

# KCTCS GOOD NEWS REPORT

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### AFTER MORE THAN A DECADE IN ELECTED OFFICE, QUARLES LOOKS TO THE FUTURE IN HIGHER ED

BY TESSA DUVALL



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"I believe that KCTCS is  
**THE MOST IMPACTFUL HIGHER EDUCATION ENTITY  
IN KENTUCKY.**

We play a special role, and we have to be the biggest tool in the toolkit to  
address our workforce crisis in Kentucky."

- KCTCS President Dr. Ryan Quarles



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**Herald-Leader:** In talking about workforce development, what role do you see KCTCS playing in addressing that and such things as certifications or technical training?

**Ryan Quarles:** KCTCS already plays a big role in workforce development. One of my goals as the incoming president is talking about the positive stories that are already occurring in our community and technical colleges. That we are already the biggest provider of degrees and certificates in Kentucky. We are also the biggest driver of training for companies that either want to recruit or retain employees. Are there areas of improvement? Absolutely. And so hopefully one of my first initiatives once taking office is to announce a workforce development initiative that helps reassure the business community that our community and technical colleges are the place to go. And in many cases they already are, but we want to make sure that they're being as utilized as best possible.

**H-L:** Enrollment at colleges and universities over the past decade has been declining. Are you starting to think about ways to address that? **RQ:** Yes. I plan on using my contacts and life experience to aggressively recruit Kentuckians to choose community and technical colleges. Right now, one-third of our enrollees are high school students doing dual-credit programs. But we also want to make sure that we are active with reminding Kentuckians about the financial rewards of getting a two-year associate's degree or a nursing degree or a welding certificate. For those who choose, you can exit our program debt-free, oftentimes, with our KEES scholarships and other grants providing the majority of the funding of your degree, that in two years time, you can own your own business. I plan on actively recruiting from the base I know very well: Our 4-H and FFA members, our other rural and urban communities, as well. Also, making sure we are aligning with what the General Assembly, as well as the Cabinet for Economic Development and the Kentucky Chamber, have identified as high-need areas, and what are those? Well, healthcare obviously is No. 1. We pump out more – I believe we pump out more nurses – as a system than the other nursing schools, and that's a bright spot. We also need to make sure we are aligning our programs with modern industry needs. We're about to build a lot of batteries in Kentucky. Are our programs aligning with modern workforce needs as well? We're going to have a period of evaluation at KCTCS to make sure our programs are up-to-date and also are serving the needs of our employers.

**H-L:** In a recent Council on Postsecondary Education study, it talked about Kentucky's community college funding being the sixth-worst in the nation, and tuition for in-state students being higher than the national average. **RQ:** As the incoming president, we will be making an ask to the General Assembly that is significant, that directly ties into helping solve our workforce development crisis in Kentucky. I know that there are things that need to be improved and fixed at KCTCS. But at the same time, if we want to get serious about filling all these job openings as well as improving the quality of life of Kentuckians, we will have a legislative ask that directly relates to the workforce. I also think the Council on Post-secondary Education study highlighted some positive things about the system, but also opened the door for possible funding opportunities that are unique to community and technical colleges.

**H-L:** In the last year, we've seen some state legislatures take aim at DEI issues. KCTCS schools serve a really diverse array of students. If that were the case in Kentucky, how would you work with legislators to make sure these schools continue to be a welcoming place for students? **RQ:** Of course we want to make sure that all of our campuses are a welcoming environment for Kentuckians of all backgrounds. We also need to be mindful that we're an open admissions system, meaning we'll take anybody that is willing to improve themselves, and we want to give them the opportunity to earn a better income with a new skill set as well.

**H-L:** How do you see your role, your relationship with the legislature unfolding in the next session? **RQ:** As a former member, and as an eight year executive officer, I've built up a positive rapport with both sides of the aisle in Frankfort. I'm gonna bring that same study-handedness and trusted voice as the KCTCS president. I'll be the first to admit there are changes that need to be made, and the most recent audit and the Senate Joint Resolution 98 study, have highlighted some weaknesses in the system. And so, when I get started, we're going to focus on correcting the findings on the audit, but also provide transparency at the General Assembly about our progress, as well as making sure that their concerns are being addressed.

[Read this article in its entirety here.](#)



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