

### **Special Section: Kentucky Skills U (KYSU) and COVID-19 Pandemic FY19-20**

Besides the COVID-19 pandemic, KYSU experienced multiple transitions throughout the fiscal year, including: a reorganization and restructuring, by Executive Order, from the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) to the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet (EWDC), a physical relocation, a State administration change (including political affiliation), and significant staff changes, notably the retirement of its long-tenured Executive Director. Obviously, the most significant and farthest-reaching impact for KYSU local providers and their students was the pandemic. Elements of that impact are described below.

**Program Administration and Accountability (PAA):** As the COVID-19 pandemic evolved, staff and student safety and protection were paramount, including adherence to federal, state, and local guidance. Communications from state-level KYSU staff underscored the importance of following state and local fiscal agent guidance on shutdowns, personal protective equipment (PPE), social distancing, and any other directives related to safety and stanching the spread of the virus.

As a result of the challenges and adjustments necessary due to the pandemic crisis, which began in full in mid-March 2020, local KYSU providers did not receive from KYSU, nor were they able to offer, usual and customary services. Adaptations were required and implemented quickly. Continuing services with existing students and the eventuality of reaching new students were not without their challenges, including full implementation of distance learning and instructional strategies and addressing barriers to access, e.g., inadequate technology, digital skills (both instructor and student), Internet access, and bandwidth.

Due to State and Federal mandates, KYSU providers were shut down from March 15, 2020 – June 30, 2020. Program directors were required to submit *Contingency Plans* indicating how instruction and instructional strategies would be modified to serve students during suspended services. Each local program directors' *Contingency Plan* served as a continuity service plan, outlining activities to continue both academic and support services as the crisis evolved. The plans included staffing allocations, hours of operation, use of distance learning platform(s) and instructional resources, expectations for re-opening, and revised strategies to support students during the pandemic. Additionally, as learning centers began reopening, the PAA team conducted a KYSU COVID-19 *Re-opening Impact Survey* to encourage well thought-out service plans, including the deployment of safety, PPE, and social distancing precautions. KYSU also shared *Instructional Technology Frameworks* with local program directors for ideas and instructions on how to use technology to overcome challenges related to distance learning.

The PAA team also released several guidance letters to the field to address OCTAE updates from Program Memorandums 20-3 and 20-4, adjustments to the FY19-20 KYSU performance funding model, instructions to Data Recognition Corporation's (DRC) remote testing opportunities, and test assessment and enrollment guidance. Additional guidance was provided to local program directors via webinars, FAQs, and in-demand technical assistance. Guidance letters and supporting resources were uploaded to KAERS' State Resources repository. All webinars were recorded and shared with local program directors. To maintain consistency with monitoring and compliance, the PAA team continued to conduct bi-monthly phone calls, evaluated performance outcomes weekly, and produced monthly *Distance Learning Reports* to examine attendance, distance learning hours, and digital courseware curricula usage (i.e., Burlington English, AZTEC, etc.). As KYSU works to identify best practices to support students and local providers under the ongoing COVID-19 circumstances, the PAA team endeavors to provide timely, targeted technical assistance, program compliance, and performance monitoring in FY20-21.

**College and Career Preparation (CCP):** Swift action was necessary to expedite effective use of instructional technology and remote learning. During the crisis period, KYSU CCP team offered 25 virtual professional learning (PL) sessions to the local provider network intended to assist them in navigating remote instruction. These sessions included an initial, comprehensive distance learning webinar, twelve Microlearning Monday sessions focused on building targeted skills necessary for remote instruction, and twelve follow-up Workshop Wednesday sessions that allowed providers to engage in virtual, sandbox-style forums for practicing skills learned in Microlearning Monday sessions.

These weekly sessions were combined with a digital newsletter to reinforce learning and provide resources to recorded sessions/events. CCP's response to intervention (RTI) approach received national attention as a state-level best practices model, and their professional learning efforts were featured in GED Testing Service™'s *Tuesdays for Teachers* webinar series. Furthermore, CCP staff facilitated a national World Ed *Distance Learning Strategy Session*, for which they were honored as "Team Contributor of the Year" by Network Resources Open College & Career (NROC) at the 2020 Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE) National Conference.

Unfortunately, several planned provider innovations (particularly related to Innovation Fund Proposals that are described below) were delayed or revised due to the pandemic. Even though PL services were in high gear, many program directors and instructors reported having to alter their plans for innovation and embrace of instructional technology due to pandemic-related obstacles. Even purchases of technology were delayed or

approvals declined in response to a lack of availability due to high demands for related products. Therefore, the intent is to harness the momentum caused by the pandemic to continue improvements in and implementation of instructional technology and remote/distance learning innovations.

Despite earning accolades for pandemic-driven PL interventions and making attempts at maintaining continuity, KYSU's local provider network reported that adult learners were particularly reticent about engaging in remote instruction and required significant digital literacy upskilling in advance of academic instruction. These challenges were compounded by the realities of Kentucky's digital divide, stymying providers and students because of inadequacies related to technology, Internet access, and bandwidth.

