

# KENTUCKY STUDENT ACCESS SUMMIT

## 2025

FUTURE FOCUSED: RECOGNIZING WHAT  
WORKS, REIMAGINING WHAT'S NEXT



November 17, 2025  
Lexington, KY



# Meet the Student Access & Success Team



*Dr. Aaron Thompson  
President*



*Dr. Amanda Ellis  
Sr. Vice President for  
Access and Success*



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Assistant Vice  
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*Dr. Dawn Offutt  
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Access and Success*



*Kim Welch  
Executive Director of  
GEAR UP Kentucky*



*Robin Hebert  
Senior Fellow for  
Student Access*



*Jessica Fletcher  
Chief Communications  
Officer & Futuriti*



*Mitzi Holland  
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Advising Academy*



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*Arion Jett-Seals  
Associate Director,  
Student Basic Needs*



*Olivia Morris-Bush  
Research Fellow and  
Associate, Student  
Basic Needs*



*Dr. Chris Ledford  
Director of Data &  
Advanced Analytics*



*Nan Harnice  
Senior Associate*



Scan to meet the Kentucky Student Success Collaborative Senior Fellows that help drive the state's strategic initiatives.

# Agenda at-a-Glance

NOVEMBER 17, 2025

8:30am - 8:50am	<b>Opening Doors: Ensuring College Access for All Kentuckians</b>
8:50am - 9:30am	<b>Keynote: You Belong Here: The Power of One Invitation</b>
9:45am - 10:45am	<b>Breakout Sessions, Round 1</b>
11:00am - 12:00pm	<b>Breakout Sessions, Round 2</b>
12:00pm - 1:35pm	<b>Networking Lunch, Plenary &amp; Student Panel</b>
1:35pm - 1:45pm	<b>Futuriti in Focus</b>
2:00pm - 3:00pm	<b>Breakout Sessions, Round 3</b>
3:15pm - 4:00pm	<b>Keynote: When Potential Meets Purpose</b>
4:00pm - 4:15pm	<b>Closing Remarks</b>

# KENTUCKY STUDENT ACCESS SUMMIT

Monday, November 17, 2025

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## 8:30 A.M. - 9:30 A.M. - WELCOME AND OPENING KEYNOTES

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### OPENING DOORS: ENSURING COLLEGE ACCESS FOR ALL KENTUCKIANS

*Aaron Thompson, Ph.D., President, Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education*

Imagine a Kentucky where every student knows exactly how to find their future. In this powerful keynote at CPE's first-ever Student Access Summit, Dr. Aaron Thompson will share his vision for connecting the state's K–12 and postsecondary systems to create seamless, supported pathways from the classroom to meaningful careers. Using the latest data and insights, Dr. Thompson will both celebrate Kentucky's progress and call the education community to action - to strengthen advising, close gaps, and use innovative tools like CPE's Futuriti platform to help every learner make confident choices.



### TEACHING IS AN ACT OF HOPE

*Jennifer Montgomery, 2025 Kentucky Teacher of the Year, Eminence Independent Schools*

Sometimes, all it takes is one person to change a life. In this inspiring session, the 2025 Kentucky Teacher of the Year, Jennifer Montgomery, shares how intentionally reaching out can transform your classroom, school, and even your community by creating a space of genuine belonging. Don't miss this opening keynote where Montgomery will draw from her personal experiences in education and leadership and explore how educators and leaders can use their connections and authenticity to help every student feel not only seen, but valued.

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## 9:45 A.M. - 10:45 A.M. - CONCURRENT BREAKOUT SESSIONS

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*Location: Bluegrass Ballroom A*

### Vision to Practice: Embedding Postsecondary Transition Advising

Imagine a school where every student feels seen, supported, and ready for what comes next. This inspiring panel brings together principals, assistant principals, and district leaders who have transformed advising from a program into a culture of connection that empowers students to dream bigger and plan with purpose. Through real-world stories and proven strategies, panelists will share how they've woven advising into classrooms, schedules, staffing, and partnerships. Attendees will leave with ideas and inspiration to build lasting systems of support that help every student find their path and thrive beyond high school.



