FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE RURAL ACCESS WORK GROUP

RURAL ACCESS WORK GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Pam Miller, Chair of the Workgroup & CPE Chair

Wayne Andrews, President, Morehead State University
Dale Billingsley, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs, University of Louisville
Bobbie Bryant, Community Development Advisor, Kentucky League of Cities
George Cheatham, II, Mayor, Greensburg, Kentucky
Leslie Combs, State Representative, Kentucky General Assembly
Gary Cox, President, Association of Kentucky Independent Colleges and Universities
Al Cross, Director, University of Kentucky Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues
Mason Dyer, Vice President, Association of Independent Kentucky Colleges and Universities
Dennis George, Associate Provost and Regional Higher Education Dean, University College, Western Kentucky University
David Givens, State Senator, Kentucky General Assembly
Robert King, President, Council on Postsecondary Education
Gloria McCall, Vice Chancellor, Kentucky Community and Technical College System
Ian Mooers, Executive Director, Center for Economic Development, Entrepreneurship and Technology, Eastern Kentucky University
Jay Morgan, Provost, Murray State University
Patrick Moynahan, Vice Provost, University Programs, Northern Kentucky University
Dan O'Hair, Dean, College of Communication and Information, University of Kentucky
Thomas Parker, Coordinator, Regional Stewardship Degree Initiatives, Eastern Kentucky University
Paul Patton, President, University of Pikeville, former Governor of Kentucky and former Chair of the Council on Postsecondary Education
Brian Roy, Deputy Director, Kentucky Association of Counties
Javiette Samuel, Associate Extension Administrator, College of Agriculture, Kentucky State University
Ron Stevens, Associate Dean, Western Kentucky University-Elizabethtown/Radcliff/Fort Knox
Diana Taylor, Taylor-Gray Associates, Representing the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce
Gene Tice, Regional Chancellor, Western Kentucky University-Owensboro Campus
Terry Tolan, Executive Director, Governor's Office of Early Childhood
Bill Walter, Interim Assistant Director, Western Kentucky University-Glasgow Campus
Joe Wind, Vice President, Government and Community Relations, Northern Kentucky University

STAFF TO THE WORK GROUP

Lee Nimocks, Chief of Staff, Council on Postsecondary Education
Melissa Young, Director of Special Projects, Council on Postsecondary Education
Tammie Clements, Associate, Board Relations, Council on Postsecondary Education

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In October 2012, the Council on Postsecondary Education formed a work group to explore the causes of perennially low educational attainment in rural pockets of the state. The Rural Access Work Group was charged with formulating policies, strategies, and initiatives to advance not only the recommendations proposed by NCHEMS in a 2012 study on the feasibility of making the University of Pikeville a public institution, but also the objectives of the *2011-15 Strategic Agenda for Kentucky Postsecondary and Adult Education* aimed at increasing postsecondary access and success in all parts of the state. Based on testimony and discussions, the group formulated over 30 draft recommendations focused on six broad areas for improvement. The work group then narrowed the field to 19 final recommendations included in this report.

The Recommendations

1
COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY
College affordability is a barrier to postsecondary entry and completion in rural, distressed areas of the state. State need-based aid programs are under-funded, and aid for working-age adults is inadequate to meet the needs of a key target population (adults 25-44 without a postsecondary degree or credential).

1A. Urge the legislature to fully fund Kentucky's need-based student aid programs.

1B. Urge the legislature to expand the Go Higher Grant program to serve more adult learners (full-time and part-time), for a longer period of time, and at a higher level of funding. A new source of funds would need to be identified so as not to compromise support for the state's College Access Program or Kentucky Tuition Grant Program.

1C. Support legislation, which was under consideration in the 2012 and 2013 legislative sessions, to provide college scholarships for students in coal producing counties with coal severance dollars.

1D. Urge the legislature to encourage local businesses and corporations to create or continue tuition reimbursement programs and to offer paid co-ops and internships to students. Explore federal and state tax incentives for students enrolled in postsecondary education (e.g., earned income tax credits for postsecondary enrollment), as well as for employers who subsidize the cost of employees enrolling in postsecondary education.

2
COLLEGE READINESS & OUTREACH
Students in rural eastern, southeastern, south central, and some western counties score below the state average on college readiness assessments. Students who are less academically prepared are less likely to go to college; if they do go, they face greater obstacles to degree completion. Kentucky needs to strengthen the college-going culture in these areas.

2A. Work with the Kentucky Department of Education to develop funding mechanisms that encourage dual credit, Advanced Placement, and other such arrangements between high schools and colleges. For high schools that are underserved, explore ITV and other distance education technologies to connect students with available AP and dual credit courses.

2B. Encourage KCTCS to expand partnerships and align curricula with the state's Area Technology Centers and career and technical high schools so that students pursuing skilled trades are encouraged to earn postsecondary credentials.

2C. Create a grassroots campaign toolkit to promote the value and affordability of postsecondary education to students and families in rural distressed areas. This should include unified statewide messages, materials, and templates that can be customized for local use. Engage statewide organizations with footprints in rural areas to play a central role in helping disseminate college-going information (e.g., League of Cities, Association of Counties, Family Youth Resource Service Centers, Early Childhood Education, Adult Education, Area Development Districts, Workforce Investment Boards, Leadership Kentucky, Extension Service offices, KHEAA, etc.).

2D. Seek state, federal, and/or private resources to expand the College Coaches Program into every county, with a priority on the state's economically distressed rural areas.

3

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT

Effective and sustained partnerships between local postsecondary leaders and employers are critical to advancing common regional development and education goals. Kentucky's Work Ready Community initiative is serving as a catalyst for increasing cross-sector collaboration. Increased entrepreneurship is also part of the solution.

3A. Establish educational attainment targets for each university's "geographic area of responsibility" and, if possible, create financial incentives for meeting these targets to encourage greater collaboration among postsecondary providers, employers, and other stakeholders in the region.

3B. Ensure state policies and programs recognize and leverage the value and contributions of Kentucky's independent colleges and universities, many of which have long served rural regions of the state.

3C. Recommend that Kentucky develop financial incentives for communities that achieve the "Work Ready" designation, and promote Kentucky's "Work Ready Communities" as a catalyst for community and education leaders to come together to address their educational and workforce needs.

3D. In partnership with the Kentucky Center for Education and Workforce Statistics (KCEWS), create reports on the current and future workforce needs of each region and how these align with current educational skills and degree programs. As resources allow, provide technical assistance to local community leaders on how to interpret and use these data as policy levers for change.

3E. Encourage colleges and universities to create and deliver postsecondary entrepreneurial certificate programs in rural areas to help people start businesses, and leverage university resources for small business development support.

4

PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN KCTCS & UNIVERSITY REGIONAL CAMPUSES

Some regional campuses have more transparent, efficient partnerships with KCTCS than others, especially around joint programs and seamless advising services.

4A. Encourage the KCTCS institutions and universities to expand joint enrollment, advising, and completion programs that result in more students transitioning from 2-year to 4-year campuses and more timely degree completion (2+2 degrees, completer degrees, 3+1 degrees).

4B. Encourage universities to develop full degree programs at regional campuses through a variety of means (ITV, online courses, partnerships with KCTCS institutions, etc.). Use faculty and advising resources at university regional campuses to provide face-to-face support and educational counseling for distance education students. The University Center of the Mountains in Hazard (in which multiple providers offer full programs) may be a useful model to replicate in other underserved rural areas of the state.

5

ADULT-FRIENDLY DEGREE PROGRAMS

Certain conditions must be in place to persuade adults to devote the time, energy, and money to go back to school. An affordable, flexible online delivery system could improve access if cost and connectivity issues are addressed.

5A. Work with Kentucky's universities and KCTCS to develop, implement, and fund a collaborative, affordable, competency-based higher education delivery model that offers career pathways; direct assessment of student learning (in lieu of measuring student learning in credit hours or clock-hours); and online associate and baccalaureate degree programs in high-demand fields tailored to working adults. These programs should be fully supported by online advising and tutoring services, in addition to face-to-face advising and/or instruction.

5B. Study the structure of online tuition and fees for the purpose of improving access and affordability for online students.

6

HIGH SPEED INTERNET ACCESS

Access to high-speed Internet is still a challenge in many of Kentucky's rural, remote areas, and even where available, it is prohibitively expensive for some students.

6A. Promote the development of "E-Learning Centers" in rural areas that offer free high-speed Internet access for students enrolled in postsecondary education programs. The centers would be developed through partnerships with schools, libraries, adult education centers, businesses, and nonprofits to provide after-hours access to high-speed Internet services.

6B. Work with local governments, USDA Rural Utilities, and telephone and Internet providers to develop an infrastructure to create and expand affordable broadband availability and help eliminate service and cost barriers. In many cases rural areas are paying higher prices for slower speeds than those in more urban areas – if they have access at all.

