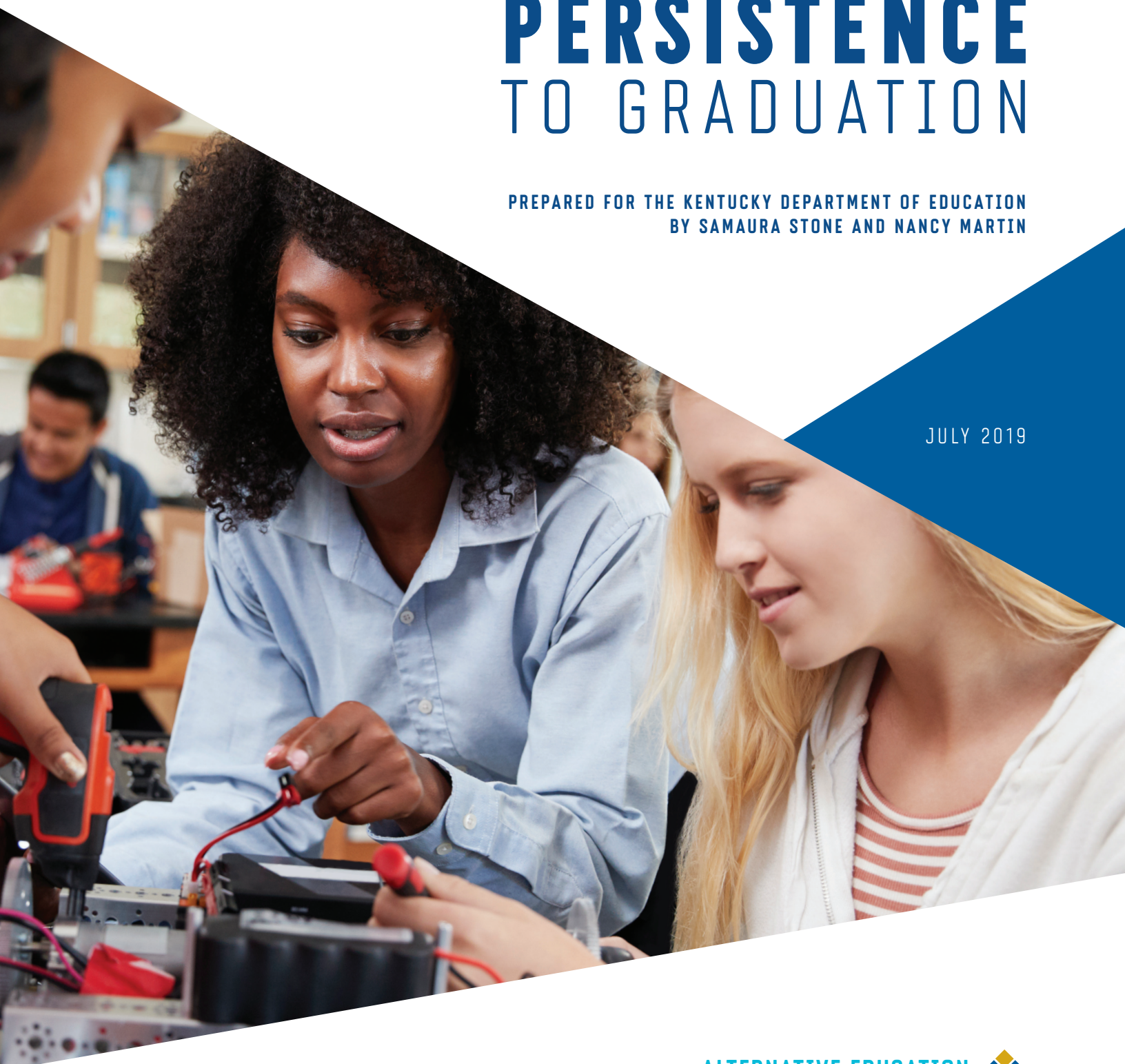# PERSISTENCE
TO GRADUATION

PREPARED FOR THE KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

◆ ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

OVERVIEW

Most states and districts offer alternative education programs, or schools and programs outside of the traditional K-12 curriculum, though the programming offered and population served vary widely (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Alternative education programs and schools provide students who are struggling the opportunity to achieve in a new setting and use creative, individualized learning strategies. Thus, alternative education settings can help ensure students at risk of dropping out of traditional schools receive the guidance and additional supports needed to complete coursework and remain ''on track'' to graduate. While in the past many students were referred to alternative schools for chronic absenteeism, disciplinary concerns, and credit recovery, according to the National Dropout Prevention Center, the definition of an alternative school is becoming broader and goes beyond students who are struggling in the classroom (Cash, 2004). Alternative settings can range from magnet programs, dual enrollment or college-based programs, schools focused on serving students with unique interests or learning disabilities, education programs providing support for teen mothers, street academies serving homeless students, charter schools, and programs for youth involved with the juvenile justice system. Although there are many different kinds of alternative schools and programs, most are characterized by smaller student-to-teacher ratios; flexible scheduling; personalized learning; relevant, career-oriented themes; and innovative curricula. High-quality alternative programs and schools focus on reengaging students in their education and moving them forward academically (Martin & Brand, 2006). As such, the existence of strong alternative education options can help a district ensure equity and prospects for students who might have ''fallen through the cracks'' in more traditional school settings.

In Kentucky, state legislation defines an ''alternative education program'' as ''a program that exists to meet student needs that cannot be addressed in a traditional classroom setting'' and that is ''designed to remediate academic performance, improve behavior, or provide an enhanced learning experience'' in alternative classrooms, centers, or campuses. Alternative education programs, which do not include career or technical centers or departments, serve students in all grades, vary in length of enrollment, and vary in size. While historically alternative education has been associated primarily with ''at-risk'' students, Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) clearly indicates that these programs can also serve students who: have special needs, are gifted and talented, are adjudicated, have been abused and neglected, are differently abled, or could benefit from a non-traditional environment. In Kentucky, four types of alternative programs serve a wide range of students:

1. District-operated programs on-site within a traditional school;

2. District-operated programs in a separate facility, including a range of programs, such as gifted and talented, behavior-focused, teen pregnancy, online, and specialized programming for immigrant and refugee students (A5);

3. Programs for students in the care of a state agency, such as juvenile detention centers, treatment facilities, residential group homes (A6); and

