A Message from the Director

My Fellow Kentuckians,

“The fishermen know that the sea is dangerous and the storm terrible, but they have never found these dangers sufficient reason for remaining ashore.”
-- Vincent Van Gogh

Like many of you, I am growing used to the old adage of doing more with less. In these tough times of economic turmoil and the storm of financial uncertainty in our Commonwealth, we are being challenged to meet the growing needs of our state agency children with fewer resources than ever before. In just the few preceding months we have face two budget reductions to the state agency children’s fund (SACF) while simultaneously being asked to raise the bar on our expectations. In response to both of the budget reductions KECSAC has worked diligently with our Interagency Advisory Group (IAG) and our state partners to diminish the direct impact on the children we serve. I believe we have done just that. In both instances, KECSAC has managed to absorb the budget reductions internally without passing the cuts on to our partnering school districts and the children we serve daily. It will mean fewer resources for our partners, it will mean fewer opportunities for the KECSAC staff to grow professionally, but it will mean that our children will continue to receive a quality, equitable education. Indeed, as Vincent Van Gogh noted, the dangers of the storm are not nearly sufficient reasons for remaining ashore. The payoff, the benefits our state agency children receive because of our work will remain in the forefront of our thoughts and our work on their behalf.

During the first quarter of this fiscal year, we have experienced many great accomplishments while weathering the tough budget storm stirring across the Commonwealth. The Program Improvement Process has been fundamentally enhanced to meet the changing needs of our programs. We have increased the allocated number of visits for the program improvement specialists, added additional staff to assist in the visits, provided alternate visit schedules and streamlined the site visit process to address any variance. In addition, KECSAC has been engaged in two new projects designed to educate our Commonwealth about state agency children and the educational programs serving them. You can learn more about those projects in the following pages. Our professional development series continues to impress our educators while providing much needed, hands-on, implementable skills for our teachers and administrators.

These accomplishments, and many others, are highlighted in this quarterly report. You will find enclosed a summary of our work and accomplishments, as well as details related to our ongoing initiatives. The ambitious action agenda we are highlighting here could not happen without the broad base of support we have formed with our state agency partners, our local school districts and the teachers and administrators working on behalf of state agency children. We appreciate your continued support as we work to enhance the educational services provided to our students.

Sincerely,

Ronnie Nolan, Ed.D.

Determination

Tears of happiness stream down my face,
As I look around I see that I am in a better place.
Life is hard depending on how hard life gets,
You deal with what life brings to you,
you do not give up and quit.

I look around and see all of these good people trying to help me,
They try to help me and I push them away.
I think about what a wonderful person I can be,
I am going to be the person they know that I can be
starting today.

Life may be hard but let the people around you help,
Even though you may deny having problems
and you do not care for yourself.
Let the people who care about you help you
with your life and the problems,
Before you get out of control, gain control and solve 'em

Let people help you even when you do not want to help yourself,
Life may come at you fast, unexpectedly, and determined.

If you look at life and smile, you will live life to the fullest and be yourself.
No one can expect more,
but to lose that last straw would be to lose your pride
and lose everything you have worked for.

Look at yourself in the mirror and say I can do this

Fifteen-Year-Old-Girl
From “The Circle Three” written by Ramey-Estep Students
Maneuvering through a crowd of veteran teachers and school administrators, six young men dressed in desert camouflage bearing the US and Kentucky flags, posed the colors at the start of the 9th Annual Alternative Strategies for Educating Students At-Risk Conference on July 27-29, 2010 at the Perkins Conference Center on the campus of Eastern Kentucky University. A routine event for some perhaps, but these young men are students at the Cadet Leadership and Education Program (CLEP) in Breathitt County. For these young men, being able to show their military precision and dedication to proper protocol is an opportunity to demonstrate how far they have come as state agency children in the custody of the Department of Juvenile Justice. KECSAC (the Kentucky Educational Collaborative for State Agency Children) has one-hundred programs in fifty-four school districts across the Commonwealth of Kentucky serving the educational interests of state agency children, some of the most vulnerable students in Kentucky—many of whom have been dismissed as “throw-aways” by abusive parents or dysfunctional communities. The overriding theme of the 9th Annual Alternative Strategies for Educating Students At-Risk Conference was the triumph of state agency children when properly nurtured, remediated and inspired by teachers who believe in the power of the individual to reach, teach and inspire at-risk students.

KECSAC typically organizes, co-sponsors, and produces 15-18 professional development events, including online content, each school year. However, the pinnacle of the year is always the Alternative Strategies for Educating Students At-Risk Conference, a three day event in July that showcases instructional strategies, curriculum innovations, assessment techniques and service projects intended to provide teachers and administrators who work with state agency children and other at-risk youth with the skills and resources needed to address the educational needs of this vulnerable population of students.

