 lead into the locker room. Red Bay then managed only three field goals in the entire second half, scoring just nine points.

The visiting Blue Devils out-scored the Tigers 14-3 in the third quarter to get back within four, but Red Bay got a three-pointer from Gath Weatherford and a three-point play from Braden Ray in the fourth quarter to hold on.

Weatherford hit three threes on the night and finished with 13 points, eight of which came in the second quarter. Junior point guard Clay Allison scored all 12 of his points in the first half, hitting two threes in the first quarter and two more in the second. Ray and Noah Brewer each finished with five points, and Jalen Vinson, Arden Hamilton and Tanner Hamilton scored two apiece. Lane Shewbart added one.

'BOYD,' from page 13

phenomenal job of setting up his blocks and knowing where the creases were in the schemes we were running. More than anything, he did what he was supposed to do and what he was coached to do. That includes blocking for other guys when they ran the ball and blocking in the pass game, too."

Boyd opened the season with a bang, rushing for 185 yards and five touchdowns in an overtime win over rival Deshler. He didn't really get rolling until mid-season, though, posting a prolific four-game run with 242 rushing yards against West Point, 275 against Haleyville, 195 against Lawrence County and 210 against Hamilton.

Boyd saved his best for last, setting his own personal single-game high with 281 yards (and four touchdowns) on 27 carries against Dora in Week 9—and then topping it one week later with 286 yards (and five scores) on just 14 attempts against Central in the regular season finale.

Central-Tuscaloosa's Javonta Leatherwood and East Limestone's CJ Yarbrough join Boyd as finalists for 5A Back of the Year. Award winners will be announced at the Mr. Football banquet on January 15. Every Back or Lineman of the Year candidate is in the running for Mr. Football.

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Mason Bragwell

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Bragwell topped the 30-point mark for the second time this season last Friday, scoring 30 on the nose to help the Bulldogs improve to 5-0 in Class 1A, Area 12 with an 83-72 win over Phillips. The 6'6 senior had 14 points by the end of the first quarter and 22 by halftime as Belgreen built a 47-32 lead.

Through Sunday, Bragwell had scored in double-figures in each of his team's 15 games and was averaging 18.5 points per contest, tops in Franklin County. He entered the week with 1,575 career points at the varsity level.



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'BUCKHALTER', from page 13

number two [McNutt] have hit a lot of big shots for us over the years, and they did it again tonight."

Buckhalter, who came into the day averaging 15.0 points per game, had scored only four points on Saturday before spearheading a late rally by Russellville. Central was up six with 1:46 remaining and had a chance to extend the lead, but Dalton Hanback missed the front end of a one-and-one. Buckhalter's layup on the other end trimmed the lead to four at 82-78.

After two more misses at the line by the Wildcats, McNutt drove for a three-point play to make it a one-point game at 82-81 with 1:12 remaining. Payton Palmer split a pair of free throws for Central to make it 83-81, and then Buckhalter scored on a putback to tie the game with 50 seconds left to play.

After the exchange of threes by McCay and McNutt, the Golden Tigers got the defensive stop they needed and then executed two inbound plays to perfection to compete a season sweep of the Wildcats.

"With two minutes to go, it looked like we were headed for a loss," said Odom, whose team had let an eight-point fourth-quarter lead slip away the previous night and then watched West Point steal a 70-69 win on a last-second three. "We were finally able to string a couple of stops together, and we had some guys make some big plays on the other end. The word I keep going back to is 'resiliency.' When a team shoots the ball like Central did tonight, you have to be resilient, and our guys were."

Central hit six threes in the first quarter and never let up, drilling 15 shots from beyond the arc on the night (compared to just five by the Golden Tigers). The Wildcats' undoing came at the foul line, where they missed four straight attempts during Russellville's late rally and finished the night just 7-for-16. [The Golden Tigers shot 16-for-22

from the line.]

"They missed some free throws late," Odom said, "but part of that is us playing to the scouting report and putting the right guys on the line."