4. Blended A5/A6 programs.

In the 2017-2018 school year, a total of 23,288 students were enrolled in 181 A5 and A6 alternative programs in Kentucky. These programs were operating in 90 (52%) of the Commonwealth's 173 school districts. Districts vary widely in terms of the number of alternative programs offered, with nearly half offering no such programs, many offering only one alternative program and, at the high end, one district offering 38 alternative programs serving both in- and out-of-district students.

Because traditional schools are not an appropriate fit for all students, it can be helpful for districts to offer a range of schools and programs to meet the needs of a diverse group of learners. Furthermore, the very existence of high-quality alternative schools and programs can expand and improve education options for *all* students, including those in traditional schools. Strong alternative programs and schools develop expertise in what works with students who are struggling in school and are engaged in testing the efficacy of a range of pathways to high school success. As such, alternative education programs, both those offered within and those offered alongside traditional public schools, should be seen as a critical tool in districts' efforts to increase persistence to high school graduation.

KEY STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES OF EFFECTIVE ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS AND SCHOOLS

Kentucky schools and districts offer a wide range of alternative programming employing a variety of strategies and practices to meet the varied needs of students. In this practice brief we document seven key strategies and the associated practices in place in five programs and schools across the Commonwealth. These include:

STRATEGY 1: HAVING A VISION OF STUDENT SUCCESS AND DOING WHATEVER IS NECESSARY TO REACH IT

Those helping struggling students in successful alternative education settings generally share three mindsets:

❏ They believe all students, even those who have struggled significantly in traditional settings, have the ability to meet high expectations and succeed;

❏ They recognize the clock is ticking and have a sense of urgency about each student's education; and

❏ They are willing to think outside the box and innovate to facilitate student success.

STRATEGY 2: WILLINGNESS TO BE FLEXIBLE TO MEET STUDENTS' NEEDS

Successful alternative programs and schools bend to meet students' needs, through offering, for example:

❏ Flexibility in time, such as open entry and exit, flexibility in scheduling, extended year programming, and self-paced learning based on competency;

❏ A small, personalized learning environment;

❏ Credit recovery or catch-up for students who have fallen behind; and

❏ Blended (computer-based) learning.

This often means using staff in new ways. For example, in programs in which students do not begin or end at the same time, teachers often take on the role of "coach" or "facilitator" as students move through the curriculum at their own pace.

STRATEGY 3: ENCOURAGING STAFF COLLABORATION

Alternative schools and programs successfully meeting the needs of their students make staff collaboration a high priority. This is most evident in situations where:

❏ Classroom teachers and those providing other services, such as mental health services or juvenile justice programming, collaborate to offer students a coherent, consistent program; and

❏ An alternative school or program and a student's home school collaborate to offer students a smooth transition between education programming.

