

**IN-PERSON – 500 Mero Street, Frankfort, KY: 4<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room**  
**Or Via Zoom**

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**Attendees:** Lori Ulrich, David Potter, Miles Feroli, Alicia Crouch, Jesse Schook, Mason Dyer, Matt Berry, Sam Keathley, LeeSa Page, Rajeev Darolia, Johnny W. Collett, Kendrah Pearson, Beth Hargis, Myra Wilson, Becky Gilpatrick, Aveana Jackson, Leslie Sizemore

**KWIB Staff:** Alisher Burikhanov, Debbie Dennison, LaChrista Ellis, and Elishah Taylor

### **10:00 am Welcome and Introductions**

**Alisher Burikhanov, Executive Director, Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (KWIB)**, welcomed attendees and acknowledged key partners and leadership. He referenced prior progress made by the group and outlined the purpose of the meeting, including the review of a proposed governance structure and continued coordination among partner organizations. Participants were invited to provide feedback to ensure alignment and appropriate representation within the workgroup structure.

### **Key Outcomes**

Alisher Burikhanov led the group in reviewing the desired outcomes of the initiative, with particular focus on governance alignment and programmatic priorities. Members confirmed continued support for the governance structure proposed thus far. The discussion then shifted to two primary focus areas for the meeting: (1) defining how adult education could support student preparation and successful outcomes, and (2) establishing clear definitions for “high-wage, high-skill, and in-demand” occupations. Members emphasized the importance of reaching consensus on these definitions, incorporating business input, and aligning with data previously shared in in-demand sectors. Additional consideration was given to coordinating related efforts such as Perkins, WIOA, and Workforce Pell to ensure strategic alignment moving forward.

### **Workforce Pell Update**

**Rajeev Darolia, Ph.D., Wendell H. Ford Professor of Public Policy & Economics, University Research Professor, University of Kentucky**, provided an update on the federal rulemaking process for Workforce Pell, noting that the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) has been submitted to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for interagency review. Because negotiated rulemaking reached consensus, the proposed rule is expected to closely reflect agreed-upon language, with implementation still anticipated by July 1. The group also discussed a projected Pell Grant funding shortfall identified by the Congressional Budget Office, explaining that future congressional action could affect eligibility or program parameters in the coming years.

The discussion expanded to include a newly announced Department of Labor (DOL) [grant opportunity](#) to support community college implementation of Workforce Pell, as well as the likelihood that four-year institutions may compete for related funding. Members also clarified that Workforce Pell recipients must complete the FAFSA, with timelines reviewed to ensure shared understanding. The conversation concluded with reflections on

Kentucky's unified WIOA structure and how Adult Education and other workforce programs may be positioned to support effective implementation.

### **Piloting Dual Enrollment in Adult Education**

**David Potter, Ph.D., Senior Coordinator, Kentucky Office of Adult Education**, introduced a proposal to pilot a dual enrollment model in which Workforce Pell participants would also be enrolled in Adult Education to provide integrated academic and durable skills support. He emphasized that the anticipated Workforce Pell population—primarily low-income, non-traditional learners balancing work and family responsibilities—closely mirrors the students Adult Education currently serves. The proposed model involves collaboration between Adult Education providers and post-secondary training institutions to deliver targeted literacy, numeracy, and workplace skills support, either embedded within training programs or offered through flexible formats such as bootcamps, co-instruction, or online modules. The goal is to improve program completion, employment attainment, and job retention outcomes.

Members discussed launching the concept as a pilot program to test outcomes before broader implementation, potentially beginning with programs such as CDL training and in partnership with institutions like BCTC. Questions were raised regarding eligibility requirements, FAFSA and diploma considerations, potential student burden, program capacity, and the limited number of programs projected to meet Workforce Pell's performance thresholds. Participants also discussed incorporating employer input to strengthen durable skills alignment and suggested that correctional education programs might present an additional opportunity for integrated support. Overall, there was general interest in exploring a proof-of-concept approach while remaining mindful of data limitations, institutional readiness, and fiscal responsibility.

### **Group Discussion**

The group engaged in an in-depth discussion regarding how Kentucky should define "high-wage, high-skill, and in-demand" occupations for purposes of Workforce Pell eligibility and broader workforce alignment. Members noted that states are approaching these definitions differently and acknowledged the importance of establishing clear, data-informed standards that could also inform WIOA and Perkins implementation. Considerable attention was given to defining "high wage," including whether to anchor the threshold to the state median wage, a percentage premium above median wages, gainful employment standards, living wage calculations (e.g., MIT Living Wage), or other benchmarks. Participants discussed the philosophical implications of setting an aspirational bar versus a minimum value-added threshold, particularly in relation to family-sustaining wages and long-term economic mobility.

