

SUMMARY MINUTES ARE DRAFT UNTIL APPROVED AT THE DECEMBER 2025 MEETING



**KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Local School Board Members Advisory Council
SUMMARY**

SUMMARY:

I. Agenda Item: Roll Call and Approval of Minutes

Presenter: Jodi Doman, Program Consultant, Division of Innovation
Kentucky Department of Education

David Webster, Local School Board Advisory Council Chair

Summary of Discussion:

Webster welcomed members and asked for approval of previous minutes and the current agenda. The minutes were approved by Venita Murphy and seconded by Felix Akojie. The agenda was approved by Felix Akojie and seconded by Julia Fischer.

ATTENDANCE:

PRESENT: David Webster, Simpson County; Venita Murphy; Webster County; Julia Fischer, Bellevue Independent; Brenda Rose, Whitley County; Joanna Freels, Shelby County; Linda Duncan, Jefferson County; Joanna Hinton; LaRue County; Felix Akojie; Paducah Independent.

ABSENT: Ruschelle Hamilton, Breathitt County,

Summary of Discussion:

II. Agenda Item: Welcome

Presenter: David Webster, Local School Board Advisory Council Chair

Summary of Discussion:

Webster welcomed members and motioned for the meeting to begin.

III. Agenda Item: Assessment and Accountability Framework 4.0

Senior Capstone Project and Rubric Examples

Presenters: Jennifer Stafford, Associate Commissioner

Sarah Snipes, Director of Innovation
Office of Continuous Improvement and Support
Kentucky Department of Education

Summary of Discussion: Snipes introduced Jennifer Stafford as the new Associate Commissioner of Education who will be highlighting the Assessment and Accountability Framework 4.0. Stafford began by stating that the Kentucky United We Learn (KUWL) initiative is beginning the fourth year. The group is ready to advocate for change. This readiness follows a thorough learning process where the Accelerating Innovation Committee explored educational approaches in other states and countries, and reviewed Kentucky's own educational history, specifically focusing on the 1990s reforms, obstacles encountered, and the origins of the state's assessment and accountability systems. This diligent background work has led to the development of prototypes and frameworks, signifying a move from learning and due diligence to action. Stafford discussed the federal government grant that was received in 2022 which funded the work. The KUWL council comprises a diverse group of stakeholders, intentionally bringing in voices typically underrepresented. This includes:

- Students
- Teachers
- Administrators
- Representatives from the General Assembly
- Parents
- Community members from various backgrounds

Stafford explained that the goal is to gather a wide range of perspectives to inform the initiative and discussed the priorities which include:

- Vibrant Learning Experiences (VLE) for every student
- Authentic demonstrations of learning
- Collaboration with community

Stafford further explained the KUWL council is a stakeholder-driven group, facilitated by the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE). The council's discussions and direction are primarily shaped by its members' diverse voices and interests.

A significant part of the council's work and learning has come from the Local Laboratories of Learning (L3's). Snipes and her innovation team have spearheaded the efforts in these labs.

L3's are schools or districts that have agreed to inform state systems by:

- Creating vibrant learning experiences.
- Developing their own local accountability systems.

These labs serve as models for other schools and districts. Visitors can observe, learn from their successful practices, and understand the obstacles they've encountered while developing their innovative learning experiences.

Stafford described the Kentucky Coalition of Advancing Education (KCAE) and that empathy interviews were conducted which culminated in the KUWL Report. This report identified three key priorities that have served as the foundation for the initiative's work to date. In Summer 2024, a prototype of the initiative's framework was developed. The first version of this prototype was shared in May 2024 and provided an outline of the proposed changes. In May 2024, the first prototype was shared, outlining potential systems for assessment and accountability.

Stafford stated it is crucial to understand that while often discussed together, assessment and accountability are distinct but interrelated systems:

- **Assessment System:** This refers to the tests students take, such as reading tests in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades, and assessments in mathematics, science and social studies. These measure student learning.
- **Accountability System:** This system, while heavily reliant on the assessments, determines how schools are held responsible for student outcomes. Examples of accountability indicators include post-secondary readiness and graduation rates. Stafford further explained the development of prototypes for the assessment and accountability systems involved a structured, iterative process. In April 2024, during a KUWL council convening, the first prototype was unveiled. This initial draft aimed to translate the council's ideas into a concrete structure for both assessment and accountability. The council provided swift and clear recommendations for revisions. This feedback directly led to the creation of Prototype 2.0.

