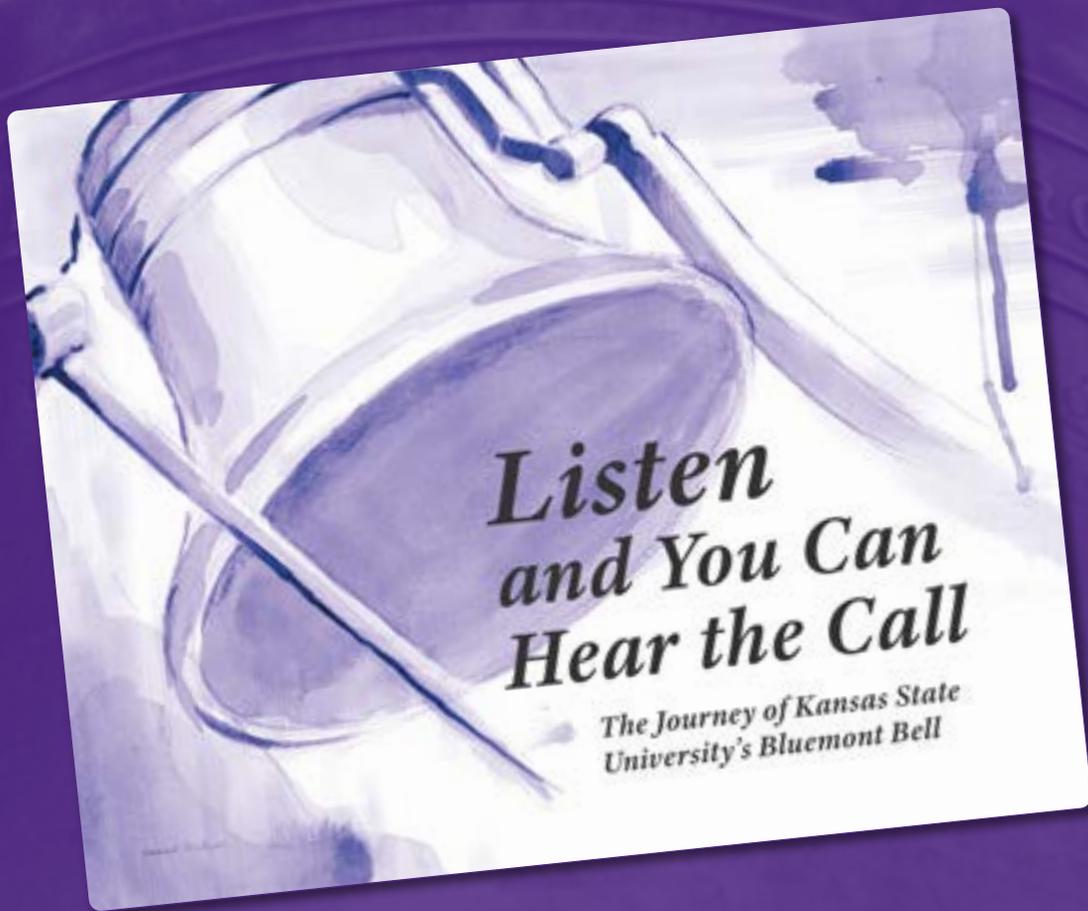


K-STATE  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
**CONNECTIONS**

*The Artistic Journey of  
the Bluemont Bell Book*





WW

# CONNECTIONS

**2021**

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College of Education

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# CONTENTS

- 4** Greetings from Dean Debbie Mercer
- 5** James B. Boyer – Champion of Diversity
- 6** From mortar to mortarboard
- 10** Together, Embracing New opportunities
- 16** Saved by the bell
- 22** Three award-winning college programs take aim at teacher vacancies
- 24** NACADA thanks Nutt and welcomes Anderson as executive director
- 26** College's video team shoots documentary about KSDE moonshot
- 27** Trauma: from Sesame St. to Anderson Ave.
- 28** Wizards of Oz-some: Rural Education Center
- 30** Excerpts of a Survey: The COE Student Experience during the Pandemic
- 31** KSU Foundation
- 32** This little piggy went to . . . class!



