



KENTUCKY

goes to college

College Decision Day

Program Implementation Guide



Adapted from Michigan College Decision Day Project Coordinator Resource Manual



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Part I: Program Basics



Welcome!

Dear College Decision Day Site Coordinator:

On behalf of Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority (KHEAA), thank you for participating in College Decision Day. The goal of a Decision Day program is to recognize and celebrate seniors who have made postsecondary educational plans and inspire younger students and families to prepare early for college.

Your seniors have worked hard throughout their time in high school to prepare for college and take the necessary steps to complete college enrollment. This is not an easy process for many, and your College Decision Day program can help to support and celebrate students as they continue to finalize their college plans. We also encourage you to use Decision Day as a way to enhance your school's college-going culture and help start conversations with younger students to build excitement about their postsecondary endeavors.

College Decision Day is an annual program and is usually held on or around May 1, which coincides with the date that most seniors must inform a college of their plans to enroll. Schools in Kentucky that have participated in College Decision Day in the past have hosted programs as early as late April and throughout the month of May.

To help you plan and prepare a College Decision Day program at your school or organization, we are pleased to provide the resources in this Implementation Guide and on our Kentucky Goes to College website at kygoestocollege.com. You will find timelines, event ideas, student resources, templates and much more to help make your event a success.

Please feel free to reach out to your KHEAA Outreach Counselor or contact me at sgortney@kheaa.com or 502-759-0798. We can help answer any questions you may have about planning and implementing a College Decision Day event in your area. In addition, we hope that you will share your best practices and new ideas with us as we grow this program around the state.

Thank you for what you do to encourage Kentucky students and their families to make college a part of their future. We look forward to seeing College Decision Day become an annual tradition in Kentucky schools!

Sincerely,

Summer Gortney
Assistant Director of Outreach Services
Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority
sgortney@kheaa.com

What is College Decision Day?

Hosting a College Decision Day program allows you to celebrate and recognize your seniors for making educational plans beyond the high school level. College Decision Day is typically held on or around May 1 and is designed to coincide with the date that most seniors must inform a college of their plans to enroll.

College Decision Day is inspired by the NCAA's National Signing Day to reinforce that excellence in the classroom should be given as much recognition as athletic excellence. NCAA's National Signing Day is when high school seniors sign a letter of intent to play sports at a specific college. Our goal is to mimic this excitement for ALL students going to college.

While there are a small number of schools and districts in Kentucky that have been doing Decision Day programs for several years, 2017 was the start of KHEAA's efforts to expand College Decision Day more broadly across the state. KHEAA has launched an official toolkit at kygoestocollege.com to provide the resources needed to help schools quickly and easily host a Decision Day program. The hope is that College Decision Day not only celebrates students' intent to go to college, but that it also helps close the gap between college application rates and enrollment rates among our students, and the sometimes complicated process for officially enrolling in college.

Why Host College Decision Day?

- To recognize all students for their postsecondary plans;
- To encourage and remind students it's time to make a decision;
- To support the best match and fit for each student;
- To influence younger students as they prepare for college; and
- To support a college-going culture and wrap up the school year with a celebration.

Who Should Participate in College Decision Day

For any college access programming that KHEAA promotes, the word "college" is meant to include a variety of postsecondary education options. College Decision Day programs should celebrate and recognize the full variety of plans that seniors may have after high school.

The hope is that every Kentucky student plans to complete some type of education or training beyond high school. Kentucky is fortunate to boast a wide variety of public and private two- and four-year colleges, universities and technical schools to meet the individual needs of each student. Some postsecondary options that may be celebrated during College Decision Day include:

- Certificate or Diploma Programs
- Associate Degrees
- Bachelor's Degrees
- Apprenticeship Programs
- Military Service
- Workforce Commitment

Students who are still undecided about what they want to do after high school, or who know they are not going to attend college or complete additional career-related training, can still be included in the event. While you may not recognize them in the same way as those pursuing the options listed above, attending the event may inspire these students to make plans for postsecondary education.

