

COMMISSION ON RACE & ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY

Minutes

September 16, 2026

Call to Order and Roll Call

The fourth meeting of the Commission on Race & Access to Opportunity was held on September 16, 2026, at 3:00 PM ET/2:00 PM CT in Room 129 of the Capitol Annex. Representative Kevin Jackson, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Representative Kevin Jackson, Co-Chair; Senator Lindsey Tichenor; Representatives George Brown Jr. and Samara Heavrin; and Sonita Justice.

Guests: Dr. Phil Neal, Executive Vice President and Provost, Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS); Dr. Anton Reece, Chancellor, West Kentucky Community and Technical College (WKCTC); Dr. Beth Hargis, Ed.D., Associate Commissioner, Office of Career and Technical Education; Dr. Lauren Graves, Policy Advisor, Kentucky Department of Education, Office of Career and Technical Education; and Dr. Mike Yoder, PhD., PHR, Commissioner, Department of Workforce Development, Education and Labor Cabinet.

LRC Staff: Brandon White and Logan Schaaf.

Workforce Readiness

Dr. Phil Neal, Executive Vice President and Provost, Kentucky Community and Technical College System, and Dr. Anton Reece, Chancellor, West Kentucky Community and Technical College, provided an overview of the community and technical college system, highlighting characteristics of their student populations, barriers to success, and workforce programs. They discussed the KCTCS prison education program, the Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship, and the Workforce Pell Grant. Dr. Reece discussed the operations and student support services of WKCTC.

Chair Jackson praised Dr. Neal and Dr. Reece's work in the community and technical college system.

Responding to Ms. Justice, Dr. Reece discussed the nursing and allied health pathways available to WKCTC students, and highlighted the student advising and guidance processes.

Representative Brown praised Dr. Neal, Dr. Reece, and the Community and Technical College System.

Dr. Beth Hargis, Ed.D., Associate Commissioner, Office of Career and Technical Education, and Dr. Lauren Graves, Policy Advisor, Kentucky Department of Education, Office of Career and Technical Education, discussed the role of career and technical education (CTE) in preparing students for the workforce. They highlighted CTE programs available in areas that include manufacturing, business, agriculture, engineering, and healthcare.

Dr. Graves provided an overview of available opportunities, including apprenticeships, internships, and dual credit programs. Dr. Hargis detailed CTE student progress and achievement statistics and discussed challenges, including the reluctance to hire youth, teacher shortages, finding the correct career path, and chronic absenteeism.

Responding to Chair Jackson, Dr. Hargis discussed factors contributing to the growth of CTE programs and thanked the General Assembly for its support.

Responding to Senator Tichenor, Dr. Graves said the most completed career pathways for 2024 high school graduates were management, entrepreneurship, allied health, pre-nursing, and animal science systems.

Dr. Mike Yoder, PhD., PHR, Commissioner, Department of Workforce Development, Education and Labor Cabinet, discussed workforce preparedness. He highlighted the importance of getting high school and college graduates into entry level jobs. The Department of Workforce Development's Office of Industry and Apprenticeship Services works to place students in registered apprenticeships and create talent pipelines for the participating companies.

Responding to Chair Jackson, Dr. Yoder discussed outreach efforts to make students aware of the apprenticeship programs.

Representative Brown praised Dr. Yoder's presentation and emphasized the importance of educational opportunities.

Adjournment

With no further business to come before the committee, the meeting adjourned.