

NKCES Report – June/July 2026

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:

NKCES Team Meeting, June 1: Our June team meeting provided an opportunity to pause and reflect on another meaningful year at NKCES. Together, we celebrated the accomplishments, growth, and successes that defined the year while recognizing the impact of our collective work in serving our districts, schools, and students. Team members shared highlights, lessons learned, and moments that reinforced the importance of collaboration, innovation, and our commitment to continuous improvement. The conversation also focused on carrying those successes forward as we prepare for the year ahead.

We also took time to honor two exceptional members of the NKCES family as they begin their well-deserved retirements. Vicki Dansberry and Annie Wheatcraft have each made lasting contributions to our organization through their dedication, professionalism, and unwavering commitment to those we serve. Their years of service have helped shape the culture of NKCES, and their influence will continue to be felt long after their retirement. We are grateful for the many ways they have impacted our team and our member districts and wish them both every happiness in this next chapter.

NKCES Budget Discussion, June 4: NKCES leadership participated in a collaborative planning meeting with the Kentucky Department of Education to review the budget for the recently awarded Migrant Education Grant. The conversation was productive and informative, providing valuable guidance and clarification as we begin implementation of the grant. This discussion helped ensure that funding is aligned with program priorities and established a strong foundation for delivering meaningful services and support to the students and families the grant is intended to serve.

Imagine Learning Research Collaboration, June 5 – Portrait of Learning White Paper

Dr. Razor and Dr. Smith had the opportunity to meet with researchers from Imagine Learning who are leading the development of a national white paper focused on Portrait of Learning initiatives. They reached out to request NKCES's expertise based on our work supporting districts in designing and implementing learner-centered systems.

The research is examining the most common barriers organizations encounter when implementing Portrait of Learning initiatives, with particular focus on three areas: Conviction (building the "why"), Constraints (policy and structural barriers), and Coherence (aligning systems for successful implementation). The researchers specifically sought NKCES's perspective on navigating policy and state-level constraints, recognizing our experience partnering with districts across Kentucky since Dr. Smith led state-wide work in this area.

This invitation reflects the growing recognition of NKCES as a thought leader in educational innovation and systems change. We are grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this important national

conversation and to help shape guidance that will support schools and districts as they create learning environments that prepare students for the future.

Superintendent Retreat, June 10-12: Our annual Superintendent Retreat once again provided a meaningful opportunity for Northern Kentucky's superintendents to step away from their daily responsibilities to learn, collaborate, and strengthen the relationships that are so important to our work. Dr. Amy Razor and Dr. Robb Smith continue to keep the retreat fresh, engaging, and relevant by thoughtfully designing an experience that blends professional learning with intentional opportunities for connection.

This year's retreat was held at the beautiful Clayton & Crume in Louisville. The venue was selected not only for its unique atmosphere but because it perfectly complemented the retreat theme, "The Heroes We Need." Throughout the retreat, participants explored the qualities of courageous leadership, service, and sacrifice, as well as the everyday acts that make a lasting impact on students, staff, and communities.

The retreat began with a special evening celebrating our retiring superintendents. We were honored to recognize Dr. Matt Baker, Mr. Chad Molley, Mrs. Traysea Moresea, Dr. Shelli Wilson, and Mr. Alvin Garrison for their years of dedicated leadership and service to public education. Their collective contributions have shaped schools, supported students, and strengthened communities across Northern Kentucky and beyond. We are deeply grateful for their commitment and wish each of them the very best in retirement.

The retreat concluded with renewed inspiration, strengthened relationships, and a shared commitment to continuing the important work of serving the students, educators, and communities of Northern Kentucky.

KASS, The Multiplier Effect: Unleashing The Genius In Our Schools, June 17: NKCES was honored to host the Synergy Experience for Exemplary Leaders on behalf of the Kentucky Association of School Superintendents (KASS), welcoming experienced superintendents from across the Commonwealth for a unique executive leadership learning experience.

Designed specifically for veteran superintendents, the training focused on strengthening leadership through advanced professional learning, executive reflection, and peer collaboration. Grounded in the research-based framework The Multiplier Effect, participants explored leadership practices that empower others, build organizational capacity, and increase effectiveness. The experience also emphasized the value of cross-sector partnerships and collaborative leadership in creating greater opportunities for students, schools, and communities throughout Kentucky.

We were grateful for the opportunity to welcome these leaders to NKCES and support KASS in providing this exceptional professional learning experience.

Schools To Watch Conference, June 25-27: The 2026 National Schools to Watch Conference, hosted by the National Forum in Washington, D.C., brought together educators from across the country to celebrate excellence in middle-level education. The conference recognized 219 outstanding middle-grades schools and featured professional learning, networking opportunities, keynote presentations, and advocacy efforts to advance academic excellence, social equity, and developmental responsiveness. This year, Logan County and Fayette County schools were honored at the award ceremony. We would love to support NKY schools through this process.