Expectations of Host Sites

Each school must decide for itself the benefit of hosting a Decision Day program, and must organize an event that meets the needs of the school. At a minimum, schools should aim to create an event that includes the following:

- Recognizes all students for their postsecondary plans (two-year, four-year, military, postsecondary certificate);
- Takes place in front of the entire student body (or include some younger students);
- Involves the local community – encourage publicity and outreach beyond the high school building;
- Creates a fun and celebratory atmosphere!

Part II: Plan Your Event



Planning Timeline and Checklist

Successful College Decision Day events will look different from school to school. It is important to plan an event that works best for your school and students. This is a recommended timeline and checklist for planning a College Decision Day event. You may choose to do certain tasks earlier or later than suggested here, so feel free to customize this to best fit your needs. It's always best to start planning as early as possible.

8 weeks prior to event — Week of: _____

- Print and review the current College Decision Day Program Implementation Guide found at kygoestocollege.com.
- Establish a planning team to assist with your school's preparations; host first meeting. Your planning team may include school counselors, teachers, administrators, students, parents/families, higher education admission and/or financial aid representatives or other college access personnel who work with your school. At your first meeting you may:
 - Evaluate current resources
 - Establish an event budget (if applicable)
 - Pick a date for your College Decision Day event and add it to your school's master calendar.
- Contact your KHEAA Outreach Counselor for assistance and to schedule any workshops or events that you may want them to be involved with as a part of your Decision Day program. Refer to the Resource Directory in the back of this guide for counselor contact information.

7 weeks prior to event — Week of: _____

- Determine what type of event you want to have based on available resources and budget. Some examples include:
 - Pep rally (most popular)
 - Lunch celebration
 - Student workshop
- Reserve the space for your event (typically school auditorium or gym).
- Start communicating with potential volunteers for your event by making announcements at school meetings, PTA/PTO meetings, and/or parent nights.
- Invite college reps, if applicable to your event.

6 weeks prior to your event — Week of: _____

- Set a schedule for your event, including which groups or classes of students will participate at what time (see sample event schedule in this guide).
- Encourage teachers to begin connecting classroom lessons to your program. Some examples include:
 - Learning how to compare financial aid award letters
 - Learning how student loans work and calculating return on investment
 - Creating College Decision Day poster design
 - Creating college mascot and college pennant artwork

5 weeks prior to your event — Week of: _____

- Contact your local Mayor's office to have your College Decision Day proclaimed in your community. If other schools in your district are hosting events, coordinate with them on the request.
- Decide on potential keynote, workshop or panel speakers, if applicable to your event, and extend invitations.
- Contact local colleges and businesses asking for donations, sponsorship and support. Examples include:
 - Colleges may provide small items to hand out to students who have selected their college.
 - Local businesses may donate t-shirts, raffle prizes or food/refreshments.
 - Hand out fliers for local businesses to post in their windows or ask them to support seniors by changing their outdoor signs on College Decision Day.

4 weeks prior to your event — Week of: _____

- Provide seniors with the Enrollment Checklist (page 14).
- Check in with volunteers to confirm event date and time. Recruit more volunteers if necessary.
- Decide if students' college choices/postsecondary plans will be announced during the event. If so, start confirming postsecondary plans with seniors.

3 weeks prior to your event — Week of: _____

- Create a schedule for volunteers, taking into account the availability of your volunteers, tasks they may be asked to perform, and meal/refreshment breaks.
- Start promoting event information throughout the school:
 - Morning/afternoon announcements
 - School website
 - Official school marquee/kiosk/outdoor signs
 - School newspaper and/or newsletter
- Prepare for event publicity outside of school:
 - Develop a press release to be sent to local newspaper, radio and/or television outlets (see template on page 20).
 - Notify local businesses and ask them to wear college gear the day of the event.
 - Schedule robocalls or text message alerts for parents.
 - Develop social media posts (see samples on page 18).

2 weeks prior to your event — Week of: _____

- Finalize guest speaker arrangements
- Send parent/guardian letter (see template on page 19).
- Send a message to your volunteers to confirm the details of your event, including parking information and when/where to meet.
- Distribute press releases to media outlets.
- Confirm any additional personnel needed, such as custodial or facilities staff.

