

TOWN HALL MEETINGS



Introduction

In July 2015, the Council on Postsecondary Education held five town hall meetings to hear public comments and feedback on a draft framework of the 2016-2020 Strategic Agenda for Postsecondary and Adult Education. Participants heard a contextual presentation from President Bob King that highlighted the progress and challenges experienced by the public postsecondary system over the last decade, followed by an update on the strategic planning process by Vice President of Policy, Planning and Operations Lee Nimocks. The rest of the evening was facilitated by the ECU Professional Facilitation Center and was designed to elicit comments from both individuals and tables working in small groups. The forums were held on the following dates and locations:

Date	Location	Attendance
July 15	Pikeville	39
July 16	Frankfort	47
July 20	Somerset	31
July 21	Murray	98
July 29	Highland Heights	79
Total		294

Biggest Challenges

The facilitators began the interactive part of each event with the prompt: “What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing postsecondary education in the next five to ten years?” In the smaller forums, participants shared their concerns via open mike sessions, while in the larger forums, participants shared via open mike and through written responses. (These half-sheets were collected by CPE staff and are paraphrased in this summary.) Participants’ responses overall were remarkably consistent, although some concerns were more pronounced in certain locations (e.g., the need for a public postsecondary institution in Pikeville, the need

for more online education in Somerset, and the need for a fair, consistent funding formula in Northern Kentucky). Financial constraints was by far the most common concern, followed closely by the low value that many Kentuckians place on postsecondary education.

Financial Constraints

- The General Assembly continues to cut higher education appropriations, and a larger portion of the pie is going to prisons, pensions and health care.
- Student affordability and college costs are a major concern.
- Rising student loan debt is a financial burden for students and a disincentive to college-going.
- State financial aid funding is not adequate. The General Assembly is not directing all lottery proceeds to state aid programs, and KEES awards are not keeping pace with rising costs.
- Kentucky lacks the will to raise more revenue through comprehensive tax reform.
- Budget cuts, increased fixed costs and deferred maintenance obligations are decreasing the financial viability of institutions.
- The use of adjuncts and part-time faculty to save money, as well as the reduction in student support services, is eroding quality.
- Attracting and retaining quality faculty has become increasingly difficult with non-competitive salary levels.

Value of Postsecondary Education

- Not enough Kentuckians value postsecondary education or feel it is relevant.
- The lack of jobs for college graduates is fueling notions that college is not worth it. College graduates are working minimum wage jobs and are not seeing a return on their investment.

- Economic stagnation, especially in rural areas of the state, is fueling the perception that college is not worth it.
- Kentucky secondary schools have not done a good enough job creating a college-going culture for all students.
- There is a lack of understanding among the general public that technical degrees/training programs count as “postsecondary education.” While it is true that not everyone needs a four-year degree, the vast majority of people need some education and training beyond high school to become part of the middle class.

College and Career Readiness

- We need to do a better job reaching out to families to educate them about the importance of sending their children to college.
- We must ensure Kentucky’s high school curriculum is rigorous (encourage STEM, AP, dual credit). Postsecondary education suffers the effects of “P-12 mediocrity.”
- We need to ensure that all students are encouraged to pursue postsecondary opportunities, even lower-achieving students.
- Students lack emotional readiness, determination, grit, motivation, and problem-solving skills that help them succeed in college.
- College advising in high school is insufficient; high school guidance counselors do not have the capacity to advise all students.
- We need to make it easier to fill out the FAFSA.
- We need to reduce the time students spend in developmental education, so they will not exhaust their aid on non-credit courses.

Postsecondary Education Advocacy

- We need to organize and mobilize alumni, students, community members, and others to advocate for increased funding for postsecondary education.
- All institutions need to stop competing over diminishing resources and band together with one common voice.

College and Career Alignment

- Colleges need to increase communication with employers to create a career-ready workforce.
- Employers need to have more skin in the game as well. Postsecondary students need access to internships, tuition reimbursement, and employer-subsidized programs.
- It is important that colleges teach soft skills as well as academic skills.
- Colleges need to teach core critical thinking and adaptability skills that will prepare students for any career, even those careers that don’t yet exist.
- Don’t underestimate the value of the liberal arts; these majors teach individuals transferable skills like communication and critical thinking.
- We must educate more Kentuckians before we can create meaningful economic development opportunities in rural areas of the state.

Teacher Preparation and Quality

- Teacher preparation programs need to be more rigorous and focus on pedagogical training much earlier in the process.
- Teachers need to learn how to accommodate diverse learning styles.
- Too many teachers leave the profession for higher-paying jobs in business and industry.
- High-performing teachers tend to teach in high-performing schools, and vice versa. This needs to change.
- Teaching is not a well-compensated or valued profession; the best and brightest go into other fields. If the United States paid teachers as well as Finland, we would attract the same level of talent.
- Too many teachers are teaching outside of their area of expertise (e.g., English teachers assigned to history courses). We need to align degree production in teacher preparation with workforce needs.

