

COMMISSION ON RACE & ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY

Minutes

July 29, 2024

Call to Order and Roll Call

The second meeting of the Commission on Race and Access to Opportunity was held on July 29, 2024, at 1:00 PM in Room 129 of the Capitol Annex. Representative Killian Timoney, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Representative Killian Timoney, Co-Chair; Senator Amanda Mays Bledsoe, Co-Chair; Senators Karen Berg and Whitney Westerfield; Representatives George Brown Jr., Samara Heavrin, and Nima Kulkarni; Kimberly Baird and Lyndon Pryor.

Guests: Patrick A. Lewis, Ph.D., Director of Collections and Research, The Filson Historical Society; Ebony Hutchinson, Principal, William Wells Brown (WWB) Elementary School; Linzell Brundage, Behavior Coach, WWB; Misty Lynch, English Learners Teacher, WWB; Carrie Mulert, Gifted and Talented Teacher, WWB; Amanda Stewart, Instructional Coach and Multi-Tiered System of Supports Lead, WWB; and Bill Bradford, Ed.D., Assistant Superintendent of School Leadership, Fayette County Public Schools.

LRC Staff: Brandon White and Logan Schaaf.

Approval of June Minutes

On a motion by Co-Chair Mays Bledsoe, seconded by Senator Westerfield, the June 18, 2024 meeting minutes were approved by voice vote.

Searching for Kentucky's Juneteenth

Patrick A. Lewis, Ph.D., Director of Collections and Research at The Filson Historical Society, discussed candidates for a state holiday comparable to Juneteenth. These included: August 8, celebrated primarily in Paducah, with possible origins in celebrations of hemispheric emancipation originating in Haiti or local commemorations in Tennessee; February 29, 1864, when African American enlistment in the U.S. Army was approved in Kentucky; March 3rd, 1865, emancipation for the families of African American Kentuckians enlisted in the U.S. Army; May 11, 1865, when General John Palmer gave an order that officially liberated formerly enslaved citizens to be able to seek work and to travel; July 4, 1865, when the Declaration of Independence was read at the State Fairgrounds and General Palmer declared formerly enslaved people "substantially free"; December 5, 1865, when a case against General Palmer, for helping slaves to escape, was dismissed, and Palmer declared to

a crowd of African Americans outside the courthouse, "A Kentucky judge has declared you all free"; and December 7, 1865, when General Palmer issued a final order, saying "slavery has now ceased to exist in Kentucky."

Rather than choosing a specific day, History Made by Us, a network of museums and historical organizations, has instituted a nationwide civic season running from Juneteenth through July 4, encouraging exhibitions, lectures, programs, and volunteering.

Senator Berg praised the presentation and stressed the importance of learning history.

Responding to a question from Co-Chair Mays Bledsoe, Dr. Lewis provided an overview of the activities, programs, and ideas involved in the civic season.

Responding to a question from Senator Westerfield, Co-Chair Timoney said that 28 states and Washington D.C. have codified Juneteenth. Senator Westerfield said that the General Assembly should do the same.

Co-Chair Timoney emphasized the importance of understanding history and developing empathy.

Discussion on Elementary Education: The Promise Academy at William Wells Brown

Ebony Hutchinson, Principal, William Wells Brown (WWB) Elementary School; Linzell Brundage, Behavior Coach, WWB; Misty Lynch, English Learners Teacher, WWB; Carrie Mulert, Gifted and Talented Teacher, WWB; Amanda Stewart, Instructional Coach and Multi-Tiered System of Supports Lead, WWB; and Bill Bradford, Ed.D., Assistant Superintendent of School Leadership, Fayette County Public Schools, detailed their successful efforts to improve William Wells Brown Elementary's performance and reputation over the last five years. The WWB staff discussed their mission, vision, demographics, improvement data in reading and math, and the creation of a culture of belonging.

Responding to a question from Representative Kulkarni, Principal Hutchinson credited a change in expectations as key in the school's turn-around. Changing the family and community mindset was key to improving attendance.

Responding to a question from Representative Brown on lessons from WWB that could be applied to other schools, Principal Hutchinson highlighted the expectation of excellence throughout the building, emphasized by every staff member, regardless of their job. Ms. Lynch said that the achievement gap was an opportunity gap, and that increasing the opportunities available to students improved achievement. Ms. Mulert said that building relationships with students and families is a top priority.

Responding to a question from Co-Chair Mays Bledsoe, Principal Hutchinson discussed community partnerships and volunteer opportunities at WWB.

Responding to a question from Senator Westerfield, Principal Hutchinson said that family involvement has risen significantly and has been an important factor in WWB's improvement. Senator Westerfield encouraged the collection of data on obstacles to parental and community involvement so that those factors could be mitigated.

Responding to a question from Mr. Pryor, Ms. Lynch, Ms. Stewart, and Ms. Mulert discussed students' concerns and barriers to achievement, including violence, homelessness, and parents' attitudes towards education.

Responding to questions from Senator Berg, Ms. Stewart said that daily attendance averages between 85 and 92 percent. Ms. Stewart and Mr. Brundage work to determine the factors contributing to each student's absences or tardiness. These include a lack of resources and overworked parents. Mr. Brundage and Principal Hutchinson highlighted the school's attendance challenge, which aims for 95 percent daily attendance.

Bill Bradford, Ed.D., Assistant Superintendent of School Leadership, Fayette County Public Schools, further discussed Senator Berg's question on attendance and test scores. Dr. Bradford said that attendance has become a major focus in the district and that it is an important factor in school performance.

Responding to a question from Co-Chair Timoney, Dr. Bradford discussed the designations for underperforming schools, the resources and support that accompany those designations, and the paths to improvement. William Wells Brown is a model of this improvement.

Responding to a question from Co-Chair Timoney, Principal Hutchinson detailed the process for establishing the school's culture, especially for students who start in the middle of the year. Ms. Stewart provided an overview of the house system.

Responding to a question from Senator Berg, Principal Hutchinson said that the additional resources and support provided to WBB as an underperforming school will continue to decrease as the school's performance continues to improve. Dr. Bradford said that family resource center coordinators are common throughout schools all over the state, but the Family and Community Engagement Liaison at WWB is a more unique and innovative position that is not as commonly seen throughout the district or the state.

Adjournment

With no further business before the commission, the meeting was adjourned at 2:30 PM.