AESA Conference, July 14-16: The 2026 AESA Summer Leadership Conference, Systems in Sync, brought together Educational Service Agency leaders from across the country to explore strategies for aligning leadership, instruction, operations, well-being, and community partnerships. Hosted in collaboration with the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools and the Riverside County Office

of Education, the conference focused on strengthening systems to improve outcomes for students, staff, and communities.

Dr. Amy Razor and Dr. Robb Smith were honored to lead a breakout session highlighting the success of Sprout Boxes, sharing how the initiative provides educators with meaningful instructional resources while fostering collaboration and connection among schools. Their presentation offered practical strategies and sparked valuable conversations with educators from across the nation.

District Leadership Retreats: We are thrilled to continue serving as a destination for our member districts' leadership retreats. It is both an honor and a privilege to provide a welcoming space where district leadership teams can step away from their daily responsibilities to collaborate, plan, and engage in meaningful conversations. These retreats create valuable opportunities to strengthen relationships, establish shared priorities, and develop strategies that set the stage for a successful school year. We are proud to support our districts by providing an environment that fosters thoughtful planning, innovation, and collaboration.

Procurement Update:

Mr. Mike Wilson left NKCES effective June 30 to further his career in the Army National Guard. The Procurement Director position will not be filled immediately as we recalibrate and determine the region's needs. We are working to create a recurring PLN for procurement leaders through a partnership with Kenton County.

Facilities:

Building Update

We continue to invest in facility improvements that enhance both the appearance and functionality of our buildings. The tuckpointing of the Administrative Building has been completed, and our next project will be painting the brick at the building's main entrance to provide a refreshed, welcoming appearance.

At RSP, new, modern furnishings have been installed throughout the school, creating updated and more comfortable learning spaces for students and staff. This is the first time furniture has been purchased for the entire school. We are also preparing to begin a major HVAC improvement project that will replace the building's aging, inefficient boiler with new split-unit systems. This significant project will begin this summer and continue into the start of the school year, helping ensure a more comfortable and efficient learning environment for everyone.

Professional Learning (PL) Update:

June/July Professional Learning: NKCES supported 124 professional learning opportunities focused on academics, culture and climate, leadership, and special education during June/July, serving 2,326 educators.

Professional Learning (PL) Consortium: The 2025.26 NKCES PL Consortium ended in April and the dates have been set for the 2026.27 school year. These meetings are set to occur in-person from 10 am -12 pm on Aug 21, Sep 25, Oct 23, Nov 20, Jan 22, Feb 26, Mar 26, Apr 23.

Title I & Title II Meeting: The 2025.26 NKCES Title I/Title II Consortium ended in April and the dates have been set for the 2026.27 school year. These meetings are set to occur in person from 8 am -

9:30 am on Aug 21, Sep 25, Oct 23, Nov 20, Jan 22, Feb 26, Mar 26, Apr 23.

District Assessment Coordinator (DAC) Meeting: The 2025.26 NKCES DAC Consortium ended in April and the dates have been set for the 2026.27 school year. These meetings are set to occur virtually from 10 am -12 pm on Aug 4, Sep 15, Oct 20, Nov 17, Jan 19, Feb 16, Mar 16, Apr 13.

Professional Learning Networks (PLNs): PLNs provide opportunities for educators to grow professionally in collaborative environments focused on collective learning. Check out our [2026.27 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:

Ms. Brittney Howell, NKCES Director of Special Education, attended Solution Tree's All Means All Institute to continue to develop the systems and instructional practices that improve outcomes for students with disabilities. This learning will support the continued development of iSPROUT as a regional school improvement process that helps leaders examine inclusive practices, identify barriers to achievement, and develop focused next steps to strengthen special education outcomes across the region.

Dr. Amanda Bell led TEACCH training for educators in both Northern and Western Kentucky, expanding NKCES's reach in autism and structured teaching. These training opportunities support educators in using predictable routines, visual supports, and intentionally designed environments to increase independence for students with autism. Her statewide engagement also strengthens professional connections, raises the visibility of NKCES, and may help attract future special education teachers to the Northern Kentucky region..

Ms. Tasha Taylor presented the NKCES Reverse Career Fair through KDE's Vibrant Learning Spotlight, highlighting the region's innovative approach to connecting students with disabilities to employers and postsecondary opportunities. The presentation showcased NKCES's transition work on a statewide platform and elevated the region's commitment to preparing students for meaningful adult outcomes.

Ms. Kim Snowball led regional planning efforts to bring the All Learners Network to Northern Kentucky to strengthen mathematics instruction for students with disabilities. The All Learners Lesson Structure uses an inclusive main lesson, differentiated learning opportunities, and four consistent components—Launch, Main Lesson, Math Menu, and Closure—to support conceptual understanding and meaningful engagement for a broad range of learners. This partnership will help build educator capacity and improve mathematics outcomes across the region. We look forward to the work this year and are looking for invitations to join this network.

