



Building Lifelong Success and a Stronger Kentucky through Higher Education

The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) is guided by an unwavering commitment to the transformative power of higher education. High-quality postsecondary education is the key to addressing many of the challenges facing the Commonwealth. It unlocks the path to meaningful careers, economic opportunity, vibrant communities, a stronger, more responsive workforce, and richer, healthier lives for all citizens.

Kentucky is blessed with an array of public and private research, comprehensive, and liberal arts universities, and a dynamic system of public community and technical colleges. In recent years there has been significant progress on virtually every key measure of postsecondary success, including college preparation levels, progression through programs, the number of degrees and certificates awarded and the percent of Kentucky adults who have earned a higher education credential.

But more can and must be done to ensure that every Kentuckian, regardless of race, age, or economic status, has access to the transformative benefits of higher education. More can and must be done to ensure that Kentucky's employers have access to a pipeline of talent aligned to current and future workforce needs. More can and must be done to ensure we improve the quality of education, not just the quantity of degrees and credentials.

Built on Kentucky's 2016-2021 Strategic Agenda for Postsecondary Education and the state's goal to increase the percentage of adults with a postsecondary credential to 60% by 2030, the following four overarching priorities have been identified to guide the work of CPE through 2020 to drive postsecondary education change and improvement in the Commonwealth:

- 1. Build broad understanding that higher education is the key to personal opportunity and Kentucky's economic growth.**
- 2. Make higher education affordable for all Kentuckians.**
- 3. Ensure more students earn degrees or certificates regardless of race, income, age, or geography.**
- 4. Meet Kentucky's current and future workforce needs through high-quality, innovative programs.**



Build broad understanding that higher education is **the key** to personal opportunity and Kentucky's economic growth.

In a decade of reduced government spending, rising tuition, and public skepticism about the value of college, CPE, under the leadership of President Aaron Thompson, will lead a statewide effort to remind Kentucky why higher education matters. CPE will encourage reinvestment in this public good and increased participation in postsecondary education through stronger engagement with elected leaders, students and families, and business and community partners.

How?

1. **Expand the *Kentucky Higher Education Matters* brand and message** launched earlier this year through **a statewide listening tour**, social media, op-eds, speeches, presentations, the CPE website and distribution of branded materials (pins, banners, etc.). Part of the **Higher Education Matters** messaging will focus on developing a common understanding of the terms “college,” “higher education,” “technical education/training,” and “postsecondary education.”
2. **Use data, research, and personal stories to drive and shape the message.** **Weekly data infographics** are shared through social media and distribution lists help inform messages and presentations. An annual ***Postsecondary Education Return on Investment* report, data dashboards** and **localized higher education fact sheets** will be launched this summer/fall. **Sharing and elevating personal experiences** through **testimonials and interviews** will be a priority in reminding us why higher education matters
3. **Reach out to K-12 students and their families.** Programs like **CPE's Gear Up program** are reaching students as young as middle school, their families, and their teachers and guidance counselors to help them prepare for and to demystify the higher education experience. CPE is seeking state and foundation resources to help develop a **comprehensive on-line portal** and advising tools to help students navigate the path to a Kentucky college.
4. **Engage decision-makers.** The governor, legislators and other elected officials, local and business leaders, and others in positions of influence and authority can be the **strongest champions** of the *Kentucky Higher Education Matters* message. CPE is working closely with key decision-makers to help advance these priorities, help **build support for investing in postsecondary education performance**, and **recognize higher education as a key driver of economic development.**



Make higher education affordable for all Kentuckians.

Significant cuts to Kentucky's public colleges and universities over the past decade have shifted a larger portion of college costs to students and their families. CPE will lead a statewide effort to moderate costs to students and families, encourage greater state investment in postsecondary education, reign in student loan debt, and help students save money by finishing their programs faster.

How?