INTRODUCTION

Background

House Bill 260, introduced into the Kentucky General Assembly in January 2012, proposed to make the University of Pikeville the ninth member of the state's public postsecondary system. The lack of affordable, accessible four-year universities in southeast Kentucky[1] was the impetus for this bill, and proponents of the legislation argued that locating a public university in southeast Kentucky would improve the low levels of baccalaureate attainment in the region and have a positive effect on the attendant problems of unemployment and poverty.

In January, 2012, Governor Steve Beshear commissioned the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) to conduct an independent study of the advisability and feasibility of HB 260. While the report did not ultimately recommend moving the University of Pikeville into the public postsecondary system, it raised a number of concerns pertaining to postsecondary access and success in rural Kentucky—not only in eastern Kentucky, but in counties bordering Tennessee and extending through southcentral Kentucky into the western part of the state. To begin to address the most educationally and economically distressed areas of Kentucky, NCHEMS recommended the following actions (below).

Formation of the Work Group

With this report in hand, the Council on Postsecondary Education formed a work group to further explore the causes of perennially low educational attainment in rural pockets of the state. The Rural Access Work Group was charged with formulating policies, strategies, and initiatives to advance not only the recommendations proposed by NCHEMS, but also the objectives of the *2011-15 Strategic Agenda for Kentucky Postsecondary and Adult Education* aimed at increasing postsecondary access and success in all parts of the state.

The work group was comprised of members representing a broad array of education, business, legislative, and state and local government leaders in Kentucky. The chair of the work group, former Lexington mayor Pam Miller, also chairs the Council on Postsecondary Education. The group met six times between October 2012 and May 2013 to hear presentations from the public institutions and the Association of Independent Kentucky Colleges and Universities (AIKCU) on current outreach and education activities in the region. Other speakers included MDC, a North Carolina consulting firm focused on rural development issues; the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority (KHEAA); the Commonwealth Office of Broadband Outreach and Development; superintendents from three rural P-12 districts; and the Kentucky Workforce Investment Board's "Work Ready Communities" staff. Additionally, Council staff members traveled across the state

Recommendations from NCHEMS

- Create a scholarship program for rural residents with 60 hours of credit from a Kentucky Community or Technical College System (KCTCS) campus so that they may complete a bachelor's degree at a Kentucky public or private institution in their region.

- Establish entities similar to the University Center of the Mountains in Hazard at Big Sandy Community and Technical College and Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College.

- Provide funding to KCTCS to make arrangements with four-year providers to bring high-demand completer degrees into the region and provide wrap-around student support services to ease transfer.

- Reinforce the concept of "responsibility" regions, not regions that are protected markets for specific public universities.

- Develop a proactive, concentrated strategy to deal with regions and pockets of low levels of preparation and [increase] access and opportunities to complete bachelor's degree programs.

- Revise finance policies (state appropriations, tuition policy, and student financial aid) to increase incentives for institutions to collaborate on efforts to increase baccalaureate degree completion in areas of high need.

to meet with each work group member individually and learn more about their specific community and regional challenges.
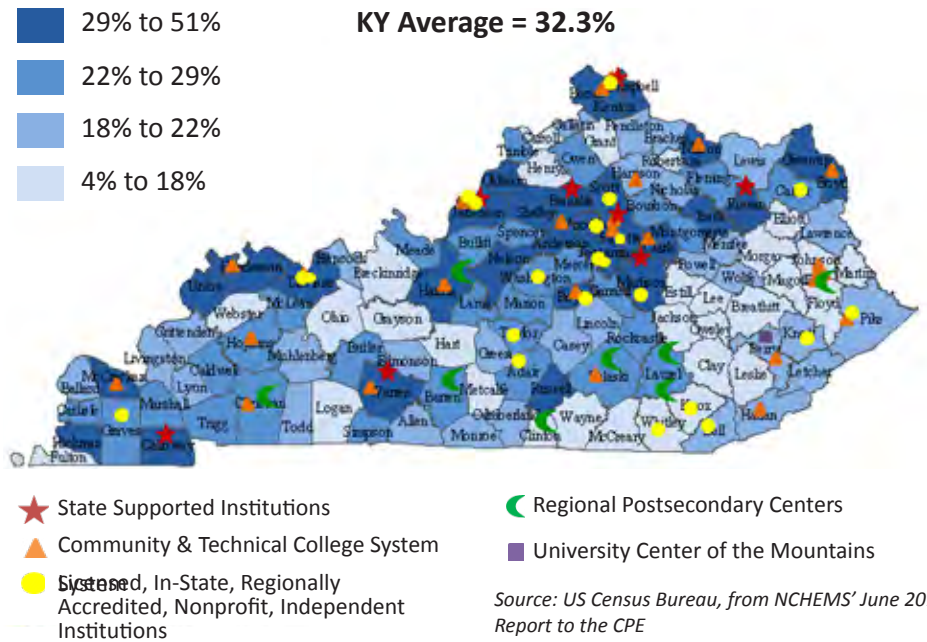
Based on testimony and discussions, the group formulated over 30 draft recommendations focused on six broad areas for improvement: 1) college affordability; 2) college readiness and outreach; 3) education and workforce alignment; 4) partnerships between KCTCS and university regional campuses; 5) adult-friendly degree programs; and 6) high-speed Internet access. The work group then narrowed the field to 19 final recommendations included in this report.

When considering directions for future action, the work group resolved to build on existing efforts whenever possible, with the goal of increasing alignment among activities and strengthening partnerships. The resulting report summarizes the major themes that emerged in both collective and individual discussions of the work group and offers a range of next steps that can be taken to improve educational access and success in distressed, rural counties. These recommendations build and expand on NCHEMS's findings, while also identifying other promising practices for consideration by local community, business, and education leaders.

The Rural Educational Challenge

Over the past decade, Kentucky's rate of improvement on key higher education performance measures increased at a faster rate than any other state. In spite of this success, progress has not been evenly distributed across all geographic regions or institutions. NCHEMS estimates that for Kentucky to match national attainment levels by

Percent of Adults (Ages 25-44) with an Associate Degree or Higher

■	29% to 51%
■	22% to 29%
■	18% to 22%
□	4% to 18%

KY Average = 32.3%

★ State Supported Institutions
▲ Community & Technical College System

☾ Regional Postsecondary Centers
■ University Center of the Mountains

● Licensed, In-State, Regionally Accredited, Nonprofit, Independent Institutions

Source: US Census Bureau, from NCHEMS' June 2012 Report to the CPE

2025, 43 percent of Kentucky adults will need to have an associate or bachelor's degree, which translates into an additional 66,800 degrees.[2] Merely increasing attainment in Kentucky's urban and metropolitan areas will not be enough for Kentucky to achieve this target. The pace of improvement also must accelerate if the state is to achieve the kinds of economic and societal improvement called for in the *Postsecondary Education Improvement Act of 1997* and subsequent legislation that has addressed adult education (SB 1, 2000), the new economy (HB 572, 2000), and college readiness (SB 1, 2009).

According to the 2010 American Community Survey, 30 percent of Kentucky's working-age adults (25-64) have an associate degree or higher, compared to 38.3 percent nationally. Kentucky fares slightly better in the younger 25-44 age group, with 32.6 percent holding

an associate degree or higher, compared to 39.6 percent nationally. However, all states bordering Kentucky, with the exception of West Virginia, have higher levels of educational attainment in both of these categories.[3] Looking only at Kentuckians with a bachelor's degree or higher, the proportion falls to 22 percent, while the national average is 30 percent. As long as Kentucky trails its region and the nation, it will always experience a competitive disadvantage in attracting high-wage, high-skill jobs that could lift per capita income and quality of life.

Kentucky's educational attainment challenges are compounded by significant regional differences within the state. The NCHEMS report illustrates that educational attainment levels in eastern Kentucky are markedly lower than the rest of the state.

This problem is not confined to Appalachia, however. Fourteen of the 30 counties that fall in the lowest quartile of degree attainment are clustered in eastern Kentucky, five in southeast/southcentral Kentucky, seven in western Kentucky, and four in northern Kentucky. In fact, looking at these counties on the map on page 7—from Robertson County in the northeast; to Whitley, McCreary, Wayne, and Clinton Counties in the south; and then up to Breckinridge and Webster Counties in the west— this swath of educationally distressed counties roughly resembles the shape of a necklace.

These regional and county-level differences cannot simply be attributed to geographic proximity to a higher education institution or even to an urban center. For example, Rowan County, where Morehead State University is located, borders Elliot and Menifee Counties. Similarly, Edmonson and Hart are contiguous to Warren County, where Western Kentucky University and the city of Bowling Green are located.

The link between economic well being and educational attainment has been well documented, so it is not surprising that the Kentucky counties identified as the most educationally challenged often struggle on economic indicators like per-capita income and employment. According to 2012 labor market data from the state's Cabinet for Education and Workforce Development, 20 of the 30 counties with the lowest levels of educational attainment have among the state's highest levels of unemployment. Furthermore, according to 2010 data from the American Community Survey, 17 of those counties are in the lowest quartile for per capita income.

