# Interim Joint Committee on Education

### Minutes of the<MeetNo1> 7th Meeting

### of the 2017 Interim

### <MeetMDY1> December 11, 2017

**Call to Order and Roll Call**

The<MeetNo2> 7th meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Education was held on<Day> Monday,<MeetMDY2> December 11, 2017, at<MeetTime> 1:00 p.m., in<Room> Room 154 of the Capitol Annex. Representative John Carney, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members:<Members> Senator Max Wise, Co-Chair; Representative John Carney, Co-Chair; Senators Julie Raque Adams, Danny Carroll, Alice Forgy Kerr, Gerald A. Neal, Reginald Thomas, Johnny Ray Turner, and Stephen West; Representatives Danny Bentley, Jim DeCesare, Mark Hart, Regina Huff, Reginald Meeks, Tim Moore, Kimberly Poore Moser, Rick G. Nelson, Melinda Gibbons Prunty, Jody Richards, Steve Riley, Attica Scott, James Tipton, Russell Webber, and Jill York.

Guests: Bob Rowland, Kentucky Association of School Administrators; and Wayne Young, Executive Director, Kentucky Association of School Administrators.

LRC Staff: Jo Carole Ellis, Yvette Perry, Joshua Collins, Lauren Busch, and Maurya Allen.

Representative Riley made a motion to approve the minutes of the November 13, 2017, meeting, seconded by Senator Turner. The motion passed by voice vote.

**Peer Networks for Students with Special Needs**

Chairman Carney recognized Senator Carroll for introduction of the presentation. Senator Carroll said that as a parent of a child with special needs, he was grateful for the peer tutoring program that his daughter participated in and how it benefited her both academically and socially. Through further research, he learned of the KY Peer Support Network Project at the Human Development Institute at the University of Kentucky. He hopes to see it expanded to all school districts in Kentucky so that every child would have the opportunity to develop such valuable peer support groups.

Patti Logsdon, Project Coordinator, KY Peer Support Network Project, Lou-Ann Land, Project Director, KY Peer Support Network Project, Katie Newton, Special Education Teacher, John W. Bate Middle School, Tina Wray, Director of Special Education, Danville Independent Schools, and Gretta Hylton, Director, Division of Learning Services, Kentucky Department of Education testified about the project.

Ms. Logsdon provided data regarding peer relationships during high school. In particular, she noted that six percent of students with autism frequently see friends outside of school and 43 percent never see a peer outside of school. Additionally, as many as 50 percent of students with autism have not been invited to other youth’s social activities in the past year. This is a concern because it shows that the creation of peer networks and the social skills they foster, is not automatic and is incredibly rare for students with significant disabilities. Additionally, research shows that while the location of assistance for special needs children is important, the existence of true peer support matters more. Important elements of true inclusion are shared activities, proximity to peers, reliable communication, informed peers, and just enough support from adults. This final piece had been critical, emphasizing that adults needed to be instructed in when it was best to step back and allow for peer-to-peer support.

Ms. Land discussed the KY Peer Support Network Project and its ability to fill the need of building relationships between students with significant disability and their peers by providing opportunities for shared learning, development of lasting friendships, and expanded authentic communication. There are four evidence-based and effective intervention approaches: peer networks, peer support arrangements, peer tutoring, and peer partner programs. The KY Peer Support Network project focuses on the first two, peer networks and peer support arrangements. Kentucky has a long tradition of implementation of peer tutoring arrangements throughout the state and while these have seen good results, they also can set up the peer tutor in a position of “mini teacher” and create an unintended social imbalance between the peer tutor and the special needs student. Peer networks consist of a social group of three to six peers interacting socially with a focus special needs student. A peer support arrangement is a community of learners in a general education class who are supporting each other, including the focus special needs student.