1. **Keep tuition and fee increases low.** President Thompson will work with the board to **limit tuition and other college costs**, while assuring campuses have the resources needed to provide quality programs and essential services. Advocating for **state reinvestment in postsecondary education** will be a key strategy in moderating tuition costs, and **rethinking current tuition models**, including those for out-of-state students, will be a high priority.
2. **Help students finish on time.** Accumulating college credit in high school through **dual credit** and other accelerated learning options is an important affordability strategy. CPE will review the state's dual credit policy to assure it meets the needs of students, high schools and postsecondary institutions. CPE will help institutions promote on-time completion through information campaigns such as *15 to Finish* which encourages students to take 15 credit hours per semester or 30 credit hours per year.
3. **Improve financial literacy and "college knowledge."** **GEAR UP Kentucky, a 7-year, \$24M federal grant** targeting low-income school districts, is the centerpiece of CPE's efforts to improve outreach and college-going. An ongoing initiative with financial aid directors encourages saving for college and responsible borrowing and financial literacy through **student debt letters, near peer mentoring** and **professional development** for high school counselors.
4. **Increase financial aid to needy students.** President Thompson will urge campuses to **direct more of institutional aid to needier students** to improve college affordability. CPE will also advocate for **increased funding in need-based state financial aid programs** and explore the development of **scholarship models, including free college programs**, that have had success in other states in increasing student enrollment and completion.



Ensure more students earn degrees or certificates regardless of race, income, age, or geography.

At the heart of this agenda is a commitment that every Kentuckian, whatever their race, income, age, or region of the state, has the opportunity to not just attend a college or university, but to succeed and graduate with a degree or certificate leading to a rewarding career and more fulfilling life. Too often low-income and underrepresented minority students enroll and graduate at lower rates. More can and must be done understand why students drop out, and to help all students succeed.

How?

- 1. Create incentives to make student completion the top priority.** The **state's new performance funding model** makes state funding contingent on student progression and completion, and it prioritizes outcomes for low-income and minority students. CPE will lead discussions with state partners to strengthen the model, as well as introduce campus incentives (such as the new **Stronger by Degrees Student Success Grants**) to improve college completion.
- 2. Close achievement gaps.** Through CPE's **comprehensive diversity policy and planning process**, campuses are held accountable for making progress in closing enrollment, retention, and graduation gaps, and for creating a more inclusive campus culture. CPE's annual **Student Success Conference** will be supplemented by a statewide **equity and inclusion conference** and a variety of **professional development opportunities** to help postsecondary success for all students.
- 3. Streamline pathways to and through college.** Many students get lost in the college search, application, financing, and registration process. CPE will lead efforts to **promote semester-by-semester degree pathways that ensure seamless transfer and guide students to complete associate degrees in two years and bachelor's degrees in four years**. CPE will also continue to lead efforts to reform **developmental education** to allow more students needed academic supports when transitioning into credit-bearing coursework.
- 4. Welcome and support adult students.** With support from the Lumina Foundation, CPE is raising awareness among adult students about the new **Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship (WRKS)**. CPE will support and expand **Project Graduate**, a successful program to recruit former students with more than 80 credit hours but no degree. CPE will explore including adult students as a priority group in the state performance funding model and will incentivize **Competency Based Education** to provide on-demand programming.



Meet Kentucky's current and future workforce needs through high-quality, innovative programs.

CPE will advance high-quality academic programs and strategies that position students to succeed in the workforce of today and tomorrow. How we understand and assess learning is changing, and CPE will lead this change. CPE will encourage institutions to be innovative and nimble in responding to workforce shortages. At the same time, we will ensure Kentucky's graduates are high-level problem solvers, innovators, and communicators who can adapt to new technologies and work in teams.

How?

- 1. Re-vamp CPE's academic program review process to focus on efficiency and outcomes.** Under President Thompson's leadership, CPE is undertaking a **comprehensive revision of the state academic program review process** to focus more deeply on program costs and efficiency, graduation and employment outcomes.
- 2. Graduate career-ready students.** CPE will encourage institutions to incorporate and evaluate **employability skills** throughout the curriculum. CPE's innovative partnership with the Quality Assurance (QA) Commons responds to the need for programs that equip students with the skills for workforce success. Program **certification from QA Commons**, assures that graduates have mastered these skills. Currently six campuses are participating in CPE's QA Commons pilot.
- 3. Incentivize campuses to graduate students in high demand fields.** Kentucky's new performance funding recognizes the importance of building a pipeline of talent that responds to workforce needs. KCTCS campuses earn a **premium in the funding model** for producing graduates for high demand industries. All campuses receive a **premium for STEM+Health degrees**. CPE will work with state partners to further refine the model and build in appropriate funding incentives that respond to workforce needs.
- 4. Increase work-based learning opportunities.** Opportunities for students to get work experience while still in college helps launch them into careers and contributes to a greater chance of graduation. CPE will work with campus leaders, employers and state partners to expand **internships, co-op, apprenticeship and other work-based learning opportunities** for Kentucky students. Part of this effort will include **earlier and more comprehensive career advising** to help students make informed decisions about choosing a major aligned with career and personal interests.