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# Greetings from Dean Debbie Mercer

Hello!

In this edition of *Connections*, we have important research, inspiring documentaries, and genuine stories about the K-State College of Education family. I am proud to have such amazing faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends to represent this college in such an incredible way. We have made it through trying times due to the pandemic. This edition contains joy and the extraordinary commitment that each of us have to the College of Education. We hope that as you read you will be inspired and connect with us on our journey.

This year we are celebrating my tenth year as the Dean of the College of Education. This anniversary came at the perfect time to reflect on everything we have accomplished during the past decade. Collectively...

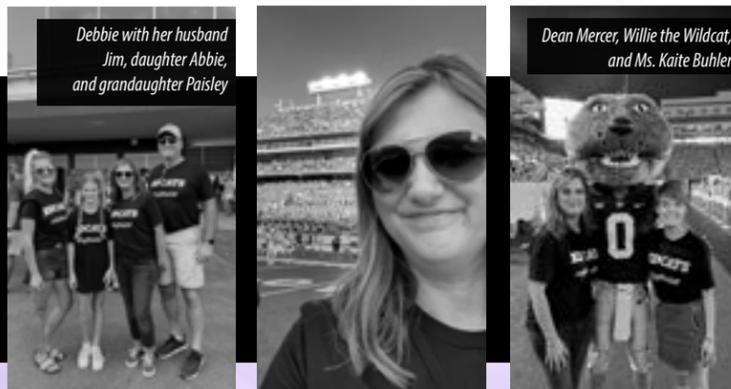
- We launched new programs at all levels – bachelor, master and doctorate,
- We surpassed our original goal - securing more than \$20 million during the Changing Lives fundraising campaign,
- We secured an excess of \$44 million in external funding,
- We provided professional learning to our school partners,
- we established an e-textbook initiative for faculty modeled after the university's,
- We created EdCats branding initiative that includes EdCats Live and EdCats Central,
- We created the Kansas Educational Leadership Institute,
- We formed the Call Me Mister program,
- We introduced more than three million people to the K-State College of Education through documentaries and our YouTube channel, and
- We ranked 10th in the U.S. News & World Report for our online masters in Curriculum and Instruction.

None of this could have been accomplished without the collaborative efforts of the entire College of Education family. My appreciation to each of you for your support, trust and confidence that allowed us to accomplish so much. As you read through *Connections*, you will continue to see more of these highlights and achievements. Our goal is to continue providing the same level of expertise, innovation, and support for our K-State College of Education family. Even though this year was full of unprecedented challenges, we had still had an impactful year.

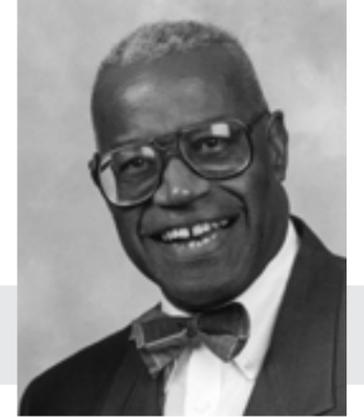
There is so much that this past year has taught us about ourselves, our relationships, our passions, and our values. I'll leave you with a bit of advice, take that leap of faith, find happiness in simple things, follow your passions, take a moment to slow down, and never stop learning. Thank you all for your commitment to this college and the people that make it what it is, a family who values the importance of hard work, and educating the present and future EdCats.

With purple pride,

*Debbie Mercer*



# James B. Boyer Champion of Diversity



An exhibit memorializing the late James B. Boyer, the College of Education's first African-American full professor and one of K-State's original champions of diversity, was unveiled May 12<sup>th</sup> in Bluemont Hall, the place where his legacy lives on.

Boyer was one of the nation's preeminent scholars on designing learning environments that incorporate and embrace the cultures of increasingly diverse student populations throughout the United States. He authored several textbooks and numerous articles with formulas for eliminating "racism, sexism, elitism, ageism and handicappism" in the curriculum, class materials, student activities, policies and reward systems.