1 week prior to your event — Week of: _____

- Finalize event supplies which may include:
 - Banner or individual cards or certificates for students to sign during the event
 - Decorations and posters/signage
 - Prizes and giveaways
 - Music
 - Food/refreshments (if applicable)
- Remind teachers, counselors and administrators of the event schedule and ensure all students will have the opportunity to participate.
 - Through advisory periods or senior English classes, review with students why you are having a Decision Day event and what will happen during the event.
 - Confirm all seniors have informed you of their plans, particularly if there will be an announcement during the event.
- Follow up with media outlets and ask them to attend your event (most will not make final decision until the day of).
- Encourage students and staff to wear college clothing on the day of the event. Send guest speakers and volunteers a final reminder a day or two prior to the event.
- Send parents a final reminder about the event through your school's robocall or text messaging system.
- Message about the event via social media.

Your College Decision Day Event — _____

- Welcome guest speakers and volunteers and thank them for their support.
 - Let volunteers know what their role is for the day; ensure they receive a badge or sticker identifying them as a volunteer.
- Remember to take pictures and video during your event and upload them to social media using the hashtags **#idecidedky**, **#BeenAdmittedNowCommitted**, **#kygoestocollege**, **#KYDecisionDay**, **#KYCommit**, and **#BetterMakeRoom**
- Enjoy!***

After Your Event

- Send thank-you letters to guest speakers, volunteers, event sponsors, local businesses, college and universities and school administration.
- Send follow-up letter to seniors and their families congratulating them on being one step closer and reminding them of steps they need to take this summer. Provide contact information for someone they can reach out to in the summer with questions, if possible.
- Follow up with the school planning team to share what worked and what can be improved for next year.

Sample Event Outline

Below is a sample outline for the most popular College Decision Day format, the pep rally celebration. This is merely a suggestion. Site coordinators are encouraged to be as creative as they'd like in planning their event. The most important thing is to create a program that will fit the needs and interests of your school's staff, students and families.

College Decision Day

Student Arrival

If other grade levels are invited, have them seated first, then let the seniors enter last. As students are coming in, fun music, marching bands, or local college cheerleaders and mascots are great additions to build an exciting atmosphere. If seniors will be signing a certificate from their seat, hand these out as they enter or in class beforehand.

Welcome and Overview

Suggested speakers include the principal, superintendent, or member of the school board.

Keynote Speaker/Panel Discussion

Remarks from an individual highlighting the importance of postsecondary education and/or inspiring students to continue their education; suggested speakers include motivational speakers, community leaders who have graduated from college, alumni from the school who benefited from postsecondary opportunities and/or overcame obstacles to pursue their dreams. The most important thing is to pick someone engaging and uplifting!

In lieu of a keynote speaker, schools may choose to have a panel discussion with current college students or recent graduates about life after high school. Again, prep panelists to ensure they are engaging and positive role models.

Recognition of Seniors

Your approach here may depend on time constraints or the size of your school. Options include:

- Recognize students individually, for example by calling their names and having them walk across stage to receive a certificate and sign a poster or banner.
- Pass out certificates as students enter and do a roll call for each college/military branch/apprenticeship program/etc., and students sign their certificate when their college/group is called.

Closing Remarks and Dismissal

The same speaker who welcomed everyone thanks students and guests for coming and congratulates seniors. Music, band, cheerleaders, etc. continue to play as everyone leaves.

Group Photos

After the closing remarks, it is a great time to take photos of students grouped by college/career choice or individually with friends or family members who may have come to the event. If college reps are invited, students can also use this time to ask final questions.

Bringing in Volunteers

Having volunteers outside of the school building for your College Decision Day program not only shows your students that the community at large cares about their success, but it also helps you to build a sustainable college-going culture at your school. If community members have a positive experience helping with an event like Decision Day, they will be more likely to want to volunteer for other events in the future.

Volunteer Recruitment

Volunteers may want to donate time or resources or both! Below is a list of potential contacts in your community that may be interested in helping with Decision Day:

- School alumni
- Student family members (check with your PTA)
- College admission and financial aid representatives
- Business, community and political leaders
- Senior citizen groups
- Civic organizations
- Church organizations
- Youth organizations (i.e. YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, Boy/Girl Scouts, etc.)

