

SUMMARY MINUTES ARE DRAFT UNTIL APPROVED AT APRIL 2024 MEETING



## KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (KDE)

### COMMISSIONER'S STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

#### SUMMARY

MARCH 26, 2024

**Present (20 members present):** Reese Blakeman, Cameron Breier, Hunter Combs, Joud Dahleh, Raima Dutt, Manas Garla, Nicholas Hazelett, Peter Jefferson, Vijaykumar Karthikeyan, Seth Langford, Danica Love, Tanvi Rakesh, Daniel Ratley, Jocelyn Reddick, Sophia Staples, Carley Watts, Bentley White, Aliete Yanes Medina, India Young, Joshua Zyzak

**Absent (15 members absent):** Ava Benson, Owen Borden, Owen Cody, Justin Dunning, Honette Irakiza, Trey Jackson, Shraman Kar, Gabriella MacAdams, Constance Martin, Anopa Musoni, R.J. Osborne, Amy Roblero-Perez, Ian Swenson, Sarah Umbarger, Austin Vitato

#### **Summary:**

**Agenda Item:** Welcome

**Presenter:** Robin Fields Kinney, Interim Commissioner of Education, KDE

**Summary of Discussion:** Kinney provided an update about the [Kentucky Board of Education's selection of Robbie Fletcher, Ed.D., as Kentucky's next commissioner of education.](#)

**Feedback:** None.

#### **Summary:**

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

**Presenter:** GlyptusAnn Grider Jones, Ph.D., CSAC Liaison, KDE

**Summary of Discussion:** Jones called roll. The [summary notes from the Feb. 27, 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 Peter Jefferson, a junior at Henry Clay High School (Fayette County).

**Feedback:** None.

**Agenda Item:** Mindful Minute Activity

**Presenter:** Damien Sweeney, Ed.D., Director, Division of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging, Office of Teaching and Learning, KDE

**Summary of Discussion:** Sweeney led students through reflective activities including a deep breathing exercise. He also said, “People are sometimes hard on themselves,” and asked students to share “something that makes you uniquely and perfectly you that others may not know.” He then asked members to share one of their favorite learning experiences at school and brainstorm ways to deepen the learning experience on that topic.

**Feedback:** Students described their unique and lesser-known backgrounds. Several members mentioned books or topics they are currently exploring as areas for deeper learning. Seth Langford, a sophomore at J. Graham Brown High School (Jefferson County), shared about his recent research project and paper on the impact of antidepressant use in teenagers. “In part the paper is about moral courage and the courage to stand up for each other and for the younger generation,” Langford said. “I think to deepen my learning, I would like to ... find more articles, more perspectives, because my paper seems very limited in perspective. I would like to do a more holistic search of what moral courage and abuse means.”

**Agenda Item:** Discussion on Chronic Absenteeism

**Presenter:** Christina Watford and Florence Chang, Education Program Consultants, Division of Student Success, Office of Continuous Improvement and Support; Ronda Devine, Branch Manager, Division of District Support, Office of Finance and Operations, KDE

**Summary of Discussion:** Devine shared chronic absenteeism percentages reported in the Kentucky Student Information System (KSIS) from the 2017-2018 reporting year through 2022-2023, the most current reporting year. Chronic absenteeism before the pandemic was under 18%. Devine said the department was unable to track absenteeism during the pandemic. Chronic absenteeism rose to nearly 30% in the 2022-2023 school year.

Watford and Chang shared that two absences a month can affect student learning. Watford mentioned that in addition to all the missing work that students are trying to get caught up on, they must figure out if there is an opportunity for the instructional part of those assignments to be made up.

Chang said the department’s findings show that post-pandemic, 75% of Kentucky students now attend schools with high or extremely high absenteeism, which is a significant increase from the 5% seen before the pandemic.

Watford and Chang asked the council members for some of the reasons they’ve heard from their peers as to why they are not attending school. Watford also asked the students, based on

their reasoning for students not attending classes, to brainstorm strategies or initiatives that may help attendance improve.

**Feedback:** Several students provided input. “The majority of absences I see at my school are due to the parents,” said Langford. “When I volunteered in the front office, the majority of tardiness was the parents being apathetic towards their attendance. Many of my peers have parents who simply do not care.”

Manas Garla, a sophomore at Western Hills High School (Franklin County), said that it could be in part because of a lack of motivation and a combination of technological advances. “Students have placed less importance on school because they have felt like it isn’t the place for them and it isn’t benefiting them,” said Garla. “I think technology has also hindered attendance due to resources like Google Classroom. Now more than ever, it is extremely easy to do everything at home, so people don’t feel the need to show up if they can do the same work from the comfort of their own house.”

Hazelett recommended finding a solution that is led by student peers. “At least in my experience, kids that I know, especially that I know, are very deep friends to me. If you tell them, ‘Hey, why don’t you come to school tomorrow,’ and you put an emphasis as a friend you want to come to school, even if they don’t want to, they will because of you,” said Hazelett.

Watford mentioned working with students to develop peer-led attendance campaigns much like Sources of Strength does for mental health and suicide prevention.

**Agenda Item:** Council Project Update

**Presenter:** Raima Dutt, CSAC Chair

**Summary of Discussion:** Dutt discussed the timeline for the council’s ongoing project focused on student voice. She said the council will present their final update to the commissioner on the topic at the next advisory council meeting. Dutt said she will follow-up with council members by email with additional announcements and review items related to the project presentation.

**Feedback:** None.

**Agenda Item:** Opportunities for Students and Member Announcements

**Presenter:** GlyptusAnn Grider Jones, Ph.D., CSAC Liaison, KDE

**Summary of Discussion:** Jones encouraged students to check out bulletin board announcements on “Kentucky Teacher,” KDE’s flagship publication. Announcements include scholarship and learning opportunities, as well as contests that may be of interest to Kentucky students. She invited council members to share additional announcements of interest to the council.

**Feedback:** Members identified upcoming meetings for high school students around the state, as well as personal accomplishments.

The meeting adjourned at 2:22 p.m. ET. The next council meeting will be held in person on April 24 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. ET.