Kentucky's Strategies and Recommendations to Address Students' Basic Needs

2023

The Kentucky Student Success Collaborative

CPE

Lumina FOUNDATION

About Lumina Foundation

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation in Indianapolis committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all. We envision higher learning that is easy to navigate, addresses racial injustice, and meets the nation's talent needs through a broad range of credentials. We are working toward a system that prepares people for informed citizenship and success in a global economy.

About the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education

The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) is the state's higher education coordinating agency committed to strengthening our workforce, economy and quality of life. We do this by guiding the continuous improvement and efficient operation of a high-quality, diverse and accessible system of postsecondary education.

Key responsibilities include:

- Developing and implementing a strategic agenda for postsecondary education that includes measures of progress.

- Producing and submitting a biennial budget request for adequate public funding of postsecondary education.

- Determining 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.

- Licensing non-public postsecondary institutions to operate in the Commonwealth.

TEAM KENTUCKY

Contents

Kentucky's Public Institutions

■ Kentucky Community and Technical College System
Ashland Community and Technical College
Big Sandy Community and Technical College
Bluegrass Community and Technical College
Elizabethtown Community and Technical College
Gateway Community and Technical College
Hazard Community and Technical College
Henderson Community College
Hopkinsville Community College
Jefferson Community and Technical College
Madisonville Community College
Maysville Community and Technical College
Owensboro Community and Technical College
Somerset Community College
Southcentral Kentucky Community and Technical College
Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College
West Kentucky Community and Technical College

● Kentucky Public Universities
Eastern Kentucky University
Kentucky State University
Morehead State University
Murray State University
Northern Kentucky University
University of Kentucky
University of Louisville
Western Kentucky University
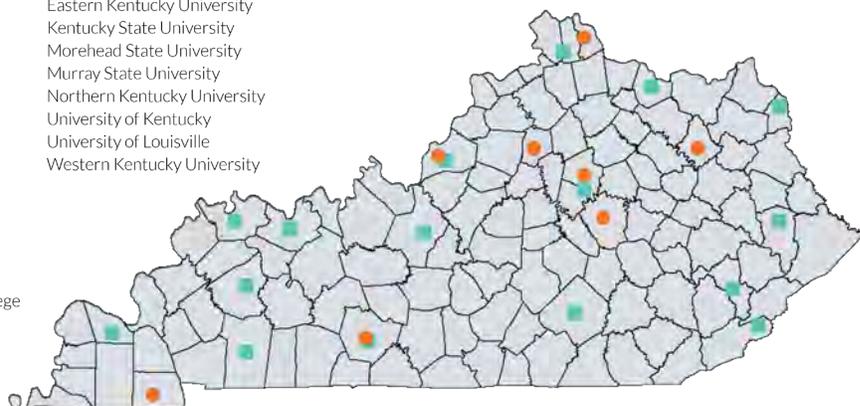
Fast Facts

Kentucky's Population: 4.5M

Demographics	Kentucky	U.S.
White	83%	58%
Black	9%	12%
Hispanic	4%	19%
Other race	4%	11%
Median household income	$55,454	$69,717
Persons in poverty	16.5%	13%
Workforce participation rate *(age 16 and over)*	59%	63%

Kentucky's Educational Attainment (2021)

High School Diploma or Less	Some College	Certificate or Certification	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate Degree+
38%	8%	15%	10%	18%	11%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau and CPE Data, Research and Advanced Analytics Unit.

CPE President's Message

Dear Friends,

With less than seven years remaining to achieve Kentucky's educational attainment goal of 60% of adults with a postsecondary credential, colleges and universities have been laser-focused on providing academic supports to improve retention and graduation rates. Yet, it is often non-academic barriers like food and housing insecurity that stand between students and a postsecondary credential, a situation that was exacerbated by the global pandemic. Basic needs insecurity disproportionately affects low-income students, students of color, students with dependents, and students from eastern Kentucky, who experience significantly higher levels of poverty than the rest of the state.

I'm pleased to report that the Council on Postsecondary Education, through our Kentucky Student Success Collaborative, has been working on a plan to ensure Kentucky's most vulnerable students have the resources they need to meet their basic needs while enrolled in postsecondary programs. With funding support from Lumina Foundation, we convened the Kentucky Student Basic Needs Action Network, which over the last year conducted quantitative and qualitative research to arrive at a set of eight priority recommendations for future action.

I'd like to thank everyone who generously contributed their time and resources to make this project a success—from faculty members, to students, to state agency staff. By working together, we can capitalize on opportunities to link public benefits recipients to postsecondary programs that will move them toward economic security, as well as helping college students access campus-based, state, and federal resources that enable them to meet their educational goals.

Sincerely,

Aaron Thompson, Ph.D.

If you have any questions or comments about the report, please direct them to Lilly Massa-McKinley, Ed.D., executive director of the Kentucky Student Success Collaborative, at lilly.massamckinley@ky.gov.

3

Executive Summary

Nearly three in five undergraduate students on U.S. campuses experience basic needs insecurity,[1] which means they lack access to stable sources of food, housing, or other living or educational essentials, like affordable childcare or technology. Basic needs insecurity unequivocally jeopardizes student success, increasing the likelihood of leaving college without a degree. As Kentucky approaches 2030 with the goal of increasing the state's educational attainment rate to 60%, we must do more to enroll a greater proportion of low-income adults into postsecondary education and support them with campus-based services throughout their academic careers.

With funding support from Lumina Foundation, the Kentucky Student Success Collaborative (KYSSC) embarked upon a year-long project focused on student basic needs. The primary objectives of the project were to increase access to basic needs support for postsecondary students and to increase access to postsecondary education for individuals receiving state support.

The project's phases included discovery and strategy development. In the discovery phase, several projects were undertaken to develop a comprehensive understanding of student basic needs. Discovery projects included:

1. An analysis of benefit participation rates among students.

2. Faculty research on the availability and effectiveness of campus basic needs programs to meet student needs.

3. A public benefit policy scan and interviews with diverse stakeholders.

In the strategy development phase, a diverse stakeholder group, the Student Basic Needs Action Network (SBNAN), synthesized the knowledge gained through the discovery projects and developed a strategic plan for collaborative work moving forward. The SBNAN identified the following priority recommendations and critical success factors to ensure the plan is successful, scalable and sustainable.

Priority Recommendations

Objective 1: Increase access to basic needs support for postsecondary students.

1. Implement basic needs screening and benefits eligibility screening for students.
2. Review state public benefit plans and programs to increase flexibility for postsecondary students.
3. Increase staff capacity of colleges and universities to provide basic needs support to students.
4. Provide training and ongoing professional development for college and university staff and faculty to provide accurate information and consistent support to students.

Objective 2: Increase access to postsecondary education for individuals receiving state support.