If free throws were one major factor, offensive rebounds were another. The Golden Tigers struggled to finish around the rim for much of the night but generated lots of second and third opportunities with relentless effort on the glass. Many of those extra shots came courtesy of Dyas, who had a pair of huge putbacks in the fourth quarter to help Russellville stay in it when the Wildcats were threatening to pull away.

"We told our guys at one point, 'Look, when we miss a shot, we have to have the rebound.' With the way [Central] was shooting the ball on the other end, we couldn't afford any empty trips," Odom said. "When we go with the small lineup, Chandler plays a lot down low for us, and he's capable of being a factor on the offensive glass."

Trailing by eight at 81-73 after a three by Palmer, the Golden Tigers got a free throw from McNutt and then a putback from Dyas to cut the deficit down to five. Hanback hit 1-of-2 at the line to make it 82-76, but Buckhalter and McNutt took over from there. The senior duo combined to score every Russellville point in a 13-4 run by the Golden Tigers to close out the game.

McCay made four threes in the first quarter, but McNutt countered with 10 points and Will Bonner scored six to keep Russellville even. McNutt and Bonner each had seven second-quarter points, helping the Golden Tigers out-score Central 21-17 to take a 45-41 lead into the locker room.

Dyas had seven points in the third, but McCay countered with 11 for Central as the Wildcats out-scored Russellville 23-20 to cut the lead to one at 65-64 going to the fourth. The Golden Tigers were still up one at 68-67 following a free throw by Collin Bonner, but Central responded with an 8-0



PHOTOS BY KYLE GLASGOW

Murray (above, 1) matched her season-high with 22 points, but Keener (below, 1) put up 33 to help Central's girls hold on for a 48-40 win.

run to grab a 75-68 lead. A basket by McNutt and a putback by Dyas sparked a game-ending 21-11 run by Russellville.

McCay managed to flirt with the 40-point mark despite attempting only three free throws (and making two). Carter finished with 15 points, and Tyler Inman scored 12. Palmer hit three threes and had 10 points.

McNutt, who came into the day averaging a team-best 17.2 points per game, fell just two shy of what would have been his third 30-point outing of the season. Will Bonner added 18 points, and Dyas shot 5-for-5 from the line on his way to scoring 13 points. Buckhalter finished with 11. Collin Bonner and Brooks Scott scored seven apiece, and Parker had five.

Russellville will return to action Friday at home with an area game against Lawrence County.

Varsity girls

Central 48 Russellville 40

Laura Lee Keener scored 33 points on Saturday and shot 11-for-15 from the foul line in the fourth quarter, helping the Lady Wildcats hold off a Russellville rally.


Madison Murray matched her season-high with 22 points to lead the Lady Golden Tigers (4-13), who trailed by nine at the break before cutting the deficit to a single point on three separate occasions in the second half. The last of those came midway through the fourth quarter, when Murray was fouled on a three-point attempt and went 2-for-3 at the line to cut Central's lead to 38-37. The Lady Wildcats responded with a 7-0 spurt to regain control and ultimately seal the deal.

Keener came out on fire and scored 14 first-quarter points to help Central build an early 17-8 lead. She finished the night with four threes and shot 13-for-18 from the foul line. The Lady Wildcats were 22-for-34 from the line as a team.

Murray hit two threes and shot 10-for-15 from the line, topping the 20-point mark for the third time this season. Chalea Clemmons added five points for Russellville, and Krista Sikes and Autumn Logan each finished with four. Alivia Clemmons had three, and A.J. Taylor and Lexi Glass added one apiece. The Lady Golden Tigers shot 18-for-32 from the line.



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'SLIPS', from page 16

But we also talked about the fact that it doesn't matter [what gets said], we've gotta maintain our composure. We've gotta be above [that stuff]. But emotions run high with teenage kids. Devin gathered himself and came out and played well the rest of the way. One thing about Devin—you don't see him say anything. He did what he was supposed to do.

