



2026 STUDENT ACCESS SUMMIT

*ABCs of Student Access: Accelerating Access, Breaking Barriers and
Creating Connections*

Date: Monday, November 2, 2026

Location: Knicely Conference Center at WKU, Bowling Green

**All times listed in Central Standard Time (CST)*

7:30 – 8:30 AM

Registration, Continental Breakfast & Exhibit Hall Opening

Kick off the Summit by checking in, enjoying a complimentary continental breakfast, and networking with K–12 and postsecondary professionals from across the Commonwealth. During this time, explore interactive exhibits showcasing key Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) initiatives and practical resources designed to support student access and success.

8:30 – 8:50 AM

Opening Remarks

CPE President Aaron Thompson will open the 2nd Annual Student Access Summit, framing the event's vision and highlighting statewide initiatives centered on the ABCs of Student Access, including the 2026 passage of the My Kentucky Future Act, which allows Kentucky to notify high school students about their college eligibility.

Dr. Aaron Thompson — President, Council on Postsecondary Education

8:50 – 9:35 AM

Morning Keynote

Featured keynote speaker Dr. Taylor Odle will offer a national perspective on how proactive and direct admissions strategies remove structural friction, simplify application pathways, and expand postsecondary opportunities for all students.

Dr. Taylor Odle — Assistant Professor of Educational Policy Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Breakout Sessions – Round #1

Choose one of the following four concurrent sessions.

AI for the Future: Helping K–12 Students Prepare for College, Career & Life

Artificial intelligence is transforming both the educator's role and the way students prepare for college, careers, and life after high school. This interactive session will explore practical ways educators, school counselors, and CCR professionals can use AI to save time, organize their work, personalize student support, create resources, develop college and career timelines, write and refine communications, and prepare engaging lessons and activities. Participants will also explore how to teach K–12 students to use AI responsibly for career exploration, college research, resumes, recommendation-letter preparation, scholarships, interviews, portfolios, and postsecondary planning. Emphasis will be placed on maintaining student voice, verifying information, protecting privacy, recognizing bias, and using AI as a thought partner—not a replacement for professional judgment, relationships, or student thinking.

Building Brighter Futures With the Predictors of Postschool Success

What helps students thrive after high school? Decades of research has identified experiences, skills, and opportunities linked to success in employment, postsecondary education, and independent living. In this session, participants will explore the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition's (NTACT) Predictors of Postschool Success and learn how these factors can guide planning throughout the educational continuum. Participants will explore the Predictors and the research connecting them to positive adult outcomes for students with disabilities. Activities and examples will highlight why these predictors matter. Next, participants will identify opportunities within school, family and community practices where predictors can be intentionally strengthened. Then, participants will evaluate existing practices using a predictor-focused lens to move from awareness to action by creating opportunities that increase student access, engagement, independence, and future success.

CLIMB 2.0: A Collaborative Model for Student Access & Success

In Kentucky's rural areas, access to college and good careers can seem unreachable. CLIMB 2.0 is a collaborative initiative designed to expand access to education, credentials, and career pathways in Kentucky's behavioral health workforce to current high school students. By partnering with multiple college campuses, workforce, and behavioral health partners to create seamless pathways from high school and postsecondary education into meaningful, in-demand careers, CLIMB 2.0 is expanding opportunities for early college credit and familiarity with postsecondary education. At the same time, these students are earning industry-recognized credentials, gaining hands-on experience, and exploring their chosen career field. With a particular focus on rural and underserved communities, the initiative demonstrates how cross-sector partnerships can reduce barriers, strengthen student access and success, and help communities develop the workforce they need.

From Framework to Practice: Introducing the GPS Advising Toolkit

Kentucky is developing a GPS Advising Toolkit to help first-year and dual credit advisors integrate Growth Mindset, Purpose, and Sense of Belonging into everyday advising practice. Building on Kentucky's experience implementing the GPS framework with gateway course faculty, the toolkit translates these concepts into practical strategies, resources, and advising activities that can be used to support students during the transition to postsecondary education. During this session, participants will receive an overview of the toolkit, explore selected resources and strategies, and consider how they can be incorporated into advising conversations and practices. The session will highlight how GPS-informed advising can help students connect academic choices to their goals, build confidence, and make informed decisions about gateway coursework. Participants will also have an opportunity to reflect on how the toolkit could be adapted within their own secondary or postsecondary advising context.

11:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Breakout Sessions – Round #2

Choose one of the following four concurrent sessions.

Data-Informed, Student-Focused: Efficient & Proactive Enrollment Strategies

Students often encounter barriers to postsecondary education not because resources are missing, but because institutional communication is fragmented. This session highlights how Somerset Community College leverages data-informed strategies to align Recruitment, Admissions, Financial Aid, Advising, and the Campus Support Center into a unified enrollment engine that saw a 10% growth in credential-seeking enrollment for Fall 2026. Presenters will showcase how refined application tracking, FAFSA data integration, and data-driven cross-departmental messaging eliminate confusion and support first-generation and low-income students. Moving beyond passive lecture, participants will engage in an interactive "Data & Barrier Diagnostic" workshop. Working with sample enrollment bottlenecks, attendees will analyze key drop-off points within their own institutional workflows and map out data-triggered communication strategies to create a seamless, student-centered pathway to enrollment.

From Classroom to Career: Building Professionalism, Breaking Barriers

Too many students leave college career-ready in their major but unprepared in the skills employers rank first: communication, professionalism, and workplace readiness. For first-generation students who work and help support their families, optional professionalism programming is often out of reach — leaving them further behind peers who can attend. Western Kentucky University's Gordon Ford College of Business leveled the playing field by making professionalism part of the required academic core, revising the business core to make room without adding tuition costs. Pair that with our Student Success Center's advising, internships, career coaching, and recruitment/retention support, and every student gets equitable access to career readiness. This session shares how we built both, the barriers we broke, and a replicable framework attendees can bring home.