- Beth Lawson, Director of District Services, GEAR UP Kentucky
- Sabrina Brandenburg, Principal, Bath County High School
- Brandi Brewer, Director of Counseling, Instruction, and Food Service, Augusta Independent Schools
- Lisa Rudzinski, Assistant Principal, Mercer County Senior High School

# KENTUCKY STUDENT ACCESS SUMMIT

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## 9:45 A.M. - 10:45 A.M. - CONCURRENT BREAKOUT SESSIONS

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*Location: Bluegrass Ballroom B*

### **Kentucky College Coaches: Guiding Students To and Through College Success**

Students succeed when they have the guidance, encouragement, and support to navigate college and career pathways; Kentucky College Coaches (KCC), powered by AmeriCorps, makes that possible by placing trained near-peer coaches in high schools and community colleges across Kentucky, KCC ensures students - especially those who are low-income, first-generation, or living with disabilities - receive one-on-one and group support on postsecondary opportunities, financial aid, and strategies to overcome barriers and persist. This session led by EngageKY, will explore how KCC coaches build relationships, not transactions, to transform lives. One student, one family, one community at a time.

- Gayle Hilleke, Executive Director, EngageKY
- Janice Fenwick, Disability Support Services Coordinator, EngageKY



*Location: The Rockbridge Reserve*

### **Reaching the Shared Goal through Dual Enrollment**

Kentucky has a bold vision: expand dual enrollment opportunities so every student can access college-level coursework before high school graduation. Join this dynamic panel of K-12 leaders, college representatives, and experts from CPE and KHEAA as they share lessons from 18 months of collaboration on how to make this goal a reality by 2030. Explore strategies to increase access, provide academic and financial support, and overcome barriers—while engaging directly in the conversation. Bring your questions, ideas, and energy, and leave inspired with practical steps to help more students succeed through dual enrollment.

- Megan Adams, Coordinator of Dual Credit, University of Louisville
- James Catchen, Director of Dual Credit and Transfer Pathways, Thomas More University
- Harmony Little, Associate Vice President of Teaching, Learning and Student Transformation, KCTCS
- Joel Pace, Director, Eagle Scholars Program, Morehead State University

*Location: The Barrel Room*

### **Career and Technical Education & Postsecondary Advising for Special Student Populations**

How can career and technical education open doors for students who face unique barriers to postsecondary success? This session explores strategies to support students with disabilities, English learners, economically disadvantaged youth, foster and homeless students, and those pursuing nontraditional careers. Presenters will share data-driven approaches, equity-focused advising practices, and Kentucky-specific resources to create inclusive pathways to college and career readiness. Leave with actionable ideas to ensure every student has the guidance and opportunities they need to thrive.

- John Paise, Program Consultant, Office of Career and Technical Education, Kentucky Department of Education
- Bill Bates, Exceptional Child Education Consultant for the Office of Career and Technical Education, Kentucky Department of Education



# KENTUCKY STUDENT ACCESS SUMMIT

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## 11:00 A.M. - 12:00 P.M. - CONCURRENT BREAKOUT SESSIONS

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*Location: Bluegrass Ballroom A*

### **College Awareness in Action: Access and Opportunity**

How can we create real pathways to college for every student? This session explores strategies to expand early postsecondary opportunities and remove barriers to college access. Learn from three impactful initiatives - the College Awareness Program, Latino Literacy's Graciela's Dream component, and Roots to Readiness - all of which foster family engagement and equip students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to pursue postsecondary success. Participants will leave with practical approaches and inspiration to help students navigate their college and career journeys with purpose.



- Renita Wilburn, District Family and Community Engagement Liaison, Fayette County Public Schools
- Whitney Young, District Family and Community Engagement Liaison, Fayette County Public Schools

*Location: Bluegrass Ballroom B*

### **From High School to Higher Ed: Tools for Student Transition & Success**

Helping students successfully move from high school to college starts with understanding the real challenges they face and knowing how to address them. In this interactive session, participants will explore barriers identified by Kentucky students and reflect on their own advising practices using the KAA's Postsecondary Advising Practices Reflection tool. K-12 and postsecondary staff will engage in peer discussions to share insights, brainstorm solutions, and strengthen collaboration. Attendees will also gain practical tools and resources from the Kentucky Advising Academy and GEAR UP Kentucky to support students in navigating college and career pathways with confidence.

- Mitzi Holland, Director of Kentucky Advising Academy, Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education
- Missy Ross, Chief Communications and Engagement Officer, GEAR UP Kentucky

*Location: The Rockbridge Reserve*

### **Increasing Retention through an Improved New Student Orientation**

How can a redesigned student orientation boost student success? Join this session to explore Southcentral Kentucky Community & Technical College's new student-centered orientation and discover how student feedback shaped modules, activities, and videos to create a data-driven, continuously improving program. Attendees will gain insights on centering student voices, building stakeholder buy-in, fostering cross-campus collaboration, and leading cultural change to enhance retention and support student success.

