

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Minutes of the 5th Meeting of the 2021 Interim

October 5, 2021

Call to Order and Roll Call

The 5th meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Education was held on Tuesday, October 5, 2021, at 11:00 a.m., in Room 149 of the Capitol Annex. Representative Regina Huff, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator Max Wise, Co-Chair; Representative Regina Huff, Co-Chair; Senators Danny Carroll, David P. Givens, Denise Harper Angel, Jimmy Higdon, Alice Forgy Kerr, Stephen Meredith, Gerald A. Neal, Adrienne Southworth, Robert Stivers, Reginald Thomas, Stephen West, and Mike Wilson; Representatives Shane Baker, Kim Banta, Tina Bojanowski, Jennifer Decker, Jeffery Donohue, Myron Dossett, Mark Hart, Adam Koenig, Scott Lewis, C. Ed Massey, Bobby McCool, Charles Miller, Melinda Gibbons Prunty, Felicia Rabourn, Steve Riley, Attica Scott, Killian Timoney, James Tipton, Russell Webber, Richard White, and Lisa Willner.

Guests: Kyle Wilson, CEO, Boom Beans; and Nick Such, Executive Director, Awesome Inc.

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

Approval of Minutes

Senator Wilson made a motion to approve the minutes of the August 3, 2021, and September 1, 2021, meetings. The motion was seconded by Representative Massey and passed by voice vote.

Impact of COVID-19 on Student Mental Health

Linda Tyree, consultant, Kentucky Center for School Safety, and Crisis Response Director, GRREC; Amy Riley, school counselor, Mercer County Middle School, and Chairperson, Kentucky Center for School Safety Board of Directors; and Marsha Duncan, Transition Readiness/SEL Specialist, LaRue County Schools discussed the many impacts on student mental health caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms. Tyree said the crisis response teams many schools formed, thanks to prompting from school safety legislation, were designed for short term critical events, but these teams are now being brought in to help students with increased anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation related to the pandemic. Many students struggled when transitioning to virtual learning, either from

increased exposure to trauma in the home, stress from parents' job loss or illness, and exposure to pornography or other problematic content due to extended time online.

Ms. Riley shared her personal experiences in the school. She also reported that the CDC had polled students and found approximately 25 percent of respondents had contemplated suicide. She wanted to impress upon the committee that these were not just statistics because each number represents a student in crisis. Prior to the pandemic, students had mental health concerns, and there was not sufficient support for them. Now the number of those with anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation has skyrocketed. This is also not limited only to high schoolers as she works primarily with eight- to ten-year-old children and has seen the dramatic increase in severe mental health concerns among them as well. Diverse concerns led to this increase in suicidal ideation including increased isolation which led to increased stress. Ms. Riley also noted that the loss of in-person instruction also led to a loss of access to student health supports and a decrease in the ability of teachers and staff to monitor for early warning signs of mental health distress. She said increased legislative support for mental health professionals in school was appreciated, but there was still inadequacy because of the pressure of the pandemic. She urged for an even more increased effort toward supporting the mental health of students in the months ahead.

Ms. Duncan said she has spent over 25 years in education, most recently having transitioned to support for student mental health. She said the switch to remote learning made it impossible to meet the mental health needs of students, and students cannot learn when their mental health needs are not met. She echoed the sharp increase in student anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation she witnessed among students in the wake of the pandemic. She also noted the strain on school staff from an ever increasing caseload. She noted that students as young as 3rd grade are exhibiting symptoms of grief as a result of the trauma and stress over the last year. They are grieving the loss of normal activities, fun at school, consistent routines, as well as the loss of loved ones to the virus itself. Dramatic changes to school are also impacting staff, creating a sense of grief among the adults, which also bleeds over into the student population who can sense losses suffered by the school community. Students also have fears about school safety and what the future will bring. Teachers and staff are overwhelmed and ill-equipped to support students because COVID-19 has left many in consistent emotional turmoil. Each student and staffer needs the skills and support to not just survive this school year but thrive and have the resiliency to rebound. She said mental health professionals in schools value the legislature's willingness to acknowledge this crisis and take steps necessary to support this critical effort towards wellness for students and staff.

Responding to questions from Representative Bojanowski, Ms. Tyree said the impact of the opioid crisis and negative aspects of social media have been significant in schools over the last several years, and they are clearly continuing to fuel the explosion of mental health concerns witnessed in the wake of COVID-19. Representative Bojanowski

said she would support efforts to assist mental health professionals in the schools to address all the challenges facing students and staff today.

In response to a question from Representative Massey, Ms. Tyree said there is no data yet on the increased use of mental health resources, but nationwide there has been reported an increase in demand for mental health services of about 300 percent.