Clearly, these educational challenges are complex and entrenched, but they must be addressed if Kentucky hopes to progress economically and expand opportunity for all citizens.

Excerpt From "To Improve Completion, Remember the Countryside"

"
Rural students have lower college aspirations and are less likely to attend college than their urban and suburban counterparts, perhaps because, research shows, they are more likely to live in areas with no postsecondary institution, have little access to college information, and have parents who did not attend college. Unlike students in more populated areas, rural students must often face the dilemma of choosing between going to college (and leaving their families) or staying in their communities.

Meanwhile, a decline in rural educational resources has added to the problem. With struggling local economies, many rural school districts have been forced to cut staff, curriculum (arts and technical programs), and programs that focus on gifted children and those with special needs.

And although people have pointed to online and distance education as ways to expand curriculum and choice for rural students, many rural schools and homes still lack high-speed Internet access. For instance, rural households, particularly low-income ones, are less likely to have personal computers and broadband Internet, making access to online classes difficult."

Sarah Beasley and Neal Holly
Chronicle of Higher Education
May 13, 2013.

1 COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY

The issue of college affordability as a barrier to postsecondary entry and completion was a serious concern among work group members. A 2005 report, "College Affordability in Kentucky," conducted by JBL Associates, Inc., confirmed that "low-income families are more sensitive to the price of attendance...[and] that low-income students are more likely to drop out of college for financial reasons."[4] At that time, JBL concluded that, for most Kentuckians, college was affordable, with the exception of lower-income independent students (typically over age 24), who did not receive as much state aid as dependent students and thus borrowed more heavily. The report also found that dependent students in the lowest income quartile attending four-year universities were at the margins of affordability.

Unfortunately, the challenge of college affordability has increased since the 2005 JBL study, accelerated by the national "Great Recession" beginning in 2007. Between fiscal years 2008 and 2013, inflation-adjusted net General Fund appropriations for public postsecondary institutions fell from $1.183 billion to $916 million, a loss of $267 million or 23 percent. Despite nominal dollar increases in the overall state budget, funding for public postsecondary education has assumed a smaller and smaller portion of state expenditures, especially given the growth of Medicaid and corrections spending.

With these declines in state higher education appropriations, the share of college costs paid by the state and by students and parents has shifted over time. During the late 1990s, Kentucky assumed about two-thirds of college costs through the provision of net General Fund appropriations, and students and families assumed the other third through tuition and fees. Fast forward 13 years later, and tuition revenue makes up over 60 percent of college revenue versus only 40 percent from the state.

Of course, students rarely pay the full sticker price for college. Financial aid from federal, state, and institutional sources can discount college prices significantly. Because Kentucky

Change in State & Student Shares of Total Public Funds for Postsecondary Education

Students & Families Pay 60% of the Cost, while the State Pays 40%

State Share = Net General Fund Appropriations ÷ Total Public Funds

Student Share = Gross Tuition & Fee Revenue ÷ Total Public Funds

Source: Kentucky Budget of the Commonwealth, CPE Comprehensive Database

State Share of Total Public Funds
Student Share of Total Public Funds
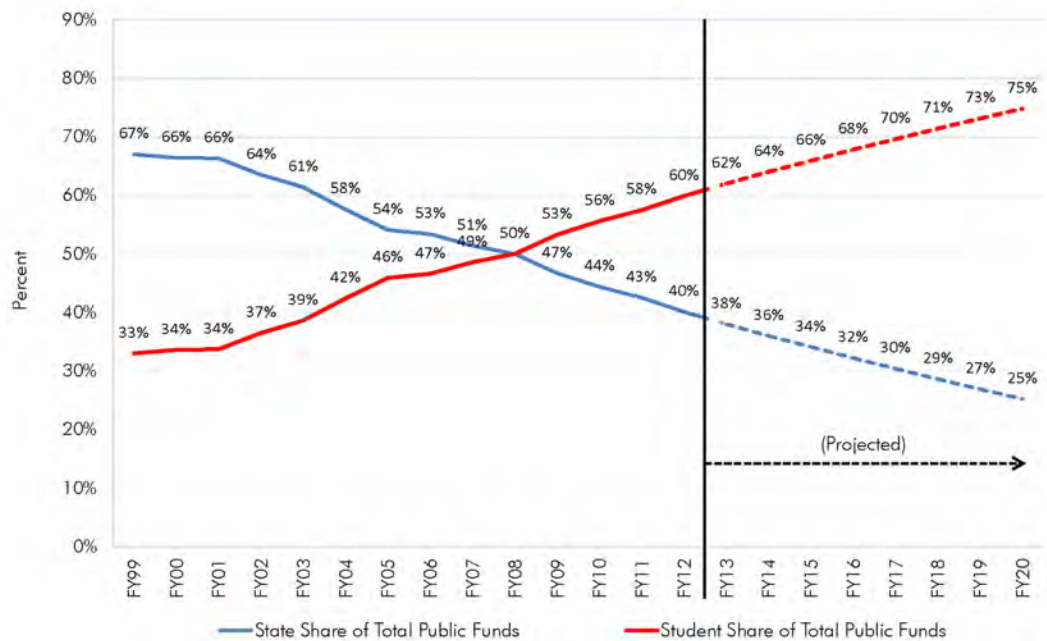
dedicates nearly 100 percent of its lottery revenues to state student aid, it remains a high-aid state when compared to the rest of the nation. In FY 2011, Kentucky ranked 13th in the nation in state-funded, need-based undergraduate grant dollars awarded per full-time student, and 8th in state-funded, total undergraduate grant dollars awarded per full-time student.[5] These higher rankings are due to the state's three-pronged, overlapping programs of lottery-funded student financial aid:

• Two primary need-based aid programs, the College Access Program (CAP) and the Kentucky Tuition Grant (KTG), receive 55 percent of total lottery funds (after a $3 million allocation to state literacy programs [KRS 154A.130(4)]).They are awarded on a first-come, first-serve basis until all allocated funds are exhausted.

• CAP is awarded to Pell-eligible students attending public, private, and proprietary institutions, while KTG, a tuition equalization program, awards funds to full-time students with financial need attending four-year private and proprietary institutions.

• An incentive-based aid program, the Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarship program, or KEES, accounts for 45 percent of state lottery proceeds (after a $3 million allocation to state literacy programs [KRS 154A.130(4)]).

Despite these significant investments in state aid, lottery funds have not been sufficient to award all eligible students with financial need in the state. In academic year 2011-12, 141,548 qualified students applied for CAP but only 47,962 received awards; similarly, 27,326 qualified students applied for KTG, and 17,210

received awards. Since students may apply for and receive both CAP and KTG (in addition to KEES), depending on their postsecondary institutional choice, the unduplicated number of otherwise eligible students denied CAP and/or KTG funding was 96,665.

Available CAP and KTG funding for the 2013-14 academic year was exhausted in February 2013. In contrast, KEES scholarships are earned by students while they are in high school, and 100 percent of KEES earners who enroll at a Kentucky college or university receive awards. Furthermore, when lottery funds were not sufficient to cover KEES disbursements in FY 2010, the General Assembly acted to remedy the shortfall. No such action has been taken to supplement CAP and KTG appropriations.

There is also the continuing challenge of finding adequate aid for working adults, a large proportion of the state's undereducated and underserved population, and the segment that JBL Associates identified as the least able to afford postsecondary education. These adults are typically balancing school with work and family obligations and may have family incomes that nominally exceed the cutoff for need-based aid. Working-age adults (24 and older) do not qualify for KEES. While they may be eligible for CAP and KTG, they often do not make the decision to enter college early enough to compete for these limited funds. By the time they fill out a FAFSA (if they know to do so), the pot of state need-based aid has been depleted.
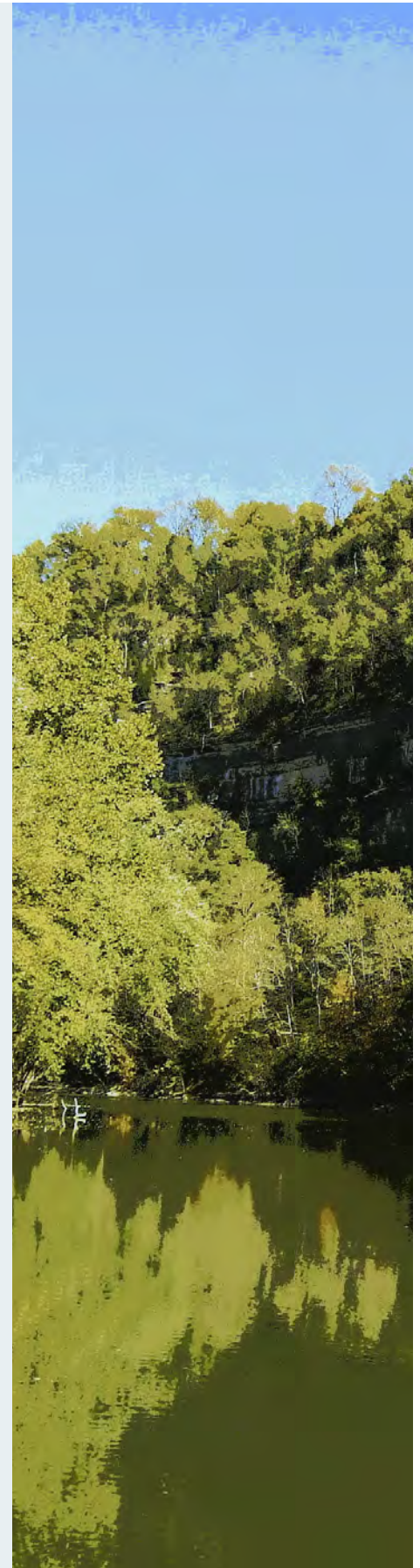
To provide another source of assistance for adult students and motivate them to begin a degree program, Kentucky created the Go Higher Grant program for Kentuckians 24 and older who do not have an

undergraduate degree. This program awards $1,000 per year to those with demonstrated financial need who are taking one to two courses a semester. Unfortunately, the program is not well-funded, and grants do not support students at a level or for an adequate amount of time to encourage degree completion.