In practice, a peer network meets weekly throughout the semester to talk, participate in shared activities (such as board games, crafts, or a meal), and discuss interactions occurring outside the group (such as sports or other shared interests). These networks encourage the focus student to become more involved in everyday school life and connect to other school activities. This experience often expands their peer network outside of the formal group. A key element of a peer network meeting is also the inclusion of an adult facilitator. The adult facilitator is there to provide guidance and feedback but does not necessarily need to be a trained special educator. In the case of Bate Middle School, the adult facilitators are sometimes other teachers or even community members who volunteer their time to the group. Parents and other related service professionals, such as speech therapists, are also frequently involved in the creation of peer support networks.

A peer support arrangement consists of one or more peers without disabilities working together with classmates with disabilities as a community of learners, supporting each other academically and socially. Peers who participate in a peer support arrangement, support participation in class activities, provide feedback and encouragement, model communication and other skills, support learning by assisting with understanding of task directions and work completion, and promote interaction with other classmates. The composition of a peer support arrangement typically includes a focus student with two peer partners enrolled in the same general education class, a general educator, and a paraprofessional who while assigned to assist the focus student, is asked to “step back” and allow for peer support unless help is requested. A special educator is consulted in the formation of a peer support arrangement and can help the general educator in terms of modifications of classroom activities to be more inclusive of the special needs student. These arrangements take a considerable amount of pre-planning to be successful and may sometimes include consultation with related services professionals.

Ms. Logsdon discussed the shifting practices of paraprofessionals. The typical role of a paraprofessional is to provide support that allows students with significant disabilities to be educated in the least restrictive environment as well as supporting teachers in meeting the needs of individual students across school and classroom settings. Within the network and peer support arrangements, these roles do not change but the focus of practice shifts from direct one-to-one support to a more generalized facilitative role. She stressed that she does not want to imply that the role of paraprofessional is unnecessary and can be replaced entirely with peer support, because the support they provide is critical.

 Ms. Logsdon said there are four key reasons why these networks and arrangements are so important and why they were selected as the target practices. First, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act which specifies the “least restrictive environment” and that students should be included in the same classrooms. Secondly, inclusion and positive interaction with peers is a strong indicator of positive post-school outcomes. A national longitudinal study and national transition center have identified a list of indicators for positive post-school success where inclusion and participation in social activities are some of the strongest indicators for employment, entering higher education, and successful independent living. Third, the program is low- to no-cost because most of what is necessary for these programs already exists in the schools. The most costly aspects are the increased training and planning which must occur in order for the programs to be done well. Lastly, they are evidence-based practices. Research performed by Dr. Erik Carter at Vanderbilt, shows that typical peers (those without a disability) who participate in peer support arrangements, and who typically make As and Bs, continue to do so. However, typical peers who typically make Cs, Ds, or Fs show an improvement of one to one and one-half letter grades. His data also shows that special needs students who participate in peer support arrangements double, and sometimes triple, their social contacts and friendships within school, and this carries over to outside of school as well.

Ms. Logsdon discussed the website, kypeersupport.org, which includes resources for schools, including higher education, and information regarding the pilot sites.

Ms. Newton and Ms. Wray illustrated what these programs look like in practice at John W. Bate Middle School, Danville Independent Schools. Ms. Newton said that Bate Middle School’s mission is “to create meaningful relationships and supports for ALL students.” She said that “all means all,” and so they are excited to provide opportunities for students with significant disabilities to fully participate in the school experience of learning and making friends. Bate Middle School has three peer arrangements and seven peer networks. The peer arrangements are in 8th grade social studies, 8th grade science, and 6th grade art. The peer networks meet on Friday during lunch. Ms. Newton noted that the primary barrier to peer networks was finding non-instructional time during the week for student networks to meet. Primarily she has resolved this by using lunch as the shared activity for the students. Simply sharing a meal and talking about what movies they have seen or sports events they have watched, has been instrumental in the creation of friendships among her focus students and their peers.