"But that [six-point trip] was a critical part in the game, because they get the shot, they get a free throw and then they hit a jumper. Again, you feel like you're in control, and you look up and you just had six points erased. Odd things occurred. I've seen that happen before, and when it does you've gotta find a way to survive. We didn't do that tonight."

Russellville's initial response to open the fourth quarter was terrific. The Golden Tigers held West Point scoreless for roughly four minutes, going back in front on a layup by Brooks Scott that sparked a 10-0 run. Buckhalter and Chandler Dyas each made two free throws, and a bucket by Lucas McNutt made it 58-51. Buckhalter then ripped the ball away from Jones and raced coast-to-coast for a layup to cap the run and extend the lead to nine.

That's when Sapp started to heat up, sandwiching a pair of threes around two free throws by Dyas to cut Russellville's lead to five at 62-57. Sapp then converted a three-point play to make it a two-point game at 62-60.

A basket by Buckhalter pushed the lead back to four, but Bowers buried a three to make it 64-63. Will Bonner was fouled and made two free throws to make it 66-63, but Sapp answered with a quick two to pull West Point back within a point. Buckhalter drove the lane for a layup with 49

seconds left, pushing Russellville's lead to 68-65. West Point responded by going inside to Jones, who scored to cut the lead back to one. Buckhalter was fouled and headed to the line, where he entered the night shooting 91 percent (29-for-32) on the season. The senior guard made the first but missed the second (Russellville's only missed free throw in ten attempts in the fourth quarter), and West Point grabbed the rebound.

The Warriors brought the ball up the floor and got it to Bowers, who nailed an open three from the left wing with roughly 15 seconds left to give West Point a 70-69 lead. The Golden Tigers had two timeouts left, but Odom elected to let the action play out. Bonner quickly advanced the ball and got it to McNutt, whose three-point try from deep on the left wing was partially blocked. In the scramble for the loose ball, the officials ruled that McNutt knocked it out of bounds and awarded possession to West Point with five seconds on the clock.

West Point inbounded the ball to Bowers, who streaked into the frontcourt and got rid of the ball before the Golden Tigers could even foul him. The Warriors dribbled out the clock and escaped with their first area win of the season. [They had already lost at home in December to Hamilton and Lawrence County.]

"I'll kick myself for not calling a timeout," Odom said afterward. "I actually thought we had a numbers situation on that last possession; that's why I didn't call one. I still think when the ball got kicked out of bounds that it was our ball. I was really surprised when they said it wasn't. Then we wind up getting pinched on a screen, and the ball gets kicked out and we don't even get a chance to foul them and put them on the line."

Bowers finished with a game-high 25 points, 16 of which came in the second half. Sapp scored 21 of his 23 points after the break, and Jones finished with 10 points. West Point hit six threes on the night (four in the fourth quarter) and shot 4-for-9 from the foul line.

Buckhalter went 3-for-4 from the line [he's now 32-for-36 on the season] and scored 19 points. McNutt had 17 points, nine of which came in the third quarter. Dyas hit two threes and went 4-for-4 from the line [improving to 33-for-38 on the year], finishing with 12 points. Will Bonner scored nine points, Scott added eight and Caden Parker finished with four.

The Golden Tigers shot 18-for-21 from the foul line but never found the range from deep, hitting just three three-pointers. [They entered the night averaging 8.5 makes from beyond the arc per game.]

"We did not shoot the ball well from the perimeter at all tonight," Odom said. "When we make shots, it covers up a lot of things. When we don't, it exposes the fact that we don't have a 6'4, 6'5 post guy we can throw the ball to or count on to clean the glass and give people problems that way. That's not how we're built. We've gotta overcome that with defense, and we didn't overcome it with the right component tonight."

"We can't play the first quarter the way we played it, and we can't finish the game defensively the way we did. We can come out with excuses, but there are none. Overall, we got what we deserved, even though I felt like we still should have won the game."

The Golden Tigers will return to action in area play this Friday when they host rival Lawrence County.

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