

Haslam family gift will support insurance for student laptops

A generous gift from the Haslam family will help economically disadvantaged families obtain insurance for new Chromebooks that will be provided to all K-12 students in Knox County Schools.

Earlier this year, the Knox County Board of Education and Knox County Commission approved a 1:1 plan that will make a Chromebook computer available to each KCS student in grades K-12, starting in August.

While that plan makes Chromebooks available at no cost, families will be given the option to buy insurance for \$30. This insurance will offset the cost of repairs or a total loss of the device, which would result in a charge of \$200.

Recognizing that some families

may find it difficult to pay for insurance, the Haslam family will provide a \$900,000 gift to offset the cost of that insurance for Knox County's neediest families. The joint gift is being made by Natalie and Jim Haslam; Dee and Jimmy Haslam; former First Lady Crissy Haslam and former Gov. Bill Haslam; and Ann Haslam Bailey and Steve Bailey.

"The Haslam family has always been strong advocates of education and of Knox County Schools in particular," said Superintendent Bob Thomas. "This gift continues their legacy of supporting our students, and we're deeply grateful for their generosity. By providing insurance for families who otherwise could not afford it, we believe this gift will give

students peace of mind to fully utilize their Chromebooks and to enhance their learning."

In a statement, the Haslam family said, "Equal access to education is critical, and this includes the technology tools that help students learn. We want to ensure that all Knox County students feel comfortable and confident utilizing the new Chromebooks for enriched learning, and we hope that the coverage of insurance fees will allow all students to consistently utilize their Chromebooks. As a family, we are always humbled to be able to help empower our youth and continue to give them a stronger and equal foundation from which they can achieve."



The Haslam family from left to right: Bill Haslam, Steve and Ann Bailey, Jimmy, Dee, Natalie, Jim and Crissy Haslam

South High Senior Living opens



Rick Dover welcomes everyone to the opening of South High Senior Living. Old South High School has been totally renovated with 62 rooms. Photo Courtesy of Mike Cohen.

By Mike Steely
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Old South High School, abandoned for years until developer Rick Dover bought it, officially opened

Thursday with a ribbon cutting ceremony. Dover, who also developed Knoxville High School into a senior living facility, took the 1937 South High School and renovated the facility, designed originally by Charles Barber, into a state-of-the-art assisted living facility.

The South High Senior Living facility is now "like new" and has 62 rooms and 28 of those are for Memory Care.

KCS unveils reopening plan for 2020-21

By Ken Lay

Knox County Schools unveiled its reopening plan at the board of education's regular session meeting Wednesday at the Andrew Johnson Building.

While the schools will open, the school year won't begin as scheduled. Classes will begin on Aug. 17, week later than expected and KCS Superintendent Bob Thomas urged parents and students to be patient when things finally get going.

"I'm asking all of our stakeholders for grace. It's not going to be perfect on the first day," Thomas said. "I wish it would be perfect, but it probably won't be."

Although schools are slated to open, the plan, which was released prior to the meeting on the KCS website and on its social media outlets, includes a virtual learning option.

Parents and students wishing to participate in remote learning must enroll in the Virtual Learning Program by Wednesday, July 22. Students who select the remote learning option must remain in the program for at least the fall semester.

"If students go into remote learning, they have to stay there for the whole semester," Thomas said. "We wanted to try to remain as flexible as we could, but they'll have to stay for the first semester."

"We tried to listen to everybody and incorporate as much of what we heard into this plan and give the parents choices."

Remote learning will continue regardless of COVID-19

3 of 5 Board of Health Benchmarks turn red

By Mike Steely
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With three of the five COVID-19 benchmarks showing as red lights in the Knoxville region the Knox County Board of Health has issued a list of recommendations, including continuing its mask mandate, and voted Wednesday to begin meeting weekly rather than bi-weekly.

Knox County Health Department Director Dr. Martha Buchanan introduced the "traffic light" symbol months ago but this is the first time three of the indicators are shown in as a stop or red light. Three of the benchmarks

are red, indicating upswings in the number of COVID-19 cases, an increase in deaths and lagging test results. While capacity to deal with the pandemic got a "green" light the capacity of hospitals was indicated in "yellow" or caution.

Dr. James Shamiyeh, chief quality officer of the University Health Systems, was successful in introducing a two-page "Community Education Recommendation" which went into effect Thursday. The unanimous vote on the guidelines got Knox County Mayor Glenn Jacobs' "yes" vote after Jacobs asked Deputy Law Director Myers Morton about the motion. Myers answered, "It's a recommendation."

Jacobs had been the lone "No" vote on the initial mask requirements for the county.

Knox County Health Department Director Dr. Martha Buchanan told the board the county has received a \$7.1 million COVID-19 grant to help deal with the local upsurge and that funding will go to the Knox County Commission for approval. She said that one of the testing companies has pulled out of local testing and switched to Nashville testing. She said that test results have been too slow in being reported back to the health department.

She said, with that lag, people who were tested are "out and about" before results are reported back to the department.

She also noted that during the two weeks between board meetings the number of deaths have increased from five to 15.

Dr. Shamiyeh said wearing masks is "so fundamentally important." He said that 52 people of every 1,000 cases in the region will be hospitalized and hospital capacity is decreasing. He said hospitals are experiencing "staff fatigue" and Dr. Buchanan indicated that includes her staff.

"It's everywhere," Shamiyeh said of the virus outbreak and said local hospitals are coordinating efforts to look at creating additional space. He said when local health efforts settle down the virus spikes again, eases off, and then spikes again.

Mayor Jacobs described the effort as "buying time until we have a vaccine" and called the increase in cases "pretty alarming."

Buchanan said the health department is getting reports from citizens about businesses not following COVID-19 requirements and said those businesses



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