STRATEGY 4: CONSOLIDATING SERVICES TO IMPROVE QUALITY

Sometimes the most effective way to offer students high-quality alternative programming is to offer these services to a critical mass of students in one program or school. For instance, a district or consortia of districts might:

❑ Consolidate specialized services, highly skilled staff, and other resources in one location; and

❑ Provide augmented literacy and numeracy instruction for students who have experienced significant disruptions in their formal education or otherwise fallen significantly behind.

STRATEGY 5: EXPOSING STUDENTS TO COLLEGE AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

While all students benefit from early exposure to college and career exploration opportunities, this may be especially true for students who struggle in traditional education settings. Effective alternative programs are dedicated to providing their students with:

❑ College exposure, through, for example, co-location on a community college campus or dual-enrollment; and

❑ Career exploration opportunities.

STRATEGY 6: REMOVING DISINCENTIVES TO WORKING WITH STRUGGLING STUDENTS

Alternative programs often serve students who have experienced major difficulty or disruption in their education. As such, their effectiveness is not always evident through traditional accountability measures. For this reason, it is very important to:

❑ Ensure there are no disincentives related to accountability to working with struggling students or students for whom a traditional education program is not appropriate; and

❑ Where possible, add incentives to working with such students.

STRATEGY 7: CREATING A SUPPORTIVE, STRUCTURED ENVIRONMENT

Successful alternative education settings are generally characterized by clear behavior expectations and auxiliary supports for students and their families. Alternative programs and schools featured in this practice brief offer:

❑ Straight-forward rules and codes of conduct, with consistent enforcement and follow-through;

❑ Extensive support services, including on-site counseling, healthcare, social services, and supports for families;

❑ Trauma-informed practices throughout the program; and

❑ Careful attention to student transitions between programs and schools.

WESTERN MENTAL HEALTH DAY TREATMENT
JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS | LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

KEY STRATEGIES HIGHLIGHTED:

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The Western Mental Health Day Treatment Program[1] (Western Day), a collaboration between Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) and Centerstone, a non-profit behavioral health organization, provides children with severe emotional disturbances in kindergarten through grade five with intensive therapeutic services alongside academic instruction. The program, which students generally attend for six months to a year, is meant for children in need of a more restrictive environment than a traditional public school and offers coordinated services, including academic instruction; individual, family, and group therapy; psychiatric services; and a variety of assessments. With a maximum enrollment of eight students in four classrooms, Western Day offers a small, personalized learning environment with extensive therapeutic offerings and a high level of coordination among staff, an intensive program that helps many students gain the skills they need to successfully attend a traditional public school. The program follows the JCPS academic calendar with an additional summer session.

Students are considered for the program when a child's therapist makes a referral that includes information about a student's current school placement and interventions as well as documentation of a student's difficulty functioning in various environments (school, family, self-care, self-direction, and interpersonal relations). To determine program appropriateness, Western Day staff conduct an intensive screening assessment which they present to the treatment team.

Western Day pays particular attention to student transitions into and out of the program. The program's case manager meets with home school staff when a student enters and exits the program. Upon exit from the program, a student has a profile sheet that follows them to their next school. This sheet identifies the student's strengths, areas for growth, and MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) scores. This ensures that students experience continuity of their education program and therapeutic services as they move across educational settings. Students and families are thoroughly prepared for transition from Western Day. For example, prior to exiting the program, each student attends a meeting with staff from the school they

will be attending. In addition, the program offers departing students many commemorative rituals, including an individual graduation ceremony and a gift of a watch to remind them of Western Day. After a student exits the program, their therapist and the program's case manager meet with staff in their new school and continue to have access

to all electronic education and medical records. Lori Nodler, the school's Associate Principal, notes: "Kids are coming to us and then moving on with a lot of success in their new schools. We do a very good job with appropriate placements post-Western Day."

TYPE OF PROGRAM:	Education and intensive mental health day treatment center collaboratively run by Centerstone and Jefferson County Public Schools
POPULATION SERVED:	32 K-5 students with severe emotional disturbances
BENEFITS TO DISTRICT:	▪ Students previously not functioning in a traditional public school setting are able to get the therapy and attention they need at Western Day and often return to a traditional school setting experiencing improved success. ▪ 90 percent of students who have attended Western Day show growth on MAP math, and 65 percent show growth on MAP reading.
FUNDING SOURCE/S:	▪ JCPS Per Pupil Funding ▪ Kentucky Educational Collaborative for State Agency Children (KECSAC) grant for summer program ▪ Medicaid for therapeutic services
CHALLENGES:	▪ Program dependence on Medicaid funding means there are students who could benefit from the program but are ineligible because they are not eligible for Medicaid. ▪ The school's small size, part of its success, makes it impossible to meet the full need in the district.

