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Dear KECSAC Community,

I have shared many times before the impact teachers have had on my life. I have recounted with fondness and with humor how they have challenged me and motivated me to think bigger than I thought I could. It’s not exaggeration to say that a great teacher can change a student’s life, indeed, I am living proof; many of you are as well. There are endless amounts of great teacher stories that can attest to the benefits of a strong relationship between a teacher and a student, and they are readily available by a quick Google search or over a cup of coffee with your friends.

As some of the most influential role models for developing students, teachers have a growing responsibility for more than just academic enrichment. Teachers are expected to lead a classroom, teach every content area for every grade level, be a counselor, a nurse, a guardian and at times a parent. It’s clear that if you want to be a great teacher, you must connect with your students and reach them on multiple levels. Teachers in state agency programs across Kentucky are leading examples of what it means to commit yourself to a student’s well-rounded development. By forging strong relationships, our teachers are able to affect virtually every aspect of our students’ lives, teaching them important life lessons that will help them succeed way beyond formative assessments and standardized tests.

As we sprint towards the finish line of another great year, I want to remind our teachers who are frontline warriors to educational opportunity, how much we appreciate your work, your continued commitment to state agency children, and your compassion for students who are often forgotten. It is not always easy to change a student’s life, which is exactly why it takes a great teacher to do it.

Sincerely,

Ronnie Nolan, Ed.D.
Director, KECSAC
Dr. Doug Bennett of Laurel County Schools, and superintendent representative on KECSAC’s Interagency Advisory Group (IAG), received the top superintendent Dupree Award from KSBA during its annual conference on Feb. 22-24, in Louisville.

In his seventh year as superintendent, and sixth year as IAG member, Dr. Bennett is described as having a “laser-like focus” on student engagement and instructional programs. He is also responsible for overseeing considerable improvements to operations and outcomes during his tenure.

Dr. David Johnson, executive director of the SESC Educational Cooperative and a retired superintendent, said of Bennett, “His is a voice of deliberate and careful thought with a long-term perspective. He shows great courage in his willingness to speak to controversial or sensitive issues for the purpose of expressing what he believes to be best for schools and students, even if contrary to the popular flow of ideas.”

District programs and initiatives attributed to Bennett include the formation of a Superintendent’s Student Advisory Committee, district eLearning Academy, Aspiring Administrator Program and a New Principal Academy. Bennett has also made community engagement a priority by creating a district public information officer position, a district mobile app and a district newspaper.

In accepting the award, Mr. Bennett pointed to the collective effort required of district success. “I think most superintendents would agree that great things don’t happen by accident,” he said. “It takes a great team of teachers, support staff, administrators and board members who are all focused and driven to do what’s best for kids.”

Indeed Dr. Bennett is very humble and honored in receiving this award, pointing to the result of positive student outcomes in the district as the thing that brings him most joy in his position. “Graduation is the most rewarding day,” Bennett said. “Seeing the fruit of our efforts as a district culminate in student success really lets us see that what we are doing, and how we do it, really does matter.”

He also recognizes success as more than just test results when it comes to his students. “I am constantly encountering stories about students, coaches, teachers, and staff that embody the type of spirit we strive for in the district and make me proud to be superintendent,” Mr. Bennett said. “I am most impressed when our students exhibit the character, civility, respect and positive outcomes that count.”

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Dupree Outstanding Superintendent Award, which was founded by the family of the late London Independent board member F.L. Dupree, Sr., in partnership with the Kentucky School Boards Association. The award honors an exemplary school leader each year which is selected by a panel of previous award recipients.

Information for this article was provided by the Kentucky School Boards Association
KECSAC Welcomes Angela Austin as Program Improvement Specialist

KECSAC is excited to welcome Angela Austin, former head teacher at Owensboro Day Treatment, as our new program improvement specialist for the western region. Mrs. Austin brings more than 30 years of outstanding education experience to this new role and will be working with the western region for the remainder of this school year. Prior to serving at Owensboro Day Treatment for eight years, Angie was a middle school teacher for 22 years in the Daviess County school district. We are pleased Angie is part of our team working to provide the best educational opportunities to all children in our state!