It's always best to reach out to potential volunteers in person, but don't forget to promote the need for volunteers in press releases and other publicity as well.

Working with Volunteers

The key to a positive volunteer experience is good communication. Below are some things to remember to ensure your volunteers have a positive experience with your program:

- Follow your school's policy for conducting background checks and let volunteers know what those requirements are well in advance.
- Obtain volunteer contact information when they sign up. Let them know up front how you plan to communicate so they can be on the lookout for your event information and updates.
- Send plenty of reminders leading up to your event. Communicate specifics such as parking, what time to arrive, where the event will be held, options for lunch and other logistical details.
- Greet volunteers when they arrive, and provide them with a name tag, a specific assignment or task, an event agenda and any other necessary details.
- It is nice to have light refreshments for your volunteers such as bottled water, coffee and small snacks.
- Follow up with a thank-you letter and let them know if there are other opportunities coming up at your school when they may be able to volunteer again.

Making the Event Special

As you plan your event, consider using some of these ideas to help make your event to special and exciting for the entire school.

Create a College Wall. Find pennants (or create your own) for the colleges/military branches your students will be attending, and have the students write their names or post their acceptance letters under the pennant where they plan to attend.

Make student videos. Have your seniors record 30-second video spots about why they are excited about making the decision to attend their particular college, go to the military or start their apprenticeship program. You can air the videos on TVs in your school or during your Decision Day event. Make sure you include a variety of students pursuing various postsecondary options. The videos can also be posted to social media using the hashtags **#idecidedky**, **#BeenAdmittedNowCommitted**, **#kygoestocollege**, **#KYDecisionDay2021**, **#KYCommit2021**, and **#BetterMakeRoom**

Give away prizes. Students must inform you of their postsecondary decision to be eligible for the drawings. The raffles can take place during announcements in the week(s) leading up to your Decision Day event or during the event itself, if time allows. This may depend on your budget or donations from the community.

Conduct a panel discussion for juniors. Select a small group of seniors who represent a variety of postsecondary plans, and have them conduct a panel discussion for juniors. This can take place the day of your event, or any time before or after. It is a great way to get juniors thinking about their options and excited about participating in Decision Day when they are seniors.

Involve underclassmen. Have seniors write down a bit of advice for younger students on a large poster or pieces of colorful paper and post them in the freshman, sophomore and junior hallways or on their lockers. If time and space allow, inviting younger students to the Decision Day event can be a great way to get them excited about their future plans as well.

Dress the part. Encourage all faculty and staff to wear clothing from their colleges in the days and weeks leading up to the event and during the event. Students should be encouraged to ask all faculty and staff about their college experiences.

Invite family members. If possible, it is great to invite parents and guardians to the Decision Day event. Another option may be to invite families in for donuts and coffee the morning of the event or an ice cream social in the afternoon.

Encourage community support. Ask local businesses to congratulate college-bound seniors and wish them luck on their outdoor signs and marquees. They can also take out ads in the local newspaper or radio station doing the same.

Part III: Preparing Students



Checklist for College Enrollment

Aside from being an opportunity to celebrate your seniors' postsecondary choices, College Decision Day is also a great way to remind them of the steps they need to take to officially enroll in their chosen school. Most schools expect an enrollment decision on or before May 1. Below is a checklist of common enrollment steps, but students should be sure to check with their colleges to ensure they are doing everything expected of them.