**College and Career Navigation (CCN):** The COVID-19 pandemic also presented challenges for CCNs and their students. With rapidly shifting priorities – including childcare, supporting transitions to online instruction for their children, underemployment, and/or unemployment – recruiting, engaging, and retaining students has proven difficult at best. To complicate matters, limited access to technology, unreliable or non-existent Internet connectivity, and lack of digital skills have hindered relationship building and educational and workforce goal setting. Anxiety, depression, unreliable transportation, food insecurities, and, of late, “pandemic fatigue” have overwhelmed existing and potential students, leading to anemic enrollments, academic advancements, and transitions. Overall, lack of motivation was reported as the number one issue affecting recruitment, retention, and completion.

CCNs searched for ways to stay connected and engaged with students during this unparalleled crisis. Navigators reached out to students using Zoom and phone sessions; mentored and encouraged students via social media channels, participating in a national Technology-Based Coaching in Adult Education pilot project; and reverted to less digitally advanced methods to reach students, e.g., U.S. Postal Service and dropping off instructional materials directly to students. As we move into FY20-21, plans include transforming CCNs into Digital Navigators to align with programmatic (e.g., IFP goals and strategies) emphases on digital literacy and distance learning.

**Strategic Partnerships (SPC):** Kentucky Career Centers (KCCs) and their partners were not immune to the pandemic's havoc, either. In addition to Unemployment Insurance (UI) volatility, KCC closures have lasted considerably longer than expected, and services are currently still only available by appointment. Due to extensive COVID-19 outbreaks in correctional settings, many continue to prevent external personnel from entering the premises, including educators. When permitted, some KYSU local providers have made efforts to supply inmates with packets of instructional materials. Recovery centers experienced closures as well. As evidenced by the demand on UI, employers - especially hospitality, restaurateurs, and small businesses - have been adversely affected by shutdowns and/or stringent re-opening guidelines (e.g., 50% capacity, curbside only, etc.)

#### **State Leadership**

**Describe how the State has used funds made available under section 223 for each the following required activities.**

#### **Alignment:**

**Alignment of adult education and literacy activities with other One-Stop required partners to implement the strategies in the Unified or Combined State Plan as described in 223(a)(1)(A).**

**Workforce and Other Partners:** On June 27, 2019, the prior administration's Executive Order went into effect, moving all Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) partners under one common “umbrella” – Education and Workforce Development Cabinet (EWDC). There were other organizational realignments, ultimately resulting in the following agencies falling under the EWDC's purview: Kentucky Department of Workforce Investment (DWI); Workforce Innovation Board (KWIB); Department of Libraries and Archives (KDLA); Center for Statistics (KYSTATS); Department of Education (KDOE); Commission on Proprietary Education; Educational Television (KET); Center for School Safety; Commission of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing; Governor's Scholars Program; Unemployment Insurance Commission; Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC); Governor's School of Entrepreneurs; Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR); Office of Employer and Apprenticeship Services, and KYSU. (Since then, UI has been transitioned to the Cabinet of Labor.)

As UI claims demand exploded early in the pandemic, nearly all EWDC agencies contributed to staff to the effort of fulfilling claims and assisting claimants. However, KYSU took every opportunity to maintain strong partnerships (e.g., KDLA, KSTATS, KET, OVR) and continued to leverage resources and forge partnerships with other workforce and external partners. While the Cabinet and State government leadership experienced shifts, KYSU created awareness whenever possible around AEFLA and KYSU services.

**Perkins Leadership Grant Funds FY18-19, 19-20:** The Perkins grant afforded KYSU the opportunity to hire a state level CCN Coordinator. The Coordinator monitors local providers' CCN activities, provides support to local CCNs, and collaborates with the KYSU CCP team to anticipate digital advances and promising practices that may be shared through training and workshops. The CCN Coordinator hosted two, face-to-face training sessions for local navigators and guided CCNs through

independent completion of professional projects, allowing CCNs to showcase their grasp of new technologies at the onset of the pandemic. Additionally, activity logs were submitted and monitored to capture CCN activities in relation to student outcomes. CCNs assist students with completing career pathway plans that are designed for students to set educational and workforce goals based on interests, workforce needs, and post-secondary education and training requirements. A major responsibility of the local CCN is to be aware of and refer students to support services (e.g., public assistance, community-based services, etc.) to remove barriers to educational pursuits. The Coordinator keeps the local CCNs connected through Google docs and classrooms – forums in which the Coordinator can share important communications and local CCNs can ask questions, share best practices, etc. CCNs are also integral as a “face” of connection points, job fairs, and other awareness-inducing events.

**Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (KWIB):** KYSU leadership serves on two of the four KWIB committees – Workforce Participation and Sustainability and Education and Employer Engagement. The dashboard created by Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS), in cooperation with individual agencies, is typically used to report several metrics of interest for the KWIB. One metric is adult education. KYSU shares KAERS data with KYSTATS to keep the dashboard up to date. The Board’s strategic plan will also guide the WIOA state plan. In addition, KYSU leadership serves on six out of ten local boards and related committees. This work allows greater alignment with regional and local initiatives and helps connect KYSU local providers with partnership opportunities, e.g., community-based organizations, local government, and employers.