Register Now for KECSAC’s Alternative Education Summit at www.kecsac.eku.edu

18th Annual Kentucky Alternative Education Summit

July 30-31, 2019 Embassy Suites Lexington, KY

Presented by KECSAC & DJJ Title I*  

*Partially paid with Title I Part D Funds
One thing LuAnne Littlefield will tell you about her 32-year career as an educator and behavioral specialist is that the use of data has been instrumental in developing successful behavioral management strategies and systems. As the current principal of Boyle County Day Treatment, and former behavioral consultant for the district, the proof of success can be seen in her numbers tracking behavior incidents and student outcomes both in the district, and her program, through the years.

“I love excel, and data, and pivot tables. It just blows my dress up!” Ms. Littlefield joked.

Born and raised in Meade County, Kentucky, she attended community college in Elizabethtown before going onto Murray to earn her bachelor’s degree in special education with an emphasis in working with people with severe and profound disabilities in 1982. Education was not her first choice when she began college though. She was initially going to school for business and quickly got bored with the degree. At the same time Ms. Littlefield was also volunteering at a school that served handicapped kids where she met a five-year-old she got to work with, and fell in love with the work.

“I’d tell my basketball coach, who was also a business teacher of mine, all about the work and this child and how much I loved it, and he is the one who told me, ‘that’s what you need to do, you need to teach special education,’” she explained. “At first I blew it off, but after the third time he told me this I thought maybe I should. And thank goodness he saw that in me, because it has been the most perfect fit for me. I don’t get bored, I love the challenge and I love the kids. I truly cannot imagine doing anything else.”
After receiving her bachelor’s, Ms. Littlefield began working at a residential program with kids who had cerebral palsy, which she loved. After a few years at that job, she and her husband “got a wild hair” and decided to move to Kodiak, Alaska, sight-unseen, where they agreed to take jobs for two years, but ended up staying for 11. The small town they lived in was only accessible by ferry or plane, had a limited school population so in her elementary special education class she also encountered students with behavioral issues, gifted and talented students, and those with severe learning disabilities.

“I think teaching these kids kind of found me. It wasn't until I taught in Alaska that I realized how much I loved teaching an at-risk student population,” she said. “I like trying to figure out what a student's behavior is telling me and help them address that. Teaching kids to regulate their own behavior is also a great accomplishment to experience, I mean who wouldn't want to do that?”

After 11 years up north, her family decided to move back to Kentucky to her husband’s family farm in Danville. At first Ms. Littlefield was teaching in a job training grant program at the Boyle County High School and pursuing her Master’s in emotional behavior disorders. When the need arose for a teacher to work with some challenging students in one of the elementary schools, she became a special education teacher there and stayed in that position for six years. After that, she was approached to be a behavioral consultant for the whole district and worked with all the schools that had tough behavior cases, in order to keep from moving students out of their home school. To accomplish this, Ms. Littlefield developed training and strategies to help better equip teachers when dealing with those students. During her eight years in that position she also earned her school principal certification in 2008 through a leadership program with Eastern Kentucky University.

During her time as a behavior consultant, she explained how her love of data became a major part of her job. “One of the biggest things we did was clear up our data collection, and really look at where incidents were coming from, what were the causes, and what areas needed the most help. In the past a kid who was chewing gum would get sent to the vice principal, and the number of students being pulled out of class for any number of behaviors was overwhelming to the administration,” she said. “So we worked to develop behavior management systems at the schools that were much more efficient, and defined the levels of behavior and the consequences for those levels. Therefore, the principals could focus on being proactive rather than reactive all that time.”

As a result of streamlining behavior management, it gave administration more time to focus on instruction and academics, and that’s when test scores began improving district-wide. “We weren’t just reacting to behavior,” Ms. Littlefield explained. “We could focus on better quality teaching and more quality instructional methods.”

After her success with behavior management, Ms. Littlefield applied to become the principal at the alternative school in 2010, and she says it by far has been the best job she has ever had. “I loved teaching in my classroom but I loved the behavior management parts as well, so this job is the best of both worlds and lets me manage the culture as well,” she said. “Being with these students keeps me engaged and feeds my need for something different. We actually get to see them improve when we understand what their needs are and help them find a way to meet those needs and teach them coping strategies. I kind of feel bad for people who have jobs where they don’t get to see the great effect they’re having like I do.”