5. Explore and identify solutions to alleviate the lack of childcare availability and affordability.
6. Identify models and incentives to increase direct referrals for enrollment from the Kentucky Department for Community Based Services and workforce agencies to postsecondary institutions.
7. Facilitate training and information sharing among postsecondary, government, and nonprofit partners focused on outreach to target populations.
8. Communicate clear career pathways to prospective students aligned with in-demand labor market opportunities that lead to financial self-sufficiency and economic mobility.

Next steps

In partnership with Kentucky stakeholders, the KYSSC will move from strategic planning to strategy implementation. Immediate next steps include:

1. Communicate broadly with stakeholders to raise awareness about the SBNAN recommendations and opportunities.
2. Develop the coordinating infrastructure and implementation plan for the priority recommendations outlined in the report.
3. Identify funding sources to scale and sustain the work over the next three to five years.

Introduction

Most people would not guess that nearly three in five undergraduate students on U.S. campuses experience basic needs insecurity,[2] which means they lack access to stable sources of food, housing or other living or educational essentials, like affordable childcare or technology. At some point in their college careers, these students often face the difficult decision of paying for tuition or for basic necessities.

Basic needs insecurity unequivocally jeopardizes student success. Students who experience basic needs challenges are 15 times more likely to fail a course, and 25% will drop out or withdraw.[3] Among students who pause their education for financial reasons, less than 20% eventually graduate.[4] When students leave college with significant debt but no college credential, they find themselves further behind than when they started.

Despite the cost, a college credential remains one of the surest paths to economic stability, especially for students who are financially insecure. Individuals with low incomes are five times more likely to move out of poverty if they earn a college degree. In Kentucky, over 54,000 working-age adults earned a postsecondary credential between 2010 and 2019, and more than half of these adults experienced upward economic mobility.[5] Among students enrolled at KCTCS who received public benefits, more than 80% earned more than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level or continued their education within a year of graduating.

> *In Kentucky, over 54,000 working-age adults earned a postsecondary credential between 2010 and 2019, and more than half of these adults experienced upward economic mobility.*

The link between postsecondary attainment and per capita income is clear. States with a high percentage of college-educated residents have more robust economies and greater prosperity.

Because of this, the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) established a goal for 60% of the state's working-age population (25-64) to hold a postsecondary degree or credential by 2030, up from the current level of 54%.

While Kentucky is making progress toward the goal, we will not achieve it unless we enroll greater numbers of working-age adults, many of whom face significant economic challenges. Increasing postsecondary access and success for individuals from low-income backgrounds will be key to reaching the state's educational attainment goal and improving economic mobility for all Kentuckians. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to provide basic needs supports to our most vulnerable students, and to increase pathways from public assistance to postsecondary education.

The Kentucky Student Success Collaborative

To accelerate meaningful transformation around student success, CPE launched the Kentucky Student Success Collaborative, a first-of-its-kind statewide program to support increased degree completion.

The approach of the KYSSC is cross-sector collaborative action, which is based on the premise of "systemness." Because the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, we can accomplish more together than on our own. Through a structured process of collaboration, communication, and coordination, we accelerate our learning, scale our successes, and sustain our impact across stakeholders from education, government, nonprofit, and workforce agencies.

With financial support from Lumina Foundation, the KYSSC was able to elevate the conversation around student basic needs and build momentum for discovery research, partnership development, and strategic planning. KYSSC's participation in a Lumina Equity Audit focused on two primary objectives related to student basic needs: 1) increasing access to basic needs support for postsecondary students, and 2) increasing access to postsecondary education for individuals receiving state benefits, namely SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), KTAP (Kentucky Transitional Assistance Program), and CCAP (Childcare Assistance Program). The audit explored the accessibility, impact and outcomes of basic needs supports for Kentucky students, disaggregated by Pell-grant status, race/ethnicity, age and geographic region of the state.

Creating equitable conditions for all students to succeed, regardless of their circumstances, requires a deep understanding of the nonacademic barriers they face. To center equity in the design of the Student Basic Needs Project, the KYSSC identified the following equity guiding principles: center student voice in all conversations, invite diverse project teams to participate, check the cultural responsiveness of strategies, and disaggregate data by race, region, and income.
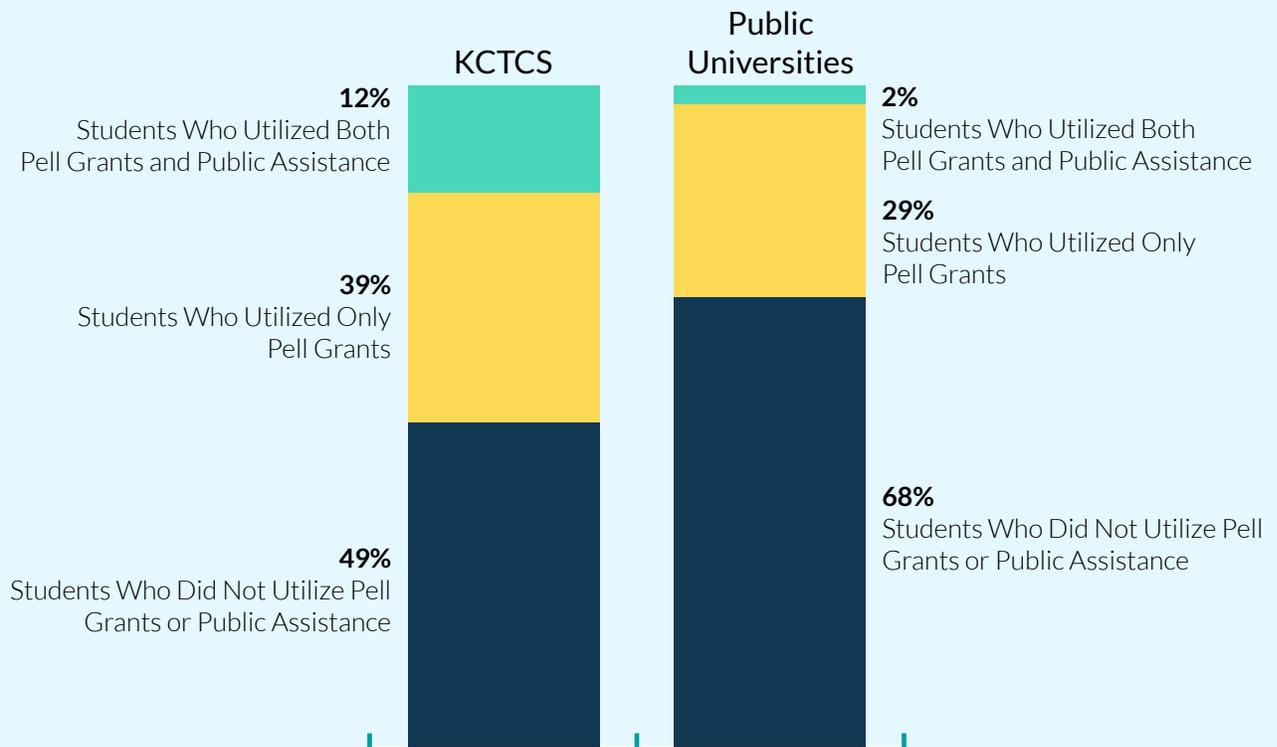
All guiding principles have been integrated into the Student Basic Needs Project design and approach in meaningful and intentional ways.