Titled "Champion of Diversity," the permanent exhibit was a collaboration among Debbie Mercer, dean of the College of Education; Boyer's son, Alan, a K-State alumnus and visiting professor in the A.Q. Miller School of Journalism and Mass Communications; and Roy Garrett, a Manhattan artist.

"Dr. Boyer was truly a renaissance man – a visionary on so many fronts," Mercer said. "Decades ago, he developed formulas to address issues that we are grappling with to this day. My greatest hope is that it serves to remind future teachers of the profession they are entering, what is expected of them and that they are walking in the footsteps of giants."

The exhibit features information, graphics, images, and artifacts that bring to life Boyer's dedication to faith and family through the Fellowship Temple church which he founded in Manhattan, KS in 1976. He was also an accomplished gospel music recording artist. Alan Boyer hopes it inspires future generations of aspiring teachers – a group his father considered heroes – for students in rural, suburban and urban communities around the country.

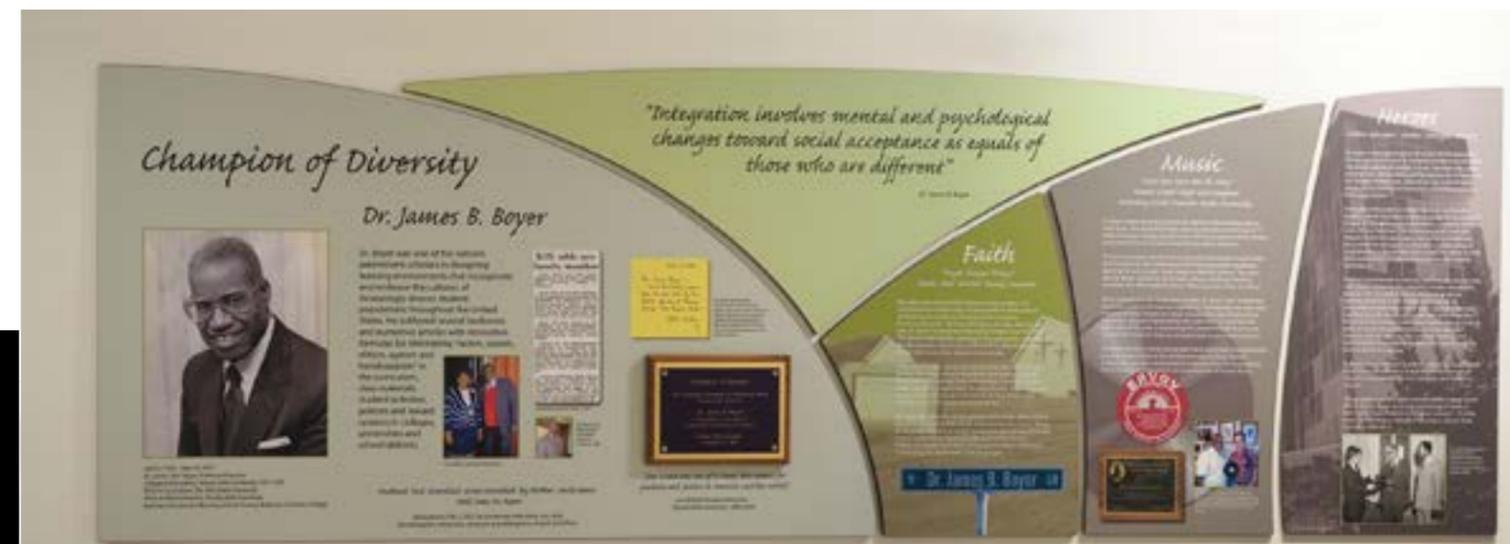
"My father loved teaching, the church and gospel music," Alan Boyer said. "My mother and I are so honored that the College of Education and

the university will remember him through this wonderful tribute to his life on campus and in the Manhattan community."

K-State's commitment to diversity and inclusion has its roots in Boyer's vision for the university. K-State recruited Boyer in 1971 as the first African American graduate teaching professor in the College of Education. Boyer was a confidant to administrators, faculty and staff; a coach to student leaders; and an authentic example of integrity and dedication for his colleagues and friends on campus.

