



**Andy Beshear**  
Governor

**Jamie Link**  
Education and Labor Cabinet Secretary

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## Advocacy and Education Committee

### Minutes

April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024  
9:00am – 10:00am

#### **Attendees:**

Amanda Owen, Jeff Edwards, Amanda Friend, Tara Eversole, David Allgood, Bill Bates, Katie Wolf Whaley, Tracy Belfield, Morgan Turner, Carrie Wedding, Lisa Amstutz, Megan Coleman, and Melanie Lybarger.

#### **Staff Present:**

KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard and Administrative Specialist Senior, Anu Kumari.

#### **Members Absent:**

Andrew Johnson, Susan Brown, Kaitlyn Paschall and Michelle Cobb.

#### **Welcome:**

Employment First Committee Chair, Amanda Owen welcomed everyone to the meeting. The agenda was reviewed by all participants.

## Announcement

### Announcement 1:

Employment First Council Member, Bill Bates, shared an update on the Transition Education Unit's through the Office of Special Education and Early Learning collaboration with Career View from North Dakota on a virtual career experience project.

- Two of three Kentucky-specific virtual career experiences were completed, with filming at Ingram Barge in Western Kentucky and Cleary Construction in Monroe County.

- Filming at Conley Bottom Resort is scheduled for the next couple of months. Students will be able to virtually experience various careers at these two Kentucky sites.

## Announcement 2:

- Committee Member, Megan Coleman, Director of the State Independent Living Council (SILC), highlighted roles the Statewide Independent Living Council, noting that it had a governor-appointed board of directors.
- Two roles were highlighted:
  - Develop a three-year state plan addressing issues and setting goals for people with disabilities across the state, based on feedback and stakeholder input.
  - Support Centers for Independent Living (CIL) across the state, including the Center for Accessible Living and Disability Resource Center, which have recently merged.
- The state plan has recently been updated, ensuring that services will be available in every county across the state starting July 1st, 2025.
- She announced that SILC had launched a new project called the Youth Advisory Council, focused on:
  - Self-advocacy skills training
  - Peer support for youth across the state
- The Youth Advisory Council is open to disabled youth ages 14-24, and participation will be virtual. She provided contact information for youth coordinators and encouraged sharing the information.

## Review FAQ Google Doc

Employment First Committee Chair, Amanda Owen, provided an update on the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document, noting that it had received significant feedback from other committees. She mentioned that the document wasn't finalized yet, and with the full council meeting scheduled for April 11, 2025, no actions were taken.

## Feedback

- Amanda Owen shared positive feedback on the document's usefulness for teachers in understanding "Employment First," which aligned with the committee's goal of creating a beneficial resource.
- Committee Member, Carrie Wedding, Special Education Director at Owensboro Public Schools, reviewed the document and provided feedback, on the education related aspects of the document.
- Amanda highlighted that the document had the potential to serve as a useful tool for teachers to better understand Employment First and could be utilized in

IEP meetings or as a resource for parents. She the importance of making the document accessible and useful for multiple stakeholders.

- Carrie provided insights into the education section, emphasizing that the document could have been a valuable resource for teachers. She noted its potential as a tool for parents to understand career preparation.
- Amanda inquired whether the document could have been used as a resource for schools, parent meetings, or teacher training.
- Carrie confirmed this potential, noting a parent's request for more comprehensive information.
- Amanda expressed enthusiasm for the feedback, emphasizing how one school adopting the document could lead to wider sharing and impact.

## Action Items

Committee Chair, Amanda Owen inquired about the next steps asked Employment First Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley for provide advice and guidance.

- Katie Wolf Whaley encouraged reviewing the document (link provided in the chat), adding comments directly to it, and emailing suggestions to Amanda and Katie.
- Katie Wolf Whaley and Amanda Owen planned to meet to discuss and revise the FAQ document based on the feedback received.
- Katie suggested review and finalizing the FAQ document before the Full Council July meeting for approval and dissemination.
- Amanda Owen agreed and proposed a review process involving individual comments, a joint review with Katie Wolf Whaley to address questions and suggestions, and a final meeting before the deadline.
- The plan was to present the draft to the Employment First Council for approval. Upon approval, it would proceed to the office of vocational rehabilitation for universal design review and in-house collaboration.
- The transition committee is collaborating with another group to refine the FAQ document
- Katie clarified that while the Employment First Council's approval technically precedes the Universal Design review, they were exploring ways to expedite the process by seeking accessibility feedback earlier, potentially speed up the overall approval process through vocational rehabilitation accessibility and cabinet approval.

## Public Comment:

No public comment addressed.

## Adjournment:

Committee Chair, Amanda Owen, thanked everyone for their contribution and adjourned the meeting.