Key Facts: Kentucky's Students with Low Income

Approximately one out of three undergraduate students attending Kentucky's public institutions qualifies as low-income. Income status is determined by usage of Pell Grants, which are federally funded grant awards based on demonstrated financial need.

Distribution of Students Based on Utilization of Pell Grants or Public Benefits
2020-21 Academic Year

KCTCS

Public Universities

12%
Students Who Utilized Both Pell Grants and Public Assistance

39%
Students Who Utilized Only Pell Grants

49%
Students Who Did Not Utilize Pell Grants or Public Assistance

2%
Students Who Utilized Both Pell Grants and Public Assistance

29%
Students Who Utilized Only Pell Grants

68%
Students Who Did Not Utilize Pell Grants or Public Assistance

To learn more about Kentucky's postsecondary students, visit https://cpe.ky.gov/data/.
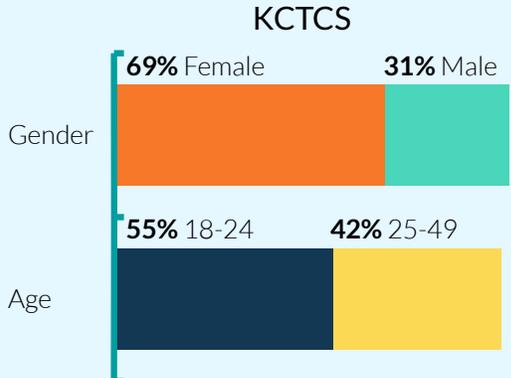
Demographics: Kentucky's Students with Low Income

Low-income students attending either KCTCS or Kentucky's public universities are predominantly white females. While the age of most low-income students attending public universities is 18-24, approximately half of low-income students attending KCTCS are between the ages of 25 and 49.
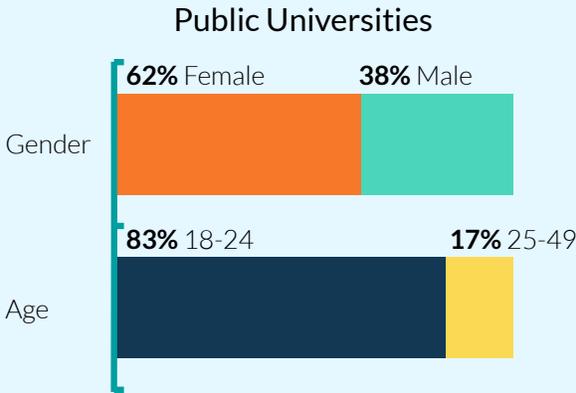
Race of Low-Income Students
2020-21 Academic Year

KCTCS

76% White

6% Other

12% Black

6% Hispanic

Public Universities

67% White

10% Other

17% Black

6% Hispanic
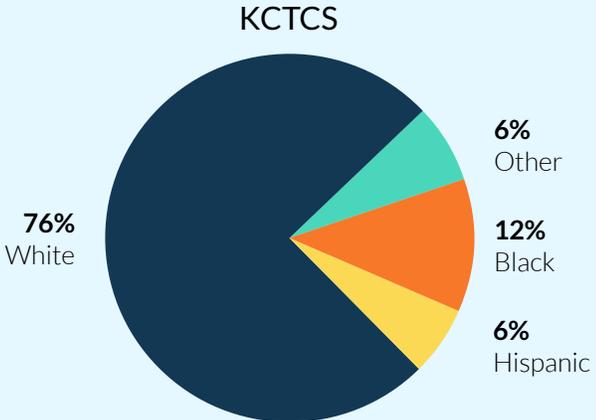
Gender and Age of Low-Income Students
2020-21 Academic Year

KCTCS

69% Female   **31%** Male

Gender

55% 18-24   **42%** 25-49

Age

Public Universities

62% Female   **38%** Male

Gender

83% 18-24   **17%** 25-49

Age
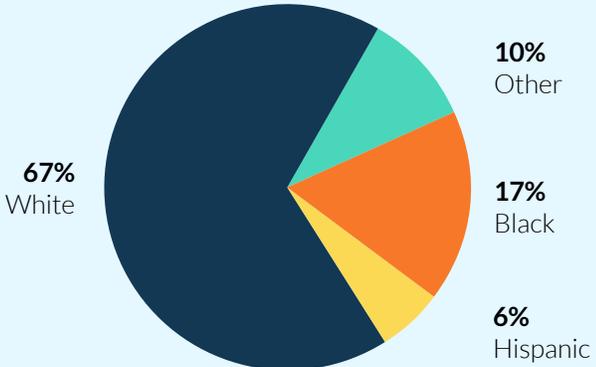
(Note: Ages under 17 and above 49 are less than 1%.)

Key Facts: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, provides funds to low-income families to supplement their grocery budget so they can afford the nutritious food essential to health and well-being.

Household Size	Annual Income	Monthly Benefit	Total Annual Benefit
1	≤ $29,160	$281	$3,372
2	≤ $39,440	$516	$6,192
3	≤ $49,720	$740	$8,880
4	≤ $60,000	$939	$11,276

Recipient Demographics

✳ 92% have less than an associate degree and are not currently enrolled in postsecondary education.

✳ Over 70,000 (or 34%) of recipients age 18-49 are considered "able-bodied-adults-without-dependents" and have employment requirements to maintain benefits.

Recipient Eligibility

To qualify, a postsecondary student must be enrolled at least half-time and meet at least one exemption, which includes but are not limited to the following:

✳ Employment: Work at least 20 hours a week in paid employment or participate in a federally financed work study or on-the-job training program.

✳ Enrollment: Enroll in a KCTCS program that cannot transfer to a four-year degree program and agree to participate in the SNAP E&T program.

✳ Childcare: Care for a child under age 6, or care for a child age 6 to 11 but have no means for childcare while satisfying the minimum work/study criteria above, or care for a child under 12 and are a single parent enrolled full-time in college.

✳ Other considerations: Be under age 18 or over age 50 or have a physical disability.

To learn more about Kentucky's SNAP program, visit kynect.ky.gov/benefits/s/snap-program.

Key Facts: Kentucky Transitional Assistance Program

The Kentucky Transitional Assistance Program (KTAP) is a monetary assistance program that provides financial support for up to five years (60 months) to eligible families with dependents and helps adults find jobs and job training.

