



Grow Your Own Pipelines Spring 2026

Rising Strong: State Conference Highlights and Wins



The March 2026 Educators Rising Kentucky State Conference, "Rising Stars: Lights, Leadership, Action!" was a powerful celebration of growth and fueled with passion for education. With our largest attendance to date, we welcomed 743 competitors, 243 attendees and teacher leaders – who enjoyed their own red carpet spotlight! – and nearly 1,000 participants overall (986 total), a clear reflection of the GYO momentum building across our state.

Across competitions, students shined with excellence and determination, earning a remarkable 254 medals: 98 gold, 83 silver and 73 bronze. Each medal represents not just achievement, but the intent to step forward, the commitment to grow and the spark of future educators finding their voice.

Beyond competition, the conference theme was on full show – Lights, Leadership, Action!" – with connection and opportunity bustling. KDE partnered with 25 vendors, including dedicated community collaborators and university programs, creating meaningful pathways for students to explore their futures. Attendees also experienced dynamic, engaging sessions led by motivational and compassionate speakers who inspired, challenged and affirmed the next generation



KY Educators Rising Vision:

To eliminate the teacher shortage by reimagining educator pathways.

KY Educators Rising Mission:

To inspire and grow current and rising educators to become community leaders and advocates for high-quality education.



Grow Your Own (GYO) Greats

Haley Chowning, our state director of communications, is our GYO Spring Spotlight! She is completing her clinical experience hours at her former middle school in Jefferson County Public Schools. Below, she shares her compelling story:

of educators.

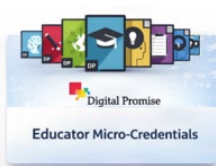
Together, this year's conference was more than an event. "Rising Stars" showed us the strength of our community, the growth of our students and the bright future of education in Kentucky.



To access our full list of the Top 3 Awardees for each competition or contest, visit our [Educators Rising Conference Awardees webpage!](#)



Teaching and Learning Post-Secondary Readiness: What You Need to Know



Kentucky's seniors can prove they are either college or career ready through certifications, end-of-program assessments, and dual credit achievement.

Did you know that Education is among the [Top 5 In-Demand Sectors](#)? This means Teaching and Learning pathway seniors who pass the Pre-Pac (Teaching and Learning's industry certification), OR complete all the Educators Rising (Digital Promise) Microcredentials, OR complete the comprehensive and relatively extensive TRACK Youth Apprenticeship will receive a 1.25 score toward their post-secondary readiness accountability scores instead of only a 1.0, which is what others who are not identified as in-demand sectors receive.

- Our [Teacher Leader folder](#) has an [entire subfolder](#) dedicated to prepping our seniors taking the Pre-PAC.

Middle school is probably one of the toughest and most pivotal times students go through. It's a time filled with constant changes, intense emotions and expectations that sometimes feel impossible to meet.

For the class of 2026, COVID-19 added its own set of challenges to an already difficult time. It had a major impact on me especially. I struggled immensely with virtual learning and with returning in-person. My mom worked on the frontlines of COVID at a nursing home, going to work early and coming home late. At times it felt like my teachers were the only constant I had in my life, and they made a huge difference.

I carried that difference with me when I got to high school and it came time to pick out career pathways, and I knew immediately what I was going to choose. I chose Teaching and Learning, not only because it interested me but because I remember seeing on the pathway flyer that there were opportunities to do our field experience at Thomas Jefferson Middle School: the middle school I attended, where I had countless educators inspire me and encourage me to be successful. I had a huge desire to return to TJ, not only because I was interested in teaching middle school but because I wanted to give back to a community that invested so much time, knowledge and kindness into me.

Beginning my junior year, I began working in Ms. Hawthorne's 6th-grade classroom where I get to lead lessons, grade papers and build relationships with the incredible students. Getting to walk through the halls to my class and see the educators that inspired me to get to this point in the first place is always the most incredible feeling.

