

SUMMARY MINUTES ARE DRAFT UNTIL APPROVED AT THE DECEMBER 2025 MEETING



**KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (KDE)
COMMISSIONER'S STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL (CSAC)
SUMMARY**

Oct. 30, 2025

Present (18 members present): Tejas Basneth, Graham Borden, Ani Cockerham-O'Donnell, Delanie Crump, Lillian Darr, Vivian Fox, Manas Garla, Patrick Graboviy, Preston Graham, Sophia Johnson, Charlie Kinkade, Abigail Ladwig, Sophia (Seth) Langford, Gabriella MacAdams, Hadley Nicolas, Lacey Paige, Tara Rakesh, Daniel Ratley, Luisa Sanchez-Almenarez, Prisha Shah and Austin Eric Vitto.

Absent (1 member absent): Aliete Yanes Medina

Summary:

Agenda Item: Welcome

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

Summary of Discussion: Fletcher welcomed the students to the first Commissioner's Student Advisory Council meeting.

Summary:

Agenda Item: Roll Call and Approval of Minutes

Presenter: Rosalind Turner, CSAC Liaison, KDE

Summary of discussion: Turner called the roll. The summary notes from the [April 15, 2025,](#) meeting were approved, on a motion by Sophia Langford and second by Gabriella MacAdams.

Summary:

Agenda Item: Announcements

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

Summary of Discussion: Fletcher made several announcements, including recognizing Preston Graham's service as a non-voting student member of the Kentucky Board of Education and being selected for the Distinguished Student Service Award from the National Association of School Boards; and the naming of Maya K. Davis and Palmer M. Schmidt as 2025 U.S. Presidential Scholars. He also recognized Michelle Gross, a mathematics teacher at Spencer County Middle School with 22 years of experience, for being named as the 2026 Kentucky Teacher of the Year. Kara Byrn Dowdy, an English teacher and department head at Mayfield High School in the Mayfield Independent School District, was the Kentucky High School Teacher of the Year finalist, and Melanie Howard, a special educate moderate and severe disabilities educator at Corbin Primary School in the Corbin Independent School District, was the 2026 Kentucky Teacher of the Year Elementary School finalist.

Summary:**Agenda Item: Mindful Minute Activity**

Presenter: Thomas Tucker, Pd.D., Deputy Commissioner, Office of Teaching and Learning, KDE

Summary of Discussion: Tucker led the council through mindfulness and well-being exercises, including a four-corner activity and journaling sharing personal reflections on stress management and the importance of being present.

Summary:**Agenda Item: Suicide Prevention**

Presenter: Blake Konny, Safe and Supportive Schools Consultant, Division of Student Success, Office of Continuous Improvement

Summary of discussion: Konny led a discussion on suicide prevention, including student stressors, available supports, barriers to accessing mental health resources, and strategies for improving school and community interventions, with active student participation. He shared magnets with the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline information for the students to share. He encouraged them to get the word out that if someone they know needs support to call or text 988 or chat 988lifeline.org.

Summary:

Agenda Item: Attendance Matters: Addressing Chronic Absenteeism in Kentucky)

Presenter: Lisa Henry and Ashley Gates, Education Program Consultants, Division of Student Success, Office of Continuous Improvement and Support, KDE

Summary of discussion: Henry and Gates discussed the department's Attendance Matters chronic absenteeism campaign, another one of the agency's top priorities.

A student is defined as chronically absent if they miss 10% or more of their time in school. This includes both excused and unexcused absences.

KDE launched a public messaging campaign, which included a [commercial](#) and ads strategically placed on streaming services, websites, public transportation services, event venues and billboards across the Commonwealth. The ads feature messaging about how when a student misses school, they miss more than lessons, they miss connection with their school community and building their future.

