



Kentucky Department of  
**EDUCATION**

# Commissioner's Report

## December 1, 2021

### 2021 Kentucky Education Summit

Using input from thousands of Kentuckians, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) unveiled a vision for the state's public education system at the 2021 Kentucky Education Summit in Louisville on Nov. 2. After the tours, survey and interviews were done, the Kentucky Coalition for Advancing Education (KCAE) was formed to use the data to develop a report detailing the current state of education and create a vision for public education in the Commonwealth.

The coalition was formed using an inclusive model – a third of members were appointed directly by KDE, a third through an open application and a third through a random selection of citizens across Kentucky. After months of listening to the various stakeholder groups, the KCAE developed the [“United We Learn: Hearing Kentucky’s Voices on the Future of Education”](#) report, which features themes from the survey and the listening tour, as well as the collective imagination about where education can and should go in the future. The themes highlighted in the report include prioritizing a holistic approach to student well-being, partnering with families and community members as part of the educational experience and providing personalized professional support for teachers.

Our work already has begun with Kentucky's Innovative Learning Network. Seven districts – Allen, Fleming, Frankfort Independent, Jefferson, Johnson, Logan and Shelby – currently serve as full Local Laboratories of Learning (L3s), where they are piloting new assessment, accountability and learning approaches. These districts also have formed local and inclusive coalitions to guide their work. We will learn from their experiences and help to bring about the large-scale changes for our entire state.

Beyond these leading districts, opportunities to engage communities and create deep and meaningful learning experiences for students abound in our Commonwealth. We call upon every district, school and community to engage with this United We Learn effort and help us bring about a bold new era of education in Kentucky.

### Former superintendents take on new roles as special assistants to Commissioner of Education

I am pleased to share that former school superintendents Scott Hawkins and Rachel Yarbrough have started as special assistants to the commissioner on Oct. 4.

They will serve as a bridge of communication between KDE and school district leaders.

These part-time assistant roles were designed to better mesh the work of districts with KDE. The two will provide a field-based perspective on current trends, concerns and needs across the state.

Scott and Rachel bring a combined 62 years of public education experience to their roles.

I am excited to have Scott and Rachel be a part of our team at KDE. Having former superintendents helping us engage and involve our stakeholders directly will help KDE be even more responsive to district needs.

Scott and Rachel previously knew each other from their time as superintendents, and they look forward to working with each other.

### **Scott Hawkins**

Scott served as Woodford County superintendent for 13 years and retired in June 2021 after a 33-year career in education.

Originally from Meade County, Scott's career began at the same school where he did his student teaching – Apollo High School. He was a math teacher and coach there for several years before becoming assistant principal and then principal.

He served as the director of personnel in Daviess County for seven years, and briefly served for one year as the director of high schools in Fayette County before becoming Woodford County superintendent.

He holds a bachelor's degree in education from Brescia University and a master's degree and superintendent certification from Western Kentucky University.

He and his wife have one daughter, who is a senior in high school.

### **Rachel Yarbrough**

Rachel served as superintendent of Crittenden County Schools for six years and as Webster County superintendent for four years. She retired in June 2018 with 29 years of service in public education.

A graduate of Webster County High School, Rachel previously served as a middle school teacher, counselor and principal in the Webster County school system for 19 years. She then served as Webster County assistant superintendent for nine years before accepting the superintendent role in Crittenden County in 2008. She returned to Webster County as superintendent in 2014, and stayed in that role until her retirement.

During her time as Webster County superintendent, Rachel also served as an adjunct professor at Murray State University for the school's educational leadership certification. Upon her retirement, she accepted the position of dean of education at her alma mater, Oakland City University (OCU) in Indiana, and served in that role until August 2021.

Currently, she serves as a clinical assistant professor at the University of Louisville for its educational leadership program and does contract work for two higher education institutions.

She holds a bachelor's degree in education from OCU, a master's degree and Rank 1 in administration from Western Kentucky University, and a doctorate from OCU. She currently lives in Madisonville on her family farm.

Welcome, Scott and Rachel!

**KDE's Gretta Hylton and Amy Patterson chosen for top leadership positions in national organization**

**Gretta Hylton**, associate commissioner in KDE's Office of Special Education and Early Learning, was elected as president-elect of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) during its annual business meeting on Oct. 18.

Since it was founded in 1938, KDE staff have filled the role of NASDSE president only twice. Gretta will become Kentucky's third president, following Gwen Rutherford in 1951-1952 and Stella Edwards in 1968-1969.

**Amy Patterson**, KDE's IDEA data manager, also was elected as chair of the NASDSE's Special Education Data Manager Affinity Group (SEDMAG).

Amy is Kentucky's first chair-elect of SEDMAG.

NASDSE is a premier membership organization that supports state leaders of special education throughout the United States and its territories.