Her first task in managing the culture at the day treatment was utilizing the data available to her in order to streamline how referrals were made to the alternative program. The first year as principal she had 102 office referrals from the middle and high school, and through behavior management policies she cut that number down by half in one year, and continued to decrease that number through the years. The number of charges on students generated from the alternative school also greatly reduced to only when an illegal act occurred. “We’re always looking at what’s working and what’s not, and making changes from there,” Ms. Littlefield explained.

“"We spend a lot of time affirming to our students that they can do this and they are capable. And once their behavior is in good shape, their academics improve."
Another focus for the program is Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS) so students are able to manage their own behavior as they go back to their home school, or graduate and enter the “real world” beyond school. “I want my students to understand their own behavior and how they are responsible for that and their reactions to things. The goal is to teach them that they can make decisions and they can move through tough spots because they can control it, and they’ll be alright,” Ms. Littlefield said.

According to her, a lot of credit for the program’s success goes to her superintendent, for the support to focus so heavily on student behavior above things like improving test scores. Her goal is to produce well-rounded students and therefore their main focus is on changing behavior while students are in the program. Because of this however, grades and test scores end up improving anyway since students are being taught the skills to manage the things that were impending their focus on academics in the first place. And when they start seeing academic success, they’re more motivated to continue.

Of course Ms. Littlefield also credits the success of the program to her great staff who work with the students day in, and day out, to provide exceptional behavioral, academic, and emotional support. Jennifer Fowler is the full-time teacher and she is in charge of their online APEX learning program, as well as blended classroom learning teaching subjects in algebra 1, book studies for English, and life skills. Ms. Littlefield also teaches algebra 2 in addition to her principal duties. Tao Costello is the secretary and instructional assistant for the program, who has also been instrumental in incorporating yoga into the everyday activities of the students, which has shown to have many positive effects. Lastly, Kim Miller is the DJJ mental health counselor who is at the program to offer counseling to the students in regularly scheduled sessions, and when students might need the extra attention.

With their learning environment incorporating PBIS, the staff can attest to the positive effect on students’ academic performance. In turn, students are able to return to their home schools better equipped for learning.

“We spend a lot of time affirming to our students that they can do this and they are capable,” Ms. Littlefield said. “And once their behavior is in good shape, their academics improve and I can say things like, ‘I’ll only accept A’s and B’s from you,’ and they’ll step up and deliver because they know they can.”

Their online learning platform, APEX, supports the students as well because even through setbacks, it allows a student time to regroup and come back when they are focused again. “We give them time, and we help them through whatever negative thing happened. With APEX their school work is still there, and it hasn’t left them behind like it may have in regular classroom settings, and then they are able to move on.”

And although their program is structured to provide extra supports to each student, Ms. Littlefield stresses that they don’t sugarcoat the reality of their situations.

“We are not heavy handed with them or operate a ‘gotcha’ system,” she explained. “We stress PBIS and creating win-win outcomes because students have to have hope. So we are very blunt and transparent with them, and there is no hidden agenda. For example, if I have a student in court, before we go we’ll have a conversation about what I’m going to say. Even if it’s something not good that student won’t be happy about, they will accept it because we’re honest and they are made aware of the consequences of their actions. But, they also know I’ll be the one there to fight for them, even while I hold them accountable.”
After nine years at the day treatment program and 23 years at the district, Ms. Littlefield reflects on the many positives of her journey as an educator as she prepares to retire at the end of this school year. She is also confident for the future of at-risk kids in her district.

“Our district principals are our best advocates for this program and they fight to keep it operational,” She said. “Also, our district has recently made concentrated efforts to support school safety and mental health services district-wide and I think that is definitely the right track for proactively providing these kids with the supports they need.”

Ms. Littlefield will however, miss her kids and the fulfillment she gets from them. “My cup, my soul is filled every day working with them,” she said. The feedback from students is always rewarding, in what Ms. Littlefield has said typically comes in small gestures, and sometimes big ones as well. In what may seem an odd way of honoring her and Ms. Miller, one student actually got their last names tattooed on each of his shoulders after graduating from the program a few years ago.

