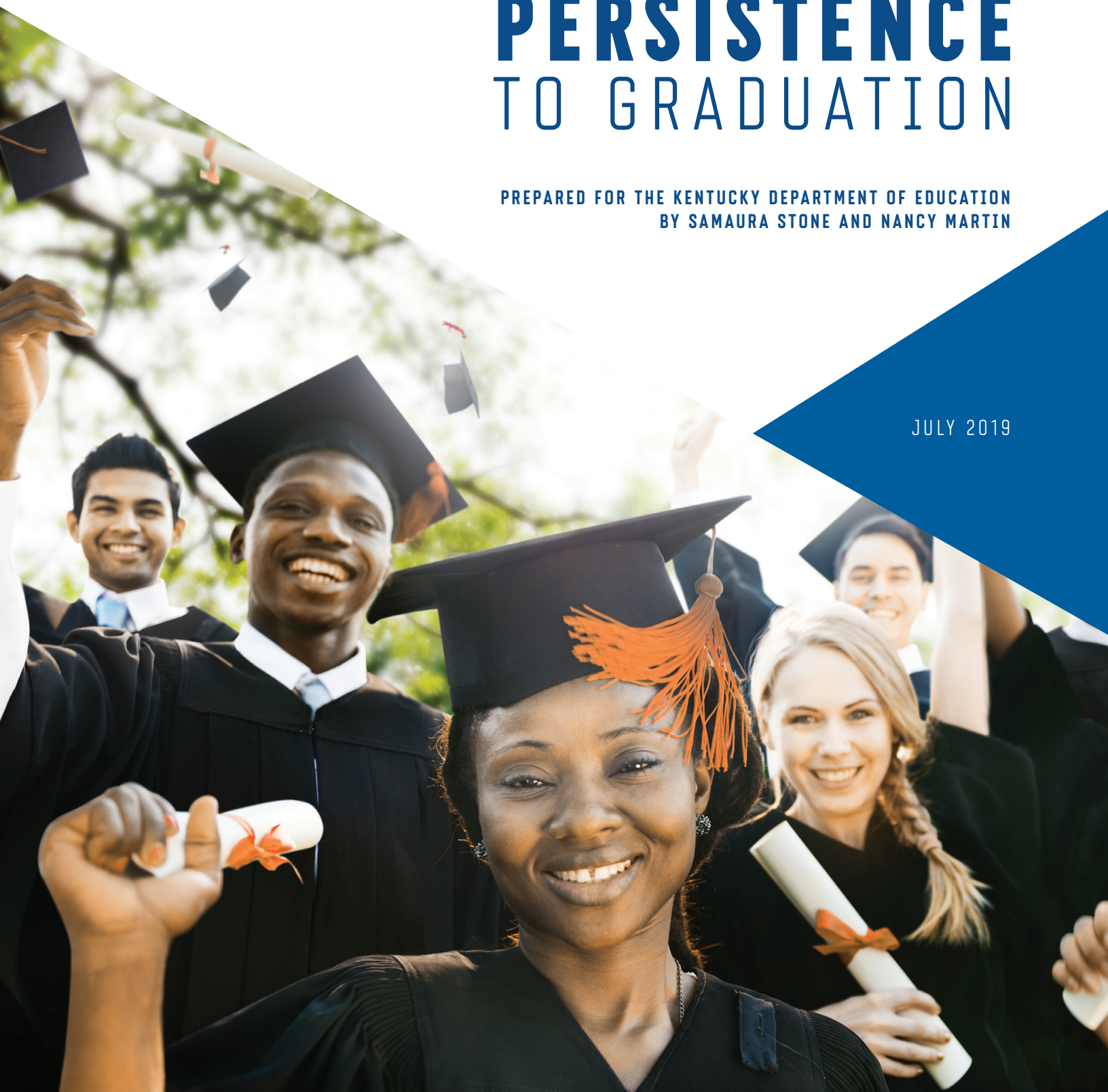




PERSISTENCE TO GRADUATION

PREPARED FOR THE KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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KENTUCKY PERSISTENCE TO GRADUATION

While in the past high school graduation was all that was necessary to enter the workforce and earn a living wage, now students in the U.S. must graduate high school ready for postsecondary education.

In fact, by 2020, 65 percent of all jobs and 92 percent of STEM jobs will require postsecondary education or training beyond high school (Carneval, Smith & Strohl, 2013). Unfortunately, high school graduation is not a reality for a significant portion of our students. Those who do not complete high school face economic and social challenges throughout their lifetimes. Compared to their high school graduate counterparts, they are less likely to be employed earning a living wage and more likely to be poor and experiencing adverse health outcomes (Rumberger, 2011).

In anticipation of the new workplace that would require more education and training, policymakers and advocates aggressively pushed for school reforms during the latter half of the 1990's and to address what came to be known as the "dropout crisis." Simultaneously, economists and researchers continued to project another wave of changes in the labor market and expressed how critical it was to prepare the next generation of young people for 21st century jobs that would require more education than a high school diploma. This shift made way for national and state reforms to improve graduation rates. These include: The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 and Dropout Prevention Act (Title I, Part H of NCLB), federal legislation requiring schools to make measurable progress on high school graduation; the identification of

early warning signs of attendance, behavior, and course performance (ABC's); and the adoption of the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) to compare graduation rates across districts and states (Allensworth, Nagaoka, & Johnson, 2018).

Combined, these interventions led to a considerable increase in national graduation rates. According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics, in school year 2015–16, the ACGR for public high school students was 84 percent, the highest it had been since the rate was first measured in 2010–11. More than four out of five students graduated with a regular high school diploma within four years of starting ninth grade. Asian/Pacific Islander students had the highest ACGR (91 percent), followed by White (88 percent), Hispanic (79 percent), Black (76 percent), and American Indian/Alaska Native (72 percent) students (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).*

While impressive progress has been made in increasing graduation rates, including for historically underserved groups of students, these gains have not been even and large disparities remain. “Black and Hispanic students continue to make graduation rate gains greater than the national average, but their overall graduation rates still fall below 80 percent. More states are increasing graduation rates for these students than ever before, but the gaps between them and White students still remain significant (11.9 percentage points between Black and White students and 9 percentage points between Hispanic and White students)” (Depaoli, Balfanz, Atwell & Bridgeland, 2018). Additionally, underserved students graduate from public high schools having earned a college and career ready (CCR) diploma at a much lower rate, in comparison with their peers, in the twenty-three states that offered students multiple pathways to a diploma (Almond, 2017).

Like most states, Kentucky increased the statewide ACGR in 2016, to 88.6 percent, a 2.5 percent increase from the 2011 rate of 86.1 percent. However, Kentucky continues to struggle to raise graduation rates for students of color, low-income students, and students with disabilities. In order for Kentucky to reach a 90 percent graduate rate, the Commonwealth will need to increase its focus on these populations of students. In terms of numbers, for example, Kentucky would have to graduate approximately 2,475 more students within those demographics, excluding the general population, students in alternative settings, and students who do not fall into those categories (Depaoli, Balfanz, Atwell & Bridgeland, 2018).

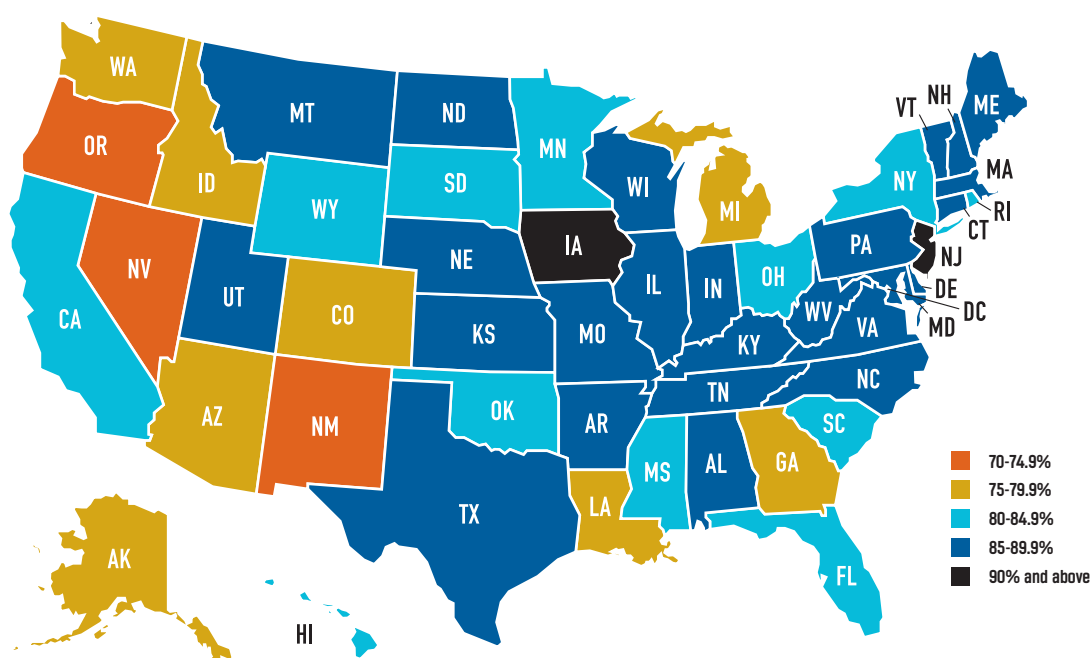
Students in alternative programs in Kentucky have generally much lower graduation rates than students in traditional high school; yet this is unsurprising since most

* Please note that the 2016-17 data became available after this report writing began. You can find the updated data summary on the National Center for Education Statistics website: <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=805>

alternative programs serve a struggling student population, a population that might have dropped out of school were it not for the existence of an alternative program. These schools and programs are part of any robust portfolio of options to meet a range of student needs. It is important that these programs be of high quality. In the past, many have been disciplinary dumping grounds, and that is not the solution. The accompanying Alternative Education Practice Brief provides detailed examples of high quality alternative programs and best practices in alternative education.

Figure 1 illustrates the graduation rates of states, ranging from 70% to over 90%.

FIGURE 1. ADJUSTED COHORT GRADUATION RATE (ACGR) FOR PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, BY STATE: 2015-16



KENTUCKY'S LEGISLATIVE REFORM EFFORTS TO LOWER DROPOUT RATES

With graduation rates now above 80 percent in Kentucky, it might be hard to believe the Commonwealth once ranked 50th in the nation in adult literacy and the percentage of adults with a high school diploma, 49th in percentage of college graduates, 42nd in per pupil expenditure, and 41st in pupil-teacher ratio. The Kentucky Education Reform Act (1990) or KERA, was "sweeping legislation that restructured and redefined the way the state designed, delivered, governed and

financed education" (Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, 2016). KERA created stronger academic standards and also redesigned postsecondary education. This reform set the stage for the additional statutes, as KERA was nationally regarded as a very influential education reform.

Kentucky continued to adopt multiple education reform laws between 2000 and 2006 to aggressively tackle the high school "dropout crisis" and track holistic interventions throughout the state to increase high school graduation rates. In 2000, the Kentucky Revised Statute (KRS) 158.145 was passed with additional updates in 2014. The current statute states in relevant part:

(a) The statewide annual average school dropout rate will be cut by fifty percent (50%) of what it was in the year 2000. All students who drop out of a school during a school year and all students who have not graduated, fail to enroll in the school for the following school year, and do not transfer to another school, shall be included in the statewide annual average school dropout rate; (b) No school will have an annual dropout rate that exceeds five percent (5%); and (c) Each county will have thirty percent (30%) fewer adults between the ages of sixteen (16) and twenty-four (24) without a high school diploma or a High School Equivalency Diploma than the county had in the year 2000.

In conjunction with this, KRS 158.146 was enacted to create a strategy to address school dropout problems by the Department by providing technical assistance, grants, and disseminating information to school districts and school level personnel. This statute established the Dropout Prevention Fund, which was unfortunately eliminated in 2017. However, at the time, the fund allocated the following:

Seventy-five percent (75%) of the available dropout funds be directed to services for at-risk elementary and middle school students, including, but not limited to, identification, counseling, home visitations, parental training, and other strategies to improve school attendance, school achievement, and to minimize at-risk factors. Twenty-five percent (25%) of the funds directed to services for high school students identified as likely to drop out of school, including, but not limited to, counseling, tutoring, extra instructional support, alternative programming, and other appropriate strategies. Priority for grants shall be awarded to districts that average, over a three (3) year period, an annual dropout rate exceeding five percent (5%). The department shall disseminate information on best practices in dropout prevention in order to advance the knowledge for district and school level personnel to address the dropout problem effectively (KRS 158.146(4)-(5)).



PERSISTENCE TO GRADUATION

To implement the Commonwealth's focus on high school graduation, the Kentucky Department of Education created *The Persistence to Graduation Initiative* in 2015. Spearheaded by the Office of Continuous Improvement and Support's Division of Student Success, this initiative provides a variety of supports to schools and districts to identify students who may be off-track for CCR, promotion, and/or on-time graduation, and provide interventions to support students until they earn a diploma. The work has evolved over the years to include an emphasis on equity because, just as is the case nationally, as graduation rates in Kentucky increase, graduation rates for students of color (particularly African-American and Latino/Hispanic), students in alternative settings, migrant and immigrant populations, youth in foster care, rural settings, low-income neighborhoods, and students with disabilities continue to lag behind.

Kentucky uses both a five-year and four-year ACGR for purposes of accountability. The five-year rate recognizes the persistence of students and educators in completing the requirements for a Kentucky high school diploma. The cohort is “adjusted” by adding any students who transfer into the cohort and by subtracting any students who transfer out of the cohort to a legitimate educational setting or situation (e.g., transfer to an out-of-state school, enroll in a private school, emigrate to another country, or student death).