"Jim is – and was – one of K-State's best orators for goodness and justice in America and the world," said Jon Wefald, former K-State president.

Boyer was born in Winter Park, Florida, on April 3, 1934, and died May 10, 2017. His wife of 60 years, Edna, lives in Manhattan. His son, Alan, lives in Duluth, Georgia, with Boyer's granddaughter, Alexandria, and two great-granddaughters, Aniyah and Olivia.



# From mortar to mortarboard

## College sets its sights on student success for military-connected students and families

*The College of Education is once again on the front lines of Army readiness by supplying education experts and programs that help soldiers and their families meet the demands of military life in the 21st Century – whether they are in Kansas or on the other side of the world.*

“We have a number of initiatives at Kansas State University to support the military, and I am very proud of that,” said **K-State President Richard Myers**. “In the College of Education, Dean Mercer and the faculty are providing education and the delivery of education with a focus on the unique needs and support that are helpful for military-connected students – from adjusting to adult learning to helping veterans transition for jobs in civilian life. It’s an honor to be able support our military through these educational initiatives.”



## Joining Forces

First Lady Jill Biden held a live stream event April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021, about **Joining Forces**, her comprehensive effort to address the needs of military-connected students and family members. Prominently positioned on the screen over her left shoulder was K-State College of Education Dean Debbie Mercer.

“We are geographically blessed at K-State because of our close proximity to Fort Riley and Fort Leavenworth,” Mercer said. “These military instillations enrich our schools, communities,

university and programs, and we are passionate about contributing to the success of service members and their family members.”

Biden and Mercer joined forces in 2012 when the College of Education was among the first 100 teacher preparation programs in the nation to sign on to Operation Educate the Educator, a Joining Forces initiative co-founded by First Lady Michelle Obama and Biden. Over the next several years, the college’s activities – being an early adopter of the program, producing a documentary on military life and developing a non-credit

class for pre-service teachers – impressed Biden.

During her speech at the **White House Convening on Operation Educate the Educator** in 2016, Biden thanked Mercer for her support for military-connected learners.

“I’d like to take a moment to thank Dean Deb Mercer from Kansas State University for being here today and facilitating last week’s discussion with the KSU student-teachers at Fort Riley Middle School,” Biden said. “The work that you are doing – that your student teachers are doing in the classroom – is so important. Thank you.”

***“We have an all-volunteer force – and it continues only because generations of Americans see the honor, dignity, and patriotism of military service. How can we hope to keep our military strong if we don’t give our families, survivors, and caregivers what they need to thrive? That’s what Joining Forces is about.”***

– First Lady Jill Biden



*First Lady Jill Biden, hosts a virtual event with educators, military members and family members about her initiative Joining Forces. Dean Debbie Mercer, who appears prominently in the background, was an early adopter of the initiative in 2012.*



*As program leader, Collins presents on her area of expertise, informal leadership, twice a week.*



## Spousal Brigade

The College of Education was notified early this year that it was awarded a one-year renewable contract from the U.S. Army to continue its leadership development program for the brigade command team spouses at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. In total, the five-year contract was valued at \$1.2 million. The college has provided this leadership training since 2010.

Royce Ann Collins, associate professor of Educational Leadership, serves as program leader for the Command Team Spouse Development Program – Brigade, which was specifically designed for spouses of brigade command teams. The weeklong course is conducted concurrently with spouses of Army leaders in the Brigade Pre-Command/Command Sergeants Major Courses.

“It is an honor to lead this leadership development program and contribute to the Army’s vision of 21st Century readiness,” Collins said.

From April to October, Collins and her team are delivering seven one-week courses with up to 25 participants. For the following four years of the contract, faculty will deliver 14 courses, two courses running simultaneously, with up to 32 participants.

As program leader, Collins presents on her area of expertise, informal leadership, twice a week. Brett Mallon, instructor in the College of Health and Human Services, teaches conflict resolution; Judy Favor, assistant professor, teaches leadership and coping strategies; and Susan Yelich Biniacki, associate professor, teaches mentoring and networking.