In 2008, the Lumina Foundation funded the Council to conduct the Kentucky Adult Learner Initiative, which issued a final report recommending strategies for making college more affordable for adults. These included the expansion of institutional policies that reward credit for prior learning and experience, as well as incentives to employers to offer Lifelong Learning Accounts and educational assistance benefits like tuition reimbursement. While some progress has been made, more could be done to encourage these forms of assistance.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY

1A. Urge the legislature to fully fund Kentucky's need-based student aid programs.

1B. Urge the legislature to expand the Go Higher Grant program to serve more adult learners (full-time and part-time), for a longer period of time, and at a higher level of funding. A new source of funds would need to be identified so as not to compromise support for the state's College Access Program or Kentucky Tuition Grant Program.

1C. Support legislation, which was under consideration in the 2012 and 2013 legislative sessions, to provide college scholarships for students in coal producing counties with coal severance dollars.

1D. Urge the legislature to encourage local businesses and corporations to create or continue tuition reimbursement programs and to offer paid co-ops and internships to students. Explore federal and state tax incentives for students enrolled in postsecondary education (e.g., earned income tax credits for postsecondary enrollment), as well as for employers who subsidize the cost of employees enrolling in postsecondary education.

2 COLLEGE READINESS & OUTREACH

When contemplating the root causes of historically low levels of postsecondary attainment in rural areas, the work group considered a range of complex socioeconomic and cultural issues. A full discussion of these issues is outside the scope of this report, but three main contributing factors were the focus of discussion and consideration: poor academic preparation, a lack of economic opportunity (discussed in the next section), and the absence of a college-going culture.

The first of these factors is easiest to quantify and, as such, lends itself more readily to concrete, measurable intervention strategies. With the passage of Senate Bill 1 in 2009, Kentucky undertook a major effort to improve college readiness by aligning high school exit requirements with entry-level college expectations and developing a unified plan to ensure that all students graduate from high school prepared for the rigors of college or career. For practical purposes, Kentucky defines college readiness by an ACT subject area score of 18 in English, 19 in mathematics, and 20 in reading (although there are alternate assessments that can be used). As part of its performance dashboard, the Council tracks the percentage of students from each university's area of geographic responsibility who graduate ready for college-level mathematics, English, and reading.

Clearly, college readiness rates in every region must improve significantly if the state hopes to reach the state's performance goal: 72 percent of all high school graduates meeting college and career readiness benchmarks by 2014. But certain regions are more challenged than others. The bar graph below illustrates that high school students in Morehead State University's service region are the least prepared for college, with Eastern Kentucky University's service region following close behind. Western Kentucky University's service region was next, performing at about the statewide average. As one might expect, the service regions of EKU, MoSU, and WKU roughly correspond to the map of educationally distressed counties in Kentucky.

Students who are less academically prepared are less likely to go to college and, if they do go, face greater obstacles to degree completion. Developmental education lengthens a student's time-to-degree, increases costs, and consumes more institutional resources.

Percentage of High School Graduates Who Are College-Ready in Math, English, & Reading, by Each University's Area of Geographic Responsibility
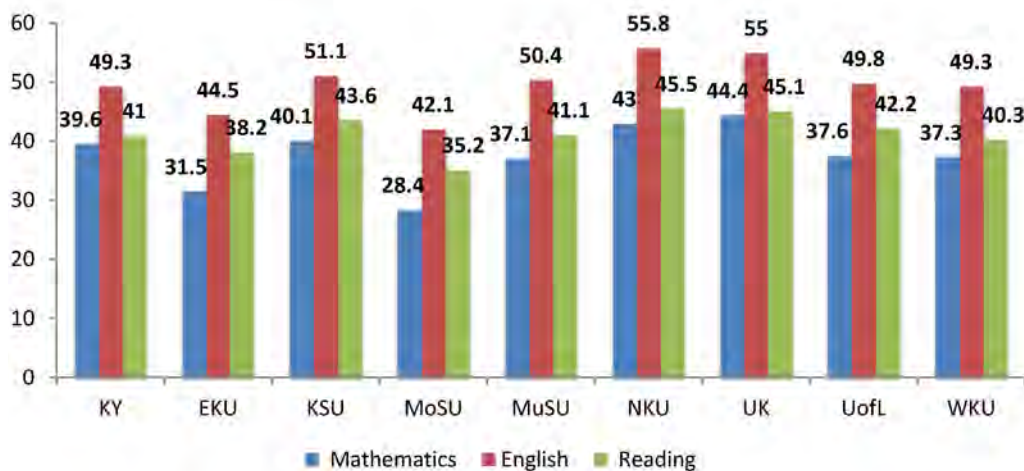
Source: P-20 Data Collaborative, County Factbook

The good news is that every student in Kentucky will benefit from the implementation of Senate Bill 1's intervention strategies, which include accelerated programs for at-risk students, greater opportunities to earn college credit in high school through dual credit and AP courses, and increased mentoring and tutoring supports. The bad news is that some rural school districts will not be able to take immediate advantage of these improvements due to a shortage of teachers qualified to instruct AP or dual credit courses, a shortage of students willing to take these courses, and fewer financial resources to enhance support services.

For students who do not pursue a direct route to a four-year degree, Area Technology Centers at high schools can provide academic and technical training that transfers to applied degree programs at KCTCS or to apprenticeship programs. Kentucky Tech, which oversees the state's 53 secondary technical schools, teamed up with KCTCS to provide dual credit or articulated credit to students studying information technology, business technology, health careers, construction technology, automotive technology, and manufacturing technology.[6] These programs may be especially attractive to rural high school students, as they are in close proximity to KCTCS campuses and provide clearer pathways to employment. But again, a lack of qualified secondary teachers to teach dual or articulated credit limits the usefulness of this approach.

The third factor—the absence of a college-going culture—is not as easy to quantify, so progress can be more difficult to assess. The work group heard a number of stories from rural residents about parents who do not encourage their children to go to college because they fear if children leave the region, they will never return. Similarly, the group heard of employers who resist providing postsecondary education and training opportunities because they fear workers will leave them for higher-paying jobs.

Arguments about the value and benefits of postsecondary education—which include higher earnings, better health, and greater economic and community development opportunities—can be a tough sell when unemployment, poverty, and low aspirations are widespread. Outside of teaching, health care, and financial services, often there are few job opportunities for degree holders, particularly at the bachelor's degree level, in these communities, another disincentive for rural residents to pursue a degree. Even if the desire to enroll is present, rural residents are more likely to be first-generation college students and may have limited knowledge and understanding of what it takes to prepare for, finance, and persist to degree completion.
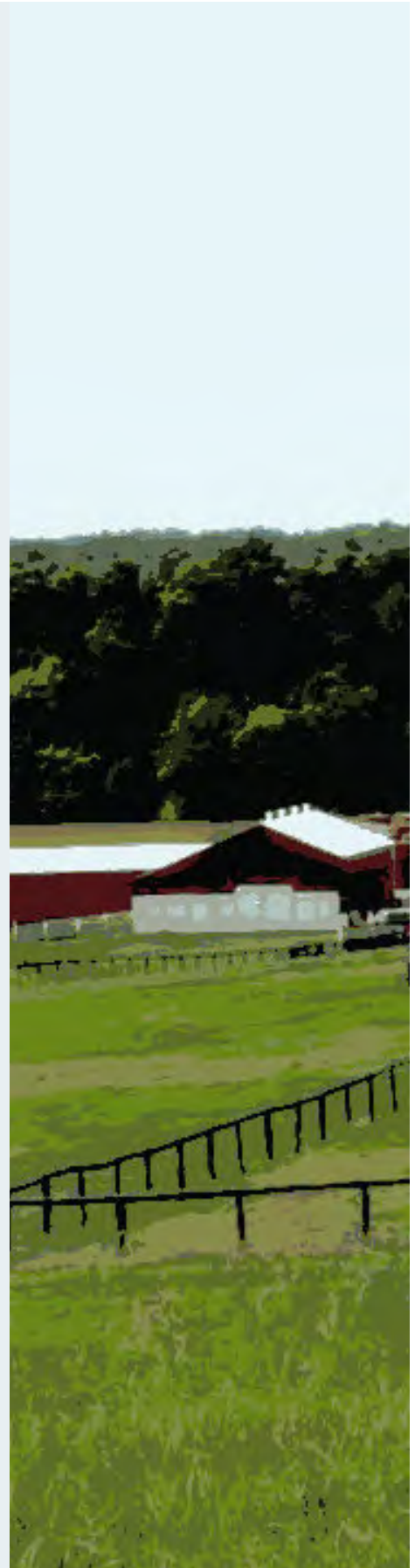
Creating a college-going culture among rural young people, adults, and employers alike is a longer-term enterprise, but a number of promising outreach strategies are currently underway in Kentucky to raise college aspirations in areas of low educational attainment. These primarily involve the dissemination of information through various channels, as well as direct, sustained personal contact with mentors or coaches. All of these strategies offer successful foundations upon which to build.