The group also explored how to operationalize "in-demand" and "high-skill" criteria, including whether to align with existing key sector designations, educational attainment requirements, long-term on-the-job training, or apprenticeship standards. Regional variation, occupational-to-credential crosswalk complexities (SOC to CIP), and potential standardization across agencies were identified as important technical considerations. Members expressed interest in reviewing modeled data scenarios to better understand how different definitional approaches would affect program eligibility statewide. While no final determinations were made, there was general agreement on the need for a high-standard, transparent framework that balances accountability, flexibility, and statewide workforce goals.

### **11:26 am – Closing Comments and Adjournment**

Alisher Burikhanov concluded the meeting by outlining the decision-making timeline and next steps for establishing Kentucky's Workforce Pell framework. He emphasized the July 1 federal implementation deadline and noted that the proposal had to be approved by the board at its final meeting before that date, currently anticipated in May. This timeline leaves March and April for the workgroup to reach consensus, followed by

internal and external reviews, as required by statute. Members acknowledged that while the framework did not have to be perfect at launch, it had to establish a clear and defensible foundation for high-wage, high-skill, and in-demand program eligibility.

Discussion also addressed the importance of setting high-standard yet thoughtful standards that prioritized strong student outcomes and responsible public investment. Alisher encouraged the group to view eligibility thresholds not as limiting access, but as directing students toward programs with higher likelihoods of long-term success. Members discussed the need for clarity in terminology, particularly distinguishing between the broader governance role of the workgroup and the separate program review function. Additional considerations were raised regarding regional wage variation, four-year institution implications, apprenticeship alignment, FAFSA timing, and administrative feasibility. The group agreed to reconvene on March 19, with brief documents to be distributed in advance to allow for thorough review.



# KWIB Workforce Pell Workgroup Meeting

**AGENDA**  
**February 19, 2026**  
**10:00 am – 11:30 am EST**

**Education and Labor Cabinet**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Floor Main Conference Room**  
**500 Mero Street**  
**Frankfort, KY 40601**

<b>10:00 am</b>	<b>Welcome.....</b>	<i>Alisher Burikhanov</i> <i>Executive Director</i> <i>Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (KWIB)</i>  <i>David Potter, Ph.D.</i> <i>Senior Coordinator, Education Transition Strategist</i> <i>Kentucky Adult Education</i>
<b>10:10 am</b>	<b>Key Outcomes.....</b> - <i>Update on the Workforce Pell Governance</i> - <i>Supporting Students (discussion on adult education enrollment)</i> - <i>Identifying High-Wage, High-Skill, and In-Demand Definitions</i>	<i>Alisher Burikhanov</i>
<b>10:20 am</b>	<b>Workforce Pell Update.....</b>	<i>Rajeev Darolia, Ph.D.</i> <i>Wendell H. Ford Professor of Public Policy &amp; Economics</i> <i>University Research Professor</i> <i>University of Kentucky</i>
<b>10:30 am</b>	<b>Piloting Dual Enrollment in Adult Education .....</b>	<i>David Potter, PhD.</i>
<b>10:45 am</b>	<b>KYSTATS Data Review.....</b>	<i>Matt Berry, Ph.D.</i> <i>Executive Director</i> <i>Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS)</i>  <i>Sam Keathley</i> <i>Senior Workforce Analyst</i> <i>Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS)</i>
<b>11:00 am</b>	<b>Group Discussion.....</b>	<i>Workgroup Members</i>
<b>11:30 am</b>	<b>Adjournment.....</b>	<i>Alisher Burikhanov</i>

## Summary of Key Sector Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative analysis that supported key sector selection discussions in 2024 generally followed this premise:

- 1.) Which occupations, at a statewide level, exhibit some favorable combination of wages, projected job openings (demand), and projected growth?
- 2.) Among those occupations, are there any that should be excluded? For example, maybe they don't pay a living wage, or maybe they require extremely high (or low) levels of educational attainment.
- 3.) For the remaining occupations, which industries account for the highest volumes of jobs in those occupations?

The final result of this analysis was a series of ranked lists of industries (one list for each ruleset considered in Step 2, shown on the sector\_outputs tab of Attachment 1). Note that the lists of occupations that are produced in order to arrive at those industries (shown on the occupation\_inputs tab of Attachment 1) were not formalized as a set of 'priority occupations', and existed only as a by-product of the industry identification process.

## Key Sectors vs. Workforce Pell - Labor Market Data Alignment

	<b>Key Sectors</b>	<b>Workforce Pell</b>
What units of analysis are important?	Industries (with occupations as a foundation).	Instructional programs (with occupations <i>and/or</i> industries as a foundation).
To the extent that occupational data are important, what specific metrics matter?	Demand, Wages, and Growth Rate.	Demand, Wages, and Skill.
Are those metrics considered independently or in conjunction with one another?	In conjunction with one another. Occupations received a 'composite' score in the underlying calculations for key sector quantitative work.	Either. States are free to make independent lists (e.g. occupations can be considered High Wage but not High Demand, or vice versa).
How might regionality play a role?	Local WIBs were able to supplement key sectors with their own regional priority industries, so regionality wasn't a feature of the quantitative analysis.	LWA-level labor market data could potentially be used to generate region-specific frameworks for High-Wage, High-Demand lists.

