

**2020 PEAK Award**  
**Overview of the Ignite Institute**  
**By Jessica Dykes, [Jessica.dykes@kenton.kyschools.us](mailto:Jessica.dykes@kenton.kyschools.us) 859-322-6967**

Boone and Kenton County School Districts are proud to announce the establishment of an IGNITE INSTITUTE partnership to inspire STEAM learning and elevate educational opportunities for all students in the Northern Kentucky region. IGNITE INSTITUTE at Roebbling Innovation Center is an innovative, collaborative high school committed to inspiring creativity and empowering scholars to compete in the workforce of tomorrow.

This collaborative partnership will provide students with a curriculum structure for 7 Colleges (Bio-Medical/Health Science, Engineering, IT/Computer Science, Construction Technology, Logistics, Design and Education) which will lead students into several potential career pathways.

Boone County Superintendent Dr. Randy Poe says, “This partnership is groundbreaking for our region and in public education. By joining our resources together we know the outcome will be transformational for the region by being the incubator for future careers leading to employer attraction and job creation.”

Kenton County Superintendent Dr. Webb says, “The Kenton County School District is excited about this partnership and what it will do to ensure that a world-class education is available for ALL students. One of our objectives in Kenton County is to prepare students for college or careers, and the partnership with Ignite will help us reach this goal.”

**Objectives of the Program:** Our focus is to provide education and experience in career fields that are in high demand in our community. We are creating a reality where industry and education work together to ensure that students have the skills and creativity to succeed in our fast-paced, technology-driven society. Through project-based learning, students will have authentic, real-world experiences that will prepare them for the jobs of the future. Scholars will have access to over 20 dual credit courses through partnerships with local universities that will allow them to graduate from Ignite with an Associate’s Degree. Our goal is to provide a blended learning experience for scholars that includes working collaboratively and independently using an online platform. The teacher becomes a facilitator and mentor to scholars, providing them the resources and support they need to achieve their goals. Project-based learning will also be part of the DNA at the Ignite Institute. Scholars and teachers will collaborate with industry partners to solve real-world problems which will provide scholars the skills necessary to succeed.

**Scope of the Program** Ignite will have numerous points of community and business partnership that will benefit both scholars and the region. Local colleges and other state institutions have played a crucial role in the planning and development of the school. At Ignite, industry partners will collaborate with curriculum specialists and create mentorship opportunities for scholars that will provide the skills needed to succeed in a competitive job market. Ignite prepares scholars to be leaders and entrepreneurs in their chosen field. At Ignite, scholars will participate in authentic, personally challenging work that is meaningful beyond the school walls. We live in an age where technology, creativity, and entrepreneurship are outpacing our current ways of educating

our students. Parents, students, and the community are looking at our schools to prepare students for careers and opportunities that have not been developed or conceptualized. Today's students need to have experiences that will give them the confidence and interpersonal skills required to be a competitive and productive professional. The structure of the curriculum is built upon our career college pathways. These academic pathways begin at the freshman level, and focus on high demand career opportunities. The colleges are; Biomedical Sciences, Computer Science, Design, Education, Engineering and Pre-Nursing. At Ignite, scholars are also provided access to dual-credit college classes while earning their high school diploma. The college offerings allow scholars the opportunity to earn an Associate's Degree by the time they graduate. The college credits that they receive are transferable to all public colleges in the state of Kentucky. While there is a focus on college credit attainment, there is likewise a pathway within each college for students not wanting to pursue dual credit opportunities, or perhaps wish to have a reduced number of college classes.

**Uniqueness of the Program** Our goal is to provide a blended learning experience for students that includes working collaboratively and individually using an online platform. The teacher becomes a facilitator and mentor to their students providing them with the resources and support they need to achieve their goals. Project-Based Learning will also be an integral part of the DNA at the Ignite Institute. Students and teachers will collaborate with industry partners to solve real-world problems which will give students the skills necessary to succeed. The Ignite Institute colleges offer scholars the opportunity to earn the same credits required for graduation as their home high school. Scholars have several career-focused college options to choose from. Scholars will attend their specific college at the Ignite Institute for the whole day while taking classes in the following areas: career elective, English, mathematics, science, social studies, and world language.

Small, personalized learning environments can motivate and inspire students to put in the extra time needed to be successful. We believe that each content area is equally important in enhancing the scholars' overall educational experience. Personalized learning, equal emphasis on all content areas, along with authentic, oftentimes hands-on, experiences are critical ingredients to student achievement. Before high school graduation, each scholar will have the opportunity to spend 400+ hours with regional companies learning on-the-job skills. These experiences will allow our students to begin networking with local businesses. This relationship is a crucial element in creating a workforce pipeline for the region.

