

## Kentucky Department of Education Updates

### Kentucky Board of Education

December 2, 2020

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### *Commissioner's Report* *Commissioner of Education Jason E. Glass, Ed.D.*

Dear Kentucky Board of Education members:

As you know, Gov. Andy Beshear [suspended all in-person instruction in Kentucky schools](#) last month. A decision like this is not easy and was made after many tough conversations about the safety of our students, teachers and school staff.

The announcement came following another record-breaking week of COVID-19 cases. The positivity rate announced by the governor earlier this week stood at more than 9%.

I want to thank our schools and districts for the great job they have done so far managing COVID-19 in their buildings by following the [Healthy at School guidance](#). But even with the good work they have done, the rapidly increasing virus levels in our communities are making normal school operations impossible, and we must consider the escalating risks. When you look at the [COVID incidence rate map](#), nearly the entire state is in the red.

While the executive order suspends in-person instruction, it still allows schools to provide in-person targeted services to small groups. I encourage your schools to think about how to use this ability to reach your students.

Elementary schools (grades K-5) are allowed to reopen for in-person instruction beginning Dec. 7, as long as the school is not in a red zone county and follows all the safety expectations found in the [Healthy at School guidance document](#). Middle and high schools (grades 6-12) will transition to non-traditional instruction and will not resume in-person learning before Jan. 4. Of course, we should remember that while we hope that all our schools will be able to return to in-person instruction in January, that is dependent upon our infection numbers heading in the right direction. Right now, we're not heading that way, and the holidays will probably only increase our infection rates.

COVID-19 is causing us to do some complex calculations on a regular basis about when the infection rate is too high to risk exposing our students, teachers and staff. I understand the disruption that these constant stops and starts create, but all of these decisions are done with the intent of protecting all of the Commonwealth's residents.

With a vaccine on the horizon, it is my hope that we will be able to go back to in-person instruction in the foreseeable future. Until that time, it is critical that we continue stressing the importance of social distancing and wearing a mask to protect our families, friends and community members. If we want to get our students back in school, we must practice what we preach.

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Stay safe, stay thankful and stay optimistic. I am confident that better days are ahead for all of us and the students and families we serve. I hope your holiday season is a happy one.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jason E. Glass".

Jason E. Glass, Ed.D.  
Commissioner of Education

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### **KDE Welcomes New Staff**

New staff who joined KDE since the board's October regular meeting are listed below by office:

#### *Office of the Commissioner:*

11/1/20: Dr. Thomas Woods-Tucker, Commissioner's Office

#### *Office of Career and Technical Education:*

11/1/20: Lisa Oakes, OCTE/Student Transition and Career Readiness/Student Leadership

#### *Office of Continuous Improvement and Support:*

10/16/2020: Regina Dawson, OCIS/Student Success

10/16/2020: Laura Heslop, OCIS/School and Program Improvement

11/16/2020: Sarah McIntosh, OCIS/Student Success/Student Engagement and Support

#### *Office of Education Technology:*

10/16/2020: Diane Nguyen, OET/School Technology Services

10/16/2020: Kristie Graham, OET/School Technology Planning and Project Management

10/16/2020: Jacob Greer, OET/School Technology Services

11/16/2020: Hillary Morton, OET/School Data Services

#### *Office of Special Education and Early Learning:*

10/16/2020: David Wickersham, Office of Special Education and Early Learning

### **Communications-Related Board Survey Results**

Thank you for providing feedback on the communication from the Commissioner of Education with the board. Survey results indicated the following:

- Roughly 73% of members are extremely satisfied with the communication level between the Commissioner and the board, and 27% are very satisfied with the level.
- 100% of board members indicated the amount of communication they receive is just right.
- 90% of members indicated they preferred email as the main communication method, and 10% indicated phone calls were preferred.
- Highlights of ways the Commissioner can improve his communication with the board included:
  - To be as proactive as possible;
  - To continue the same excellent communication skills shown currently;



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- To provide more information during the process and not at the end;
- To address complex issues with the board and promote a proactive stance on policymaking rather than allowing the board to take a reactive, backseat approach that leads to a board rubber-stamping decisions that already have been made; and
- To take the time to know the board members individually so we can all form a relationship that will improve Kentucky schools and education, and so we know how we are going to tackle issues.

This information will be used as a baseline level of data to inform future communication strategies and methods. Thank you again for your valuable feedback, and I look forward to your continued feedback in the future.

### **Statewide Equity and Inclusion Scan**

In Dr. Thomas Woods-Tucker's presentation on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion during the Nov. 10 Superintendents' Webcast, he discussed a Statewide Equity and Inclusion Scan and asked each superintendent to complete a Google Form. This scan serves as the beginning of our work, and the feedback will help the department better understand how to support schools and districts in our efforts. As a follow up, Woods-Tucker plans to share and discuss results from the Google Form with superintendents during his presentation at the KASS Conference on Dec. 8. On Dec. 10, Woods-Tucker will engage in a conversation on race, equity and inclusion with our Commissioner's Teacher Advisory Council. Additionally, the department is finalizing dates with Dr. Roger Cleveland to continue KDE's professional development series to help address racial equity and racial justice in all schools in the Commonwealth.

