

County school district honored for school safety initiatives, communications

The Harlan County School District received 13 awards, with eight of those being first place, in the Outstanding Achievement in School Information Services (OASIS) competition.

Sponsored by the Kentucky School Public Relations Association in collaboration with the Kentucky Association of School Administrators, OASIS is a professional development program designed to recognize excellence in school communications.

Several of the top honors bestowed upon the district were for work on school safety and related communication efforts during a series of threats last school year.

The district initiatives put in place by Superintendent Brent Roark and his support staff received five first place honors, including the top award in the inaugural competition for the Innovations in Communications category. That award stemmed from his formation and facilitation of the Superintendent's Student Council at HCHS.

One of the judge's wrote, "The superintendent's response to student concerns was clearly delivered by creating the student council. His message of listening and working to address concerns resonated... his follow-through and spirit of working with students to make a difference is the important result. The whole program is great and well communicated as far as purpose and results."

A second judge noted that the program is "impressive" with "great feedback" from students. "It is a unique idea to connect the central office closer to kids. The Black Bear Kindness Award (is) a great idea... Very effective! Resolving issues through council. It worked! Good use of social media."

The District received the top award in campaigns and programs for numerous "Safe Schools Initiatives" which also resulted from the same series of threats and related concerns during the last school year.

"Impressive, well planned campaign to address a wide-range of student issues. Good use of social media. Even more exciting is the Superintendent's Student council. It seems to be working to effect change and help schools meet student needs (concerns)," wrote one of the judges. "Good job responding with this campaign to address concerns immediately. Using a variety of ways to meet district's needs. Information provided shows a quick response to address concerns: in person, meetings, Facebook, lots of organized efforts."

This entry included a series of meetings with law enforcement and first responders, drills in schools, safety assessments of buildings and grounds, meetings with parents, students, faculty and staff,



The Harlan County School District received 13 awards during the Outstanding Achievement in School information Services competition. Several of the awards stemmed from initiatives put in place regarding school safety concerns last year. Here, from the left, are Public Relations Director Jeff Phillips, Kris Roark, Kentucky School Public Relations Association President Jill McKenzie and Superintendent Brent Roark.

communications with the community through press releases, social media posts, and news and feature articles, assembly programs for students, and much more.

“Good use of promoting positivity,” wrote a second judge for this category. “Good job. It definitely showed you made things better at your district. Lots of work went into this campaign.”

A series of communications by the district concerning school safety, student and parental concerns earned a top award as well.

“The Superintendent’s message to students, parents and community were effectively delivered in a variety of media vehicles. All writing sent out by the district is clear and understandable. You can see by the number of views with online posts that the messages were widely disseminated. I have judged several entries for this communication campaign. It’s well done and has proven results of calming the district/ community concerns through quality communications!”

A second judge wrote, “Each piece was organized well to convey a message that all was under control in the school system despite numerous events that could cause panic in parents. Very proactive and really addressed the issues.”

The district received first place in the Miscellaneous Public Awareness and the Miscellaneous Printed Materials for two billboards promoting the district’s schools and students.

“I believe the supporting Facebook posts show the billboard is attention getting and that comments showed how everyone feels about their schools and education in Harlan County... A unique way to promote schools. Billboards can be expensive but in a small district where the whole district can see (them) it is innovative.”

The district received top honors for its social media communications efforts, specifically the Facebook page.

“Wow! Excellent work. Terrific information vehicle. Well written and very engaging,” said one judge.

Other awards included:

- First Place in Photography for a feature photo at the county elementary schools cheerleading competition.
- First Place in News/Sports Photography for a feature photo “Jumping Hurdles” at the Harlan County High School Track and Field meet.
- Second place for feature article on the Black Bear Kindness Award and the first recipient;
- Honorable mention for a Harlan County High School promotional video;
- Honorable mention for an article on dual credit program growth at the high school;
- Honorable mention for District website;
- Honorable mention for a photo titled “Talking with the Superintendent” and featuring youngsters at Black Mountain Elementary School with Roark.