Ignite offers employers an effective process to make an impact on students and their industry. Every week at The Ignite Institute, scholars will have two "production days" where scholars and teachers will have the flexibility to collaborate with business and industry partners. On these days, regional companies will have the opportunity to work with Ignite Institute scholars. The business partners can customize how they want to work with scholars, but these interactions will generally fall under one of three categories: business mentorship, real-world projects, and workforce training. These production days allows employers to guide scholars on acquiring the skills needed to have an immediate and long term contribution in the workplace.

**Cost and funding source** Ignite is funded by multiple sources. Currently Boone County Schools, Kenton County Schools, and Walton Verona Schools provide district funds, SEEK,

Perkins, Kentucky Department of Education Local Operated Career Center Funds, and multiple grants from Bosch, New Skills for Youth, Work Ready Skills Initiative, Greater Cincinnati Foundation, and Team Kenton Foundation.

**Degree of school board involvement** The school boards from Boone County, Kenton County, and Walton Verona Schools have written Memorandum of Agreements to have solid partnerships so scholars have a world class education at Ignite. Each board are hands on in establishing both long term and short term goals to ensure scholars will be able to attend Ignite without barriers.

**An assessment of the progress** The main area to acknowledge is that the high school scholars see the value of the educational experience they have at Ignite. This is due to a methodology built around a “Care First Then Teach” defined structure. These methods motivate the scholars which leads to a high level of engagement. In the process, scholars learn the necessary (soft) skills along with curriculum content. These intersection blur the lines between career education and core content. The outcome is scholars graduating with confidence and ability to have lifelong success.



**THE IGNITE INSTITUTE**  
37 ATLANTIC AVENUE, ERLANGER, KY 41018  
TELEPHONE: (859) 817-3570  
WEBSITE: [www.igniteinstitute.org](http://www.igniteinstitute.org)

September 12, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

The conception, development, and execution of the Ignite Institute has changed the way I think about leadership and the education process. Ignite was founded on the idea that all scholars are capable, and it is the responsibility of adults to make the education system work for these scholars' capabilities. Ignite was designed to change lives--and to change the way Northern Kentucky, the state, and the nation think about education. At Ignite, we know that potential impact on the future lies in the empowerment of students. In its current iteration, we are reframing the way scholars think about school. In the future, the potential impact on academic achievement is as limitless as our scholars' talents.

Giving scholars opportunities to communicate their knowledge to the world around them is the basis of student empowerment at Ignite. It isn't enough to know the answer. Scholars have to be able to communicate this knowledge effectively if they are going to make an impact in our world. Ignite's curriculum is driven by the trial and error that comes with learning to express yourself. Our students lead meetings, give tours, illustrate greatness, and make mistakes--all with the knowledge that Ignite is a safe place where they can try out who they want to be.

The Ignite Ambassador Program is an entirely student-led opportunity where scholars from all grade levels take responsibility for presenting our school to partners in industry and education from around the world. Our regular exhibitions of knowledge empower students to share their research projects with advisory panels within the field. Knowing material, and knowing how to communicate that material, are the essential drivers of academic achievement. Professional habits are a key part of Ignite's curriculum that are explicitly taught.

The impact of teacher/student relationships cannot be understated. Scholars have to know that adults believe in them. In addition to the soft skills taught on Ignite's production days, teachers also meaningfully plan for scholar mentoring. Teachers loop with scholars; each six-person team of teachers moves with their cohort of students on a yearly basis. These meaningful relationships serve as the basis for the professional mentoring students will experience in college and in the workforce.

Ignite excels at equity of access. We are a school for all scholars, and believe that all scholars are smart scholars. Scholars at Ignite have the opportunity to earn an associate's degree and experience meaningful college coursework at a discounted rate. Research shows that scholars who experience 30 or more hours of meaningful dual credit coursework are 95% likely to complete a bachelor's degree in four years or less. This opportunity begins for Ignite scholar in their sophomore year. Dual credit opportunities at Ignite empower students by making college financially feasible in a mentoring environment.

As an educator, my impression of Ignite is that it is designed to work for kids. When scholars are intentionally chosen, mentored, and supported through a variety of opportunities, they express their ideas at a high level. Our scholars have the ability to change the world. Ignite is one way to help them do that.

Respectfully,

Amanda Dempsey  
College Coordinator  
Ignite Institute

### COLLEGE CAREER PATHWAYS

Biomedical Sciences

Design

Education

Computer Science

Engineering

Pre-Nursing

The Ignite Institute is a regionally operated Career & Technical Education School



Kenton County School District | *It's about ALL kids.*

THE KENTON COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION  
1055 EATON DRIVE, FORT WRIGHT, KENTUCKY 41017  
TELEPHONE: (859) 344-8888 / FAX: (859) 344-1531  
WEBSITE: [www.kenton.kyschools.us](http://www.kenton.kyschools.us)  
*Dr. Henry Webb, Superintendent of Schools*

September 10, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

This correspondence serves as a letter of support for the Ignite Institute's nomination of the 2019 PEAK Award. On behalf of the Kenton County Board of Education, we stand united with Boone County in our support for Ignite. The impact Ignite will have in the lives of students can never fully be measured.

