



Commissioner's Report
Interim Commissioner Kevin C. Brown

Dear Kentucky Board of Education members,

As we recently enjoyed a holiday, I hope you will take a few moments to reflect on the work, leadership and example of Martin Luther King Jr., whom the holiday honors, and on how it relates to our work in education.

A recent blog post from the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence calls attention to a report by The Education Trust that shows Kentucky's African American students are poorly represented in our schools' gifted and talented programs and other advanced learning opportunities. We are also all aware that achievement gaps between black students and their white peers continue to persist.

If King was in Kentucky today, he would tell us that these inequities are unacceptable for an education system that is required by law to make the same opportunities available to all of Kentucky's children. "It is a trite yet urgently true observation that if America is to remain a first-class nation, it cannot have second-class citizens," he said in a 1960 speech in New York. One of our top priorities in Kentucky must be to constantly strive to assist schools and districts in remedying these inequities. It is one of the surest ways to ensure a better future for our state and its people.

I also would like to take a minute to reflect on another event that happened last month, the two-year anniversary of the tragedy that occurred at Marshall County High School. We will never forget Bailey Holt and Preston Cope and the 18 others who were injured on January 23, 2018. Students walking in our front doors often are facing traumas in their personal lives that don't simply stop when they arrive at school. We must redouble our efforts to provide mental health support for Kentucky's schools. It is only by helping children become whole – regardless of what they are facing – that we can help ensure the brightest possible outcome for them and the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

Kevin C. Brown



Commissioner Search

One of the most important responsibilities of the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) is the appointment of an education commissioner. Pursuant to KRS 156.148, the commissioner serves as the executive and administrative officer of the KBE in its administration of all educational matters and functions placed under its management and control. He or she shall carry out all duties assigned to him by law; shall execute under the direction of the state board the educational policies, orders, directives and administrative functions of the board; and shall direct the work of all persons employed in the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE).

The board set the selection and hiring process in motion at its December 12, 2019 special meeting. Since that time, the board voted to create an RFP Evaluation Team. The team met on January 30 to view vendor proposals and will make a recommendation to the full board at its regular meeting on February 4. To prepare for the search and upcoming special meeting, the department [created a survey](#) asking the public what qualities they want in a new commissioner. It was released to the public on Tuesday, January 21, and promoted to all Kentucky residents to get as broad a range of opinions as possible. Results of this survey will inform the board's development of a list of desired characteristics of the next education commissioner to be used by the search firm in the search and selection process.

Department Leadership Changes

With a new year, and a new decade upon us, changes are taking place at the KDE. However, the department remains committed to its mission statement: to partner with districts, schools, families, students, business and industry, and communities to provide leadership and support to ensure success for each and every student.

Recent changes in the department's leadership staff include:

- Todd Allen now serves as the Interim General Counsel
- Tracy Herman serves as the Interim Director of Government Relations
- Toni Konz Tatman serves as the Interim Communications Director, who is on loan from Jefferson County Public Schools.

Dr. Amanda Ellis, who served in a variety of roles during her time here at the department, now serves as the associate commissioner of the recently re-established Office of Teaching and Learning. The office will consist of dedicated staff in the areas of standards, Title II Part A and counseling. After receiving feedback, we felt this is an example of one way we can be responsive to the needs of those in schools and districts. With all of the recent changes in these areas, our hope is that the re-establishment of this office will be of value to everyone.



New Department Staff

Office of the Commissioner:

Kevin Brown, Interim Commissioner, Commissioner's Office

Toni Konz Tatman, Interim Chief Communications Officer, Division of Communications

Office of Finance and Operations:

Tanya Bradshaw, Human Resource Administrator, OFO/Resource Management/Payroll and Benefits Branch

Katlyn Comley, Human Resource Administrator, OFO/Resource Management/Employee Relations Branch

Jerry Roberts, Educational Financial Analyst, OFO/School and Community Nutrition/Schools Branch

Office of Education Technology:

Stephen Thomas, Network Analyst II, OET/School Technology Services

Shauna Dunham, Systems Consultant IT, OET/School Data Services

Holly Kell, Resource Management Analyst III, OET/School Data Services

Robert Amback, Resource Management Analyst III, OET/School Data Services

Office of Educator Licensure and Effectiveness

John Paise, Education Administration Program Consultant III, OELE/Educator Recruitment and Development

Office of Continuous Improvement and Support:

Wes Blake, Education Administration Program Consultant II, OCIS/School and Program Improvement/English Learners, Migrant and Neglected Students

Lee Bowling, Education Administration Program Consultant II, OCIS/Student Success/Student Engagement and Support Branch

Elise Crisp, Education Administration Program Consultant II, OCIS/School and Program Improvement/Community Engagement and Support Branch

