



Commissioner's Report
Interim Commissioner Kevin C. Brown

Dear Kentucky Board of Education members,

It should have come as no surprise to any of us when Gov. Andy Beshear asked Kentucky's school superintendents on Thursday to keep schools across the state closed for another two weeks. It's clear that we have a ways to go before the COVID-19 emergency is behind us and that the need for social distancing remains urgent in the fight to limit the spread of the coronavirus.

The governor's announcement was in part a response to the president's decision to extend federal social distancing guidelines through April 30, and in part an acknowledgement that the best estimates available from our public health officials about the spread of the virus tell us that Kentucky simply won't be ready for schools to reopen on April 20.

Both the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and all of Kentucky's schools already were preparing for this. Two weeks ago, I advised superintendents to ask educators to prepare enough materials to extend their use of the Non-Traditional Instruction (NTI) Program for six weeks, which would take most districts through May 1.

Schools and districts have done a tremendous job of changing or adapting their methods of operation in a very short time to ensure that educational services continue during this unprecedented event. We have seen one example after another of creativity, collaboration and dedication by those who are devoted to serving our students and all Kentuckians should be extremely proud of the work being done to serve the approximately 650,000 students in our public schools.

Our focus at the KDE continues to be three-fold – educate, feed and support.

- Educate – We are making sure students continue to receive a meaningful education through the NTI Program.
- Feed – We are assisting districts in making sure students have access to breakfast and lunch while school buildings are closed.
- Support – We are working daily with schools and districts to help them get the information and resources they need to make sure that no students, educators, schools or districts are hurt by the closure of school buildings.

As I mentioned, we recently created the Education Continuation Task Force, a group that will serve as a guiding coalition to help provide perspective on solutions to facilitate the delivery of services to Kentucky students during the current period of school closure. The group continues to meet virtually at least once a week to ensure Kentucky's school districts have knowledge of and

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access to all available resources, both educational and otherwise, while schools are closed. Two of their top concerns are how do we make sure students who were on track to graduate, can graduate, and what does our grading system look like for NTI work.

Rather than include all COVID-19 related issues in this report, I wanted to make you aware of the new KDE COVID-19 launch webpage at <https://education.ky.gov/comm/Pages/COVID-19-Updates.aspx>. In addition, we will devote a large portion of today's meeting to COVID-19 related updates from each KDE program area.

Please know that as we work through these challenges, we will not be making any suggestions or recommendations in a vacuum. We already are asking our students, superintendents and teachers for their ideas about what they deem to be the best solutions. Just like the governor mentions on his nightly COVID-19 updates, we will get through this together. We are #TeamKentucky.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kevin C. Brown".

Kevin C. Brown



Kentucky K-12 Education Technology

Kentucky K-12 education technology really has shined to historic levels over the past six weeks. The weeks prior to March 11, KDE's Office of Assessment and Accountability (OAA) and Office of Education Technology (OET) led an effort where schools conducted and completed the largest and most successful implementation of on-line summative testing (K-PREP) in Kentucky's K-12 history, with close to 800,000 successful on-line tests taken by near to 400,000 students with nearly zero issues.

To say the life of those involved with education in the KDE and our 172 school districts has been tremendously busy nearly every waking moment since March 11 would be an understatement. The efforts of all our OET staff and chief information officers/edtech leaders are to be commended for helping both our KDE staff and all 172 school districts with a fast, high quality transition to telecommuting, virtual meetings, distance digital learning and virtual cloud operations services. However, had we not been putting the right things in place for the past 25 years, there would have been no way that we could have pivoted to nearly 100% virtual participation across the entire KDE and all 172 school districts over the past 25 days.

Kentucky is "the" pioneer and "the" national leader in most aspects of education technology so we are in a much better position and prepared for telecommuting, virtual operations, virtual resources, virtual meetings and cloud based services than the other 49 states since we have doing all of these things for over a decade. All 172 of our school districts already are connected by high speed, high quality, reliable fibered internet service and all schools already have dense Wi-Fi within each school building. Kentucky was the first state to have all of this in place for every school district throughout a state. All of this uniquely positioned KDE staff and our school districts to quickly transition and continue to provide services and instruction in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are far from perfect and continue to learn and make improvements daily, but we are very proud of how our staff have transitioned to a full telecommute environment and embraced the use of these virtual tools. We also fully appreciate the acceptance and willingness of our board members to incorporate remote tools/virtual meetings.

The OET continues to work very closely and well with KDE's Office of Continuous Improvement & Support (OCIS) and Office of Teaching and Learning (OTL) on non-traditional instructional (NTI), and distance digital teaching and learning. Keep in mind, Kentucky has had NTI days for over a decade, so a high percentage of our districts already have been doing this for a long time for bad weather days and flu days. Kentucky's students who can drive or ride with their parents to a school's campus can access the school's internet for school-related work at an exterior location on the campus. We are educating all the new NTI school districts, as fast as we can, about ways they can quickly and easily extend internet access for their students on campus to locations on the school campus not within a school building since it is so easy, quick and inexpensive to do. As we all work through these challenging times, the KDE remains committed



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to continued support of education technology to help ensure access to high-quality education opportunities.

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

Both the Kentucky School for the Blind (KSB) and Kentucky School for the Deaf (KSD) submitted and were granted requests to use NTI days due to the COVID-19 school closures. Neither school ever considered implementing NTI days due to the residential nature of the schools and limited number of days the schools closed for weather issues during a “normal” school year. Teachers, staff and administrators accepted the challenge and developed materials for students within 36 hours of notification of school closure. Staff considered the individual needs of each student. If large print was called for in the student’s Individual Education Program (IEP), large print was used for any printed material sent home. Assistive technology needed for student learning was cataloged and sent home with the student. All this took place before students left school on Friday, March 13, 2020.

Teachers began NTI instruction on Monday, March 16, 2020, and have continued to provide personal contact with students on a daily basis. Both schools are tracking student contact through a Google Sheet. Both schools also are tracking modifications needed to support student learning and related services are being offered as possible. Both schools are aware of the potential for compensatory education upon return to a traditional school setting. Each student’s Admissions and Release Committee (ARC) will review the services provided and determine if compensatory education is needed and how much will be expected.

Teachers are using a variety of platforms to interact with students. Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, Facebook and video phones are a few examples. The KSD is working to ensure the native language of American Sign Language (ASL) is being used with all Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH) students.

Not all students have access to internet service so both schools are being creative in the way instruction is delivered to students. After sending students home, some additional forms of technology, traditional and assistive, were identified by teachers as necessary to support individual students. Those technologies have been delivered to the appropriate students.

Both schools also collaborated with local districts to ensure their students are able to participate in all food service offerings within the school district. Additional backpack program students are being supported by the schools with the help of donations from the schools’ charitable foundations and individual donations by staff.

Teaching staff from the KSB took braille embossers home to continue providing braille material to students. Both KSB and KSD teachers are utilizing Google Hangouts to conduct “almost normal” looking classes particularly at the high school level. Virtual ARCs are continuing in both schools to ensure timelines are met if at all possible.



Parent feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

Kentucky Tech District of Area Technology Centers Updates

All 53 of the KY Tech Area Technology Centers (ATCs) currently are participating in NTI days under the 2020 ATC Emergency NTI Plan. The plan directs state-operated ATCs to participate in NTI days aligned to their sending school district(s). The 2020 ATC Emergency NTI Plan sets forth minimum expectations, which is intended to allow flexibility for ATCs to support sending district NTI plans to the greatest degree possible.

The KY Tech 50/50 committee (an advisory committee comprised of 50% ATC principals and 50% ATC teachers) will meet Thursday April 2 to discuss modifications to the 2019-2020 Certified Evaluation Plan (CEP). Discussion and action items will address alternatives to “in-person” summative evaluation meetings, as well as additional items that may be used as evidence due to the COVID-19 emergency. The 2020-2021 CEP also will be discussed and approved during the meeting.

On a positive note, ATCs have been hard at work helping provide personal protective equipment (PPE) to the Kentucky Department of Health and their local health care providers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus far, the ATCs have donated the following:

- 6,337 N95 Masks
- 60 N95 Cartridges
- 619 Face Shields
- 1,593 Boxes of 100 Exam Gloves
- 1,976 Gowns
- 954 Boxes of Surgical Masks

Additional donations include items such as shoe and hair covers, safety glasses, rubbing alcohol, disinfecting wipes, universal precaution kits (gown, gloves, mask, face shield, shoe covers and hat), and temperature probe covers. We are grateful to the ATCs for their commitment to the Commonwealth during this time of crisis and their demonstration of the #TeamKentucky spirit.