Chair Huff stated that there has been a reported increase in student suicides attributed to COVID-19 and that just because they are children, it does not mean they do not suffer mental health crises. Ms. Tyree agreed, adding that there has been an increase in suicide attempts by approximately 57 percent in just the last year, with children as young as 11 taking their own lives. She also noted that these figures only illustrate the increase in demand for those who have reached out. Students without opportunity to reach out, and those who suffer in silence, are not recorded in those statistics. The actual number of students needing help with suicidal ideation is likely much higher.

Responding to a question from Representative Tipton, Ms. Duncan said her school district has contracted with outside agencies to get more staff, but the sheer scale of the problem is brutal on counselors. Many are leaving the field due to burnout and it is taking a long time to fill vacancies. Also, she noted that students rarely reach out to an adult. Instead, they communicate with friends via email and text messages, so it is harder to identify those that need crisis intervention. Even when they have been identified, though, there are not enough spaces in crisis units because of the scale of the problem and the lack of clinicians.

Representative Baker said it seems it would be easier to build strong children than repair broken men, asking what can parents and educators can do to help build students up and keep them from being fearful. Ms. Riley said she encourages parents to get involved in the social/emotional learning (SEL) going on in schools. While the legislature may not hear as much about preventative measures being taken in schools, she and others advocate for strong Tier 1 SEL curriculum to be adopted in schools. These courses teach resiliency and how to bounce back from adverse situations. Teachers can be equipped to teach this curriculum. Ms. Tyree added that an emphasis on adopting SEL curriculum was part of the school safety legislation and, when combined with a social/emotional health assessment tool, is a vital step toward making students feel safe in school and a proactive approach toward lifelong improved mental health. She agreed that intervention and education through teaching students to articulate their emotions and practice social regulation before there is any display of at-risk behavior is the goal.

In response to questions from Representative Willner, Ms. Riley said the inclusion of trauma-informed care and the creation of trauma response teams in the school safety legislation displayed amazing foresight because several schools were able to activate those teams to address COVID-19 related stress and grief in schools. Teams are having a very

positive impact in schools and are meeting regularly to develop individualized plans for at-risk students. Students going through the pandemic are experiencing trauma, and the teams are ready to help address their needs. Representative Willner said she would like to hear more from the trauma response teams in future meetings.

Responding to questions from Senator Givens, Ms. Tyree said school counselors have been working toward embedding mental health resiliency into school curriculum, but it has not been fully incorporated in many schools at this time. Senator Givens said he understands the school day is limited, but including these skills in the curriculum would be very timely and appropriate. Ms. Tyree said there are many programs that embed SEL into classes, but it has been shown to be more effective in elementary schools as a stand-alone class or segment of daily instruction. Unfortunately, that also makes SEL much more difficult to effectively implement during remote instruction. It is also harder for teachers to recognize those that might be struggling during remote instruction, because they do not get the in-person social/emotional feedback from students.

Ms. Riley added that it is hard to incorporate SEL when competing with other courses. Ms. Duncan said using a stand-alone model and performing individual SEL evaluations on every student was a model they are attempting in her school. She looks forward to using the information from the evaluations to increase efforts to support every child. She has also been reaching out to teachers to give them the training necessary to address student mental health through professional development courses. Responding to another question from Senator Givens, Ms. Tyree said there are currently grant funds to assist districts in paying for mental health professional development courses for teachers, but she does not know how much longer those funds will be available. Ms. Duncan encouraged all districts to consider incorporating the training because when you experience a student death by suicide as an educator, you wish you had the training necessary to speak up and the skills to stop future tragedies from occurring.

Chair Huff said the legislature did pass a bill she had sponsored to add an hour of professional development on suicide prevention but that it may be timely to look at increasing that requirement or assisting districts in completing it.

Representative Banta said she has taken the course as an educator and found it very enjoyable. It was a helpful way to learn how to talk to students about feelings and emotions. She suggested the legislature reach out to the Kentucky School Boards Association to see which schools are doing this professional development course and see what could be done to assist all school districts in incorporating this training.

Responding to questions from Senator Southworth, Ms. Duncan said they use an SEL assessment tool from Panorama Ed, a third-party organization. The company provides a model assessment that can be customized to the needs of the school. Questions on the assessment are the same throughout the year and changes can be noted over time in the

mental health of individual students. Using a standardized set of questions also allows for comparison between schools and across the country. Ms. Riley said her school uses a tool from SRSS, and it is used to assign needed interventions. Ms. Tyree noted, however, that the universal screeners are impossible to perform during remote learning as many questions use teacher perceptions based on student observation. Without having their eyes on students, those perceptions cannot be formed and gathered.

