



Commonwealth
Education Continuum

Midterm Report

June 2021



A collaboration of Kentucky's education agencies:

Kentucky Department of Education

Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education

Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Cabinet

Report prepared by
Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education
100 Airport Road
Frankfort, KY 40601
<http://cpe.ky.gov>

Purpose

In order for students to earn degrees and credentials that lead to sustainable, competitive-wage careers, it is imperative that their educational experience, from preschool through postsecondary education, provides an equitable opportunity to successfully transition to the next level.

The Commonwealth Education Continuum (CEC) was formed out of the moral imperative to strengthen the education pipeline. Co-chaired by Lt. Governor Jacqueline Coleman, Council on Postsecondary Education President Aaron Thompson, and Education Commissioner Jason Glass, the Continuum consists of 28 members whose expertise ranges from early childhood to the workforce (see Appendix B). CEC members meet quarterly to achieve the following outcomes and approximate timeline: February – establishment of annual objectives; June – midterm progress report; September – report on legislative and policy recommendations; and December – annual progress report. CEC leadership and members are supported by a continued partnership with Education Strategy Group (ESG).

To further understand the diverse needs of the state and seek actions to improve Kentucky's education system, the CEC created three workgroups with distinct focus areas at its April meeting. The workgroups include: Early Postsecondary Opportunities, Educator Workforce and Diversity, and Successful Transition to Postsecondary Workgroups. The workgroups meet monthly to develop recommendations, implementation plans, key inputs and strategies, and viable policy proposals to present to the CEC in consideration of its efforts. The workgroups are co-chaired by the following leaders: Early Postsecondary Opportunities – Commissioner Jason Glass and KCTCS President Paul Czarapata; Educator Workforce and Diversity – Lt. Gov. Jacqueline Coleman and WKU College of Education Dean Corinne Murphy; and Successful Transition to Postsecondary – CPE Pres. Aaron Thompson and Kentucky Board of Education Chair Lu Young (see Appendix B).

Overview of Work Accomplished

During its initial meeting in January 2021, CEC members focused the work of the Continuum around an annual objective to develop and execute a specific plan to activate the biggest levers for increasing successful student transitions into postsecondary. The work that began in the CEC workgroups then began to hone in on how to accomplish this objective. The focus of the workgroups centered on the following:

April

Information sharing by ESG on the Unlocking Potential Framework and national trends, sharing and revising workgroup objectives and focus areas, and starting to lift up key challenges.

May

A re-centering on workgroup objectives and focus areas, sharing and discussing the structure and process for the first workgroup deliverable, co-creating an aspirational vision, continuing to build a list of challenges, and starting to build a list of potential strategies.

June

Exploration of the initial findings from stakeholder engagement efforts, finalizing the first workgroup deliverable, and lifting up key questions or considerations for other workgroups.

Stakeholder Engagement

In an effort to elevate the voices of the communities that will be most impacted by the work of the CEC, ESG, in collaboration with the CPE, held a series of interviews and focus groups with various stakeholders from across the state while the workgroups were meeting. Coordinated with the eight regional educational cooperatives to ensure geographical diversity, the questions centered on the three workgroup areas: Early Postsecondary Opportunities, Educator Workforce and Diversity, and Successful Transition to Postsecondary. Further, the regions were charged with the recruitment of participants of color and those who were from schools and districts with economic and racial diversity. A total of 166 individuals participated in the stakeholder interviews and focus groups: 120 from the K-12 sector and 46 from higher education. The insights gleaned from these engagements will support the CEC in developing a set of recommendations grounded in the interests, needs, and challenges experienced by the communities it serves. See Appendix A for more information on who participated in the interviews and focus groups and the key takeaways.

Additionally, in July, the CEC shared the stakeholder insights and workgroups' emerging recommendations with thought partners, which include a group of individuals who expressed interest in the CEC's work. Thought partners bring a variety of experiences and include higher education faculty and administrators, high school administrators, education research and advocacy organizations, nonprofits, and chambers of commerce. The thought partners were invited to a meeting to review the stakeholder engagement takeaways and see the working list of emerging recommendations. During this meeting, the thought partners were able to ask questions and provide feedback on the emerging recommendations. Additionally, the thought partners completed a survey to help prioritize and refine the recommendations.

Emerging Recommendations

The stakeholder insights and thought partner feedback have helped narrow the list of recommendations. The emerging recommendations for each workgroup are as follows:

Successful Transition to Postsecondary

- Employ more postsecondary transition advisors to help students plan for and transition postsecondary education and training.
- Ensure both counselor and teacher preparation programs include college and career advising components, and offer annual professional development to counselors and teachers.
- Launch a collective communications campaign that will communicate the value of postsecondary education and training to students and families.
- Launch a statewide campaign to increase FAFSA completion that addresses common misconceptions.
- Improve access to student-level data on FAFSA completion for schools and districts, and provide training and resources on leveraging data to target support to students and families.
- Develop a standardized financial aid award letter that is used by all public, in-state institutions.
- Create a uniform, statewide cost of attendance calculator to help students better understand their expected costs and financial aid.
- Expand capacity to support students after high school through the transition to postsecondary.