Collins’ team includes the wives of two retired senior officers who are College of Education alumni. They are, Patricia A. Brown, a doctoral candidate in adult learning and leadership and Margie Banach, a graduate of the master’s program in adult learning and leadership.

“This program is focused on theory to practice,” Collins said. “Patti and Margie, with their experience and expertise at the senior levels of military leadership, are great assets to the team and add an important dimension to the program – one that that participants will connect with.”

K-State’s Graduate School is also closely involved with the courses. Claudia Petrescu, vice provost for graduate education and dean of the Graduate School, is providing quality assurance oversight and Audrey Ayers, program coordinator, is providing administrative functions for the program. Their contributions provide critical efficiencies for participants who want to convert the course into three graduate credits in informal leadership, which is achievable by combining the week-long program with additional graduate work.

The Brigade Spouse program operates under the School for Command Preparation, one of the four schools that make up the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, or CGSC. K-State’s adult learning and leadership program has had a long-standing relationship with CGSC and continues to offer the master’s degree on post. The Brigade Spouse partnership will ensure better leadership to support soldiers serving in the Army.

## Hiring Our Heroes

A 12-week **Hiring Our Heroes fellowship** in the department of educational leadership was so successful for transitioning Army aviator Paul Berg that it led to not one – but two – teaching positions in higher education.

Berg earned a Ph.D. in **adult education and leadership** from K-State in 2016 and retired this spring after a 29-year career in military. He accepted a faculty position as an assistant professor in the Department of Tactics at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, or CGSC, at Fort Leavenworth. He was also extended a contract as an adjunct professor in the department of educational leadership where he began teaching the course Program Planning this fall.

“The Hiring Our Heroes program gave me valuable academic and teaching experience at the university level that I use in all of my

classes at CGSC and at K-State,” Berg said. “I am grateful to K-State and the College of Education for my growth as an educator and want to thank the faculty in the department of educational leadership and college administrators for building relevant programming in such an aspirational environment.”

Dr. Susan Yelich Biniiecki, Associate Professor, served as Berg’s fellowship mentor and coordinated his experience as a faculty member in the areas of teaching, service and research. Together, they developed the curriculum for her courses, virtually participated in a number of committee meetings and expanded their research and writing projects to focus on “(En)countering Extremism: Navigating Adult Education’s Role.”

“Paul’s real-world experience and expertise in leadership and adult education in the military was an incredible asset to our adult learning and leadership program during his fellowship,” Yelich Binecki said. “We were honored to have him as part of our team and co-create innovative connections between military and civilian higher education practice.”

Berg co-taught the graduate course Critical and Social Issues of Adult Education

with Royce Ann Collins. In addition, he worked with faculty to design a new summer course, learned about the grant process, and gained a greater understanding of academia, his profession of choice following retirement.

While on campus, Berg worked closely with the Staley School of Leadership Studies where he presented guest lectures based on his leadership expertise and skills from his 29-year military career. He also co-taught Critical and Social Issues of Adult Education, which was mainly comprised of military officers in the Command and General Staff College cohort, another key partnership between K-State and the Army.

An Army aviation officer who flew CH47D/F helicopters for the past 25-years, Berg deployed for four combat tours, including the occupation of Afghanistan in 2002, and was company commander during the invasion of Iraq in 2003. His final deployments were both with the 1st Cavalry Division: Iraq in 2009 and Afghanistan in 2011. He was also an instructor at every level of Army officer education, including the Officer Basic Course, the Captains Career Course and an assistant professor at the CGSC.

*Dr. Susan Yelich Biniiecki presents a certificate of appreciation to Col. Paul Berg for his Hiring Our Heroes Fellowship.*

*Photo by K-State alum Dan Neal, Army University*



**Col. Paul Berg**



## Military Initiatives Committee

Who better to lead the college’s **military initiative committee** than a veteran? Meet former staff sergeant and current professor of practice in secondary education, Dustin Meritt.



Dustin Meritt

Meritt spent eight years in the Army and definitely had an atypical path to the classroom. “I wasn’t a kid who enjoyed school, I didn’t play school as kid, and my school experience wasn’t one that I look back on fondly.”