- ❑ Talk to your family, teachers, counselors and other people you trust to help you make a final decision about where to enroll.
- ❑ If you've been accepted to more than one college, compare the financial aid award letters to make sure you understand the types of aid you qualify for at each school and if you will owe any money out of pocket.
 - If you've been selected for verification, complete all necessary steps with the school you choose to attend to avoid any delays with payment of your financial aid.
- ❑ To enroll, follow the directions in the official acceptance letter/email you received from the college. Each college has its own steps and system for officially enrolling. Most likely you will need to go to the college's website to set up a student account. If you need help, don't hesitate to ask for it!
- ❑ Some colleges may require a monetary deposit (some may call it a tuition deposit) to officially enroll. If you need help with the deposit, don't hesitate to contact the admissions rep you've been working with at the school or the school's financial aid office to discuss your options.
- ❑ As a part of the enrollment process, you may be prompted by your college to accept your financial aid award, sign up for a campus email address, apply for campus housing and/or take placement exams.
- ❑ Upon enrollment, you will usually receive information about orientation dates. Sign up for the earliest orientation date possible. This is typically when you will sign up for your classes.
- ❑ Don't forget to request a final copy of your high school transcript be sent to your college after graduation.
- ❑ Stay engaged with your college throughout the summer. Follow social media feeds, communicate with your roommate if living on campus, and talk with your family and friends about what you are excited or worried about so they can help you with this important transition.

Guidance for Students Who Haven't Enrolled

In preparing for your Decision Day event, it is important to also work closely with those students who have not made a final choice. Below are some common scenarios and tips on how to work through them.

Scenario 1

Student has not yet applied to college or may have an incomplete application.

- Meet with the student to ensure they have explored all of their postsecondary options.
- If money is a concern, discuss financial aid resources and encourage them to complete a FAFSA if they haven't already.
- Have a list of schools that accept late applications and discuss late application procedures with the student.
- If the student has an incomplete application, help them review the letter/email from the school to determine what is needed to complete the application. Direct the student to reach out to the college to discuss their options.
- Invite admission reps to your Decision Day event and provide time and space for them to speak to students who have not yet applied.

Scenario 2

Student has applied to college, but has not yet been admitted.

- Meet with the student to explore other postsecondary options they may not have considered.
- Encourage the student to follow up with the college, if they haven't already, to determine the status of their application.
- Connect the student with schools that accept late applications if they need additional options.

Scenario 3

Student has been admitted to college, but has not yet decided or officially enrolled.

- Encourage the student to talk to trusted adults about their questions or concerns.
- Connect the student with an admissions rep, financial aid officer or other contact at the school who may be able to help answer any lingering questions.
- Assist the student with the enrollment steps. If the deposit is a concern, help the student and their family explore options with the college.
- Help the student and their family read and understand the financial aid award letter to alleviate questions or concerns about cost.
- Discuss logistics like how the student will get to campus or what supplies they will need to take. Sometimes it can be a seemingly simple concern like these that may prevent a student from enrolling.

College Decision Day Questionnaire

FULL NAME (PRINTED): _____

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR AFTER HIGH SCHOOL?

- Attend a college or university**

Which college? _____

Have you been accepted? yes no

What is your intended major and/or minor? _____

- Complete a certificate in a career or technical training program**

Where will you complete your program? _____

What is your field of interest? _____

- Enlist in the military**

Which branch? _____

Has your enlistment been confirmed? yes no

- Become an apprentice**

Please describe your apprenticeship: _____

- Go directly to the workforce**

Do you have a job lined up? What will you do? _____

- Other** (Please explain): _____

- Not sure or don't know**

HOW CAN WE HELP?

We want to make sure you succeed in the future. What questions do you have about preparing for your next step? Can the counseling office or school staff help you in any way?

CAN WE CONTACT YOU OR YOUR FAMILY NEXT YEAR TO SEE HOW YOU'RE DOING?

Contact person: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____

WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO COME BACK IN THE COMING YEARS TO TALK TO OTHER STUDENTS ABOUT LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL? yes no

Part IV: Event Outreach



Sample Social Media Tools

Social media is an excellent way to promote your College Decision Day event, recognize your students and share your school's work with the community. Here are a few tips for maximizing your social media efforts:

Tag it! Just like an in-person conversation, it's hard to participate if you can't follow what's happening. Hashtags and mentions make it possible to find and follow posts from a wide variety of sources and link together the conversation. For College Decision Day, the following hashtags can be used:

- **#idedecidedky, #BeenAdmittedNowCommitted, #kygoestocollege, #KYDecisionDay, #KYCommit, and #BetterMakeRoom**
- : Students around the state can use these Kentucky-specific hashtags to tout their postsecondary plans.
- **#CollegeBound:** Students across the country are using this hashtag to share their college-going plans.
- **#ArmyBound, #NavyBound, #AirforceBound (etc):** As with #CollegeBound, students across the nation are sharing their pride in enlisting in the military using these hashtags.
- **@KHEAA:** Students can mention KHEAA on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to share their stories with us. We'll retweet the best ones!