**Employer Partnerships:** SPCs were tasked with identifying potential workforce partners and employer integrated education and training opportunities. In FY19-20, KYSU partnered with the Pikeville Medical Center (PMC). PMC began accepting applicants, who have not yet completed their high school diploma requirements, with the understanding that applicants work toward earning their GED® credential while accepting an entry-level position in the PMC health system. The Center offers a dual-credit apprenticeship for 100 local high school students who want to pursue a degree in a medical field. For adults, free GED® preparation classes are provided through KYSU’s local provider, Big Sandy Community and Technical College (BSCTC), and occupational skills by PMC, which accelerates the process of students earning a high school equivalency credential and prepares them for a better job in the healthcare sector. Eastern Kentucky Employment Program, Inc. (EKCEP), a comprehensive Kentucky Career Center (KCC), is also a central partner as well.

Other partnerships in which KYSU local providers collaborated with employers included, Somerset Community and Technical College’s and American Woodmark Foundation’s donation-funded assistance for students who cannot afford test fees and Morehead State University / Greif, Inc. and Newport Independent / Tyson Industries collaboration to provide employees adult education services.

**(See also segment on SPC under Integration of One-Stop Partners.)**

**Professional Learning:**

**Establishment or operation of a high-quality professional development program as described in section 223(1)(B).**

**Professional Learning Model:** In FY19-20, KYSU launched, for its first full year, a professional learning model that had been piloted in FY18-19. This new model places emphasis on internal, continuous, job-embedded communities of inquiry dedicated to monitoring data and other program information to improve student outcomes. The new KYSU Professional Learning (PL) Model was implemented in July 2019 and ran through June 2020. As indicated in the Kentucky State Plan (KSP), the model is predicated on professional learning communities (PLCs) emphasizing student focus, provider voice, and local innovation. FY19-20 PLCs concentrated on instructional technology and distance learning. Partners include the Adult Education Academy at Morehead State University, National Center for Families Learning, and Kentucky Educational Television.

The launch of the new model incorporated lessons learned from the previous year’s pilot and emphasized two foundational instructional technology tools – the use of videoconferencing platforms for synchronous distance learning and the use of Google Classroom as a free Learning Management System (LMS) for asynchronous distance learning. Further, the new model aligned with and supported the year’s Innovation Fund Proposal efforts (see description below) by placing additional accentuation on instructional technology and digital literacy.

KYSU local providers submitted Innovation Fund Proposals (IFPs) for a set of earmarked (a part of providers’ grant funding) funds targeting innovation and use of technology to engage existing and potential students. Most proposals/programming targeted the use of state-of-the-art instructional technology to reach students with inventive approaches to instruction. KYSU purposefully aligned its professional learning to support the implementation of the IFPs and promote program and student success. (See also Monitoring and Evaluation.)

A team of 11 KYSU PLC Coaches was hired to facilitate professional learning communities and guide providers' successful implementation of IFPs. The PLC Coaches are veteran educators with instructional leadership experience in adult, K-12, and/or post-secondary education. The 11 Coaches participated in a mandatory, two-day KYSU PLC Coach Train-the-Trainer event to fully orient them to KYSU's PLC Model, instructional technology to be used during the PLC process, local KYSU providers' IFPs, and provider program performance data and information. Once trained, the Coaches assisted with local PLC "kick-off" events, designed to unite, and inspire enthusiasm for IFP implementation and its PL support.

During a series of nine regional KYSU local PLC events held around the state, the KYSU College and Career Prep (CCP) team, Program Directors, Assistant Directors, and PLC Coaches introduced to 643 KYSU Instructors, Data Specialists, and CCNs to program specific IFP proposals and reacquainted them to the PLC model and expectations. The events also provided opportunities for continued upskilling of the provider network on the use of instructional technology tools, digital curricula, GED® Analytics, and the KYSU *Implementation Guidelines (IG)*. (Note: The KYSU PAA team reviewed new *IG* content with participants.) Moreover, events were hosted in computer labs, which permitted trainees to practice newly acquired skills in a "sandbox-style" environment and receive coaching support throughout the session.

Over the course of FY19-20, PLCs assembled at least seven times, informally and formally, to chart progress toward successful implementation of local innovations. Documentation of progress was required, culminating in generating a product/process that included a summary and evaluation designed to problem-solve PLC-identified program issue(s), emphasizing the effective use of technology and distance learning. Once finalized, PLC products/processes were uploaded to a new [KYSU Professional Learning Website](#), which serves as a searchable repository of professional learning products/processes intended to provide "road-tested" innovations modifiable to local needs.

Additionally, four statewide PLC pilots were facilitated by CCP team staff and were open to all KYSU instructors who worked 500+ hours per year and fulfilled professional learning elective requirements. The pilot PLCs were offered for English as a Second Language (ESL), Mathematics, Corrections, and Distance Learning. Participants in these pilots grappled with statewide instructional challenges and devised products/processes to address topic-specific, programmatic issues. These products/processes were also uploaded to the website above. (See also Corrections for pilot PLC.)

The first full-year implementation of the new KYSU PL Model included a final recalibration of professional learning requirements for Program Directors, Assistant Program Directors, College and Career Navigators, and Experienced Instructors working 500+ hours per year. Provider perceptions of the KYSU PL Model were monitored throughout the year and overall feedback remains positive. However, many new professional learning interventions were necessitated by the onset of the pandemic.

