



Newport Independent Schools

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

Meeting Date: January 28, 2026

Prepared by: Autumn Slankard

I. Executive Summary

Throughout late December and January, district efforts centered on translating professional learning theory into classroom practice while continuing to strengthen instructional **consistency**, system **coherence**, and a shared sense of **belonging** across all schools. While I initially held concerns about receiving coaching and guidance from multiple organizations, I was encouraged to learn that TNTP has provided training for KDE's Office of Teaching and Learning, and that both KDE and NKCES have intentionally adapted systems and processes rooted in TNTP's work. This alignment has enhanced coherence across partners and reinforced a shared instructional language and vision. A major focus of the month was the design, delivery, and follow-up of the January 5 districtwide professional learning day in partnership with TNTP, NKCES, KDE, and district instructional leaders.

In addition to professional learning, January includes strategic planning for professional learning communities (PLCs), postsecondary readiness, and assessment preparation. Across all initiatives, the emphasis remained on building systems that support educators, create clarity around expectations, and ultimately improve outcomes for students.

II. Key Updates & Highlights

A. Curriculum & Instruction

- TNTP Partnership and January 5 Professional Learning

In preparation for the January 5 professional learning day, I engaged in multiple planning meetings with TNTP, NKCES, KDE, and district partners throughout late December. These conversations ensured that the learning was tightly aligned to district priorities and responsive to the unique needs of each school.

For Newport Primary School and Newport Intermediate School, the professional learning occurred during the morning and centered on TNTP's *Opportunity Makers* framework. This work focused on the enabling conditions of **consistency**, **coherence**, and **belonging**, providing teachers with a shared understanding of how aligned instructional practices, clear systems, and

supportive environments create opportunities for all students to succeed. Teachers applied this theory directly to local student data and instructional contexts, moving from concepts to actionable next steps.

The final portion of the morning was organized into instructional cadres (behavior intervention, math, and reading) where educators engaged in aligning systems and/or the unit internalization process. Unit internalization is a key component of KDE's Intellectual Preparation Guidance and supports the effective use of HQIRs. This guided PLC process helps teachers deeply understand unit content, anticipate student misconceptions, and plan scaffolds and supports before instruction begins, strengthening instructional quality while preserving professional expertise.

At Newport High School, the afternoon session focused on TNTP's *Opportunity Myth*, examining patterns of access, expectations, and outcomes for students. Teachers analyzed multiple data sources, including Kentucky Summative Assessment results, i-Ready diagnostic, and CERT data, to identify students with high potential who may benefit from targeted instructional moves and increased access to rigorous learning opportunities. This work reinforced a collective responsibility for ensuring that all students experience high expectations and meaningful academic opportunities.

Science teachers in grades 3–12 participated in a concurrent virtual morning session focused on the implementation of the OpenSciEd curriculum. This session acknowledged the rigor and complexity of the curriculum while providing targeted support to strengthen instructional practice. Additionally, NHS Career and Technical Education teachers, school counselors, the assistant principal, and the instructional coach participated in a professional learning and planning centered around postsecondary readiness with Julie Kaeff. This consisted of understanding the parameters around postsecondary readiness accountability and a “name and claim” process for seniors who are not yet postsecondary ready.

B. Strategic Planning & Districtwide Initiatives

- Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

I met with KDE's Office of Teaching and Learning to plan the launch of ongoing professional learning for instructional leads focused on PLCs. Beginning in February, this work will address the enabling conditions necessary for effective PLCs, supporting coherence in how collaborative planning and continuous improvement are implemented across schools.

-Portrait of a Learner Planning

I met with KDE representatives to discuss the potential revision of the district's Portrait of a Graduate into a Portrait of a Learner. This process presents an opportunity to engage staff and community stakeholders in defining what we want the educational experience in Newport to represent. Additionally, if proposed accountability regulations move forward, this work may positively support local measures of quality alongside traditional academic indicators.

-Postsecondary Readiness

In collaboration with NKCES, district staff, and high school representatives, I participated in a planning meeting focused on strengthening postsecondary readiness systems. Guidance and shared resources from NKCES will support high school staff as they plan next year's schedule and align coursework and supports to student goals.

- Instructional Coaching and Leadership Capacity

The January instructional coaches' meeting focused on next steps following the January 5 professional learning and models of classroom observation and feedback. To support continuity and coherence, the assistant principal at NIS began attending these meetings in preparation for the upcoming retirement of the instructional coach. This reinforces the expectation that all administrators serve as instructional leaders and ensures a smooth transition for ongoing coaching and support.

-Assessment and Accountability Preparation

I participated in the regional District Assessment Coordinator (DAC) consortium and KDE's Professional Development Coordinator Exchange. These sessions supported preparation for upcoming assessments, including ACCESS and SAT, and deepened understanding of curriculum-based professional learning (CBPL) as a model for sustained, job-embedded professional growth rather than isolated professional development events.

C. English Language Learners, Gifted and Talented

We have several celebrations in our English Language Learner and Gifted and Talented programs, namely the hiring of a gifted and talented teacher. ACCESS testing is also in progress at NPS and NIS and completed at the high school. Please see Dr. Hemmerle's attached report for a thorough update with our English Language Learner and Gifted and Talented program.

D. Partnerships and Collaboration

-School Leadership Collaboration

I met regularly with principals from each building on a weekly or biweekly basis throughout the month. These meetings focused on aligning expectations, monitoring implementation of professional learning, addressing building-specific needs, and maintaining coherence between district initiatives and school-level practices. This ongoing collaboration ensures that instructional priorities remain clear, consistent, and responsive across all schools.