Ms. Emily Borchers attended KY CASE with Brittney Howell, where they learned from Mr. Brandon Wright about recent case law and its implications for special education systems and decision-making. Building on that learning, Ms. Borchers is leading plans to bring Mr. Wright to Northern Kentucky this spring to provide principals and ARC chairs with practical legal context to support informed, compliant decisions related to special education.

Learning and Empowerment Team Update:

School-Based Mental Health (SBMH) and Trauma-Informed School Services (TISS): Throughout June and July, the SBMH and TISS teams focused on professional learning, planning, and expanding regional mental health supports. A major highlight was the successful delivery of the two-day *Conditions for Success* training, providing educators and school leaders with practical strategies to build safe, supportive, and engaging learning environments. In addition, NKCES welcomed Dr. Clayton Cook for the two-day CharacterStrong MTSS Certification Training, equipping regional educators with evidence-based practices to strengthen Multi-Tiered Systems of Support while integrating social-emotional learning and student mental health into schoolwide systems. The ArtsWave initiative provided another opportunity to collaborate and support districts with arts integration. It was inspiring to see educators, district leaders, and community partners working together to strengthen meaningful learning experiences for students.

The department also expanded its capacity with the addition of two new team members. Jill Fowee joined NKCES as the School-Based Mental Health Provider, and Lindsey Buckler joined as the Higher Education Liaison, strengthening partnerships that support both direct services and the development of future mental health professionals across the region.

Finally, the department worked closely with Jared Perkins to develop and strengthen grant proposals designed to expand resources, partnerships, and sustainable funding opportunities for school-based mental health services throughout Northern Kentucky. These collaborative efforts position the region for continued growth and innovation while ensuring schools have access to high-quality supports that promote the well-being and success of every student and educator.

Learning Acceleration Specialists (LAS): During June and July, the Learning Acceleration Specialist (LAS) team continued to support educators through innovative professional learning, statewide partnerships, and preparation for the upcoming school year. The team facilitated multiple sessions focused on artificial intelligence in education, including NotebookLM, AI Essentials, AI Leadership Tools, and participation in a regional AI panel discussion at Cincy AI, equipping educators with practical strategies to enhance teaching, learning, and leadership.

The LAS team also partnered with the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) to deliver a full-capacity administrator session on the revised Kentucky Academic Standards for Reading and Writing, followed by a teacher session that supported more than 60 educators with implementation of the updated literacy standards. Additionally, the 2026–2027 Sprouting Early Educators Cadre kicked off, welcoming and supporting teachers in years 1–3 of the profession as they build instructional practices and professional connections.

Summer also provided valuable opportunities to recruit educators into NKCES rank change programs through the Read to Succeed Conference and the launch of the Kentucky Center for Mathematics (KCM) Numeracy Counts Cohort 2. Throughout June and July, the team dedicated significant time to planning and preparing customized district back-to-school professional learning that will launch across the region in August.

Grants and Development Update

Mr. Jared Perkins joined NKCES as Grants and Development Specialist on July 1. During the month, NKCES received two grant awards for proposals submitted prior to his arrival: the FY26 Migrant Education Program Regional Service Center grant and the Byrne State Crisis Intervention Program grant. Mr. Perkins

worked with NKCES staff to begin implementation of both programs.

NKCES also pursued two SAMHSA funding opportunities. Although the Strategic Prevention Framework grant closed before NKCES could submit due to a national application cap, staff successfully submitted a competitive Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resiliency in Education) proposal on July 24. If awarded, the five-year project will establish a regional framework to strengthen student mental health supports across Northern Kentucky.

Mr. Perkins also implemented a new grant management software platform and is exploring a customer relationship management system to strengthen grant management, compliance, and organizational efficiency.

Planning is underway for the 2026–2027 Grants Consortium. Beginning September 29, consortium meetings will transition to monthly in-person meetings at NKCES. A new District Grants Toolkit is also scheduled to launch October 1, providing member districts with grant resources, templates, data tools, and grant search capabilities to strengthen local grant development and management.

Current Grant Status:

Migrant Education Program Regional Service Center	AWARDED	\$290,000
Byrne State Crisis Intervention Program (SCIP)	AWARDED	\$170,542
Haile Foundation Arts Award	AWARDED	\$40,000
STOP School Violence	Pending	TBD
Drug-Free Communities (DFC)	Pending	\$125,000
Project AWARE (SAMHSA)	Submitted	\$1,500,000
Innovative Approaches to Literacy	Submitted	\$750,000
Horizon Foundation (AI Institute)	Submitted	TBD

Multi-District Grants in Implementation

Trauma-Informed School Services and School-Based Mental Health Services are in process, with Trauma-Informed School Services ending this year and School-Based Mental Health ending in 2027.

Regional School Programs (RSP) Update:

- RSP's furniture began arriving in mid June, with the remainder of it completed in July. We are looking forward to students seeing it when they return!
- RSP's first day for students is August 12th, 2026.
- The RSP Leadership team attended the KECASAC Alternative School Conference at the end of July, and presented a session during the conference. They directly followed the conference with a leadership retreat meeting to prepare for the upcoming school year.