Promising Statewide Outreach Strategies

- **KHEAA employs 13 outreach counselors who work with schools to provide free, year-round assistance in planning and applying for college and financial aid. In addition to workshops and in-school presentations, KHEAA offers the College Info Road Show, a mobile unit equipped with state-of-the-art technology to deliver college-going information.**

- **Every college and university engages in a variety of outreach efforts throughout their areas of geographic responsibility to improve college going and help students navigate the financial aid and application process.**

- **GEAR UP is a federally-funded program that encourages middle and high school students to stay in school, study hard, and take the right courses to go to college. GEAR UP Kentucky is administered by the Council, and Berea College administers two GEAR UP partnership grants that serve students in 17 rural Eastern Kentucky counties. Aside from activities conducted at participating schools, GEAR UP Kentucky is currently developing an outreach campaign to promote the value of postsecondary education to local communities.**

- **The Kentucky College Coaches program is a statewide, near-peer advising program that uses recent college graduates to mentor middle and high school students. In its first year the program funded 65 full-time AmeriCorps members to serve as College Coaches. The program focuses on assisting first-generation college students and populations with low rates of college enrollment.**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COLLEGE READINESS & OUTREACH

2A. Work with the Kentucky Department of Education to develop funding mechanisms that encourage dual credit, Advanced Placement, and other such arrangements between high schools and colleges. For high schools that are underserved, explore ITV and other distance education technologies to connect students with available AP and dual credit courses.

2B. Encourage KCTCS to expand partnerships and align curricula with the state's Area Technology Centers and career and technical high schools so that students pursuing skilled trades are encouraged to earn postsecondary credentials.

2C. Create a grassroots campaign toolkit to promote the value and affordability of postsecondary education to students and families in rural distressed areas. This should include unified statewide messages, materials, and templates that can be customized for local use. Engage statewide organizations with footprints in rural areas to play a central role in helping disseminate college-going information (e.g., League of Cities, Association of Counties, Family Youth Resource Service Centers, Early Childhood Education, Adult Education, Area Development Districts, Workforce Investment Boards, Leadership Kentucky, Extension Service offices, KHEAA, etc.).

2D. Seek state, federal, and/or private resources to expand the College Coaches Program into every county, with a priority on the state's economically distressed rural areas.

3 EDUCATION & WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT

The previous section briefly described how the lack of high-skill, high-wage employment in rural, distressed counties inhibits college going and completion. Not only are families less able to afford college, they are skeptical about its return on investment if they are place-bound and unable or unwilling to move. If people leave their rural communities for college, they are much more likely to migrate to larger metropolitan areas for employment, creating a "brain drain" effect. Unfortunately, rural communities are unlikely to attract good jobs without an educated, skilled workforce, so the cycle of underemployment and low educational attainment continues.

The work group agreed that effective and sustained partnerships between local postsecondary education leaders and employers are critical to advancing common regional development and education goals. An OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) literature review of higher education's role in regional economic development concludes that "high need communities that do not engage education and business to create strategies that integrate education with the workforce probably will not generate and retain a highly educated population capable of driving economic growth."[7] Bruce Vandal, former Director of Postsecondary Education and Workforce Development at the Education Commission of the States

(ECS), describes the importance of aligning a state's education, economic development, and workforce development policies, which often lack coordination because their parent organizations operate in silos. Vandal observes that meaningful engagement among all regional stakeholders, including elementary and secondary education, can begin a growth cycle that turns brain drain into brain gain.

Excerpt from "Revving the Education Engine"

" *Education institutions should be engaged with business and economic development leaders to develop interventions and policies all along the P-20 pipeline that will result in higher academic achievement and better preparation for the workforce…[A] strong P-20 system that is connected to the critical needs of industry creates a growth cycle that leverages investment, attracts high-tech entrepreneurs, and results in brain gain in the region."*

-Bruce Vandal, Education Commmission of the States

Kentucky's landmark *Postsecondary Education Improvement Act of 1997* (HB 1) recognized the importance of college and university responsiveness to regional employers, and required that regional advisory groups be created to work with postsecondary institutions to ensure they were meeting the varied economic and social needs of their geographic areas of responsibility.[8] Since then, the Council has emphasized economic and community development in its public policy, developing or supporting local P-16 councils, regional stewardship programs, joint initiatives with the Kentucky Science and Technology Corporation, the Bucks for Brains program, and performance metrics and goals to measure postsecondary education's contributions to economic and community development.

All of these efforts have made a difference, but as with educational attainment, progress is unevenly distributed across the state. Northern Kentucky's "Vision 2015" and Louisville's "55,000 Degrees" initiatives are examples of business, education, and community partnerships evolving into successful, collaborative strategic planning entities for their regions. These are the types of efforts that need to be replicated throughout the state, but without tangible incentives to reward postsecondary institutions for reaching collaborative, regional goals, there are few policy levers the Council can apply to accelerate these positive behaviors.

One potential catalyst for increasing cross-sector collaboration is the "Work Ready Community" initiative, administered by the Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Cabinet and the Kentucky Workforce Investment Board. In February 2012, Kentucky became the third state to begin certifying counties as "Work Ready Communities" based on the quality of their workforce. To be certified, communities are required to meet criteria in six areas: high school graduation rate, National Career Readiness Certificate holders, community commitment, educational attainment levels, soft-skills development, and digital literacy. To date, 22 counties have been certified as "Work Ready" or "Work Ready in Progress," which indicates that certification is likely within three years. Once certification is achieved, counties must be re-certified every two years to ensure that these high standards continue to be met.

Beth Brinly, Commissioner of Workforce Investment, and Tom West, Executive Director for Kentucky Workforce Investment Board, addressed the work group in April 2013, and emphasized that joint regional planning is one of the most valuable benefits to emerge from the "Work Ready" certification process. To meet the criteria for "community commitment," active participation from economic development, elected officials, education, workforce development, and business and industry sectors is required; additional partners are strongly encouraged to be at the table. While a number of rural, distressed counties have begun the application process, none has yet achieved certification as "Work Ready" or "Work Ready in Progress." Providing data and information tools to help these counties mobilize could increase regional planning efforts in the long-run.

The "Work Ready Community" initiative is aimed at attracting large-scale businesses and industries into a region. While valuable, this is not the only economic development strategy that should be deployed, particularly when the adult population is low and infrastructure and geographic access is limited. For these smaller communities, promoting entrepreneurship is also a promising economic development strategy. The Rural Policy Research Institute observes, "The structure of rural economies is essentially composed of small enterprises, which are responsible for most of the job growth and the innovation… [S]mall businesses represent an appropriate scale of activity for most rural economies."[9]

22 Kentucky Counties Have Been Certified "Work Ready" or "Work Ready in Progress"
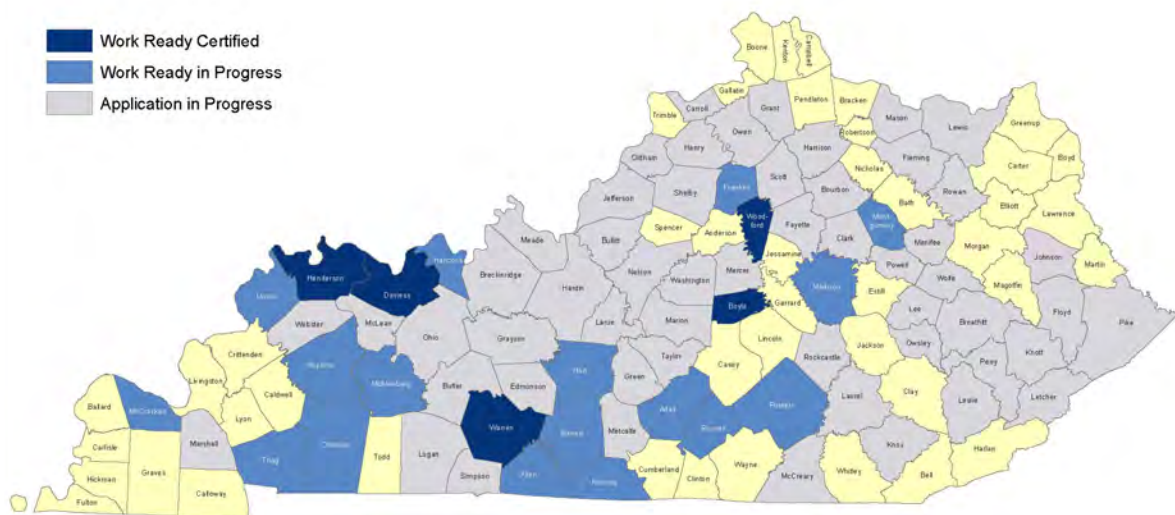
Source: Kentucky Workforce Investment Board, Education & Workforce Development Cabinet, June 2013

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATION & WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT

3A. Establish educational attainment targets for each university's "geographic area of responsibility" and, if possible, create financial incentives for meeting these targets to encourage greater collaboration among postsecondary providers, employers, and other stakeholders in the region.