Other barriers included the difficulty of finding facilitators and getting “buy-in” from all staff. Ms. Newton said that she turned to the community and looked for individuals who had a background check already on file with the school who were willing to learn about the peer network program and could give time every week to be a facilitator. She has seen that the buy-in from staff has been gradual, but as more of them see special needs students interacting socially in the halls, they have been supportive of the programs. Other benefits that have been experienced by all students in the program have been increased student satisfaction, friendships among all their peers, and students feeling like they belong. They have a more meaningful school experience based on these networks.

In regard to the peer support arrangements, Ms. Newton said they have learned many lessons from implementation, including the need for frequent and open communication. Bringing regular educators and special educators together to brainstorm and lesson plan has resulted in a benefit to all students as it brings more diverse instructional methods to the classroom and expands the skill sets of both educators. She has witnessed the improved grades of all participant students, higher student engagement, and improved instructional delivery to students of diverse learning styles. Beth Murphy, speech-language pathologist, John W. Bate Middle School, joined the presentation via video conference and discussed the use of augmentative or alternative communication (AAC) as part of the peer support program. She said that using the technology with same aged peers has been effective to achieve their communication goals but that there have been barriers in terms of time and training for all staff. The impact however has been an increase in the use of AAC, an increase in natural opportunities to communicate, and an increase of models when communicating using AAC.

Ms. Wray said that the impact on the school and the entire district has been significant and positive. The culture of inclusion has greatly improved and student satisfaction has increased for all students. There has also been an improved awareness, understanding, and acceptance of difference, particularly of individuals with disability. She said it has been a ripple effect that will continue into the community as these students who have learned how to interact normally with disabled individuals go out into the community, to college or into the workplace, and will take that sensitivity and understanding with them. Initially, she and others were concerned that they were asking too much of the focus students but she quickly realized that with the right supports, special needs students can and will exceed expectations.

Ms. Newton then showed video clips of students, both focus students and typical peers, discussing the benefits they saw from participation in the program. Students were available via video conference to take questions from the committee. In conclusion, Ms. Hylton spoke regarding the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the perspective of the Kentucky Department of Education on peer support networks. The IDEA stresses that students with significant disability be provided with a free, appropriate, public education with access to the general curriculum and with the least amount of restriction. The implementation of peer support arrangements does precisely that. Additionally, these networks and arrangements lead to increased achievement of individual education plan (IEP) goals, more friendships, and peer role models for both academic goals and behavior. Students who participate in these programs learn the social skills they need to have continued lifelong success. The Kentucky Department of Education has supported programs like this for over 30 years, beginning with Kentucky’s Peer Tutoring Program. She also noted that the special education divisions of the regional cooperatives are involved in peer support networks by offering regional training, supporting local schools and districts, and providing low-incidence consultants as co-trainers.

Responding to a question from Senator Carroll, Ms. Wray said that they have a program in the high school, but it is less structured than the middle school program largely because of the increased independence of high school students. More students initiate friendships outside of the structured school networks and invite them to outside of school activities continuing to build their social networks. Ms. Newton said that it has been heartening to see the networks and friendships carry over naturally into high school.

Senator Carroll commented that he felt this program was very valuable and he intends to file a resolution to make the program available more widely. He wanted to emphasize how important it is for programs like this to be carried into the early childhood and elementary level as well as post-graduation into early adulthood. He would like to see a community of support for special needs individuals. With the proper supports, special needs individuals can become a viable and valuable sector of the workforce as well, and we should not be limiting their potential.

Responding to comments and questions from Representative Riley, Ms. Logsdon said that there is not any longitudinal data available yet for how much contact students maintain after graduation from high school, but data does show that these friendships are maintained over the summer when students are not meeting regularly in a structured environment, but they are initiating contact with their peer groups naturally. Ms. Wray said that she has witnessed some anecdotal evidence of friendships carrying into post-graduation and college through her own daughter who still maintains a friendship with a special needs peer whom she connected with during school. She said that social media and texting has been a key part of their ability to maintain a friendship even when they went separate ways. Ms. Logsdon said that the ability of a special needs child to not only have friends, but learn to create friendships, is a critical element of the peer-to-peer supports they emphasize as it is a skill everyone needs to develop in order to have a meaningful life.

