

A mentor for disabled children

His job is to help provide better education for deaf and blind children

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ASHLAND — Kentucky school administrators are banking on a retired Ashland educator to help improve the quality of education for the state's blind and deaf children.

Less than three years after retiring from his post as assistant superintendent of the Ashland Independent School District, Steve Gilmore is back in full swing after being named the first special education mentor in the state overseeing changes at the Kentucky School for the Blind in Louisville and the Kentucky School for the Deaf in Danville.

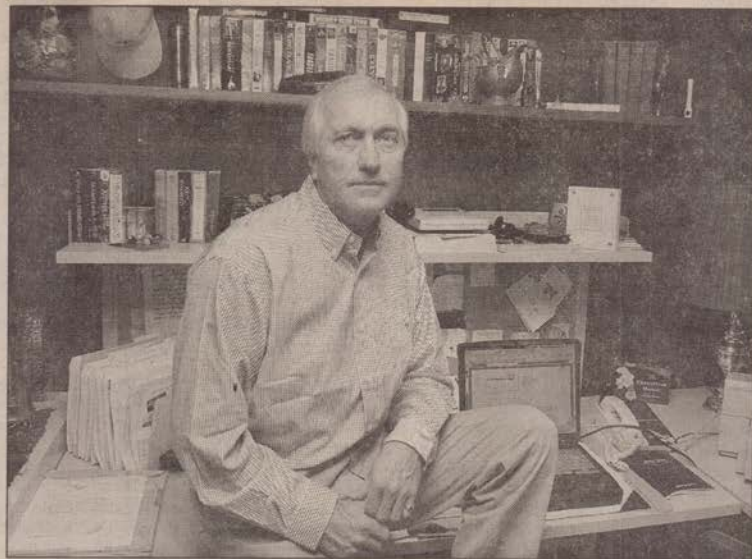
"It's absolutely rejuvenated my feelings on education," Gilmore said. "It's been a unique experience for me and it makes you so much more thankful for what you have."

The 56-year-old educator began working in the position last July as part of House Bill 519 passed by the General Assembly. In his new assignment, Gilmore helps the deaf and blind schools improve deficiencies noted by the state on their corrective action plans and their curricula.

"We're getting things done for the benefit of the kids," he said. "People are beginning to realize (education reform) isn't just a bunch of more stuff; they're realizing this is the way it's going to be."

Students in each Kentucky public school district are assessed under the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System, which includes a multiple choice section that compares students against national statistics, core content tests, a writing portfolio, writing tests that measure skills gathered from writing instructions and an alternative portfolio for students with moderate to severe disabilities.

The tests allow the state to



Frank Altizer/The Herald-Dispatch

Steve Gilmore of Ashland is the first special mentor for the Kentucky School of the Blind and Deaf. Gilmore also is chairman of the Ashland Park Board.

Faces of the TRI-STATE

Steve Gilmore bio

Age: 56.

Hometown: Ashland.

Occupation: Special education mentor for the Kentucky School for the Blind in Louisville and the Kentucky School for the Deaf in Danville.

Family members: Daughters Katy Sebastian and Stephanie Clark and granddaughter Carlyle Grayson Clark, 3.

accountable for being effective. Schools that do well receive financial rewards. Those that do poorly receive help to improve.

That's where the special education mentor comes into play. Students at the Louisville and Danville schools simply weren't performing up to state standards.

"The expectation levels weren't high enough," he said. "They have good teachers, but we need to arm them better."

The schools needed assistance in meeting the state-mandated curriculum which ensures that each student receives the same public education, regardless of disabilities.

"There are no limits on these kids," he said. "Many have normal and even high intelligence. We must treat them as we would any other child in any other school system."

The schools also needed work ensuring due process, including timelines on identifying students' special education needs.

ject," he said. "It's a tough area to deal with."

Gilmore is one of two special education mentors in the state. Shortly after he began his 100-day contract, another appointment was made for Fayette County schools.

Even though he hasn't received specialized training in special education, Gilmore said he gained invaluable experience working in various capacities in Ashland schools, including coordinator of special education and director of federal programs such as Head Start and Adult Education, and as the state's senior due process hearing officer.

A 1961 graduate of the former Holy Family High School in

four years later. He began teaching English at Putnam Junior High School before moving on to Paul G. Blazer High School as a teacher and coach and finally to the district's central office.

He also made his name known while serving eight years on the Ashland Board of City Commissioners in the 1980s and nearly a lifetime on the park board.

"I love Central Park," he said. "We look at it as everyone in the town's back yard and try to protect it. We're very careful about that."

Most recently, Gilmore spearheaded an effort to uncover the park's pond, which was filled in 38 years ago to combat a severe mosquito problem.

"I remember walking home from Holy Family every day and seeing a little more dirt in the pond," he said.

Now 38 years later, even the original lily pads have been reawakened. The project clearly is one of Gilmore's most prized.

"I've got a pictorial history of them digging it out," he said. "I was there every day."

Faces of the Tri-State is a