3B. Ensure state policies and programs recognize and leverage the value and contributions of Kentucky's independent colleges and universities, many of which have long served rural regions of the state.

3C. Recommend that Kentucky develop financial incentives for communities that achieve the "Work Ready" designation, and promote Kentucky's "Work Ready Communities" as a catalyst for community and education leaders to come together to address their educational and workforce needs.

3D. In partnership with the Kentucky Center for Education and Workforce Statistics (KCEWS), create reports on the current and future workforce needs of each region and how these align with current educational skills and degree programs. As resources allow, provide technical assistance to local community leaders on how to interpret and use these data as policy levers for change.

3E. Encourage colleges and universities to create and deliver postsecondary entrepreneurial certificate programs in rural areas to help people start businesses, and leverage university resources for small business development support.

4 PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN KCTCS & REGIONAL CAMPUSES

Because KCTCS has 16 colleges with over 70 campuses across the state, most rural residents in Kentucky are within a reasonable distance of a two-year degree program. However, accessing four-year degree programs close to home can be more difficult. University regional campuses, sometimes called extended campuses, are remote public university locations where students can take baccalaureate and graduate courses, either through classroom instruction, ITV, or distance education.

Many cooperative arrangements between KCTCS and regional campuses exist that allow students to begin their coursework at KCTCS and then transfer to a baccalaureate "completer" degree program at a regional campus. In some cases, KCTCS and regional campus sites are co-located in a single building or city; in other cases, these connections are forged through distance education technologies. These remote sites are vital to carrying out a university's mission to provide postsecondary access to every part of its geographic area of responsibility.

The seed for these cooperative programs was planted back in 1998, when HB 321 established five regional postsecondary education centers with the stated purpose of expanding access to postsecondary education while increasing institutional productivity and efficiency. These centers were premised on the idea that locating KCTCS and university campus sites in a single building would reduce duplication of effort, as KCTCS could deliver all developmental and lower-division courses, while comprehensive universities could offer upper-division baccalaureate and graduate courses. A sixth center was added five years later.

A somewhat distinct version of this model emerged in 2002, when Hazard Community and Technical College, EKU, Lindsey Wilson College, Midway College, and MoSU formed a consortium called University Center of the Mountains (UCM). This public/private partnership, funded in part by coal severance revenues, provides southeast Kentuckians with much-needed access to a range of four-year degrees. Additionally, UCM serves as a regional hub for student outreach programs (including Upward Bound, GEAR UP, and others) and provides consulting and educational services to community, business, and civic leaders. The NCHEMS report on moving the University of Pikeville into the state system singles out UCM as an effective delivery model and suggests that similar entities be created in community colleges to identify needed degree programs in the region, provide wrap-around

The University Center of the Mountains Brings Higher Education Home

Located in Hazard, KY, UCM is a dynamic consortium of postsecondary institutions providing bachelor's and master's degrees and increased educational opportunities to southeastern Kentucky. Since opening its doors in fall 2004, nearly 1,000 degrees have been awarded. Partnering institutions include:

- Eastern Kentucky University
- Hazard Community & Technical College
- KCTCS
- Kentucky State University
- Lindsey Wilson College
- Midway College
- Morehead State University
- University of the Cumberlands

UCM Success Story:
Janice Hagans-Higgins
2012 UCM Graduate

"Thanks to an education, my life is better."

In 2000, after the tragic death of her husband, Janice Hagans-Higgins found herself a single mother of four young children. In order to make ends meet, she obtained an associate degree from HCTC in 2011 and, through UCM, enrolled in Lindsey Wilson College and obtained a bachelor's degree in Human Resources and Counseling. Janice is now a Rape Crisis Center Community Educator in Knott County and is currently pursuing her master's degree through UCM.

student services, and ensure a smooth transfer articulation process between two-year and four-year programs, without unnecessary duplication of credit.[10]
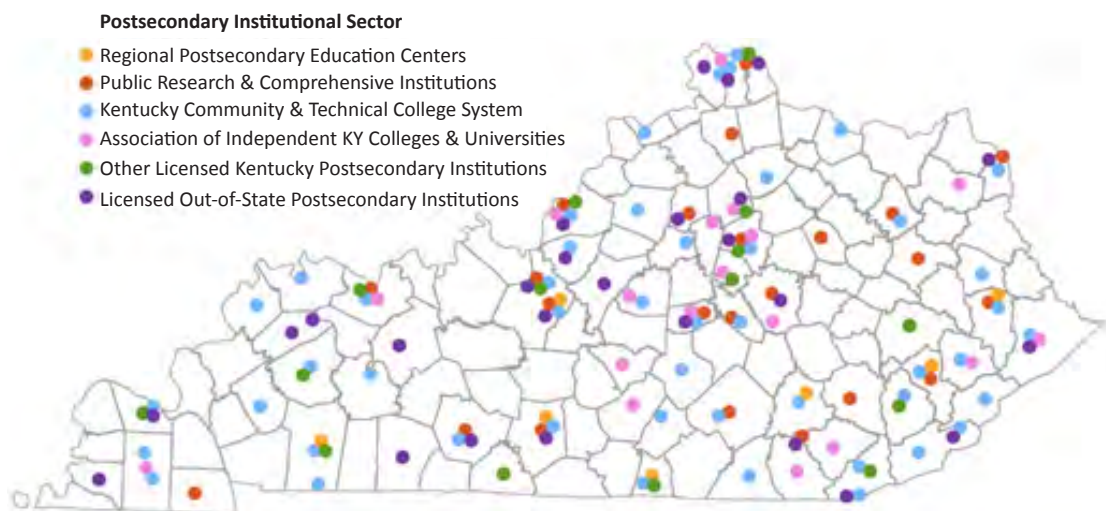
In informal discussions with work group members and in site visits conducted by Council staff, it became apparent that some regional campus sites have more transparent, efficient partnerships with KCTCS campuses than others, especially around joint programs and seamless advising services. In some instances, there is a feeling of competition between KCTCS and regional campuses for enrollments or for serving local business and industry. Back office issues—like incompatibilities between administrative software systems and financial aid policies—can be a barrier to effective joint enrollment programs and other partnerships. Also, as state higher education appropriations diminish, students may not have access to a broad array of full degree programs at remote sites. The effective, affordable provision of online programs has the potential to greatly augment the number of available degree offerings in educationally distressed areas.

Regional Postsecondary Centers Established by HB 321

1. EKU and KCTCS: Southeast Regional Postsecondary Education Center—London, Corbin, and Somerset

2. WKU and KCTCS: Southern Regional Postsecondary Education Center—Glasgow

3. WKU and KCTCS: Central Regional Postsecondary Education Center— Elizabethtown

4. Morehead State and KCTCS: North East Regional Postsecondary Education Center—Prestonsburg

5. Murray State and KCTCS: West Regional Postsecondary Education Center— Hopkinsville

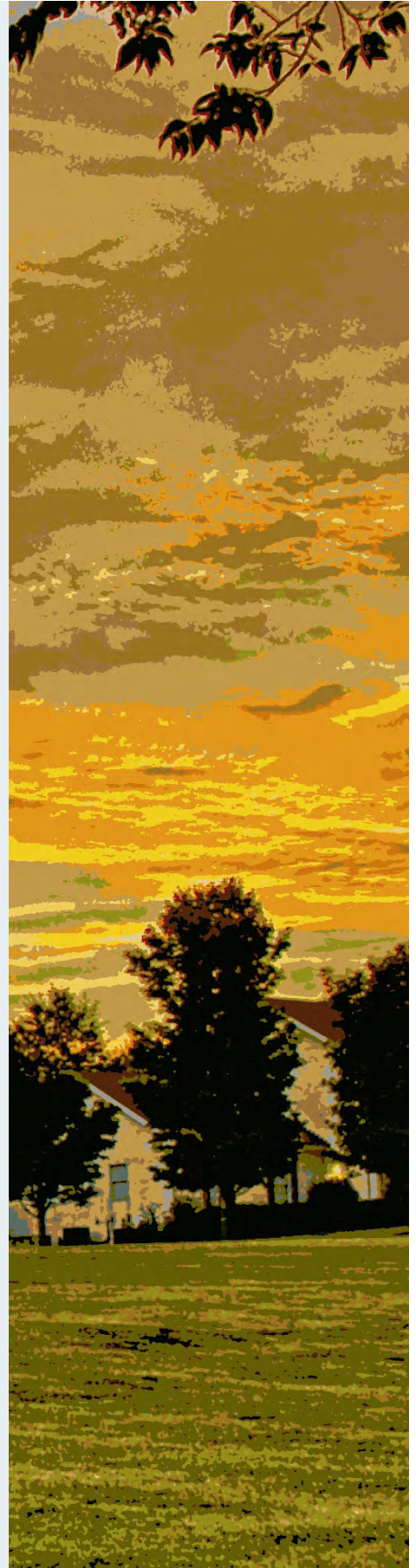6. KCTCS: South Central Regional Postsecondary Education Center—Albany