Congratulations, Gretta and Amy!

## **KY Tech District of Area Technology Centers (ATCs)**

The 51 ATCs are continuing to provide relevant and rigorous career and technical instruction to over 16,000 students this term. The ATCs are working to promote career and technical student organizations (CTSOs), which offer co-curricular resources and opportunities for students in the form of leadership development through activities, community service and competitions.

ATC administrators have attended regional fall leadership meetings focused on innovative ideas for career and technical education during the pandemic, as well as social and emotional well-being for both staff and students. The meetings were held at the Paducah Innovation Hub, the Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky Regional Council of Carpenters (IOKRCC) Campus in Grayson and the Rockcastle County ATC. In Grayson, administrators were provided a tour of the facility and engaged in conversations with campus administration, which reiterated the need for skilled carpenters and millwrights in Kentucky's workforce.

The ATCs are continuing to utilize ESSER funds to provide after-school remediation and industry certification testing is underway within many of the career pathways. Successful passing of such certifications provides students with postsecondary articulated credit and/or accelerated entry into the workforce.

### **Kentucky School for the Deaf**

The Kentucky School for the Deaf (KSD) continues to progress through the accreditation process with the Council of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD). As part of the accreditation process, KSD asked stakeholders, including students, staff, families and community members, to complete perception surveys during the month of September. KSD staff are following the CEASD accreditation steps to collect and analyze all data to identify school strengths and opportunities for improvement. The results of the analysis will be utilized at the next accreditation team meeting in November to identify short- and long-term goals for the KSD strategic plan. The approach and deployment used both for accreditation and strategic planning are based on the Baldrige Excellence Framework.

KSD teachers use differentiation as part of the planning and delivery of instruction to support students with various needs in the classroom. In September, the teachers participated in professional development training on differentiation. This training was provided based on

feedback from teachers. Weekly tips for differentiation in the classroom are posted in the daily staff Roll Call. Teacher lesson plans are reviewed by school leadership to ensure differentiation is included and to provide ongoing feedback and just in time coaching to staff.

The KSD “Colonel Walk” occurred in November in which leadership from KSD and the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) conducted walkthroughs across elementary, middle and high classrooms. The team met at the end of the day to discuss observations and identify overall strengths and opportunities for improvement. The purpose was to assess teaching and learning at that moment in time across KSD classrooms. These walkthroughs are conducted quarterly. KSD held several Halloween events on campus for students. Elementary Trick or Treat and Monster Walk took place at KSD. The KSD team did an amazing job of organizing all the events which included a truck or treat, a dance, sensory tables for the younger students, a haunted house for older students and a bonfire. The students and staff had a great time!



KSD Students and staff celebrated Halloween with a Monster Walk and Elementary Trick or Treat.

KSD College Day was held November 8 for high school and eight grade students. Seven colleges and organizations participated. Gallaudet University was one of the schools participating in the event. Gallaudet University is a private, federally chartered research university for the education of the deaf and hard of hearing in Washington, D.C. Founded in 1864, Gallaudet University was originally a grammar school for both deaf and blind children. Several KSD graduates are currently attending the university.



KSD High School and 8<sup>th</sup> grade Students participate in College Day on Nov 8<sup>th</sup>.

### Kentucky School for the Blind

The Kentucky School for the Blind (KSB) staff and students have been busy this fall. They celebrated White Cane Day on October 15. White Cane Day was established in 1964 through a proclamation from President Johnson. The purpose is to highlight awareness of the white cane as a mobility tool and the independence it establishes for people who are blind or visually

impaired. Middle and High school students celebrated with a student led activity at the Civil War Museum in Bardstown. Elementary students stayed on campus and participated in a scavenger hunt, followed by making edible white canes out of pretzels and white chocolate.



A student reads a braille story about White Cane Day.

On October 21<sup>st</sup>, students and staff enjoyed the first KSB Fall Festival. Students decorated pumpkins, enjoyed a hayride, played cornhole, participated in a cookie walk, and enjoyed hamburgers and hotdogs donated and cooked by the Middletown Lions Club.



A student decorates a pumpkin at the Fall Festival.



Students are sitting on the Hayride at the Fall Festival.

James Dollar began as KSB's new Safety Administrator on November 1, 2021. Using federal COVID-19 relief funds, KSB hired a full-time social worker, Whitley Combs. Ms. Combs began her position at KSB on November 8 and will work closely with students and families. Ms. Combs, Cortnea Schuster (school counselor) and Peggy Sinclair-Morris (principal) will take part in a team training on the Resilience Toolkit as staff social-emotional well-being is a priority at KSB. The annual Christmas program will be held on December 17 at the Frankfort Ave. Church of Christ. The program will be followed by a holiday luncheon and a visit from Santa provided by the Downtown Lions Club and the KSB.