**(Note: Specific impact on professional learning and subsequent interventions outlined in separate Covid-19 section.)**

**Provision of Technical Assistance:**

**Provision of technical assistance to funded eligible providers as described in section 223(1)(c).**

KYSU's Program Administration and Accountability (PAA) team has four state-level staff (one program director, two regional coordinators, and one Kentucky Adult Education Reporting System [KAERS] administrator) who provide technical assistance to KYSU-funded adult education providers. Each of the four state-level staff serves the technical assistance and policy and procedural interpretational needs of local providers. The KAERS administrator works with all local providers to provide technical assistance related to Skills U's student information system called the KAERS.

To facilitate a smooth transition from FY19 to FY20, the PAA team hosted three-hour, face-to-face meetings with local program directors, two at a time, to review changes to the *IG*, College and Career Navigation, Strategic Partnership initiatives, and Fiscal Stewardship. The PAA team, in concert with other subject matter experts in appropriate KYSU units, directed seven, half-day, face-to-face informational/technical assistance sessions (June 25, 2019 – July 24, 2019). Each of the 27 local program directors attended a session at the KYSU Central Office in Frankfort, KY. In addition to the face-to-face, local provider meetings, KYSU work units jointly conducted annual KAERS, *Implementation Guidelines*, and Professional Learning trainings (July 29, 2019 – August 23, 2019) across eight, regionally-dispersed sites (Bowling Green, Carrollton, Hager Hill, Lexington, Louisville, Madisonville, Morehead, and Somerset) throughout the state.

Sessions focused on the state's *IG* and the newest KAERS functionalities, which included, but was not limited to, data quality and flow, defining data elements (with an emphasis on the barriers to employment), data collection, and data analysis. The training also included the use of the reporting tool in KAERS and how best to interpret and utilize reports for program improvement. Review of the KYSU *IG* highlighted important policy-related



matters, placing particular emphasis on the assessment policy and appropriate testing protocols. For example, KYSU and our WIOA core partners require any person administering a TABE test to be certified through the DRC/McGraw-Hill TABE testing certification process to ensure proper and consistent testing protocol.

Regional coordinators also conducted bi-monthly phone calls with all local program directors to review performance data and strategies for improving outcomes. Directors were asked to rate strategies for effectiveness. These calls afforded the directors the opportunity to address successes, barriers, and challenges to implementation. Throughout the year, new information relative to performance (e.g., TABE and CASAS testing protocols), state and federal expectations, policy guidance, etc. was disseminated through quarterly program director meetings, mass e-mails, guidance letters, and other forms of online communication. Regional coordinators also responded to program inquiries via telephone, SKYPE, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and e-mail and made individual program visits as requested (July 1, 2019 – February 28, 2020).

**Monitoring and Evaluation:**

**Monitoring and evaluation of the quality and improvement of adult education activities as described in section 223(1)(d).**

Throughout the year, state staff evaluated local providers' performance outcomes on a weekly basis. A statewide report was shared every Monday with KYSU staff, and a county-level (with 27 service areas) report was examined by the PAA team. Performance outcomes served as indicators of quality services and an assessment tool for program improvement. Each week, regional coordinators provided technical assistance based on performance and progress, as necessary. Regional coordinators also conducted bi-monthly phone calls with local program directors to address successes, barriers, and challenges concerning their IFPs. As mentioned, IFPs were designed to leverage innovation, specifically around classroom instruction, partnerships, service delivery, distance learning, and digital literacy. Each of the local program directors were required to submit a one-page proposal and budget narrative outlining their planned local innovations. At mid-year (January 2020), regional coordinators conducted a bi-annual assessment with each local provider to identify progress on their proposed IFP activities. This information was captured in an *Evaluation Logic Model* and one-page narrative.

In addition to the bi-monthly phone calls, regional coordinators conducted quarterly desktop audits with local providers to assess record keeping, data quality, and adherence to policies. The elements selected for the audit were based on indicators that (1) reflected meaningful and measurable achievement, (2) were aligned with state and/or federal goals, and (3) were accessible through the state's data system. Encrypted documents, or documents with Personal Identification Information (PII) removed, were submitted to the PAA team electronically. A secondary data analysis was conducted to identify anomalies or outliers in indicators of performance from quarter to quarter. Subsequently, a *Key Findings Report* was created to document data elements for further investigations. Local program directors were contacted to discuss key findings, and, if necessary, develop an action plan to correct any issues. Local providers who did not achieve at least 30% of their performance goals were required to complete a *Technical Assistance Plan (TAP)* that included specific actions the provider would take to improve performance outcomes in the future. Local providers with performance less than 50% of all performance goals were placed on a *Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)* that includes monthly meetings with KYSU staff. Additionally, independent audits were conducted by the Kentucky Auditor of Public Accounts at programs in 30 Kentucky counties (25% of the state). Both programmatic and financial records were reviewed, along with policy compliance. Findings and/or recommendations were followed-up by appropriate personnel to rectify any anomalies or non-compliance.

At fiscal-year end, local program performance data was e-mailed to local providers' fiscal agents and local KYSU program directors. The end-of-the-year letter was accompanied by a local provider score card. The score card provided descriptive data related to the program and students as well as end-of-year performance data (specifically, metrics used in the state performance funding formula, which is primarily composed of the three means of making a measurable skills gain - i.e., percentage of students earning a GED® diploma, pre-test/post-test level gains, and adult education students transitioning to postsecondary education and training). The score card is available to provider staff through the KAERS system year-round, and some provider staff share their score cards with local partners.