Household Size	Annual Income	Monthly Benefit	Total Annual Benefit
1	≤ $10,680	$372	$4,464
2	≤ $12,252	$450	$5,400
3	≤ $14,028	$524	$6,288
4	≤ $15,780	$656	$7,872

Recipient Demographics

* In 2022, over 10,000 families received KTAP support, including 3,400 adults and 17,000 children.
* 89% of adult recipients were work-eligible and participated in the Kentucky Works Program (KWP), which includes postsecondary education as an eligible activity.
* Approximately 650 KTAP clients were enrolled in the KCTCS Ready to Work program during the 2022-23 fiscal year, representing 21% of the work-eligible KTAP population.

Recipient Eligibility

To qualify, an applicant must be low income,[6] a Kentucky resident, U.S. citizen or qualified immigrant, and a parent/caretaker relative responsible for children up to age 18.

To learn more about Kentucky's KTAP program, visit kynect.ky.gov/benefits/s/ktap-program.

Key Facts: Child Care Assistance Program

The Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) provides support to help families pay for childcare.

CCAP allotments vary by county, age of child and childcare provider type.[7] Families are responsible for a co-pay based on income and family size.

Recipient Demographics

In 2023, 36,714 children were served to allow low-income parents to work or participate in an education or training program, 4,808 children were served through prevention or protection services, and 287 were teen parents.

Recipient Eligibility

To qualify for CCAP, a family must meet income guidelines and have a child under the age of 13 (age exempted if the child has special needs).

Parent(s) must also be employed (20 hrs. single parent or 40 hrs. per couple) or meet one of the following:

* Unemployed, but participating in job search.
* Teen parent attending school or pursuing GED.
* Participating in full-time education in a certified trade school or accredited college.
* Participating in SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T).

To learn more about Kentucky's CCAP program, visit kynect.ky.gov/benefits/s/child-care-program.

Student Basic Needs Project

Overview

The project included two phases: a discovery phase and a strategy development phase.

In the discovery phase, several projects were undertaken to develop a comprehensive understanding of student basic needs, including:

1. A data project conducted with the Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS) to analyze postsecondary students receiving state benefits.

2. A campus voice research project designed by Kentucky faculty members to determine the availability and effectiveness of campus basic needs programs.

3. A public benefit policy scan and interviews with diverse stakeholders conducted by The Institute for College Access and Success (TICAS).

In the second phase, a diverse stakeholder group, the Student Basic Needs Action Network (SBNAN), was convened to synthesize knowledge gained through three discovery projects and develop a statewide action plan for collaborative work moving forward.

The discovery projects reinforced two key findings:

▶ **Resource gaps exist for every student group that struggles with basic needs security and is not connected to public benefits, campus support services, or community resources to meet their basic needs.**

These resource gaps are inequitable because they disproportionately impact students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, adult students, and students in eastern Kentucky. Students with basic needs insecurity have lower postsecondary retention and completion rates compared to students whose basic needs are met.

Proactive and pervasive information, resources, and support are essential to help meet the basic needs of students.

▶ **There is a need for continued and enhanced collaboration across state agencies, community-based organizations, and postsecondary institutions to share data and information, co-create policy, provide training, connect community resources, and promote postsecondary opportunities.**

The state has significant resources at its disposal that can be leveraged to achieve the project objectives that are presently not well aligned or communicated. Enhanced collaboration among these entities is key to increasing basic needs support for students and increasing access to postsecondary education for individuals receiving state support.

Discovery Project Component 1: KYSTATS Data Project

Kentucky is a national leader in integrated, longitudinal data systems. KYSTATS links databases across state agencies to evaluate education and workforce efforts in the Commonwealth, including K-12, postsecondary, workforce, and community-based services. Through this data system, KYSTATS can provide a comprehensive view of postsecondary access, success, and completion, as well as employment outcomes of students and clients disaggregated by race, region, age, and income. Continued engagement with KYSTATS will ensure high-impact projects demonstrate improved employment and earnings outcomes for program participants.
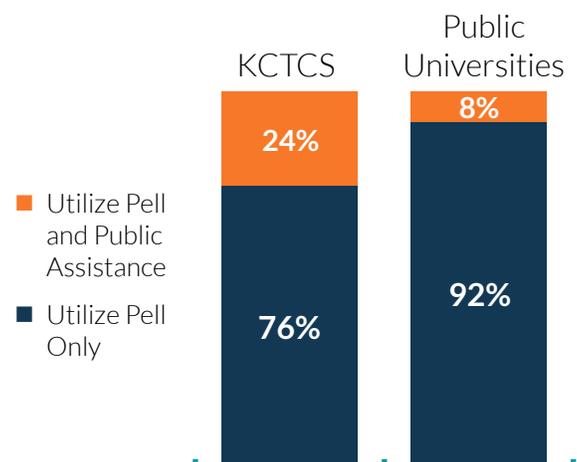
KYSTATS analyzed enrollment for the Student Basic Needs Project included enrollment, retention and completion outcomes for students at public colleges and universities, disaggregated by benefit recipient status, race, age, and institution.

Key findings include:

▶ **There are opportunities to increase access to public benefits for eligible students not receiving SNAP.**

Only 24% of students who receive Pell grants at KCTCS also receive public benefits. At our public universities, only 8% of students who receive Pell grants receive public benefits. While not all Pell recipients will meet SNAP eligibility requirements, there is an opportunity to incorporate eligibility screening and outreach to Pell recipients to reduce food insecurity and financial instability.

Pell Recipients Utilizing Public Benefits

KCTCS — Public Universities

- Utilize Pell and Public Assistance
- Utilize Pell Only

KCTCS: 24% / 76%
Public Universities: 8% / 92%

▶ **National research from the Hope Center indicates that students of color are more likely to face basic needs insecurity and are also less likely to seek support than their white counterparts with similar challenges.**[8]

In Kentucky, 47% of students of color receive Pell grants, compared to 33% of white students.

When we control for Pell status and disaggregate benefit recipients by race, we find that underrepresented minoritized (URM) students at both KCTCS and public universities receive benefits at slightly higher rates than non-URM students.

At KCTCS, 25% of Pell URM students receive benefits, compared to 23% of Pell non-URM students. At public universities, 10% of Pell URM students receive benefits, compared to 7% of Pell non-URM students.

In both instances, Black students with Pell have the highest participation rates in benefit programs (30% at KCTCS and 12% at public universities).

At KCTCS, Hispanic students with Pell are slightly underrepresented among benefit recipients compared to white students (23% of white students and 18% of Hispanic students receiving Pell also receive benefits).

While it is good news that we do not see gaps in benefit participation by race, we do recognize that all Pell recipients are underutilizing public benefits.

