On November 2-5, 2014 the culmination of two years of planning was realized at the 26th Annual National Dropout Prevention Network Conference held in Louisville. Dr. Ronnie Nolan, director of KECSAC, and Ms. Sherri Clusky, program consultant for the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and KECSAC advisory board member, both served as co-chairs of the national conference planning team and worked with the National Dropout Center to welcome nearly 800 educators from across the country to Kentucky.

The planning team, comprised of KECSAC staff and other Kentucky educational representatives, also partnered with the Center to honor Governor Steven L. Beshear and First Lady Jane Beshear during the conference awards ceremony with the 2014 Crystal Star Award for Distinguished Leadership and Service. Along with endorsement from Commissioner of Education Dr. Terry Holliday, the planning team nominated the Beshears for their work in promoting Senate Bill 97, commonly known as the ‘Graduate Kentucky’ Bill.

“Governor Beshear and the first lady have demonstrated their commitment to education by championing programs and legislation designed to ensure that students throughout the state not only graduate high school but are college- and career-ready,” said Dr. Elizabeth Reynolds, the Network’s executive director. “Their example is certainly one to emulate, and we are pleased to recognize their leadership in dropout prevention.” The award is presented annually to individuals and organizations who have demonstrated their commitment to education and to bettering the lives of others.

Gov. Beshear and the first lady, a former teacher, worked with the General Assembly in 2013 to introduce, pass and
Dear Friends,

We have been discussing the importance of innovation in education quite a bit lately. If you are involved in district PLC’s, receive newsletters from the Kentucky Department of Education, or have been following recent discussions concerning charter schools, you have no doubt heard the new buzz word in our world. With all sincerity, it is at its very essence, something we should all be striving for. Innovation isn’t a new concept, but it is a concept that has constantly challenged us to improve our systems to think boldly about how we educate our students. In fact, the Kentucky Educational Collaborative for State Agency Children (KECSAC) is a direct result of thinking boldly about how we educate students who are in the care, custody or supervision of the Commonwealth. In a time when the traditional silo system was still the most common approach to education, the general assembly of Kentucky took a bold and innovative step in creating a cross-system collaborative team to address educational needs of state agency children.

KECSAC, while partnering with the Kentucky Departments of Education, Juvenile Justice, Community Based Services and Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities, works with local education agencies to provide exceptional educational services to our students. In accordance with our governing regulations (505 KAR 1:080), KECSAC is governed by an interagency advisory group (IAG) comprised of representatives from each of our partner state agencies. The organizational membership is mandated in our governing regulation and appointed by the respective commissioner of those agencies. In addition to state agency representatives, our IAG consists of two members from the State Agency Children School Administrator Association (SACSAA), two school district superintendents and a youth representative. These collective voices oversee the work we take on at the state level while meeting as a full team six times per year. The governing structure for KECSAC, initiated by state regulations and implemented by both our agency leadership and the leadership of our partners, provides policy development guidance and approval, financial oversight, technical support for KECSAC and other partnering agencies, as well as demonstrates a collaborative approach to meeting the needs of our students.

The oversight of education programs serving state agency children doesn’t happen in a silo; it isn’t a one-person job. The shared responsibility of these state agencies, each having some direct responsibility for the care of children in their custody or supervision, requires us to work together in a collaborative spirit and partnership. The innovation we so frequently talk about today, the need for all of us to work together to meet the needs of our students, is being lived out daily in our collaborative network. Because of the history of these state agencies working across the aisle, across individual silos, we are making continual progress for our children. Certainly there is more to be done, we can always improve. But the reality is that we already have the right folks at the table to discuss the needs of our kids. As Thomas Jefferson noted, the art of government is in being honest. We know there is much more to be done, and we are excited to have a collaborative team partnering together in innovative ways to address the harsh realities our children face.
implement Senate Bill 97. The legislation increases the compulsory school attendance age from 16 to 18. Senate Bill 97 stated that implementation would be voluntary until 55 percent, or 96, of the state’s school districts adopted the policy. As of November 2014, 160 of the state’s 173 school districts had amended their attendance policies from 16 to 18. The remainder of Kentucky’s school districts must adopt and implement the standard no later than the 2017-18 school year.

“Keeping students enrolled in school is just the first step,” said Gov. Beshear. “We must also keep them engaged and on the path to graduation and success in college, career and life. Preventing dropouts strengthens our economy and workforce, and improves the standard of living for every citizen.”