Lack of Innovation

- Kentucky needs multiple pathways to a bachelor's degree and multiple delivery formats, particularly for busy adults.
- We need to increase the number of completer degrees and articulation agreements between KCTCS and colleges and universities.
- Rural Kentuckians especially need access to affordable, quality postsecondary programs, both online and face-to-face. Broadband availability is still a concern. "Rural regions feel abandoned."
- Colleges need to be more nimble, change more quickly, and keep up with the latest technologies.
- Colleges need to be more creative in finding new revenue sources.

Low College Completion

- Retention and completion rates must increase, especially among low-performing populations like low-income, underprepared, and underrepresented minority students.
- There is a growing disparity in the skill levels of Americans versus the citizens of other countries.
- Kentucky must address large regional disparities in educational attainment.
- We need to move to a new completion rate that accounts for transfer students, part-time students, and others not in the traditional first-time, full-time cohort.

Other Concerns

- Government intrusion and regulation, however well-intentioned, is making it harder for institutions to do their job.
- We must do more to prevent academically talented Kentuckians from leaving the state (brain drain).
- Postsecondary education is not doing enough to enroll difficult-to-reach populations.
- Kentucky needs a fair, rational funding distribution model that rewards institutions based on performance.
- Education suffers from an over-reliance on high-stakes testing and other standardized assessments.

Feedback on the Focus Areas

In general, participants supported the three focus areas—opportunity, success, and impact—and liked that the Council was proposing to talk more directly about the positive impact postsecondary education has on the state's economy, communities, health, and welfare. The facilitators asked participants to choose the focus area that most interested them, and in small groups, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of its proposed objectives, as well as strategies that could be used to implement these objectives. Each table chose a scribe to record responses on flip charts and another individual to report out. The following comments are paraphrased from all of the responses collected from flip charts and captured from oral reports. Comments are listed in no particular order (comments that were off-topic or irrelevant have not been included).

Opportunity

- We must expand higher education/P-12 partnerships. Both sectors need to work together to deliver early awareness programs that expose students to college, interventions that reduce the need for postsecondary remediation, and professional development programs for P-12 educators and faculty.
- P-12 and postsecondary educators need to align their standards and expectations so that students understand what they need to know in order to be successful in college.
- More should be done to help students and families understand how to apply for college and the many options available to finance postsecondary education (more financial literacy and early college awareness activities are needed).
- Kentucky needs to conduct a public awareness campaign about the value of postsecondary education. Remember to reach students and families through places of worship, community centers, social service agencies, employers and schools.
- Consider requiring a high school course in college-going, or making every student apply to a

postsecondary institution as a graduation requirement.

- Allow students to use KEES money to pay for dual credit courses.
- We need more college advisors and mentors for high school students; high school guidance counselors do not have the capacity to perform this function adequately. We also need to ramp up advising for postsecondary students.
- More should be done to build a college-going culture in every region of the state.
- Linking college credentials to employment opportunities is important so that students understand the relevance of furthering their education.
- Expand P-12, postsecondary, and employer partnerships.
- We need to continue working with P-12 to increase college readiness and redesign developmental education so students can enter credit-bearing courses sooner. Consider using Kentucky Adult Education programs to provide more developmental education to students, since their services are free.
- Consider identifying rural students as a target population in the metrics, like we do for low-income and underrepresented minority students. There is still an access problem in rural Kentucky.
- We need to create more pathways to a four-year degree—from adult education programs, KCTCS certificate and degree programs, and the workplace.
- There should be more opportunities for place-bound adults to pursue four-year degree programs, and more access to financial aid. Online programs need to be affordable and of a high quality and include student support services.
- Improve financial aid access for students in certificate and training programs, as well as for part-time and nontraditional students.
- Teacher preparation programs need to be restructured. We need to use clinical models and be guided by the world's best performing countries

(like Finland). We need specific, targeted, differentiated instruction in P-12 and postsecondary education to teach diverse learners.

- There needs to be a more diverse teaching force in Kentucky (P-12 and postsecondary education); perhaps that would increase diversity in our colleges and universities.
- Consider administering high school equivalency exams other than the GED, like the HISET (administered in Tennessee) or TASC.
- Replicate the success of the Falcon Academy in Hickman, Kentucky, a program offering dual credit to adult education students and to high schools with high poverty rates.