### **Kentucky School for the Blind and Kentucky School for the Deaf Updates**

The Kentucky School for the Blind (KSB) and the Kentucky School for the Deaf (KSD) are continuing to provide virtual instruction to students across the Commonwealth. While both schools have developed reopening plans, due to the increasing COVID-19 cases the state schools continue to remain closed with only essential personnel on campus. Staff at both schools continue to review individual student-level data to determine additional supports needed for some students.

Based on these determinations, Admissions and Release Committee (ARC) meetings have been and continue to be convened. The ARCs determined some students need face-to-face instruction in addition to virtual instruction. Based on the Kentucky Department for Public Health's (KDPH) recommendation, the two state schools are providing this small group instruction to students within the students' counties of residence. For those students living in Jefferson (KSB) and Boyle (KSD) counties, the small group services may occur at the school. For students living in



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other counties, the schools' staff are collaborating with students' local school districts to provide a location for small group instruction.

The schools are following the Kentucky Department of Education's [Guidance on Safety Expectations and Best Practices for Kentucky Schools \(K-12\)](#), the guidance for [Exceptional Learners and Preschool Students](#), and the [Welcoming Students for Orientation and Targeted Services](#) guidance when providing this small group instruction.

### Kentucky School for the Blind

KSB staff delivered non-traditional instruction (NTI) materials to 66 students last week. These materials are used by students during virtual instruction and include manipulatives, braille and adaptive materials. Staff are continuing to meet in professional learning communities (PLCs) weekly and discuss ideas for continually improving the virtual instruction provided to students. Short Course teachers are continuing to produce videos related to the Expanded Core Curriculum. These videos can be accessed on the KSB YouTube channel.

Staff training has continued during the pandemic, although it has shifted to a virtual model. On Nov. 11, staff participated in the Strengthening Virtual Instruction for Struggling Learners training provided by the Greater Louisville Education Cooperative (GLEC).

The school principal, teachers of students with moderate to severe disabilities, outreach staff and short course staff attend the Texas School for the Blind's virtual coffee hours. These coffee hours focus on improving virtual instruction for students with visual impairments and complex needs.

The KSB principal participated in a national webinar on Nov. 12 on "Charting a Path Forward in Education" in collaboration with former U.S. Secretaries of Education Arne Duncan and Margaret Spellings. All staff recently participated in training regarding the new Title IX policies and procedures approved by the KBE at its October meeting.





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*Pictured above is KSB teacher Melissa Evers, instructing a kindergarten student on the use of the Mountbatten Brailler. The Mountbatten Brailler is an electronic braille writer with audio. It is an excellent learning tool for young students during the beginning stages of learning braille.*

#### Kentucky School for the Deaf

Staff at the KSD continue to participate in virtual training sessions. Teachers have completed a third professional development opportunity provided by Kristin DiPerri and Todd Czubek (Bilingual Grammar Curriculum Training) focused on strengthening American Sign Language (ASL) skills and vocabulary before moving to English. The Statewide Educational Resource Center on Deafness offered this training opportunity to teachers of the Deaf across the state.

Teachers also participated in training related to Visible Learning Feedback by John Hattie. All staff recently participated in training regarding the new Title IX policies and procedures approved by the KBE at its October meeting.

Teachers are utilizing multiple platforms to support students as part of virtual teaching and learning, focusing on continuous improvement through a plus-delta approach. Teachers complete plus-deltas daily through an online roll call. Plus-deltas are reviewed and analyzed frequently to ensure the KSD is meeting the individualized needs of all students. The KSD principal is collaborating with school staff and KDE staff to develop a data collection system that will capture daily formative assessments across all grade levels. These data will be used to measure student growth across content standards.

The KSD continues to offer several virtual supports to students and families. The school is providing a parent support group for elementary families, and staff are considering scaling this up to middle and high school parents as well.

With nine new students enrolling at the KSD since August, staff are developing a new student virtual orientation for these students' families. The KSD also is offering virtual tutoring sessions for families to learn ASL. This is the first time virtual ASL instruction has been offered to families. Based on very positive feedback, the KSD will continue to offer this support for families through the 2020-2021 school year.

KSD high school teachers hosted a virtual Halloween party for students. Student Life is providing homework, storytelling and technology support for students and families during the evening. The mental health team is focused on supporting student and staff well-being through ongoing surveys of staff needs and group and individual social-emotional learning (SEL) instruction and counseling for students.

In addition, Doug Brewer transitioned into a new role as the Student Life Director. Brewer is a graduate of Gallaudet University and McDaniel College with a master's degree in Deaf

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Education. In other news, beautification projects are continuing across campus with a current focus on painting classrooms and the library. Capital projects also are continuing across campus. The lighting project is complete, providing increased lighting across campus for nighttime safety along with the outside alarm system to alert students and staff.

### **Updates on Kentucky Tech District of Area Technology Centers**

Effective Nov. 23, Area Technology Centers (ATCs) are adhering to virtual instruction for students through Jan. 4, with targeted small groups available in accordance with the COVID-19 Considerations for Reopening Schools guidance series. Information has been shared with ATCs and local feeder districts. ATCs will continue to monitor the Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH) metrics dashboard on a weekly basis and the required self-reported data entry by each school.