Encourage students and families to share: Students often love to share info about themselves — and parents love talking about their kids! If your school is active on social media, here are a few ideas about what you may post to engage students and families:

- Ask students to post their postsecondary plans.
- Ask students to post pictures of their college acceptance letters.
- Ask students to share why they chose the pathway they plan to pursue.
- Encourage parents to brag a little about their student's successes and future plans.
- Ask students to share a bit of advice to help younger students prepare for the future.
- During the event, remind students to share their photos and status updates using the hashtags above.

Sample Posts

- Seniors! [Insert date] is College Decision Day at [insert school]! Tell us where you're going to college!
- Seniors... our school is celebrating all students who are planning to enroll in some type of education and training after high school! What are your plans?
- Tomorrow is College Decision Day at [insert school]. Don't forget to wear your favorite college gear or colors!
- [Insert number of seniors] at [insert school] are heading on to some form of education or training beyond high school! Congrats, #classof[INSERT YEAR]!
- Congrats to our #collegebound seniors! #IDecidedKY, #BeenAdmittedNowCommitted @KHEAA

Sample Letter to Students and Families

SCHOOL LOGO / LETTERHEAD
SCHOOL ADDRESS

[DATE]

Dear Students and Families,

On [DATE OF EVENT] at [TIME], we will be conducting a College Decision Day event. During this event, we will celebrate the Senior Class of [ENTER YEAR] for their commitment to pursuing education or training beyond high school. This event is possible due to the collaborative efforts of the administration, faculty, and staff at [NAME OF YOUR HIGH SCHOOL], as well as students, their families, and volunteers across the community.

The purpose of College Decision Day is to recognize high school seniors for their postsecondary educational plans and encourage younger students and families to prepare early for postsecondary education. We have planned a program that we hope will make this time in our seniors' lives fun and exciting while also helping us to further enhance the college-going culture in our school and community. Throughout the year we have been working with this class to research their college options, complete applications and apply for financial aid, and now we are looking forward to celebrating their hard work.

In order for this program to be as successful as possible, we are encouraging all students to speak with their families about what they plan to do after high school so they can finalize their decision. In addition, if family members are interested in volunteering during the event or donating items, please let me know.

If you have any questions please call [NAME, TITLE], at [PHONE NUMBER]. We are extremely proud of our Senior Class and we look forward to celebrating them on [DATE OF EVENT]!

Sincerely,

[SCHOOL COUNSELOR/PRINCIPAL/SITE COORDINATOR]

Press Release Template

For Immediate Release: [date]

Event Contact:

[Name, Title]

[Organization]

[Phone]

[Email address]

NEWS RELEASE

[High School] to celebrate college bound students during ‘College Decision Day’

[CITY], Ky. — [High school] will recognize seniors who plan to pursue some form of education or training beyond high school as part of a statewide “College Decision Day” campaign. College Decision Day is promoted on the state level by Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority (KHEAA).

College Decision Day programs take place around the nation on or around May 1 each year, to mark the day by which seniors declare what they want to do with their futures and decide where they will go after high school. The goal of the program is to celebrate seniors for making postsecondary plans and to encourage younger students and families to prepare early for their futures.

“[Insert quote from school contact about what the event means for the school, being proud of the senior class, wanting all students, not just athletes, to feel important for what they decide to do after high school, etc.]”

[High School’s] College Decision Day event will be held [insert date, time and location]. School staff, students and families will recognize and celebrate each senior who plans to pursue some form of postsecondary education, including certificate programs, workforce training and apprenticeship programs, two-year degree programs, four-year degree programs and military service. Additionally, [insert other activities that are occurring, such as transition workshops, financial aid counseling, or specifics regarding how you will honor your students.]