**(Note: Specific impact on PPA activities and subsequent interventions outlined in separate Covid-19 section.)**

**As applicable, describe how the State has used funds for additional permissible activities described in section 223(a)(2).**

**Instructional Technology:**

As KYSU placed greater emphasis on innovation and technology, it recognized a need for broad-based and targeted instructional technology support. KYSU was able to add a new, full-time staff member to the CCP team whose focus is instructional technology support.

Subsequently, a master instructional technology spec sheet was created. This sheet contains a list of technology resources for service providers, such as laptops, hotspots, and smartboards. It also includes cost estimates so providers may make informed decisions when budgeting for innovative technology line items. Another

approach to instructional technology support included upskilling providers in the use of digital curricula available statewide, such as Burlington English, EdReady, and the Worldwide Interactive Network (WIN) Learning System.

Additionally, targeted instructional technology support was available, based on provider requests, through customized, professional learning electives featuring instructional technology topics. In Fall 2019, 253 adult education instructors were trained in 18 different customized, professional learning electives. These sessions included the use of Google G Suite, understanding fundamentals of building a blended distance learning model, and maximizing use of digital curricula for program performance.

**(Note: Specific impact on professional learning and subsequent interventions outlined in separate Covid-19 section.)**

#### **Performance Data Analysis (The Year of the COVID-19)**

**Describe how the adult education program performed in the overall assessment of core programs based on core indicators of performance. Discuss how the assessment was used to improve quality and effectiveness of the funded eligible providers and any plans to further increase performance in future reporting years.**

This was the first year Measurable Skills Gain (MSG) Performance was based solely on TABE 11/12 test results, and, as such, the performance numbers reflected the establishment of a new MSG performance benchmark. Performance numbers demonstrate that providers offered a full complement of services for approximately 8.5 months, at which time the COVID-19 pandemic caused learning center shutdowns. While technology was used to continue services to students, enrollment and retention suffered and adversely affected performance metrics. When KYSU local providers suspended services in mid-March, 1,964 students had 40+ hours and were eligible to post-test, but ultimately did not achieve a level gain. Of the 1,718 active students in the system, 432 were eligible to post-test at the time of closure, and 234 clients had no initial test. An additional 458 students enrolled in services during the pandemic crisis, with 212 of those students enrolling using eligibility methods other than standardized assessments (TABE Locator estimate).

MSG performance declined from 51.10% to 40.14%, a difference of 10.96 percentage points (ppt). The greatest decline occurred within ABE level 5 (14 ppt) and ESL level 1 (20 ppt). However, these were also two of three smallest cohorts of students. The two largest cohorts of students (i.e., ABE levels 2 and 3) decreased 10 ppt and 7 ppt respectively, while the only gain was with ABE level 6 (12 ppt). In terms of performance, the KYSU did not meet its negotiated MSG target (56%). Furthermore, it did not meet its state performance targets to enroll 20,000 participants without a high school diploma or equivalent (achieved 48% of goal) or attain 5,000 GED® credentials (58% of target).

Regarding the employment measures, 35.88% of all exiters gained employment in the Second Quarter after Exit, along with 34.18% in the Fourth Quarter after Exit. The Median Earnings of the exiters employed in the Second Quarter after exit was \$4,138. The overall Credential Rate decreased 28 ppt, from 48.33% to 20.40%.

With the understanding that performance outcomes were truncated due to suspension of services, KYSU adopted an 8.5 months of service sliding-scale performance model to account for program closures March 2020 – June 2020. The revision to the performance model allowed higher-ranking programs (those who reached their scaled performance goals) to receive performance funding. KYSU sent a guidance letter and hosted a webinar for local program directors to inform them of the change. After the webinar, an FAQ was created to address local program director questions, along with the opportunity to meet one-on-one, virtually or via phone, with their Regional Coordinator to discuss program performance. To accommodate for further potential pandemic impact on performance, KYSU decided to adjust its FY20-21 State Performance Funding Model from a 90/10 base-performance split to a 95/5 model, giving programs a larger base of funds to operate from. Additionally, a new state policy allowing providers to fast-track students at NRS levels 4-6 to the GED® Ready test likely resulted in higher-functioning students taking and passing the GED® test with minimal instruction. KYSU also invested in a free first-time GED® test-taker promotion, which was made visible through support from the Governor and Lt. Governor as well as marketing material, social media, and radio spots.

#### **Integration of One-Stop Partners**

**Describe how the State eligible agency, as the entity responsible for meeting one-stop requirements under 34 CFR 463, subpart J, carries out or delegates its required one-stop roles to eligible providers. Describe the applicable career services that are provided in the one-stop system. Describe how infrastructure costs are supported through State and local options.**

As indicated in last year's annual narrative, KYSU negotiated Memoranda of Understandings (MOUs) with the ten local Workforce Innovation Boards (WIBs). While some adult education providers are co-located physically, all have come to agreements to avail services on site and/or facilitate referral processes using direct linkages (technology). KYSU has contributed to infrastructure costs statewide by purchasing online TABE tests (which local provider staff typically administer) and access to Worldwide Integrated Network (WIN) Learning System's digital courseware and corresponding cumulative assessments. State staff and local WIBs cost out services through the

KCC to share infrastructure costs, e.g., provider services (see below), TABE tests, Strategic Partnership Coordinators' (SPCs) and College and Career Navigators' (CCNs) time and service, etc.