He deployed to Iraq in 2003-04 and was in Army

movement control. “We worked checkpoints, conducted searches and tracked the movement of supplies and people,” Meritt said. “When I came home, I took the job as a training NCO where I set up training sessions and led training with Army Reserve soldiers.”

That’s when the shift occurred.

“As my Army career progressed, I really gained a passion for training, teaching, and instructing,” Meritt said. “I also enjoyed helping struggling soldiers and I think that is when my path to education really opened up. The thought of being a teacher was intriguing, and I felt like I could help students who had school experiences like me.”

He believed he could be especially helpful with transitioning soldiers.

“Every veteran has their own journey from soldier to civilian,” Meritt said. “But, by sharing my experience and struggles in that journey, we can create a bridge – a connection – to the goals and focus of our military initiatives committee.”

Meritt said the military initiatives committee is focusing on a mixture of evidence and research-based approaches along with relying on the committee members’ vast backgrounds and knowledge. “We want to make informed decisions and create a direction that has purpose and keeps the focus on veterans and their families,” he said.

The committee is focused on a three-pronged approach to support military-connected students by defining the



Dustin Meritt

college’s role and responsibility to veterans, preservice teachers and preservice educators who are military spouses and/or children.

In addition, the committee has identified a number of activities, and initiatives to support our military-connected students, such as exploring the need for military-related micro-credentials and addressing the topic of military and veteran life in our **Hot Topics web series**.

Major Robert Pough and his wife Lei-Lani brought a wealth of information to the discussion because they had a myriad of perspectives. They grew up in military families, both expressed their appreciation for K-State because they earned their degrees here, and as proud parents, both shared their gratitude for educators.

“We cannot thank educators enough,” Lei-Lani Pough said. “We are 100 percent advocates (of education). We know your love and passion for our babies, and we are so extremely grateful for that.”



*K-Staters Major Robert Pough and his wife Lei-Lani visited with EdCats about military life on Hot Topics this spring. The Poughs are the proud parents of 7th grader Anthony and 4th grader Jordan. Izzy rounds out the family.*

**Members of the college’s military initiatives committee are:** Sandra Avalos, academic advisor; Kelly Briggs, academic advisor; Royce Ann Collins, associate professor of educational leadership; Art DeGroat, K-State executive director of military and veterans affairs; Judy Hughey, associate professor of special education, counseling and student affairs; Jessica Lane, assistant professor of special education, counseling and student affairs; Lori Levin, assistant professor of curriculum and instruction; Tonnie Martinez, assistant professor of curriculum and instruction; Vicki Sherbert, assistant professor of curriculum and instruction, and Jim Teagarden, associate professor of special education, counseling and student affairs.



# Together Embracing New Opportunities

100 reasons to celebrate as we approach Dr. Mercer's 10th anniversary as dean

COVID-19 touched every aspect of education in Bluemont Hall. The pandemic, coupled with the 10-year mark of Debbie Mercer's tenure as dean – which began in June 2012 – became a natural time to reflect. We look back on where we've been and what we've accomplished – together – not only over the past 18 months but also the past decade with Dean Mercer at the helm.

*“Absolutely none of these programs and initiatives would have been possible without the faculty’s vision, expertise and determination. When we needed bold ideas, they brought them. When we needed new delivery modes, they made it happen. When our students needed grace and support, they offered it. I hope there is a resounding sense of pride in what has been accomplished. I truly believe we are stronger because of what we’ve gone through and are well positioned for growth in every area of our college.”*

– Dean Debbie Mercer

## Academic Initiatives

- Launched a **Doctoral program in Leadership in Academic Advising**
- Created the **John E. Roueche Center and Doctoral Program** in Community College Leadership
- Initiated **Master of Arts in Teaching** – started with **Elementary Track** and added secondary areas in **Ag Education, English Language Arts, Modern Languages, and Social Studies** tracks
- Created a **Bachelor’s degree in Educational Studies**
- Added **Physical Education/Health licensure** area
- Created **Educational Technology Graduate certificate**
- Multiple programs moved to an online delivery mode, the most recent include the **Master’s in Special Education** and the **Ed.D. in Curriculum and Instruction**
- Celebrated 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the **Summer STEM Institute** and launched inaugural online **Summer STEAM Academy** in 2021
- Launched a **Bachelor degree in Elementary Education online** and added year-long residency for student teaching
- Collaborated with urban and rural districts and developed partnerships that advanced their districts and our programs including Shawnee Mission School District, Wichita Public Schools and the new **Rural Professional Development Schools network**.



