

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Minutes of the Second Meeting of the 2023 Interim

July 18, 2023

Call to Order and Roll Call

The second meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Education was held on July 18, 2023, at 11:00 a.m. in Room 154 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Stephen West, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Representative James Tipton, Co-Chair; Senator Stephen West, Co-Chair; Senator Danny Carroll, Senator Shelley Funke Frommeyer, Senator Stephen Meredith, Senator Gerald A. Neal, Senator Gex Williams, Senator Mike Wilson, Senator Max Wise, Representative Jared Bauman, Representative Tina Bojanowski, Representative George Brown Jr., Representative Kevin Jackson, Representative Scott Lewis, Representative Candy Massaroni, Representative Bobby McCool, Representative Steve Rawlings, Representative Josie Raymond, Representative Steve Riley, Representative Killian Timoney, Representative Timmy Truett, Representative Russell Webber, Representative Lisa Willner.

Guests: Hunter Moore, CEO, Plasma Games; Will Hodges, Superintendent, Green County Schools; Ben Davenport, Principal, Green County High School; Dr. Corinne Murphy, Dean, College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, Western Kentucky University; Jennifer Smith, Legislative Liaison, Western Kentucky University; Wes Bradley, Superintendent, Nelson County Schools; Dr. Karen Lee, Director, District Grants and Programs, Nelson County Schools; Dr. Rhonda Caldwell, Executive Director, Kentucky Association of School Administrators; Dr. David Meinshein, Superintendent, Livingston County Schools; Priscilla Keller, Teacher, Livingston County Schools; and Mr. Jim Allen, Vice Chairman, RW Baird Corporation

LRC Staff: Yvette Perry, Joshua Collins, and Maurya Allen.

Approval of Minutes - June 6, 2023

Following introduction of special guests, including Representative Jackson's grandson, Brooks Henry Jackson, a rising 3rd grader at Cumberland Trace Elementary, Senator Neal made a motion to approve the minutes of the June 6, 2023, meeting. The motion was seconded by Representative Timoney and passed by voice vote.

Chemistry Education and Career Pathways in Kentucky

Hunter Moore, CEO, Plasma Games, said he founded Plasma Games to help the United States better compete in science education and increase the number of individuals attaining careers in science. Chemistry jobs are a high growth, high need industry and have a high impact on local economy. There is a need to increase both the number of students entering the chemistry field as well as the number of qualified chemistry teachers. Current teachers reported that to succeed with science education, students need to be engaged with the material and have context and meaning. To help teachers achieve these goals, Plasma Games developed a 3D game platform that embeds science content rather than simple gamification of quizzes. Additionally, the game includes career pathways information as in-game character backstory, which are regionally specific and reflect gender and racial diversity, so more students can see themselves reflected in the game and believe that the same career pathways are accessible to them. Mr. Moore then briefly demonstrated the game for the committee and discussed the awards that the game has received in global edu-game rankings. In addition to chemistry, the game incorporates elements of other sciences including physics and engineering. Teachers are provided with additional resources to expand the learning outside of the game and all teachers who participated in a pilot study asked to continue using the game in their classrooms.

In response to a question from Chair West, Mr. Moore said the game covers middle school and high school physical science standards. Some schools have piloted the game in younger classes and have been able to accelerate learning for some students.

In response to a question from Representative Bojanowski, Mr. Moore said there is not a demo version currently available online, but any teacher who would like to demo the game can reach out for access.

Responding to a question from Representative Tipton, Mr. Moore said the game allows for students to review concepts at their own pace. Many states are either using the game in schools or beginning the process of piloting the game in classrooms. Representative Tipton said that KDE is currently going through an RFP process to evaluate the usage of this game, or one like it, in Kentucky.

In response to a question from Senator Wise, Mr. Moore said the budget request presented in the materials is lower than the budget allocation from other states and represents a significant discount. He is looking forward to the discussions surrounding the RFP process with KDE.

Responding to a question from Senator Funke Frommeyer, Mr. Moore said he was unable to address the budget allocation currently. Representative Tipton said the current budget allocation is from ARPA sources to pilot the program and any future allocation would need to come from other sources.

