



KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (KDE)

COMMISSIONER'S STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

SUMMARY

OCT. 29, 2024

Present (22 members present): Lisa Abrampah, Mary Beth Bolen, Graham Borden, Ani Cockerham-O'Donnell, Isabella Edghill, Aniji Fox, Manas Garla, Preston Graham, Samarah Higgins, Honette Irakiza, Peter Jefferson, Allan Kalambayi, Sophia Langford, Gabriella MacAdams, Tanvi Rakesh, Daniel Ratley, Luisa Sanchez-Almenarez, Abigail Sears, Koah Ta, Austin Eric Vitato, Aliete Yanes Media, India Young

Absent (2 members absent): Sophia Staples, Carley Watts

Summary:

Agenda Item: Welcome

Presenter: Robbie Fletcher, Ed.D., Commissioner of Education, Kentucky Department of Education (KDE)

Summary of Discussion: Fletcher provided several updates to the council. He congratulated Peter Jefferson and Daniel Ratley on their appointment as council chair and vice chair, respectively. He noted that KDE created and distributed posters to schools based on the council's recent input on chronic absenteeism. These posters, as well as other resources, are available on [KDE's Chronic Absenteeism website](#). Fletcher also presented data on statewide classified and certified staff shortages and discussed KDE's efforts to address these shortages through recruiting, retention and marketing efforts.

Fletcher provided updates about the [October Kentucky Board of Education meeting](#), including the board's legislative priorities and the board's resolution supporting the use of state dollars to exclusively fund the common system of public schools. He discussed the [Kentucky United We Learn Council's convening on Oct. 21 and 22](#), which focused on feedback for a new assessment and accountability model. Fletcher noted recent schools he has visited, stating that school visits are his favorite part of his position as commissioner.

Feedback: Honette Irakiza, a senior at South Warren High School, asked if the commissioner plans to visit all Kentucky counties. Fletcher said his goal during his tenure as commissioner is to visit all of Kentucky's school districts.

Agenda Item: Roll Call and Approve Summary from Last Meeting

Presenter: GlyptusAnn Grider Jones, Ph.D., CSAC Liaison, KDE

Summary of Discussion: Jones called roll. The [summary notes from the Aug. 27, 2024, Commissioner's Student Advisory Council meeting](#) were approved. Motion made by Peter Jefferson, a senior at Henry Clay High School (Fayette County), and seconded by Daniel Ratley, a junior at Grayson County High School.

Feedback: None.

Agenda Item: Mindful Minute Activity

Presenter: Michelle Sircy, Ed.D., Program Coordinator for Comprehensive School Counseling, Office of Teaching and Learning, KDE

Summary of Discussion: Sircy discussed the importance of journaling to track goals and manage stress. She demonstrated deep breathing exercises as a stress management technique and way to improve focus. She also discussed positive, tolerable and toxic types of stress and asked students to share what they want educators to know about students' stress.

Feedback: Students shared their goals and plans to address obstacles related to those goals. Members also discussed items related to stress that they wished educators knew. Austin Vitato, a junior at J. Graham Brown High School (Jefferson County), said, "I know a lot of teachers may think that our work day tends to be the burden of our stress when it's not really—we have lives outside of school and it's other things going on that can also be stressful." Ratley said he wanted teachers to know that the volume of exams can be stressful. "I have three finals in one day They can really put a lot of stress ... based on how things line up," he said. Ani Cockerham-O'Donnell, a sophomore at the Kentucky School for the Deaf, added, "Letting me know things last minute causes a lot more stress."

Agenda Item: Discussion on Vaping and Substance Use in Schools

Presenter: Judi Vanderhaar, Ph.D., and Jessica Napier, Program Consultants, Division of Student Success, Office of Continuous Improvement and Success, KDE

Summary of Discussion: Vanderhaar and Napier discussed the latest information from the [Youth Risk Behavior Survey \(YRBS\)](#) with the council. According to the YRBS data, the percentage of high school students who have used an electronic vapor product at least once was reported at its highest in 2019 at 53%. Since then, there has been a decrease to 41% in 2023, matching the same percentage as the YRBS in 2015, when the question was first asked.

Feedback: Students shared their perspectives on vaping and substance use, discussing the impact of peer pressure, the role of parents and the need for community involvement and education. They also suggested potential solutions, such as peer support groups and partnerships with local businesses and law enforcement.

“We have a lot of predatory marketing, and a lot of younger students are victims of that, even in their own households,” said Samarah Higgins, a senior from John Hardin High School (Hardin County). “So really I think it’s taking the time to educate a lot of our younger students to say this is what this is if you see something like this in your own possessions.”

Khoa Ta, a junior on the council from Owensboro High School (Owensboro Independent), said resources at school have helped students. “My district has specific vape boxes where you can dispose of vapes without getting in trouble or just being able to remain anonymous, which I think is an amazing place to start. They actually have (anti-vaping) pamphlets right next to it,” said Ta.

Higgins shared the importance of presenting an alternative coping mechanism for students using vape substances versus stating the negative impacts from substance use. “I think we need to think about how schools can engage communities and really involve them in the process and the transition of healing that coping mechanism,” Higgins said.

Agenda Item: Student Input on Kentucky’s Assessment and Accountability System

Presenter: Preston Graham, Non-Voting Student Member of the Kentucky Board of Education, Woodford County High School

Summary of Discussion: Graham discussed efforts to build a new assessment and accountability system for Kentucky that aims to incorporate vibrant learning experiences and local accountability. He invited council members to submit their feedback on components currently under consideration and to gather feedback from their peers to ensure more student voices are heard in the process.

Feedback: Isabella Edghill, a senior at duPont Manual High School (Jefferson County), said she was encouraged to hear the inclusion of vibrant learning in the new framework and the recognition of its importance when it comes to student learning. “I like the idea of incorporating these vibrant learning experiences into the assessment (and) accountability system because we're recognizing that students learn and present their learning in different ways. Not everyone does well on tests, but at the same time it does not mean they’re not exceeding in the classroom in other ways,” Edghill said.

The meeting adjourned at 11:02 a.m. ET. The next council meeting will be held virtually on Dec. 10 from 9 to 11 a.m. ET.