

# The Paducah Sun

SATURDAY, January 24, 2015 www.paducahsun.com Vol. 119 No. 24



JOHN PAUL HENRY | The Sun

**Clark Elementary School kindergartner Nora Henschel** checks out at the end of the lunch line on Wednesday at her school in Paducah. The Southern Education Foundation found that 55 percent of Kentucky public school students qualify for free and reduced lunch.

## Poor public school students increasing

BY GENEVIEVE POSTLETHWAIT  
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Low income students now make up just over half of all children attending public schools in America, according to a new analysis of federal data.

While hitting this mark is news for the nation, for Kentucky it's a disheartening mile marker that's long since passed.

The Southern Education Foundation found that Kentucky, with 55 percent of its public school students qualifying for free and reduced lunch, is one of

21 states with mostly low income students.

Kentucky has had this distinction since 2001 — Kentucky, Mississippi, New Mexico and Louisiana were the first four. The commonwealth has since been joined and surpassed in these unfortunate rankings by 10 other states.

Locally, 10 of the Purchase's 12 public school districts serve mostly low-income students, according to the most recent district and school report card data from the Kentucky Department of

Education. As a region, 62 percent of the Purchase's public school children qualify for free and reduced lunches.

Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level are eligible for free meals, and children from families with incomes between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-cost meals. According to the KDE, 52 percent of Kentucky's public schoolchildren qualify for free

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## Engine problems caused fatal plane crash

BY JOSHUA ROBERTS  
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The pilot of a Piper PA-34-200T reported problems with his plane's engines, including one that had completely lost power, moments before it crashed near Kuttawa this month, killing four people.

The engine problems, along with other flight and weather information,

are mentioned in a preliminary report issued by the National Transportation Safety Board on the Jan. 2 crash. The accident killed pilot Marty Gutzler, 48, wife Kimberly, 46, daughter Piper, 9, and 14-year-old cousin, Sierra Wilder, all of Nashville, Illinois.

The youngest of the passengers, 7-year-old Sailor Gutzler, survived. A final report is months from com-

pletion, an NTSB official said Friday. The average length of investigations into flights that had fatalities is 12 months, he said. Information in the preliminary report is subject to later revision.

The Gutzler family departed Tallahassee Regional Airport in Florida af-

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## Admissions increase at new Harrah's casino

BY DAVID ZOELLER  
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Harrah's Metropolis Casino & Hotel had a 60 percent increase in admissions in December 2014 over the previous December, as patrons said goodbye to the riverboat-based casino and hello to the revamped land-based gambling operation.

Harrah's Metropolis unveiled its new \$8 million facility, which features 800 slots and 23 gaming tables, in late November. Statistics compiled by the Illinois Gaming Board for December, the first full month of operation, show the casino had 68,119 admissions in

2014, compared to 42,565 in December 2013.

Adjusted gross receipts for December 2014 were \$7,539,281, compared to \$5,860,622 the previous December, an increase of 28.6 percent. The actual square footage of the casino was reduced about 22 percent in moving the gaming operation on shore.

The renovations, which did away with the riverboat and moved the gaming operations to the revamped convention space, have been well received, according to Brad Hirsch, senior vice president and general manager.

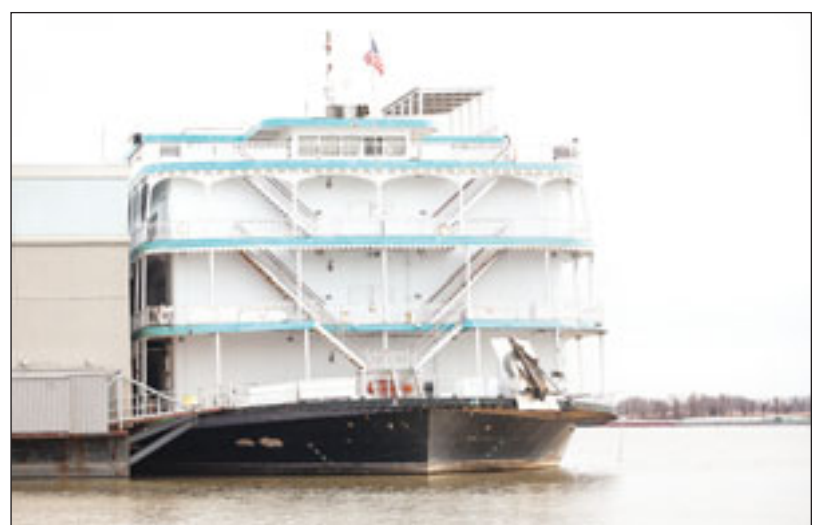
"Our guests repeatedly tell us

on the floor and in customer surveys how much more they enjoy this," Hirsch said. "One of the most prevalent comments is how it has a 'Vegas feel' now.