## Next Meeting:

Date: July 2, 2025

Time: 9:00am to 10:00am (EST)

Administrator: Nanci Howard

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# Advocacy and Education Committee Meeting

## Minutes

July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2025

9:00am – 10:00am (EST)

### Attendees:

Katie Wolf Whaley, Amanda Friend, Bill Bates, Tracy Belfield, Carrie Wedding, Megan Kuhlwein and Melanie Lybarger.

### Staff Present:

Nanci Howard, Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator  
Anu Kumari, KYOVR Administrative Specialist Senior

### Interpreter:

Tara Eversole and Chelsea Naugle.

### Members Absent:

Amanda Owen, Jeff Edwards, David Allgood, Morgan Turner and Michelle Cobb.

## Welcome:

In the absence of the Committee Chair, Employment First Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley welcomed everyone to the meeting. The agenda was reviewed by all participants.

## Review FAQs Google Doc:

Employment First Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley discussed the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document with the committee, with particular emphasis on the '*Educational Professionals section*'. She highlighted Committee Chair Amanda Owen's objective to finalize the document for approval or submission to the full Council for a vote at the upcoming meeting on July 11, 2025.

## Educational Professionals Section:

### *How do I assist students with disabilities prepare for employment?*

*Answer: You can assist by conducting assessments of their skills and interests, developing individualized employment plans, providing job readiness training, and connecting them with supported employment services that match their goals. You can use the UK-HDI [Transition Checklists](#) as a tool to think about how to build vocational inventories and skills across grade levels.*

*You can support transition by considering how to implement key pieces of the transition process within your curriculum around the five targeted areas of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS): Job exploration counseling, Work-based learning experiences, post-secondary opportunities, Work readiness training, and Self-advocacy instruction. This [Pre-ETS flier](#) can help you connect students with Kentucky's Vocational Rehabilitation system, and [this website can help you better understand](#) Pre-ETS and how they can benefit your students.*

## Committee Members' Suggestions:

It was suggested that the sentence in the second paragraph be rephrased to begin with, "You can support transition by considering how to..." in order to more clearly emphasize the

transition process. The committee member acknowledged the recommendation and incorporated the revised language into the document.

## ***How can I promote Employment First with my students and their families?***

*Answer: Employment First requires prioritizing employment for individuals with disabilities. As an educator, this begins with maximizing inclusion efforts throughout the student's educational career and creating expectations that life after school will include employment, as it does for other students. You can start conversations around the job search process by sharing resources such as this on [How to Get Help Finding a Job](#) and the [Supported Employment Training Project's website for job seekers and families](#).*

## **Committee Members' Suggestions:**

It was suggested to include that the Supported Employment Training Project's team has revised a page intended for job seekers, families, caregivers, and supporters. A link to the updated page was shared in the chat. It was suggested that this page be positioned more prominently for those seeking more in-depth information.

## ***How can I effectively educate and guide the student and/or guardian to help them prepare for employment after high school?***

*Answer: Stay focused on building skills leading to employment and discussing employment from an early age within ARC meetings. Some suggestions for implementation include regularly including employment planning in conversations, offering age-appropriate career exploration within the classroom but also sharing information with the family and student, collaborating with vocational rehabilitation services, and supporting work-based learning opportunities.*

*Transition discussions should focus on offering integrated employment opportunities, ensuring access to job coaching, and eliminating barriers that prevent individuals from working in their communities. The transition present levels section within the IEP should highlight student's interests and strengths. It should intentionally discuss key*

*employability skill development areas such as social communication, self-advocacy, technology literacy, time management, and following workplace instructions.*

*Successful implementation requires coordinated efforts among special education teachers, general educators, school counselors, rehabilitation specialists, families, and community employment providers. It may be helpful to share [resources that include ideas for families and students to think about employment](#) or to share examples of other people with disabilities who are successfully employed. Here are ways you can share [video examples](#) and [written examples](#).*

*Educators may also benefit from resources such as the [Kentucky Department of Education's Transition Resources](#), including contact information to [access KY Transition 360 for educators](#), and the [National Technical Assistance Center on Transition](#).*

## Committee Members' Suggestions:

Council Member Bill Bates suggested and provided an overview of key transition-related initiatives and resources. He emphasized the importance of utilizing the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative (NTACT:C) in partnership with KDE Transition Education Unit. This collaboration is focused on improving post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities, including pathways to:

- Additional training
- Competitive integrated employment
- Short-term certificate programs

Bill highlighted that KDE offers a wide range of transition resources, including guidance on transition planning, technical assistance, and transition to post-secondary trainings. He referenced two major initiatives:

- Kentucky Transition 360 for Educators – The program's first cohort of 140 educators is currently in Tier 2, with a second cohort recently launched. In-person training is scheduled for later this month.
- Kentucky Transition 360 for Families – KDE is in the process of hiring regional family mentors to work directly with families on transition planning, further strengthening community-based support.