Pell Recipients by Race

URM — Non-URM

- Utilize Pell
- Do Not Utilize Pell

URM: 47% / 53%
Non-URM: 33% / 67%
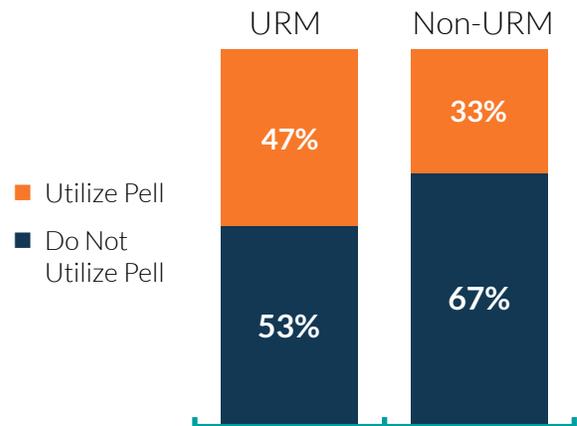
Underrepresented minority student
Someone whose racial or ethnic makeup is from one of the following: American Indian, Alaskan Native, Black, Hispanic or Latino (regardless of race), Native Hawaiian, Other Pacific Islander, or two or more races.
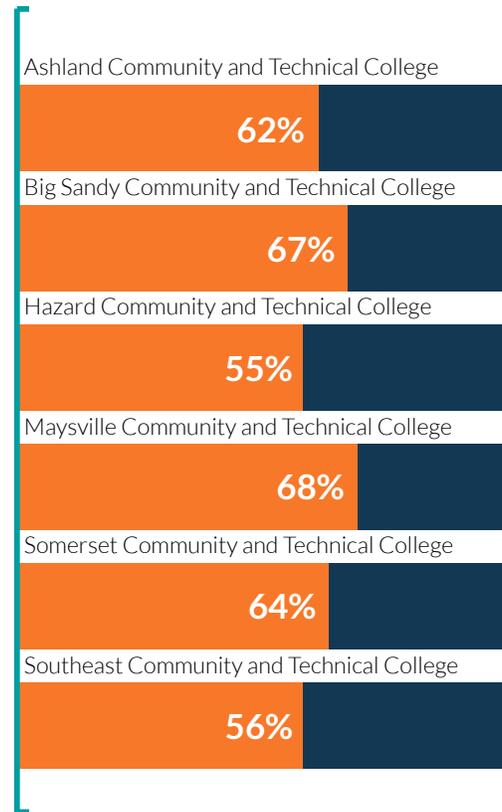
Pell Recipients
Utilizing Public Benefits By Race

KCTCS
Pell URM — 25%
Pell Non-URM — 23%

Public Universities
Pell URM — 10%
Pell Non-URM — 7%
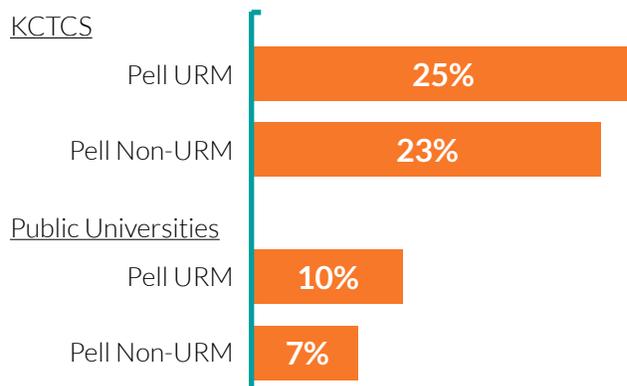
▶ **Eastern Kentucky is the poorest region in the state, with 25% of the population living in poverty compared to 16% of Kentucky's population overall.**

We looked specifically at KCTCS institutions serving eastern Kentucky. At these institutions, an average of 62% of students receive Pell grants, and 31% of Pell recipients receive benefits. Across all KCTCS colleges, 51% of students receive a Pell grant and 24% of Pell recipients also receive public benefits. Supporting institutions that serve higher proportions of students from low-income backgrounds is especially important to meeting regional workforce needs and increasing economic mobility among Appalachian students.
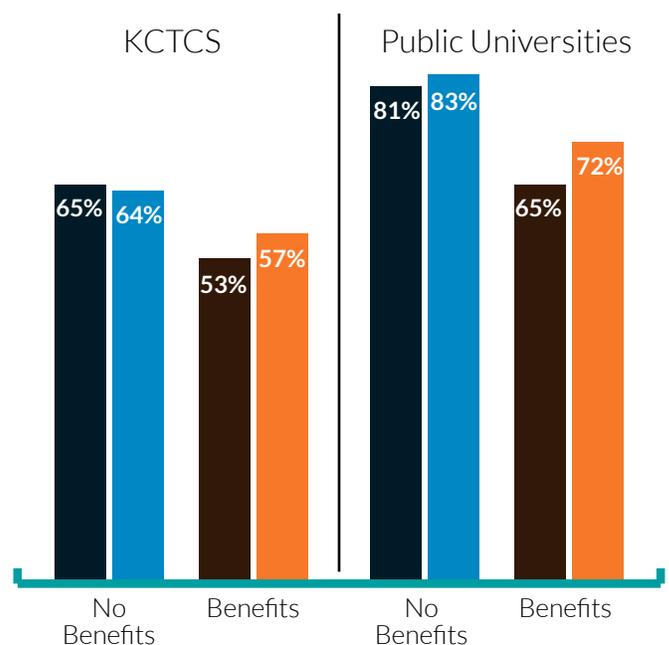
Students Receiving Pell Grants in Eastern Kentucky by KCTCS Institution

Ashland Community and Technical College
62%

Big Sandy Community and Technical College
67%

Hazard Community and Technical College
55%

Maysville Community and Technical College
68%

Somerset Community and Technical College
64%

Southeast Community and Technical College
56%

▶ **Significant gains in first-year to second-year retention have been made for students receiving public benefits over the past four years.**

While retention of non-benefit recipients increased by two percentage points at public universities, retention among students receiving benefits increased by seven percentage points. At KCTCS, retention declined by one percentage point among students not receiving benefits but increased by four percentage points among students receiving benefits. While a gap in retention still exists between students receiving benefits and those who do not, the gap is closing.

Change in First-to-Second Year Retention by Benefits Participation, 2017 - 2021

KCTCS | Public Universities

KCTCS:
No Benefits: 65%, 64%
Benefits: 53%, 57%

Public Universities:
No Benefits: 81%, 83%
Benefits: 65%, 72%

While first-to-second-year retention among Pell students receiving benefits shows some promising trends, completion data highlights significant gaps.

Benefit enrollment data and postsecondary enrollment data were connected starting in fall 2017. The dataset provides completions of bachelor's and associate degrees through academic year 2020-2021.

Of the fall 2017 starting cohort at public universities, 51% of students not receiving Pell or SNAP completed a bachelor's degree within four years. In comparison, 34% of students who received Pell but did not receive SNAP and 27% of students who received both Pell and SNAP completed a bachelor's degree in the same amount of time.