Jodi Dempsey, Education Administration Program Consultant II, OCIS/Innovation

Office of Career and Technical Education and Student Transition:

Connie Witt, Adult/Technical Administrative Consultant III, OCTEST/Student Transition & Career Readiness/Student Leadership Development Branch

Office of Special Education and Early Learning:

Julie McCown, Exceptional Children Consultant, OSEEL/IDEA Monitoring and Results

Jennifer Riley, Education Administration Program Consultant II, OSEEL/IDEA Implementation and Preschool/School Readiness Branch

Jarrold Slone, Education Academic Program Consultant, Office of Special Education and Early Learning



Impact Kentucky Survey

Impact Kentucky, which replaces the TELL Kentucky survey, opened to certified educators on January 13 and runs through February 21. The survey was designed to be simpler for educators to complete than past working conditions surveys and should take only about 15 minutes to complete. The survey, administered by the KDE and Panorama Education, will provide schools with critical data that guides implementation of policies and practices that maximize teacher effectiveness. Panorama Education, whose mission revolves around helping educators use data to improve student outcomes, will collect and analyze the survey results which are expected to be available to schools in March. Panorama then will offer a series of workshops co-hosted by the KDE that will focus on data inquiry and action planning to help schools focus on how to use the data.

The GoTeachKY Campaign

The [GoTeachKY](#) campaign to recruit the next generation of educators partnered with 10 teacher ambassadors across the state to help promote the teaching profession. These ambassadors have three goals:

- Communicate with and inspire students in high school and college to consider teaching as a career;
- Communicate with potential and current teachers to positively capture the rewards and opportunities associated with a career in teaching; and
- Support and promote the central focus areas, programs and organizations of GoTeachKY, such as Educators Rising and the Teaching and Learning career pathway.

The 2020 GoTeachKY Ambassadors are:

- DeeAnna Albright, Carter County schools
- Erin Ball, Scott County schools and the 2020 Kentucky Teacher of the Year
- Bruce Blanton, Shelby County schools
- Jennifer Emberton, Simpson County schools
- Miles Johnson, Jessamine County schools
- Ashley Judd, Jackson County schools
- Theresa McDavid-Dobbins, Boyd County schools
- Christine Meisberger, Scott County schools
- Noraa Ransey, Calloway County schools
- Cathy Thrasher, Daviess County schools



Commissioner's Student Council

Eleven Kentucky public high school students recently were named to the Commissioner's Student Advisory Council, a group that provides input to Kentucky Commissioner of Education.

The newly selected members will serve the remainder of the school year. Sophomores and juniors will have the opportunity to serve again in Fall 2020. The new members include:

- Nicole Arnett, 12th grade, Kentucky School for the Blind
- Madelyn Blankenship – 10th Grade, Pulaski County High School
- Sarah Davenport – 12th grade, Fleming County High School
- Reece Dicken – 11th grade, Barren County High School
- Rohin Dutt – 10th grade, duPont Manual High School (Jefferson County)
- Renuka Gentela – 11th grade, Paul Laurence Dunbar High School (Fayette County)
- Elizabeth Holcomb – 11th grade, Kentucky School for the Deaf
- Solyana Mesfin – 10th grade, Eastern High School (Jefferson County)
- Madison Ortega – 12th grade, Rowan County Senior High School
- Lauren Shackelford – 11th grade, Corbin High School (Corbin Independent)
- Samuel Smith – 10th grade, Daviess County High School

The 11 new members join 11 returning members, including:

- Mi'Keyla Crumble – 11th grade, Hickman County High School
- Joshua Griffith – 12th grade, Russell High School (Russell Independent)
- Laila Hayes – 11th grade, duPont Manual High School (Jefferson County)
- Michael Johnson – 12th grade, Marshall County High School
- Ying Lin – 11th grade, Bardstown High School (Bardstown Independent)
- Katelynn Perkins – 12th grade, Glasgow High School (Glasgow Independent)
- Anastasia Pohlgeers – 12th grade, Campbell County High School
- Caleb Spencer – 12th grade, Wolfe County High School
- Parker Stobaugh – 12th grade, South Warren High School (Warren County)
- Lauren Witt – 12th grade, Glasgow High School (Glasgow Independent)
- Luke Wyatt – 12th grade, Marshall County High School

The purpose of the council is to provide valuable feedback from Kentucky students and to engage student leaders in learning by doing. This group will meet with the commissioner and KDE staff to discuss how decisions made at the state level are affecting public school students throughout Kentucky and provide feedback – from a student perspective – on critical issues impacting Kentucky students and schools.

