

Andy Beshear
Governor



Lt. Gov. Jacqueline Coleman
Secretary
Education and Workforce
Development Cabinet

Kevin C. Brown
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Dear Kentucky Public School Families:

With all that has happened in the closing weeks of this school year, you may not want to think about what the next school year will look like for your children just yet. That's certainly understandable given that we have all been working so hard to complete this year under extraordinary circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 emergency.

However, your schools and districts have to plan for the future, and so do we at the Kentucky Department of Education. In fact, planning has been underway for some time at the state and local levels for the 2020-2021 school year, even though we don't yet know what the start of the school year will look like in Kentucky. We are working with districts to prepare for every scenario we can envision and to be ready to adapt to changes we can't yet foresee as the pandemic continues to unfold.

When the new school year begins, your school will be ready to educate students in the best and safest possible manner. Districts will take into account health guidelines issued at the state level and any considerations that are unique to individual communities or even individual school facilities.

I spoke this week with Gov. Andy Beshear and Lt. Gov. Jacqueline Coleman, who wanted to ensure that [KDE and local school districts were already thinking through what the start of the next school year might look like](#) and that we understand that any number of scenarios could affect that.

The governor and lieutenant governor asked KDE and its districts to consider three possibilities for when the next school year might start:

- An early start, perhaps as early as late July;
- A traditional start, which for most districts is usually in mid-August; and
- A late start, perhaps after Labor Day.

It isn't hard to envision the latter two scenarios, but it might be more difficult to understand why there might be a need to start the school year early. An early start would allow districts to begin the year with in-person instruction if a decline in the number of cases of the coronavirus allows it, with the possibility of a suspension of in-person classes if there is a spike in cases during the fall or winter. Should that happen, schools already would have "banked" a number of days of in-person classes.

We have asked superintendents to consider asking their local boards of education to approve multiple calendars to allow for the different scenarios, and districts should be prepared to adapt to changing circumstances near or after the beginning of the school year. We don't know that any of this will occur, but we need to be prepared for all possibilities if the public health landscape should change.

There are a number of possibilities to consider within any scenario: What will social distancing requirements look like at that time? How would those requirements affect our classrooms? How would that look in lunchrooms and libraries? In gymnasiums and on playgrounds? What activities could take place and which ones would have to wait? How would social distancing look on school buses?

The good news is we have time to plan; the bad news is we don't know exactly what we're planning for. We need every district to be nimble and to be able to adjust to what could be a changing public health landscape in the fall.

KDE will not dictate what the calendar will look like for individual districts. We are developing guidance for districts in cooperation with national, regional and state partner groups, but any guidance issued by KDE will focus on what is best for Kentucky's students. Planning will continue in the coming weeks and months, but decisions ultimately will be made at the local level.

And in a sea of unknowns, here's one thing I do know: The first consideration in any guidance we issue and any decisions that are made will be the health and safety of your children and of the teachers and other staff members who support them.

Now here's an update on some other things that have happened at the Kentucky Department of Education this week:

On Monday, the Education Continuation Task Force, a group of education stakeholders that is helping schools and districts continue to serve their students during the extended school closure period, [discussed the increased concern about summer slide](#) – the tendency for students to lose some of the academic gains they made during the previous school year – and ways to mitigate it.

The task force also discussed ways in which Kentucky's educational partners can assist school districts in pandemic recovery efforts as they receive funding from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

On Tuesday, [the lieutenant governor paid a surprise virtual visit to the Commissioner's Student Advisory Council](#), hearing feedback from the council members on how they are handling this extended period of remote learning and offering them encouragement.

On Wednesday, KDE staff members told the Local School Board Members Advisory Council that [meeting the academic and mental health needs of students will be a top priority](#) for the KDE staff as the agency helps schools and districts prepare for the eventual return of students to their classrooms.

On Thursday, members of KDE's leadership team and I told the Kentucky Board of Education that [local school districts will likely be unaffected by an upcoming budget reduction](#) necessitated by a revenue shortfall for the current fiscal year, which ends June 30, but we probably will not be able to avoid cuts in programs and services to schools and districts if KDE is asked to make further budget cuts in the next fiscal year.

No matter what lies ahead in these uncertain times, you can be sure that we will continue to work as hard as we can and make the most of the resources available to us to support your children. We are #TeamKentucky.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kevin C. Brown". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

Kevin C. Brown

To stay up to date on resources and news about what is going on in Kentucky's education system related to COVID-19, make sure you check out [KDE's website](#) regularly. The website contains vital information during this time of uncertainty, including frequently asked questions for parents and schools, new resources for educators and feeding sites in each district.