For the KCTCS fall 2017 starting cohort, we see a similar trend. 52% of students without Pell or SNAP completed an associate degree within four years compared to 43% of students who received Pell and not SNAP and 34% of students who received both Pell and SNAP.

These completion gaps demonstrate the importance of increasing access to basic needs supports among students with low income as they are at a much higher risk of not completing than their peers.

Four-Year Degree Completion Rates for Kentucky Students by Benefits Participation

KCTCS: Completion of an Associate Degree in Four Years

No Pell/Benefits	Pell	Pell and Benefits
52%	43%	34%

Public Universities: Completion of a Bachelor's Degree in Four Years

No Pell/Benefits	Pell	Pell and Benefits
51%	34%	27%

Retention Rate
This metric captures the percentage of first-time, degree or credential-seeking students enrolled in the previous summer or fall who are still enrolled the following fall or, in the case of KCTCS students, have successfully completed a credential.

Completion Rate
First-time, full-time, degree-seeking students entering in the fall semester (or entering in the summer and continuing in the fall), who graduate with an associate degree/credential or a bachelor's degree within four years of entry.

To learn more about students experiencing basic needs insecurity, visit the KYSSC website at kystudentsuccess.org/basic-needs/.

↗ **Supporting Student Basic Needs**

More than half of all college students struggle to have their basic needs met. Forcing them to choose between their educational goals and paying their bills.

▶ **In a separate data project, KYSTATS explored employment and earnings outcomes for KCTCS graduates who received SNAP and found strong economic potential.**

More than 80% of SNAP clients who earned a KCTCS credential in academic year 2021 were either re-enrolled in a KCTCS program or were employed a year later with median earnings at least 200% above the Federal Poverty Level for an individual.

Additional analysis exploring degree completion and earnings among low-income students attending public universities is also warranted, as bachelor's degrees lead to significant gains in economic mobility for graduates.

KCTCS Employment and Enrollment Outcomes Within One Year of Graduation for Students Receiving SNAP Benefits

80%
Re-enrolled or Employed in a Job Paying a Living Wage
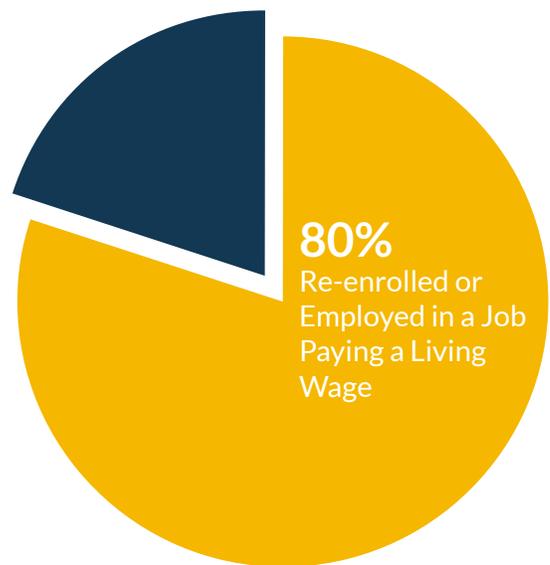
The data inquiry and analysis led by KYSTATS helped us better understand our student population and opportunities to increase access to basic needs supports for these students. It also documented the effectiveness of postsecondary programs in providing pathways out of poverty and toward prosperity.

Discovery Project Component 2: Campus Voice Research Project

To ensure the student voice and experience was centered in the project, faculty researchers from three Kentucky universities designed an Institutional Review Board (IRB)-approved study to document basic needs services on postsecondary websites, as well as better understand awareness and access of services from both the student and administrator point of view.

Members of the research team spoke with over 26 administrators and 50 students from nine participating institutions. Demographic representation of students participating in the focus groups included: 33% students of color, 63% female students, and 37% students ages 25 or above. The overall student population in Kentucky is 20% students of color, 58% female students, and 25% students aged 25 or above.

Key findings include:

▶ **Students usually seek help from college or university staff and faculty to meet their basic needs when they are already in crisis.**

Both administrators and students report that students frequently search for information about housing assistance, food resources, or emergency financial aid reactively rather than proactively. This means that students are usually reaching out to individuals they already know rather than gaining a more holistic understanding of college and university services. And, in some cases, these points-of-contact for students may not be aware of the full array of resources available and/or have inaccurate information about those resources or services.

▶ **When students do look online, the information that is available about basic needs services or resources is often inconsistent with the realities of service provision.**

In some cases, there were more services available than indicated online. For instance, eight partner institutions' websites listed a food bank or pantry but, in many instances, the food bank/pantry provided more than fresh and non-perishable food (e.g., home goods and personal hygiene products). In other instances, there were fewer services offered by the campus itself than appeared online. For example, one campus website suggested that childcare was available and provided by the institution itself when campus representatives were directing students to off-campus childcare options.

▶ **Administrators and students are interested in coupling campus-based service provision with resources that are available through the state government and/or local community-based organizations.**

Across campuses, students reported wanting more help from campus officials to figure out how they might be able to access safety net benefits (e.g., housing vouchers or SNAP). Administrators, too, are interested in partnerships with local organizations, although they are limited by the ecosystem of supports that exist in their geographic region. This is especially a challenge for campuses located in more rural areas.

The findings and recommendations developed through the Campus Voice Research Project highlight the importance of communication with students regarding resource availability; resource training for campus faculty, staff, and administrators who may be a student's preferred point of contact; and enhanced partnerships with community-based organizations and state agencies to expand support available to students. Faculty researchers will continue to analyze the data and findings to produce academic literature from this research.

Discovery Project Component 3: Policy Scan and Stakeholder Interviews

The Institute for College Access and Success (TICAS), a national leader in anti-poverty and basic needs security, conducted a policy scan and a series of interviews with diverse stakeholders to understand the underlying challenges and opportunities to advance project objectives.

TICAS has conducted public benefit policy scans in many other states, which serve as examples of different approaches to and interpretations of federal guidelines. States have significant opportunities to leverage federal flexibility to prioritize postsecondary education in eligible work requirements and to coordinate with institutions as part of the state's public benefit programmatic and workforce development goals. However, state administration offices often face funding shortages, capacity limitations, and high turnover that impacts their ability to administer state programs.

The policy scan focused on SNAP, KTAP, and CCAP. It found that Kentucky is successfully leveraging many policies and state options, but opportunities exist to better connect these programs to postsecondary credential attainment in Kentucky.

Key findings include:

▶ **States can expand the reach of SNAP by classifying more academic programs at community and technical colleges as SNAP eligible activities.**

Massachusetts utilizes this more inclusive approach to support their workforce development goals.[9] Oregon allows students to explain and justify the economic value of their chosen postsecondary program to reduce burdensome administrative processes. Several states have also created streamlined student verification forms[10] and published eligibility guidance[11] to allow for consistency across workers and provide a resource for external organizations to understand and interpret state eligibility. Such opportunities exist across the three primary programs: SNAP, KTAP, and CCAP.