To learn more about College Decision Day, visit kygoestocollege.com.

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Related social media hashtags: #idecidedky, #BeenAdmittedNowCommitted, #kygoestocollege, #KYDecisionDay, #KYCommit, #BetterMakeRoom

Part V: Additional Resources



College Decision Day Resource Directory

Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority (KHEAA)

MAIN CONTACTS:

Kim Dolan

Director of Outreach Services

kdolan@kheaa.com

Phone: 502-696-7379

Summer Gortney

Assistant Director of Outreach Services

sgortney@kheaa.com

Phone: 502-759-0798

MOBILE UNIT CONTACT:

Kevin Wilson

College Info Road Show Counselor

kwilson@kheaa.com

Phone: 502-753-9938

REGIONAL OUTREACH CONTACTS:

Katie Bower

Southwestern KY Outreach Counselor

(Butler, Christian, Logan, Muhlenberg, Simpson, Todd and Warren Counties)

kbower@kheaa.com

Phone: 270-392-8675

Casi Benedict

Northwestern KY Outreach Counselor

(Breckinridge, Daviess, Grayson, Hancock, Henderson, Hopkins, McLean, Ohio, Union and Webster Counties)

cbenedict@kheaa.com

Phone: 270-316-4676

Kelly Smith

Louisville Metro East Outreach Counselor

(Jefferson east of Interstate 65, Oldham and Shelby Counties)

kjsmith@kheaa.com

Phone: 502-541-7745

Jeremi Bumpus

Far Western KY Outreach Counselor

(Ballard, Caldwell, Calloway, Carlisle, Crittenden, Fulton, Graves, Hickman, Livingston, Lyon, Marshall, McCracken and Trigg Counties)

jbumpus@kheaa.com

Phone: 270-498-8291

Brandon Brown

Eastern KY Outreach Counselor

(Breathitt, Elliott, Floyd, Johnson, Knott, Lawrence, Magoffin, Martin, Morgan, Pike and Wolfe Counties)

bbrown@kheaa.com

Phone: 606-205-8810

Amy Marvin

Northeastern KY Outreach Counselor

(Bracken, Bath, Boyd, Carter, Fleming, Greenup, Lewis, Mason, Menifee, Montgomery, Nicholas, Robertson and Rowan Counties)

amarvin@kheaa.com

Phone: 606-776-3030

Bob McDermott

Northern KY Outreach Counselor

(Boone, Campbell, Carroll, Gallatin, Grant, Henry, Kenton, Owen, Pendleton and Trimble Counties)

rmcdermott@kheaa.com

Phone: 859-630-1030

Melanie Adams

Southeastern KY Outreach Counselor

(Bell, Clay, Harlan, Knox, Leslie, Letcher, McCreary, Perry and Whitley Counties)

madams@kheaa.com

Phone: 606-273-9644

College Decision Day Resource Directory, Cont.

MacKenzie Massey

Southern KY Outreach Counselor
(Adair, Allen, Barren, Clinton,
Cumberland, Edmonson, Green, Hart,
Metcalfe, Monroe, Russell, Taylor and
Wayne Counties)

mmassey@kheaa.com

Phone: 270-991-4481

Joplin Rice

South Central KY Outreach Counselor
(Casey, Clark, Estill, Garrard, Jackson,
Laurel, Lee, Lincoln, Madison, Owsley,
Powell, Pulaski and Rockcastle Counties)

jrice@kheaa.com

Phone: 502-229-1147

Candis Tingle

Central KY Outreach Counselor
(Bourbon, Fayette, Franklin, Harrison,
Jessamine, Scott and Woodford Counties)

ctingle@kheaa.com

Phone: 502-330-8002

Steven Held

Louisville Metro West Outreach Counselor
(Bullitt, Jefferson west of Interstate 65
and Spencer Counties)

sheld@kheaa.com

Phone: 502-352-5697

Toni Wiley

West Central KY Outreach Counselor
(Anderson, Boyle, Hardin, LaRue, Marion,
Meade, Mercer, Nelson and Washington
Counties)

tmwiley@kheaa.com

Phone: 270-403-9468