Henry and Gates engaged students in a discussion about chronic absenteeism, including a rundown of the data and how chronic absenteeism has grown since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The absenteeism rate went from 18% during the 2018-2019 school year to 27% in 2021-2022, following two years of disrupted data collection due to the pandemic. The rate rose to 30% in the 2022-2023 school year but dipped to 28% the following year. Commissioner of Education Robbie Fletcher said data from the 2024-2025 school year shows another decline, as well.

KDE's goal is to reduce the chronic absenteeism rate in Kentucky to 15% by the end of the 2028-2029 school year.

Students shared experiences related to attendance, whether it be their own or what they have noticed with their peers. Some explained difficulties they have noticed with illness and economic issues producing barriers to consistent attendance.

Lillian Ruth Darr, a senior at Muhlenberg County High School, said some students simply do not want to go to school, "and their parents don't make them come, so they just don't come (to school)."

Sophie Johnston, a junior at Morgan County High School, noted chronic absenteeism rates tend to be higher in parts of eastern Kentucky. She said many of her own classmates are working instead of going to school.

“I am in one of those areas that did have (issues with) chronic absenteeism before COVID, and most of my friends don’t come to school due to the fact that they have to have jobs to take care of their families,” Johnston said.

Lacey Paige, a senior at Christian County High School, said some of her classmates have skipped school to take care of younger siblings for parents who either work or have healthcare issues.

Manas Garla, a senior at Western Hills High School (Franklin County), said he has noticed since online learning became more normalized and assignments are mostly done virtually, many students lack motivation to come to class.

“All you have to do is email your teacher and be like, ‘Hey, what do I have to do’ and they’ll give you the assignment, you can just do it at home,” Garla said. “So even if you just want to take a day off, it’s like you’re not missing much because you can do it at home.”

Fletcher said vibrant learning experiences within those activities and others inside the classroom can provide incentives for students to come to school. Fletcher said he has seen countless examples across Kentucky’s districts of these experiences, such as tiny house projects and job shadowing opportunities.

“Do we give you good motivation to be at school?” Fletcher asked. “Is there something that’s going on in your school that you’re doing each and every day to make you say I can’t miss this because ... I would hate to miss the experience?”

KDE provides resources on the [Attendance Matters chronic absenteeism webpage](#) for families, community members and educators. Guidelines on when students should stay home due to an illness, steps communities can take and other information to help promote attendance in schools are just a few of the many helpful resources available on the webpage.

Summary:

Agenda Item: From Vision to Action: Defining Objectives for the Student Advisory Council

Presenters: Karen Dodd, Chief Performance Officer, KDE, and Susan Strange, Strategic Plan Program Manager, KDE

Summary of discussion: Dodd and Strange led council members in an exercise to identify priorities for the council.

The council addressed several different topics, ranging from how to address AI in classrooms to more mental health supports, but narrowed down their top focus to addressing student progression from high school through higher education.

Dodd said the Commissioner's Student Advisory Council will continue working toward a project aimed at addressing their top priority with plans to present their project results to the [Kentucky United We Learn Council](#) and the Kentucky Board of Education.

Council members also went over some of the top priorities for KDE, including the [United We Learn](#) vision of vibrant learning experiences, encouraging innovation – especially when it comes to assessments – and collaboration with communities.

KDE and the Kentucky United We Learn Council started working on the future of assessment and accountability after KDE conducted a survey during the COVID-19 pandemic and a listening tour in 2021, asking people what worked for their students, what could be improved and what kind of education system they wanted to see. The United We Learn vision for advancing education was developed from feedback.

The Kentucky United We Learn Council, which is comprised of a wide-ranging group of people – families, students, educators, legislators, business leaders and community members – has contributed to the development of an assessment and accountability model framework. More details on that framework can be found on [KDE's Future of Assessment and Accountability webpage](#).

Summary:

Agenda Item: Adjournment

Presenter: Rosalind Turner, CSAC Liaison, KDE

Summary: Turner called for a motion to adjourn. Graham made a motion and Ratley seconded the motion.

Next Meeting Date: Turner announced the next CSAC meeting will be virtual and is scheduled for Dec. 9.