



Columbia Academy football hires Rob Phillips as next coach

SPORTS, 1B

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THINGS TO DO

Mule Day festivities, Aladdin Jr. top list

Jay Powell

Columbia Daily Herald
USA TODAY NETWORK - TENNESSEE

Mule Day weekend is upon us, which means Columbia will host lots of fun events, parades, as well as shopping opportunities and live entertainment for all to enjoy.

1. Mule Day festivities

Columbia's biggest weekend is upon us as the 52nd annual Mule Day commences this weekend with events, competitions and the iconic Mule Day Parade.

For a full list and schedule of Mule Day events, visit www.MuleDay.com.

The Mule Day Parade will take place starting at 11 a.m. Saturday down West 7th Street, featuring NASCAR legend Sterling Marlin as this year's grand marshal, as well as an enormous lineup of floats, businesses, schools and nonprofits taking part in the fun.

The James K. Polk Home & Museum will also host its annual pre-parade

Bloody's & Biscuits starting at 9 a.m. Saturday. Tickets are \$30 per person.

In addition to the big parade and park events at Maury County Park, Mule Day will also feature many nighttime activities, such as live music, line dancing and more at the Ridley 4-H Center, 850

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Students arrive at J.R. Baker Elementary School for the first day of class on Aug. 7, 2025 in Columbia, Tenn.

JAY POWELL/THE DAILY HERALD

Feds tell TN to stop taking orphans' Social Security benefits

Vivian Jones

Nashville Tennessean
USA TODAY NETWORK - TENNESSEE

After Tennessee diverted more than \$31.5 million in benefits from orphans in state care since 2019, federal officials are telling the Lee administration to stop confiscating those survivor benefits, saying the state's existing policy is "contrary to the best interests of children."

When guardians of a child in custody of the Department of Children's Services die, that child is entitled to federal Social Security survivor benefits.

In Tennessee, instead of ensuring the funds are maintained to support the child, DCS uses survivor benefits to care for children until they leave custody or turn 18. Leftover funds are then returned to the Social Security Administration.

Between 2019 and 2024, Tennessee collected \$31.5 million in Social Security benefits for orphan children in state custody, and spent \$20.8 million toward their care, averaging \$42,000 per recipient child.

Four months ago, Health and Human Services Assistant Secretary Alex Adams for the Administration of Children and Families wrote to Gov. Bill Lee calling for him to stop confiscating Social Security survivor benefits from the state's most vulnerable population.

"This practice is contrary to the best interests of children, and we are working to put an end to this practice," Adams wrote in a letter dated Dec. 8.

Adams offered to share resources "to help your state change this practice," including "executive order templates governors may use when directing their state agencies on the issue."

"These benefits could be the last, or only, financial support deceased parents can provide to their children," Adams wrote.

At least 12 states including Colorado, Arizona, Maryland, Oregon and New Mexico have changed their policies to require survivor benefits to go to the designated surviving child.

As of April 6, Lee had not signed an executive order stopping DCS from confiscating orphans' survivor benefits.

Elizabeth Johnson, a spokesperson for Lee, said the governor is "working closely" with the Trump administration

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Screens in the classroom

New legislation aims to minimize digital devices during school hours

Melissa Brown

Chalkbeat Tennessee

Tennessee elementary schools could limit classroom digital devices under new legislation aimed at minimizing screen time for young students, even on educational electronic devices.

The General Assembly this week finalized legislation that will require schools serving kindergarten through fifth grade to develop a policy to limit the use of electronic devices and block any students from accessing social media during school hours.

Senate Bill 2310 was significantly dialed back from its original form, which sought to totally ban digital educational devices like Chromebooks for young students except in special circumstances, such as in individualized education programs for students with disabilities.

Some lawmakers and educators raised concerns about instructional tools already deeply integrated into the classroom, such as digital whiteboards. The legislation that passed would allow schools to set their own

policies while prioritizing "in-person, teacher-led" instruction.

The Tennessee legislation, which still has to be signed into law by Gov. Bill Lee, gives local districts broad discretion to continue using devices as long as they believe the device serves an "instructional purposes for which such use provides a clear educational benefit."

The pending law is part of a growing national backlash to educational technology that comes after an earlier push to ban recreational screen time for students. Last year, Tennessee required schools to enforce smart phone bans, though many school systems already had restriction policies in place.

Concerns about the effects of screen time for children have also coincided with a national decline in reading and math achievement in recent years, sparking a flurry of public debate about the use of educational technology inside the classroom.

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