The national conference also featured many other Kentucky voices, including featured speakers Mr. Hasan Davis, former KY Department of Juvenile Justice commissioner, Mr. Gene Wilhoit, executive director of the National Center for Innovation in Education, and Ms. Emily Kirkpatrick, vice president of the National Center for Families Learning (formerly the National Center for Family Literacy). Kentucky student talent was highlighted as well from the River City Drum Corps of Louisville, directed by Mr. Ed White, the Bulldog Beats acapella group from Male High School in Louisville, directed by Alexis Paxton, and the Youth Performing Arts School of Louisville who performed numbers from their upcoming production of “Hairspray!” The students provided entertainment during the general sessions of the conference and impressed the audience with their talent and performances.

Attendees also had the opportunity to participate in site visits during the conference that allowed them to tour and learn about best practices from several exemplary and innovative educational programs in the area. Two of the sites featured, Audubon Youth Development Center and Bullitt Alternative Center, are also KECSAC programs.

“Having this conference in Kentucky provided us with a national platform to highlight the remarkable progress Kentucky is making in education,” Dr. Nolan said. “We had an opportunity to showcase how we are continually improving educational outcomes for our students, while demonstrating substantial growth in national rankings.”

Gov. Beshear also proclaimed November 3, 2014 to be dropout prevention awareness day in Kentucky. In doing so, he recognized the Kentucky Department of Education, the Kentucky Educational Collaborative for State Agency Children, the National Dropout Prevention Network and Jefferson County Public Schools, all state partners in the planning of the national conference. Gov. Beshear said of the proclamation: “It is imperative that educators, school administrators, parents and other leaders continue to explore strategies for addressing the school dropout problem among our students and encourage our young learners to finish their high school educations.”
Boys and Girls Haven decided to use their awarded mini-grant funds to improve their health and wellness curriculum through supporting instruction, providing additional physical education equipment for self-monitoring wellness activities, providing participation incentives and rewards, and sponsoring a Field Day event.

Students participated in classroom instructions with the Healthy Minds and Bodies and Countdown to Health curricula. This included discussions on food portion size and games such as ‘My Plate BINGO.’ Self-monitoring incentive charts were used to record personal fitness data, and the purchased pedometers, stopwatches, and heart rate monitor were put to excellent use as each student tracked individual physical activity. The access to sufficient equipment meant the students experienced less “down time” and demonstrated increased ownership of their fitness activities.

Students and staff also received T-shirts that said “Work those Muscles – Mind & Body!” and wore them during the Field Day activities which included kickball, relay races, four square, a repetitive stretching competition, and volleyball. Students earned ribbons and metals for demonstrating learned skills in these activities and demonstrating teamwork, positive attitudes, and good sportsmanship. Students also completed reflection writings as one of the self-assessment strategies during this time. One student in their reflection stated, “I helped make our Field Day a positive experience by being a good sport whether I lost or won,” while another said, “I was positive (no complaining) and not lazy.”

Program teachers are appreciative that the instructional materials and physical education equipment acquired this year will continue providing interactive wellness activities of great benefit to the students.
Otter Creek Academy Expands Opportunities Across Curriculum

The 2014 mini-grant awarded to Otter Creek Academy proved to be beneficial in many areas of curriculum, especially the arts and humanities. They decided to divide their funds into a variety of different content areas to meet the needs of all of their students, so progress will be addressed in those different areas. The following is an overview of how their mini-grant benefited many areas of instruction.

Library books: Otter Creek purchased books to continually improve the variety of library books available for students to help improve reading ability. During the first nine weeks of 2014, girls at the program took 220 Accelerated Reader tests with an 83% pass rate, with some students reading a book for the first time ever.

Science kits: This year the program has “Weird Wednesday” for each science class. The materials purchased with the mini-grant allowed teachers to excite students about and expose them to the various aspects of science. Weird Wednesday led to questions and experiments about why or how things work such as: What things does a magnet pick up? How can this egg bounce? What type of items will decompose in soil over a 6 week period? Why does ice pop when placed into water?

Technology: To better prepare students for technology use in regular school settings and in the work place, it is important that girls be able to use a variety of different technology applications. The purchase of calculators with more sophisticated applications allowed the math teacher to better prepare students for higher level math classes.

Art/music supplies: Many students are visual and auditory learners and have talents in the arts, so to be able to increase the amount of art and music available to students is a necessity for the program. Funding helps students have hands-on opportunities with activities such as piano lessons, percussion instruments, oil painting, still life art, and photography.

Cooking supplies: These materials allow the program to offer each student lessons in food preparation. Students learn by demonstration and hands-on practice, many of them cooking for the first time.

Software: Otter Creek was able to purchase Accelerated Math and ACT Mastery software programs to help individualize skill needs and provide practice and assessment in math as well as help students who are preparing for the ACT and/or college to have additional practice and preparation for this standardized assessment.

