

SUMMARY MINUTES ARE DRAFT UNTIL APPROVED AT THE DECEMBER 2026 MEETING



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

SUMMARY:

I. Agenda Item: Welcome, Roll Call and Approval of Minutes

Presenter: Sarah Snipes, Director of the Division of Innovation

Summary of Discussion:

Snipes called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. She welcomed the advisory council members and noted that the session was being recorded for publication on the KDE media portal for later public access. She shared that Jodi Doman, the Innovative Programs Consultant and lead liaison for this advisory council, was unable to attend the meeting. The council reviewed the proposed agenda. David Webster requested a motion to approve a change to the agenda to discuss the council chair transition. A motion to approve the changed agenda was made, seconded and unanimously approved by the council. Following agenda approval, a motion was called to approve the minutes from the previous advisory council meeting. The motion was moved, seconded and approved without opposition. Upon concluding introductory business, individual council members shared local celebratory updates from their home districts. Celebrations included girls' state basketball championship victories in Clark County, all schools achieving blue status across Walton-Verona, the ongoing success of a fire safety program in Anderson County that expanded participating students, physical security facilities improvements in Shelby County, the hiring of a new superintendent and facility completions in Garrard County, and exceptional state test index gains in Bellevue Independent.

ATTENDANCE:

PRESENT: Felix Akojie, Jerry Browning, Jason Collins, Julia Fischer, Joanna Freels, Carl Kiser, Venita Murphy, Brenda Rose, David Turner, David Webster

ABSENT: Jennifer Thomas, Lisa Mays

II. Agenda Item: Commissioner's Remarks

Presenters: Dr. Robbie Fletcher, Commissioner of Education

Summary of Discussion: Commissioner Fletcher offered opening remarks focused on leadership dynamics. Drawing on his ten years of prior experience as a superintendent, he emphasized that a superintendent's local success is entirely dependent upon a collaborative and supportive working relationship with their school board.

Fletcher characterized local school board members as a district's 'first line of defense' and 'first line of offense' in community communication. He encouraged members to actively listen to their constituents' feedback, but strongly advised them to refer day-to-day operational decisions directly to the central office or superintendent. This operational boundary, he noted, protects board members and keeps roles clear.

In closing, the Commissioner expressed strong support and enthusiasm for the evening's primary agenda focus on local teacher recruitment initiatives and the ongoing development of the state's local accountability models.

III. Agenda Item: Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Presenter: Elly Gilbert, Division of Educator Recruitment and Development

Summary of Discussion: Elly Gilbert presented state data, trends and localized solutions regarding teacher recruitment and retention in Kentucky. Gilbert emphasized that addressing staffing challenges requires balancing aggressive recruitment with intentional, structural retention strategies to prevent 'churn' and keep high-quality educators in classrooms. Under legislative authority, KDE collects exit survey data across Kentucky districts. While current reporting is voluntary and limited to a subset of districts, the aggregate feedback highlights critical trends. The top three reasons cited overall for leaving a district are (1) work-life balance, (2) school culture and (3) retirement. For teachers moving between districts, school culture, relocation and leadership style are primary. For those exiting the profession entirely, resources (which saw a major rise this year), work-life balance, and workload drive departures. Notably, direct compensation is not the primary driver of retention. Only 22% of professionals leaving entirely, and 31% changing districts, cited compensation as a factor. Gilbert noted that teachers typically enter the field understanding the pay scale, making compensation primarily a recruitment issue rather than a retention issue. In contrast, emotional drivers—such as feeling appreciated and having a sense of belonging—regularly outrank compensation in retaining staff. Trust in local administration is also paramount, with leadership style appearing as a top-five departure factor in every surveyed scenario. To combat retention challenges, several Kentucky districts have designed innovative benefits and incentive structures. Examples provided included Union County, Danville Independent and Clark County. Gilbert strongly urged all school board members to advocate for and establish structured 'Grow Your Own' teaching and learning career pathways within their local high schools and middle schools. Gilbert pointed out that over 60% of Kentucky teachers are employed within a short driving distance of where they grew up. These pathways are highly cost-effective to implement—requiring only an experienced educator with a master's degree—and build a sustainable local talent pipeline. In response to board inquiries regarding continuous feedback, Gilbert announced that KDE is finalizing a guidance package containing low-, medium- and high-commitment stay interview models for school principals. These tools are scheduled for release in September to help administrators proactively address educator concerns before they escalate to departures.