Kentucky's Early Warning and Persistence to Graduation data tools were developed to help support schools in meeting graduation and college and career readiness goals. Kentucky benefits from having a single student information system that is used for all schools and districts in the Commonwealth, allowing for robust use of data at the school, district, and state levels. The new Early Warning tool allows school and district staff to have a complete and better understanding of the many factors that are contributing to students dropping out and to determine which interventions will be the most successful in helping the student get back on track. Every student in grades 6-12 is provided with a GRAD (Graduation-Related Analytic Data) Score based on various data points such as attendance, behavior, grades, enrollment history, demographics, test scores, household demographics, school type, and more. The Early Warning tool uses machine learning to improve its accuracy over time. The Persistence to Graduation report is available for all grade levels and assigns each student a risk score based on attendance, behavior, course performance, and demographics using live data each time the report is run. Because the Early Warning tool has not yet expanded to incorporate all grades, the Persistence to Graduation report is recommended for grades K-5.

PROMISING PRACTICES WITHIN 4 KEY AREAS

Kentucky has made considerable efforts to raise awareness of promising and successful practices throughout the commonwealth that are in alignment with Kentucky's dropout prevention goals. *The Persistence to Graduation Summit* is an annual gathering hosted by the Kentucky Department of Education every summer that provides participants with the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of dropout prevention and re-engagement strategies. The conference features keynote speakers, peer-led interactive breakout sessions on a variety of relevant topics, and multiple networking opportunities for attendees. Most sessions are led by Kentucky educators and community partners who have been identified as implementing practices that others could replicate in their own schools and districts. The intent is to highlight what their peers in other parts of the state are doing to help students be engaged in school until they graduate.

Many of Kentucky's Persistence to Graduation efforts are focused on identifying programs of distinction, as well as promoting and sharing best practices within four focus areas: *Alternative Education*, *Community Partnerships*, *Culture and Climate*, and *Student Transitions and Reengagement*. Evidence indicates each of the four areas is a significant contributor to improved outcomes for students. No one area is sufficient on its own and they are all interconnected; therefore, districts and schools should focus on applying these practices using a holistic approach. The four focus areas are further explored in a series of accompanying practice briefs that highlight the importance of each and feature schools and programs from across the state.

**MANY OF KENTUCKY'S
PERSISTENCE TO GRADUATION
EFFORTS ARE FOCUSED
ON IDENTIFYING PROGRAMS
OF DISTINCTION, AS WELL AS
PROMOTING AND SHARING BEST
PRACTICES WITHIN FOUR FOCUS AREAS:**

- 1. ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION**
- 2. COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**
- 3. CULTURE & CLIMATE**
- 4. STUDENT TRANSITIONS & REENGAGEMENT**

Despite national and state high school graduation rates being at an all-time high, levels of student achievement have remained largely stagnant over the past few decades, and sizable gaps in academic achievement and graduation rates among socioeconomic and racial/ethnic groups persist. Inequitable access and income inequality continue to shape the current education system and pose a serious threat to future gains. While an 84 percent high school graduation rate demonstrates improvement, it is simply not enough. The urgency and passion must continue for the remaining 1.2 million high school students who drop out every year. There is much work to be done, and the practice briefs that accompany this document can serve as a guide for educators throughout the Commonwealth of Kentucky who seek to improve outcomes for students and families.

The Kentucky Department of Education hopes these four practice briefs will be beneficial to educators and practitioners of all types from across the state. Examples represent promising and successful practices in rural, suburban, and urban programs, schools, and districts, as well with various student populations in traditional and alternative settings with both small and large class sizes. Many of the practices highlighted can be easily replicated with little or no cost. The briefs focus on positive steps practitioners can take to build upon Kentucky statutes enacted nearly three decades ago to promote graduation and success for all students.

While the areas of Alternative Education, Community Partnerships, Culture and Climate, and Student Transition and Reengagement are interconnected and should be all part of a strategy to improve student persistence to graduation, there are many ways to get started on the work, depending on existing community strengths, context, and resources.

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ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

OVERVIEW

Most states and districts offer alternative education programs, or schools and programs outside of the traditional K-12 curriculum, though the programming offered and population served vary widely (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Alternative education programs and schools provide students who are struggling the opportunity to achieve in a new setting and use creative, individualized learning strategies. Thus, alternative education settings can help ensure students at risk of dropping out of traditional schools receive the guidance and additional supports needed to complete coursework and remain “on track” to graduate. While in the past many students were referred to alternative schools for chronic absenteeism, disciplinary concerns, and credit recovery, according to the National Dropout Prevention Center, the definition of an alternative school is becoming broader and goes beyond students who are struggling in the classroom (Cash, 2004). Alternative settings can range from magnet programs, dual enrollment or college-based programs, schools focused on serving students with unique interests or learning disabilities, education programs providing support for teen mothers, street academies serving homeless students, charter schools, and programs for youth involved with the juvenile justice system. Although there are many different kinds of alternative schools and programs, most are characterized by smaller student-to-teacher ratios; flexible scheduling; personalized learning; relevant, career-oriented themes; and innovative

curricula. High-quality alternative programs and schools focus on reengaging students in their education and moving them forward academically (Martin & Brand, 2006). As such, the existence of strong alternative education options can help a district ensure equity and prospects for students who might have “fallen through the cracks” in more traditional school settings.

In Kentucky, state legislation defines an “alternative education program” as “a program that exists to meet student needs that cannot be addressed in a traditional classroom setting” and that is “designed to remediate academic performance, improve behavior, or provide an enhanced learning experience” in alternative classrooms, centers, or campuses. Alternative education programs, which do not include career or technical centers or departments, serve students in all grades, vary in length of enrollment, and vary in size. While historically alternative education has been associated primarily with “at-risk” students, Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) clearly indicates that these programs can also serve students who: have special needs, are gifted and talented, are adjudicated, have been abused and neglected, are differently abled, or could benefit from a non-traditional environment. In Kentucky, four types of alternative programs serve a wide range of students:

1. District-operated programs on-site within a traditional school;

2. District-operated programs in a separate facility, including a range of programs, such as gifted and talented, behavior-focused, teen pregnancy, online, and specialized programming for immigrant and refugee students (A5);
3. Programs for students in the care of a state agency, such as juvenile detention centers, treatment facilities, residential group homes (A6); and
4. Blended A5/A6 programs.

In the 2017-2018 school year, a total of 23,288 students were enrolled in 181 A5 and A6 alternative programs in Kentucky. These programs were operating in 90 (52%) of the Commonwealth's 173 school districts. Districts vary widely in terms of the number of alternative programs offered, with

nearly half offering no such programs, many offering only one alternative program and, at the high end, one district offering 38 alternative programs serving both in- and out-of-district students.

Because traditional schools are not an appropriate fit for all students, it can be helpful for districts to offer a range of schools and programs to meet the needs of a diverse group of learners. Furthermore, the very existence of high-quality alternative schools and programs can expand and improve education options for *all* students, including those in traditional schools. Strong alternative programs and schools develop expertise in what works with students who are struggling in school and are engaged in testing the efficacy of a range of pathways to high school success. As such, alternative education programs, both those offered within and those offered alongside traditional public schools, should be seen as a critical tool in districts' efforts to increase persistence to high school graduation.



KEY STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES OF EFFECTIVE ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS AND SCHOOLS

Kentucky schools and districts offer a wide range of alternative programming employing a variety of strategies and practices to meet the varied needs of students. In this practice brief

we document seven key strategies and the associated practices in place in five programs and schools across the Commonwealth. These include:

STRATEGY 1: HAVING A VISION OF STUDENT SUCCESS AND DOING WHATEVER IS NECESSARY TO REACH IT

Those helping struggling students in successful alternative education settings generally share three mindsets:

- They believe all students, even those who have struggled significantly in traditional settings, have the ability to meet high expectations and succeed;
- They recognize the clock is ticking and have a sense of urgency about each student's education; and
- They are willing to think outside the box and innovate to facilitate student success.

STRATEGY 2: WILLINGNESS TO BE FLEXIBLE TO MEET STUDENTS' NEEDS

Successful alternative programs and schools bend to meet students' needs, through offering, for example:

- Flexibility in time, such as open entry and exit, flexibility in scheduling, extended year programming, and self-paced learning based on competency;
 - A small, personalized learning environment;
 - Credit recovery or catch-up for students who have fallen behind; and
 - Blended (computer-based) learning.
- This often means using staff in new ways. For example, in programs in which students do not begin or end at the same time, teachers often take on the role of "coach" or "facilitator" as students move through the curriculum at their own pace.

STRATEGY 3: ENCOURAGING STAFF COLLABORATION

Alternative schools and programs successfully meeting the needs of their students make staff collaboration a high priority. This is most evident in situations where:

- Classroom teachers and those providing other services, such as mental health services or juvenile justice programming, collaborate to offer students a coherent, consistent program; and
- An alternative school or program and a student's home school collaborate to offer students a smooth transition between education programming.

STRATEGY 4: CONSOLIDATING SERVICES TO IMPROVE QUALITY

Sometimes the most effective way to offer students high-quality alternative programming is to offer these services to a critical mass of students in one program or school. For instance, a district or consortia of districts might:

- ❑ Consolidate specialized services, highly skilled staff, and other resources in one location; and

- ❑ Provide augmented literacy and numeracy instruction for students who have experienced significant disruptions in their formal education or otherwise fallen significantly behind.

STRATEGY 5: EXPOSING STUDENTS TO COLLEGE AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

While all students benefit from early exposure to college and career exploration opportunities, this may be especially true for students who struggle in traditional education settings. Effective alternative programs are dedicated to providing their students with:

- ❑ College exposure, through, for example, co-location on a community college campus or dual-enrollment; and
- ❑ Career exploration opportunities.

STRATEGY 6: REMOVING DISINCENTIVES TO WORKING WITH STRUGGLING STUDENTS

Alternative programs often serve students who have experienced major difficulty or disruption in their education. As such, their effectiveness is not always evident through traditional accountability measures. For this reason, it is very important to:

- ❑ Ensure there are no disincentives related to accountability to working with struggling students or students for whom a traditional education program is not appropriate; and
- ❑ Where possible, add incentives to working with such students.

STRATEGY 7: CREATING A SUPPORTIVE, STRUCTURED ENVIRONMENT

Successful alternative education settings are generally characterized by clear behavior expectations and auxiliary supports for students and their families. Alternative programs and schools featured in this practice brief offer:

- ❑ Straight-forward rules and codes of conduct, with consistent enforcement and follow-through;
- ❑ Extensive support services, including on-site counseling, healthcare, social services, and supports for families;
- ❑ Trauma-informed practices throughout the program; and
- ❑ Careful attention to student transitions between programs and schools.

CASE EXAMPLE #1

WESTERN MENTAL HEALTH DAY TREATMENT

JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS | LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

KEY
STRATEGIES
HIGHLIGHTED:

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The Western Mental Health Day Treatment Program¹ (Western Day), a collaboration between Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) and Centerstone, a non-profit behavioral health organization, provides children with severe emotional disturbances in kindergarten through grade five with intensive therapeutic services alongside academic instruction. The program, which students generally attend for six months to a year, is meant for children in need of a more restrictive environment than a traditional public school and offers coordinated services, including academic instruction; individual, family, and group therapy; psychiatric services; and a variety of assessments. With a maximum enrollment of eight students in four classrooms, Western Day offers a small, personalized learning environment with extensive therapeutic offerings and a high level of coordination among staff, an intensive program that helps many students gain the skills they need to successfully attend a traditional public school. The program follows the JCPS academic calendar with an additional summer session.

Students are considered for the program when a child's therapist makes a referral that includes information about a student's current school placement and interventions as well as documentation of a student's difficulty functioning in various environments (school, family, self-care, self-direction, and interpersonal relations). To determine program appropriateness, Western Day staff conduct an intensive screening assessment which they present to the treatment team.

Western Day pays particular attention to student transitions into and out of the program. The program's case manager meets with home school staff when a student enters and exits the program. Upon exit from the program, a student has a profile sheet that follows them to their next school. This sheet identifies the student's strengths, areas for growth, and MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) scores. This ensures that students experience continuity of their education program and therapeutic services as they move across educational settings. Students and families are thoroughly prepared for transition from Western Day. For example, prior to exiting the program, each student attends a meeting with staff from the school they

will be attending. In addition, the program offers departing students many commemorative rituals, including an individual graduation ceremony and a gift of a watch to remind them of Western Day. After a student exits the program, their therapist and the program's case manager meet with staff in their new school and continue to have access

to all electronic education and medical records. Lori Nodler, the school's Associate Principal, notes: "Kids are coming to us and then moving on with a lot of success in their new schools. We do a very good job with appropriate placements post-Western Day."

TYPE OF PROGRAM:	Education and intensive mental health day treatment center collaboratively run by Centerstone and Jefferson County Public Schools
POPULATION SERVED:	32 K-5 students with severe emotional disturbances
BENEFITS TO DISTRICT:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students previously not functioning in a traditional public school setting are able to get the therapy and attention they need at Western Day and often return to a traditional school setting experiencing improved success. 90 percent of students who have attended Western Day show growth on MAP math, and 65 percent show growth on MAP reading.
FUNDING SOURCE/S:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> JCPS Per Pupil Funding Kentucky Educational Collaborative for State Agency Children (KECSAC) grant for summer program Medicaid for therapeutic services
CHALLENGES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program dependence on Medicaid funding means there are students who could benefit from the program but are ineligible because they are not eligible for Medicaid. The school's small size, part of its success, makes it impossible to meet the full need in the district.

