

NKCES Report – November/December 2025

Our mission at NKCES: We connect, grow, and serve our community of educators.

BEECHWOOD INDEPENDENT

BELLEVUE INDEPENDENT

BOONE COUNTY

BRACKEN COUNTY

CAMPBELL COUNTY

CARROLL COUNTY

COVINGTON INDEPENDENT

DAYTON INDEPENDENT

ERLANGER-ELSMERE INDEPENDENT

FLEMING COUNTY

FORT THOMAS INDEPENDENT

GRANT COUNTY

GREENUP COUNTY

KENTON COUNTY

LEWIS COUNTY

LUDLOW INDEPENDENT

MASON COUNTY

NEWPORT INDEPENDENT

NORTHERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

OWEN COUNTY

PENDLETON COUNTY

SOUTHGATE INDEPENDENT

WALTON-VERONA INDEPENDENT

WILLIAMSTOWN INDEPENDENT

Executive Director Update:

KDE Local Accountability, November 3: Participants gathered to explore the newly released Local Accountability Design Guide and Toolkit from the Kentucky Department of Education. The session engaged attendees in reflecting on their current accountability practices and examining how the guide's tools could support more meaningful measures of student learning and system effectiveness. Through facilitated discussion and collaborative planning, participants began outlining the next steps needed to design a Local Accountability System aligned with their district's values, priorities, and long-term goals.

AMLE Conference, November 5-7: NKCES was excited to join educators at the 52nd Annual Conference for Middle Level Education, hosted by AMLE25, in November. As education stands at a pivotal intersection, the conference provided an opportunity to explore how the middle grades are uniquely positioned to shape the future of our youth. NKCES was proud to have several team members presenting throughout the three-day event, contributing their expertise to this important national dialogue.

SAT Training, November 6: NKCES recently partnered with Torchprep to host an SAT-focused professional development session for educators. Torch Prep, recognized across Kentucky as a leading test prep provider, guided participants through the key differences between the SAT and ACT exams. The training emphasized how these distinctions impact instructional planning, offering strategies for adjusting curriculum and formative assessments to better prepare students for SAT success.

Team Meeting, November 10: NKCES held its November team meeting, focusing on connection, growth, and organizational alignment. The session began with a pulse check, providing an opportunity to celebrate successes, share important updates, and foster collaboration across the team. Members then engaged in a discussion on the Portrait of a Leader, reflecting on the qualities and practices that guide effective leadership. Mrs. Angie Perkins, Finance Director, provided updates and guidance on the use of electronic calendars to support improved scheduling and coordination. The meeting concluded with reflections from the Executive Director, offering perspective, appreciation, and direction as the organization moves forward.

Board of Directors Meeting, November 12: During the November NKCES Board Meeting, Dr. Smith shared an update on Professional Learning, followed by Mrs. Emily Giles' report on HQIR initiatives and Ms. Brittney Howell's SERTAC update, highlighting how NKCES continues to position itself to support districts in the ways they need most. The external auditing firm, Barnes Dennig, presented its annual financial review, affirming NKCES's strong financial health. The auditors echoed the sentiment that Dr. Razor has provided exceptional leadership in guiding NKCES to become a highly successful and financially stable organization.

SAT Training, November 14: NKCES offered a second training due to the regional response we received. TorchPrep, recognized across Kentucky as a leading test prep provider, guides participants through the key differences between the SAT and ACT exams. The training emphasized how these distinctions impact instructional planning, offering strategies for adjusting curriculum and formative assessments to better prepare students for SAT success.

Education Cooperative Executive Director Monthly Meeting with KDE, November 14: Dr. Razor, along with the other Education Cooperative Executive Directors from across the state, participated in a virtual meeting with KDE to stay informed about KDE initiatives. The Commissioner was extremely complimentary about the support and partnership with cooperatives.

Synergy Team Meeting, November 17: Each month, Dr. Razor and Dr. Smith meet with the leadership team to hear department reports and review the RACI chart, ensuring major initiatives are progressing on time with the right team members engaged. The team also revisits the NKCES mission and vision, keeping them at the center of every decision and action.