IV. Agenda Item: Kentucky's Accountability Model

Presenter: Jennifer Stafford and Shara Savage, Office of Assessment and Accountability

Summary of Discussion: Dr. Stafford provided historical and procurement updates regarding Kentucky's mandated, state-funded college admissions exam. Established in 2008, the program administers a free exam to all 11th-grade students to foster equity and college access. Historically, the ACT was written into state law by name. In 2015, the legislature amended state statute to replace 'ACT' with the generic term 'college admissions exam,' enabling competitive RFP bids. In the most recent bid cycle, the College Board (SAT) won the state contract. This transition resulted in a direct, recurring state savings of \$380,000. The SAT was successfully administered in spring 2026, receiving high praise from administrators for its flexible six-week testing window. On the final day of the legislative session (April 15), the General Assembly passed Senate Bill 197. Section 15 of the bill prohibits the expenditure of general state funds on any exam contract that is not custom-aligned with Kentucky-specific academic standards and mandated that KDE immediately initiate a new competitive bid process for the 2026-2027 school year. Although Governor Beshear vetoed the specific requirement for custom state standards alignment—citing that national college entrance exams like ACT and SAT are built on national blueprints and cannot be modified for individual states—the statutory directive to re-bid the contract stood. KDE is working closely with the Finance and Administration Cabinet to fast-track the procurement process under Model Procurement Code 45A. The new RFP, published in late May, incorporates several critical updates: enhanced student/educator resources, fluid accommodations for special needs students, and an expanded scoring team. For increased evaluation objectivity, scoring partners now include representatives from the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) alongside a District Assessment Coordinator (DAC). Bids are currently with the finance cabinet. Scoring is scheduled for August, with contract negotiations taking place shortly after. Shara Savage and Dr. Stafford also discussed the local accountability opportunities established under House Bill 257. The legislation permits school districts to develop and implement 'Locally Developed Indicators of Quality.' These indicators allow local communities to establish metrics that measure and reflect what they value locally, supplementing—but not replacing—mandated state testing data. KDE has been authorized to provide a one-time grant payment of up to \$15,000 to assist participating districts in designing and implementing these models. Participating districts must compile student performance data on their chosen indicators and display the aggregated metrics on their public district website. KDE Regional Innovation Specialists provide technical assistance, from organizing community design sessions to supporting the construction of public-facing data dashboards. Several Kentucky districts were referenced as examples, including Shelby, Rockcastle, Greenup and Jefferson Counties. The presenters reviewed the state assessment and accountability roadmap. For the 2025-2026 school year (reporting in fall 2026), the state's testing and accountability index formulas remain unchanged, utilizing the existing status and change indicators. Beginning in the 2026-2027 school year (with reporting in fall 2027), the state accountability model will undergo statutory changes to align with federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requirements and state goals. Specifically, editing and mechanics, on-demand writing, and the school climate survey will be removed from state assessment calculations. Writing will be formally removed as an accountability indicator. The 'change' indicator is being replaced by an

'individual student growth' metric in reading and math. This tracks the year-over-year progress of individual students utilizing the spring Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA) (e.g., tracking a student's score from 3rd grade spring reading to 4th grade spring reading). Dr. Stafford clarified that interim or formative commercial assessments (e.g., STAR, MAP, i-Ready) are not peer-reviewed by the state and cannot be used in formal state-level accountability formulas. Chronic absenteeism—defined as missing 10% or more of the school year—is being introduced as a formal metric under the federal school quality and student success bucket. During the discussion, council members voiced apprehension regarding the weighting of this indicator in the final formula. Members noted that chronic health conditions or difficult family circumstances are frequently beyond a school's direct control, and strongly recommended that chronic absenteeism represent a smaller, minor percentage of the overall accountability index.

V. Facilitated Open Discussion and Feedback

Presenter: Sarah Snipes, Director of the Division of Innovation

Summary of Discussion: Sarah Snipes opened the floor for general council discussion and feedback. Snipes invited members to submit further detailed thoughts and answers on accountability questions via email as the department drafts the formal regulatory language. Board Chair David Webster announced his resignation from the chair position, citing personal commitments. The council expressed gratitude for his service and leadership. Following nominations, the council voted unanimously to approve Joanna Freels (Shelby County) to serve as the new Vice Chair.

The meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m. ET

Next Meeting: Kentucky School Board Association Annual Conference

Location: TBD

Date: December 2026

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