Grow Your Own Programs in Kentucky

Presenting two different local grow your own programs throughout the Commonwealth were, Will Hodges, Superintendent, Green County Schools; Ben Davenport, Principal, Green County High School; Dr. Corinne Murphy, Dean of the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, Western Kentucky University; Dr. Susan Keeseey, Director of the School of Teacher Education, Western Kentucky University; Dr. Karen Lee, Director of Community Centered Programs, Nelson County Schools; and Wes Bradley, Superintendent, Nelson County Schools.

Mr. Hodges said there is a need to increase the number of teachers, especially following the pandemic, and his district strove to keep the program simple but provide results. They have three foundational principles for the program: building relationships, creating relevance, and having rigor. The first relationship they built was with a postsecondary partner, Campbellsville University. Another critical component was the leadership of local teacher, Courtney Mooney, who was driven to create the program and ensure its success. To date, the program has created a “good problem” in that more qualified candidates have been created than there are positions within the county.

To create relevance in the program, the district has elevated the issue of teacher shortages within the community and incentivized local students to become a part of the program. The teaching and learning pathway is promoted to students as young as 5th grade and the local school board has incorporated the grow your own program into district’s strategic plan. Monetary incentives for the program come from a future educators’ scholarship program funded by the Morris and Leona Ingram \$1 million memorial endowment. Annually students can apply for and receive up to \$10,000 in scholarship funds to further their education as teachers. Approximately 20 students participate in the program annually, pursue teaching degrees from local postsecondary institutions, and upon certification many are returning to the community looking to be teachers in the district.

Another style of grow your own program being developed is an apprenticeship model at Nelson County in partnership with Western Kentucky University. Dr. Murphy explained how the K-12 teacher apprenticeship program was piloted in Tennessee last year through a special request to the US Department of Labor. The approved pilot resulted in a partnership between Austin Peay and local school districts. The Tennessee model had positives and negatives, a significant one being that there are shortages in more than classroom teachers. Taking other staff, such as instructional aides, into the teaching profession further deepened shortages in other areas. Nelson County and WKU developed their apprenticeship program with an aim to create net gains and teachers who have strong desire to teach within the local community. Apprentices are paid employees within the district and participate in structured on-the-job learning. The program includes the US Department of Labor work process, dual credit coursework, university coursework, and student teaching. Partners included preK-12 school districts, the university

educator preparation program, the Kentucky Career and Technical College System (KCTCS), and the new Kentucky Office of Employer and Apprenticeship Services (OEAS). Dr. Murphy gave an extensive overview of the pathway and the many steps that potential students would follow to go from middle school students to fully certified teachers two years after high school graduation.

Current funding for the apprenticeship program comes from unfilled teaching assistant positions, but that is not sustainable because the apprentices cannot be full-time teaching assistants. Other sources of funding must be found to pay the required wages for an apprenticeship as required by the US Department of Labor. Also, not every school has the necessary master teacher mentors or funding to retain mentors. Universities will also have to examine their curriculum delivery model as not every university is capable of digital delivery of teacher preparation curriculum as is required in this model. Western Kentucky University has applied for grants and other funding to expand the program to other districts and the program continues to expand.

Mr. Bradley said he is grateful for the individuals in his district who have worked to bring the apprenticeship model into reality, especially Dr. Karen Lee. Dr. Lee spoke briefly about the process to get approval from the US Department of Labor to expand the apprenticeship models that were existing to create a teacher apprenticeship program. It was critically important to create academic rigor within the program so the resulting teachers would be prepared to enter classrooms. Students are given the opportunity to see themselves as a teacher and achieve a career that they previously felt was unattainable. Mr. Bradley said this is a common-sense approach to addressing teacher shortages that is achievable on a local level.

Representative Bojanowski said a system where students do all their college work during high school may not allow kids time to be kids, which is concerning. She then asked the panel which subject matter area had the most critical shortages of applicants. In response, Mr. Bradley said the highest need in his district is for science teachers, but there are teacher shortages in all areas and pre-date the pandemic.

In response to a question from Chair West, Dr. Murphy said the current funding source is a three-year \$2 million grant from the US Department of Education for a work-based program which the apprenticeship program qualified for. It does not require a local funding match. Other federal grants may be available in the future, and may require a state or university funding match. Dr. Lee said the grants are highly competitive and never guaranteed.

Responding to a question from Senator Wise, Mr. Hodges said there are very few vacancies but the highest demand in his district is in career and technical education and those openings are frequently filled by individuals who go through alternative certification pathways. Dr. Lee said

there is also a difficulty getting qualified teachers for the apprenticeship program itself, as it requires bringing in new hires strictly to teach the apprentices in high school.