One attendee noted, “I look forward to this KECSAC conference every year. It is informative, entertaining and has a wealth of knowledge. It provides very realistic strategies related to our ‘at-risk’ population.” Providing real, relevant classroom strategies that will help educators reach these students is KECSAC’s goal. Katie Helton, KECSAC Training and Technology Support Specialist, explains that, “we spend a large part of the year planning the conference and try to take into account what our educators really need and want to see. The best part is when our programs get to show off the good work they are doing by presenting break-out sessions; sharing strategies with other educators who do this very difficult job is so important.” According to Ms. Helton, “the At-Risk Conference is always such an exciting time for KECSAC staff. I love getting to see our teachers and administrators in person. Considering the important work these educators do, it's really rewarding to see the interest and encouragement when they tell us they are enjoying themselves and offering suggestions for next year’s conference.”

This year’s conference featured Dr. Stephen Sroka, an educator and motivational speaker who integrates cutting edge research with reality based strategies for dealing with the issues that face our youth today including sex, drugs, violence and academic achievement as well as mental health and school safety. Dr. Sroka used his personal story of triumph to illustrate the power of individual educators to reach students at-risk of academic failure and social alienation. Other keynote speakers included Elizabeth Breaux, a master educator and author who believes that a calm, caring environment, innovative teaching strategies and constant positive feedback are key to at-risk student success. Her presentation was grounded in specific techniques and strategies that teachers could use in the classroom. Her book entitled How to Reach and Teach All Students: Simplified was given out to all the attendees. Maria Banks, keynote speaker for the third day of the conference, is a master educator and K-12 Literacy Development Supervisor for the Wissahickon School District in Ambler, Pennsylvania. Ms. Banks engaged the audience as she demonstrated classroom management techniques within the context of a differentiated classroom environment. Her presentation presented techniques, strategies and lesson plan development for a broad range of subjects and disciplines.

Although the keynote speakers provided great motivation and hands on strategies for educating at-risk students, the highlight of the conference was, without question, the presentation of the SACSAA Awards and the first ever KECSAC Outstanding Student of the Year Award. Kentucky Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Terry Holliday, guest speaker for the lunchtime awards ceremony, reminded the audience the difference a caring teacher can make in the lives of at-risk youth.

The SACSAA awards were presented over by SACSAA President Garet Wells of Woodford County. Ann Lyttle-Burns of the Fayette Regional Juvenile Detention Center in Lexington was honored as Outstanding School Administrator of the Year for 2009-2010. Ms. Lyttle-Burns has led the education team at PRJDC for twelve years, constantly striving to deliver a quality education for all students who cross her threshold and to inspire students and staff alike to achieve their best each and every day. Ms. Lyttle-Burns has been selected for Kentucky’s Minority Superintendent Internship Program and will serve in Clark County. She is currently working towards her doctorate at Eastern Kentucky University.

Samantha Denise Lawson of Gateway Children’s Services in Mt. Sterling received Outstanding Teacher of the Year for 2009-2010. Ms. Lawson excels in diagnosing educational, social and emotional deficiencies in youth, as well as individualizing instruction to meet her students’ needs and underscore their strengths. Her supervisor, Hopey Newkirk notes: “Samantha sees ‘beyond school’ for her students and helps them to prepare for the work force, and/or obtain post secondary education. More importantly, she provides the motivation and skills they need to become productive members of society.”

Deborah Wilson of Hardin County Day Treatment was honored as the Outstanding Support Staff of the Year for 2009-2010. Ms. Wilson has been an instructional assistant at Hardin County Day Treatment since 2004. Ms. Wilson is always willing to go above and beyond to help the students at HCDT succeed in school and in life. Her positive attitude and willingness to take on any task that will improve the lives of the students make her a valuable asset to the program.

After the SACSAA Awards, Dr. Ronnie Nolan, KECSAC Director, presented the KECSAC Outstanding Student of the Year awards. The culmination of a year’s worth of collaboration and planning, the Outstanding Student of the Year award was designed to recognize a state agency child who has demonstrated exemplary efforts in overcoming personal and educational obstacles to attain their educational goals. To be considered for the award students needed to submit two letters of reference as well as a personal essay discussing the obstacles they have faced in their lives and the goals they have set for themselves and have the required GPA. The winner of the award received a $500 nonrenewable award that may be used at any Kentucky post-secondary program. The applicants for the award were so inspiring that the selection committee chose to honor two state agency children. Shaquil Adams and Jasper Bryan are exciting students who truly remind us that we do make a difference in the lives we touch.

Shaquil Adams, a graduate of Louisville Day Treatment shared the many obstacles he overcame to receive his high school diploma, including being shot five times during a gang related retaliation and spending 16 days in a coma followed by months of physical therapy. He credits the
guidance from caring teachers and counselors he received while receiving treatment in juvenile detention facilities with helping him overcome some of the obstacles in his life. Standing at the podium, Shaqueil spoke of his past life of turmoil and violence as well as the one he strives to achieve, his dreams of becoming a teacher.

Similarly, Jasper Chance Bryan talked about being the first person in his family to not be incarcerated for any time of length (both parents and several of his siblings are currently in prison) as well as being the first in his family to graduate high school. Jasper credits the excellent staff at Ramey- Estep High School in Boyd County with helping him break the cycle of incarceration he inherited from his parents. His work ethic, his personal determination to beat the odds and his desire to attend college have helped him to complete high school. This fall he will enroll at Ashland Community & Technical College and then later Morehead State University in pursuit of his dream to become a Registered Nurse. His graduation speech focused on the belief that “your past is not your potential.” Finishing school, seeking out positive role-models and finding fulfilling work are the keys Jasper has credited as the way to break dysfunctional family cycles. After the award recipients’ speeches, the audience of veteran teachers was visibly moved by the heartfelt stories, dreams and aspirations of the two outstanding students of the year.

