



Commonwealth Education Continuum

Meeting Minutes
April 16, 2025
1:00 - 3:00 p.m. (ET)

Welcome and review of agenda

Dr. Amanda Ellis opened the meeting by expressing excitement for the agenda and introduced Dr. Aaron Thompson, who acknowledged recent flooding in Kentucky with a moment of silence for affected communities. Dr. Thompson highlighted the state's education progress, including increased engagement through the new "Futuriti" platform, improved college-going rates, and rising national rankings in enrollment and completion. He praised the P-20 education-workforce continuum for its impact and outreach. Commissioner Robbie Fletcher followed with updates on various initiatives, including the Go Teach Kentucky campaign to promote teaching careers, the "All In for Ag" week highlighting agriculture-related careers, and the success of the Kentucky Educators Rising conference. He also spotlighted the expansion of fire science career pathways and workforce development events like Go Pro Day. Dr. Ellis concluded by introducing new CEC members and emphasizing the meeting's workforce-first perspective in alignment with Kentucky's top five in-demand sectors.

Introduction of Kentucky's updated top 5 high-demand work sectors

Alisher Burikhanov, Executive Director of the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (KWIB), discussed the top five high-demand job sectors in Kentucky and the methodology behind their selection. Alisher emphasized the need to align education and workforce strategies with evolving economic needs, highlighting four key focus areas: employer engagement, education attainment, workforce participation, and organizational alignment. Using a mix of quantitative data and qualitative input from business, education, and government leaders, KWIB identified the top sectors as healthcare, manufacturing and logistics (now combined), construction, education, and professional/scientific/technical services. These sectors were chosen for their current demand, future growth, and wage potential. The discussion also touched on implications for programs like the Work Ready Scholarship, noting that while these sectors guide policy and funding focus, not all careers within them (like K-12 teaching) currently qualify due to degree requirements. The session concluded with a call for

ongoing alignment, policy adaptation, and collaboration to ensure education and workforce systems support Kentucky's economic growth.

Panel discussion of the education and workforce implications for meeting the top 5 high-demand sectors.

Dr. Ellis opened the panel by introducing a diverse group of leaders from education and business sectors to discuss Kentucky's high-demand career fields and workforce needs. John Hughes from the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce emphasized the need for a better-aligned, educated workforce and highlighted ongoing collaborative efforts like SWATT. Kim Menke of ProVision Solutions stressed the importance of bridging language gaps between business and education and aligning career paths with student interests. Dr. Karen Mayo from BCTC focused on the critical role of partnerships in aligning curriculum with industry demands and shared successful examples of responsive programs. Dr. John Gregory highlighted the potential of adult learners, especially GED seekers and transitioning military families, as an untapped labor force. He emphasized that workforce development should include accessible education pathways to ensure employment and self-sufficiency. Dr. Jim Flynn, speaking from his experience as a superintendent, highlighted two main challenges and opportunities for K–12 education: addressing the ongoing education workforce crisis and better aligning career pathways with local workforce demands. He emphasized the need for innovative partnerships between schools, communities, and industries to ensure students are prepared for in-demand careers through relevant, locally tailored pathways. Flynn stressed the importance of scalable practices like “grow your own” teacher programs and leveraging data systems and AI to fill workforce gaps. He also called for a shared language and aligned systems across education and workforce sectors to drive sustainable progress and elevate Kentucky's educational and economic future.

Review of current data trends within the high-demand sectors

Sam Keathley, KYSTATS, provided a data-rich overview of Kentucky's key economic sectors, highlighting their employment levels, average wages, regional concentrations, and alignment with national industry trends. He explained how sectors like manufacturing and logistics, healthcare, and professional services shape the state's labor market, noting the importance of understanding not just job roles but also the industries and credentials tied to them. He emphasized that while data can reveal broad patterns—like the high demand for registered nurses and truck drivers—true insight often lies beyond the numbers, in how education and workforce systems connect individuals to opportunities. Dr. Ellis praised the clarity of Sam's presentation and urged continued collaboration, particularly through regional strategies and asset mapping to avoid duplicative efforts. She encouraged the group to help shape the direction of future initiatives by identifying gaps, highlighting successes, and sharing resources to strengthen collective impact.

Discussion of the role of the Continuum to help address these needs

Dr. Ellis closed the session by emphasizing the importance of continued collaboration, early career exploration, and cross-sector partnerships to support Kentucky's workforce and education goals. She invited feedback and encouraged participants to engage through the chat or unmuting, highlighting the resources already available and asking where more support is needed. Dr. Thompson expanded on the integration of essential skills into higher education and workforce programs, stressing the shift from competition to collaboration across sectors, with legislative backing serving as a model for others. The discussion also touched on the need to involve families early, break down silos, and ensure educators have access to externships and partnerships to better prepare students. Dr. Ellis concluded with a call for ongoing input and strategic regional collaboration, noting that this is the beginning of a multi-year effort to strengthen connections between education and workforce needs.

In this closing session, Dr. Ellis emphasized the importance of collaboration, alignment, and shared responsibility in creating a seamless, cradle-to-career education system for Kentuckians. The session highlighted key themes such as career preparedness, access to educational pathways, and the role of partnerships in addressing barriers to student success. Attendees were encouraged to share feedback via Mentimeter or chat, with specific interest in actionable ideas for 2025 and beyond. Concerns around access to programs like CTE and dual credit were raised, prompting discussions about data transparency and the importance of early exposure to career opportunities.

Closing

The session concluded with a commitment to continue outreach, data gathering, and resource sharing, reinforcing the CEC's role in accelerating meaningful educational progress across Kentucky.