College Access Begins in Middle School

College access begins long before students complete admissions applications or step onto a college campus. This session explores how Ignite, a three-year, cohort-based middle school program in rural Kentucky, helps students build college aspirations, career awareness, workplace skills, and confidence through intentional relationships and authentic learning experiences. Participants will learn how career exploration, college visits, job shadowing, work experiences, and community partnerships work together to accelerate access, break barriers, and create meaningful connections that support long-term student success. Attendees will leave with practical strategies and adaptable ideas for strengthening college and career readiness within their own schools, districts, or organizations, regardless of size or available resources.

People Shouldn't Have to Fit the System: Living Design for Real Life

People enter postsecondary education with different responsibilities, resources, abilities, histories, and relationships to institutional systems. Many policies and transition processes still assume that students have sufficient time, transportation, technology, money, and institutional knowledge. This interactive session introduces Living Design, an emerging principle within The Dandelion Framework. Variation is not an exception to design. It is the condition for which we design. Participants will use a practice grounded Institutional Friction Test to examine a familiar policy, identify who bears additional burdens, and consider whether flexibility could remove barriers without lowering meaningful standards. Each participant will develop an actionable redesign proposal, identify its intended result, and choose a practical indicator for measuring improvement in access, participation, belonging, or connection.

12:00 – 12:45 PM

Networking Lunch

Join colleagues and summit attendees for lunch, open conversation, and exhibit browsing. Use this time to refuel, visit exhibit tables highlighting key CPE access resources, and strengthen cross-sector connections committed to student success.

12:45 – 1:15 PM

Special Announcement: A New Futuriti Partnership

As lunch wraps up, CPE will take the stage for a special announcement about a new Futuriti partnership that will give Kentucky school districts a way to intentionally advise students and meet Individual Learning Plan (ILP) requirements **for free**.

1:15 – 2:00 PM

Breaking Barriers Through Resilience, Purpose, and Leadership

During this dedicated lunch keynote, Jason Booher explores what it truly takes to break barriers in education and empower students to succeed against the odds. Drawing on his 30-year career as a teacher, state championship coach, and school superintendent, Booher delivers an uplifting address on reframing challenges, building a culture of high expectations, and creating clear pathways over the obstacles facing Kentucky's students.

Jason Booher — Educator, State Champion Coach, Author, and Superintendent of Mercer County Schools

2:15 – 3:15 PM

Breakout Sessions – Round #3

Choose one of the following four concurrent sessions.

Beyond Accommodations: Creating Connected Student Access

Access does not end when a student receives an accommodation. For many students with disabilities—particularly first-generation and limited-income students—success depends on their ability to navigate complex systems, ask for help, build relationships, and connect with meaningful academic, social, and career opportunities. Drawing from the work of TRIO Student Support Services for Students with Disabilities at Western Kentucky University, this interactive session will examine a proactive, relationship-centered approach to student access. Participants will explore practical strategies for accelerating connections to support, breaking down institutional and student-level barriers, and creating intentional pathways to belonging and future success. Through case studies, reflection, and collaborative activities, participants will identify strategies they can adapt to their own campus.

Building a Statewide College-Going Culture

Creating a true college-going culture requires more than isolated programs—it takes sustained messaging, strong partnerships, and intentional statewide coordination. This session will explore how KHEAA's "KY Goes to College" suite of campaigns has evolved into a coordinated framework for engaging students, families, schools, higher education institutions and community partners. Presenters will share the strategy behind developing and implementing statewide initiatives, including college application, FAFSA completion and Decision Day campaigns, as well as the resources, branding, communication strategies and partnerships that support successful participation.

From Connection to Career: CTE, Early Warning & Student Persistence

How do we help students not only graduate, but see a future beyond high school worth working toward? This session explores how Early Warning data, student connectedness, and Career and Technical Education (CTE) can work together to identify barriers, strengthen relationships, create meaningful learning experiences, and support student persistence. Participants will explore real-world student scenarios and consider how CTE and career-connected opportunities can help students find relevance, purpose, and a pathway forward. The session connects the ABCs of Early Warning to practical strategies for accelerating access, breaking barriers, and creating connections that prepare students for life beyond graduation.

From Exploration to Action: Building a Culture of Postsecondary Advising

Students need intentional opportunities throughout grades 6–12 to explore careers, understand postsecondary pathways, develop essential skills, and make informed decisions about their futures. Transform postsecondary advising from counselor-led activities into a cohesive, school-wide culture of support. This interactive session will showcase how Kentucky's Postsecondary Advising Scope and Sequence, Futuriti, and related advising resources can help schools create consistent, meaningful experiences that move students from exploration to action. Participants will also examine strategies for moving beyond ILP compliance to build a sustainable, schoolwide culture of postsecondary advising. Through practical examples, participants will consider how advising can be embedded into existing structures, supported by staff and community partners, and used to ensure every student has access to the knowledge, experiences, and support needed for success beyond high school.

3:30 – 4:30 PM

Closing Keynote Panel & Wrap-Up

By 2040, Kentucky will have 10% fewer students graduating from high school due to a demographic cliff, while Kentucky's workforce will still need more than 60% of its working-age population equipped with a postsecondary credential. This closing panel will tie together key pieces of Kentucky's student access strategy — proactive admissions, Common App, Futuriti, and Level All — to discuss how early postsecondary advising with these tools can show students the possibilities of the Kentucky workforce and what they need to do academically to succeed, helping Kentucky increase its college-going rate even as populations dip.