Prototype 2.0 was then shared more broadly in Summer 2024. It was distributed to a wider audience, including educators and superintendents, through direct emails and postings on the initiative's website, allowing for more extensive review and feedback. A comprehensive feedback collection process was implemented, emphasizing broad engagement:

- **Public Survey:** An open survey was made available for anyone to provide feedback on the prototype's various aspects.
- **Interviews with L3 and Non-L3 Districts:** Snipes and her team conducted interviews with both L3 districts and non-L3 districts to gather their reactions and insights.
- **Expert Feedback:** Education and measurement experts were engaged to review Prototype 2.0 and provided feedback in the form of research and memos.

This multi-faceted approach aimed to gather diverse perspectives and inform further refinements of the prototype.

The KUWL initiative has involved numerous iterations of its prototypes for assessment and accountability systems, driven by a desire to reflect the needs and preferences of Kentuckians. After extensive feedback on the initial prototypes, a fourth prototype was developed by August 2024 with a shift from broad concepts to more detailed frameworks. The process then moved

into refining these frameworks, starting with Framework 1.0. Over the past year, the KUWL initiative has actively engaged with key legislators in multiple ways. They have been invited to council meetings, with some actively participating. Notably, Representative James Tipton is a member of the KUWL council and has been an advocate for the initiative, actively engaged in conversations and understanding its goals. Commissioner Fletcher has been individually meeting with legislators to discuss the key components of the framework.

The initiative is now in its advocacy phase, having received extensive feedback from stakeholders. The sentiment is that this proposed system is "homegrown" and reflects what Kentuckians want for their assessment and accountability system. The KUWL initiative is committed to developing an accountability system that is meaningful and useful to all audiences. This aligns with their moonshot goal: to build a prosperous Kentucky. The overarching objective is to secure legislation for consideration in the 2026 legislative session, with the aim of having a bill sponsored in January 2026 to support this work. A key method for gathering stakeholder input occurred during January and February of this year (2025), when the initiative held a series of nine town halls across the state. These town halls provided crucial opportunities for direct engagement and feedback from various stakeholders.

KDE conducted nine in-person town halls throughout January and February of 2025. This was considered a significant accomplishment, allowing them to engage with approximately 600 interested Kentuckians across the state. These town halls served as a critical platform for gathering feedback on Framework 2.0. Commissioner Fletcher attended all sessions, and Snipes' staff presented on VLE. The local districts shared their journeys and successes in developing their local accountability systems, providing real-world examples that resonated more deeply than theoretical discussions.

Feedback from these town halls, including what people liked and disliked, and their suggestions, directly inspired the creation of Framework 3.0. The current document in hand is Framework 4.0, which reflects what Kentuckians have expressed they want from their assessment and accountability systems.

Key desires expressed by Kentuckians include:

- Moving away from standardized testing for all subjects and instruction centered solely around tests.
- Placing students at the center of all systems, granting them more voice and autonomy in their learning to make it meaningful and engaging, and to see its relevance.
- Allowing students to demonstrate skills in various ways, recognizing that not all students excel on traditional tests and express themselves differently. This emphasizes the importance of "vibrant learning experiences," which Sarah will elaborate on.
- Shifting from a model of school comparison and competition toward collaboration and partnerships between districts.

Stafford discussed the updated state accountability system focuses on key indicators, with some changes from the current system:

- Reading

- Emphasizes student growth on the state assessment for all students as a core indicator.
- Transition Readiness: Continues to include college admissions exams, dual credit, and college/career measures, demonstrating student readiness for post-secondary education or work.
- Graduation Rate: Retains both the four-year and crucial five-year graduation rates, celebrating student and educator efforts.
- English Language Progress: Measures the growth of English learners in acquiring the English language, indicating the school's support for these students.
- Climate and Safety Survey: Includes student perceptions of their school's climate and safety.

Notably, science, social studies and writing scores are *removed* from the formal state accountability system's overall score, although they will still be tested and reported publicly (e.g., on the public school report). This aligns with federal requirements that these subjects don't *have* to be part of the formal accountability calculation.