OPPORTUNITY MIDDLE COLLEGE

FAYETTE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS | LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

KEY STRATEGIES HIGHLIGHTED:

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Opportunity Middle College[2] (OMC) is a dual-enrollment program located on the Cooper campus of Bluegrass Community and Technical College (BCTC). The program's 100 high school juniors and seniors take a mix of high school and college courses on a college campus, getting exposure to postsecondary education, while also ensuring they complete the credits they need to graduate high school. The majority of OMC students are low-income (75%), racial minority (70%), and/or first generation to attend college (70%). Opportunity Middle College operates with an instructional staff of three teachers, two of whom are part-time, a part-time counselor, and a part-time principal.

Admission to OMC is by application with primary criteria being work ethic, maturity, attendance, and behavior as opposed to past academic performance. Juniors begin with two college courses in their first semester. As long as they maintain a ''B'' average, they may take three college courses in their second semester, four courses in the fall of senior year, and five courses in the spring of senior year (for a total of about 45 college credit hours while still in high school). All college courses count toward high school graduation requirements as well.

Opportunity Middle College staff closely monitor student performance and have the flexibility to move students into and pull students back from college courses, depending on their success. If a student is struggling in college courses, OMC moves them to high school courses for a semester before having them try college courses again. Program staff work hard to help all OMC students succeed and have only sent five students back to their home school in ten years of operation, usually for attendance or behavior issues. Frank LaBoone, OMC Principal, notes that the chance to take college courses is a big motivator for students:

> *We've talked to traditional high schools about having trouble getting students motivated to take the ACT that wonder how our students get such high scores. We have the kids who've figured out it matters, so they put forth more effort.*

Most OMC students who attend the program for two years graduate high school with about one year's worth of college credits (though OMC has had three students

graduate high school having completed an Associate's Degree). Students' BCTC credits transfer easily within Kentucky's university system.

The program's success rates are impressive. In the 2017-18 school year, 75 percent of OMC students earned grades of "A" or "B" in college level courses, and 90 percent of students earned grades of "A," "B," or "C" in college level courses. In addition, 73 seniors earned a total of 1,510 college credit hours, 12 graduating with between 25 and 40 college credits, 10 graduating with more than 40 college credits, one with 54 college credits, and one with an Associate's Degree. In addition, OMC routinely ranks high in the district on nearly every measure of school climate and student satisfaction. Staff attribute their students' success in large part to early exposure to success in college courses helping them to realize they are capable and providing continued interest in learning, as well as the program's small, personalized atmosphere. Students attribute the program's success to the ability to get a real college course experience without being seen as a high school student, an excellent school climate, caring teachers with whom they can connect one-on-one, and the program's small size and flexibility.

TYPE OF PROGRAM:	Middle college high school program located on a community college campus
POPULATION SERVED:	100 students in grades 11-12 who demonstrate motivation
BENEFITS TO DISTRICT:	- OMC improves college readiness and success, including for the large portion of its students who are first-generation college goers, low income, and/or students of color. - OMC provides interest and motivation for students who were not thriving in a traditional high school program. - OMC decreases graduates' time to postsecondary degree.
FUNDING SOURCE/S:	- FCPS Per Pupil Funding - By Kentucky law, BCTC waives two-thirds of tuition for dual-credit students. The remaining one-third of tuition and textbooks costs are covered by FCPS for students who qualify for the Free and Reduced Meals program. For others, families pay about $180 per course.
CHALLENGES:	- Staff is small and must be flexible based on changing student needs for high school classes each semester. - Previously, FCPS paid for 1/3 of college tuition cost for all students. With recent budget cuts, the district has stopped covering this cost for students who are not eligible for Free and Reduced Meals.

MCCRACKEN REGIONAL SCHOOL

MCCRACKEN COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS | PADUCAH, KENTUCKY

KEY STRATEGIES HIGHLIGHTED:

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McCracken Regional School[3] (McCracken or MRS) is a short-term residential detention facility for juvenile delinquents pre- and post-adjudication, prior to placement, run in partnership by McCracken County Public Schools (MCPS) and the Kentucky Department of Juvenile Justice. One of eight detention facilities in Kentucky, McCracken serves 18 counties in the far western portion of the state.

