

Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education

2023 Legislative Priorities



Higher Education Matters

About the Council

The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education is leading transformation in our workforce, economy and quality of life by advancing progress in educational attainment across Kentucky. As the state's higher education coordinating agency, we champion high-quality, inclusive and affordable postsecondary opportunities that prepare students for civic engagement and sustainable careers. That's why we are undertaking the 60x30 goal, an ambitious effort to raise the percentage of working-age Kentuckians with a postsecondary degree or certificate to 60% by the year 2030. At CPE, we believe that higher education matters – for everyone.

Why Higher Education Matters

A college degree or credential helps Kentuckians pursue their purpose and leads to a more rewarding career and a better financial future.

College graduates in Kentucky earn more money, have lower rates of unemployment, enjoy better health, live longer and are more active citizens and volunteers. Since the Great Recession, 99% of all new jobs created require some level of postsecondary education and training, but less than half of Americans between the ages of 25-34 have the credentials to fill these jobs.

Higher education matters to the public good because it increases tax revenue, decreases unemployment and entitlement program expenses, improves health outcomes and produces a myriad of benefits that can't easily be quantified, like increases in volunteerism and voting.





P-16 Pipeline Project

Rationale

Successfully transitioning high school graduates to a postsecondary training or education program is vital to strengthening the state's workforce. Unfortunately, the percent of Kentucky high school graduates who attend a postsecondary education institution directly after graduation continues to decrease. Over the last five years, this percentage has declined from 59% to 54%, significantly below the national average of 66%. Even more alarming, the trend is accelerating, declining 3 percentage points from 2019 to 2020. Overall, only 54% of Kentucky high school graduates attended any institution nationwide, while only 48% attended an in-state university.

The low college-going rate has a negative effect on overall enrollment, and subsequently, on the number of credentials conferred. The number of in-state, first-time, undergraduate students attending a public college or university has declined by almost 15% in the last five years. Although degree and credential production has grown, the increase will not be sustainable without an increase in the college-going rate. If this trend continues, it will further reduce the proportion of college-educated adults in the workforce.

It is imperative that Kentucky expand upon its work to successfully transition students to college and provide them with the tools they need to graduate. This will ensure that Kentucky remains competitive in the knowledge-based economy.



Priorities for Action

- » Sustain the Kentucky Advising Academy, a highly successful, CPE-led professional learning series developed for school and district leaders. This academy builds advising capacity through collaboration and coaching with postsecondary partners without adding new positions, and ensures that learning is systematic, strategic and sustainable within our schools, districts and postsecondary institutions.
- » Strengthen postsecondary education readiness and aspirations through an online platform that brings students into the postsecondary pipeline, incentivizes enrollment through micro-scholarships and other strategies, and provides a forum for students to share their achievements and start building relationships with institutions long before decision day.
- » Build and launch the Kentucky Uniform On-Line Application System to reduce the complexity of navigating the application process across institutions and increase awareness of programs across the state.
- » Codify and sustain the work of the Commonwealth Education Continuum to address the moral imperative for students to successfully progress through Kentucky's education system and access degrees and credentials that lead to sustainable, competitive-wage careers.



Kentucky Teacher Workforce Initiative

Rationale

The state of Kentucky, like the nation, is facing a critical teacher shortage that has been exacerbated by the global pandemic, school safety concerns, the impending retirement of late-career educators, high rates of attrition among newer hires and other factors. According to recent statistics from the Kentucky Department of Education, 72% of the state's 42,000 full-time teachers are at risk of leaving the profession.

Since 2017, Kentucky's teacher turnover rate is around 17%, slightly higher than the national rate of 16%. Job postings for teachers have increased every year since 2015, but, on average, only an estimated 83.5% of those postings are filled. And since 2015, Kentucky has experienced an increase in the number of emergency certifications issued.

Kentucky's K-12 system must work hand-in-hand with our colleges and universities on initiatives to recruit, train and retain substantially more high-quality teachers, particularly in critical shortage areas like mathematics and science. We also must diversify the teaching force by increasing the number of Black, Hispanic and other minoritized individuals in the profession.