In response to a question from Representative Tipton, Dr. Murphy said the standards for coursework in education are already quite high, and they are even higher for the apprentices. They are working and learning simultaneously. The university has held local apprenticeship fairs to share the success of the existing program and expand it into other districts. As a highly customizable model, it will look different in each district but will maintain the same academic rigor. Drawing down additional funding will require more discussion with the federal government and it will be a lengthy process.

Senator Neal said it will take investment from the state to show commitment to fixing the serious need experienced by districts across the commonwealth

In response to a question from Senator Williams, Mr. Bradley said the current structure is for students to receive wages but some of those wages are invested back into the program to cover their tuition. However, this results in less than a sustainable wage for many students and more investment may be necessary to continue to incentivize student participation. Dr. Murphy said all the partners have skin in the game currently as it is a critical issue at all levels.

In response to a question from Chair West, Mr. Bradley said there are choices that individuals make and there is not parity between student teachers and apprentices. Additionally, student teachers are only receiving six months of classroom experience while the apprentices receive many years of experience through the program. Dr. Murphy said that other surrounding states do pay student teachers, and she has campaigned for that to change in Kentucky. In her opinion, student teaching is a critical component of learning for prospective teachers and student teachers should be paid for the critical role they play in teaching.

Coalition to Sustain the Education Profession

The Coalition to Sustain the Education Profession includes educators, parents, legislators, and other community partners and began work last fall to make a series of recommendations for legislative actions that could be used to address teacher retention. Dr. Caldwell presented the preliminary recommendations in a summary document, choosing to highlight three in the presentation. First, around teacher compensation, it is necessary to ensure that every educator receives a living wage. Second, they recommended establishing a statewide mentorship program named K-NET, expanding the GoTeachKY program to all districts, and creating a tenure review committee. Third, they recommended an educator stabilization fund to ensure the state can attract and retain high quality teachers in high demand subject areas.

Mr. Jim Allen, Vice Chairman, RW Baird Corporation, spoke to the creation of the Baird Teacher Recognition awards for teachers within JCPS and as a private company it would be difficult to sustain a business if it experienced the same turnover rate currently impacting the teaching profession. He said compensation is a big part of the conversation and necessary for any company to recruit and retain talent. There is no silver bullet, it will take addressing quality of life and preparation among other approaches, but compensation is a good starting place. He also advocated for student teaching stipends, as have many university deans who have seen a decline in the number of candidates applying to teacher education programs.

Dr. David Meinshein, Superintendent, Livingston County Schools, said in reflecting on his new role as a member of the Murray State University Board of Regents, it has been tremendous to see the growth around Murray as a result of the investment in the university as a teaching college 100 years ago to today. Teacher turnover rate has accelerated over the last few years and fewer new candidates are entering the pipeline. Education is essential for economic development and students need to be able to enter the workforce as well-prepared employees. Many states are tackling this issue by addressing salaries, primarily by setting minimum salary levels well higher than our existing average starting salary. Nate Jebson, Principal, Shelby County Schools, said there has been a high turnover rate in his school this year and no applicants from traditional educator programs. Additionally, applicants are being emergency certified or are individuals coming from another teaching role or career pathway, which is not sustainable. Shortages among teachers also extend to substitutes and the need to ask teachers to sacrifice planning and professional development periods to cover other classes. Priscilla Keller, teacher, Livingston County Schools, spoke to the reasons that existing teachers choose to leave the classroom including being priced out of the classroom and needing better work-life balance. Dr. Meinshein spoke briefly in closing to the need to renew the K-NET and bonuses to attract teachers in low performance and critical need schools.

Representative Willner thanked the presenters for their insights and for focusing on including teacher voices. It was helpful to have concrete recommendations that can be used as a foundation for legislation.

Representative Timoney said the number of applicants per opening is the important metric that is often overlooked, because for 1,200 openings there need to be many thousands of applicants.

In response to a question from Representative Bauman, Dr. Caldwell said the recommendation for the starting salary to be set at \$45,000 was based on conversations among all the partners and the reality of the finances in many school districts that could not take on anything higher as

an unfunded mandate. The end goal should be much higher, but a starting point had to be reasonably attainable at this time.

Adjournment

With no further business to come before the committee the meeting adjourned at 1:05 p.m. The next meeting of the committee will be Tuesday, August 1, 2023.