Since the average student stay is 20 days, teachers at McCracken work hard to make sure students enter the educational program rapidly. Upon placement in the facility, a student is assessed to determine whether he or she is on-track to graduate and is assigned classes. Because student records are housed in the Infinite Campus system, this process is quick; and within a handful of hours, new students are in a classroom. ''These students have lost instructional time already, and we can't afford to lose more,'' explains one of McCracken's teachers.

Education and corrections staff members maintain a building-wide focus on education, and the district ensures the school is staffed with highly skilled teachers. (Two of the school's three full-time teachers are National Board Certified). For students likely to be in the juvenile justice system until age 18 or beyond, the focus is on helping them to graduate, which usually means accelerating their program. For those who are on-track and may return home, there is less need for acceleration. Brian Bowland, Director of Pupil Personnel for the district explains:

> We take kids who are traditionally not engaged, who succeed in our program! Our students do not feel they are being punished by their teachers. McCracken teachers walk in and they are focused on giving instruction to those students. Students are getting their consequences elsewhere.

McCracken teachers are proud of their focus on education with students who have not always experienced success in school in the past, explains one teacher:

> Kids come back after being in other facilities and tell us they weren't academically relevant or challenging. We throw hard stuff at the kids. A lot of alternative programs

feel the need to make it super easy to accomplish stuff, and we don't and our students still accomplish things!

McCracken students say teachers treat them like their own children and will not let them get away with failure. They also appreciate that they are able to progress with their education and even take courses at McCracken not offered at their previous schools.

McCracken offers a trauma-informed program, including trauma-sensitive yoga and a life and employability skills course taught by a social

worker, critical for a group of students who exhibit very high levels of Adverse Childhood Experiences (60% have four or more; 42% have seven or more).[4]

When a student completes their high school education at McCracken, staff make it a very big deal, inviting parents to a ceremony and providing the graduate with a cap and gown. Several years ago MRS changed its name so graduates would not have that stigmatizing language of ''juvenile detention'' on their diploma. ''We don't treat these students like they are criminals. As Americans they have a right to an education. Period,'' explains a McCracken teacher.

TYPE OF PROGRAM:	Education program within a short-term residential facility for juvenile delinquents pre- and post-adjudication
POPULATION SERVED:	Young people to age 18 who are court ordered, primarily 15-17 year-olds
BENEFITS TO DISTRICT:	- MRS focuses on helping students to get back on-track to graduation and provides them with hope and skills for the future. - Credit recovery and counseling services begin the rehabilitation process and help students transition back to their home community and high school.
FUNDING SOURCE/S:	- District per pupil funds - Title I funds - KECSAC
CHALLENGES:	- Due to the short length of stay for most students, it is hard for McCracken students to maintain the educational momentum they are able to build at MRS. - Sometimes students have to be moved to another facility because of a Department of Juvenile Justice reason, and this further disrupts their education.

NEWCOMER ACADEMY

JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS | LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

KEY STRATEGIES HIGHLIGHTED:

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Newcomer Academy[5] (Newcomer) is a Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) middle and high school for recent arrivals to the United States up to age 21 who are not native English speakers. Now in its 14th year of operation, the school focuses on helping students develop English language skills quickly while progressing (or catching up) in all school subjects. Most of Newcomer Academy's students attend for one to two years, with students departing at the end of the school year so they can move to a comprehensive school at the beginning of the year. Because Newcomer accepts new students at any time, the program begins the year with about 350 students and swells to more than 700 by the end of the year. Newcomer's students hail from more than 45 different countries, and speak more than 30 languages. The program works to diversify classes with students from various backgrounds. Newcomer is a trauma-informed program that intentionally takes into consideration the background of students and seeks to build social emotional capacity and resiliency for future academic success.

New students, who are welcomed at Newcomer all year long, are quickly oriented and placed in classes. All of the program's teachers are dual-certified in English as a Second Language (ESL) and their teaching content area. Thus, students receive intensive ESL instruction and interaction in English in all of their courses. For the approximately one-fifth of Newcomer students who have experienced significant interruptions in their formal education (e.g., due to lack of access, war), the program offers extra time in core areas of literacy and numeracy. Students who arrive prior to the spring are generally ready to transition to a traditional school by the end of the school year. Those who arrive later in the year may stay a second school year if not yet prepared. Outside of the classroom Newcomer Academy offers students and their families extended supports, including mental health services; an adolescent English Learner (EL) library filled with high-interest, easy to read books; a free clothing boutique; connections to partner community-based organizations and refugee agencies; a volunteer mentor program; and parent outreach activities such as open houses and adult education. Newcomer Academy students leave the school ready to take part in comprehensive classrooms with understanding and confidence.