Early Postsecondary Opportunities

- Analyze data to better understand where and why gaps exist in program offerings for early postsecondary opportunities across the state, and target interventions to high-need areas.
- Ensure that every student has access to at least one early postsecondary opportunity.
- Provide incentives for high school teachers to obtain the necessary credentials to teach dual credit courses (e.g. scholarships, bonuses, loan forgiveness, etc.).
- Target proactive outreach to students and families who have been traditionally underrepresented in early postsecondary opportunities.
- Increase state funding to cover the cost of dual credit tuition and fees and AP exam fees, with equity grants for low- and middle-income students and families.

- Strengthen partnerships among high schools, institutions and the workforce to expand access, advising and support.
- Invest in expanding early college programs and career academies to offer more EPO courses in both CTE and academic fields.
- Develop a user-friendly common course catalog that is accessible to counselors, students and families and clearly outlines which courses are offered and how they will transfer to all public, in-state institutions.

Educator Workforce and Diversity

- Launch a compelling campaign that highlights the importance and benefits of entering the teaching profession.
- Increase pay and opportunities for advancement for educators.
- Extend the Praxis validity from five to 10 years.
- Provide funding for testing waivers and scholarships to recruit candidates of color as future teachers.
- Invest in development and mentorship programs for new teachers.
- Create support networks and mentoring programs for teachers of color.
- Create a culture of support and collaboration that allows teachers to provide input and feedback on policy.
- Require recurring training on implicit bias and cultural competency for hiring committees and supervisors.

Looking Ahead

While the work of the CEC over the past six months has not yet led to the development of formal recommendations for policy or legislative action, it is likely that such recommendations will emerge as we progress through the prioritization of the emerging recommendations identified in this report. Based on future workgroup and CEC discussions, such recommendations can be expected to be presented for consideration at the CEC's September meeting and solidified by the December meeting in preparation for the 2022 Kentucky Regular Legislative Session.

Appendix A

Stakeholder Engagement Participants and Key Takeaways

Participants

A total of 166 individuals participated in the focus groups and interviews. The breakdown of participants was as follows:

Table 1: K-12 Participants by Role

Role	Participants
Counselors	41
Teachers	25
Administrators	27
Students	15
Parents	12
Total	120

Table 2: Higher Education Participants by Role

Role	Number of Participants
College Administrators	8
Financial Aid Administrator	6
Dual Credit Coordinators	20
Education Program Directors	9
Students	3
Total	46

Key Takeaways

The focus group and interview questions centered on the three workgroup focus areas. The following key themes emerged from the conversations with stakeholders:

Successful Transition to Postsecondary

- Counselors do not always have enough capacity to support students with postsecondary planning. Stakeholders called for more personnel, training and partnerships to help ensure all students have access to quality advising.
- Students and families are often overwhelmed by the number of college and career options. They need early and frequent exposure to a variety of college and career opportunities and support in building the academic and other essential skills to ensure they succeed in their postsecondary endeavors.

- Students are hearing a lot of messages about college, career and postsecondary, but there is a need for more unified messaging, more information about different postsecondary opportunities and stronger family engagement.
- Many students and families still struggle to complete the FAFSA and verification, understand the true cost of college, and interpret their award letters.
- Rural students, first-generation college students, DACA and undocumented students, special education students, and students of color often face additional barriers in transitioning to postsecondary, and the final recommendations should ensure all students receive equitable support.

Early Postsecondary Opportunities

- There is significant variability in the number and type of EPO courses to which students have access. This often stems from district challenges around funding, scheduling and teacher credentialing.
- Many students and families are unaware of their options for accessing EPO courses, and advisors play a pivotal role in increasing participation.
- While the state dual credit scholarships and AP fee waivers are valuable, many students and families still face challenges in affording EPO courses.
- There is significant variability in policies between schools and institutions, which can be difficult to navigate. Cross-sector partnerships are key to building effective programs. Career pathway programs and early college programs have been successful ways to increase exposure and create an early entry point into dual credit coursework.
- Academic preparation is a key barrier for students succeeding in EPO courses. While we didn't hear issues around credit transfer for dual credit, counselors called for an easier system for viewing institutional policies. Students and families, however, are concerned about credit acceptance for AP courses, viewing dual credit as a surer bet.

Educator Workforce and Diversity

- There is a need to elevate the teaching profession and provide more opportunities for early exposure to the educator workforce.
- Educator Preparation programs have admissions and financial barriers that students need support and resources to navigate.
- Teacher salaries are not competitive, and there are limited opportunities for advancement.
- Mentoring and early support are valuable to the success of new teachers. Counselors also expressed a need for formalized training and mentoring once on the job.

- Teachers wanted more training and support that focused on topics beyond just standards.
- Positive and safe working environments and administrator-teacher relationships were important for retention.
- Black and Latinx educators and counselors expressed concerns about implicit bias in hiring practices.
- Limited representation of educators and administrators of color makes it challenging to find support when needed.