Kentucky School for the Blind and Kentucky School for the Deaf Updates

Kentucky School for the Blind

The Kentucky School for the Blind (KSB) provides services to 66 students from across the Commonwealth. These students may be residential or they may commute on a daily basis. Students attending the KSB adhere to the same graduation requirements as all other students in Kentucky. They receive additional instruction, not only aligned to the Kentucky Academic Standards, but also in the Expanded Core Curriculum to support the additional needs of a visually impaired student. Orientation and mobility instruction is provided to help prepare students for self-sufficiency at the school and in the other environments they visit.



Expanded Core Curriculum

Additionally, the KSB provides support to approximately 1,400 other visually impaired students across the Commonwealth through eight outreach consultants. These consultants provide direct support to districts and schools allowing those districts and schools to provide direct support to students who have not been placed at the KSB. The consultants are part of the KSB staff and are housed in the Regional Special Education Cooperatives.

Braille Note Touch and Refreshable Keyboard Training

The KSB also offers “short course” experiences to interested students who remained in their local districts. “Short course” allows students to visit and reside at the KSB for one week, multiple times during the year. Students receive their regular instruction, but also experience the additional supports from the KSB they may not have access to in the local district.

The KSB currently is seeking to add a new playground to the campus through grant opportunities with the Kentucky School for the Blind Charitable Foundation and Make A Wish organization. If approved, the playground will provide additional recreational and learning opportunities to the KSB students.





Goalball Competition

On February 20, 2020, the KSB will host the Regional Braille Challenge as a partner with the American Printing House for the Blind. This is the 10th year of the partnership. Winners have the chance at an all-expense paid trip, funded by the National Braille Challenge, to Los Angeles for the national competition. Last year, one of the regional winners won gold in the freshman category at the National Braille Challenge.

Leadership Update

The KSB currently is in the process of hiring a new principal. The process will include a nationwide search. Feedback on the desired characteristics and traits of the new principal currently is being gathered from several stakeholder groups.

Kentucky School for the Deaf

The Kentucky School for the Deaf (KSD) provides services for 94 students. As with the KSB, students may be residential or day-students. The KSD does have a higher percentage of residential students than does the KSB. Students at the KSD adhere to the same graduation requirements as do all Kentucky students. The KSD is a bilingual school. American Sign Language (ASL) and English are both part of the instruction for students. The KSD collaborates with local districts to provide additional career pathways to students that the KSD would not be able to offer on its own. Additionally, hearing students from neighboring districts attend classes at the KSD to have access to career pathways the KSD offers, but are not offered in local districts.

The KSD includes regional consultants who function in the same way as described for the KSB. The consultants are housed in Regional Special Education Cooperatives and are supervised by the KSD staff. The consultants support districts that house an additional 900+ Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DHH) students.

The KSD is hosting “short course” experiences for DHH students from across the Commonwealth. The short course experience will occur February 3 through February 14. Four high school students will attend. The KSD is excited to provide these students an immersive ASL experience that cannot be achieved in local districts. The hope is to expand these opportunities as implementation is completed. This will be the first time the KSD hosted a “short course” experience. The KSD worked with the KSB to understand the unique value in the experience.

The KSD hosted the Mason Dixon Boys Basketball Tournament in January. Nine other schools for the deaf from across the south came to Danville for the tournament. This is a yearly event and

each state hosts the tournament on a rotating basis. It is a great opportunity for students to interact with other DHH students from across the nation.



The KSD began this school year with a new elementary school and is completing the installation of a new playground.

New playground just prior to completion

Erin Ball, Teacher of the Year, Joins the Department

Erin Elizabeth Ball has taught language arts at Georgetown Middle School throughout her six-year teaching career. Ball earned her bachelor's and master's degrees at Georgetown College. She is a member of the Teacher Effective Leadership Network for Scott County Schools. Ball also serves on the Georgetown Middle School Leadership Team and is an 8th-grade team leader for her school. She served on the school's school-based decision making council and as a cooperating teacher for a student-teacher candidate. Ball was named 2019 Scott County Middle School Teacher of the Year and was the 2018 Teacher of the Year for Georgetown Middle School.

In May of 2019, Ball was selected as the 2020 Kentucky Teacher of the Year, which offers the winner a \$10,000 cash prize and a semester-long term of service at the KDE. During that semester, the Kentucky Teacher of the Year has the opportunity to join the department and select a platform of work. Ball joined the KDE in January, where her passion for closing Kentucky's racial achievement gap is leading her to pursue the recruitment of minority teachers into Kentucky's educator pipeline. While working at the KDE, Ball will participate in a variety of projects and represent the department at public appearances. Most recently, she was selected as an ambassador to the GoTeachKY Campaign, which focuses on recruiting new teachers to the field. Ball is excited for the opportunities that lie ahead in this dual role.