▶ **States can also use their state plans to establish policy priorities. The state plan is the guiding document between the state and the federal government that describes how the SNAP program will be administered.**

Federal law sets broad eligibility requirements for the programs and mandates coverage of benefits, while leaving many options for implementation up to the state. States make many operational and policy decisions that determine eligibility, services, priorities, and partnerships. States specify the nature and scope of their programs, which are then approved by the relevant federal agency. State plans can be amended as needed to reflect changes in state policy and federal law and regulations. The state plan is a prime opportunity to expand work requirements to include enrollment in postsecondary programs, which will improve participants' long-term self-sufficiency and economic stability.

Following the policy scan, TICAS reached out to key stakeholders across the Commonwealth to learn more about the implementation of policy and programs. Stakeholders who

participated in interviews represented postsecondary institutions, the Kentucky Department for Community Based Services, public benefit intermediaries, and community organizations. TICAS asked interviewees a set of questions that covered their organizational activities, responsibilities in their role, efforts to connect the populations they serve to postsecondary education, and ways to improve equity, partnerships, and programmatic alignment in the state. The interviews focused on the SNAP Employment and Training program. SNAP E&T is open to all those deemed appropriate for the program, which can include Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) "Subject to Time" as well as non-ABAWDs. ABAWD's Subject to Time have a work requirement. The work requirement can be fulfilled by participating in a SNAP E&T activity such as a KCTCS technical program, employment, or volunteering.

Key findings include:

▶ **Stakeholders agreed that clearer guidance and more aligned partnerships with postsecondary institutions would be beneficial to the state. There was interest from stakeholders in continuing these conversations.**

▶ **Stakeholders shared some skepticism or lack of understanding about how the SNAP E&T program can be used to support SNAP recipients broadly and within postsecondary education. Further exploration of barriers and opportunities is needed.**

▶ **Overall, benefit program work requirements de-emphasize postsecondary education, both in terms of prioritizing partnerships with postsecondary institutions and in the activities in which clients are placed. This partly stems from federal and state goals in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs that prioritize work over education.**

▶ **Postsecondary institutions identified issues in receiving referrals for postsecondary enrollment from SNAP E&T intermediaries, including the complexity of the postsecondary enrollment process and an incentive for E&T providers to refer SNAP E&T clients to their own services.**

▶ **There is a general lack of information shared or included in client assessments that would help clients learn about postsecondary programs and services.**

The findings and recommendations from the policy scan and stakeholder interviews illuminated the importance of continued communication, relationship building, and information sharing to strengthen partnerships and programs for ultimate student and client success.

Strategy Development Phase

Student Basic Needs Action Network

The Student Basic Needs Action Network convened from January through May 2023, with a goal of developing a statewide plan with recommendations for advancing postsecondary attainment and economic mobility for low-income Kentuckians. The group was comprised of 53 stakeholders representing state agencies, nonprofit organizations, community colleges, public and private universities, workforce investment boards, and other critical education stakeholders.

The group was racially and regionally diverse and included many representatives who provide direct support to students and individuals from low-income backgrounds. Several Student Voice Interns with the KYSSC were invited to participate in Action Network meetings as a part of their paid internship, but these students had limited availability.

The Action Network followed a structured process for collaborative action developed by CivicLab, a national nonprofit organization focused on cross-sector partnerships to address complex social issues. Meetings consisted of presentations from partners leading the discovery components of the work and facilitated discussions around priorities and critical success factors needed to achieve the project's two objectives.

Ultimately, the Action Network identified eight priority recommendations and five critical success factors to advance basic needs security for Kentucky postsecondary students.

Become active in the KYSSC's groups by joining our open events. Our calendar and registration opportunities are available on our website, kystudentsuccess.org.

Priority Recommendations and Rationale

Objective 1: Increase access to basic needs support for postsecondary students.

Recommendation 1: Implement basic needs screening and benefits eligibility screening for students.

One of the greatest challenges colleges and universities face is finding and connecting students to resources in an emergency. When students reach out, they often are in crisis or facing a decision that could derail or delay their educational progress. Proactively screening students for basic needs and wellness security can help identify students who may benefit from additional support before concerns turn into crises.

Recommendation 2: Review state public benefit plans and programs to increase eligibility and flexibility for postsecondary students.

In addition to the Action Network meetings, KYSSC and TICAS met with leaders from DCBS to discuss the policy scan findings and recommendations. Overall, the goals of DCBS public benefit programs are aligned with recommendations to create conditions that encourage postsecondary education as a high-impact path to financial self-sufficiency and reduce barriers to benefit program participation for eligible students.

TICAS identified additional opportunities to strengthen partnerships between DCBS and postsecondary institutions. DCBS leaders expressed a commitment to ensure maximum flexibility for student populations, and whenever possible, postsecondary education will be incorporated in future Kentucky state plans.

Recommendation 3: Increase staff capacity of colleges and universities to provide basic needs support to students.

Through the Campus Voice Research Project, a significant finding emerged. Among the 48 Kentucky higher education institutions included in the asset map, only one had a dedicated coordinator for basic needs support, who served over 20,000 students. Increasing the human capacity to effectively serve students from low-income backgrounds is a top priority. Through partnership discussions with the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, the state has committed to placing a full-time kynector on college campuses to conduct outreach and education about public assistance programs; assist with applications for Medicaid, SNAP and childcare assistance; and make referrals for services in the community. Other partners, such as the Family Scholar House, will continue to work with colleges and universities to enhance capacity and develop a robust ecosystem of support.

Recommendation 4: Provide training and ongoing professional development for college and university staff and faculty to provide accurate information and consistent support to students.

The Campus Voice Research Project found that when in crisis, students reach out to a trusted staff or faculty member. However, many staff and faculty members do not feel well equipped to address concerns related to basic needs insecurities. Through the convening of the SBNAN, it became clear that stakeholders are willing and able to educate one another about the policies, processes, and resources that exist in the Commonwealth and on campus. However, there is currently no formal mechanism by which to do so. To ensure students receive accurate information quickly, ongoing professional development should be available to all staff and faculty engaging with students.

Objective 2: Increase access to postsecondary education for Kentuckians receiving public benefits.

Recommendation 5: Explore and identify solutions to alleviate the lack of childcare availability and affordability.

Many Kentuckians receiving public benefits are supporting families, and roughly one in five students is a parent. Caregiving responsibilities and the availability/affordability of childcare are significant barriers to enrollment and persistence in postsecondary education.[12] While CCAP provides financial support to full-time students, many individuals in need of childcare may not qualify for CCAP. Additionally, many families eligible for the CCAP benefit face issues identifying a local childcare provider that is licensed and has the capacity to enroll new children. A root cause of the limited childcare availability in Kentucky is the lack of workforce. Addressing these workforce shortages will be critical to increasing available childcare providers and thereby increasing access to postsecondary education.