CASE EXAMPLE #2

OPPORTUNITY MIDDLE COLLEGE

FAYETTE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS | LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

KEY
STRATEGIES
HIGHLIGHTED:1
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Opportunity Middle College² (OMC) is a dual-enrollment program located on the Cooper campus of Bluegrass Community and Technical College (BCTC). The program's 100 high school juniors and seniors take a mix of high school and college courses on a college campus, getting exposure to postsecondary education, while also ensuring they complete the credits they need to graduate high school. The majority of OMC students are low-income (75%), racial minority (70%), and/or first generation to attend college (70%). Opportunity Middle College operates with an instructional staff of three teachers, two of whom are part-time, a part-time counselor, and a part-time principal.

Admission to OMC is by application with primary criteria being work ethic, maturity, attendance, and behavior as opposed to past academic performance. Juniors begin with two college courses in their first semester. As long as they maintain a "B" average, they may take three college courses in their second semester, four courses in the fall of senior year, and five courses in the spring of senior year (for a total of about 45 college credit hours while still in high school). All college courses count toward high school graduation requirements as well.

Opportunity Middle College staff closely monitor student performance and have the flexibility to move students into and pull students back from college courses, depending on their success. If a student is struggling in college courses, OMC moves them to high school courses for a semester before having them try college courses again. Program staff work hard to help all OMC students succeed and have only sent five students back to their home school in ten years of operation, usually for attendance or behavior issues. Frank LaBoone, OMC Principal, notes that the chance to take college courses is a big motivator for students:

We've talked to traditional high schools about having trouble getting students motivated to take the ACT that wonder how our students get such high scores. We have the kids who've figured out it matters, so they put forth more effort.

Most OMC students who attend the program for two years graduate high school with about one year's worth of college credits (though OMC has had three students

graduate high school having completed an Associate's Degree). Students' BCTC credits transfer easily within Kentucky's university system.

The program's success rates are impressive.

In the 2017-18 school year, 75 percent of OMC students earned grades of "A" or "B" in college level courses, and 90 percent of students earned grades of "A," "B," or "C" in college level courses. In addition, 73 seniors earned a total of 1,510 college credit hours, 12 graduating with between 25 and 40 college credits, 10 graduating with more than 40 college credits, one with 54 college credits, and one with an Associate's Degree. In addition, OMC

routinely ranks high in the district on nearly every measure of school climate and student satisfaction. Staff attribute their students' success in large part to early exposure to success in college courses helping them to realize they are capable and providing continued interest in learning, as well as the program's small, personalized atmosphere. Students attribute the program's success to the ability to get a real college course experience without being seen as a high school student, an excellent school climate, caring teachers with whom they can connect one-on-one, and the program's small size and flexibility.

TYPE OF PROGRAM:	Middle college high school program located on a community college campus
POPULATION SERVED:	100 students in grades 11-12 who demonstrate motivation
BENEFITS TO DISTRICT:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ OMC improves college readiness and success, including for the large portion of its students who are first-generation college goers, low income, and/or students of color. ■ OMC provides interest and motivation for students who were not thriving in a traditional high school program. ■ OMC decreases graduates' time to postsecondary degree.
FUNDING SOURCE/S:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ FCPS Per Pupil Funding ■ By Kentucky law, BCTC waives two-thirds of tuition for dual-credit students. The remaining one-third of tuition and textbooks costs are covered by FCPS for students who qualify for the Free and Reduced Meals program. For others, families pay about \$180 per course.
CHALLENGES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Staff is small and must be flexible based on changing student needs for high school classes each semester. ■ Previously, FCPS paid for 1/3 of college tuition cost for all students. With recent budget cuts, the district has stopped covering this cost for students who are not eligible for Free and Reduced Meals.

CASE EXAMPLE #3

MCCRACKEN REGIONAL SCHOOL

MCCRACKEN COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS | PADUCAH, KENTUCKY

KEY
STRATEGIES
HIGHLIGHTED:1
2
4
7

McCracken Regional School³ (McCracken or MRS) is a short-term residential detention facility for juvenile delinquents pre- and post-adjudication, prior to placement, run in partnership by McCracken County Public Schools (MCPS) and the Kentucky Department of Juvenile Justice. One of eight detention facilities in Kentucky, McCracken serves 18 counties in the far western portion of the state.

Since the average student stay is 20 days, teachers at McCracken work hard to make sure students enter the educational program rapidly. Upon placement in the facility, a student is assessed to determine whether he or she is on-track to graduate and is assigned classes. Because student records are housed in the Infinite Campus system, this process is quick; and within a handful of hours, new students are in a classroom. “These students have lost instructional time already, and we can’t afford to lose more,” explains one of McCracken’s teachers.

Education and corrections staff members maintain a building-wide focus on education, and the district ensures the school is staffed with highly skilled teachers. (Two of the school’s three full-time teachers are National Board Certified). For students likely to be in the juvenile justice system until age 18 or beyond, the focus is on helping them to graduate, which usually means accelerating their program. For those who are on-track and may return home, there is less need for acceleration. Brian Bowland, Director of Pupil Personnel for the district explains:

We take kids who are traditionally not engaged, who succeed in our program! Our students do not feel they are being punished by their teachers. McCracken teachers walk in and they are focused on giving instruction to those students. Students are getting their consequences elsewhere.

McCracken teachers are proud of their focus on education with students who have not always experienced success in school in the past, explains one teacher:

Kids come back after being in other facilities and tell us they weren’t academically relevant or challenging. We throw hard stuff at the kids. A lot of alternative programs

feel the need to make it super easy to accomplish stuff, and we don't and our students still accomplish things!

McCracken students say teachers treat them like their own children and will not let them get away with failure. They also appreciate that they are able to progress with their education and even take courses at McCracken not offered at their previous schools.

McCracken offers a trauma-informed program, including trauma-sensitive yoga and a life and employability skills course taught by a social

worker, critical for a group of students who exhibit very high levels of Adverse Childhood Experiences (60% have four or more; 42% have seven or more).⁴

When a student completes their high school education at McCracken, staff make it a very big deal, inviting parents to a ceremony and providing the graduate with a cap and gown. Several years ago MRS changed its name so graduates would not have that stigmatizing language of “juvenile detention” on their diploma. “We don’t treat these students like they are criminals. As Americans they have a right to an education. Period,” explains a McCracken teacher.

TYPE OF PROGRAM:	Education program within a short-term residential facility for juvenile delinquents pre- and post-adjudication
POPULATION SERVED:	Young people to age 18 who are court ordered, primarily 15-17 year-olds
BENEFITS TO DISTRICT:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MRS focuses on helping students to get back on-track to graduation and provides them with hope and skills for the future. ▪ Credit recovery and counseling services begin the rehabilitation process and help students transition back to their home community and high school.
FUNDING SOURCE/S:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ District per pupil funds ▪ Title I funds ▪ KECSAC
CHALLENGES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Due to the short length of stay for most students, it is hard for McCracken students to maintain the educational momentum they are able to build at MRS. ▪ Sometimes students have to be moved to another facility because of a Department of Juvenile Justice reason, and this further disrupts their education.

CASE EXAMPLE #4

NEWCOMER ACADEMY

JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS | LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

KEY
STRATEGIES
HIGHLIGHTED:1
2
3
4
6
7

Newcomer Academy^s (Newcomer) is a Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) middle and high school for recent arrivals to the United States up to age 21 who are not native English speakers. Now in its 14th year of operation, the school focuses on helping students develop English language skills quickly while progressing (or catching up) in all school subjects. Most of Newcomer Academy's students attend for one to two years, with students departing at the end of the school year so they can move to a comprehensive school at the beginning of the year. Because Newcomer accepts new students at any time, the program begins the year with about 350 students and swells to more than 700 by the end of the year. Newcomer's students hail from more than 45 different countries, and speak more than 30 languages. The program works to diversify classes with students from various backgrounds. Newcomer is a trauma-informed program that intentionally takes into consideration the background of students and seeks to build social emotional capacity and resiliency for future academic success.

New students, who are welcomed at Newcomer all year long, are quickly oriented and placed in classes. All of the program's teachers are dual-certified in English as a Second Language (ESL) and their teaching content area. Thus, students receive intensive ESL instruction and interaction in English in all of their courses. For the approximately one-fifth of Newcomer students who have experienced significant interruptions in their formal education (e.g., due to lack of access, war), the program offers extra time in core areas of literacy and numeracy. Students who arrive prior to the spring are generally ready to transition to a traditional school by the end of the school year. Those who arrive later in the year may stay a second school year if not yet prepared. Outside of the classroom Newcomer Academy offers students and their families extended supports, including mental health services; an adolescent English Learner (EL) library filled with high-interest, easy to read books; a free clothing boutique; connections to partner community-based organizations and refugee agencies; a volunteer mentor program; and parent outreach activities such as open houses and adult education. Newcomer Academy students leave the school ready to take part in comprehensive classrooms with understanding and confidence.

Accountability scores remain with the district while students are at Newcomer and for the first year following their transition to a traditional

school. This helps remove any disincentive to work with a student population that typically struggles with standardized tests in English.

TYPE OF PROGRAM:	Middle and high school program for newly arrived English Learners offering full-day ESL instruction in all subjects
POPULATION SERVED:	350-700+ students ages 11 to 21 who are new to the United States and speak limited English
BENEFITS TO DISTRICT:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Newcomer intentionally acclimates new student arrivals to the United States to the U.S school system of formal education. ▪ By consolidating services for newly arrived middle and high school students who are English Learners, the district is able to offer much more specialized, individualized, extensive, instruction and services than it could if these students were dispersed in the 10 middle and 10 high schools with ESL programs. ▪ Newcomer Academy offers older recent immigrant students a welcoming program ready to accept them throughout the school year and prepares them to be successful members of the district's mainstream, comprehensive middle and high school classrooms. ▪ Having a newcomer hub frees the district's other schools from the disruption of new students entering throughout the year.
FUNDING SOURCE/S:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ JCPS Per Pupil Funding ▪ Elementary And Secondary Education Act Title I and Title III funding ▪ Refugee School Impact Grant (Kentucky Office of Refugees) for summer school funding ▪ Various small grants and gifts (under \$5000)
CHALLENGES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Many students have had some interruption in their education and need help catching up, even once they have transitioned to a traditional school. ▪ Newcomer is not able to offer informal interactions with native English speakers. To mitigate this, school staff are purposeful in creating diverse classroom groups so students are speaking English with each other and the school organizes periodic social activities with its 20 partner schools as well as shadowing experiences for students. Although there are currently several deeper-learning activities in collaboration with schools with fluent English peers, Newcomer is developing plans to offer students and their parents more frequent and meaningful interactions with receiving schools. These efforts are growing and thriving with increased social media awareness and implementation.

CASE EXAMPLE #5

STEAM ACADEMY

FAYETTE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS | LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

KEY
STRATEGIES
HIGHLIGHTED:1
2
5

STEAM Academy⁶ (STEAM) is an innovation zone program focused on science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics founded in 2013 in an attempt to address racial achievement gaps in Fayette County Public Schools (FCPS). While the district had a lot of special programs working with the highest achieving students, prior to STEAM there was no program or school open to everyone. STEAM Academy offers a rigorous, accelerated curriculum to all students, regardless of past academic performance.

YOU CAN STEP FOOT IN STEAM AND YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY A GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENT FROM A SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENT. WE INCLUDE THEM ALL IN OUR CLASSES. OUR CLASSES ARE COLLABORATIVE, AND OUR STUDENTS SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER IN THEIR LEARNING.

—TINA STEVENSON, STEAM PRINCIPAL

The school operates on an innovative schedule, with most courses lasting one semester and five 75-minute classes per day. This allows what are traditionally full-year courses to be taught at an accelerated pace during the first semester. At the semester break, if students have demonstrated proficiency (defined as earning a grade of “A” or “B”), they may go on to the next course. During the second semester, teachers target the needs of students who remain in a course to ensure they master all content before the end of the school year. STEAM staff report the high expectations of an accelerated course are enough to help students succeed at higher levels. Regardless, this innovative scheduling and acceleration practice allows for flexibility to meet the needs of a diverse group of students.

STEAM students are able to take dual-credit courses at Bluegrass Community & Technical College, where STEAM Academy has a satellite campus, and during the 2018-19 school year, 120 STEAM students completed more than 450 such courses.

As juniors most STEAM students complete internships for a half day if their schedule permits. In total, STEAM students engage in about 10,000 unpaid internship hours each school year. STEAM faculty and staff spend a lot of time prepping students to be interns, primarily through student advisory time and meetings with the school's Internship Coordinator. Twice a year students attend "Presentation of Learning" nights where they formally address the community about their internship experiences, skills they used to succeed, and lessons learned.

STEAM Academy students report a high sense of connectedness to their school and their learning and feel they are thriving at STEAM in a way they might not have in a larger, traditional high school, offering comments such as:

I'm doing better here than I would at a normal high school. Because of the small class size, relationships with my teachers, one-on-one help I'm comfortable asking questions. [STEAM teachers] teach us how to work smart and do more learning.

STEAM makes us explore.

I'm doing better here than I was in a regular school, both educationally and behaviorally. Everyone makes sure to keep you on a straight line at STEAM. There's not really drama here. We all come from different neighborhoods. It's pretty fast-paced. So those not focused on school leave within the first two years. They keep you on track.

STEAM Academy is committed to equity and inclusion, and its 350 students are representative of the district as a whole (i.e., 44% students of color, 35% Free and Reduced Price Lunch, 15% English Learners or students with documented disabilities). Yet despite admitting the same students attending the district's other high schools, STEAM boasts an average daily attendance rate of 96 percent and the lowest high school discipline rate in the district by far. In addition, STEAM students consistently perform above district and state averages on the ACT and in 2017-18 9th and 10th grade STEAM students achieved the highest reading MAP assessment growth in the district.