Accountability scores remain with the district while students are at Newcomer and for the first year following their transition to a traditional school. This helps remove any disincentive to work with a student population that typically struggles with standardized tests in English.

TYPE OF PROGRAM:	Middle and high school program for newly arrived English Learners offering full-day ESL instruction in all subjects
POPULATION SERVED:	350-700+ students ages 11 to 21 who are new to the United States and speak limited English
BENEFITS TO DISTRICT:	• Newcomer intentionally acclimates new student arrivals to the United States to the U.S school system of formal education. • By consolidating services for newly arrived middle and high school students who are English Learners, the district is able to offer much more specialized, individualized, extensive, instruction and services than it could if these students were dispersed in the 10 middle and 10 high schools with ESL programs. • Newcomer Academy offers older recent immigrant students a welcoming program ready to accept them throughout the school year and prepares them to be successful members of the district's mainstream, comprehensive middle and high school classrooms. • Having a newcomer hub frees the district's other schools from the disruption of new students entering throughout the year.
FUNDING SOURCE/S:	• JCPS Per Pupil Funding • Elementary And Secondary Education Act Title I and Title III funding • Refugee School Impact Grant (Kentucky Office of Refugees) for summer school funding • Various small grants and gifts (under $5000)
CHALLENGES:	• Many students have had some interruption in their education and need help catching up, even once they have transitioned to a traditional school. • Newcomer is not able to offer informal interactions with native English speakers. To mitigate this, school staff are purposeful in creating diverse classroom groups so students are speaking English with each other and the school organizes periodic social activities with its 20 partner schools as well as shadowing experiences for students. Although there are currently several deeper-learning activities in collaboration with schools with fluent English peers, Newcomer is developing plans to offer students and their parents more frequent and meaningful interactions with receiving schools. These efforts are growing and thriving with increased social media awareness and implementation.

STEAM ACADEMY

FAYETTE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS | LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

KEY STRATEGIES HIGHLIGHTED:

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STEAM Academy[6] (STEAM) is an innovation zone program focused on science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics founded in 2013 in an attempt to address racial achievement gaps in Fayette County Public Schools (FCPS). While the district had a lot of special programs working with the highest achieving students, prior to STEAM there was no program or school open to everyone. STEAM Academy offers a rigorous, accelerated curriculum to all students, regardless of past academic performance.

> YOU CAN STEP FOOT IN STEAM AND YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY A GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENT FROM A SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENT. WE INCLUDE THEM ALL IN OUR CLASSES. OUR CLASSES ARE COLLABORATIVE, AND OUR STUDENTS SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER IN THEIR LEARNING.
>
> —TINA STEVENSON, STEAM PRINCIPAL

The school operates on an innovative schedule, with most courses lasting one semester and five 75-minute classes per day. This allows what are traditionally full-year courses to be taught at an accelerated pace during the first semester. At the semester break, if students have demonstrated proficiency (defined as earning a grade of ''A'' or ''B''), they may go on to the next course. During the second semester, teachers target the needs of students who remain in a course to ensure they master all content before the end of the school year. STEAM staff report the high expectations of an accelerated course are enough to help students succeed at higher levels. Regardless, this innovative scheduling and acceleration practice allows for flexibility to meet the needs of a diverse group of students.

STEAM students are able to take dual-credit courses at Bluegrass Community & Technical College, where STEAM Academy has a satellite campus, and during the 2018-19 school year, 120 STEAM students completed more than 450 such courses.

As juniors most STEAM students complete internships for a half day if their schedule permits. In total, STEAM students engage in about 10,000 unpaid internship hours each school year. STEAM faculty and staff spend a lot of time prepping students to be interns, primarily through student advisory time and meetings with the school's Internship Coordinator. Twice a year students attend ''Presentation of Learning'' nights where they formally address the community about their internship experiences, skills they used to succeed, and lessons learned.

STEAM Academy students report a high sense of connectedness to their school and their learning and feel they are thriving at STEAM in a way they might not have in a larger, traditional high school, offering comments such as:

I'm doing better here than I would at a normal high school. Because of the small class size, relationships with my teachers, one-on-one help I'm comfortable asking questions.

[STEAM teachers] teach us how to work smart and do more learning.

STEAM makes us explore.