KYSU local providers also provide and report career services at comprehensive and affiliate KCCs, including outreach, intake, orientation, initial assessments, referrals to and coordination of activities with other programs and services, provision of performance and program cost information on eligible providers, information on availability of supportive services or assistance, and integrated education and training programs.

As a result of the Request for Application (RFA), each local KYSU provider employs at least one full-time CCN. A Carl D. Perkins leadership grant funded the state level CCN Coordinator for the last three years. Another position, SPC, was introduced to the service provider network shortly after the conclusion of the RFA. Deployed locally as employees of the state, they are responsible for regional coverage in five workforce innovation areas. SPCs act as conduits between workforce and other partners to identify potential, external opportunities for program directors to engage as ways to achieve alignment, integration, and seamless services to students and clients.

While SPCs are expected to travel and network, they are frequently co-located at KCCs to stimulate and unite education and workforce services. They work closely with local WIBs and KCC operators to coordinate services and facilitate collaboration with KYSU local providers. When possible, SPCs serve as members of local WIBs alongside other KYSU state agency staff. The SPCs direct outreach to individuals and organizations, creating awareness of both educational and workforce services. Successful partnerships include expanded services to recovery centers in several locations across the state and facilitating a collaborative effort to offer a local, short-term (3 months), integrated education and training program. The co-enrollment program prepared students to earn their high school equivalency (HSE) diploma while simultaneously pursuing a credential in Title I funded skills training. (See also last year's narrative for greater descriptions of both CCNs and SPCs roles and responsibilities.)

#### **Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) Program**

**Describe when your State held a competition for IELCE program funds, and the number of grants awarded by you State to support IELCE programs. Describe your State efforts in meeting the requirement to provide IELCE services in combination with integrated education and training, and discuss any performance results, challenges, and lessons learned from implementing those program goals.**

As indicated in prior reports: As a result of the Request for Application released in spring 2018, three counties applied for and were awarded Section 243 funding.

Although intensive program director informational and technical assistance (TA) sessions were hosted by KYSU, full integration of IELCE program components and provider performance expectations were not realized. Therefore, further TA and program monitoring were planned for the three providers in FY20-21.

Overall, KYSU served 252 IELCE English language learners (ELLs) and attained 88 measurable skills gains in two of the three Kentucky IELCE counties: Fayette and Warren. Both programs are located at community colleges and were partially successful in retaining ELLs in their programs by transitioning them to virtual instruction. The third program, Jefferson County, had completed hiring and training of their instructional staff when the pandemic forced their site, a board of education, to close for the remainder of the year. During 2019-20, the PAA team conducted a thorough evaluation of the three local Skills U IELCE programs. Consequently, it became apparent there was not a common understanding of how best to implement the IELCE program.

One provider's fiscal agent had instituted an organization-wide restructuring, including hiring a new program director. With this restructuring, institutional knowledge of IELCE program implementation was lost. However, the new program director appeared eager to serve students in innovative ways, gratefully accepted TA, and acknowledged it would take time to mobilize improvements in the program. A second provider did not have a clear understanding of IELCE's integration and assimilation goals. The third provider's IELCE program served as an example of appropriate integration and implementation of English Language Acquisition, workforce, civics, and citizenship preparation, and access to occupational sector co-enrollment opportunities. Additionally, the provider recognized the importance of retaining English Language Learners (ELLs) to transition them to Adult Basic/Secondary Education and facilitate the goals of attaining a high school equivalency and technical credential through its GED®+Plus program.

Therefore, the PAA team held an IELCE workshop with these three providers. Common agenda items for the workshop included: program updates; budget review; program design (i.e., offerings, partnerships, staffing, barriers to implementation, etc.); effective implementation of workforce preparation and sector occupational contextualizing and co-enrollment in workforce training; and recruitment and retention strategies.

After the workshop, the PAA team scheduled individual TA trainings with each of the IELCE providers to address any issues and provide recommendations for improvement. The team used the following resources to guide the programmatic review: "Building Opportunities through Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education: IELCE Self-Assessment Too;" "Quick-Reference Guide to Using LINCS;" and Program Memorandums OCTAE/DAEL 15-7, 17-2, and 19-2. Following the individual TA sessions, each of the three local providers were

required to submit a one-page proposal outlining their revised program design, program goals, curriculum and course syllabi, staffing allocations, partnerships to support workforce preparation and training needs, and budget updates.

The PAA team conducted bi-monthly check-ins (January, March, and May) to ensure strategies were being implemented and producing the desired outcomes. At fiscal year-end (2019-20), each IELCE provider submitted a one-page narrative and evaluation logic model to show evidence of demonstrated effectiveness. The evaluation logic model served as a monitoring tool for the PAA team to assess performance outcomes, ensure compliance, address barriers to implementation, provide TA, and identify key strategies and best practices to support IELCE programming.

Unfortunately, despite the concerted effort to provide TA and to continue to monitor activities with regular check-ins, the largest IELCE program, Jefferson County, was never able to bring services to fruition. While KYSU has documented numerous reasons and explanations from the provider for delays (in part exacerbated by COVID) in program implementation, eventually it was agreed it was too late in the year to expect student success, at which time the provider abdicated the effort.