RSP Advisory Meeting, November 18: The recent meeting provided an opportunity to inform the advisory board about the updates and needs of RSP. Feedback was requested on the electronic folders for each student, and districts shared that this additional communication has been very beneficial.

Munetrix Meeting, November 18: Dr. Razor and Dr. Weber met with Senior Account Executive Susie Manikas in person, with Chairman Buzz Brown joining virtually, to review recent updates made to their system designed to support and potentially enhance the data offerings available through ElevateNKY. While the improvements show promise, the group agreed that additional development and training are needed before moving forward with a formal partnership.

Superintendent Webcast, November 18: Dr. Razor, along with leaders from across the state, participated in a virtual meeting to stay informed about important updates from the Education Commissioner and his staff.

Learning Forward Presentation Prep Meeting, November 19: During Dr. Smith's regular Instructional Leadership meeting, the team dedicated time to refining their upcoming Learning Forward presentation. The discussion centered on strengthening key messages, aligning content with current instructional priorities, and ensuring the presentation effectively highlights impactful practices and leadership strategies.

Learning Forward Presentation Prep Meeting, November 20: This meeting focused on the final product and revisions that each team member agreed to complete. The refinements created a strong product, and the team is ready to highlight NKCES.

PL Consortium Meeting, November 21: At the PL Consortium Meeting, the team highlighted upcoming NKCES professional learning opportunities and dedicated time for districts to collaborate, exchange ideas, and support one another's learning. We also discussed the opportunity that will be provided for all members by Franklin Covey.

AESA Presentation Prep Meeting, November 24: Dr. Razor met with Certified Professional Coach & Energy Leadership Index Master Practitioner Tamara Lindholm from the Kansas Education Cooperative, ESSDAK to discuss and review their national presentation for the AESA conference. They collaborated

on the topic of G.R.A.C.E., which is designed to help leaders manage the varying energy they encounter each day.

AESA Presentation & Conference, December 2-5: Dr. Razor and Dr. Smith recently traveled with the Executive Committee to attend the AESA 2025 Annual Conference & Expo. This year's conference was designed to spark innovation, foster well-being, and empower educational leaders across the nation. Programming is organized around four key strands:

- **Storytelling:** Leveraging innovation and AI to communicate impact more effectively
- **Well-Being:** Strategies to support the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of educators, students, and leaders
- **Governance/ESA Board:** Best practices in leadership, governance, and board development
- **Educational Excellence:** Approaches to accountability, continuous improvement, and program effectiveness

In addition to attending sessions, Dr. Razor co-presented alongside Mrs. Tamara Lindholm. Their session, *"G.R.A.C.E. in Action: Transforming Stress into Strength,"* provided participants with practical tools for navigating stress and cultivating resilience in educational environments. Their presentation was well-received and sparked meaningful dialogue among attendees.

The AESA Annual Conference consistently provides outstanding professional learning and invaluable networking opportunities. Dr. Razor and Dr. Smith thoroughly enjoyed hosting the Executive Committee, as this dedicated time away supports deeper connection, shared reflection, and collaborative learning. The experience continues to strengthen relationships and inform leadership efforts across NKCES.

Learning Forward Presentation and Conference, December 7-10: Our leadership team presented at Learning Forward (LF) on our long-term plan and growth strategy, utilizing the LF standards as a tool for growth. This work has enhanced our growth, and it is built upon the foundation established over the past decade. The team also attended sessions to strengthen our capacity as leaders in the professional learning community.

Aspiring Leaders Institute, December 11: The NKCES Principal Institute cultivates a robust network of school leaders dedicated to growth, collaboration, and shared success. Through in-person sessions, participants engage in leadership development, community building, and feedback-driven learning. With programming valued at over \$3,200, the institute is offered at a significantly reduced rate for NKCES members and non-members alike.

Education Cooperative Executive Director Monthly Meeting with KDE, December 12: Education Cooperative Executive Directors from across the state met with KDE to discuss statewide initiatives, updates, and collaborative priorities.