Representative Prunty said that she agreed with Senator Carroll’s sentiments that “earlier is better” and told the students that she thought that what they were doing was incredibly inspiring. They may not realize now the impact they are having, but that it will continue for years to come. She asked Ms. Newton if area youth ministers or therapists had been invited to participate as facilitators for the peer network groups. Ms. Newton said she had reached out broadly into the community as the only requirement was a background check to be filed at the school. Ms. Logsdon commented that there had been elementary school pilot programs, although there were not currently any active elementary programs.

In response to a question from Chairman Carney, Ms. Land said that there were currently between six and eight pilot sites, and that they have been attempting more district wide approaches. Sometimes when a teacher moves from a school, it jeopardizes the ability of the program to continue unless there are several district teachers supporting it. Also, she informed the committee members that there were still openings for pilot sites if they knew of a school in their districts who would like to participate.

Senator Carroll had a final comment that developing these networks is critical to improving the outcomes for students beyond high school. There is a need for more support and funding is limited. But while inequities exist throughout the state, he hoped that increasing the number of these programs in schools would help lay groundwork for the future.

**Report from the Commissioner’s Dyslexia Task Force**

Commissioner Stephen Pruitt, Kentucky Department of Education (KDE); Gretta Hylton, Director, Division of Learning Services, KDE; and Gina Mullins, Human Development Institute, Facilitator – Dyslexia Task Force came forward to give an overview of the statewide Dyslexia Task Force report and recommendations. The task force had been comprised of individuals from diverse backgrounds who were to study what approaches exist to address dyslexia and understand their implementation in schools. Ms. Mullins stated that they looked nationally at the impacts of various different dyslexia policies as well as what was already in practice in the Commonwealth. Commissioner Pruitt stated that there was certainly a sense of urgency on the part of the Department to address dyslexia, but that there remained a need to balance their approach with that of budget constraints.

The task force recommendations were presented in terms of three main categories; Planning and Preparation, Student Supports, and Related Supports. Regarding instruction, the task force recommended creation of a dyslexia toolkit and increased emphasis on structured literacy, expansion of resources based on evidence-based instructional intervention practices, and creation of guidelines for individual interventions and for identifying and documenting progress. There was also a recommendation to increase allocations from the Read to Achieve Grant funding to districts for the delivery of tiered reading interventions. It was also recommended that the Education Professional Standards Board enhance teacher preparation programs at all levels to address teaching literacy to all students, and that it utilize existing partnerships to promote equity and consistency with instruction for students identified with or displaying risk factors for dyslexia. Additionally, the task force recommended support for ongoing training for teachers, identification of high quality trainers to support schools utilizing a coaching model to develop building level dyslexia experts, and creation of a network of ongoing communication from state level personnel to district level personnel and higher education.

Recommendations for student supports included improved screening methods for all students from preschool through Grade 12 and ensuring that data collected will inform instructional supports for students who are identified with or displaying risk factors for dyslexia. Additionally, the task force recommended that a process be developed to monitor and evaluate the practices and supports implemented as well as teacher, parent, and student perceptions of efficacy of changes made in relation to these recommendations.

Finally, the task force presented legislative considerations which included updating the definition of dyslexia in statute, further delineating the response-to-intervention process from the process of identifying dyslexia, and directing local boards to create and adopt policies specific to dyslexia. They also made recommendations that the legislature direct KDE to update its policies and guidance on dyslexia, gather resources into a toolkit for districts and parents, collaborate with partners (including the Council on Postsecondary Education) to update training programs for educators, survey districts annually on efforts surrounding dyslexia, and establish a pilot study in collaboration with three districts to review, test, and identify effective policies for identifying and supporting students with dyslexia.

Chairman Carney stated that it was his understanding that as many as one in five students could have some degree of dyslexia. He asked how many students that would equate to in the state. Commissioner Pruitt answered that there are approximately 600,000 students in schools in Kentucky so roughly 20 percent of that would be a 120,000 students that this issue may affect. Chairman Carney said that it was unfortunate that many students would go through their entire school career and remain undiagnosed, because this is a condition that will affect them their entire lives.