Bill offered to share relevant resource links with the committee to enhance awareness and access to these programs.

The committee concluded the discussion and noted that educators could have benefited from Kentucky Department of Education's Transition Resources, including contacts for Kentucky Transition 360 and the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition.

## **Employer Section:**

Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley highlighted one of the questions under the "*Employer Section*" of the FAQ document.

*If an employer is interested in hiring individuals with disabilities, who should they contact? Should they reach out to a local Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Employer Services Branch, or is there a designated point of contact within VR that would be most helpful to include?*

## **Committee Members' Suggestions:**

There was no clear consensus on a designated Vocational Rehabilitation contact for employer-related inquiries. It was recommended to include Coalition Forward in the employer section. Additional resources, including guidance on accessible job descriptions, will be incorporated.

## **2025 Annual Report Recommendations:**

It was recommended that, once finalized, the FAQ document be included in the 2025 Annual Report. Committee members were also encouraged to share any additional activities.

## **Vote for Submit FAQs Document to the Employment First Council:**

It was stated that, once the FAQ document is finalized and all comments have been removed, it will be submitted to the full Council for a vote on its content.

Employment First Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley called for a motion to submit the finalized FAQ document to the full Employment First Council for a vote. **Council member Bill Bates made the motion to accept and submit the FAQ document for a vote. The motion was seconded by Amanda Friend. A vote was taken with no opposition or abstentions. The motion passed unanimously.**

## Public Comment

No comment was addressed.

## Adjournment

Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley thanked everyone for their contribution and adjourned the meeting.

## Next Meeting

Date: October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025.

Time: 9:00 am to 10:00 am (EST)

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## Advocacy and Education Committee

Minutes  
October 1, 2025  
9:00 am – 10:00 am (EST)  
Zoom

### Members Present

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Amanda Owen, Katie Wolf Whaley, Bill Bates, Jeffery Edwards, Tracy Belfield, Morgan Turner, and Melanie Lybarger

### Members Absent

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Amanda Friend and David Allgood

### KYOVR Staff Present

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Nanci Howard, Michelle Cobb, and Anu Kumari

### Welcome and Agenda Review

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Employment First Advocacy and Education Committee Chair, Amanda Owen, welcomed attendees. The agenda was reviewed and acknowledged by all participants.

### FAQ Document Update

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The Employment First Council FAQ document is in review. Once approved, it will be posted on the Employment First website as a resource.

### How do we distribute the FAQ document?

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Employment First Committee Chair Amanda Owen opened the floor for discussion:

## Highlights:

1. How to Utilize Resources
  - Exploring effective ways to share and implement the FAQ document and other committee resources.
2. Email Template
  - Create a Google Doc email template to send to groups, with the FAQ attached.
  - Discussion focused on strategies for spreading the message consistently.
3. Post-Finalization Use
  - How to use the finalized resource, particularly in educational settings, to share with teachers.

## Committee suggestions

- It was suggested to use the finalized FAQ in educational settings, targeting teachers and school districts.
- It was also suggested that the email templates already drafted will be used to send the FAQ as a PDF to teachers, educators, and other stakeholders. QR codes will be incorporated into presentations, conference tables, and flyers for easy access.
- It was highlighted that the Employment First Employer Education and Engagement Committee is developing a series, in partnership with Innovative Support for Autistic Workers (ISAW).
  - Strategies include:
    - Sharing session dates and access information.
    - Providing recordings or resources post-session.
- The goal is to ensure a consistent message and reach a broad audience:
  - Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) can send through their listserv.
  - Kentucky Adult Transition Council (KATC) and regional co-ops to share with educators and families.
  - Creating a centralized Dropbox with links, QR codes, and templates for easy access for council use.

## Conference Integration

- It was suggested that the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) upcoming conference and other educator presentations will serve as opportunities to share the FAQ and related resources.

- Flyers and QR codes will support engagement and on-the-spot access to the document.

## Annual Report Recommendation

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Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator, Nanci Howard, reported that the draft Annual Report will be circulated once Employment First Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley has incorporated the committee's recommendations and data updates. The draft will be provided for content review only prior to Cabinet approval, allowing members to submit feedback before the quarterly council meeting. The report is expected to be distributed by the end of the week. The report is scheduled for submission by November 1, 2025.

## Action Items

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### FAQ & Email Templates

- Amanda Owen will circulate draft templates (education-focused and general).
- Committee members will review and edit templates for clarity and conciseness.

### Resource Access

- KYOVR Staff will process for placing FAQ / QR code materials in the Dropbox for future access.