Leadership Institute for School Principals

Kate Shanks, Senior Vice President, Public Affairs, Kentucky Chamber of Commerce; and Houston Barber, Superintendent, Frankfort Independent Schools, were present to inform the committee on the value of the Leadership Institute for School Principals. Ms. Shanks said the program is very important for local business communities and is funded through the Kentucky Chamber Foundation. The goal of the program is to make principals the CEOs of their schools with similar leadership skills as those used by successful business CEOs. The program consists of a three-day training retreat at the Truist Leadership Institute, followed by several one-day sessions in Kentucky. These continuing learning opportunities include virtual sessions, coaching, and peer-to-peer assessments. Principals attend for free through a partnership with the Truist Leadership Institute and donations from Kentucky's business community. To date, the Chamber Foundation has raised over \$3 million to allow principals to participate in this valuable training opportunity. She used a map of Kentucky to illustrate which counties have taken advantage of the program, highlighting the need to reach out to those that have not participated yet. She encouraged members to reach out to their schools to encourage participants to apply soon for the spring class. Applicants are considered based on years of service, percentage of students receiving free/reduced-price lunch, achievement gaps, and recommendations from superintendents. She said the Chamber looks forward to continuing this program, which has already been in place for 10 years, for many years to come.

Mr. Barber presented his testimony as a graduate of the program. He said it was a life-changing experience. Being a principal is challenging on a daily basis and a key take-away for him was the ability to change the game. It helped him better understand the dynamics of being a leader in the school and in the community and becoming a moral leader for students. He stated that the businesses in communities get involved because it helps change the workforce as well because principals as CEOs approach students as future employees. It leads to principals actively encouraging student growth as well. He hopes to someday see every county represented in this program and also encouraged members to reach out to their communities to get involved. One particularly useful aspect was the executive coaching sessions, which gave him a mentor to lean on in times of making difficult decisions. He worked as a principal in a JCPS school, which was often stressful, and he appreciated having the assistance of mentor.

Responding to a question from Representative Bojanowski, Mr. Barber said the primary difference between a principal and being a 'principal as CEO' was noting how

much he did not understand about being a leader until he was a principal. The program helped him determine what kind of leader he was, identifying his own strengths as well as those of his staff, and how to use those strengths to benefit the school as a whole. He said those skills are not always highlighted in standard principal training.

In response to a question from Representative Gibbons Prunty, Ms. Shanks said they are looking to expand the Board of Managers for the program to increase diversity in many ways, including regionally.

Responding to a question from Representative Baker, Ms. Shanks said she does not believe that the curriculum for the program speaks to increasing equity among marginalized communities. Mr. Barber said the curriculum is more about personal growth and understanding oneself as a leader. The goal is to train principals in leadership skills they can take back to their schools.

Senator Higdon commented that strong leadership is important in every organization and encouraged principals to get all the leadership training they could to be most effective in their schools.

In response to a question from Representative Decker, Ms. Shanks said she would follow up to provide her with a copy of the curriculum from the Truist Leadership Institute.

Creating a Foundation for Change: Youth Entrepreneurship in Appalachia

Kyle Wilson, CEO, Boom Beans and Nick Such, Executive Director, Awesome Inc., gave testimony on their innovative approach to teaching entrepreneurship to students in Appalachia. Mr. Wilson said he has worked with various start-ups and industries that are innovating, including Awesome Inc. in Lexington, and wanted to duplicate that success in the Appalachian region. He wanted to provide opportunities for students to take charge and change the trajectory of their region. He did that by providing seed funding for start-ups led by high school students. Additionally, he teaches them about start-up creation and management through his already established brand, Boom Beans. Boom Beans is a coffee brand, inspired by a high school student, which is easily relatable to everyone and accessible by students. By helping to run Boom Beans, students learn how to run an established brand, and through his courses on entrepreneurship, students brainstorm ideas for their own start-up companies.

Mr. Wilson said his class is live every day in classrooms and virtually. He helps students create and launch a product, service, or software by the end of the year and forms a lifetime partnership to assist in the continued success of that product, service, or software. In collaboration with Awesome Inc., they have also created a proprietary social platform to provide students an opportunity to network with other students and create regional partnerships. He said this has played a major role in keeping students connected after graduation. Students who do not want to create or run a business may stay involved after

college by bringing their skills to work for other student run businesses in eastern Kentucky because of the connections made and maintained on the social networking platform. The platform also provides investors with a way to view the start-ups and contribute seed money.

Mr. Such spoke to the many ways in which technology is an enabler in our society. His company, Awesome Inc., brings technology assistance to the start-ups in Mr. Wilson's entrepreneurship classes. Awesome Inc. has held many classes and camps to increase the number of students and adults with the expertise in coding and software development needed in today's technology driven markets. Mr. Wilson said they discovered it was necessary to first create a technology ecosystem for the project to be successful because not many schools have the resources to teach coding and software development. In working with students, he saw many great ideas but no guidance to bring them to life. For example, an individual came to him with an idea to connect her community via a phone app, but needed the skills taught in his course to develop and launch it. So many students are like her, only needing the guidance to bring great ideas to fruition. As someone with experience launching many different brands, he wants to bring that expertise to support the youth of Kentucky. Awesome Inc., and other organizations like it, have created a foundation of coding and technology that can be capitalized on with further training in entrepreneurship.