Hirsch attributes the positive responses to the fact the facility is on a single floor, has live music nightly on the weekends in the Signature Bar, and features more food and beverage options.

"While we are seeing new customers coming over to enjoy the music and food and beverage experience, we are also seeing some guests we haven't seen in a

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The Harrah's Metropolis riverboat, **The North Star**, seen here in Metropolis on Tuesday, has been sold to an auction company, said Chad Lewis, Harrah's Metropolis public relations supervisor.

## Justices will review use of sedative in executions

BY MARK SHERMAN

Associated Press

**WASHINGTON** — The Supreme Court is stepping into the issue of lethal injection executions for the first time since 2008 in an appeal filed by death row inmates in Oklahoma.

The justices agreed Friday to review whether the sedative midazolam can be used in executions because of concerns that it does not produce a deep, coma-like unconsciousness and ensure that a prisoner does not experience intense and needless pain when other drugs are injected to kill him. The order came eight days after the court refused to halt the execution of an Oklahoma man that employed the same combination of drugs.

Oklahoma, as well as Florida, uses midazolam as one of three drugs in lethal injection executions. The second drug serves to paralyze the inmate and the third one is used to stop his heart.

The case will be argued in late April, an attorney for the men said Friday. A decision is expected by the end of June.

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## Man dies trapped inside grain bin

Central Kentucky News Journal

**BRADFORDSVILLE** — A Marion County man died after he became trapped in a grain bin at 911 Merri-mac Road in Bradfordsville.

Joseph Gary Blanford, 64, of Holy Cross, had climbed into the bin Wednesday afternoon to attempt to unclog the auger when the soybeans caved in on top of him, burying him, according to a news release from the Taylor County Sheriff's Office.

Blanford died at the scene. Taylor County Coroner Terry Dabney said Blanford died from asphyxia.

"This gentleman accidentally fell into the middle of the grain bin and was unable to rescue himself," Dabney said. "It was like falling in quicksand. The person that found him was unable to rescue him, and death was imminent. I've been coroner for 46 years, and it's the first accident of this nature that I've encountered. It was a very unusual situation from A to Z; something I've never seen, and I hope I never see again."

Dabney added that Blanford was an experienced

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### NATION

#### PRESIDENT OBAMA HEADING TO INDIA

President Barack Obama and India's prime minister plan to meet in New Delhi this weekend seeking to move the world's two largest democracies past the tensions between them.

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### WORLD

#### REBELS REJECT PEACE AGREEMENT

Pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine say they are rejecting a peace deal and launching a new offensive against Ukrainian troops, vowing to push them out of the Donetsk region.

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### Forecast

#### Today

50°



Mostly sunny.

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lunches. Another 6.3 percent qualify for reduced lunches.

The current poverty level, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, is an annual income of \$23,850 for a family of four, and the difficulties that come with this threshold vary with location and local costs of living. A child who qualifies for free lunches in Paducah likely has a very different life than a child who meets the same qualifications in New York City.

Still, the number of students in need is rising, and the trend poses new challenges for educators.

Low-income students are less likely to have support at home or be exposed to enriching activities outside of school. They are also more likely to experience other hardships that can negatively affect their ability to learn.

They're more likely to start school at a disadvantage — only 50 percent of incoming Kentucky kindergartners this year were "kindergarten ready, and that number was even lower (39.4) for low-income students.

"There is no one magic bullet," said Steve Ybarzabal, principal of Clark Elementary in Paducah. "Our student body is so diverse, there's no program you can buy out there that's going to fix it all."

A high percentage of students qualifying for the lunch program typically indicates lower performance on tests such as the Kentucky Performance Report for Educational Progress (K-PREP).

Clark, however, does not meet those expectations. It exceeds them. Although 68 percent of Clark's students in grades pre-K through 5th grade qualify for the lunch program, Clark has consistently performed well on K-PREP assessments. Last year, the school scored better than 85 percent of other Kentucky schools.

"It takes very individualized instruction based on the individual needs of the students," Ybarzabal said. "That's one of the biggest challenges here at Clark. We have kids who have everything imaginable, and we have kids that have nothing. We have kids



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**Kelsey Owens, 6**, a first-grader at Farley Elementary School in McCracken County, studies reading with her mother at their home. Although 80 percent of Farley's students qualify as low income, together those students scored at the 88 percentile in statewide rankings.

that during breaks travel all around the world, and we have kids that don't get out of the six blocks around their apartment other than their bus ride to school. Test scores are very important, but so are field trips and providing life experiences that some of our students wouldn't get otherwise."

In addition to individualized instruction given by teachers in the classroom, Clark tries to use all of its resources — the surrounding community and willing parents included — to wrap students in a positive, supportive environment. The school's family resource center coordinator, Robyn West, mentioned the Watch DOGS Program in particular. Watch DOGS (Dads of Great Kids) are dads who visit students at school to offer mentorship, encouragement and positive male influences.