RSP Holiday Shop, December 12: This event holds a special place in Dr. Razor's heart, as she brought it to life over a decade ago when she first joined NKCES. Each year, it provides students with a meaningful opportunity to shop for a gift for someone special in their lives, allowing them to experience the true spirit of the season. With the support of NKCES staff, students select the perfect gift, which is then wrapped by our team while they enjoy festive activities, such as crafting and

sipping hot cocoa. It is a joyful tradition that brings our community together, and it is something we look forward to all year long.

Synergy Meeting, December 15: Our Synergy team meeting was a wonderful opportunity to pause and celebrate the holiday season together. Taking this time to connect reminded us of the importance of nurturing the relationships that strengthen our team. Moments like these help us recharge, appreciate one another, and carry that positive energy into the meaningful work we do every day.

NKCES Superintendent Holiday Gathering, December 18: Our NKCES Superintendents' gathering was a meaningful moment to celebrate the holiday season and reflect on the strength of our regional partnerships. Coming together in this way reinforces the relationships that allow us to collaborate with purpose and impact students across Northern Kentucky. These shared moments of connection remind us that our collective commitment is what truly drives opportunities and success for the students we serve.

NKCES Holiday Gathering, December 19: NKCES hosted its annual holiday gathering of staff to celebrate the season and express appreciation for the outstanding work of our team. The event offered a meaningful pause — a chance to reflect on the year's accomplishments, recharge, and look ahead with excitement to a new year filled with possibilities.

Facilities:

Building Update: The landscape has been updated to provide a welcoming environment for guests. A sign has been erected in the side yard for NKCES/RSP. Other facility needs include replacing the window units in classrooms and training rooms. The process to replace these units has begun, and the Serve Room was recently updated.

Professional Learning (PL) Update:

November/December Professional Learning: NKCES supported 223 professional learning opportunities focused on academics, culture and climate, leadership, and special education during November/December, serving 2,989 educators.

Professional Learning (PL) Consortium: The 25.26 NKCES PL Consortium continued in November with a collaborative meeting. Topics included NKCES [Instructional Team Reports](#) given by IDEA - Ms. Brittney Howell and Learning & Empowerment - Mrs. Emily Giles and Dr. Kim Weber, Instructional spotlight: Mr. Chris Shaw with Ellipsis Education, and planning for the monthly district share-outs. The meeting ended with a member-led PLC discussion. There was no meeting in December.

Title I & Title II Meeting: The 25.26 NKCES Title I/Title II Consortium continued in November with a collaborative meeting. Topics included [Declaration of Participation](#) (due in GMAP February 1), Audit items, Desk Audit support, and [Title I Handbook and Resources](#). The meeting ended with a member-led PLC discussion. There was no meeting in December.

District Assessment Coordinator (DAC) Meeting: The 25.26 NKCES DAC Consortium continued in November with a collaborative meeting. Topics included SAT ([HS Assessment Survey Data Results](#) - 9th - 12th grades (repeat), [SAT Date Survey Results \(new\)](#), [SAT Resources/Training Notes](#), Accommodations due 1/12 (recommend prior to winter break), [Technical Readiness Webinar](#) - 1/15 from 10-11:15, 10-day regulatory period and [add data to your school and district websites](#) - by December 3rd, [Public Release Template from KDE](#), Parent/Guardian Reports ([KSA Letter](#), [AKSA Letter](#)), [KSA released items](#), [AKSA released items](#), [New KY Portal](#), DAC/BAC Support

(kentuckysat@collegeboard.org, (866) 609-2430, [Kentucky-specific webpage](#)), Testing Sophomores - Contact Information - Mark Yoho - myoho@collegeboard.org), Assessment & Accountability Data, Alternate Assessment (Testing Window - 11/10 - 12/19, Data in the SRD by 12/22, Be sure proctors have completed training, Use the same field test number in all content areas, Students coming in after window 1 will still have to do window 1 and 2 assessments, TAR Qualification Quiz - 9/29-12/22, ESAR Qualification Quiz - Opened 10/10), WIDA ACCESS & Alternate ACCESS (12/2 - 12/3 - materials ship, 1/5 - 2/13 - testing window). The meeting ended with a member-led PLC discussion. There was no meeting in December.