Part of what makes the program successful has also been the emphasis on creating revenue with these start-ups so they continue to succeed after their initial seed money is invested. His course teaches students to think about what the expectations are for a business, how to address market competition, and how to face fears. The initial seed money is also budgeted to include marketing expenses to get the start-ups out into the world and generating revenue. These are skills that students can apply at any company, not just their own start-up, and will stop the 'brain drain' of bright individuals leaving the state. Mr. Wilson said his goal is to build a better future here in Kentucky with Boom Beans and his entrepreneurship course. The company is largely a non-profit, with 55 percent of revenue generated turned back into seed money for other launches. However, there is also a set cost to districts wishing to participate of \$30,000. This cost is to provide necessary training for teachers and purchase of equipment/software for skills training. Boom Beans then wraps operations teams around the start-ups to make them safe investments for other investors and extend their success. The whole process builds personal relationships with students.

Mr. Wilson said his primary goal coming before the committee is to advocate for state funding of the project. Currently, they are looking to onboard 15 more schools, primarily focusing on middle schools, and are seeking \$400,000 for educator training, coding training, and an entrepreneur showcase. In addition to seeking state funds, they will also be going to regional groups to solicit funding and support. Mr. Such said that working with the Governor's School for Entrepreneurs as a technology training partner has been rewarding, and partnering with Boom Beans has led to shared stories of student success. He added it is a misconception that students already know everything about technology.

He looks to continue to build opportunities by utilizing this moment coming out of the pandemic, combining enhanced broadband support and the ability to connect virtually through Zoom, to propel Kentucky into the future.

Responding to a question from Representative Bojanowski, Mr. Wilson said he had worked with the Governor's School for Entrepreneurs, and agrees it is an excellent program. He envisions his program fitting in with their program as his occurs during the school-year and the Governor's School for Entrepreneurs occurs during the summer.

Responding to questions from Senator Thomas, Mr. Wilson said one of the biggest things the legislature can do to support his program in eastern Kentucky is to help offset the cost to schools to implement the program.

Senator Southworth commented that roughly a third of jobs require a college degree, and she appreciates organizations that set students on a pathway to success apart from college. Mr. Wilson agreed that students are a great source for innovative ideas and that his program seeks to teach them how to validate there is a market for their idea or launch a successful adaptation to an existing idea. In response to further questions from Senator Southworth, Mr. Wilson said increased funding support will allow the program to expand beyond current high schools and ATCs. Many schools want to participate, but there is not funding for all of them. Currently, the program is only available in districts that have acquired funds on their own to pay for technology upgrades and staff training.

Responding to statements from Senator Givens, Mr. Wilson agreed that failure is not a problem because it is part of the entrepreneurial spirit. They start the course with that lesson and continue on to teach that students have to keep working through the process to find success.

In response to a question from Representative Banta, Mr. Wilson clarified that the 55 percent does not go to schools, but rather goes to seed-funding for additional start-ups. The course instruction is paid through the school and students pitch their ideas to the Boom Beans operations team in the hopes of receiving seed money to launch their ideas. The Boom Beans organization distributes seed money grants of \$25,000 to 41 pitches at this time.

Senator Meredith commented that rural western Kentucky also is neglected and to date has not received the same kind of investment support as eastern Kentucky. He asked what kind of guarantee the program could give that it would be successful over the long term. Mr. Such answered that an income agreement is currently part of their model for their adult coding program, in that they guarantee graduates will earn a minimum salary upon completion of the program. He felt the idea of a forgivable loan would be satisfactory to all parties. Mr. Wilson said many in eastern Kentucky do not feel heard in Frankfort, and as a non-profit organization, it would be difficult for Boom Beans to take on a loan

arrangement. Mr. Such added that the goal of the program is to change the dynamic of economic investment so that students and citizens of Kentucky would be building and working inside plants with their name on the outside, not that of an individual from outside the state. A system like that also means that more of the profits stay in state. Mr. Wilson said nothing is guaranteed in the world of start-ups, but this program has shown in its pilot that with good supports, these student entrepreneurship can have staying power. Senator Meredith just cautioned that there are a lot of groups asking for funding right now, and there is not enough to go around. The legislature will need to be judicious in appropriations to guarantee sufficient returns to justify the investments.

Chair Huff thanked everyone for their testimony and announced the next meeting of the committee will be Monday, November 15, at 11:00 a.m. With no further business to come before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 12:45 pm.