Looking back, middle school was one of the most challenging but valuable times in my life. The teachers I had not only managed to help shape my success in middle school, but also for the rest of my life. Some of the most important lessons I learned weren't put into the

- [Access our Teaching and Learning Industry Certification options](#) to break down your Teaching and Learning industry certification options and gain more understanding of the pros and cons of each one.

Good luck to our students who will be completing the Teaching and Learning Pathway industry certifications this year!

Keep Spring Cleaning Out of the Madness

Educators Rising's April Service Project is All About a Fresh Start!



Classroom Refresh Crew

- Organize supplies, wipe down surfaces, reset bulletin boards
- Create simple, fresh décor or seasonal displays
- Prep materials for upcoming units

Self-Care Surprise Kits

- Assemble small care packages (tea, snacks, handwritten notes, stress-relief items)
- Include affirmations like “You’re making a difference – even on the messy days.”

Teacher Recharge Lounge

- Transform a staff room corner into a calm space for a week
- Add cozy touches: soft lighting, calming music, snacks, gratitude wall

Time-Saver Task Force

- Help with copying, laminating, cutting materials
- Offer “coverage minutes” (with approval) so teachers can take a breather

2026-2027 Student Officer Finalists Announced

gradebook, but I will absolutely use them in my everyday life.



KENTUCKY

2025-2026 Educators Rising State Officers

President:

Hunter Carr, Region 1

President-Elect:

Lily Russell, Region 6

Director of Communications:

Haley Chowning, Region 3

Director of Communications:

Kelly Esquivel Hernandez, Region 3

Director of Membership:

Alyssa Pollard, Region 3

Director of Outreach & Service:

Nia Serikali, Region 3

Springtime Means Teaching and Learning Signing Days!

Looking Ahead

Contact

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Access our [Teaching and Learning KY Teacher Leaders Request Form](#)

Resources

- [Educators Rising/ Teaching and Learning Dates to Know 2025-2026](#)
- [Monthly meeting summaries and recordings](#)
- [Kentucky Teacher Leaders Google Drive Folder](#)
- [Educators Rising Curriculum Implementation](#)

Important Dates

- **April 30:** Teacher Leader Final Monthly (virtual; optional)
- **May 4-8:** Teacher Appreciation Week



These students have advanced to the next round – and now we need the support of Kentucky chapters!

Each candidate will create a campaign video explaining why they are the best fit for their chosen role.

Videos were shared with all Teaching and Learning Kentucky chapters by April 11. Chapters have about one month to review and vote. Student officers will be announced on May 15!

President-Elect

- Atiba (Nia) Serikalii (Central Magnet Career Academy)
- Olivia Prince (Graves County High School)
- Grace Hurley (Graves County High School)

Director of Communications

- Aleeyah Lyon (Union County High School)
- Brynlee Morris (Waggener High School)
- Zowiee Bishop (Ignite Institute)
- Autumn Clifton (Ignite Institute)

Director of Membership

- Mariah Townsend (Ignite Institute)
- Brooke Eadens (Arvin Education Center)
- Audrey Watson (Washington County High School)

Director of Outreach and Support

- Kristen Nickrent (Ignite Institute)
- Geneva Quig (Spencer County High School)
- Audrey Looten (Elizabethtown High School)

Springtime Means Teaching and Learning Signing Days!



- **May 5:** Educators Rising National Signing Day
- **May 4-11:** Campaign videos voting window OPEN. CLOSES May 11, 11:59 p.m. ET
- **May 15:** 2026-2027 Student Officers Announced
- **May 18:** Competition schedules posted
- **May 18:** 2026-2027 Educators Rising KY Student Officers announced
- **May 31:** [Educators Rising Honors Society Application](#) CLOSES



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Please follow us on social media to support growing our Educators Rising Kentucky community of rising professionals!

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[Educators Rising Teacher Leader Facebook Group](#)