TYPE OF PROGRAM:	Innovative, small alternative high school program organized around Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) curriculum
POPULATION SERVED:	350 students in grades 9-12 selected by lottery
BENEFITS TO DISTRICT:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> STEAM Academy provides an alternate vision of what high school can be. STEAM provides the district's students with an option for an accelerated high school program that does not depend on scores or past academic performance for admission. FCPS regularly uses the small and innovative STEAM Academy to pilot new practices.
FUNDING SOURCE/S:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FCPS Per Pupil Funding (though reduced because STEAM Academy does not offer extracurriculars) Small grants to support first-generation students, girls and women in science, etc. State funds for dual-enrollment (for up to 2 courses)

CHALLENGES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transportation poses a huge challenge for STEAM Academy, which serves students from all six of the district's high schools. ▪ The school's small size means they have to get creative with a small staff to meet KDE graduation requirements. This leaves little room for offering courses outside of the basic requirements. STEAM teachers are creative within these required courses, using project-based learning and incorporating arts content in most courses.
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CONSIDERATIONS

The above descriptions demonstrate a wide range of alternative programming in practice across Kentucky and provide examples of the many strategies programs and schools deploy to meet the varied needs of students. We encourage you to learn more about these programs and schools and to consider how your district, school, or classroom can incorporate new strategies to strengthen your support for students through alternative programming.

Education leaders and practitioners are encouraged to consider how they might implement some of the practices related to each of the seven broad strategies highlighted in this brief. Many are no- or low-cost and can be tried on a small-scale to begin. All are worthy of consideration as examples of promising and effective practice across the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

STRATEGY 1: HAVING A VISION OF STUDENT SUCCESS AND DOING WHATEVER IS NECESSARY TO REACH IT

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

- ☐ Do you believe all students, even those who have struggled significantly in traditional settings, have the ability to meet high expectations and succeed? If so, 1) how could you communicate that more effectively to school/district staff and 2) how is this reflected in school/district policy and programming?
- ☐ What could your school/district do to ensure students who require alternative programming lose as little classroom time as possible when transitioning between programs?
- ☐ In which areas would you like your school/district to think outside the box and envision new ways of operating to facilitate all students' success?

FOR EDUCATORS:

- ☐ Do you believe all students, even those who have struggled significantly in traditional settings, have the ability to meet high expectations and succeed? If so, how is this reflected in your classroom?
- ☐ What could you do to help students who transition to alternative programming lose as little classroom time as possible in the process?
- ☐ How could you think outside the box and envision new ways of teaching to facilitate the success of all students?

STRATEGY 2: WILLINGNESS TO BE FLEXIBLE TO MEET STUDENTS' NEEDS

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

- ☐ Do or could you offer students programs/schools that are flexible with time (e.g., open-entry and exit, extending year programming, etc.)?
- ☐ Does or could your school/district offer students ways to obtain course credit by demonstrating competency rather than time-in-seat?
- ☐ Does or could your school/district accommodate students who require a small, personalized learning environment?
- ☐ Does or could your school/district offer students who have fallen behind ways to recover credits or otherwise "catch up" and get back on-track to graduation?
- ☐ Does or could your school/district offer blended (computer-based) learning opportunities?

FOR EDUCATORS:

- ☐ How could you better support students who enter your classroom in the middle of the school year?
- ☐ Are there ways for your students to complete course material at their own pace?
- ☐ How could you better assist students who fall behind to catch up with their peers?
- ☐ Are there blended (computer-based) learning opportunities you could offer to help provide a more flexible learning environment for your students?

STRATEGY 3: ENCOURAGING STAFF COLLABORATION

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

- ☐ How could you encourage greater collaboration among classroom teachers and those providing other services (e.g., mental health) to provide students with a more coherent and consistent education program?
- ☐ How could you encourage greater collaboration between alternative programs/schools and students' home schools to smooth the transition between programming?

FOR EDUCATORS:

- ☐ How could you increase your collaboration with other teachers and support staff in your building to provide your students with the most coherent and consistent educational experience possible?
- ☐ How could you increase your collaboration with staff from other schools/programs who also work with your students?

STRATEGY 4: CONSOLIDATING SERVICES TO IMPROVE QUALITY

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

- ☐ Should your school/district consider consolidating specialized services (e.g., mental health or EL services) in one location?
- ☐ How does or could your school/district meet the needs of students who are significantly behind in literacy or numeracy skills? Is there augmented instruction you could provide for these students to help them get back-on-track to graduation?

FOR EDUCATORS:

- ☐ Are you able to rely on specialized programs or staff who can help meet the needs of your students (e.g., mental health, EL services) that you are not particularly prepared to meet?
- ☐ How can you augment literacy and numeracy instruction for students who are significantly behind because they have experienced significant disruptions in their formal education or otherwise fallen off track?

STRATEGY 5: EXPOSING STUDENTS TO COLLEGE AND CAREER

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

- ☐ How could your school/district increase opportunities for dual-enrollment? Does or could your school/district have high school programs co-located on a college campus?
- ☐ How could your school/district increase students' opportunity for career exploration?

FOR EDUCATORS:

- ☐ How could you increase the college and college-like educational experiences you offer to your students?
- ☐ How could you increase career exploration activities with your students?
- ☐ How could you incorporate information about careers into your curriculum?

STRATEGY 6: REMOVING DISINCENTIVES TO WORKING WITH STRUGGLING STUDENTS

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

- ☐ What disincentives to working with struggling or at-risk students (e.g., accountability measures, funding issues) exist in your school/district? What could you do to reduce or eliminate these disincentives?
- ☐ Are there ways your school/district could incentivize working with this student population?

FOR EDUCATORS:

- ☐ Are there ways you could advocate for your school/program to incentivize teachers working with struggling students?

STRATEGY 7: CREATING A SUPPORTIVE, STRUCTURED ENVIRONMENT FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

- ☐ How could your school/district increase on-site support services (e.g., mental health counseling, healthcare, social services) offered to students and their families?
- ☐ Are there ways your school/district could ensure straight-forward rules and codes of conduct across classrooms/schools?
- ☐ How could your school/district increase staff knowledge and use of trauma-informed practices?
- ☐ How could your school/district improve the smooth transition of students between programs and schools?

FOR EDUCATORS:

- ☐ How could you increase your knowledge of available on-site services to improve wrap-around supports for your students and their families?
- ☐ Do you have straight-forward rules and codes of conduct in your classroom that are consistent with expectations in your school/program? Could you work to increase student understanding of these expectations to improve outcomes for your students?
- ☐ How could you increase your knowledge and use of trauma-informed practices in your classroom?
- ☐ How could you smooth transitions for your students when they move between programs and schools?

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COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

OVERVIEW

As schools and districts assess the multiple factors that impact academic achievement and high school graduation rates, many have begun offering more holistic and integrated supports for students and their families in the areas of mental and physical health, nutrition, employment or college/career readiness services, emergency assistance, family counseling, and afterschool programs. The growth and success of community schools, federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and Integrated Student Supports have led many schools to build and sustain strong partnerships with community-based organizations and service providers. Moore & Emig (2014) define Integrated Student Supports (ISS) as a school-based approach to promoting students' academic success by developing or securing and coordinating supports that target academic and non-academic barriers to achievement. Such resources can range from traditional tutoring and mentoring to a broader set of social and emotional supports.

According to the National Center for Community Schools, having community-school partnerships increases academic performance, attendance, school climate, and parent and family engagement, and promotes positive youth development and school readiness (2009).

Integrated Student Supports executed through school partnerships serve more than 1.5 million students in nearly 3,000 elementary and high schools across the country (Somers & Haider, 2017). A report by Child Trends concludes emerging evidence gathered from quasi-experimental studies indicates ISS can contribute to student academic progress as measured by decreases in grade retention and dropping out and increases in attendance, math achievement, reading and ELA achievement, and overall GPA. Additionally, the return on investment for these programs ranges between \$4 and \$15 dollars for every dollar spent. Hispanic and Black students account for more than 75 percent of students enrolled in such programs, which can positively help narrow the opportunity gap (Moore & Emig, 2014).

Community-based partnerships can help transform learning, provide social supports, expose students to future career paths, and lead to long-term connections and provide structured support and reassurance for students who might have lacked confidence. In Kentucky, community partnerships effectively help students who are struggling find the guidance and motivation they need to realize the importance of planning for their next steps in education and careers.

KEY STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES OF EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Kentucky schools and districts are working hard to continuously improve community partnerships to better serve students and families. Two programs, *Adair Youth Development Center* and *Estill County Middle School Youth Service Center* that are featured in this brief, speak to the diversity of community partnerships and supports in different settings, proving that

partnerships and collaborations with outside organizations are a vital component of student success. We document three key strategies and the associated practices in place for schools across the Commonwealth. Schools and programs that have strategically created partnerships to promote learning all share the following:

STRATEGY 1: STRONG EFFORT TO FILL GAPS AND RESPOND TO SPECIFIC STUDENT NEEDS

Having a strong understanding of the community, current resources, and student needs are essential for developing partnerships. These are a few practices to keep in mind:

- ❑ Conduct needs assessments to address student health, social-emotional learning, and interests.
- ❑ Create partnerships to respond to student needs and enhance existing school-based services.

STRATEGY 2: DESIGNATED PERSON TO COORDINATE SERVICES BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND PARTNER

Communication is critical between partners and schools. Having a liaison or team of people focused on working with key partners will help sustain key relationships. The following are good practices:

- ❑ Identify a staff member to become the main contact for partners. If that is not feasible, consider creating a committee or seeking out volunteers to help fulfill this role.
- ❑ Focus on establishing relationships with different types of partners and develop norms/agreements. For example, are partners expected to attend certain meetings at the school or program?

STRATEGY 3: HIGH-QUALITY SERVICES AND ASSESSMENT

Depending on the school or program, all partnerships may not be formal and attached to specific youth development outcomes. However, for partnerships that are focused on academic achievement and specific skills development, having an evaluation process to measure the impact on students is important. Consider the following:

- ❑ Establish a common framework and goal between the schools and community partners focused on results or developing specific skills.
- ❑ Ensure that the skills being taught are high-quality and in alignment with best practices for youth development and learning.
- ❑ Conduct surveys with students and providers to assess learning, as well as specific milestones or progress.

CASE EXAMPLE #1

ADAIR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CENTER

ADAIR COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS | COLUMBIA, KENTUCKY

KEY
STRATEGIES
HIGHLIGHTED:1
2

Adair Youth Development Center⁷ was recognized as a 2018 Kentucky Department of Education program of distinction for their work in alternative education. Adair is a maximum security, Level 5 Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) residential male and female facility that opened in 2000. Adair serves young people ages 12-21, with a focus on education and counseling services. There are two groups of students, some are in detention and the other are in the residential program. Leadership is explicit about not viewing the youth as inmates, but instead as residents and students. “A Youth Development Center is not a prison, we have youth workers and not guards,” said Wes Irvin, Administrator. There are counselors assigned to each unit and one-on-one counseling is offered every week. Students are offered credit recovery and blended learning, through the use of technology and the Odyssey online learning program. Students are able to earn credit at a faster rate and can also earn their GED while simultaneously working toward a diploma. One student that came to Adair with a half a credit was able to earn 15 credits within 6 months.

Young people are provided with multiple career options, as well as courses that include interviewing, budgeting, financing, and skill development for transitioning out of the facility. Within 24-48 hours of entering Adair, students take a vocational assessment test to better understand their interests, and the test is combined with their Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE) scores. An individualized learning education plan is then put together for the student with a focus on vocational training that can be tailored to fit their career interests. The average stay for students is about 80 days. Similar to traditional schools, students are required to take six periods of instruction, Monday-Friday in four core academic areas, vocational course and physical exercise (PE). The vocational courses include the Computer Tech (C-TEC) Program and Building and Maintenance. C-TEC students are able to get certifications in Copper Cabling, Fiber Optic Cabling, Home Audio, Telecom, Telephone VoIP, Energy Management, and Exploring IT. Students can be placed on a national registry to get a job based on the credential they earn.

Adair teachers are all extremely energetic and passionate about the work and believe that, as one teacher explains, “the environment that’s created by taking away cell phones and screens creates a hunger to learn while here because it’s all they have to focus on.” Staff define their role as “providing hope,” as the students are only with them for a short

amount of time, and it is their intent that all students will leave with tangible skills, such as certifications and high school or college credits. Staff also assist youth with developing a resume, cover letter, and provide letters of recommendations for them. Adair students are equally as motivated to learn, and many of them stated that this is the “first time that they felt excited about learning.”

Students who are in secure facilities can often feel isolated due to their limited contact with the outside world. However, Adair makes it a priority to provide students with various ways to connect through the use of technology and work with community members by bringing them into the facility to speak with and mentor the youth during their time at Adair. Students hear from guest speakers every Friday about various career paths, ranging from engineering, to construction and small business. In addition to having the Odyssey program that allows students

to complete coursework at their own pace, Saylor Academy allows students to complete college courses and take college exams. If they pass the course, they are eligible to receive college credit.

Through a partnership with World Possible, an organization based in Oregon, students at Adair can participate in a pilot program called Endless OS, which the Remote Area Community Hotspot for Education and Learning (RACHEL) is built into. Prison education programs are now using RACHEL to give their students access to online courses, research, and materials without the hazards and distractions of the full internet. Currently, RACHEL is used by secure facilities in 14 states and Kentucky is the first juvenile facility to pilot the Endless OS.

Adair also collaborates with the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority (KHEAA) to provide a college road show bus. Through the road show, students can learn about the FAFSA and college entry process.

TYPE OF PROGRAM	Maximum Security, Level 5 Juvenile Justice Detention and Residential Facility
POPULATION SERVED	Young people ages 12-21
BENEFITS TO DISTRICT	Adair Youth Development Center is successful at working with students that were not thriving or fell behind at their previous schools. The students are able to enhance their academic performance and behavior and strengthen their motivation to learn. Additionally, students are able to gain a credential that can be used when they return to their community or gain enough credits to graduate high school.
FUNDING SOURCE/S	Adair Youth Development Center is classified as an A6 facility that is funded through the Kentucky Educational Collaborative for State Agency Children (KECSAC), and Title I Funds.
CHALLENGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The teachers are the drivers for learning and have to adapt to a much quicker pace than a traditional high school, as they have the students for as little as 2 weeks and a maximum of 6 months. ▪ Many of the students have learning disabilities and/or mental health challenges, and need more time to make progress.