Professional Learning Networks (PLNs): PLNs provide opportunities for educators to grow professionally in collaborative environments focused on collective learning.

[2025.26 NKCES PLN Dates](#).

NKCES is honored to offer a variety of professional learning opportunities. All of them can be found in our [Professional Learning Catalog](#).

Special Education Update:

NKCES supported **Dayton Independent Schools** in being awarded the **SPARK Grant** to expand and strengthen programming within the Regional Schools Program (RSP). This funding will support the development of intentional work-based learning experiences focused on building foundational employability skills for students with intensive needs. NKCES will partner with Dayton to align these experiences with individualized student transition goals, ensuring instruction is connected to post-school outcomes. This work reflects a shared commitment to high-quality transition planning that prepares students for employment, independence, and meaningful community participation.

During the December Directors of Special Education (DoSE) meeting, NKCES facilitated a review of proposed new language related to special education caseload and class size regulations. The discussion focused on clarifying expectations, implications for staffing and service delivery, and potential impacts on district practices. This collaborative review supported shared understanding and allowed districts to ask questions and provide feedback as they prepare for implementation.

The IDEA team supported the November/December SPROUT Box. The box focused on inclusive school practices for students with autism. Each box included personalized supports tailored to teacher grade level, role (general or special education), and school administration, ensuring resources were relevant and immediately applicable.

Members of the NKCES IDEA team attended and presented at the State Council for Exceptional Children Conference, sharing effective practices and regional work supporting students with disabilities. The presentation highlighted innovative approaches to instruction, collaboration, and inclusive systems. This opportunity elevated regional expertise while strengthening statewide connections and professional learning.

Ms. Annie Wheatcraft worked closely with the Kentucky Autism Training Center (KATC) to support inclusive school practices in three Northern Kentucky schools. This work focused on building schoolwide systems, providing targeted professional learning, offering classroom-level coaching, and supporting student-level needs to better serve students with autism.

College & Career Readiness Cadre Participation: Mrs. Emily Borchers attended the regional College and Career Counselor Cadre, contributing a special education lens focused on supporting students with disabilities in postsecondary planning. Mrs. Borchers provided guidance related to Indicator 13 compliance, transition planning requirements, and effective practices for connecting students to college and career pathways.

Erikson Early Math Program (EEMC) – SERTAC team members, led by Mrs. Kim Snowball, facilitated the Erikson Early Math Program (EEMC) session. The EEMC is grounded in the work of the Early Math Collaborative at the Erikson Institute, which focuses on strengthening early mathematics instruction for young learners. The program provides research-based professional development, deepens teacher understanding of foundational math concepts, and uses the “Big Ideas” framework to support consistent, developmentally appropriate math instruction across classrooms.

Learning and Empowerment Team:

School-Based Mental Health (SBMH) and Trauma-Informed School Services (TISS): During November and December, the SBMH and TISS teams engaged in statewide and national professional learning by attending and presenting at the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) Conference and supporting the Kentucky Counseling Association (KCA) through exhibition at the statewide conference. Participation at these professional learning experiences strengthened regional visibility and grew professional partnerships that support teachers and students across the region. The teams continued to research and submit grant applications to support and expand priority areas of need across the region. Additionally, the team responded to ongoing coaching and training requests from districts. This continues to be a priority area of work. The SBMH/TISS team also dedicated time to developing content for new online learning modules set to launch in January.

Learning Acceleration Specialists (LAS): In November and December, the Learning Acceleration Specialist (LAS) team advanced several key initiatives through regional collaboration, professional learning, and district-level support. The month marked the official kick-off of regional trainings centered on content-specific High-Quality Instructional Resources (HQIR), providing educators with targeted guidance on effective implementation across subject areas. Individualized HQIR work in districts was also a main focus throughout November and December. The Sprouting New Teacher Cadre convened with a strong focus on Backwards Mapping, engaging early-career educators in planning practices that promote clarity, alignment, and student-centered outcomes. The LAS team also dedicated time to developing content for new online learning modules, set to launch in January, which will expand access to high-quality professional learning across the region. District-level support continued with tailored work around developing and refining AI policies, introducing scaffolds for AI-related soft skills, supporting HQIR planning and internalization processes, and strengthening Professional Learning Community (PLC) structures to improve instructional coherence and collaboration.