Priorities for Action

- » Create an Educator Preparation Pathway Pilot through grants managed by CPE with two or three public institutions with a focus on innovative and affordable programs. Costs would not exceed the established in-state KCTCS tuition rate.
- » Pilots may include: a focus on program alignment and transfer between two- and four-year public institutions; program alignment between K-12 and public postsecondary institutions; flexible programming to include the establishment of credit for prior learning programs to shorten time-to-degree and field experiences; flexible field experiences; alternatives to the teacher licensure assessment; and intensive partnerships and wrap-around supports.
- » Funding also includes a set-aside for program administration, evaluation and strategic planning.
- » Create a Teacher Apprenticeship Pilot through grants managed by CPE and the Kentucky Department of Education with public postsecondary institutions and local school districts with a focus on creating a pathway to teaching for those interested in a non-traditional approach to a degree or certification, while removing barriers to the teaching profession.
- » Pilots will include: teacher apprentices who are educational assistants in a partnering school district that provide instructional and non-instructional support to students while learning best practices for a career in education from a mentor educator; flexible programming to include the establishment of credit for prior learning programs to shorten time-to-degree; paid teacher apprenticeships; paid student teaching experiences; and paid tuition, fees and textbooks.
- » Funding also will include a set-aside for program administration, evaluation and strategic planning.



Kentucky Healthcare Workforce Collaborative

Rationale

Federal funding provided to CPE during the 2022 General Assembly initiated prompt, targeted action to improve the talent pipeline for Kentucky's frontline healthcare workforce. This workforce sector has been falling short of demand since well before the worldwide COVID pandemic, directing particular focus on the nationwide and statewide nursing shortage.

The legislature charged CPE to assemble partnerships between public higher education institutions and healthcare employers to create healthcare workforce solutions, with a collective focus on attracting talented students into healthcare professions and reducing leaks in the healthcare workforce pipeline. Higher education institutions and healthcare organizations have together created innovative solutions and have produced plans for use of the appropriations, but there is much left to do.

It is increasingly clear that Kentucky needs to expand the scope of the Healthcare Workforce Collaborative to include a focus on mental health services and professionals. KYSTATS projects greater than a 25% need for substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors. The State of Mental Health in America 2022 ranks Kentucky 30th relative to mental health workforce availability, and more than half of the people with diagnosed mental illnesses do not receive treatment. This critical need for more mental health support is evident on our campuses as well. A national survey of colleges students returning to campus this fall indicates that nearly 70% are experiencing mental health issues related to anxiety or depression.



Priorities for Action

- » Sustain the work of the new Healthcare Workforce Collaborative (HWC), funded and launched in 2022. These funds will allow continued progress and innovation by Kentucky colleges and universities and healthcare providers in responding to Kentucky's frontline healthcare workforce crisis. \$5 million
- » Expand the scope of the HWC to include mental health. These funds will support a competitive grant program to expand and improve programs that produce frontline mental health professionals, including, but not limited to, mental health counselors and therapists, school-based counselors, clinical social workers, psychologists and psychotherapists, mental health nurse practitioners, and addiction counselors. Funding also would be available to support statewide mental health programs supporting K-12 and postsecondary students, as well as providing mental health training for staff and teachers at schools and postsecondary institutions. \$10 million



Kentucky Life-Long Learning Initiative

Rationale

The enrollment and success of adults in postsecondary education has become more critical than ever. According to the state Chamber of Commerce, Kentucky's workforce participation rate, which is among the lowest in the nation, is a primary barrier to business growth and economic development. A key contributor to the state's low workforce participation rate is the low level of education and postsecondary training of Kentucky's working-age adults.

An estimated 65-85% of jobs today require training, credentialing, or degrees beyond a high school diploma or GED. Yet, in Kentucky only 49% of working-age adults have earned a postsecondary degree or credential. Focused efforts to create lifelong learning opportunities and engage adult learners in securing additional skills training are essential to prepare them for the modern workforce.

Unfortunately, even as overall postsecondary enrollments stabilize post-pandemic, the decade-long decrease in adult learner enrollment continues, with undergraduate enrollment among working-age adults falling a massive 47% since 2011-12. Kentucky must develop innovative and effective ways to increase enrollment and completion for adult learners who are struggling to balance the competing demands of work, life, family and school.



Priorities for Action

- » Expand flexible academic programming to better meet the needs of busy adults. Campus grants managed by CPE would support the expansion and quality of competency-based programming aligned with Kentucky's workforce demands. Grants also would be available to strengthen credit for prior learning (CPL) programs for military-connected citizens and other students who bring prior learning and job experiences to their higher education programs. CPL is an important tool to shorten time-to-degree and reduce college costs but currently is not widely available in Kentucky.
- » Improve access to high-demand postsecondary training and education programs for working-age adults (particularly returning students who have the potential to finish their programs within one to two years) through advising and financial aid strategies supporting the specific challenges facing adult learners.