

Kentucky Board of Education
February 5, 2014
Report from the Secretary
Education and Workforce Development Cabinet

Northern Kentucky Career Center - In December, Governor Steve Beshear kicked off renovations at the future site of the new Kentucky Career Center in Covington. Once complete, the facility will be a state-of-the-art employment and education center for northern Kentucky residents and employers and will serve as a model for future career centers throughout the state. The new facility will provide significant additional capacity on-site that will expand the number of community partners as well as customer services including space for job fairs, employer interviews, candidate assessments, trainings and conference rooms and improved parking conditions.

Kentucky Workforce Investment Board – The Executive Director of the Kentucky Workforce Investment Board, Tom West, resigned at the end of December. The position has been posted and will accept applicants through January 31, 2014. The vacancy announcement can be found at: <https://careers.ky.gov/Pages/join-the-teamspecialnonmerit.aspx>

SOAR – Shaping Our Appalachian Region

In an effort to focus on the future success of southern and eastern Kentucky, Gov. Beshear and Rep. Rogers organized the SOAR Summit to gather ideas and recommendations about how to move Kentucky's Appalachian region forward. The SOAR Summit, held in Pikeville on Dec. 9, attracted more than 1,700 Kentuckians with varied occupational backgrounds and interests – including representatives from education, business, nonprofits, arts, finance, tourism, local government and more.

The summit was also broadcast live on KET and streamed live on KET's website.

The Rural Policy Research Institute helped facilitate discussions at the summit and compiled a report to reflect the events and dialogue of that day. The report also provides some guidelines to be used in determining the initiative's next steps. It is available on the governor's website.

We are already seeing meaningful progress toward a new future for Appalachia as well as many of our rural counties. The work of the SOAR initiative has not only captured the attention of our citizens, but has also attracted new partners outside our borders to share our work of revitalizing and reimagining this key region.

The following recent partnerships and announcements are indications of SOAR's strong momentum:

- The recent federal designation of a Promise Zone for an eight-county region in eastern Kentucky. This is one of only five Promise Zones in the United States. The designation means the federal government will partner with these zones to accelerate public-private partnerships, promote job creation and education opportunities and improve access to federal grant programs. The Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation will be the project administrator.
- A new \$2.6 million loan pool that will allow entrepreneurs and startup companies in the southeast Kentucky region to qualify for small business loans through the U.S. Department of the Treasury.
- A new \$30 million district Race to the Top award for improving education in 18 rural school districts in eastern Kentucky.
- The Governor's announcement of plans to expand the Mountain Parkway, which will essentially create the equivalent of a four-lane interstate through this key region.
- The expansion of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's StrikeForce Initiative into Kentucky. Nearly two-thirds of Kentucky's counties – 73 total – will be part of the StrikeForce, which means the USDA will partner with local community organizations, businesses, foundations, universities and other groups to support local projects and pursue needed investments into rural areas;
- The Governor and Congressman Rogers' announcement to expand high-speed broadband access statewide. The underserved eastern Kentucky region will be the first priority area for the project. Currently, Kentucky ranks 46th in high-speed broadband Internet availability. Nearly a quarter of the Commonwealth's population -- 23 percent -- have no access to broadband. The Next Generation Kentucky Information Highway will offer affordable and accessible high-speed broadband to reduce the barriers of geography for businesses and citizens.

Both Gov. Beshear and Congressman Rogers plan to review the report carefully before making further announcements about next steps for the SOAR initiative.

The summit is just the beginning of a long-term initiative to bring new opportunities and renewed prosperity to the people of the region.