Grant Consortium Update:

Grants available in November and December

- [CTE Innovation and Support Grant](#). Due November 20. \$100,000 to create or expand a career pathway.
- [STOP School Violence](#). Due 11/10. 141,000,000 over 3 years. NKCES is applying to provide training in PREPaRE and Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG), support school violence prevention curriculum, and support use of the STOP Tipline.

- [Read to Achieve](#). Due 12/2. \$70,000 X 2 years plus potential 2 additional years to provide Tier 2 and 3 training and supports for reading in grades K-3.
- [SPARK Postsecondary Transition for students with disabilities](#). Due 11/25. \$75,000 to support relationship-building with OVR; parent engagement and education about transitions; and assessments for students with disabilities.
- [STAR Academy](#). Due Dec. 11. \$1,000,000 over 3 years to establish Star academy curriculum for grades 7 and 8. No teacher salaries covered.
- [Opioid abatement fund](#). Due December 19. Up to \$1,000,000 over one or two years to fund prevention of opioid and other substance misuse. Can extend to mental health.
- [21st CCLC](#). Due January 20. \$150,000. To fund outside of school programming. Several changes this year; see the Request for Application (RFA).
- [Conflict Resolution Initiative](#). Initial project idea description, due January 9. Full proposal May 4. \$20,000 with a possible second year of \$40,000 to evaluate the effectiveness of conflict resolution skills in navigating multicultural environments among middle school youth, grades 5-9 or a subset thereof.
- [Middle School Math Coach](#). Due January 30. \$62,000 X 2 years. 10 awards to provide release time for a teacher to serve as a mathematics coach in grades 6 - 8.

Grants Pending

- [School Based Mental Health](#): Notification received: not awarded.
- [STOP School Violence](#). NKCES is applying to provide training in PREPaRE and CSTAG, support school violence prevention curriculum, and support use of the STOP Tipline.
- [Opioid abatement fund](#) NKCES applied for \$1,000,000 over two years to fund prevention of opioid and other substance misuse/mental health/arts integration activities including NKY Mental Health Roundtable, arts-based substance misuse prevention training, and youth leadership activities to prevent first use of harmful substances and build Positive Childhood Experiences. Notification expected in April 2026.
- [SPARK Postsecondary Transition for students with disabilities](#) An application was submitted on behalf of NKCES for \$74,993 to improve partnership with Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, improve family engagement, and provide additional support for student transitions.

Grants Awarded:

- [Interact for Health Safe and Supportive Spaces](#): Awarded to NKCES for mini-grants to four rural districts for substance misuse prevention; aligned with Youth Summit.
- [Interact for Health Rural Changemakers](#): Awarded to Bracken County \$70,000 for a project entitled Connecting Nature, Students, and Community. Activities will rebuild an outdoor classroom and support related learning activities

Multi-District Grants in Implementation

- Trauma Informed School Services
- School Based Mental Health Services

November 18, 2025: Office Hours were held at NKCES Learning and Empowerment.

No general Grants Consortium meetings were held in December. Ms. Vicki Dansberry provided support for multiple districts applying for grants from the list above, notably Read to Achieve, SPARK, and Opioid Abatement funding.

Regional School Programs (RSP) Update:

- RSP, in partnership with Hickory Grove, provided 37 families with Thanksgiving dinners.

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- RSP hosted our 2nd Annual Thanksgiving Day Parade on 11/21. We invited guests from NKCES, NKU, as well as members from the DoSE meeting.
- RSP, in partnership with several community partners and donors, provided holiday food totes to 29 families, which were delivered by RSP staff on December 19, 2025.
- NKCES hosted the Holiday Shop for RSP students on December 12/12-where students were able to shop for two loved ones, wrap gifts, and enjoy some holiday activities.
- Some of our RSP students partnered up with NKCES staff to assist with the December Sprout Box preparations.