- John Thomerson, Retention and Resource Coordinator, Southcentral Kentucky Community and Technical College
- Heather LaRue, Retention and Resource Coordinator, Southcentral Kentucky Community and Technical College



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## 11:00 A.M. - 12:00 P.M. - CONCURRENT BREAKOUT SESSIONS

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*Location: The Barrel Room*

### **Bridging K–12 to College: FRYSC's Role in Student Success**

How can schools break down barriers and set every student up for postsecondary success? Kentucky's Family Resource and Youth Services Centers (FRYSC) are at the forefront, connecting K-12 education with higher education and providing critical support to first-generation, low-income, and underserved students. This session will highlight the FRYSC model, innovative partnerships with colleges, and proven strategies that remove obstacles and foster student-centered success. Attendees will leave with actionable ideas to strengthen collaboration and help students thrive from the classroom to college.

- Lisa McKenzie, Region 10 Program Manager, Kentucky Family Resource and Youth Services Centers
- Tiffany Runyon, Region 5 Program Manager, Kentucky Family Resource and Youth Services Centers



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## 12:00 P.M. - 12:45 P.M. - NETWORKING LUNCH AND ALDI RECOGNITION

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Join fellow attendees for an informal networking lunch designed to spark meaningful connections and conversation. Enjoy a relaxed atmosphere to exchange ideas, share experiences, and build relationships that extend beyond the event.

Following lunch, CPE will recognize the 2025 cohort of the Academic Leadership Development Institute (ALDI). This year's cohort consisted of 16 professionals from Kentucky's universities and the Kentucky Community and Technical College System who were nominated for their leadership ability, interest in advancement, and dedication to higher education. CPE's goal is to create a learning community of early career faculty and staff from various backgrounds who are on track for professional advancement.

- Elnoe Akwa, University of Kentucky
- Mishonda Bush, Bluegrass Community & Technical College
- Natalee Brown, Maysville Community & Technical College
- Rebecca Cochran, Ashland Community & Technical College
- Courtney Coomes, Bluegrass Community & Technical College
- DuWayne Dale, Morehead State University
- Travis Haskins, Kentucky State University
- Martina Jackson, Eastern Kentucky University
- Madeline Kues, Gateway Community & Technical College
- Myah Leonard, Madisonville Community College
- Vivek Madupu, Morehead State University
- Haley Minton, Owensboro Community & Technical College
- Diane Nititham, Murray State University
- Whitney Sweeney-Martin, University of Louisville
- Jeff Varrone, Northern Kentucky University
- Harley Wenz, Maysville Community & Technical College

*Want to learn more about this initiative or interested in participating in a future cohort? Contact Dr. Dawn CheNeen Offutt, Executive Director of Student Access and Success.*



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## 12:45 P.M. - 1:35 P.M. - LUNCH PLENARY AND STUDENT PANEL

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### STUDENT VOICES: NAVIGATING THE TRANSITION TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

*Dr. Josh Sparks, 2025 GEAR UP Alum Leader of the Year and Lecturer of Statistics and Data Science at the University of California, Los Angeles*

What is the journey to college really like from the eyes of Kentucky students? In this compelling plenary, high school seniors and college students share their firsthand experiences navigating the path to and through postsecondary education. Facilitated by Dr. Josh Sparks, this candid conversation explores why students chose college, the people and resources that supported them, the obstacles they encountered, and how they're adjusting to life and learning after enrollment. Attendees will gain authentic insights into what works, the challenges that persist, and what students wish educators and policymakers understood—sparking ideas to better support the next generation of learners.

#### *Panelists*

- Katie Black, 2025 Pendleton County High School/Craft Academy graduate
- Sammy Bragg, Mercer County High School senior
- Allison Castro-Garcia, 2025 Paris High School graduate

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## 1:35 P.M. - 1:45 P.M. - FUTURITI IN FOCUS

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Have you explored Futuriti.org yet? This new platform helps Kentuckians “find their future” by offering state-specific data and information on countless career paths and educational opportunities.

In this mini-session, CPE’s Chief Communications Officer Jessica Fletcher will showcase how this interactive tool can inspire students and help them plan their post-graduation journey.