The conference was wrapped up by Kentucky’s own Hasan Davis, the Deputy Commissioner of Operations for the Kentucky Department of Juvenile Justice, who shared his personal story of triumph and change. After an early history of social and academic challenges, including learning disabilities, pre-teen arrest and expulsion from alternative schools and college, Hasan found the courage to change. He credits the excellent staff at Ramey-Estep and his desire to attend college have helped him to complete high school. Hasan has credited as the way to break dysfunctional family cycles.

The first day of training opened with Dr. Jane Bluestein delivering an incredible keynote address that spoke directly to the strategies needed to teach in an alternative setting. Dr. Bluestein’s practical advice started the two day conference on just the right note. The rest of day one was devoted to KECSAC specific policies and procedures. Attendees learned what would be expected of them as part of the KECSAC team and what reporting and monitoring procedures would be in place.

Day two focused on core content specific strategies in the areas of math, reading and science. Presenters Michelle Ruckdeschel, Mike Parks and Scott Townsend provided hands on examples and activities that could be taken to the classrooms the very next day. April Pieper from the Kentucky Department of Education did the group a great service by sharing all of the secondary intervention strategies available from the Department. One teacher noted that she’d been in the field for many years and didn’t know what all the KDE had to offer and planned to take advantage of as many of those resources as possible.

KECSAC is so excited to welcome this year’s new educators and looks forward to working with all of our partners in the pursuit of a high quality education for all of Kentucky’s students, particularly those most at-risk.

New Educator’s Training

As the 2010-2011 school year got into swing, KECSAC welcomed teachers and administrators from across the state to Richmond, KY for two days of training and motivation. But these weren’t just any teachers and administrators—they are the ones who are embarking on an exciting new journey this year. This year they have taken on the rewarding challenge of educating at-risk students in state agency children programs!

New Educators’ Training was held on September 1-2 at the Perkins Conference Center on the campus of Eastern Kentucky University. Forty-nine teachers and administrators who are beginning their first year in a KECSAC program joined a group of noted speakers and trainers to learn about the unique population of students in their classrooms. While some of these participants have been teaching for many years, state agency children face a number of barriers to their educational success, and KECSAC wants every educator in our programs to have the best resources possible to overcome those barriers.

Budget Allocation Reduction Impact

During the first quarter of the current fiscal year the Kentucky Department of Education was asked to reduce its overall budget due to anticipated deficits in the Commonwealth’s budget. The Kentucky Educational Collaborative for State Agency Children received a budget reduction of 1.5%—an amount equivalent to $158,700. While KECSAC will continue to advocate for our students and their educational needs, we have developed a plan to absorb this budget reduction without any immediate direct impact on the programs serving state agency children. During this fiscal year, KECSAC has set aside a reserve allocation intended to pay for a proposed pre and post assessment. KECSAC is currently in the process of issuing a Request for Information (RFI) in partnership with KDE to determine what resources are available and a projected cost of the assessment. Because of the budget reduction that has been proposed, the allocation set aside for the pre and post assessment will be reduced in an amount equal to the reduction. This means we will have fewer funds to pay for the pre and post assessment and this may result in our inability to afford the assessment as we had previously hoped.

Children in the care and custody of the Commonwealth of Kentucky have unique emotional, physical and educational needs. No one understands this better than the children themselves. Over the next year KECSAC will conduct a research project designed to provide these children an opportunity to voice the successes and barriers they have encountered while receiving educational services at a state agency children’s program. The interviews will provide background information about state agency children, their adversities, goals and expectations regarding their education. Information gained through this research will be used to inform state policy makers about the intense needs of this population of students and guide future initiatives aimed at improving the educational and treatment services provided to state agency children.

On-Going Initiatives

The program improvement process is one of the most critical functions of KECSAC. Each year, our team visits each state agency program to assist them in meeting the expectations set forth by the Kentucky Department of Education. In addition, KECSAC has set aside a reserve allocation intended to pay for a proposed pre and post assessment. KECSAC is currently in the process of issuing a Request for Information (RFI) in partnership with KDE to determine what resources are available and a projected cost of the assessment.

“Voices that Beg to be Heard” is modeled after a project completed by KECSAC in 1996-1997 called “Listen to the Children: Interviews with State Agency Children about their Education.” “Listen to the Children” provided insightful personal perspectives about the lives and educational needs of state agency children.

KECSAC also worked with our state agency partners to enhance the program improvement process. In order to provide a more thorough site visit, KECSAC contracted with an additional program improvement specialist, Nijel Clayton, to provide more team members on site visits so we can review additional documentation, get a broader view of the program, more classroom observations, additional student and teacher interviews, and provide our school administrators and others to be actively engaged with the program improvement process.

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