



CKEC:
Providing Service To Central Kentucky Districts

Years ago, educational cooperatives formed with a very simple mission in mind. School districts felt that, by banding together, they could realize cost savings through collective bidding on items that all school districts use. It was a singular focus, and an effective one. Districts did achieve cost savings, and cooperatives became a mainstay in the educational community. Over time, though, cooperatives like the Central Kentucky Educational Cooperative have become so much more – managing cadres, providing professional learning, doing advocacy work, and working with colleges. In this article, we will explore how CKEC meets these needs to support their districts through those four fundamental areas.

Cadres

Cadres are groups of specialists that meet to exchange ideas about things happening in education and troubleshoot problems they are experiencing in their schools or districts. They are a core structure within the work of CKEC, providing consistent opportunities for collective problem solving, sharing ideas, the pursuit of new information as requested by the districts, and a connection between the Kentucky Department of Education and other state agencies with CKEC's districts.

Cadres meet anywhere from once a month to three times a year. CKEC Chief Executive Officer David Young often refers to these cadre meetings as “support meetings”, stating, “They’re like support groups. They’re just a group of like-minded individuals who are getting together to talk about their jobs, share information, and solve problems. It’s good to have the opportunity to talk with others who are doing similar work and dealing with the same challenges that you are”.

There are several cadres currently being run by CKEC staff. Ramona Karsner, Director of Special Education at CKEC organizes and arranges the meetings in the Special Education division. A few of the cadres she’s involved in are the Speech Language Pathologist Cadre, the School Psychologist Cadre, and of course, the Special Education Directors Cadre. A current focus of these cadres centers around the evaluation practices and meeting the needs of English Language Learners that also have disabilities. Sometimes, ESL students can be identified incorrectly in Special Education. This is not good for those students. These cadres are working to prevent that from happening. It’s a good example of the important work that can be done in cadres.

Professional Learning

One of Central Kentucky Educational Cooperative's strongest skills is giving its districts opportunities to continue to improve and expand their knowledge. The professional learning offered by CKEC comes from deep data analysis, along with the needs expressed by the districts. Mark Helton, the Math Consultant for Special Education, has run many of these trainings during his ten years at CKEC. His responsibility is to increase and improve the content knowledge of teachers, but also help them incorporate specially-designed instruction based on students' needs. Mr. Helton previously worked in a high school, so transitioning to teaching adults came with a bit of a challenge. "A lot of times with adults, I not only am teaching the content, but how to teach it, and how to address misconceptions and how to plan for specially-designed instruction around that content". He often focuses on helping teachers make connections across different grade levels. This works well because the emphasis is not only on effective teaching methods, but also on the "bigger picture" of a student's education.

Over the past year, Mr. Helton was responsible for shifting some of these programs to an online format. In the past, these trainings were always face to face. However, CKEC saw that their support would be better accessed through multiple modes, and began working on online modules to broaden the accessibility of their trainings. With Covid, the move to more technological training sessions was fast-tracked. Moving forward, there will likely be in person training, self-paced online sessions, and hybrid, synchronous learning so that anyone, no matter what their situation or preference, can easily take advantage of the plethora of professional learning sessions offered by CKEC.

Advocacy Work

Central Kentucky Educational Cooperative acts as an advocate between the school districts and the Kentucky legislature, as well as other state agencies. At various times throughout the year, CKEC facilitates meetings between their superintendents and legislators. This allows each party to share information and ask each other questions about what is going on in their respective fields. They are able to express what is being prioritized, what they want to prioritize, and decisions that may be made in schools or during the upcoming legislative session. Advocacy is incredibly important because public education is publicly funded. Once the legislative session begins, David Young, CEO at Central Kentucky Educational Cooperative, goes to the capitol in order to speak with and hold individual meetings with legislators on behalf of their school districts. Through these meetings, communication is open between districts and state agencies, and CKEC is able to keep their districts and legislators up to date on any policy changes and even weigh in on some of the future decisions.

College Collaboration

It's no secret that schools excel when they are staffed with high-quality teachers. CKEC works with colleges and universities across the state to help train students and get them employed in districts across Central Kentucky. The cooperative connects pre-service teachers who have just graduated from college with the school districts they're interested in so those students can make connections with people there and potentially apply to work at those schools.

Not only do pre-service teachers have the opportunity to go to job fairs and do mock interviews, but through their colleges and universities, Central Kentucky Educational Cooperative invites the students to participate in teacher training. These trainings are the same ones they offer to their experienced teachers. In fact, the newly graduated teachers are not only getting extra training before they enter the field, but they're also getting to see the type of training and learning experienced educators are receiving.

Developing passionate and quality teachers is something CKEC strives for. Maurice Chappell revealed a potential new project that demonstrates this idea. CKEC is working to create a program for students with Bachelor's degrees in subjects taught in schools to acquire teacher certification through alternative routes. While this idea is still in the works, Chappell hopes to work with Kentucky colleges or universities to develop a program that would allow new graduates to have a fast track program that would lead to a teaching job in one of their local districts. The idea is that during a year and a half of coursework, exams, and mix of classroom and field experience, a student would be able to successfully earn their teaching certification and enter the education field, fully prepared for their career. All of these factors only emphasize how Central Kentucky Educational Cooperative is devoted to fostering innovative new and collective ideas so that they can do the best for both their students and future teachers.

While Central Kentucky Educational Cooperative still handles the bids for supplies, that is, as we've seen, only one of the many roles this cooperative plays. This organization exists to support and meet the needs of all its member districts. Every individual and program here is dedicated to the focus of the mission statement: a commitment to education. CKEC is involved in providing and assisting education at every level. From a district's students to its teachers and principals, special and general education teachers, pre-service and experienced educators, superintendents and even legislators, everyone at Central Kentucky Educational Cooperative is dedicated to providing the tools so that every individual is able to grow and improve as an educator.

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