Success

- College advising and support services need to be increased. We need to help all students navigate college in less time and limit the impact of changes in major, and we especially need to advise/mentor at-risk student populations.
- We need to increase 2-year to 4-year transfers and revise the metric so that students enrolled in universities don't count as transfers if they only take three hours over the summer at a KCTCS campus.
- Colleges and universities need to do more to prevent summer melt.
- The definition of completion needs to be broader than the traditional 6-year graduation rate. We need to move to a model like the SAM metric.
- Be careful that completion goals do not have the unintended consequence of increasing selectivity and decreasing access for marginalized populations. Also, if students achieve the goal they set out to achieve, this arguably could be considered success, even if they don't complete a degree or credential.
- We need to ensure that critical thinking, literacy, writing, and computation skills are embedded in every level of postsecondary education—from certificates to graduate and professional programs. We may be overemphasizing STEM or technical

programs and underemphasizing the value of the liberal arts.

- We need to improve teaching at the college level and update teaching styles and strategies to incorporate the latest evidence-based research in teaching and learning. Are colleges adapting to today's learner? We must share best practices to ensure they are being replicated across the state.
- Pay more attention to retention from the second year to the third year, as well as from the third year to the fourth year. There is a lot of emphasis on first-year retention, but then efforts wane.
- Ensuring academic quality is important, but how do you measure this? Quantitative measures alone are not adequate.
- Consider tying some institutional rewards to job placement and employment after graduation, since this is the most important outcome for the public.
- We need to do more to foster innovation in public postsecondary education—from program delivery to teaching methods to university operations.
- Involve students in the creation of strategies to eliminate barriers or tripwires that stand in the way of college completion.

Impact

- CPE should re-establish P-16 Councils in local areas. They were a driving force in promoting collaboration among educators across the spectrum.
- Colleges should integrate more entrepreneurship training into academic programs so that students will not just be job-seekers, but job creators (e.g. art majors could learn how to market themselves and create small businesses).
- Don't assume the comprehensive universities have no role in basic research.
- There is quite a bit of overlap between basic/applied/translational research initiatives and community outreach initiatives at our universities.
- We need to promote partnerships, like the University Center of the Mountains, which

encourage cooperation instead of competition between public and private institutions.

- CPE needs to highlight each university's program(s) of strength—not every institution needs to be all things to all people.
- Encourage universities to sit down with community leaders and understand what their service region needs.
- Just persisting and completing college isn't enough; students need internships, service learning, and other applied learning opportunities.
- Career services must be improved on college campuses. Consider funding incentives for institutions to support employer partnerships and provide students with more job shadowing and internship opportunities. Use career assessments to guide students to careers and majors.
- Do we really want to align degree programs with workplace needs? It seems difficult to determine what state needs will be in the immediate future, much less in the long-term. All degrees should impart individuals with critical thinking, problem solving and basic foundational skills that transfer to a multitude of careers. We should ask universities to ensure foundational/employability skills are being taught in all academic programs.

Conclusion

At the end of each town hall meeting, facilitators asked participants to finish this sentence: "In order to be successful with this agenda, CPE, the institutions, and other stakeholders must..." Participants wrote their responses on half-sheets of paper, which are paraphrased here, in no particular order:

- Advocate for the restoration of higher education funding from the General Assembly. Be more creative in finding alternative funding sources. Use limited resources efficiently. "We can't keep fighting over a piece of pie that's always shrinking. We need a bigger pie."

- Increase communication and partnerships with institutions, local communities, P-12 education, and other key partners and stakeholders with “boots on the ground” (this means listening more, not just speaking). Increase input and participation from business and industry, as well as from students and families. Engage at the grassroots level to promote change.
- Promote cooperation instead of competition among institutions. Put territorial disputes aside and work for the common good.
- Start college outreach and awareness activities earlier.
- Implement a public awareness campaign to communicate the value of postsecondary education (not just 4-year degrees, but certificates and technical degrees as well). Demonstrate its value in terms of employment opportunities and salaries, as well as other benefits to the state of Kentucky. Stress the importance of life-long learning.
- Improve CPE’s role in disseminating information and research to inform public opinion.
- Create an outcomes-based funding model with clear objectives, including employment outcomes. Direct additional funding to partnerships to encourage collaboration on specific initiatives.
- Advocate for adequate financial aid funding at the national and state levels. Students need enough money to complete a degree, not just fund part of their education.
- Increase innovation in higher education, especially in delivery models that can reach place-bound students where they are. These need to be flexible, adaptable, and affordable.
- Be proactive, bold, strong, daring, independent and brave—don’t be afraid to upset the status quo.
- Promote culturally responsive teaching and globally competitive students. Increase diversity on campus and among P-12 teachers and postsecondary faculty and staff.
- Higher education needs to earn the public’s trust. If higher education institutions demonstrate successful outcomes, then the state will be more likely to invest in them.
- Promote research-based best practices.
- Do more to eradicate poverty and regional disparities.
- Increase expectations for all students at all levels.
- Focus more on students and counselors and less on politics and public relations.
- Improve/revamp teacher preparation programs.
- Prioritize what’s most important—not “just do it,” but rather, “what’s doable?”
- Resist one-size-fits-all solutions for the entire state. Recognize the different needs and priorities of individual regions and institutions.