“When he was leaving us he was on the verge of tears saying, ‘this is the first time I’ve ever done well,’” she explained. “And I told him, ‘you know what you’re doing and I know you can do this. Just remember I’m sitting on one shoulder and Ms. Miller is sitting on the other and you know what we’d say, and what we’d tell you to do. So remember that when you need it.’ Then about a month later I was sent a photo of our last names on his shoulders. He meant it as sending love back, and even though it may seem a little weird, I’ll take that any time. As rough and as tough as these students sometimes are, they are truly good souls.”

In retirement Ms. Littlefield is planning to spend more time with her husband, two grown daughters and son, and plans to have more involvement with Camp Winona in Bridgeton, Maine where her children have attended all their lives and her husband now works in the summers. In fact, their family has strong camp ties, given that she met her husband at a summer camp, and now one of her daughters runs the sailing program at Camp Winona. She also hopes to become more involved in her West T. Hill community theatre, as well as the school drama program in Boyle County.

The students fill up the available floor space each day to go through their yoga exercises lead by Mr. Costello and a recorded lesson, which helps students stay calm and focused.
This spring semester students at Warren County Day Treatment are learning skills to be more employable. The program has partnered with their local Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, LifeSkills, Inc. healthcare organization, and the Southcentral Kentucky Community and Technical College (SKYCTC) to offer Pre-Employment Transition Services classes in both group and individual settings.

This weeks-long training series is offered through a mandate by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and funded by the Vocational Rehabilitation office. Every Wednesday, Ms. Armstrong from SKYCTC meets with the older students individually on learning skills such as creating effective job applications and resumes. In addition, Ms. Chaffin from LifeSkills, Inc. teaches group classes each Friday at the program focused on developing 21st century soft skills and communication skills with the students. These group classes also fall under the Day Treatment’s Career Scope and Mentoring Program umbrella.

In addition to soft skills students will also experience job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs for institutions of higher education, workplace readiness training, and instruction on self-advocacy. Warren County Day Treatment is confident these lessons will be very beneficial to the future of their students.

Above: Ms. Chaffin from LifeSkills leads group lessons to develop communication and soft skills for students. Below: Ms. Armstrong from SKYCTC works individually with students to develop job skills.
Owensboro Day Treatment Opens New Facility

Owensboro Day Treatment recently moved to its new location at 3108 Fairview Drive in Owensboro, KY. The program is operated by the Department of Juvenile Justice in collaboration with the Daviess County Public School district to provide educational services to students.

School Administrator Jeremy Camron said his staff and students are excited about their new surroundings. “The rare opportunity to move into a completely new facility is one not many teachers or students get to experience,” he said. “This is especially true for the students of Owensboro Day Treatment, who frequently experience severe poverty and multiple traumas early and often in their lives.”

Camron said the program focuses on addressing the multitude of traumas in a therapeutic environment and in a trauma-informed classroom. “Our vision is to ‘Inspire Hope for the Future,’” Camron said. “We do this by planting seeds of hope through our words, actions, mindfulness, therapeutic practices and classrooms structure … and now we have a building that we hope will ‘Inspire Hope for the Future’ as well.”

Jefferson County Uspiritus Programs Join Centerstone Organization

This January, the non-profit organization Uspiritus, which operates the Uspiritus Bellewood Campus and Uspiritus-Brooklawn Campus in Louisville, joined the Centerstone family of non-profit organizations. Together, they will have new opportunities to expand and advance specialized care for at-risk youth in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Uspiritus has been a leading provider of therapeutic treatment and counseling to children and youth living with the effects of abuse, neglect or other mental health crisis situations in the Louisville area for many years. Their services have included residential treatment, therapeutic foster care, outpatient treatment, family preservation and independent living programs. Those services will continue to be offered through Centerstone as well. Educational services for the youth are provided by the Jefferson County School District at the on-campus schools, which are receiving KECSAC funding as well.

According to Centerstone, their organization offers behavioral health care, addictions treatment and intellectual and developmental services in the greater Louisville area, serving Bullitt, Henry, Jefferson, Oldham, Shelby, Spencer and Trimble counties. They operate programs in several surrounding states as well.