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## 2:00 P.M. - 3:00 P.M. - CONCURRENT BREAKOUT SESSIONS

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*Location: Bluegrass Ballroom A*

### **Speaking the Same Language: Demystifying College and Career for Families**

When families are connected to their student's postsecondary journey, students are more likely to succeed. But for many Kentucky families, college and career planning can feel like a foreign language, full of confusing acronyms, deadlines, and systems. This session equips postsecondary access professionals with practical strategies to translate complex information into clear, family-friendly guidance. Participants will learn how to build trust, foster meaningful partnerships, and simplify financial aid, admissions, and training jargon - helping families feel confident and empowered to support their students' futures.



- Jenny Hobson, Director of Family Partnership, Partners for Rural Impact
- Rebecca Parrish, Family Outreach and Engagement Coordinator, Berea College
- Missy Scent, Family Training Coordinator, Partners for Rural Impact

*Location: Bluegrass Ballroom B*

### **Young Scholars Academy at NKU: A Regional Collaborative Access Model**

The Young Scholars Academy (YSA) is transforming early college access in Northern Kentucky. This two-year, immersive dual credit program serves approximately 250 students who take full-time, in-person college coursework on the Northern Kentucky University campus, with 38% of scholars identifying as first-generation college students. This session highlights YSA's regional, collaborative approach that provides wraparound support to help students thrive not only academically but personally. The session will also focus on the Emerging Scholars component, which is designed to provide early college access for students who have not yet demonstrated college-level math readiness.

- Amanda Dempsey, Regional Director, Young Scholars Academy
- Dan Ginn, Director, Young Scholars Academy

*Location: The Rockbridge Reserve*

### **A Community Framework for Teacher Apprenticeship**

Imagine a future where every community has a sustainable pipeline of skilled, passionate teachers prepared from high school onward. Join this session to learn about the Teacher Apprenticeship Program - a new initiative developed by Bullitt County Public Schools, Jefferson Community & Technical College, the University of Louisville, and OVEC - that is designed to grow teachers from the very classrooms they inhabit. This innovative program creates a seamless pathway from high school to teacher certification through dual credit, on-the-job learning, and mentorship, addressing teacher shortages while building a sustainable, community-centered pipeline of future educators.

- Lee Barger, Director of College and Career Readiness, Bullitt County Public Schools
- Kathy House, Chief of Educator Success, Ohio Valley Education Cooperative (OVEC)
- Charles Rains, Program Manager and Instruction in the Office of Educator Excellence, University of Louisville
- Stefanie Wooten-Burnett, Assistant Dean of Educator Preparation and Director of the Office of Educator Excellence, University of Louisville

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## 2:00 P.M. - 3:00 P.M. - CONCURRENT BREAKOUT SESSIONS

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*Location: The Barrel Room*

### **Level Up Your College Access Game with KHEAA**

Helping Kentucky students pursue higher education takes creativity, accessible resources, and engaging outreach. Discover how KHEAA is “leveling up” college access in Kentucky through creative campaigns, social media, interactive events, and free resources. Learn about initiatives such as Close the Deal, the College Application Campaign, and FAFSA Completion, and leave with practical strategies and tools to support students and families from middle school through postsecondary enrollment.

- Casi Benedict, Director of Outreach Services, Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority
- Brandi Forker, Assistant Director of Outreach Services, Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority



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## 3:15 P.M. - 4:15 P.M. - CLOSING KEYNOTE

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### **WHEN POTENTIAL MEETS PURPOSE**

*Dr. Erwin Hesse, Director of the Center for Innovation in College Admission for the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC)*

What happens when a student’s potential is aligned with their purpose? Closing out the day, Dr. Erwin Hesse will explore how educators, counselors, and institutions can help students identify their unique strengths, passions, and goals - and translate them into meaningful postsecondary pathways. Drawing on research, real-world examples, and innovative strategies from the Center for Innovation in College Admission, attendees will leave empowered with actionable insights to guide students toward fulfilling academic and career journeys.

### **WHAT’S NEXT FOR STUDENT ACCESS IN KENTUCKY AND WHAT ROLE WILL YOU PLAY IN SHAPING IT?**

Closing out the day, CPE leadership will reflect on lessons learned, next steps and how each of us have a part to play in reaching statewide success.

# Thanks to our Exhibitors



SAVE THE DATE

## Future-Focused: Student Centered

March 23-24, 2026 | University of Louisville

Join the Kentucky Student Success Collaborative, CPE and student-focused practitioners from across the Commonwealth as we learn the latest trends and strategies from colleagues as well as national experts.

Check the CPE webpage in December to learn more and register! <https://cpe.ky.gov/studentsuccess/>





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