KYSU's purchase of Burlington English appeared to contribute positively to IELCE participants blended instructional experience, civics education, and career exploration. The courseware is CASAS-aligned and provides academic instruction for ELL students. Of particular interest is its inclusion of soft skills, career exploration modules, and comprehensive technical/professional learning support services.

In response to COVID-19, KYSU will purchase CASAS Life and Work Series eTests for the providers to remote test and segue students to online classwork. Through TA, KYSU will help these programs to become experts in the test proctoring skills needed to work with the ELL population and identify best practices and strategies to provide robust IELCE program services.

**Describe how the State is progressing toward program goals of preparing and placing IELCE program participants in unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency as described in section 243(c)(1).**

KYSU continually provides opportunities to connect local providers with local partners to enhance student access, support, and success. Each fiscal year, KYSU hosts collaborative trainings and workshops between local libraries, LWIBs, and KCCs (and other partner and potential partners) to encourage them to identify and implement innovative strategies to serve adult learners, support area certification processes, and identify ways to improve the health of their communities' workforce.

All IELCE program students have access to GED®+Plus, which is a co-enrollment integrated education and training program offered in partnership with the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS). The GED®+Plus program co-enrolls participants seeking a high school equivalency (HSE)/GED® diploma in a KYSU program and in one of the state's top five in-demand industry sectors, allowing participants to earn both a HSE/GED® diploma and a short-term (i.e., one 16-week semester or less) certificate. GED®+Plus participants qualify for scholarships through the Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship (WRKS) initiative to pay for their tuition in college classes.

Skills U has 27 local providers who collaborate with the 16 KCTCS colleges to offer programs designed to meet labor market needs and increase credential attainment for adults. KYSU leadership meets quarterly with KCTCS to discuss marketing strategies, enrollment trends, and student success outcomes for GED®+Plus participants.

In FY19-20, fifteen of the 27 local providers participated in the GED+Plus program, enrolling 532 total clients (GED+Plus [Fall] – 284; GED+Plus [Spring] – 248), while awarding 160 GED® credentials (GED+Plus [Fall] – 94; GED+Plus [Spring] – 66) and distributing 217 KCTCS credentials. The highest number of KCTCS credentials awarded were Medicaid Nurse Aide (92), Welder Helper (29), Phlebotomy/Healthcare Worker (25), and Electrocardiogram Technician (10). Reported barriers to implementation included limited GED+Plus courses and/or online offerings in areas with limited access to a KCTCS campuses, lack of student participation due to Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship-related issues and meeting requirements prior to enrollment deadlines, and less than fruitful onboarding processes for students and communication barriers between KYSU CCNs and KCTCS Success Coaches.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in closures for both KYSU providers and KCTCS colleges in the spring semester, limiting access to and outcomes from the GED+Plus program. To eliminate barriers to implementation and access, KYSU continued to collaborate with KCTCS during joint CCN trainings and quarterly advisory team meetings to improve processes. Unfortunately, advisory team meetings were postponed until more hospitable conditions were apparent to address existing and new GED+Plus concerns.

To maintain continuity of services, the PAA team works closely with KCTCS and KYSU local program directors to monitor GED+Plus enrollments, GED® and KCTCS credential attainment, and students' transitions to



postsecondary education and/or on a quarterly/semester basis. The PAA team, in conjunction with Strategic Partnerships and Executive leadership, meet quarterly with the KCTCS/KYSU GED+Plus advisory team to discuss enrollment trends; marketing initiatives; retention, persistence, and graduation rates; barriers to enrollment/completion; and financial barriers to enrollment.

KYSU wants to grow and expand the concept of IET in Kentucky beyond GED®+Plus to include prospective collaborations with employers, pre-apprenticeship programs, public and private four-year universities, etc., to support the occupational training element of an IET model by offering a variety of ways students can accelerate their educational and career accomplishments.

As part of the changes implemented because of WIOA reauthorization, KYSU established a new position, SPC. Five SPCs are located regionally (corresponding to Local Workforce Investment Boards [LWIBs] regions) and report to a director at the state level. Their charge is two-fold - connect and coordinate services and activities through KCCs and identify new and innovative opportunities to serve more students by liaising with and expanding local community partnerships. While SPCs strategically recognize potential partnerships, they serve the local providers, who ultimately decide if and how services may become available based on existing resources. The SPCs have already had successes collaborating with recovery centers (many recently established or extended due to the opioid crisis), where cohorts of individuals without a high school credential reside and the potential to provide adult education services exists. Services are frequently available on-site due to the restrictions placed on residents.

Based on the Enrollment Source Report from KAERS, KYSU has received roughly 3,000 referrals from employer, community agencies, and WIOA core partners per year over the past three program years, accounting for approximately 14% of overall enrollments. With the use of available resources, technical assistance, bi-monthly monitoring, and offering additional trainings and workshops with our local partners, our IELCE providers will continue to help our state with identifying how to best align adult education activities with postsecondary, workforce, and local partner needs.