The local accountability system offers significant flexibility and local determination:

- Community-Driven Indicators: Community members will drive the selection of indicators for their local system, allowing districts to prioritize what matters most to them (e.g., social-emotional learning supports).
- Flexibility in Assessment:
 - Interim Assessments (Reading & Mathematics): Schools can currently use their own purchased interim assessment. The state is exploring providing a state-aligned interim assessment system in reading and mathematics that schools could opt into, with the state covering costs if they opt in. Otherwise, districts would pay for their own.
 - Off-Grade Science Testing: The state will offer optional science assessments for off-grades (e.g., grades 3, 4, 6, 7, 9) that schools can opt into and include in their local system.
 - Required but Optional - Writing and Social Studies: Schools/districts are required to include writing and social studies in their local accountability system, but have options for how: they can develop their own authentic assessments/demonstrations, or utilize state-offered assessments if they lack the capacity to build their own.
- Vibrant Learning Experiences: These are also a required component with options for how they are demonstrated and included in the local system.

Snipes reiterated what Stafford discussed and then began to discuss student capstone projects.

Student Capstone Projects & Durable Skills

Snipes discussed student capstone projects and other methods for assessing durable skills such as communication, collaboration and critical thinking which are challenging to measure on traditional standardized tests. These projects are a way for students to formally defend a portfolio of evidence, often called student defenses of learning (DoL) , a practice already

common in many districts. Other methods include student-led conferences and personalized pathways.

Implementation Support for Districts

Recognizing that not all districts are ready for these new assessment systems, the department is providing support through a phased approach:

1. Pilot Phase (Next Year): Continue learning from "local laboratories of learning" (18 original districts, plus many new informal participants). This involves pressure testing rubrics and frameworks with districts actively doing the work.
2. Expansion Phase (Following Year): Bring in a next wave of piloting districts, providing professional learning and fostering regional peer support networks, leveraging expertise from co-ops.
3. Sustainability Phase: The long-term goal is for every district to have a public reporting mechanism for their local accountability system. This three-year implementation plan follows legislative approval. The work is currently ongoing.

Snipes emphasized the importance of community engagement and local accountability in education reform, particularly for safeguarding initiatives through leadership transitions.

- Community Sessions: Board members are encouraged to co-facilitate or attend community sessions to directly hear stories from families and equip themselves with firsthand insights. Commissioner Dr. Fletcher, a former superintendent of an L3 district, noted how interviewing families who left his district equipped his board with concrete stories for action.
- Policy Safeguarding: A former student board member emphasized the need for reforms to be cemented in policy for seriousness and sustainability. Shelby County's experience with leadership transition demonstrated that established local policies are crucial for sustaining initiatives regardless of changes in leadership.
- Engagement Strategies: To reach a broad audience for these conversations, strategies include:
 - Board member visibility: Being present and engaged in the community.
 - Open invitations: Utilizing various media like local radio, Facebook, and social media.
 - Three-session model: Typically involving a series of three meetings to build consensus.
 - Regional support: A dedicated staff member is assigned to each region to help facilitate community meetings, including providing examples of successful invitations and approaches.
 - District-led examples: Ledger County successfully hosted a dinner that attracted 100 community members, who then developed a "portrait of a learner" for their district, demonstrating strong local ownership.
- Local Success Metrics: The goal is to define local success for each district through these community discussions, evolving into specific metrics that can be publicly shared (e.g.,

on a website). This increased engagement aims to improve student outcomes in areas like career and college readiness.

Measuring and Reporting Success of the New System

The new system aims to provide a more comprehensive and real-time understanding of student progress and school effectiveness.