MAT student Abby Vest works with students at Woodrow Wilson Elementary in Manhattan

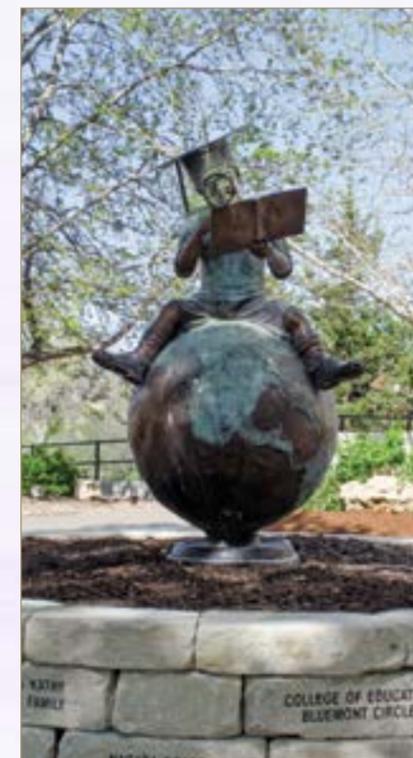


## Awards/Recognition

- 2021 *U.S. News and World Report Rankings* for online education programs
  - 10<sup>th</sup> – Curriculum & Instruction online master’s
  - 12<sup>th</sup> – Special Education master’s
  - 27<sup>th</sup> – Adult Learning and Leadership
  - 46<sup>th</sup> – Overall ranking for online master’s degrees in education
- 2021 Billy G. Dixon Award Distinguished Teacher Program Award – Association of Teacher Educators
- 2017 Outstanding Services to Underserved Populations Award for the Integrated Language Skills Program – Association for Continuing Higher Education
- 2015 Best Practice Award in Support of Global and International Teacher Education – **American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education**
- 2015 Mature Noncredit Program Award for the **Council for Public School Improvement** – Central Region of the University Professional and Continuing Education Association
- 2014 LTG (Ret) H.G. “Pete” Taylor Partnership of Excellence Award for Higher Education – Military Child Education Coalition
- 2014 Outstanding Service to Underserved Populations Award for Go Teacher Program – Association for Continuing Higher Education
- 2014 Distinguished Program Credit Award for Academic Advising – Association for Continuing Higher Education
- 2012 Best Practice Award for Professional Ethics and Moral Dispositions in Teacher Education – American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
- 2012 ‘Example of Excelencia’ finalist – Bilingual/Bicultural Education Students Interacting to Obtain Success (BESITOS) Scholarship Program



Dean Debbie Mercer and Assistant Dean Todd Goodson with the Dixon Award plaque



## Philanthropy

- Surpassed original goal, ultimately securing more than \$20 million during Changing Lives fundraising campaign
- Identified student teaching scholarships as top priority
- Held annual Scholarship Connection event to connect scholarship recipients with donors
- Quadrupled scholarships
- Created Holen Courtyard and donor plaza to honor and memorialize educators
- The **Tomorrow’s Teachers Scholarship Program** established by Lee and Barbara Harris is approaching its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and has awarded nearly 150 future teachers with \$1.5 million in scholarships
- Bestowed college leaders with three endowed chairships
- Supported fundraising by providing development director Frank Cummings, and his predecessors, a page in each issue of “Connections”.
- With contributed artwork, **Listen and You Can Hear the Call: The Journey of Kansas State University’s Bluemont Bell**, was written and designed by donor Nancy Hause
- Donated proceeds from **K-State: An Alphabet Journey Across Campus** to support scholarships