#### **Adult Education Standards**

**Describe how AE content standards are aligned with state standards.**

Throughout FY19-20, KYSU continued to promote the use of KYSU's *Instructional Framework Series*. The frameworks were designed to provide a common instructional foundation for all of Kentucky's adult education providers. Mathematics, Reasoning through Language Arts (RLA), and English Language Proficiency (ELP) Instructional Frameworks were constructed to provide uniformity and ease to effectively deploy standards-based academic instruction and instructional strategies. A College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) Key was placed in the Mathematics and RLA Framework introductions to assist users in understanding standards abbreviations. Color-coding was also used to signify the type and percentage of standards-based content at each TABE level, and a horizontal crosswalk was created to illustrate specific CCRS applications aligned with specific hyperlinked instructional resources. The ELPS Framework was based on the five proficiency levels identified in the LINCS ELPS for Adult Education. As with the previous frameworks, the ELPS Framework was designed to ensure conformity in standards-based instruction. [See the most recent Kentucky State Plan (KSP) for more explicit information on Instructional Frameworks].

Another FY19-20 standards-based initiative involved the expansion of the KYSU Lesson Bank to include 20 new Mathematics HyperDoc Lesson Plans aligned to the GED® High Impact Indicators (HIIs) for Mathematical Reasoning. All GED® HIIs are aligned to the CCRSs for Adult Education. These 20 HyperDoc Lesson Plans allow for greater differentiation, engagement, and interaction in a blended learning instructional environment.

As indicated in the KSP, KYSU continuous standards-based support is intended to create a seamless system for students to move from adult education to earning their GED®/HSE diplomas to transitioning to postsecondary education and/or training and/or career opportunities.

#### **Programs for Corrections**

**Department of Corrections (DOC):** DOC employs and directs adult education within its state institutions. However, with agreement from the local jailers (elected officials), all local KYSU providers are required to offer adult education to inmates. Kentucky renewed its focus on corrections reforms, including ex-offender transition and re-entry services. Because of the pandemic and changes in administration resulting in shifts in department leadership, many of these efforts stalled as COVID-19 outbreaks took precedence.

KYSU continues to recognize the potential for reaching more individuals without a high school diploma or its equivalent by initiating new strategies to partner with DOC. KYSU and DOC hosted an event where local program directors were introduced to regional probation counselors and arranged time to develop referral processes for re-entering ex-offenders and ex-offenders who meet with counselors/officers. Ultimately, a referral process was included in KYSU's Implementation Guidelines to underscore the importance of recruiting ex-offenders,

particularly without a high school diploma or equivalent, to seek educational and workforce advancement opportunities. (See also COVID-19 section for information on its effects on correctional education.)

**Kentucky Young Adults Diversion Partnership:** (Background) In February 2018, the U.S. Department of Education's, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) selected Kentucky to participate in a technical assistance initiative to strengthen diversion services for justice-involved youth. The goal included fortifying programs through career, technical, and special education, and workforce development. Throughout the initiative, KYSU invited local, regional, and state organizations to participate in the development of the Kentucky Young Adults Diversion Partnership.

The partnership's members view this initiative as a means for the state's corrections, education, and support services organizations to establish and maintain a broad network of public amenities to support young adults at risk or currently involved in the court system. KYSU led the partnership in developing relationships and fostering progress on a mission statement, goals, and objectives for the network. Its aim is to successfully transition at-risk youth and justice-involved young adults into productive adulthood and economic self-sufficiency by supporting the attainment of academic and employment advancement/success through collective diversion strategies.

Initially, central partners included KYSU, KCCs, the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (representing 16 institutions and numerous satellite campuses statewide), and DOC. Other partners that joined the committee included: Kentucky Department for Community Based Services (DCBS), Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS), Office of the Secretary, Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities, Job Corps, and Kentucky Partnership for Families and Children (KPFC).

Consequently, as the membership expanded, the target population extended beyond at-risk or justice-involved youth and young adults. Foci were organized around a larger population of youth and young adult opportunities and wraparound services, including streamlining service processes, increasing communication across partner agencies, establishing effective practices for "warm handoffs" at key connection points, and navigating partner services. The partnership facilitated a data-sharing agreement and action plans to develop a partner resource guide for easy reference to partner agency services.

The partnership increased communication and collaboration through in-person retreats, standing partnership meetings, and the development of a shared understanding of each partners' roles. The various partners, once operating in separate siloes with minimal cross-agency connection, affirmed connections between colleagues in other agencies that serve the same population. The initiative has enhanced and advanced other projects involving youth and young adult advocacy, such as the state's Social Impact Partnerships to Pay for Result Acts (SIPPRA) planning grants collaborative, as well as complementing the State Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (KWIB) Opportunity Youth Committee. Foster Care Youth has also become central to the committee's efforts. While originally intended to generate youth diversion strategies, the committee has evolved far beyond its initial mission to affect the far-reaching needs of youth and young adults.

**Pilot Corrections PLC:** FY19-20 marked the inaugural year of a statewide KYSU Corrections Professional Learning Community (PLC). This PLC was comprised of KYSU instructors who work in jails and/or prisons offering GED® preparation instruction. The limited-scope of the PLC pilot focused on developing a corrections-specific instructional service model that prioritized services to students whose intake assessments indicated the greatest likelihood of GED® attainment. The pilot PLC also benefitted from a corrections-customized GED® logistics session hosted by the Kentucky State GED® Administrator. The PLC piloted the use of Brainchild Study Buddies as an alternative to digital curricula. Study Buddies do not require Internet access for their use, which is attractive due to the variations in digital access in correctional settings. Within the limited scope of the pilot, 16 correctional students passed GED® Ready tests with the help of Study Buddies, and 15 students passed sections of the GED® test using Study Buddies as their primary test preparation tool.