- **Local Accountability System Reporting:** Many districts with local accountability systems are already tracking and reporting data more frequently than the state. For example, Fleming County's dashboard shows quarterly progress on various indicators, providing real-time results for both academic and non-traditional measures.
- **Disaggregated Data for Equity:** The council emphasizes the importance of disaggregated data within pilot districts to ensure that the system is truly working for all students, especially those who might otherwise go unseen, preventing the exacerbation of inequities.
- **Vibrant Learning Experiences and Academic Benefits:** Decades of data show that rigorous, standards-aligned vibrant learning experiences lead to improved academic achievement, better performance, and higher graduation rates. The new system encourages these experiences.
- **Alignment with Post-Secondary Education:** Collaboration with the Council on Postsecondary Education is leading to an aligned "portrait of a learner" across Kentucky universities. University instructors are now tasked with creating assessments that allow students to demonstrate mastery of skills at the collegiate level, ensuring continuity from K-12.
- **Community Engagement for Input:** It's crucial to include post-secondary educators and community members in local accountability discussions to gain insights into student readiness and skill development.
- **Impact of Literacy and Mathematics Investments:** Recent legislative investments in literacy and mathematics are showing positive early results, particularly in literacy rates among younger students. This is expected to significantly improve the preparedness of future graduates.

Matthew Courtney, policy advisor at KDE, was introduced to the members.

VI. Agenda Item: Legislative and Policy Discussion

Presenter: Matthew Courtney, Policy Advisor
Kentucky Department of Education

Summary of Discussion:

Kentucky Senate Bill 181: Traceable Communications

Courtney provided an overview of Senate Bill 181 (SB 181), a developing policy area concerning traceable communications in schools.

Key Provisions of SB 181:

- Policy Requirement: All local school boards must adopt a policy and a traceable communications plan for electronic communication between staff, volunteers, and students.
- Purpose: To ensure evidence and an archive of conversations between staff/volunteers and students, thereby enhancing student safety and increasing transparency.
- Prohibited Communication: Prohibits direct communication through personal social media such as Facebook Messenger, Instagram, Snapchat), text messages, or other direct messaging apps.
- Standardized Platform: Boards must adopt a standardized, approved platform for all communication with students within or outside the district. These platforms must allow parents/guardians to access and review all communications.
- Family Member Exception: Staff or volunteers who are family members of a student can still communicate directly with that student outside the approved platform.
 - Definition of Family Member: The bill specifies nieces, nephews, grandchildren, personal children, and stepchildren.
 - Crucial Note: Cousins are explicitly *not* considered family members under SB 181, which may cause issues given Kentucky's large, networked families.
- Parental Waiver: Parents can waive the requirement for staff/volunteers to use the approved platform, allowing for direct communication (e.g., text messaging). Schools must create a form for this, but parents can also provide their own written letter. These waivers must be on file with the principal *before* alternative communication begins.
- Board Member Exemption: The bill does not apply to board members, allowing them to communicate freely.

Discussion on Related Issues:

- Twelve-Month Discipline Requirement: There was a discussion about the state law requiring a 12-month removal for certain student offenses. This rule, stemming from a specific incident, means that even if an event occurs in May, the student cannot return for a full 12 months. This differs from previous policies that only required removal for the remainder of the school year.
 - Local Flexibility: There is an acknowledged need for more local flexibility in such disciplinary decisions. Kentucky Board of Education (KDE) policy advisors would support advocacy for such changes, but the department is not currently in a position to initiate that conversation.
 - Resource Inequities: The strict 12-month rule highlights resource inequities across districts, as some can provide in-person instruction during expulsion while others cannot.
- Legislative Advocacy: The suggestion was made for board members to work with their association to find a legislator to sponsor a bill for more local flexibility in disciplinary policies. KBE could then provide supporting facts and data.

V. Agenda Item: Facilitated Open Discussion and Feedback

Presenter: David Webster, Local School Board Advisory Council Chair

Summary of Discussion:

VI. Agenda Item: Recognition of Outgoing Members

Presenter: Sarah Snipes, Director of Innovation

Office of Continuous Improvement and Support

Summary of Discussion:

Snipes identified those members of the Advisory Council (David Webster, Joanna Hinton, Linda Duncan, Julia Fischer, Ruschelle Hamilton) whose terms technically ended on June 30th, were thanked for their service.

Snipes discussed future membership information regarding pathways for continuing membership or avenues for new members to apply and express interest will be communicated by email at the beginning of August. The aim is to balance retaining valuable voices with allowing new voices to join the council.

Meeting adjourned at 6:58 p.m. ET

Next Meeting: Kentucky School Board Association Annual Conference

Location: Louisville Marriott Downtown, Louisville

Date: December 2025

Time: 5:00-7:00 p.m. ET