CASE EXAMPLE #2

ESTILL COUNTY MIDDLE SCHOOL YOUTH SERVICES CENTER

ESTILL COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS | IRVINE, KENTUCKY

KEY
STRATEGIES
HIGHLIGHTED:1
2
3

Family Resource and Youth Services Centers⁸ (FRYSC) were established as a component of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990. The mission of these school-based centers is to help academically at-risk students succeed in school by helping to minimize or eliminate non-cognitive barriers to learning and enhance student academic success. The centers offer an array of services and programs that are solely driven by the determined needs of each population being served, available resources, location, and other local characteristics. The centers have established a history of achievement based on improved student performance in class work, homework, and peer relations. Parental involvement is also a critical part of the services that are designed, as there is a direct link between the impacts of family trauma on student achievement.

Estill County Middle School Youth Services Center (YSC) is one of 853 centers across Kentucky. There are 442 Family Resource Centers that serve elementary age students, 296 YSCs serving middle and high school, and 116 combined centers that serve elementary through high school students. The Youth Services Center at Estill County Middle School focuses on the following: Drug and alcohol counseling and referrals, social service and health referrals, employment counseling, and a family crisis and mental health counselor. Estill County is relatively small and rural, so identifying needed resources and supports can be challenging simply because of a lack of businesses and community-based organizations within the area. The population is approximately 14,672. For a community like Estill County, a Youth Services Center can be one of the closest and most reliable resources for students and families to access.

Center staff are devoted to serving the needs of all students and families, balancing multiple tasks each day. There is not a typical day, as the role can change based on the requests that are received from students and families. One day could be focused on providing supplies to students, whereas another day could be devoted to gathering food items from a pantry through the school Backpack Program, so the students will have enough food for the weekend. For bullying prevention month, the YSC staff work with teachers and students to create awareness events, and they also plan parent nights and various celebrations throughout the year. There is also a focus on safety,

so cyber bullying prevention and similar topics are discussed with students, and programs are created within the school to promote school safety.

There are also about 30 young people on their council. Students receive leadership training and help to plan various events that are supported through the Youth Services Center. For example, the student council plans events such as Red Ribbon Week and other drug and alcohol abuse prevention and awareness programs. They participate in a host of community service projects, such as providing holiday parties for an adult daycare, helping as servers at local Hospice Fundraising events, and reading partners for the local preschool center. They also plan and implement transition programs for students transitioning from elementary to middle and middle to high school.

Through a partnership with A Lasting Word, Inc., an environmental summer camp for students was created. A Lasting Word, Inc. raises approximately \$26,000 per year to allow students to attend this camp for free. The students in the environmental camp will have the opportunity to learn about

science and be introduced to activities, such as team building and archery. Another partnership was established with West Care, a nonprofit that provides substance abuse treatment services in eastern and central Kentucky through Estill County's Sober Living Housing and Second Chance House Residential Program. The partnership includes a program for students with parents who are struggling with substance abuse. Students are able to attend a camp that provides students with resources and skills on how to cope and also connects them with mentors to gain support and participate in activities.

The YSC has several community-based health partnerships. Kids First Dental Care mobile dental clinic provides free teeth cleanings, sealants, and restorative care for students who do not have dental insurance. Quality Care for Kids provides hearing and vision screenings. Students are given two pairs of eyeglasses, so they can take one pair home and keep one at school. There are regular Health Fairs for students through a collaboration with a local pregnancy center, health department, local hospital, and the YSC.

TYPE OF PROGRAM	School-Based Support Services
POPULATION SERVED	500 middle school students each year, grades 6 th -8 th and their families
BENEFITS TO DISTRICT	Estill County Youth Services Center benefits the district because of their focus on developing activities, supports, and resources that help to remove barriers that can lead to students not completing high school.
FUNDING SOURCE/S	Funding is allocated by the Kentucky Department of Education and sent to the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) to administer FRYSCs according to the number of students who are currently in school and based on the per free meal eligibility per student. Once the funds are received, the FRYSCs are required by law to serve every student.

CHALLENGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Eastern Kentucky does not have the same resources as larger districts. For example, there are many students who could benefit from mental health services, but because of the location and the small number of students (about 10 who could be referred), usually it is not worth the commute for a licensed professional to serve those students. Lexington, at 45 minutes away, is the closest city, and most parents are very low-income and not able to drive to those services.▪ Many grandparents are raising their grandchildren, and because many are older, they do not know much about technology or filling out some of the forms.
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CONSIDERATIONS

The above descriptions provide examples of the many strategies programs and schools deploy to meet the varied needs of students. We encourage you to learn more about these programs and schools and to consider how your district, school, or classroom can incorporate new strategies to strengthen your support for students through community partnerships.

Education leaders and practitioners are encouraged to consider how they might implement some of the practices related to each of the three strategies highlighted in this brief. Many are no- or low-cost and can be tried on a small-scale to begin. All are worthy of consideration as examples of promising and effective practice across the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

STRATEGY 1: STRONG EFFORT TO FILL GAPS AND RESPOND TO SPECIFIC STUDENT NEEDS

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

- ☐ Are school or district partnerships created based on needs assessments or to address student health, social-emotional learning, and student interests?
- ☐ What are some of the existing school-based services within your school or district and where do you see the gaps?

FOR EDUCATORS:

- ☐ Are there important student needs that go beyond the scope of your work that you think could be fulfilled through a partner? If so, what do you need to help establish this partnership?
- ☐ Are there additional services that you think students and families need that would complement or strengthen a school-based service that is already in place?

STRATEGY 2: DESIGNATE A PERSON TO COORDINATE SERVICES BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND PARTNER

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

- ☐ Is there an identified staff member in your district or school with the primary role of managing school partnerships and communicating with outside organizations?
- ☐ Are the partners in your district or school comprised of various sectors and areas? If not, what do you think is needed to create additional cross-sector partnerships?

FOR EDUCATORS:

- ☐ Are you aware of the partnerships in your schools and the staff responsible for maintaining partnerships? If so, are you able to communicate the needs of your students and/or make suggestions about programming?
- ☐ Based on the partnerships you are aware of within your school, what areas do you think are missing?

STRATEGY 3: HIGH QUALITY SERVICES AND ASSESSMENTS

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

- ☐ Does your district or school use a framework and set goals when developing partnerships?
- ☐ How does your district or school measure the quality of services from outside partnerships and providers?
- ☐ Does your district or school conduct surveys to assess student achievement and progress if partners are providing academic or structured learning opportunities?

FOR EDUCATORS:

- ☐ If your school uses a framework or sets goals for their outside partnerships, are those goals communicated to you?
- ☐ Does your school have quality standards for outside partners and service providers?
- ☐ Does your school conduct surveys to assess learning from partner organizations? If so, are the goals in alignment with student learning in the classroom?

REFERENCES

Moore, K., & Emig, C. (2014). *Integrated Student Supports: A Summary of the Evidence Base for Policymakers*. Washington, DC: Child Trends.

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CULTURE AND CLIMATE

OVERVIEW

A positive school culture and climate create the conditions necessary for successful teaching and learning to take place. In fact, both have been described as the “heart and soul” of a school and the foundation of learning. The National School Climate Center defines school climate as the “quality and character of school life” and identifies four major aspects: safety, teaching and learning, relationships, and environment (National School Climate Council, 2019). School Culture can be viewed as the various norms, traditions, behaviors and interactions between students and staff. Research documents positive climate and culture has a direct impact on graduation rates. A study of 276 Virginia high schools found a school climate characterized by lower rates of bullying and teasing was predictive of higher graduation rates four years later (Cornell, Gregory Huang, & Fan, 2013). Schools with high levels of bullying and teasing had dropout rates 29% above the state average, compared with schools with a low level of bullying and teasing, which had a dropout rate 28% below average. “The association between school climate and graduation rates was just as strong as the association between student poverty and graduation rates.” The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) explicitly recognizes the relationship between positive school climate and student learning and success, requiring states to include data related to school climate and safety in annual school report cards.

In Kentucky, school culture and climate are key elements to student success. School districts

and programs are very interested in how they can take steps to enhance both. One common way to improve school culture and climate is by measuring and evaluating data. Several Kentucky counties collect data through surveys to analyze and gain feedback on school culture and climate. For example, [Jefferson County Public Schools](#) started assessing their school culture and climate through the Comprehensive School Survey (CSS), launched during the 1997-1998 school year. The survey is conducted annually and includes feedback from staff, parents, and students in the fourth grade and above. [Pulaski County Schools](#) also conducts annual surveys with their staff, parents, and middle and high school students.

The Teaching, Empowerment, Leading, and Learning ([TELL](#)) Kentucky survey is a biennial survey that gathers input from teachers, counselors, principals, and other administrators in the areas of: Community Engagement and Support, Teacher Leadership, School Leadership, Managing Student Conduct, Use of Time, Professional Development, Facilities and Resources, Instructional Practices and Support and New Teacher Support. The test was first administered in 2011 and seeks to gain valuable information about perceptions of teaching, learning, and working conditions in schools. The most recent year, 2017, had a 91 percent response rate. A report from the New Teacher Center on TELL states that, “two of the teacher-leadership areas that have the strongest relationship to

student achievement are: involvement in school improvement planning and establishing student-conduct policies"

(Ingersoll, Dougherty, & Sirindes, 2017).

For schools and districts that are unable to administer surveys due to staff capacity, funding, and other reasons, the U.S. Department of Education has prioritized improving school culture and climate by creating several tools and surveys that teachers, schools, and districts can download for free through the [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#).



KEY STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES OF EFFECTIVE CULTURE AND CLIMATE IN SCHOOLS

Kentucky schools and districts are working hard to continuously improve the culture and climate of their schools to meet the varied needs of students. *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program at East Carter Middle School, Sources of Strength at Butler High School, and Ramey-Estep High School* are featured in this practice brief as

examples of how culture and climate can create an environment in which both students and teachers feel safe, respected, and valued. In this practice brief we document five key strategies and the associated practices in place for schools across the Commonwealth. These include:

STRATEGY 1: CREATING A SAFE AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL STUDENTS

Schools and programs that have created a strong culture and climate focus on safety and inclusion by:

- ❑ Reinforcing positive student behavior by complimenting the strengths and individual contributions of all students to help them feel valued;
- ❑ Establishing clear classroom agreements, rituals, reward systems, and norms;
- ❑ Being proactive in monitoring and intervening when bullying or behavior problems arise;
- ❑ Working to implement restorative practices as an alternative approach to discipline, which allows students to gain a better understanding of how their actions impacted others; and
- ❑ Making a space for students to share, seek peer support, and unpack traumatic incidents with trained mental health professionals.

STRATEGY 2: ELEVATING STUDENT VOICE

Students, especially teenagers and young adults, want to feel a sense of belonging and that their voice and experiences matter. Schools and programs can incorporate student voice to establish a welcoming environment by:

- ❑ Allowing students the opportunity to join or create peer led groups, such as leadership councils or committees;
- ❑ Providing opportunities for students to connect their work to their passion, interests, and personal experiences; and
- ❑ Finding innovative ways to introduce art, poetry, and social-emotional learning to students to create powerful learning exchanges.

STRATEGY 3: INVOLVING PARENTS IN A MEANINGFUL WAY

Creating ways to establish a relationship with parents and/or guardians is critical. All parents want to know they are sending their kids to a school that is safe and supportive. Schools can involve parents in the following ways:

- ❑ Conduct surveys to solicit feedback from parents regarding their perception of school culture and climate;
- ❑ Develop a consistent and clear line of communication beyond parent-teacher conferences by making phone calls, sending emails, and mailing letters home to recognize positive behavior; and
- ❑ Create a welcoming environment for parents, this may include regular parent nights, workshops geared towards parents, or creating a physical space for parents to gather within the building.

STRATEGY 4: TRANSFORMING THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT TO PROMOTE COMMUNITY

According to [Edutopia](#), the physical structure of a classroom can affect student morale and learning. Students' involvement in the process of creating a shared learning environment can empower them, develop community, and increase motivation. Buildings and schools can be transformed in the following ways:

- ❑ Display student art, hobbies, aspirations, and culture;
- ❑ Publicize student achievement that's inclusive of all students' strengths and talents;
- ❑ Allow students to help design their space; and
- ❑ Include words of affirmation, and encouragement.

STRATEGY 5: EMPOWERING TEACHERS AND STAFF TO BECOME LEADERS

Teachers and staff who are well-supported by school leadership and involved in key roles in decision making processes are more likely to have a positive impact on student success, which includes creating a strong culture and climate within the classroom. Teachers and staff can be included in these ways:

- ❑ Allow teachers and staff to be included in the development of a shared vision for the school or program, as well as ways to develop or strengthen their leadership skills;
- ❑ Provide teachers and staff with opportunities to be creative when creating or changing school culture and climate; and
- ❑ Encourage feedback and make changes based on their suggestions.

CASE EXAMPLE #1

OLWEUS BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAM AT EAST CARTER MIDDLE SCHOOL

EAST CARTER COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS | GRAYSON, KENTUCKY

KEY STRATEGIES HIGHLIGHTED:

1
2
5

A recent study conducted by the national Olweus Bullying Prevention Program⁹ (Olweus or OBPP) shows that 17 percent of all students reported having been bullied “sometimes” or more often. This number translates to about one in five students. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is an evidence-based, nationally recognized program that is credited with over 35 years of research. The program focuses on bullying, cyberbullying, and positive school climate. The program has been implemented successfully in schools around the country.