Barn quilts: Funding for this hands-on project allows students to incorporate math and art into a community service project. The barn quilts students make are displayed on local barns and they take pride in seeing their work as they leave campus. The recipients of the barn quilts in turn see the girls at Otter Creek as helpful and productive students with abilities and talents, hopefully helping to develop a more positive image in the community. Community service is also a beneficial skill the program hopes to instill in all students.
AUDUBON YDC CONTINUES SHAKESPEARE BEHIND BARS PROGRAM

With their mini-grant, Audubon Youth Development Center funded another nine-week session of the Shakespeare Behind Bars program in Spring 2014, which is now in year-round residency at the Center. The program uses theatrical encounters to help incarcerated juveniles develop life skills for successful integration into society. This year the focus of the program was to produce scenes and monologues from William Shakespeare’s play “Othello,” which approximately 25 students participated in. Through the process of exploring Shakespeare’s work and being part of the ensemble, students developed or improved many skills such as literacy, decision making, problem solving and creative thinking, and they learned tolerance and peaceful conflict resolution. Students were also able to relate the universal human themes in Shakespeare’s works to their past experiences and choices, their present situation, and their future possibility.

Through this multi-disciplinary program students performed Shakespeare’s work, wrote in journals daily about their discoveries, expressed themselves through visual art and percussion, and created original monologues. Some student journal entries illustrated the impact of the program. “I’m going to do good and show people that I’m not a criminal, and I will change their thoughts about us. Because we’re good kids,” one student wrote.

A post-review evaluation demonstrated that for students participating in the program reading scores increased, self-esteem increased, academic grades improved and minor rule violations decreased.

Cumberland Hall Purchases Current Textbooks for All Grades

Cumberland Hall was approved for mini-grant funds in order to purchase current textbooks for all grade levels at the school. Below is a review of the textbooks each grade level was able to purchase and comments from teachers about how incorporating new instructional materials is benefitting the students.

Ms. Lile - High School (Grades 9-12)

The high school purchased science (earth, biology, chemistry and physics) and social studies (government, world history, economics and U.S. history) textbooks. “These books have helped tremendously with alignment of the Common Core Standards. They are more current and up to date on information and contain analytical questioning. The students use critical/abstract thinking skills to apply knowledge they are learning. The new books also have strategies to differentiate concepts so that I am able to reach all students. The books are also designed with writing support activities to help students practice writing skills that pertain to concepts covered.”

Ms. Batts - Middle School (Grades 6-8)

The middle school purchased civics, American history and careers textbooks. “The civics textbook is geared toward higher order thinking. The reading strategies used throughout the textbook help me teach reading skills and vocabulary while teaching content. The American history textbooks incorporate technology along with the content to allow the sights and sounds of history to come alive with section spotlight videos. The textbook also does a really great job of connecting students’ past learning with real life experiences. Each section in the textbook provides differentiated instruction activities to meet the diverse needs of each student I teach. The careers textbooks require students take information they obtain from each reading section and apply it. Text questions are not just simple recall but higher level questions, and it incorporates content and activities across the curriculum.”

Ms. Carr - Elementary (Grades K-5)

The elementary school grades purchased new “Journeys” literature books. “These books are aligned with the Common Core and replace literature books we have had since the 80s. We also purchased the corresponding resource booklets which incorporate grammar, vocabulary and writing practice. Some of the skills incorporated in the text are domain specific vocabulary, essential questions, various forms of writing, analytical thinking, and connecting to self and the real world. The students take great pride in using new textbooks and are truly benefitting from the numerous activities we work on day to day.”
On September 23, 2014, teachers and administrators from Campbell County Day Treatment, Woodsbend Youth Development Center, Warren County Day Treatment, The Phoenix Academy, Corbin Day Treatment and Lexington Day Treatment participated in the first virtual PLC meetings. While the meetings on this day were primarily introductory, future PLCs will focus on answering questions, such as: What do we want students to learn? How will we know if students met learning goals? How will we respond when some students do not meet these goals? How can we extend and enrich learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency? As the PLCs are teacher-led, teachers will be able to learn from their peers pertaining to effective strategies, increasing parental involvement, differentiating lessons, and reaching multiple learning styles.

“Speaking on behalf of KECSAC/DJJ School Administrators we are extremely excited to be able to provide this learning opportunity to our teachers,” said Alvin Elsbernd, school administrator for Campbell County Day Treatment. “Additionally, we believe virtual PLCs will provide teachers with the ability to join a group of professionals working in similar settings and striving to serve high quality instruction to at-risk students.” Alternative setting PLCs will be held on the third Tuesday of the month at 2:30 p.m. EST. If you would like to participate please contact Alvin Elsbernd at alvin.elsbernd@campbell.kyschools.us.