Distribution of Postsecondary Institutions Across the Commonwealth, Including University Regional Campuses

Postsecondary Institutional Sector
- Regional Postsecondary Education Centers
- Public Research & Comprehensive Institutions
- Kentucky Community & Technical College System
- Association of Independent KY Colleges & Universities
- Other Licensed Kentucky Postsecondary Institutions
- Licensed Out-of-State Postsecondary Institutions

Source: NCHEMS's June 2012 Presentation to the CPE

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN KCTCS & UNIVERSITY REGIONAL CAMPUSES

4A. Encourage the KCTCS institutions and universities to expand joint enrollment, advising, and completion programs that result in more students transitioning from 2-year to 4-year campuses and more timely degree completion (2+2 degrees, completer degrees, 3+1 degrees).

4B. Encourage universities to develop full degree programs at regional campuses through a variety of means (ITV, online courses, partnerships with KCTCS institutions, etc.). Use faculty and advising resources at university regional campuses to provide face-to-face support and educational counseling for distance education students. The University Center of the Mountains in Hazard (in which multiple providers offer full programs) may be a useful model to replicate in other underserved rural areas of the state.

5 ADULT-FRIENDLY DEGREE PROGRAMS

While colleges and universities have traditionally focused the majority of recruitment efforts on 18-24 year olds, state demographics suggest that even dramatic increases in college completion within this age group will not be enough to meet Kentucky's projected workforce needs. A recent National Center for Higher Education Statistics report projects that the number of high school graduates in Kentucky will decline from 42,000 to 38,500 over the next few years and will not return to current highs until 2021. Kentucky has about 1.5 million adults in the state who have completed high school or some college but have not earned a postsecondary degree or credential. Only 95,000 of these adults are currently enrolled in a public, private, or for-profit accredited postsecondary institution. Kentucky must address the postsecondary education needs of its working-age adult population if educational attainment levels are to increase.

National and state data, surveys, and discussions with adults and employers tell us that certain conditions must be in place to persuade working-age adults, many with families, to devote the time, energy, and money necessary to go back to school. The price must be right. Courses must be offered at times and places convenient and accommodating to work and family obligations. A system should be in place to evaluate and award academic credit for past course completions (often from other colleges and universities) as well as for relevant work experience. Faculty must be attuned to and interested in serving the needs and interests of adult students. Advising, financial, academic, and career services must be widely available and easily accessible. And students increasingly demand structures that allow them to move through courses at their own pace, based on demonstrated mastery, knowledge, or skills—not seat time or traditional Carnegie units.

Several online models for serving working-age adult students have developed across the nation, ranging from Western Governors University

Percent of Postsecondary Students Taking Online Courses in Kentucky, By County
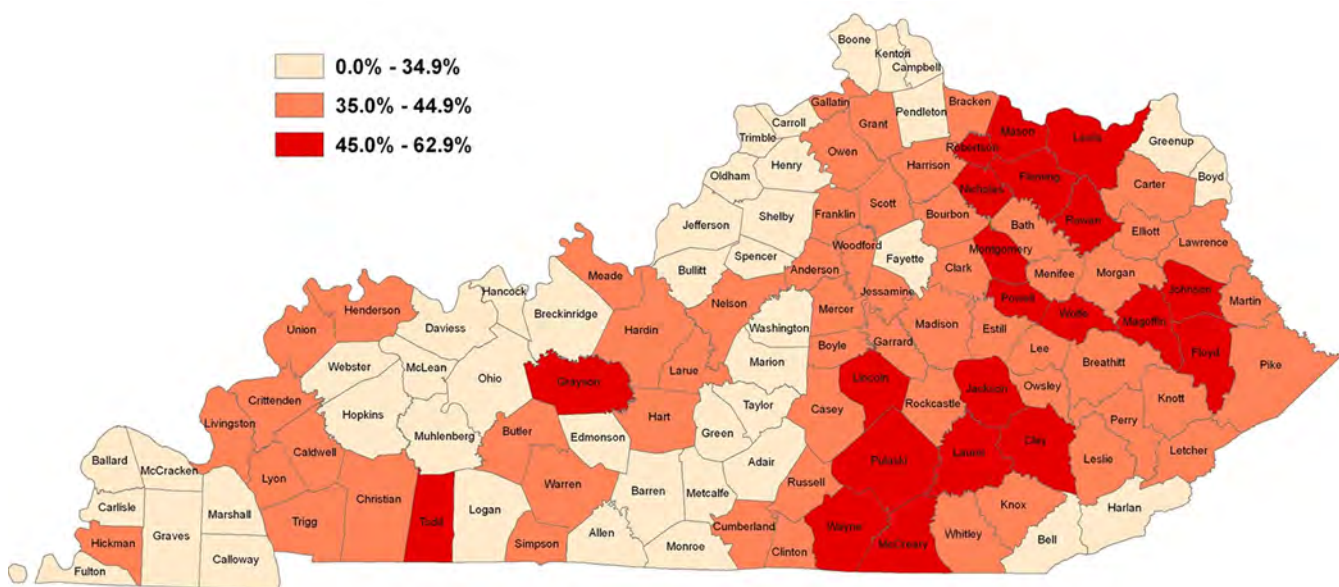
Source: CPE Comprehensive Database, 2010-11 Academic Year

to the SUNY System's Empire State College. Higher education systems in states such as Florida and Wisconsin are currently in the process of creating state-funded online delivery systems tailored to the needs of working adults. The Council has been examining all of these initiatives over the past year with the assistance of several national organizations, including the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) and the Lumina Foundation. This preliminary work and evaluation led the Council to conclude that Kentucky needs a similar enterprise.

Fortunately, Kentucky has several existing programs upon which to build. KCTCS's nationally-recognized Learn on Demand program offers high-demand associate degrees, developmental education, and tutoring and advising services in a fully online, modularized format. While each public university currently offers online programs, they are not typically competency-based

or structured in a way that allows students to enroll any time and work at their own pace. A system like Learn on Demand at the four-year level would be well-positioned to take advantage of existing infrastructure at KCTCS by layering on top its own array of online baccalaureate programs responsive to employer needs and demand. The Council is working with the public university provosts to develop a model for delivering these programs and services. This consortium of public universities is currently meeting to determine the best structure and delivery system for Kentucky students.

However, there are a couple of barriers that can potentially limit the effectiveness of distance education strategies in rural areas of the state. The first barrier, lack of high-speed Internet access, will be discussed in the next section. The second barrier is cost. While public sector online courses are significantly less expensive than those offered by proprietary

institutions like the University of Phoenix, they are usually more expensive than on-campus courses.

The work group heard from many university representatives who cited higher costs for online programs, including course development, software, security, and technology support expenses (e.g., Blackboard licensing fees) that justify the higher tuition charges. Several university representatives cautioned that equalizing tuition rates would decrease the number of online courses and programs that could be delivered and potentially limit access for adults. They also reasoned that once the cost of driving to a remote campus location was factored in, online courses were still the better bargain in many cases. The work group agreed that the issue needed further study with a goal of improving the affordability of online courses.

Learn On Demand Offers an Innovative Alternative to Traditional Learning

In January 2009, KCTCS launched Learn on Demand, which offers online, modularized, self-paced, competency-based degrees and credentials in high-wage, high-demand fields. Learn on Demand targets adults ages 19-54, a group generally comfortable with the Internet, less able to pursue education at traditional times, and more inclined to seek education for a career change or promotion.

In Learn on Demand, students can enroll whenever they want. There are no class schedules or assignment deadlines in the self-paced courses. And students can leave without facing problems when they re-enroll. The program offers full, 15-week courses as well as ones that are broken into three or more "bite

sized" pieces (called "modules"). Students take a pre-test before enrolling. If they have already mastered the material in a particular module, they can get credit without completing any additional coursework, which can save both time and money.