East Carter Middle School is one of several schools in Carter County that is implementing the program. The implementation of the Olweus program was started in response to multiple reports of bullying that were taking place at school. The program is a school-wide program that requires every student in middle school to participate. Carter County School District worked with the Kentucky Department of Education closely in the beginning to help bring the program to the school. East Carter Middle School is now in their fourth year of implementing the program. Every Monday during fourth period, the students receive a lesson. There are books that are provided for training and curriculum. The teachers all teach one session and receive a two-day training. The books and topics covered are based upon grade levels. ***Class Meetings that Matter*** are for the sixth graders; ***More Class Meetings that Matter*** are for seventh graders and ***Cyberbullying*** is for eighth graders. The lesson plans range from how to treat people, defining bullying, and interrupting bullying, and they advance with each grade and book. Core subject teachers and Special Ed teachers teach the curriculum which provides a common language throughout the school. All students fully understand what bullying is and, as a result, more students have been encouraged to stop bullying.

A survey conducted by Olweus during the first and third year of the program demonstrates the program is having a positive impact. Another survey will be administered once the entire group of sixth to eighth graders has completed the program. The survey results reflected that students felt better prepared to help stop bullying, and if they reported bullying, they felt teachers would be more supportive.

Below is a sampling of some of the survey results from Fall of 2015 and Fall of 2017, which demonstrates

overall student perception of the school's culture is changing within the two-year period:

SURVEY QUESTIONS	FALL 2015	FALL 2017
How often do you see other students trying to put a stop to bullying?	Almost never: 40%	Almost never: 20%
How often in the past 2 months have you taken part in bullying another student?	I haven't bullied another student: 64%	I haven't bullied another student: 89%
How often in the past 2 months have you been bullied at school?	I haven't been bullied: 54%, I've been bullied 2 or 3 times in a month: 10%	I haven't been bullied: 70%, I've been bullied 2 or 3 times in a month: 4%

The school has also noticed students now have the tools to interrupt bullying when it occurs. Students are more vocal about identifying it and speaking up. Many students have reported feeling safe and not feeling alone because they

know other students will help them. Also, many students previously seen as bullies were able to identify their behavior and make changes. As a result, teachers have reported the program has led to fewer disciplinary actions.

TYPE OF PROGRAM	Whole-school prevention program
POPULATION SERVED	559 middle school students
BENEFITS TO DISTRICT	The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program has created a supportive and collegial environment for students and teachers. Overall, bullying has decreased, and students feel safer at school.
FUNDING SOURCE/S	Olweus Bullying Prevention Program was funded as a pilot supported by the school district. The Kentucky Department of Education paid for the books and provided training to East Carter Middle School at no cost. The program is sustainable, as the district only has to pay for the annual student surveys. Because the program is staff-led, the only additional cost to consider is the time it takes to train teachers.
CHALLENGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A major challenge was ensuring teachers provided the lessons at a set time. In the beginning the school allowed teachers to have the lesson at any time, and now it takes place for all students on the same day and time. The programs requires a commitment of time and needs to be followed closely. Also, changing culture does not occur overnight and can be hard to measure.

CASE EXAMPLE #2

SOURCES OF STRENGTH AT BUTLER HIGH SCHOOL

JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS | LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

KEY
STRATEGIES
HIGHLIGHTED:1
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5

1 Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth and young adults in Kentucky and nationally. According to the [Kentucky Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#), “15 percent of Kentucky high school students (one in seven) reported having seriously considered suicide within a 12-month period.” In addition, 17.4 percent of Kentucky middle school students (nearly one in five) reported that they had seriously considered killing themselves at some point in their lives. In 2018, the Kentucky legislature passed HB 30, which required all “high school and middle school principals, guidance counselors, and teachers to fulfill one hour of high-quality (in-person, live streaming, or video recording) professional development training every other year to review suicide prevention.” In years that training is not provided, all new hires must be provided with suicide prevention materials. In 2019, this bill was strengthened by SB1, The School Safety and Resiliency Act, to include definitions of school safety and school security; include development and implementation of a school safety coordinator training program; adopt a trauma-informed approach to education; specify membership on the Center for School Safety board of directors; require development of a school security risk assessment tool; and several additional changes focused on enhancing school safety.

Sources of Strength¹⁰ is an international program model implemented in over 35 schools in the U.S. and Canada. In 2009, Sources of Strength was listed on the National Best Practices Registry by the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) and The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP). The Best Practices Registry (BPR) of SPRC lists interventions that have undergone rigorous evaluation and demonstrated positive outcomes. In 2011 Sources of Strength was listed on SAMHSA’s National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP). The program has been proven to increase peer leaders’ connectedness to adults and strengthen school engagement. Students were four times more likely to refer a suicidal friend to an adult, and positive perception of adult support was increased in students with a history of suicidal thought.

The [Sources of Strength](#) program at Butler High School was created after Kentucky received a grant for suicide prevention due to the increasing rates of suicide among teens. Mary Wurst, the health teacher at Butler High School that volunteers her time to oversee the program, has been teaching for over 27 years. The first year she taught there was a suicide, and she says “It changed my life. I’ve grasped onto mental-emotional health programming since then.”

Butler High School was asked to pilot the program and was the first in the state to implement Sources of Strength in 2015. The program serves 9th-12th graders and trains them as peer leaders. There are currently about 20-25 students that are peer leaders. The Sources of Strength Club meets every Monday and focuses on suicide prevention, drug addiction, and violence. One hundred and fifty students have been trained in the building, and 1700 students trained total. Students are asked to apply through a process that is led by Ms. Wurst. She reaches out to all teachers in the school to ask which students have leadership potential and personal experience. The model intends to engage students from all the different groups or “cliques” within a school setting. From there, the teachers make recommendations, and students are encouraged to apply. The program is comprised of 10 percent ninth graders, 20-25 percent tenth graders, and the rest are juniors and seniors. Peer leaders go back to their classes with a message of “strength, hope, help” that spreads throughout the entire school. Sources of Strength plans and facilitates school-wide campaigns around resiliency and

empowerment skills that are all peer-led. There are only 10 adults in the club, so it is truly run by students. While Sources of Strength is a suicide prevention program, the teachers and students rarely use the word suicide unless they are training the students on Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR), a common training to help recognize the signs of suicide that is used by professionals that are working in clinical settings. However, the students do not really think about the programs as a suicide prevention program, but as a way to build resiliency and overcome problems. In October 2018, a new class of student leaders completed training. Almost 60 students attended the training, and they were all eager to be selected as peer leaders. The initial peer training is a full school day and consists of mostly games, small group exercises, and sharing that is focused on the Eight Sources of Strength areas, which are: Mental Health, Family Support, Positive Friends, Mentors, Healthy Activities, Generosity, Spirituality, and Medical Access. Training continues throughout the year, and students meet every week to plan and talk about what they are observing in the school.

Since implementing Sources of Strength, the school social workers’ caseloads have increased because more students feel comfortable going to them for help before a crisis occurs. This has led to Butler High School hiring a dedicated social worker to focus on group sessions to help students deal with issues, such as grief. It has boosted peer relationships, and school leaders have also noticed a change in the students’ level of compassion for each other. Teachers have described the students as “really caring about their classmates,” and students who



are struggling feel “taken care of” by other students because they help identify and reach out to students that appear to be isolated or lack peer support. The principal of the school strongly promotes the program and views it as a key piece of all the other work Butler High School does around climate and culture.

Students feel like Sources of Strength is a vital part of their school experience. As one explained, “If we didn’t have Sources of Strength here, I feel like some students would take advantage of others. Sources of Strength leaders stop that immediately.”

“THE IMPACT OF SOURCES OF STRENGTH IS GETTING KIDS TO ADVOCATE AND BE THERE FOR EACH OTHER. IT’S A PIECE OF THE PUZZLE OF THE OVERALL SCHOOL CULTURE. THE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL ASPECTS OF EDUCATION ARE OFTEN FORGOTTEN, BUT SOURCES OF STRENGTH, PLUS ADDITIONAL NURSES AND SOCIAL WORKERS, ALL HELP KIDS LOOK OUT FOR EACH OTHER.”

– PRINCIPAL, BUTLER HIGH SCHOOL

TYPE OF PROGRAM	Student led peer support program
POPULATION SERVED	1,683 students in grades 9-12
BENEFITS TO DISTRICT	Butler High School’s Sources of Strength program has been featured by various local news outlets as a program that is changing the school culture and climate, ultimately preventing suicide and teen violence. Because the students are so passionate about it, they also refer students that are not at Butler High School to the program and tell teachers about their friends at other schools that are contemplating suicide or having a rough time. Teachers have been able to reach out to the counselors and principals at those schools to intervene before a crisis takes place.
FUNDING SOURCE/S	Started with \$750 startup funds from a state suicide prevention grant. The PTA has given the program money, and the principal uses his account to support it as well. Teachers have stated it “does not take much to implement, just willingness from leadership.”
CHALLENGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The program does not have access to enough national Sources of Strength certified trainers.▪ There is a huge demand to train a large number of new student peer leaders and adults/ teachers that would like to be trained, so they have to schedule multiple dates to get all students and adults trained.

CASE EXAMPLE #3

RAMEY-ESTEP HIGH SCHOOL

BOYD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS | RUSH, KENTUCKY

KEY
STRATEGIES
HIGHLIGHTED:1
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Ramey-Estep High School¹¹ is an A6 alternative education program and residential facility that serves state agency students that are struggling with academic, behavioral, social, and emotional challenges that have impacted their education. The school has been recognized regionally and nationally for their expertise in providing treatment services to youth and helping students return back to their home school, employment, or their next steps with the skills necessary to succeed. Unlike some residential facilities, the culture and climate at Ramey-Estep is immediately displayed upon entering the building. There are couches in the lobby and in various rooms throughout the school for meeting and socializing, which provides students and visitors with a greater sense of comfort. There are various pieces of inspirational art and quotes displayed, including, "Your past is not your potential," and the sentence that all students must learn: "Just for today, I will do my best not to do anything degrading to myself or any other person." These words are a constant reminder for students that they are in a new environment, one that is safe and provides them with new opportunities to learn and grow. There are currently 84 students, 60 young men and 24 young women between the ages of 12-18 in the program. The youth come to the program from all over Kentucky. The average stay for students is between 6-10 months, however some students are able to stay for one year to work on additional skills. Once students enter the program, they go through various stages of progression before they graduate, which includes: orientation and learning, lower progress, progress, and graduation. Each stage is about four to six weeks long but can be shorter or longer depending on the student's individual circumstances. Ramey-Estep High School establishes a comprehensive treatment plan for each student that is individualized to meet his or her needs. The education plan is reviewed weekly by the treatment team, comprised of a teacher assigned to the student and additional support staff. There is a constant collaboration between the education and treatment team, so staff consistently focus on both. Many of the students come to Ramey-Estep High School with low reading and math scores and have very few credits towards graduation. All teachers are highly qualified and are able to provide various approaches to help the students with credit recovery at a rapid, intensive pace. The students have responded well to Ramey-Estep High School's environment. Students always know how many credits they

have at all times and what they have to complete to earn credits. The teachers are also very committed to the students and their learning.

As part of developing a strong climate and culture, Ramey-Estep makes it possible for students to participate in different service projects throughout the year, as well as multiple activities, such as the Christmas celebration and arts and crafts, which are displayed throughout the building. Additionally, students are able to garden and publish their poetry. *The Circle*, currently in its eighth volume of the series, is a book of poetry featuring art and words by Ramey-Estep students. Poems published in the book include student letters to their loved ones, expressions of trauma and grief, and hopes and dreams for the future. The publication has served as a therapeutic outlet for the students to share and hear from their peers. There is a strong mutual respect between students and staff. As the staff explain, “many of the students have never had an opportunity to be kids. They have had to deal with abuse, neglect, and trauma.” The staff shows a great deal of compassion for

the students. The staff are supportive, but also set a high standard for each youth to achieve their individual goals. Upon exiting the program, Ms. Brewster, the principal, provides each student with her personal phone number and asks them to call her if they ever need anything. Many of the students have picked up the phone to call her with questions or just for reassurance once they returned to their community. During their transition and graduation, students are also provided with small printed note cards that say “Where the Heart Is, Creating a Sense of Belonging” on the front along with the sentence and affirmation they are required to learn. On the back of the card students are provided with their new school contact, email, location and phone number. Ramey-Estep High School also works with the community the students return to by performing outreach and traveling to various schools throughout Kentucky sharing positive stories of the youth. Ms. Brewster says, “I want the community to value and treasure the students once they return and remove any stigma that could impact their fresh start.”

TYPE OF PROGRAM	Residential Facility and Alternative Education Program
POPULATION SERVED	Youth ages 12-18 with academic and behavioral needs
BENEFITS TO DISTRICT	Ramey-Estep High School benefits the district by providing intensive educational and emotional support to students in a small setting. Most students are able to flourish in the environment and return back to their district or schools with enough credits to graduate or be promoted to the next grade level.
FUNDING SOURCE/S	Funding is based on the number of students who attended the previous year. The Kentucky Educational Collaborative for State Agency Children (KECSAC) provides a per-pupil rate. They also use funding from Title I, Part D Neglected and Delinquent Youth of the Every Student Succeeds Act.

CHALLENGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Funding is a major challenge for this program as they once had a large budget of \$1.6 million and now the budget has declined to about \$800,000. ▪ Accelerated learning can be a barrier for some students, as the program used to allow students to stay with them for over one year, and now students are not able to stay past a one-year maximum, with most students graduating between 6-10 months. This is due to the juvenile justice reforms, SB 200 (2014), that limit the length of time students can be committed to a juvenile facility.
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CONSIDERATIONS

The above descriptions provide examples of the many strategies programs and schools deploy to meet the varied needs of students. We encourage you to learn more about these programs and schools and to consider how your district, school, or classroom can incorporate new strategies to strengthen your support for students through culture and climate.

