

CLIMB program helps high school students graduate with credential

As President of the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, I am proud of the work we are doing to strengthen opportunity for Kentuckians at every stage of their educational journey. Whether it's expanding career pathways for high school students, increasing the number of degrees and



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and credentials awarded across our campuses, or building seamless education to career pathways for our high school students, I believe deeply that education changes lives—and these recent efforts reflect that mission.

One of the initiatives I am especially excited about is CLIMB 2.0. In partnership with the Cabinet for Health and Family Services and its Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities, we launched this program to give high school students in select schools in Eastern Kentucky a direct pathway into behavioral health careers. CLIMB 2.0 empowers students to graduate with industry-recognized certifications that allow them to enter the workforce immediately or continue on to postsecondary education.

Eight high schools have been invited to participate: Floyd County High School, Prestonsburg High School, Betsy Lane High School, Harlan County High School, Harlan High School, Hazard High School, Perry County Central High School and Buckhorn High School. I am grateful to these communities for stepping forward to help their students explore meaningful, high-demand career paths that strengthen both their future and Kentucky's behavioral health workforce.



Dr. Josh Sparks, 2025 GEAR UP Alum Leader of the Year, facilitated a panel with students who spoke about their challenges to success.

Inaugural Student Access Summit highlights transitions from high school to postsecondary

CPE hosted its first-ever Student Access Summit, an event that brought together nearly 250 educators, leaders and partners from across the Commonwealth. This gathering marked an important milestone for us. We created a space where K-12, postsecondary and community leaders could work side by side, share strategies, and focus on what matters most—ensuring every Kentucky student can find a path to and through college. Our attendees walked away with practical tools, new partnerships and renewed energy for expanding opportunity.

Workforce Pell will help address talent shortage in high-demand sectors

Earlier this week, I joined a New America webinar to discuss the nation's new Workforce Pell Program. Panelists from New Mexico, Oregon, Minnesota and I explored what it will take for this initiative to fulfill its promise and how strong implementation can turn policy into meaningful progress for students and communities. Workforce Pell expands federal Pell Grants to short-term training programs that can be completed in 8 to 15 weeks. Beginning in July 2026, students will be able to use financial aid for high-quality programs aligned with in-demand occupations. To qualify, programs must meet clear standards—including a 70% completion and job placement rate—and result in a stackable, industry-recognized credential. We are eager to expand programs that address Kentucky's talent shortages in welding, HVAC, healthcare and other high-demand fields.

KENTUCKY POSTSECONDARY OUTCOME TRACKER



2025 DEGREE COMPLETION



3.8%

PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS
SINCE 2024-25



STUDENT DEBT



10.2%

SINCE
2018-19



DUAL CREDIT COMPLETION



5.3

PERCENTAGE
POINTS
SINCE 2022