



**Kentucky Department of Education  
Commissioner's Student Advisory Council  
Summary  
April 24, 2024**

**Present (26 members present):** Ava Benson, Owen Borden, Hunter Combs, Joud Dahleh, Justin Dunning, Raima Dutt, Manas Garla, Nicholas Hazelett, Honette Irakiza, Trey Jackson, Peter Jefferson, Vijaykumar Karthikeyan, Sophia Langford, Danica Love, Gabriella MacAdams, Anopa Musoni, Tanvi Rakesh, Daniel Ratley, Jocelyn Reddick, Sophia Staples, Austin Vitato, Carley Watts, Bentley White, Aliete Yanes Medina, India Young and Joshua Zyzak

**Absent (9 members absent):** Reese Blakeman, Cameron Breier, Owen Cody, Shraman Kar, Constance Martin, R.J. Osborne, Amy Roblero-Perez, Ian Swenson and Sarah Umbarger

**Summary:**

**Agenda Item:** Welcome

**Presenter:** Robin Fields Kinney, Interim Commissioner of Education  
Kentucky Department of Education

**Summary of Discussion:** Kinney welcomed members to the in-person meeting. She said that this is an exciting time for graduating seniors. She invited students to share, during roll call, where they think they will be 10 years from now.

**Feedback:** None.

**Agenda Item:** Roll Call and Approve Summary from Last Meeting

**Presenter:** GlyptusAnn Grider Jones, Ph.D., CSAC Liaison  
Kentucky Department of Education

**Summary of Discussion:** Jones called roll. The [summary notes from the March 26, 2024, Commissioner's Student Advisory Council meeting](#) were approved. Motion made by Nicholas Hazelett, a senior at Paintsville High School (Paintsville Independent), and seconded by Aliete Yanes Medina, a sophomore at Fern Creek High School (Jefferson County).

**Feedback:** Students shared their post-graduation plans as roll was called.

**Agenda Item:** Mindful Minute Activity

**Presenter:** Michelle Sircy, Ed.D., Program Coordinator  
Comprehensive School Counseling  
Office of Teaching and Learning  
Kentucky Department of Education

**Summary of Discussion:** Sircy opened with a “conversation ball” activity. Next, she invited students to spend a few minutes journaling and responding to four questions: (1) What is one thing you have learned from your advisory experience? (2) What is something you are grateful for this school year? (3) What is something you look forward to in the coming year? (4) What advice would you give the upcoming 2024-2025 Commissioner’s Student Advisory group?

**Feedback:** Students shared their responses to several questions, particularly advice they would share with next year’s council members.

“I would say to not be scared to voice your opinion, because I think when you’re coming into a new environment you get really self-conscious...Recognizing your value and that you were chosen on this council for a reason, and that this is a safe space that we’re actively trying to create change,” said Raima Dutt, a senior at duPont Manual High School and chair of the Commissioner’s Student Advisory Council.

“Speak your truth, because a lot of our schools are not the same,” said Justin Dunning, a senior at Lyons County High School. “Don’t be afraid to talk about the harder topics and say this is what’s going good and this is what’s going bad. Continue to speak your truth.”

**Agenda Item:** Legislative Update

**Presenter:** Brian Perry, Director of Government Relations  
Kentucky Department of Education

**Summary of Discussion:** Perry discussed several bills that were enacted during the recent state legislative session, including [House Bill \(HB\) 2 \(2024\)](#), an act proposing to create a new section of the Constitution of Kentucky relating to education funding; [Senate Bill \(SB\) 2 \(2024\)](#), an act related to student safety; and [HB 142](#), an act relating to products that contain nicotine.

He also noted that [HB 162](#), an act relating to mathematics education and making an appropriation therefor, passed. “It was very exciting to see it get across the finish line in its first year...and to pick up a very sizeable appropriation,” Perry said.

Perry noted that KDE tracked 251 education-related bills during the recent 60-day legislation session.

**Feedback:** Students asked questions about HB 2 and [SB 167](#), an act relating to public school students’ communication skills.

**Agenda Item:** Discussion on Substance Use and Vaping in Schools

**Presenters:**

Judi Vanderhaar, Ph.D.

Florence Chang, Ph.D.

Jessica Napier

Division of Student Success

Office of Continuous Improvement and Success

Kentucky Department of Education

**Summary of Discussion:** [Vanderhaar, Chang and Napier told members that use of substances and vaping within schools has increased significantly.](#) “The biggest increases in behavior incidents related to substance use are with the younger students, so that forecasts what is coming in the later grades. Previously, we may have thought this was a secondary school issue, but this data tells us we will need to increase our guidance and supports for all ages,” said Chang.