Education leaders and practitioners are encouraged to consider how they might implement some of the practices related to each of the five strategies highlighted in this brief. Many are no- or low-cost and can be tried on a small-scale to begin. All are worthy of consideration as examples of promising and effective practice across the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

STRATEGY 1: CREATING A SAFE AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL STUDENTS

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

- ☐ Has your school/district established various ways to recognize staff and teachers for their individual contributions that go beyond traditional recognition?
- ☐ Does your school/district have clear norms, rewards systems, and rituals that are well-known?
- ☐ Is there a specified person in your school/district that is responsible for improving school culture and climate by monitoring bullying and safety issues?
- ☐ Are there district or school-wide initiatives that address alternative approaches to discipline or restorative practices? If so, how can these approaches be strengthened?
- ☐ Does your district or school have enough trained mental health professionals? If not, what are some innovative ways you could utilize mental health professionals to reach more students?

FOR EDUCATORS:

- ☐ Have you implemented a standard and consistent way of acknowledging students for their individual strengths?
- ☐ Have you created classroom norms, rituals, and reward systems that all students identify with? If so, were students involved in creating them?
- ☐ Do you have the skills necessary to monitor and intervene when bullying or other safety issues occur within your classroom or program?
- ☐ Does your school offer alternatives to discipline through restorative practices? Do you use these approaches within your classroom?
- ☐ Is there time throughout the day that you could introduce students to topics such as bullying and depression? What resources and support would you need to feel comfortable having these discussions?

STRATEGY 2: ELEVATING STUDENT VOICE

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

- ☐ Does your school or district have student-led peer groups and/or leadership councils where students are allowed to influence school policies and practices?
- ☐ Does your school or district create opportunities to elevate the voice, cultures, experiences, and passions of students?
- ☐ Is social-emotional learning a priority for your school or district? If not, how might you incorporate or introduce this form of developmental learning?

FOR EDUCATORS:

- ☐ Do students have an opportunity to lend their voice and ideas to activities and lessons?
- ☐ Do you assign projects or learning experiences that incorporate the passion, interests, culture, and experiences of your students and families?
- ☐ Do you feel like social-emotional learning is a critical aspect to youth development? If so, are there things you can do to prioritize this in your classroom?

STRATEGY 3: INVOLVING PARENTS IN A MEANINGFUL WAY

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

- ☐ Does your school or district conduct surveys involving feedback from parents? If so, how do you use these results to improve culture and climate?
- ☐ How are the voices of parents elevated throughout your school or district?
- ☐ Does your school or district host regular events for parents to create a welcoming environment?

FOR EDUCATORS:

- ☐ Do you provide opportunities for parents to share their feedback and ideas?
- ☐ Have you developed a clear and consistent way to communicate with parents?
- ☐ Do you see parents regularly in your school or classrooms? If not, what are some ways that you could increase parent engagement?

STRATEGY 4: TRANSFORMING THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT TO PROMOTE COMMUNITY

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

- ☐ Are the teachers/staff in your school or district encouraged to decorate their classrooms or offices to create a welcoming environment for students?

FOR EDUCATORS:

- ☐ Does your classroom or space display the culture, aspirations, and strengths of your students?

STRATEGY 5: EMPOWERING TEACHERS AND STAFF TO BECOME LEADERS

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

- ☐ Are teachers and staff in your school or district included in developing a shared vision for the school or program?
- ☐ Do the teachers and staff in your school or district feel like they have the autonomy to make important decisions?
- ☐ Are the teachers in your school or district able to provide feedback? If so, do you make changes based on this feedback?

FOR EDUCATORS:

- ☐ Do you feel included in the vision for your school or program?
- ☐ Are you provided with the support you need to develop your leadership skills?
- ☐ Have you participated in surveys or offered feedback on ways to improve culture and climate?

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STUDENT TRANSITIONS AND REENGAGEMENT

OVERVIEW

To improve student persistence to graduation, districts and schools focus on student transitions and reengagement to help students stay in school, progress through school, and graduate. Rumberger et al., offers four evidence-based recommendations for reducing dropout rates in middle and high schools and improving high school graduation rates:

- Monitor progress of all students and intervene if students show early signs of attendance, behavior, or academic problems.
- Provide intensive individualized support to students who have fallen off track and face significant challenges to success.
- For schools with many at-risk students, create small, personalized communities to facilitate monitoring and support.
- Engage students by offering curricula that connect schoolwork with college and career success and that improve students' capacity to manage challenges in and out of school (2017).

Students are the most susceptible to dropping out of school during transitions. In particular, the transition from middle to high school can be quite daunting for all students and further amplified when youth do not feel like they are supported or have encountered multiple challenges

and setbacks in previous years. Students can experience anxiety, a lack of motivation and have legitimate concerns about overall expectations. Many school districts have developed transition and summer bridge programs as a way to prevent dropping out and heighten student success. Ninth grade is one of the most important years for students, and consequently their academic performance during this year can be an indicator of whether a student will graduate high school or not. High school dropout rates are significantly lower in districts with intentional middle to high school transition programs that include information about curricula, facilities, safety and discipline, and provide detailed logistics and information (Smith, 1997; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001; Mac Iver, 1990).

Reengaging students who are out-of-school has gained national attention over the past decade, and advocates are attempting to bring awareness to the large cohort of "Opportunity Youth," who represent tremendous untapped potential. Nationally, 1.8 million young adults aged 16–21 are not enrolled in school and have not finished their high school education, and 4.6 million youth (aged 16 to 24) are out of school and not in the labor market. The immediate taxpayer burden for these youth is estimated at \$13,900 per youth per year, and the immediate social burden at \$37,450 per year (2011 dollars) (Rennie, Hill,

Villano, Feist, & Legters, 2014). Reengagement centers, school resources, school attendance outreach efforts, and other coordinated efforts can help to link and connect youth back to education pathways and services.

To support students meeting college and career readiness goals, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) provides various data supports via Infinite Campus (IC) to schools and districts to help monitor student progress and identify students who might be off-track and provide interventions to support students until they earn a diploma, including:

- The **Persistence to Graduation Report** uses live data to assign all students (K-12) a risk score based on attendance, behavior, course performance, and demographics. The path to this report in IC is KY State Reporting / KDE Reports / Persistence to Graduation.
- The **Early Warning System Tool** is a robust interactive data resource which allows district and school personnel to better understand which students are off track towards graduation and what is contributing to each grade 6-12 student's risk of dropping out and therefore what areas of intervention might have the greatest positive impact on their likelihood to graduation. The path to this report in IC is Student Information / Counseling /Early Warning.
- The **Transient Student Report** helps identify students who have high rates of mobility. The report provides summary and detailed information (school and student level) about the number of schools students have attended in the

current school year, the past two years, and the past five years. The path to this report in IC is KY State Reporting / KDE Reports / Transient Population.

- The **Chronic Absenteeism Report** helps district and school level staff identify trends as well as the individual students who are considered chronically absent as well as those who may become chronically absent. The path to this report in IC is KY State Reporting / KDE Reports / Chronic Absenteeism.
- Data visualization tools with a focus in three areas - demographics, attendance, and behavior - provide various views of data such as charts, heat maps, and spreadsheets. The data analysis portal can help district and school administrators obtain useful insights into each data element and can be used to guide system action planning as well as targeting individual students or student groups. The training videos for the portal are available within the [campus community data visualization forum](#).

(Please note that you must be granted access by your district's IC administrator before you will be able to view these reports.)

In addition, Kentucky school districts offer students individualized support to stay and get back on track to graduation through a variety of short- and long-term alternative programs and schools. For a more detailed discussion of the types of alternative programs and schools in Kentucky, as well as the strategies they employ, please see the companion Alternative Education practice brief in this series.



The Commonwealth of Kentucky is dedicated to ensuring each student graduates from high school ready for college and/or career. To this end, Kentucky's accountability system includes a focus on students being "transition ready," which for high school graduates means being able to succeed in entry-level postsecondary courses without remediation or enter the workforce possessing the knowledge and technical skills necessary for employment in their desired career field. For those students who receive English Language Services in high school, this also includes demonstrating English Language proficiency.

A growing number of communities across the country have put reengagement strategies in place, including one-stop centers that offer a range of services, including referral to high

school or postsecondary completion options and supports to re-enroll. While the Commonwealth of Kentucky supports many dropout prevention efforts to reengage students who are struggling in school or on the verge of dropping out, Kentucky has no dropout recovery programs to reengage students who have left school. This is a missed opportunity. The Commonwealth recently raised the age of mandatory high school attendance to 18, there are state per-pupil funds available for educating any student without a diploma up to age 21, and there are new funds available to support Kentucky high school students' dual enrollment in postsecondary courses. The policy environment in Kentucky therefore offers exciting opportunities for reengaging youth and young adults who do not have a diploma and are not in school or working.

KEY STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES FOR STUDENT TRANSITION AND REENGAGEMENT

Kentucky schools, programs, and districts utilize a wide range of strategies to support students through key transitions and reengage them when they falter on the path to high school

graduation. In this practice brief we document four strategies and the associated practices in place in three programs and schools across the Commonwealth. These include:

STRATEGY 1: MAINTAINING A POSITIVE VIEW OF STUDENTS AND DESIGNING SYSTEMS TO ENCOURAGE SUCCESS

Those seeking to help students successfully navigate key transition points and to reengage them when they fall off-track are steadfast in their high expectations for students. In particular, they:

- Focus on student assets and high expectations for students;

- Offer students who have fallen off track a "clean slate;" and
- Provide students clear rules and codes of conduct, with consistent enforcement and follow-through.

STRATEGY 2: WILLINGNESS TO BE FLEXIBLE TO MEET STUDENTS' NEEDS

School and programs successfully helping students through key transitions and reengaging students who have fallen off track bend to meet students' needs through offering, for example:

- ❑ Flexibility in time, such as open entry and exit, flexibility in scheduling, extended year programming,

and self-paced learning based on competency;

- ❑ A small, personalized learning environment;
- ❑ Credit recovery or catch-up for students who have fallen behind;
- ❑ Blended (computer-based) learning; and
- ❑ Enhanced orientation programming.

STRATEGY 3: IDENTIFYING THE NEED FOR AND PROVIDING ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

Successful transition and reengagement programs are especially good at identifying students in need of and providing wrap-around supports. Such programs and initiatives in this practice brief offer:

- ❑ Use of an early warning system to identify students in need of additional supports;

- ❑ Additional academic supports for students identified as "at-risk;"
- ❑ Wrap-around supports for students and their families to address non-academic barriers; and
- ❑ On-site mental health support services.

STRATEGY 4: ENCOURAGING STAFF COLLABORATION

Successful transition and reengagement programs make staff collaboration a high priority. This is most evident in situations where:

- ❑ Classroom teachers and those providing other services, such as mental health services or juvenile

justice programming, collaborate to offer students a coherent, consistent program; and

- ❑ An alternative school or program and a student's home school collaborate to offer students a smooth transition between education programming.

CASE EXAMPLE #1

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING CENTER

COVINGTON INDEPENDENT PUBLIC SCHOOLS | COVINGTON, KENTUCKY

KEY
STRATEGIES
HIGHLIGHTED:1
2
3
4

The Transformational Learning Center¹² (TLC or the Center) is an open-entry/open-exit alternative program for Covington Independent Public Schools (CIPS) middle and high school students who have exhibited behavioral problems in their home schools. The Center provides behavioral intervention and counseling to prepare students for a successful return to their home school, while providing continuity in their academic program. The TLC school day consists of six periods, four for core subjects, a fifth for an Intervention Class that offers intensive reading, math, and writing supports on a two-week rotation, and a sixth for a gym class that incorporates team building and social interaction. Small class sizes and the additional Intervention Class provide the opportunity for teachers to differentiate instruction and work one-on-one with students to meet the needs of a diverse group of learners who enter the program at different times and with various skill levels. Students move between classrooms, each of which has one teacher and one instructional assistant.

The TLC has three other programs co-located with its alternative setting: a short-term (one- to ten-day) alternative to suspension program, a computer-based learning program for credit recovery, and an education program for students housed at the Children's Home of Northern Kentucky. These co-located programs offer some flexibility to move students between programs as helpful. For example, students entering the TLC in need of credit recovery may begin with the on-site computer-based learning program before transitioning to regular teacher-led instruction of TLC classrooms.

The TLC takes student transition back to a home school very seriously, spending weeks preparing students for a successful return. The Center has a behavioral level system that students work through to prepare to return to their middle or high school. When students reach the third of four levels, they are asked to reflect on why they were placed at the TLC, what they have changed and learned while at the Center, what they still need to improve, and what supports they will need as they transition back to their home school. When a student reaches the 10th day of Level 4, the school leadership team decides if the student is ready to return to his/her home school. If so, the team sends a Transition Application to the student's home school (and, if

applicable, the court liaison), so that home school staff can learn about the student's progress at the TLC. With everyone on the same page, plans continue for the student to return. For high school students, the next step is a transition meeting for the student with parents, counselors, and the grade level principal to discuss the student's Transition Application, and, finally, return to the

home high school. For middle school students the process is similar, but rather than returning all at once they transition through half-days at their home middle school (and half days at TLC) for the first two weeks, during which time TLC staff can adjust any supports needed to ensure the student's success.