I'm doing better here than I was in a regular school, both educationally and behaviorally. Everyone makes sure to keep you on a straight line at STEAM. There's not really drama here. We all come from different neighborhoods. It's pretty fast-paced. So those not focused on school leave within the first two years. They keep you on track.

STEAM Academy is committed to equity and inclusion, and its 350 students are representative of the district as a whole (i.e., 44% students of color, 35% Free and Reduced Price Lunch, 15% English Learners or students with documented disabilities). Yet despite admitting the same students attending the district's other high schools, STEAM boasts an average daily attendance rate of 96 percent and the lowest high school discipline rate in the district by far. In addition, STEAM students consistently perform above district and state averages on the ACT and in 2017-18 9th and 10th grade STEAM students achieved the highest reading MAP assessment growth in the district.

TYPE OF PROGRAM:	Innovative, small alternative high school program organized around Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) curriculum
POPULATION SERVED:	350 students in grades 9-12 selected by lottery
BENEFITS TO DISTRICT:	▪ STEAM Academy provides an alternate vision of what high school can be. ▪ STEAM provides the district's students with an option for an accelerated high school program that does not depend on scores or past academic performance for admission. ▪ FCPS regularly uses the small and innovative STEAM Academy to pilot new practices.
FUNDING SOURCE/S:	▪ FCPS Per Pupil Funding (though reduced because STEAM Academy does not offer extracurriculars) ▪ Small grants to support first-generation students, girls and women in science, etc. ▪ State funds for dual-enrollment (for up to 2 courses)

CHALLENGES:	▪ Transportation poses a huge challenge for STEAM Academy, which serves students from all six of the district's high schools.
	▪ The school's small size means they have to get creative with a small staff to meet KDE graduation requirements. This leaves little room for offering courses outside of the basic requirements. STEAM teachers are creative within these required courses, using project-based learning and incorporating arts content in most courses.

CONSIDERATIONS

The above descriptions demonstrate a wide range of alternative programming in practice across Kentucky and provide examples of the many strategies programs and schools deploy to meet the varied needs of students. We encourage you to learn more about these programs and schools and to consider how your district, school, or classroom can incorporate new strategies to strengthen your support for students through alternative programming.

Education leaders and practitioners are encouraged to consider how they might implement some of the practices related to each of the seven broad strategies highlighted in this brief. Many are no- or low-cost and can be tried on a small-scale to begin. All are worthy of consideration as examples of promising and effective practice across the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

STRATEGY 1: HAVING A VISION OF STUDENT SUCCESS AND DOING WHATEVER IS NECESSARY TO REACH IT

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

❑ Do you believe all students, even those who have struggled significantly in traditional settings, have the ability to meet high expectations and succeed? If so, 1) how could you communicate that more effectively to school/district staff and 2) how is this reflected in school/district policy and programming?

❑ What could your school/district do to ensure students who require alternative programming lose as little classroom time as possible when transitioning between programs?

❑ In which areas would you like your school/district to think outside the box and envision new ways of operating to facilitate all students' success?

FOR EDUCATORS:

❑ Do you believe all students, even those who have struggled significantly in traditional settings, have the ability to meet high expectations and succeed? If so, how is this reflected in your classroom?

❑ What could you do to help students who transition to alternative programming lose as little classroom time as possible in the process?

❑ How could you think outside the box and envision new ways of teaching to facilitate the success of all students?

STRATEGY 2: WILLINGNESS TO BE FLEXIBLE TO MEET STUDENTS' NEEDS

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

❏ Do or could you offer students programs/schools that are flexible with time (e.g., open-entry and exit, extending year programming, etc.)?

❏ Does or could your school/district offer students ways to obtain course credit by demonstrating competency rather than time-in-seat?

❏ Does or could your school/district accommodate students who require a small, personalized learning environment?

❏ Does or could your school/district offer students who have fallen behind ways to recover credits or otherwise "catch up" and get back on-track to graduation?

❏ Does or could your school/district offer blended (computer-based) learning opportunities?

FOR EDUCATORS:

❏ How could you better support students who enter your classroom in the middle of the school year?

❏ Are there ways for your students to complete course material at their own pace?

❏ How could you better assist students who fall behind to catch up with their peers?

❏ Are there blended (computer-based) learning opportunities you could offer to help provide a more flexible learning environment for your students?

STRATEGY 3: ENCOURAGING STAFF COLLABORATION

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

❏ How could you encourage greater collaboration among classroom teachers and those providing other services (e.g., mental health) to provide students with a more coherent and consistent education program?

❏ How could you encourage greater collaboration between alternative programs/schools and students' home schools to smooth the transition between programming?