Commonwealth Education Continuum and Workgroup Membership 2021

Commonwealth Education Continuum Members

- Co-Chair Dr. Aaron Thompson, president of the Council on Postsecondary Education
- Co-Chair Lt. Gov. Jacqueline Coleman, secretary of the Workforce and Development Cabinet
- Co-Chair Dr. Jason E. Glass, commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Education
- Sen. David Givens, Kentucky Senate
- Sen. Max Wise, Kentucky Senate
- Rep. James Tipton, Kentucky House of Representatives
- Luke Mentzer, board chair of the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education
- Dr. Lu Young, board chair of the Kentucky Board of Education
- Dr. OJ Oleka, president of the Association of Kentucky Independent Colleges and Universities
- Kyle Thomas, board president of the Kentucky School Counselor Association
- Gene Hutchins, executive director of the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority
- Eddie Campbell, president of the Kentucky Education Association
- Dr. Rhonda Caldwell, executive director of the Kentucky Association of School Administrators
- Ronda Harmon, executive director of the Kentucky Association of School Councils
- Dr. Jim Flynn, executive director of the Kentucky Association of School Superintendents
- David Horseman, associate commissioner of the Office of Career and Technical Education, Kentucky Department of Education
- Dr. Paul Czarpath, interim president of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System
- Lisa Rudzinski, board chair of the Education Professional Standards Board
- Kerri Schelling, executive director of the Kentucky School Boards Association
- Robert Hayes, director of the Student Transitions and Family Programs, University of Kentucky
- Logan Justice, P-12 student representative
- Amy Neal, executive director of the Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood
- Dr. Dallas Kratzer, grant program manager of the Cyber Security and Workforce Development Outreach, Kentucky Commission on Military Affairs
- John Lyons, interim executive director of the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board
- Jenny Sawyer, executive director of admissions, University of Louisville

- Dr. Corinne Murphy, dean of Western Kentucky University
- Dr. Robert Jackson, president of Murray State University
- Kathleen Christian, president of the 16th District PTA
- Priyadarshini Chandrashekhar, postsecondary student representative

Early Postsecondary Opportunities Workgroup Members

- Sandra Baker, Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce
- Dr. Dan Connell, Morehead State University
- Brad Hall, University of the Cumberland
- David Horseman, Kentucky Department of Education
- Eugene Hutchins, Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority
- Carla Kersey, Kentucky Educational Development Corporation
- Marybeth Lawson, GEAR UP Kentucky
- Dr. OJ Oleka, president of the Association of Kentucky Independent Colleges and Universities
- Meredith Rozanski, Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce
- Jenny Sawyer, University of Louisville
- Rep. James Tipton, Kentucky House of Representatives
- Christine Tarquinio, Louisville Metro Chamber of Commerce
- Dr. Kathleen “Kakie” Urch, University of Kentucky
- Dr. LorryBeth Wilson, West Kentucky Community and Technical College

Educator Workforce and Diversity Workgroup Members

- Terri L. Bradshaw, Kentucky Capital Development Corp
- Dr. Rhonda Caldwell, Kentucky Association of School Administrators
- Eddie Campbell, Kentucky Education Association
- Penny Christian, Kentucky Parent Teacher Association
- Dr. Ginni Fair, Northern Kentucky University
- Dr. Jim Flynn, Kentucky Association of School Superintendents
- Elly Gilbert, Kentucky Department of Education
- Dr. Kimberly Haverkos, Thomas More University
- Logan Justice, P-12 Student Representative
- Dr. Dallas Kratzer, Kentucky Commission on Military Affairs
- Vivian Lasley-Bibbs, Kentucky Department for Public Health
- Bren Martin, Prichard Committee
- Dr. Soraya Matthews, Perspective Education Professional Services
- Dr. Sheri McGuffin, AdvanceKentucky

- Dr. Margaret Mohr-Schroeder, University of Kentucky
- Jessica Romious, Council on Postsecondary Education
- Dr. Lisa G. Stephenson, West Kentucky Community and Technical College

Successful Transition to Postsecondary Workgroup Members

- Ben Brandstetter, Brandstetter Carroll Inc.
- Stephanie Devine, Teach for America Appalachia
- Dr. Bob Jackson, Murray State University
- Mary Jackson, GEAR Up Kentucky
- Shauna King-Simms, Kentucky Community and Technical College System
- Barry Lee, Casey County Board of Education
- Shawn Lyons, Transylvania University
- Elizabeth Mays, EdjAnalytics
- Dr. Ebony Muldrow, University of Louisville
- Dr. Sarah Ochs, Western Kentucky University
- Carolyn Noe, Northern Kentucky University
- Samantha Reynolds, Henderson Community College Workforce Solutions
- Matthew Ruark, Kentucky Wesleyan College
- Sheri Satterly, Danville Independent Schools
- Sara White, Berea College

TEAM 
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