TYPE OF PROGRAM:	6-week to 2-year alternative programs for middle and high school students
POPULATION SERVED:	More than 200 students ages 11 to 18 each year who have exhibited behavioral problems in their home school
BENEFITS TO DISTRICT:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Graduation for students previously not expected to graduate▪ Improved student behavior as demonstrated by fewer behavioral referrals and improved attendance and grades▪ Credit recovery option for students who have fallen off-track
FUNDING SOURCE/S:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ CIPS Per Pupil Funding
CHALLENGES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Students react very positively to the small, personalized environment of the TLC and while most are initially placed there involuntarily, the vast majority are reluctant to leave when it is time to transition to their home school.▪ With a small teaching staff, the TLC must focus on core subjects and is not able to offer music and art programs.

CASE EXAMPLE #2

MCDANIEL LEARNING CENTER

LAUREL COUNTY SCHOOLS | LONDON, KENTUCKY

KEY
STRATEGIES
HIGHLIGHTED:1
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The McDaniel Learning Center¹³ (MLC or the Center) is a non-traditional high school program serving up to 60 students from the Laurel County Public Schools' (LCPS) two comprehensive high schools. The program offers students the flexibility of a self-paced curriculum in a small, personalized atmosphere and fosters academic success for students who have fallen off-track to graduate. The Center, which does not carry the stigma of being referred to as an “alternative program” for “problem students,” has a family atmosphere and offers four classrooms staffed by highly skilled and engaged teachers who support students one-on-one as they work at their own pace using a computer-based curriculum.

The MLC coordinates extensively with staff of the district's two comprehensive high schools to monitor student data on Infinite Campus using the Early Warning tool and credits that need to be recovered to identify students who are not on track to graduate with their class and for whom MLC might be an appropriate option. Counselors at North and South Laurel High Schools talk with these students and discuss whether MLC would be a good fit. If, after discussing with their school counselor, a student is interested in attending MLC, they complete an application, which includes teacher recommendations.

McDaniel Learning Center is highly successful in reengaging students who were not thriving in a comprehensive high school program. In its ten years of operation, the Center has helped more than 400 students to graduate high school. The Center has a long waiting list and plans to open a “second shift” program in the afternoon/early evening hours to accommodate more students. What is more, the district recognizes the Center's expertise in reengaging struggling students and asked MLC staff to develop a credit recovery program for the district's two comprehensive high schools and train teachers prior to the program's implementation.

TYPE OF PROGRAM:	Voluntary, non-traditional high school program
POPULATION SERVED:	60 students in grades 9-12 from North Laurel and South Laurel High Schools
BENEFITS TO DISTRICT:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ An alternative path for students not offered in the traditional high school setting that gives them the opportunity to graduate▪ Increased graduation rates: in the past nine years the Center has graduated an average of 67 students per year▪ Credit recovery expertise (which has been extended to the district's two high schools)▪ An effective learning environment for students who were not thriving in a traditional high school
FUNDING SOURCE/S:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ LCPS Per Pupil Funding
CHALLENGES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The Center wishes it could identify students at an earlier age to offer interventions.▪ The Center has a long waiting list of students who could benefit from the program if space were available.



CASE EXAMPLE #3

JACKSON ACADEMY

WARREN COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS | BOWLING GREEN, KENTUCKY

KEY
STRATEGIES
HIGHLIGHTED:1
2
4

Jackson Academy¹⁴ (the Academy) serves students who have been referred for disciplinary problems by one of the district's elementary, middle, or high schools. Previously more of a traditional disciplinary program—a holding tank for students that did not do much with students in the time they spent there—Jackson Academy has been completely revamped in the past several years. The program has been changed primarily by bringing a group of teachers and staff who really wanted to be there and instituting a Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS) model with clear expectations related to learning, engaging, and acting responsibly and respectfully. The goal of the Academy is to build positive relationships in order to assist each student in becoming successful academically, behaviorally, socially, and emotionally.

When a student is referred to Jackson Academy, staff are careful to make sure the student's home school has done everything it can before accepting them. Once at the Academy, the focus is on restoration. Jackson Academy staff members meet with the student, discuss situations that triggered problematic behavior in the past and set up a process with students ahead of time for when they get into trouble while at the Academy. The program is customized to the student, with both academic and behavioral differentiation. Jackson Academy students love the program, which is highly structured, with clear expectations and routines. The small environment, differentiated lessons, and meaningful relationships that Jackson Academy builds with students are not only reflected in their behavioral change but in their academic success as well. Most students rapidly improve academically at the Academy, exhibiting large jumps in reading and math scores and rapidly completing large amounts of coursework. Most Jackson Academy students enter the program with failing grades; however over 98 percent leave passing all of the classes they are enrolled in.

While Jackson Academy staff witnessed students making huge strides in the program; they noticed that when students returned to their home school, they were faltering and ending up back at the Academy. This spurred the Academy to develop a transition plan for students exiting the program that they piloted with one partner middle school during the 2017-18 school year. The pilot was wildly successful: not one student returned to Jackson Academy once they had transitioned back to their

home school. Having seen this tremendous success, other district schools are now eager to engage in the expanded transition programming. Transition planning now begins when the student first enters Jackson Academy. Academy staff members are in communication with the home school counselor to discuss their goals for the student and what they would like Academy staff to work on with the student. The Jackson Academy Coordinator keeps the home school counselor up-to-date on a student's progress during the whole time the student is in the program. As the time for returning to the home school approaches, the school interventionist and counselor are invited to Jackson Academy, where they meet with the Coordinator to develop a plan for academic and behavioral success for the student to return to school. Then home school staff have two weeks to figure out the details of implementing the plan. This often involves further communication with the Jackson Academy Coordinator who helps home school staff to think outside the box. Meanwhile, Academy staff are talking with the parents. One

week before transition, the Jackson Academy Coordinator sits down with the student to discuss the plan and to help the student write a letter to their school about what they have learned and what they want out of their middle or high school experience when they return. When the student is ready to depart, there is a final, student-led meeting with the student, all intervention specialists and counselors, parents, and a person identified by the student as a supporter from their home school. During this meeting the student talks about Jackson Academy and its expectations and they read the letter they wrote to their home school. This is often an incredibly powerful moment for all involved. Then home school staff talk about their plan for the student's success upon reentry. After the student returns to their home school, the Jackson Academy Coordinator continues to remain in communication with the guidance counselor and parents. If the guidance counselor notices a slip, they contact the Jackson Academy Coordinator, who then meets with the student.

TYPE OF PROGRAM:	Alternative program for elementary through high school students who have exhibited behavior problems
POPULATION SERVED:	86 students grades 3-12
BENEFITS TO DISTRICT:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Specialized behavior intervention program for the most at-risk, tier 3 students ▪ Intervention expertise to share with traditional schools ▪ Increased student academic and behavioral success demonstrated by improved S.T.A.R. math and reading scores, improved grades, and improved behavior upon return to home school ▪ Credit recovery options to help struggling students who have fallen behind back on track to graduation ▪ Increased graduation rates

FUNDING SOURCE/S:	WCPS Per Pupil Funding
CHALLENGES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Jackson Academy wants more schools to know their program can be a helpful intervention, rather than a holding tank. They want to be of use to more schools in their district. ▪ Some Jackson Academy students thrive in the program and do not want to return to their home school, and the Academy would like to be able to offer a permanent school program for those students.

CONSIDERATIONS

The above descriptions demonstrate a range of programs and schools in Kentucky to support students through key transitions and reengage them when they falter on the path to high school graduation. We encourage you to learn more about these programs and schools and to consider how your district, school, or classroom can incorporate new strategies to strengthen your support for students to persist to graduation.

Education leaders and practitioners are encouraged to consider how they might implement some of the practices related to each of the four broad strategies highlighted in this brief. Many are no- or low-cost and can be tried on a small-scale to begin. All are worthy of consideration as examples of promising and effective practice across the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

STRATEGY 1: MAINTAINING A POSITIVE VIEW OF STUDENTS AND DESIGNING SYSTEMS TO ENCOURAGE SUCCESS

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

- ❑ How could you ensure your school/district focuses on student assets rather than deficits?
- ❑ Do you hold the same expectations for college and career readiness for all students, including those who struggle and require transition and reengagement supports?
- ❑ In what ways do/could you ensure students are offered a “clean slate” when they have faltered and need to be helped back on-track to graduation?
- ❑ Are there ways your school/district could ensure straight-forward rules and codes of conduct across classrooms/schools?

FOR EDUCATORS:

- ❑ How could you better focus on your students’ assets, as opposed to their deficits?
- ❑ Do you hold the same expectations for college and career readiness for all of your students, including those who struggle and require transition and reengagement supports?
- ❑ Do you offer your students a “clean slate” when they have faltered and need to be helped back on-track to graduation? When they return to your classroom after spending time in another program?
- ❑ Do you have straight-forward rules and codes of conduct in your classroom that are consistent with expectations in your school/program? Could you work to increase student understanding of these expectations to improve outcomes for them?



STRATEGY 2: WILLINGNESS TO BE FLEXIBLE TO MEET STUDENTS' NEEDS

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

- ☐ Do or could you offer students programs/schools that are flexible with time (e.g., open-entry and exit, extended year programming, etc.)?
- ☐ Does or could your school/district offer students ways to obtain course credit by demonstrating competency rather than time-in-seat?
- ☐ Does or could your school/district accommodate students who require a small, personalized learning environment?
- ☐ Does or could your school/district offer students who have fallen behind ways to recover credits or otherwise "catch up" and get back on-track to graduation?
- ☐ Does or could your school/district offer blended (computer-based) learning opportunities?

FOR EDUCATORS:

- ☐ How could you better support students who enter your classroom in the middle of the school year?
- ☐ Are there ways for your students to complete course material at their own pace?
- ☐ How could you better assist students who fall behind to catch up with their peers?
- ☐ Are there blended (computer-based) learning opportunities you could offer to help provide a more flexible learning environment for your students?

STRATEGY 3: IDENTIFYING THE NEED FOR AND PROVIDING ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

- ☐ Does/could your school/district use early warning indicators to identify students in need of additional supports to stay on-track to graduation?
- ☐ How could your school/district increase on-site support services (e.g., mental health counseling, healthcare, social services) offered to students and their families?
- ☐ How could your school/district increase staff knowledge and use of trauma-informed practices?
- ☐ How could your school/district improve the smooth transition of students between programs and schools?

FOR EDUCATORS:

- ☐ Do/could you use early warning indicators to identify students in need of additional supports to stay on-track to graduation?
- ☐ How could you increase your knowledge of available on-site services to improve wrap-around supports for your students and their families?
- ☐ How could you increase your knowledge and use of trauma-informed practices in your classroom?
- ☐ How could you improve smooth transitions for your students when they move between programs and schools?

STRATEGY 4: ENCOURAGING STAFF COLLABORATION

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

- ❑ How could you encourage greater collaboration among classroom teachers and those providing other services (e.g., mental health) to provide students with a more coherent and consistent education program?
- ❑ How could you encourage greater collaboration between alternative programs/schools and students' home schools to smooth the transition between programming?

FOR EDUCATORS:

- ❑ How could you increase your collaboration with other teachers and support staff in your building to provide your students with the most coherent and consistent educational experience possible?
- ❑ How could you increase your collaboration with staff from other schools/programs who also work with your students?

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Information for this case example obtained from telephone interview with Nodler, Lori. (2018, September 5) and site visit to Western Mental Health Day Treatment. (2018, October 1).
- 2 Information for this case example obtained from telephone interview with LaBoone, Frank. (2018, August 31) and site visit to Opportunity Middle College. (2018, October 2).
- 3 Information for this case example obtained from telephone interview with Bowland, Brian. (2018, September 4) and site visit to McCracken Regional School. (2018, October 4).
- 4 Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is a term used to describe all types of abuse, neglect, and other traumatic experiences occurring to young people before age 18. ACEs have been linked to chronic health conditions, low life potential, early death, and risky health behaviors. As the number of ACEs goes up, the risk of these adverse outcomes increases. Positive experiences can help protect against the negative outcomes of ACEs (Centers for Disease Control. About ACEs.) The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers helpful ACEs prevention tools and resources at: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/resources.html>
- 5 Information for this case example obtained from telephone interview with Snow, Gwen. (2018, October 31) and site visit to Newcomer Academy. (2018, October 1).
- 6 Information for this case example obtained from telephone interview with Stevenson, Tina and Ridd, Eric. (2018, September 6) and site visit to STEAM Academy. (2018, November 13).
- 7 Information for this case example obtained from a telephone interview with Irvin, Wes. (2018, September 4) and site visit to Adair Youth Development Center. (2018, October 5).
- 8 Information for this case example obtained from a telephone interview with Flynn, Michael. (2018, September 14) and site visit to Adair Youth Development Center. (2018, November 13).
- 9 Information for this case example obtained from telephone interview with Melton, Jeanna. (2018, September 14) and site visit to East Carter Middle School. (2018, November 12).
- 10 Information for this case example obtained from telephone interview with Wurst, Mary. (2018, September 14) and site visit to Butler High School. (2018, October 3).
- 11 Information for this case example obtained from telephone interview with Brewster, Elizabeth. (2018, September 6) and site visit to Ramey Estep High School. (2018, November 12).
- 12 Information for this case example obtained from telephone interview with Lorie Duffy (2018, September 5) and site visit to Transformational Learning Center. (2018, November 15).
- 13 Information for this case example obtained from site visit to McDaniel Learning Center. (2018, November 14).
- 14 Information for this case example obtained from telephone interviews with Eric Wilson and Leslie Miller (2018, August 30 and 2019, February 13).

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Nancy Martin draws on more than 20 years of experience in education and workforce development to help organizations document, perfect, and share their efforts to improve young people's lives. Nancy's specialties include building organizational and system capacity, facilitating learning across communities and systems for youth program quality improvement, documenting alternative pathways to high school graduation and postsecondary success, and conducting insightful and sensitive site visits. Previously, Nancy was Director of Capacity Building Initiatives at the National Youth Employment Coalition, where she oversaw NYEC's education and PEPNet quality standard initiatives to expand high-quality education and employment options for youth.





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