FOR EDUCATORS:

❏ How could you increase your collaboration with other teachers and support staff in your building to provide your students with the most coherent and consistent educational experience possible?

❏ How could you increase your collaboration with staff from other schools/programs who also work with your students?

STRATEGY 4: CONSOLIDATING SERVICES TO IMPROVE QUALITY

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

❑ Should your school/district consider consolidating specialized services (e.g., mental health or EL services) in one location?

❑ How does or could your school/district meet the needs of students who are significantly behind in literacy or numeracy skills? Is there augmented instruction you could provide for these students to help them get back-on-track to graduation?

FOR EDUCATORS:

❑ Are you able to rely on specialized programs or staff who can help meet the needs of your students (e.g., mental health, EL services) that you are not particularly prepared to meet?

❑ How can you augment literacy and numeracy instruction for students who are significantly behind because they have experienced significant disruptions in their formal education or otherwise fallen off track?

STRATEGY 5: EXPOSING STUDENTS TO COLLEGE AND CAREER

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

❑ How could your school/district increase opportunities for dual-enrollment? Does or could your school/district have high school programs co-located on a college campus?

❑ How could your school/district increase students' opportunity for career exploration?

FOR EDUCATORS:

❑ How could you increase the college and college-like educational experiences you offer to your students?

❑ How could you increase career exploration activities with your students?

❑ How could you incorporate information about careers into your curriculum?

STRATEGY 6: REMOVING DISINCENTIVES TO WORKING WITH STRUGGLING STUDENTS

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

❑ What disincentives to working with struggling or at-risk students (e.g., accountability measures, funding issues) exist in your school/district? What could you do to reduce or eliminate these disincentives?

❑ Are there ways your school/district could incentivize working with this student population?

FOR EDUCATORS:

❑ Are there ways you could advocate for your school/program to incentivize teachers working with struggling students?

STRATEGY 7: CREATING A SUPPORTIVE, STRUCTURED ENVIRONMENT FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

❏ How could your school/district increase on-site support services (e.g., mental health counseling, healthcare, social services) offered to students and their families?

❏ Are there ways your school/district could ensure straight-forward rules and codes of conduct across classrooms/schools?

❏ How could your school/district increase staff knowledge and use of trauma-informed practices?

❏ How could your school/district improve the smooth transition of students between programs and schools?

FOR EDUCATORS:

❏ How could you increase your knowledge of available on-site services to improve wrap-around supports for your students and their families?

❏ Do you have straight-forward rules and codes of conduct in your classroom that are consistent with expectations in your school/program? Could you work to increase student understanding of these expectations to improve outcomes for your students?

❏ How could you increase your knowledge and use of trauma-informed practices in your classroom?

❏ How could you smooth transitions for your students when they move between programs and schools?

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ENDNOTES

1   Information for this case example obtained from telephone interview with Nodler, Lori. (2018, September 5) and site visit to Western Mental Health Day Treatment. (2018, October 1).

2   Information for this case example obtained from telephone interview with LaBoone, Frank. (2018, August 31) and site visit to Opportunity Middle College. (2018, October 2).

3   Information for this case example obtained from telephone interview with Bowland, Brian. (2018, September 4) and site visit to McCracken Regional School. (2018, October 4).

4   Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is a term used to describe all types of abuse, neglect, and other traumatic experiences occurring to young people before age 18. ACEs have been linked to chronic health conditions, low life potential, early death, and risky health behaviors. As the number of ACEs goes up, the risk of these adverse outcomes increases. Positive experiences can help protect against the negative outcomes of ACEs (Centers for Disease Control. About ACEs.) The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers helpful ACEs prevention tools and resources at: https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/resources.html

5   Information for this case example obtained from telephone interview with Snow, Gwen. (2018, October 31) and site visit to Newcomer Academy. (2018, October 1).

6   Information for this case example obtained from telephone interview with Stevenson, Tina and Ridd, Eric. (2018, September 6) and site visit to STEAM Academy. (2018, November 13).

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Nancy Martin draws on more than 20 years of experience in education and workforce development to help organizations document, perfect, and share their efforts to improve young people's lives. Nancy's specialties include building organizational and system capacity, facilitating learning across communities and systems for youth program quality improvement, documenting alternative pathways to high school graduation and postsecondary success, and conducting insightful and sensitive site visits. Previously, Nancy was Director of Capacity Building Initiatives at the National Youth Employment Coalition, where she oversaw NYEC's education and PEPNet quality standard initiatives to expand high-quality education and employment options for youth.