



**KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
COMMISSIONER’S STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL  
SUMMARY**

**MAY 31, 2022**

**ATTENDANCE:** Trevin Bevins, Delaney Daugherty, Arnav Dharmagadda, Rohin Dutt, JuLeah Edie, Vinessa Fressola, Soleila Elliot Gonzalez, Logan Justice, Ella Luking, Solyana Mesfin, Anastasia Panaretos, Spandana Pavuluri, Alexandra Perry, Sophia Retone, Sam Smith, Arivumani Srivastava, Bentley White

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Dejah Armstrong, Madelyn Blankenship, Gavin Breunig, Charleigh Browning, Drake Calhoun, Ollie Fegenbush, Jack Johnson, Loren Little, Roxanne Lockard, Jacob Lyons, Gracie Smith, Joy Ntakarutimana, Dyllan Tipton, Emma Whitehouse

**SUMMARY:**

**Agenda Item:** Welcome

**Presenter:** Jason E. Glass, Ed.D., Commissioner of Education, Kentucky Department of Education

**Summary of Discussion:**

Commissioner Glass welcomed members and members-elect to the hybrid in-person/virtual meeting. He said that KDE uses feedback from this council to make better policy decisions and noted how the group has recently moved into advocacy space on a couple of issues.

Glass noted one agenda change: the co-designing an ideal school or learning space activity will be postponed. Instead, Glass said he wanted time for students to dialogue about the recent school shooting in Uvalde and to discuss whether the group would like to develop a position paper with recommendations to policy makers on steps to better secure schools.

“In spite of all the good intentions and energy and research that adults are doing on this issue, you are the ones who are spending the most time in school right now, and you are the best experts about student experiences and how it could be made more secure,” Glass said.

**Feedback:**

None

**Agenda Item:** Roll Call and Announcement and Introduction of New Members to the Commissioner’s Student Advisory Council for 2022-2023 School Year

**Presenter:** Toni Konz Tatman, Chief Communications Officer, Office of the Commissioner, Kentucky Department of Education

**Summary of Discussion:**

Konz Tatman took roll call, announced and welcomed 17 new members to the 2022-2023 council, and congratulated graduating council members. New members include:

- Hunter Combs, 11th grade, Knott County High School;
- Joud Dahleh, 12th grade, Ignite Academy (Boone County);
- Justin Dunning, 11th grade, Lyon County High School;
- Raima Dutt, 11th grade, duPont Manual High School (Jefferson County);
- Peter M. Jefferson, 10th grade, Henry Clay High School (Fayette County);
- Nyla Johnson, 12th grade, Eastern High School (Jefferson County);
- Shraman Kar, 11th grade, duPont Manual High School (Jefferson County);
- Vijaykumar Karthikeyan, 11th grade, Paul Laurence Dunbar High School (Fayette County);
- Kallie Oblander, 12th grade, Meade County High School;
- Tanvi Rakesh, 10th grade, Cooper High School (Boone County);
- Chloe Ralston, 12th grade, Lincoln County High School;
- Amy Roblero-Perez, 11th grade, Bardstown High School (Bardstown Independent);
- Macy Spigelmire, 10th grade, Kentucky School for the Blind;
- Luke Taylor, 12th grade, Daviess County High School;
- Malley Taylor, 11th grade, Craft Academy (Rowan County High School);
- Sarah Umbarger, 11th grade, Marshall County High School; and
- Sarah Yu, 12th grade, Highlands High School (Ft. Thomas Independent).

Konz Tatman announced that the council’s first regular meeting of the 2022-2023 school year will be August 23 with most meetings occurring virtually on the third Tuesday of every month. Two in-person meetings are planned, and Konz Tatman said she will share the final schedule with the council once available. She then asked recent graduates to share their upcoming plans.

**Feedback:**

Recent graduates said they plan to pursue higher education at a variety of in-state and out-state institutions.

**Agenda Item:** Amplifying Student Voice

**Presenter:** Byron Darnall, Ed.D., Associate Commissioner, Office of Educator Licensure and Effectiveness (OELE)

**Summary of Discussion:**

Darnall invited guests Jack Hostager and Ian Coon, founders of Iowa Student Learning Institute (IowaSLI), to discuss their experiences developing a student-run nonprofit dedicated to amplifying student voice in Iowa’s approach to education.

Coon and Hostager discussed how they raised awareness to decision-makers at local, state and national levels and developed events focused on including and amplifying student voice—particularly voices of students who historically might be excluded. Efforts mentioned ranged from modeling how to have constructive conversations with teachers to discussing policy recommendations with state legislators during annual “Day on the Hill” civics events.

Coon and Hostager encouraged council members to consider their advisory and advocacy roles in education and offered five pieces of advice: (1) be a constructive stakeholder; (2) build relationships with other stakeholders; (3) set the agenda; (4) have a bold vision; and (5) involve as many other students as possible.

“There’s a lot of danger when you’re a student or a group of students trying to have a say in education to be tokenized or be thought of as ‘cute,’” Hostager said. “That can sometimes work to your advantage and make it easier for you to get into spaces and rooms with other people. But demonstrating strong organization and competence is important for getting adults to take you seriously and move beyond that cute factor.”

Darnall also invited council members to share their summer plans.