-NKCES and KDE Collaboration

Throughout January, collaboration with NKCES and KDE strengthened district capacity in leadership development, instructional planning, assessment readiness, and professional learning

design. Attendance at the NKCES “Four Essential Roles of Leadership” session further supported district-level leadership development aligned to instructional improvement.

III. Strategic Priorities

All work this month remained intentionally aligned to the district’s three guiding priorities:

- **Consistency:** Strengthening shared instructional expectations through high quality instructional resource (HQIR) implementation, unit internalization, and aligned professional learning.
- **Coherence:** Building clear systems for PLCs, coaching, leadership development, assessment, and professional learning that work together across schools.
- **Belonging:** Creating structures that support educators as professionals and ensure students experience high expectations, access, and support.

IV. Upcoming Priorities & Next Steps

All initiatives continue to be sequenced intentionally to ensure that improvement efforts remain focused, manageable, and impactful for students and staff.

- Support TNTP’s ongoing coaching with school leadership teams to translate January 5 learning into sustained practice.
- Launch KDE-supported professional learning for instructional leaders focused on PLC enabling conditions.
- Continue unit internalization support and HQIR implementation through instructional cadres and coaching.
- Advance planning for a community-engaged Portrait of a Learner process.
- Support high school staff in strengthening postsecondary readiness systems.
- Support ACCESS testing for English Learners and prepare for upcoming SAT assessment windows.



Board of Education Update – ELL & Gifted/Talented Programs

Prepared by: Dr. Melissa Hemmerle, District ELL & Gifted/Talented Coordinator

Date: January 28, 2026

I. Executive Summary

The English Language Learners (ELL) and Ignite Gifted & Talented (GT) programs continue to demonstrate steady progress through statewide assessment implementation, student identification, and expanded enrichment opportunities. During the month of January, the district began administering the WIDA ACCESS assessment to measure English language proficiency growth while completing major phases of Gifted & Talented identification at the elementary and intermediate levels.

Multilingual students at the high school successfully completed ACCESS testing, and the remaining schools are on track to finish testing next week. Concurrently, Gifted & Talented identification and placement were finalized at Newport Primary School and Newport Intermediate School, significantly expanding the district's Bright Start Talent Pool and IGNITE GT program. The district also launched a new high school enrichment initiative, in collaboration with the 21st Century Programs, further strengthening creative, leadership-based learning opportunities for advanced and gifted students.

II. Key Updates & Highlights

A. English Language Learners / Multilingual Program

- **WIDA ACCESS Testing Underway:**

The district has officially begun WIDA ACCESS testing to assess the English language proficiency growth of all active multilingual students. The ACCESS assessment measures student performance across four language domains—listening, reading, speaking, and writing and provides essential data for instructional planning, program evaluation, and state accountability.

- Multilingual students at Newport High School have completed all testing.
- Students at Newport Primary School (NPS), Newport Intermediate School (NIS), Newport School of Innovation (NSOI), and the Regional School are scheduled to complete testing by next week.

The testing rollout has progressed smoothly due to strong collaboration among building administrators, testing teams, and multilingual educators, ensuring a supportive and secure testing environment for students.

B. Ignite Gifted & Talented (GT) Program

- **Bright Start Talent Pool Identification:**

Gifted & Talented identification and placement processes have been completed at NPS and NIS. As a result of these efforts, the district now has 53 students officially identified for placement in the Ignite Bright Start Talent Pool.

Identified students receive enrichment opportunities embedded within their regular classroom settings and participate in Google Classrooms specifically designed for advanced learning. These virtual classrooms provide enrichment in Mathematics, Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, and STEM, ensuring consistent access to advanced learning opportunities aligned with Kentucky Academic Standards.

- **IGNITE Gifted & Talented Program Expansion:**

The district has also identified more than 30 students for placement in the IGNITE Gifted & Talented Program across multiple talent areas, including Leadership, Visual Art, Theater, and specific academic areas such as Math and Reading. These students will participate in specialized enrichment experiences tailored to their strengths and interests, supporting both academic excellence and whole-child development.

- **GT Teacher Hiring in Progress:**

Newport Independent Schools is currently finishing the process of hiring a Gifted & Talented teacher, with an anticipated start date in the second week of February. This position will provide direct instructional support and enrichment programming for GT and advanced learners across the district, strengthening service delivery and instructional continuity.

- **High School Enrichment Initiative – Dungeons & Dragons Club:**

Dr. Hemmerle has launched a Dungeons & Dragons Club at Newport High School in collaboration with the 21st Century Programs as a targeted enrichment opportunity for advanced and Gifted & Talented students. This innovative, student-centered program integrates storytelling, strategic thinking, collaboration, and leadership development.

Through structured gameplay, students develop:

- Critical thinking and problem-solving skills,
- Communication and teamwork abilities,
- Creativity and narrative writing skills, and

- Social-emotional learning, confidence, and leadership capacity.

The club provides an inclusive, high-interest space for students to explore imagination, decision-making, and peer collaboration while reinforcing academic and 21st-century skills.

III. Upcoming Priorities & Next Steps

English Language Learners

- Complete WIDA ACCESS testing across all remaining schools.
- Review and analyze ACCESS data upon receipt to guide instructional planning and Program Services Plans (PSPs).
- Continue strengthening family engagement through partnerships and outreach opportunities.

Gifted & Talented

- Monitor and support implementation of Bright Start Talent Pool enrichment opportunities.
- Expand and refine advanced learning Google Classrooms across content areas.
- Onboard the new GT teacher and begin districtwide enrichment programming.
- Continue identification and service expansion for IGNITE GT students.
- Maintain alignment of GT services with state regulations and district advanced learning goals.