"We have black dads, white dads, granddads — we've got all kinds of dads!" West said of the program. "I think it makes a big difference. I don't think those dads quite realize, even just giving a kid a hug in the hallway can make that kid's day."

West and Ybarzabal both said a big part of what they do is building relationships with their students' parents. They want every parent to feel comfortable coming to the school, whether its to ask questions or ask for help.

Farley Elementary in McCracken County is another school that has overcome the odds stacked against its students and attained high achievement. Though 80 percent of Farley's students qualify as "low-income,"

25th percentile statewide. Grubbs gleefully said that to close Farley's doors at the 88th percentile "ain't too shabby."

What made the difference?

"We address all areas of our students' lives, not just academics," Grubbs said. "We address behavior, attendance, tutoring, parents, the community. It takes total community involvement. We have family nights as often as we can. We monitor homework daily, and if a day or two is missed, we call home and find out why. We have mentor and peer tutoring during the day so that kids don't have to find a way to get to tutoring after school. Teachers will work with parents and stay after school — whatever it takes. And I have never seen so many teachers give parents their cell phone numbers."

Although the low income student statistics are staggering, and policy makers will likely bicker indefinitely over how to address them fiscally, local educators in the thick of it seem determined to overcome these statistics for the sake of their students.

"It's just another challenge that as educators, we have to overcome," Ybarzabal said. "Those children still belong to us, and it's our responsibility to get them where they need to be. It's their best shot at living a better life."

Contact Genevieve Postlethwait, a Paducah Sun staff writer, at 270-575-8651 or at gpostlethwait@paducahsun.com.

**EXECUTIONS**

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The appeal was brought to the court by four Oklahoma inmates with execution dates ranging from January to March. The justices allowed Charles Warner to be put to death on January 15 and denied stays of execution for the other three.

At the time, Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote a dissent that was joined by three other justices, calling on the court to examine whether the drug could be used in accordance with the constitutional prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment.

Friday's order does not formally call a halt to those scheduled procedures. Dale Baich, an attorney for the inmates, said he would ask the court to block the executions until the case is decided.

"Oklahoma's execution protocol has been affirmed as constitutional by two federal courts," Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt said Friday. "We will continue to defend the constitutionality of this protocol in order to preserve (the Department of Corrections') ability to proceed with the sentences that were given to each inmate by a jury of their peers."

In 2008, the justices upheld the use of a different three-drug combination in a case from Kentucky and set a high bar for challenges to lethal in-

jections. Chief Justice John Roberts wrote then that the court probably would not stop executions unless "the condemned prisoner establishes that the state's lethal injection protocol creates a demonstrated risk of severe pain."

What has changed since 2008 is that states have been forced to change the drugs they use in executions after drug manufacturers took steps to ensure their products are not used in executions.

The inmates are trying to stop their executions, arguing that the state would essentially be experimenting on them by injecting them with unproven and untested drugs.

"The drug protocol in Oklahoma is not capable of producing a humane execution, even if it is administered properly," Baich said.

Last April, Oklahoma used midazolam for the first time in a grisly procedure. Inmate Clayton Lockett clenched his teeth, moaned and writhed on the gurney before a doctor noticed a problem with the intravenous line and the execution was called off. Lockett died 43 minutes after the procedure began.

Oklahoma revamped its procedures in response to the Lockett execution, including a fivefold increase in the amount of midazolam used. In last week's execution, Warner showed no signs of physical distress.

Florida used the same procedure in an execution carried out the same night and has scheduled the execution of Jerry Correll for Feb. 26.

**GRAIN**

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farmer.

"He was well-versed in farming and well-versed in grain bins, and he knew what he was doing. It was just an accident," Dabney said. Emergency personnel worked for six hours to remove Blanford's body from the bin, and crews from Taylor and Marion coun-

ties, as well as Campbellsville and Lebanon, were on the scene to assist. Dabney said the body was removed around 9:45 p.m. Wednesday. A ladder truck from Marion County had to be used.

According to police, removal was difficult because of the stability of the beans and the oxygen levels inside the bin.

**HARRAH'S**

CONTINUED FROM 1A

while," Hirsch said. "Word is getting out that the new floor has a lot more to offer and some of our guests that spent some time away from us are now coming back."

The riverboat, The North Star, is still on site, although it has been sold to an auction company. Harrah's officials did not identify the company.

There were actually several different boats used over the years, according to Chad Lewis, advertising and public relations supervisor.

To comply with Illinois law that the casino be "over water," the basement under the new casino contains what Hirsch calls "a series of water bladders."

The use of the convention center space as the new casino floor means Harrah's won't be using it for larger shows. The company is still looking at hosting shows outdoors during warmer weather, according to Hirsch.

Contact David Zoeller, a Paducah Sun staff writer, at 270-575-8676.

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