The Ignite program is expected to engage scholars on authentic case-based learning opportunities and ensure all students are college and career ready. Additionally, regional workforce shows a growing demand in the career pathways outlined in Ignite's curriculum and scholars will have access to numerous opportunities included but not limited to internships and collegiate level coursework. The students completing this program will be prepared as productive citizens who collaborate with teammates and have a unique set of soft skills immediately applicable to our work force.

Lastly, our region/state needs programs like Ignite to ensure ALL students are college and career ready. It is truly unique to have two large innovative Kentucky school districts collaborate on such a grand scale to ensure kids have world class educational opportunities while also focusing on work force demands specific to our region.

Thank you for your consideration and please contact me with any questions.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carl Wicklund".

Carl Wicklund

Kenton County Board Member

To whom it may concern:

My experience with the Ignite Institute began prior to its conception through one of its predecessor programs, the Kenton County Academies of Innovation and Technology. When I was in middle school, my sister was preparing to enter her sophomore year of high school and was among the first students to be recruited to the Academies; although she inevitably decided to not enroll, she informed me about what the school had to offer: a plethora of career pathways, independently motivated learning experiences, and flexible schedules, among many other things. As someone who hated the rigid structure of traditional schooling, the idea of this school deeply resonated with me, so as soon as the opportunity became available, I applied.

My freshman year was a period of remarkable personal growth. Unfortunately, I entered high school during one of the most traumatic times of my life. Only a few months prior, I experienced multiple losses, including the death of my grandmother, the abandonment of my first love interest, and the end of several long-term friendships. As a result, I was depressed and inevitably closed myself off to others. However, upon entering high school, the environment that the Academies provided helped me rebound and gave a new light to my life. Most of the career pathways at the Academies operated within independently of the whole school in their own "realm." As a scholar in the Computer Science pathway, I learned with the same group of people for the majority of each school day, most of whom I shared many interests with, and this led to me opening myself up to others and forming some of my strongest friendships to this day. In a similar fashion, I also developed close relationships with my teachers. Such a welcoming place was ultimately conducive to my learning and development. I was surrounded by people who believed in me and pushed me to achieve my goals. This allowed me to do things that I couldn't imagine doing had I remained at my traditional school, such as losing my fear of public speaking, learning how to start a business, and developing an Android application. By establishing a closely knit environment in which both scholars and teachers cared, I rebound and achieved. I have witnessed countless stories similar to mine, even in my first few weeks at the Ignite Institute.

My sophomore year onwards has been a period of immense academic growth and flexibility. As a sophomore, I was exposed to the idea that I would be able to enroll in college-level courses during high school. The Academies enabled me to enroll in several college courses per semester through what was known as the "After School College Program." This program offered a wide variety of college courses (typically 4-6) per semester and was a means by which scholars would be able to eliminate most of their General Education requirements once admitted into college. This program now exists in a much larger scale at the Ignite Institute as a during-school program that functions essentially the same. Notably, because the Ignite Institute offers an unprecedented number of college courses, a new possibility has opened up to this year's underclassmen: It is now feasible for underclassmen to earn an Associate's degree upon graduating high school, an opportunity unheard of in any high school that I am aware of. Through these programs, I have amassed a total of 27 college

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credit hours, and by the end of this year, I will have amassed 30 additional hours. In addition, I have been offered a wide variety of Advanced Placement courses and have been awarded even more college credit through these courses.

Interestingly, most of the Advanced Placement courses I enrolled in were not typically offered at our school; they were offered because I petitioned to have them offered in place of our standard courses (for example, AP Computer Science A instead of Advanced Computer Science). The fact that both teachers and administrators were willing to go out of their way to implement an entirely new course simply because a student / small group of students requested it shows both the flexibility of the school and the lengths to which the school will go to ensure that the students receive the opportunities they desire.

As a senior at the Ignite Institute, my experiences have been a continuation of those I experienced as an underclassman at the Academies. I have continued to form strong relationships with my teachers and my peers, to grow as an individual, and to be challenged academically. In addition, I have been able to participate in opportunities exclusive to seniors. I now participate in a multidisciplinary internship at the Behringer-Crawford Museum, combining Computer Science with history in order to develop projects such as a video game relating to the history of Northern Kentucky. Countless other seniors at the Ignite Institute are involved in similar internships through the Senior Academic Internship Program. Furthermore, through partnering universities, I have been able to explore higher level coursework related to my intended career pathway, including Computer Hardware, Calculus III, and University Physics. Such opportunities simply do not exist in other high schools.

Sincerely,



Hunter McClurg

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