### **Feedback:**

Members discussed the council’s recent advocacy efforts. Anastasia Panaretos, a junior at South Oldham High School (Oldham County), discussed how the council made a video defining and demonstrating what equity looks like in Kentucky schools. She also mentioned upcoming collaborations with KDE staff to include student stories and voices in podcasts and newsletters.

Soleila Elliot González, a rising senior at Ballard High School (Jefferson County) highlighted the group’s [advocacy work regarding student mental health with Lt. Gov. Jacqueline Coleman](#), ultimately resulting in passage of House Bill 44, which allows local school districts’ attendance policies to include provisions for a student’s mental or behavioral health status. She noted that the group is meeting with multiple educational stakeholders to discuss their recommendations.

“The best part of these events is that I felt like we were being truly listened to by people in really high places of power in the state legislature,” said Sam Smith, a recent graduate of Daviess County High School. “To me, that was my big takeaway. I did feel like we were making real change.”

Elliot González asked Hostager and Coon for advice on how to increase and amplify student voice represented through the council, stating that past efforts tend to attract high-performing students and students from higher socioeconomic status. Coon suggested targeted outreach efforts to teachers to build support for the council’s mission and to anticipate and address barriers to participation for students without technology or transportation, students who speak English as a second language and LGBTQ+ students.

**Agenda Item:** End of the Year Reflection and a Mindful Moment Activity

**Presenter:** Damien Sweeney, Ed.D., director of Director, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging; Florence Chang, Ph.D., strategic analyst of learning; and Heather Bushelman, program coordinator for comprehensive school counseling; Office of Teaching and Learning (OTL)

**Summary of Discussion:**

Sweeney led a conversation with council members about their response to hearing about the recent Uvalde, Texas, school shooting. “We need proximity. We need to be able to process what’s happened and talk about it and know we’re not alone in those feelings,” Sweeney said.

Bushelman led a mindful moment with the group and invited students to share tips on how they take breaks from technology.

Chang invited council input on how KDE can help improve “sense of belonging” on the first day of school. She presented statewide findings collected from students who took state assessments in 2021 that 1 out of every 5 high school students in Kentucky does not feel a sense of belonging and 1 out of every 4 high school students of color in Kentucky does not feel a sense of belonging.

### **Feedback:**

Students shared a range of reactions – from anger, to sadness, to disgust, to outrage, to disbelief, to helplessness, to exhaustion – regarding the news of the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas. Some said that they thought leaders were evading difficult conversations and actions needed to improve school safety. Other council members noted that efforts to strengthen school safety and combat student feelings of isolation would require significant time and financial, emotional and other resources.

Konz Tatman invited council members to consider how to use their voice and advocacy efforts related to mental health and school safety. She noted that the Kentucky General Assembly passed House Bill 63 in the past legislative session, which requires (with noted exceptions by the Office of State School Security Marshal) a student resource officer (SROs) on every school campus in Kentucky. The legislature failed to appropriate the funds necessary to pay for these positions or put in place the supports for law enforcement to train these SROs.

Recommendations from council members to improve sense of belonging on the first day of school included developing more one-on-one student time with counselors and teachers, setting aside 10 minutes a day for students to share about their personal interests and activities and offering mentorship programs to new students.

### **Agenda Item:** Improving School Safety

**Presenter:** Jason E. Glass, Ed.D., Commissioner of Education, Kentucky Department of Education

### **Summary of Discussion:**

Glass spoke with students about the Uvalde school shooting and said that he thought student voice was not present in debates happening nationally on school safety. He asked council members if they were interested in developing a list of recommendations to policy makers regarding school safety.

Finding consensus, Glass asked students to work together and identify potential policy topics. Students collaborated in small groups and virtually on a shared document. They identified several topics of interest, including background checks for gun purchases, early warning systems, law enforcement training, mental health supports and unfunded legislative mandates regarding school resource officers (SROs) in Kentucky schools.

The students grouped topics in three centralizing categories: proactive efforts before a school shooting; actions in the event of an active shooter; and recovery from the effects of a school shooting.

**Feedback:**

Council members noted that student perspective is often overlooked in conversations on school safety. “This has a lot of involvement to do with students, and you don’t see that reflected in the media.... We’re the ones being affected the most,” said Soylana Mesfin, a recent graduate of Eastern High School (Jefferson County).

Some students noted their frustration that school shootings continue to occur, and several commented on the number of school shooting events in the U.S. compared to other countries. “It bothers me that the United States is the only country where school shootings are happening consistently,” said Raima Dutt, a junior at duPont Manual High School (Jefferson County). “In the U.S., guns have become politicized, which allows no progress to be made in preventing the issue from happening in the future.”

**Follow-up Required:**

Glass recommended that the group use the summer and fall to research the issues and begin writing a policy recommendation for legislators and other educators to read.

**Agenda Item:** Communications Updates and Additional Ways to Be Involved

**Presenter:** Toni Konz Tatman, Chief Communications Officer, Office of the Commissioner, Kentucky Department of Education

**Summary of Discussion:**

Konz Tatman noted that council members are often invited to serve on judging panels or network with other education stakeholders. Upcoming opportunities open to the council include the: (1) June 2 Commissioner’s School Counselor Advisory Council meeting; (2) 2023 Kentucky Teacher of the Year awards; (3) May 31 Career and Technical Education Advisory Committee; and (4) KDE’s Accountability Standards Setting Committee.

**Feedback:**

None

The next Commissioner’s Student Advisory Council meeting will be held virtually August 23 at 9 a.m. ET.