Vanderhaar, Chang and Napier discussed approaches for districts and schools to consider in addressing substance use, including prevention efforts such as using current campaign resources to raise awareness and to create supportive spaces and peer support circles for youth to safely and openly discuss substance pressures/usage. They also discussed supportive responses and ways for districts and schools to update policies.

The presenters asked council members for their input on the causes of vaping and substance use by youth; what members think can be done in districts and schools to address the problem; and what members thought about approaches proposed during the presentation.

**Feedback:** Sophia Langford, a sophomore at J. Graham Brown School (Jefferson County), said student support is an important part of preventing substance use among students. “Sometimes students feel like they’re backed into a corner, and the only way left to go is down. So, I feel like we need to be encouraging students to realize that there is a way forward that does not have to result in substance abuse,” said Langford.

“First of all, we need to focus on things that aren’t just going to stop kids from vaping at school specifically – stopping them vaping at all is the goal,” said Sophia Staples, a junior at Paul Laurence Dunbar High School (Fayette County). “Secondly, we need to focus on measures that aren’t going to punish the rest of the student body for the actions of a loud minority.”

**Agenda Item:** Presentation of the Council’s Student Voice Project

**Presenters:** Members of the Commissioner’s Student Advisory Council

**Summary of Discussion:** Members presented the council’s findings from a year-long exploration on the topic of student voice. Dutt said that student voices play an important

role in student advocacy and create a space for dialogue between students and stakeholders.

“Our council leaders introduced this idea of student voice, and we opened up the floor to all of our members to express their thoughts on it. What we saw was that there was an overwhelming amount of support for exploring this idea and wanting to see more student voice,” Dutt said.

The council’s project was based on five questions the council created to ask educational stakeholders:

- What is your definition of student voice?
- Why is student voice important in education?
- What current initiatives are underway to increase student voice?
- How do you feel that meaningful student voice could be implicated in education?
- What, if anything, holds you back from inputting student voice into decisions in your school/community?

“Student voice is all about giving students a say in the decisions that affect their lives. It means empowering students to share their ideas, perspectives and concerns,” said India Young, a junior at Craft Academy/Marion County High School.

“During our project, we’ve seen the power of student voice in action. We’ve heard from students, staff and administrators and their viewpoints, so although our project is coming to an end, this is just the beginning of the conversation,” said Young.

**Feedback:** The Presentation of the Council’s Student Voice Project is available online.

**Agenda Item: Activity:** Continuing Efforts to Collect Student Voices

**Presenters:**

Karen Dodd, Chief Performance Officer  
Kentucky Department of Education

Gretchen Morgan  
Center for Innovation in Education

**Summary of Discussion:** Dodd led council members through an activity that encouraged students to create an audio recording of student voices to be presented during the Kentucky United We Learn Council meeting on April 25. Gretchen Morgan with the Center for Innovation in Education, an innovation partner with KDE, said the Kentucky United We Learn Council is interested in hearing from more students.

**Feedback:** Council members partnered up and recorded one-minute audio recordings of their thoughts and opinions on a range of questions, such as sharing a time the students felt excited about what they were learning in the classroom.

**Agenda Item:** Roundtable Discussion: Member Sharing

**Presenter:** GlyptusAnn Grider Jones, Ph.D., CSAC Liaison  
Kentucky Department of Education

**Summary of Discussion:** Jones invited members to share about successful programs and initiatives happening in their respective school districts with the group.

**Feedback:** Students spent several minutes sharing about successful programs in their school, such as Sources of Strength, a student-led program that focuses on positive efforts to address mental health. Some students asked for advice and connections as they implement a Black Student Union and Gender Sexual Orientation Alliance at their schools.

**Agenda Item:** Concluding Remarks and Announcements

**Presenters:**

Robin Fields Kinney, Interim Commissioner of Education Kentucky Department of Education	GlyptusAnn Grider Jones, Ph.D. CSAC Liaison Kentucky Department of Education
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**Summary of Discussion:** Kinney thanked the council for their year of service and for sharing their voices and perspectives to help inform work and initiatives at KDE. “I have learned that the future of Kentucky is bright, that Kentucky kids can do anything,” Kinney said. “You’re talented academically but equally I see the compassion in each of you and the empathy in each of you.”

Jones also thanked members for their year of service and invited the council and guests to attend a certificate presentation following the meeting.

**Feedback:** None.

**The meeting adjourned at 12:00 p.m. ET. The next council meeting will be held in person on August 27, 2024, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. ET.**