Recommendation 6: Explore models and incentives to increase direct referrals from the Kentucky Department for Community Based Services and workforce agencies to postsecondary institutions.

As we discovered through stakeholder interviews and the policy scan, Kentucky's current model for SNAP E&T does not often lead to referrals to postsecondary education programs. Through in-depth discussion, the SBNAN identified several informational gaps, process barriers, and partnership opportunities to guide clients toward education and training opportunities that will allow them to achieve their career goals and increase their earnings. Through ongoing support from TICAS, partners will learn about models that have been effective in other states to increase participation in SNAP E&T in postsecondary programs and identify the best approach for Kentucky.

Recommendation 7: Facilitate training and information sharing among postsecondary, government, and nonprofit partners focused on outreach to target populations.

Like students, Kentuckians receiving public benefits often reach out to the person they know and trust when a question arises about accessing information or services. It will be critical to establish a mechanism for cross-training and sharing information and resources for the postsecondary process (application, financial aid, program registration, etc.) and the public benefit process (eligibility, enrollment, and compliance requirements, etc.). Structured networking and cross-training opportunities need to be offered to connect partners and better serve Kentuckians in need.

Recommendation 8: Communicate clear career pathways aligned to in-demand labor market opportunities that lead to financial self-sufficiency and economic mobility.

While data continue to show that postsecondary degrees and credentials pay off in the long run, many adults struggle with the immediate logistics and upfront costs needed to access postsecondary education. Because most adult learners work while attaining a degree or credential, it is critical to connect students to employers that provide tuition assistance, flexible and predictable scheduling, and other benefits. Connecting resources and opportunities across community service providers, postsecondary partners, and employers will be key to streamlining processes, increasing support, and promoting in-demand pathways to improve the financial stability and prosperity of Kentuckians.

Critical Success Factors

The priority recommendations put forward by the SBNAN were a direct result of the findings of the discovery projects and discussion among partners in the SBNAN around common and persistent challenges. Priority recommendations focus on what partners think Kentucky should address first to advance the objectives. Next, partners identified the critical success factors to ensure sustainability and scalability of the strategies. Critical success factors focused on how to organize and operate to achieve the priority recommendations. The critical

success factors needed for each priority recommendation were discussed individually, but after the notes were reviewed, clear themes emerged. The critical success factors essential to the success of all priority recommendations are commitment, infrastructure, asset mapping, communications, and data.

Critical Success Factors include:

▲ Ongoing institutional and organizational leadership awareness, engagement, and commitment to the common objective of increasing the prosperity and economic mobility of Kentuckians through dedicated time and resources.

▲ Adequate infrastructure for the Student Basic Needs Network and Guiding Team to sustain partnerships, scale strategies, and accelerate progress and success toward achieving the common objectives.

▲ A comprehensive and exhaustive asset map of statewide partners, programs, capacity, and resources to maximize the collective assets for the benefit of Kentuckians.

▲ A communication plan and media kit to advance common objectives, including suggested website content, communications expectations, timelines, protocols, and digital assets for all partners.

▲ Data to track inputs, impact, and outcomes of efforts to increase postsecondary completion and economic mobility.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The Student Basic Needs Action Network has energized an incredible group of stakeholders and leaders across the Commonwealth. The KYSSC is grateful for their participation and thought leadership, and we are eager to move forward with their continued support and engagement. Some immediate next steps include:

✳ The KYSSC will identify and convene a Student Basic Needs Guiding Team to provide leadership and cross-agency communications as the work progresses.

✳ TICAS will continue to support implementation of the recommendations and critical success factors.

✳ The SBNAN will evolve into work groups focused on specific topics (e.g., childcare) and a community of practice open to all providing professional development, training, and networking opportunities across campuses and organizations.

✳ Kentucky has been selected to participate in a technical assistance program led by the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education for student basic needs. KYSSC will leverage the technical assistance and support available through this network.

✳ The KYSSC and other partners will connect with state and national organizations and funders to build the resource and human capacity needed for success.

About the Kentucky Student Basic Needs Action Network

The Student Basic Needs Action Network, convened by CPE's Kentucky Student Success Collaborative, is a group of stakeholders seeking to understand student basic needs services, processes, policies, and experience focusing on food security, housing security, and financial stability at diverse college and university campuses in Kentucky.

Kristie Adams, Family Scholar House

Tonya Arnett, Maysville Community and Technical College

Matt Berry, Kentucky Center for Statistics

Brigitte Blom, Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence

Kim Boyd-Lane, Goodwill Industries of Kentucky

Sarah Brady, Family Scholar House

Phyllis Clark, Kentucky Student Success Collaborative

Richard Davis, Jefferson Community and Technical College

Lesa Dennis, Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services

Cathe Dykstra, Family Scholar House

Correy Eimer, Northern Kentucky Area Development District

Erica Farmer, Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College

Bobbi Frye, Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services

Natalie Gibson, Kentucky Community and Technical College System

Dan Gillum, Big Sandy Area Development District

John Gregory, Kentucky Office of Adult Education

Malesha Griffin, Jefferson Community and Technical College

Jake Gross, University of Louisville

Shannon Hall, Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services

Abbigail Hickey, Eastern Kentucky University

Arion Jett-Seals, University of Kentucky

Amanda Johannsen, Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education

Sydney Jones, Eastern Kentucky University

Shauna King-Simms, Kentucky Community and Technical College System

Jessica Klein, Kentucky Center for Economic Policy

Rae Loftis, Eastern Kentucky University

Lilly Massa-McKinley, Kentucky Student Success Collaborative

Leslie Maxie, Bellarmine University

Zitsi Mirakhur, University of Kentucky

Travis Muncie, Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education

LeAnn Myrick, Maysville Community and Technical College

Lee Nimocks, Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education

Tyler Offerman, Kentucky Equal Justice Center

Dawn Offutt, Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education

Dee Parker, Morehead State University

Susan Rieber, Office of the Lieutenant Governor

Stephanie Saulnier, Eastern Kentucky University

Rich Seckel, Kentucky Equal Justice Center

Clarizza Singayao, Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services

Arnie Slaughter, Northern Kentucky University

Ann Smith, Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services

Jennifer Smith, Murray State University

Sarah Stephens, Bellarmine University

Delaney Stephens, Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence

Sherry Tinsley, Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College

Barb Tipmore, Owensboro Community and Technical College

Todd Trapp, Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services

Carrie Welton, The Institute for College Access and Success

Peggy Whaley, Murray State University

Tommy Wheatley, Central Kentucky Community Action Council

Lorraine Wilbur, Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services - Foster Youth Program

Angella Wilson, KentuckianaWorks

Heather Yeiser, Audubon Area Community Services

Endnotes

1   https://www.luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/real-college-2021.pdf

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