### Target Contacts & Outreach

- Committee will compile a target contact list, Kentucky Department of Education, co-ops, Kentucky Adult Transition Council, and regional interagency teams.
- The committee will explore flyer/QR code distribution for the CEC Conference and other events.

### Upcoming Committee meeting schedule

- The next committee meeting will be scheduled for November 7, 2025, from 9:00 am to 10:00 am EST.

## Announcement

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Employment First Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley shared that [National Disability Employment Awareness Month](#) begins October 1, 2025. She encouraged committee members to utilize this observance as an opportunity to share information through their respective agency platforms and to remain attentive to related activities and events.

## Public Comments

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None.

## Adjournment

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Employment First Committee Chair Amanda Owen thanked everyone for their contribution and adjourned the meeting.

## Next Meeting Date

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- November 7, 2025
- 9:00 am- 10:00 am (EST)



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## Advocacy and Education Committee

Minutes

November 7, 2025

9:00 am – 10:00 am (EST)

Zoom

### Members Present

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Committee Chair, Amanda Owen, Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, Bill Bates, Tracy Belfield, Megan Kuhlwein, and Melanie Lybarger

### Members Absent

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David Allgood and Jeff Edwards

### Staff Present

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Nanci Howard, Michelle Cobb, and Anu Kumari

### Welcome and Agenda Review

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Employment First Advocacy and Education Committee Chair, Amanda Owen, welcomed attendees. The agenda was reviewed and acknowledged by all participants.

### FAQ Document Update

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The Employment First Council FAQ document has been formally approved and is now available on the Employment First “Resources” [webpage](#). It was announced that a new six-week Cabinet approval process has been established for all public-facing documents. Moving forward, all materials must comply with accessibility standards prior to submission for Cabinet review and approval.

## Distribution of the FAQ Document(s)

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The committee engaged in a comprehensive discussion regarding strategies to promote the message of Employment First through the dissemination of the FAQ document to a variety of entities, networks, and stakeholder groups.

The following potential outreach groups and platforms were identified:

- State Interagency Advisory Council (SIAC) and Regional Interagency Advisory Councils (RIACs). More information is available through the Kentucky Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities at the [SIAC Website](#) and [RIAC Website](#).
- Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Conference.
- Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) and related Employment conferences available at the [Kentucky APSE Website](#).
- Kentucky Autism Training Center and other disability/advocacy social media channels.
- Family Resource and Youth Services Centers (FRYSCs) – identified as an additional group to share the FAQ and related resources.
- Transition Fairs.
- Kentucky Career Centers.
- Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) Project SPARK participating districts' detailed grant and program information is available at this [KDE Competitive Grants Page](#).
- Coalition Forward and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)-based coalitions and trainings
- Kentucky Retaining Employment and Talent after Injury/Illness Network KY RETAIN / employer-focused listservs and campaigns
- Community Work Transition Program, interagency and transition councils, and similar collaborative networks
- Relevant provider, educator, family, and self-advocate networks via social media posts, email lists, conference presentations, and Employment First information tables.

It was also suggested that information be shared with Regional Education Cooperatives such as GRREC (Green River Regional Educational Cooperative) and WKEC (West Kentucky Educational Cooperative). Members are encouraged to further disseminate materials across all state cooperatives to maximize outreach and visibility.

The committee agreed to continue identifying additional dissemination opportunities and to share the FAQ document within their respective networks and stakeholder groups between committee meetings.

## *Action Items*

### *FAQ & Email Templates*

- Editing permissions will be updated to allow committee members to review, edit, and provide feedback prior to the next scheduled meeting.
- QR codes will be created and distributed to committee members for use in presentations and related materials. It was suggested to utilize a QR code creator to generate and track QR codes for Employment First resources.

### *Resource Access*

- The committee will use the designated Dropbox/shared folder to store: FAQ documents, QR codes, email templates, and outreach materials.
- It was suggested to include the Dropbox link in future meeting invitations for easy access.
- It was recommended to include a QR code on the Employment First one-page flyer that links directly to the FAQ documents and other resources on the website.
- It was also suggested that the Employment First one-page flyer be repositioned at the top of the Resources page, above the FAQ documents, to enhance visibility and accessibility.
- Committee members were encouraged to maintain a running list of where and how the FAQ and related materials are shared so that dissemination activities can be accurately reflected in the Employment First Council Annual Report.

## **Upcoming Committee Meetings**

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The next committee meetings will be scheduled between the quarterly Council meetings. The committee agreed to meet in February and March, prior to the April quarterly meeting, from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST).

## **Public Comments**

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None.

## **Adjournment**

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Employment First Committee Chair Amanda Owen thanked everyone for their contribution and adjourned the meeting.

## **Next Meeting Date**

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February and March 2026  
9:00am – 10:00am – Friday