In addition to online instruction, Learn on Demand offers 24/7 virtual advising and tutoring services. Interactive features allow students to work with faculty members or other students in chat rooms or live during class. In this way, Learn on Demand has singled itself out from competitors like Western Governors University and has garnered national attention from *Inside Higher Education* and other professional organizations.

Learn on Demand offers flexible, affordable associate degrees and credentials in:

- **Business Administration**
- **Nursing**
- **Information Technology**
- **General Studies (AA/AS)**
- **Developmental Education**

Credits are fully transferable to four-year institutions, many of which have developed "completer" degrees to allow students to finish a bachelor's degree in two additional years.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADULT-FRIENDLY DEGREE PROGRAMS

5A. Work with Kentucky's universities and KCTCS to develop, implement, and fund a collaborative, affordable, competency-based higher education delivery model that offers career pathways; direct assessment of student learning (in lieu of measuring student learning in credit hours or clock-hours); and online associate and baccalaureate degree programs in high-demand fields tailored to working adults. These programs should be fully supported by online advising and tutoring services, in addition to face-to-face advising and/or instruction.

5B. Study the structure of online tuition and fees for the purpose of improving access and affordability for online students.

6 HIGH-SPEED INTERNET ACCESS

As has been noted in previous sections of this report, high-speed Internet access increasingly is essential to success at the postsecondary level and is particularly important in rural areas of the state where proximity to a college campus is limited. Since 2000, the percent of total credit hours taken via distance learning has grown at all campuses in the state, both public and private. Overall, the number of credit hours students are earning through online learning has increased dramatically, from less than 223,000 in 2005 to nearly 800,000 hours in 2010. Sixty-five percent of students graduating in 2010-11 took at least one online class.

Given the limited proximity to college campuses in some parts of the state, it is perhaps not surprising that the highest percentages of distance learners are located in more rural, underserved areas. This underscores the essential need for access to reliable, affordable broadband services in these regions to raise educational attainment and expand opportunity.

Unfortunately, access to high-speed Internet is still a challenge in many of the more rural/remote areas, and even where available, it is prohibitively expensive for some students. The work group had the opportunity to hear from Brian Kiser, Executive Director of Kentucky's Office of Broadband Outreach and Development, who discussed continuing challenges to get high speed broadband to all areas of the state. As the maps below show, many counties in Kentucky struggling with low educational attainment, unemployment, and poverty are the same counties without adequate access to high speed Internet.

Mr. Kiser noted that while 1.5 percent of urban Kentucky is still without access to high speed Internet, 23 percent of rural Kentucky has no access - a fact that increasingly translates to limited access to postsecondary education for citizens in these regions. The work group heard several stories about college students in rural areas who have to drive to McDonalds or other commercial centers to take their online exams because they couldn't access or afford the Internet in their own homes. Accommodating, wired work spaces are needed for these students.

Parts of Kentucky That are Underserved or Totally Unserved by Broadband Services

Underserved Areas by Census Block Population
(Fixed or mobile wireless maximum advertised download speed of less than 3 mpbs)

0-31
32-105
106-224
225-413
414-883
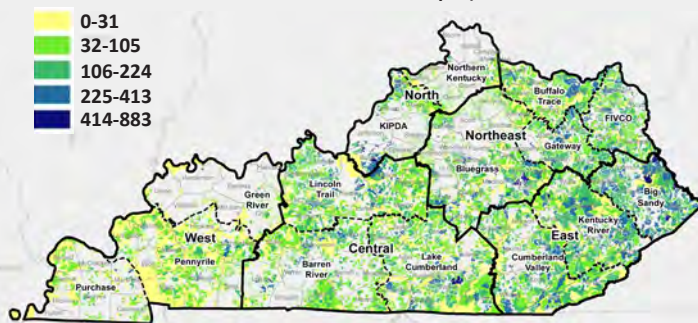
Totally Unserved Areas by Census Block Population
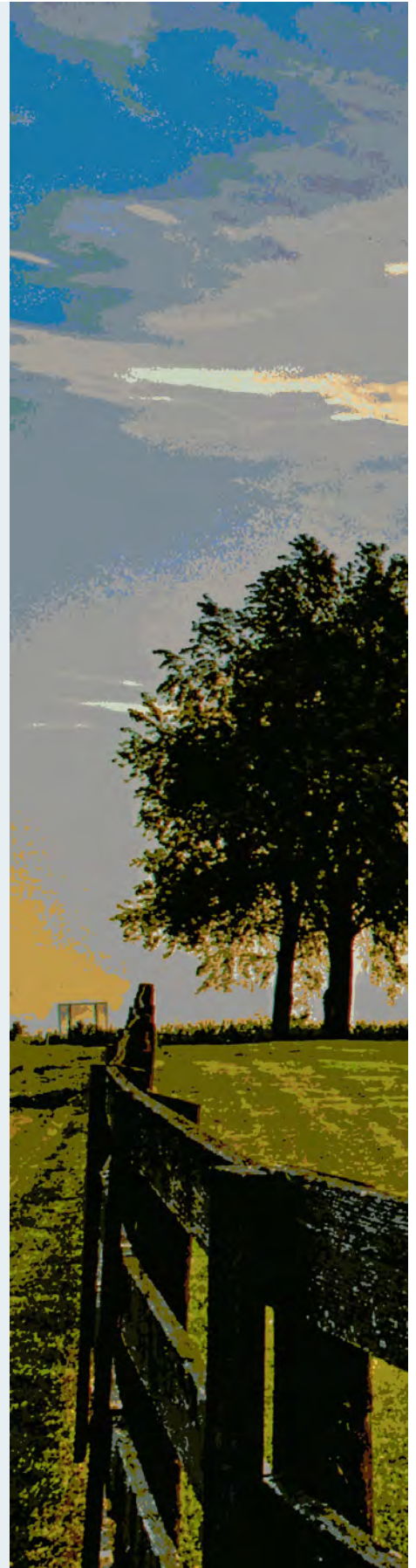
0-31
32-105
106-224
225-413
414-883

Source: Office of Broadband Outreach and Development, Commonwealth Office of Technology, 2010.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCREASING HIGH-SPEED INTERNET ACCESS

6A. Promote the development of "E-Learning Centers" in rural areas that offer free high-speed Internet access for students enrolled in postsecondary education programs. The centers would be developed through partnerships with schools, libraries, adult education centers, businesses, and nonprofits to provide after-hours access to high-speed Internet services.

6B. Work with local governments, USDA rural utilities, and telephone and Internet providers to develop an infrastructure to create and expand affordable broadband availability and help eliminate service and cost barriers. In many cases rural areas are paying higher prices for slower speeds than those in more urban areas – if they have access at all.

NOTES

1. The counties under consideration in HB 260 were Bell, Breathitt, Floyd, Harlan, Johnson, Knott, Leslie, Letcher, Magoffin, Martin, Perry, and Pike Counties.

2. Kelly, Patrick. "Realizing Kentucky's Educational Attainment Goal: A Look in the Rear View Mirror and Down the Road Ahead," National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), September, 2011.

3. ACS Educational Attainment by Degree Level and Age Group. American Community Survey, 2010 (www.higheredinfo. org).

4. JBL Associates, Inc. "College Affordability in Kentucky," prepared for the Kentucky Council on Postecondary Education, September 18, 2005.

5. NASSGAP, 42nd Annual Survey Report, 2010-11.

6. Dual credit involves concurrent enrollment in KCTCS and high school with credit awarded by both entities. Articulated credit is awarded when the student enrolls in a KCTCS college after high school graduation. Colleges must have local agreements for articulated and dual credit that are consistent with KCTCS student admission and academic policies.

7. Benneworth, Paul and Peter Arbo. *Understanding the Regional Contribution of Higher Education Institutions: A Literature Review* (Paris: OECD Institutional Management in Higher Education Programme, 2006).

8. McGrew, Charles. "Educational Policies and Migration Realities: Utilizing a State Longitudinal Data System to Understand the Dynamics of Migration Choices for College Graduates from Appalachian Kentucky," Doctoral Dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2013.

9. http://www.rupri.org/entrepreneurship.php

10. Kelly, Patrick. "A Report on the Advisability and Feasibility of Moving the University of Pikeville into the State University System," National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), March 15, 2011.

About the Council on Postsecondary Education

The Council on Postsecondary Education is Kentucky's statewide postsecondary and adult education coordinating agency charged with leading the reform efforts envisioned by state policy leaders in the *Kentucky Postsecondary Education Improvement Act of 1997* and the *Adult Education Act of 2000*. Key responsibilities include:

- Developing and implementing a strategic agenda for postsecondary and adult education that includes measures of progress.
- Producing and submitting a biennial budget request for adequate public funding of postsecondary education.
- Monitoring and approving tuition rates and admission criteria at public postsecondary institutions.
- Collecting and distributing data about postsecondary education performance.
- Ensuring the coordination and connectivity of technology among public institutions.
- Administering adult education programs serving every county in Kentucky.

Council on Postsecondary Education Members: