



KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL SUMMARY

APRIL 14, 2020

ATTENDANCE:

Madelyn Blankenship, Sarah Davenport, Reece Dicken, Rohin Dutt, Joshua Griffith, CJ Johnson, Solyana Mesfin, Madison Ortega, Katelynn Perkins, Anastasia Pohlgeers, Lauren Shackelford, Samuel Smith, Caleb Spencer, Parker Stobaugh, Lauren Witt, Luke Wyatt

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Nicole Arnett, Mi'Keyla Crumble, Renuka Gentela, Laila Hayes, Elizabeth Holcomb, Ying Lin

SUMMARY:

Agenda Item: Non-Traditional Instruction

Presenter: David Cook

Summary of Discussion and Feedback:

Students outlined their experience with non-traditional instruction (NTI). Although students recognized all teachers are not “tech savvy,” most said teachers were trying their best during this challenging time. Highlights included:

- Teachers are sending individual messages or check-ins to students whether pertaining to assignments or more casual items of interest, like sports articles or cartoons.
- There needs to be an emphasis on the importance of creating a slower routine for students where there is three to four hours of NTI work, time to go outside, an opportunity to visit with family and space to navigate the new online process.
- Student transition should be focused on more intently, including high school seniors heading to college and next school year’s incoming freshmen.

Cook reassured the students that it’s not just their district that is in the learning process with this level of NTI. NTI was not designed to replace this many school days. According to statute, districts were able to apply for 10 days of NTI. However, when Gov. Andy Beshear signed SB 177 into law on March 24, districts were granted the authority to use as many NTI days as necessary during the COVID-19 crisis.

Students mentioned positive approaches to learning they have seen, including:

- A principal posting a cap and gown countdown highlighting a different graduating student each day.
- School webpages highlighting students and asking them to submit their future plans, a favorite memory, senior pictures, etc.
- Virtual spirit days
- Yard signs made for seniors

Follow-up Required: None required

Agenda Item: Graduation and End of Year Activities

Presenter: Amanda Ellis

Summary of Discussion and Feedback:

Amanda Ellis, associate commissioner from KDE's Office of Teaching and Learning, prepared a survey for the council members that asked their opinion on the importance of graduation and how they think graduation ceremonies should be handled for the Class of 2020. Graduation ceremonies have been called into doubt due to schools being closed to in-person classes since March 16.

Highlights included:

- Nine of the students felt that having a delayed graduation would be their choice. Three mentioned supporting a virtual graduation and one listed a drive-thru event.
- Interim Commissioner Kevin C. Brown explained to the students that the type of graduation ceremony a school district holds is decided upon by the district. He emphasized that KDE is a "sounding board" to help districts explore other ideas in this challenging situation.
- Brown said he wanted to make sure important milestones for students were honored, but this may need to be done in a non-traditional way.

The survey asked the students to rank the importance of having a graduation ceremony on a scale of 1-5 – with 5 being the most important. Of the 13 council members, the average answer was 4.23, meaning the students felt that having a ceremony is important.

Follow-up Required: Students will be given the responses to the survey. The responses from this survey will be shared during the April 20 Education Continuation Task Force meeting and will be discussed with superintendents during KDE's Special Superintendents' Webcast series

Agenda Item: Social/Emotional Well-Being Check In

Presenter: Damien Sweeney

Summary of Discussion:

The mental health of Kentucky's students is of the utmost importance – especially during this time of additional stresses. Damien Sweeney, program coordinator for comprehensive school counseling in the Office of Teaching and Learning, began his presentation to the council by performing a mental health check-in with each of its members. Sweeney said that the word “depression” has been thrown around quite a bit during this period of school closure. He explained the difference between sadness and depression by describing sadness as being inconsistent, something we all feel but work through, and depression as being consistent and constant.

According to Sweeney, signs of depression may include:

- Physical complaints
- Social withdrawal
- Academic decline
- Substance abuse
- Self-criticism
- Aggression or irritability

Feedback:

Sweeney concluded his presentation by asking the council members to reach out to students in their schools who may have tough situations at home, because those situations could be amplified now. He asked students to provide him with ideas about campaigns they could start to show how students can help each other.

Students mentioned that they are concerned about fellow students who do not have internet access and cannot connect with their friends; those who live in abusive homes or in households feeling financial strain, and others who may not have a great home life and who may be experiencing trauma.

Follow-up Required: Students will be updated in regard to any materials distributed regarding student social/emotional health

Agenda Item: Student Voice – How Can You Use Your Student Voice to Elevate Others

Presenter: Emmy Sippy and Zoe Jenkins, Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence Student Voice Team

Summary of Discussion:

The presenters shared examples of how they have used their voices to elevate others. The mission of the student voice team is to amplify and elevate the voices of students not being heard and to focus on equity in regard to the students who are historically less heard and most marginalized.

The team is working with communities to create virtual mental health cafes where students may bring up issues and talk through them with their peers. They are providing resources to stay connected with friends in a way that makes the current quarantine environment a little more fun.

Both speakers emphasized that it is essential to reach out to students inside and outside of “friend circles” to connect with those who aren’t being heard from or perhaps do not have an opportunity to communicate.

Feedback:

Follow-up Required: None required