Senator Adams stated that she had a personal interest in the subject and had heard that finding qualified teachers was difficult, but that assistive technology had been helpful. Commissioner Pruitt agreed that a significant part of the solution was going to be non-legislative and centered on continuing education for teachers. Ms. Hylton said that assistive technologies were found to be useful in certain circumstances but that it greatly depended on the individual and the nature of their dyslexia. Commissioner Pruitt added that with budget constraints, schools would have to be very deliberative about what technology would be most useful in their circumstances.

Responding to a question from Representative Gibbons Prunty, Ms. Hylton answered that the causes of dyslexia had not been the focus of the task force and would require bringing different experts to the discussion. Ms. Mullins said that a work group was going to be put in place to look at the specific approaches to teaching literacy that the task force had not been able to study in detail.

**Dyslexia Legislation for the 2018 Legislative Session**

Representative Addia Wuchner was present to speak regarding proposed dyslexia legislation for the 2018 Regular Session of the General Assembly with Aaron Thompson, Executive Vice President, Council on Postsecondary Education; Brad Montell, Deputy Secretary, Education and Workforce Development Cabinet; and Clark Davis, Miss Kentucky 2015. Representative Wuchner began by stating that dyslexia is a brain disorder not caused by any specific reading teaching method and that there are many methods available to assist individuals with the disorder to learn to read.

Mr. Montell said that Grade 3 is a critical checkpoint for reading and that 70-80 percent of individuals who struggle with reading at that point may have dyslexia. Early intervention is critical to supporting later learning and was legislatively addressed in House Bill 69 of the 2012 Regular Session, also known as the “Ready to Read Act.” Ms. Davis discussed briefly her own struggles with the disorder which led her to make dyslexia awareness her platform as Miss Kentucky 2015.

House Bill 69 contained the original definition of dyslexia as well as response-to-intervention legislation. Representative Wuchner stated that there was an expectation that it would resolve many issues but that has not been the case, leading to her desire to revisit the legislation. She sponsored House Bill 307 to address these issues in the 2017 Regular Session, but the legislation did not achieve final passage. This has allowed even more time for the ideas to be refined and included in new legislation for the upcoming session.

The new bill will include updated definitions of dyslexia and response-to-intervention, as well as screening tools and mandates for the Department of Education, including the requirement to develop a toolkit as was recommended by the task force. There will also be a requirement for reporting by September 2018 to enhance accountability. The bill also addresses better teacher preparation.

Dr. Thompson addressed the need for better teacher preparation from the perspective of the Council on Postsecondary Education saying that there was a real need for skilling up of teachers in regards to dyslexia and that this could be addressed through required professional development.

Mr. Dusty Phelps, psychologist, Pulaski County Schools came forward to present his perspective. He said that he was encouraged by the collaborative focus and excited to see an accurate definition of dyslexia included in statute. In addition to effective strategies in schools and better equipping teachers, he advised that there needed to be outreach to the communities to better inform the public about dyslexia and its impacts.

Ms. Phyllis Sparks, parent and representative of the International Dyslexia Foundation-Kentucky Branch, also spoke to the committee regarding her experience as a parent with a severely dyslexic son. She stated that he had been ‘passed on’ even though he did not have the ability to read and was identified with dyslexia in Grade 5. However, even after the diagnosis, he felt as if the rest of the class was passing by him and he would never be able to catch them. His school system did not have the supports he needed so she made the difficult decision to move him to a different school in order to get the assistance that he needed. She encouraged the members to do anything they could to break the cycle and truly assist students with dyslexia.

In response to a question from Representative York, Representative Wuchner answered that yes the bill was very similar to bills in the past and that teachers had been very active and supportive, because it was similarly frustrating for them to see students struggling to read and not know what they could to help them.

With no further business to come before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 3:15 p.m.