## **Option #1: Repurposing Portions of Key Sector Methodology for Workforce Pell**

To repurpose portions of the Key Sector methodology, there are several aspects of that approach that workgroup members would need to be comfortable with in the context of Workforce Pell. For example:

- The occupations that'd ultimately be crosswalked to instructional programs would take the form of a *single* list (as opposed to separate High-Wage, High-Demand, High-Skill lists).
- Key Sectors methodology does *not* include a "High Skill" dimension, but *does* include a "High-Growth" dimension that isn't explicitly required for Workforce Pell determinations.
- Key sectors methodology does *not* account for regional labor market characteristics (and instead only accounts for the statewide labor market).

If those conditions are accepted, then, in practice, this process would look like: choosing one of 'Methods' outlined in Attachment 1, deciding whether the data should be refreshed (as opposed to using the slightly older data that drove Key Sector selection), and then crosswalking the occupations to instructional programs.

## **Option #2: Developing a new approach**

In the event that workgroup members would prefer *not* to repurpose the Key Sector methodology, and would instead prefer a methodology that accounts for regionality and which would result in independent lists for High-Wage, High-Demand, and High-Skill occupations (as opposed to composite scores), then there are other viable approaches.

Specifically, High-Wage and High-Demand occupation lists could be generated by identifying a specific threshold such that occupations exhibiting values *above* that threshold are included in the list(s).

Potential Wage thresholds:

- Living wage (likely from MIT LW Calculator... would require identifying household structure, and geographies to be used for comparison).
- Other publicly-available poverty/ self-sufficiency measures (Statewide or LWA)
- Entry-level wage for Total, All Occupations (Statewide or LWA)
- Median wage for Total, All Occupations (Statewide or LWA)
- Some % of any of the wage levels mentioned above

Potential Demand thresholds:

- X% of an area's total expected ten-year job openings accounted for by an occupation
- A predetermined volume (e.g. 500 or more job openings)
- Growth rates above or below the state or LWA Total, All Occupations growth rate (note: this isn't synonymous with demand or job openings in the *strictest* sense, but is likely still defensible)
- Occupations in the Xth percentile along Demand (State or LWA)
- Occupations with the top X highest-demand within the state or an LWA (e.g. Top 100)

"High Skill" is a categorization that probably isn't well-served by quantitative analysis alone. Typically, in labor market analyses, high-skill vs. middle-skill vs. low-skill occupations are delineated as such based on the level of educational attainment required to perform them (which isn't necessarily aligned to the

spirit of Workforce Pell). To the extent that any KYSTATS data can be brought to bear on High Skill determinations, the workgroup might consider an approach that begins with the kind of educational-attainment-based categorization described above, but wherein occupations can be ‘elevated’ to High-Skill status based on whether the workforce supply of that occupation is supported by Apprenticeship programs, CTE programs, etc.

### **Miscellaneous notes**

- Note that not all occupations that exist in Kentucky have publishable wage and/or demand estimates, as occupations’ estimates can be suppressed for a variety of reasons (e.g. insufficient sample coverage). In many of these cases, it is reasonable to assume that a suppressed occupation accounts for very a relatively small volume of employment. However, in other cases, a suppressed occupation could potentially account for a non-trivial volume of employment, especially in instances where the occupation’s employment overwhelmingly belongs to a small number of employers. Substitution of statewide estimates may or may not be appropriate in these instances, depending on the use case.
- In KYSTATS’ data products, you’ll see Demand and Total Job Openings published separately (with Demand universally being the smaller of the two data points for a given occupation). This reflects the fact that there are three underlying economic phenomena that produce job openings:
  - o *Economic growth*. The economy grows over time, so additional job openings are produced to account for the new occupational employment that is needed as a result.
  - o *Exits*. Individuals who are performing an occupation exit the labor force (e.g. retirements), and so job openings are produced to account for the replacement occupational employment that is needed as a result.
  - o *Transfers*. Individuals who are performing an occupation stop performing that occupation to begin performing another occupation, and so job openings are produced to account for the replacement occupational employment that is needed as a result.

Arguably, job openings from transfers entail a sort of ‘musical chairs’ aspect. For example, if a Human Resources Manager and an Accountant were to swap jobs, then there’d be two job openings produced – one in each of those occupations. However, in this instance, do education and workforce planners need to *do* anything in terms of producing an additional Human Resources Manager or an additional Accountant? Probably not. So, for some use cases, it is useful to *only* consider job openings produced from economic growth and exits, which is the metric that we refer to as Demand. There are many other use cases where Total Job Openings is the more useful metric.