# 10 Educators Powered by Purpose



## Research

- Secured in excess of \$44 million in external funding
- Celebrated **Center for Intercultural and Multicultural Advocacy's** milestones of securing more than \$50 million in external funding and producing 10 textbooks
- Created **Undergraduate Student Research and Creativity Fair** held before graduation each semester
- Established Distinguished Educational Research Lecture series
- Redesigned "**Educational Considerations**" which has been free to educators for more than 40 years
- Supported two scholars' research projects at the National Science Foundation
- Celebrated **Office of Evaluation and Innovation's** 20th anniversary
- Established **NACADA Center for Research**
- Established mini-grant program to seed faculty research
- Developed online **Qualitative Research Graduate certificate**



Matthew Lundy explains his research project to Dr. Kimberly Staples



Wamego school district students do science experiments at home in the Wamego's Response documentary

## Pandemic



- Navigated college through the financial, professional, and emotional challenges brought on by pandemic
- Conducted research project that queried 800 teachers and shared data with KSDE and educators statewide
- Established a **K-16 digital resource community** for parents and teachers
- Developed pandemic-inspired program **The Art of Online Teaching and Remote Learning Summer Workshop** to enhance learning using technology
- Navigated field experiences based on schools' individual delivery modes
- Conducted 30 professional development presentations for partners in our Professional Development Schools network
- Produced documentary titled "**Wamego's Response: A COVID-19 Story**"
- Produced "**International Rural School Leadership Documentary**" featuring stories in Kansas, Pennsylvania, and Australia
- Adopted multiple delivery modalities to reach students
- Posted recorded messages from Dean Mercer and administrators to EdCats throughout the pandemic to maintain strong connections with students



Australian children learn fishing techniques in the International Rural School Leadership documentary

## Technology

- Established a collegewide technology plan a 1:1 iPad ratio, supported in part with philanthropic gifts designated for technology
- Established an e-textbook initiative for faculty that was modeled after the university's
- Saved students more than \$1.5 million with e-textbook initiative
- Awarded National Science Foundation grant for Project SOARING, the Rural Education Center's program that purchased drones for STEM-related educational activities and career exploration
- Developed **undergraduate** and **graduate** certificates that use technology to enhance online learning
- Updated the technology – cameras, microphones and projectors – in 20 rooms with an investment exceeding \$1.5 million
- Adopted digital supervision that is enhanced with robotic devices
- Invested in technology to support video and graphic design production capabilities
- Updated software for academic advisors to better meet student needs
- Added flexible seating, computers and charging stations when Catalyst Center was renovated and carved out room for the **Makerspace** while continuing to provide personalized IT service to students and faculty



CATALYST



College of Education students test manipulatives in the Makerspace

## EDCATS

Educators Powered by Purpose

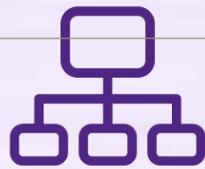
**E**xceptional Experience  
**D**edicated Faculty & Staff  
**C**onnected Community  
**A**dvocates for All  
**T**echnology & Innovation  
**S**tudent-Centered



## EdCat Branding/Recruitment/Student Success

- Created **EdCats branding initiative** that includes EdCats Live and EdCats Central
- Renamed and renovated the **Center for Student Success and Professional Services**
- Reimagined leadership positions in the Center for Student Success with a heavy focus on recruitment
- Assumed leadership of the university's **Teacher Ambassador program**
- Reimagined/renovated student recruitment room
- Held annual Welcome Back event for new and returning students
- Added the extremely popular bell ringing ceremony for incoming and graduating students
- Expanded student leadership opportunities such as EdCat officers, EdCat squad leaders and college Ambassadors
- Developed **Kansas Advanced Teacher Academy** a camp for high school students in teacher pathway programs and launched College of Education Roadshow to reach future college students across Kansas
- Identified Education Symposium as a recruitment opportunity and offered online access to those in **K-STEP UP** program and high school students in teacher pathway programs

## Leadership



- Received a perfect accreditation report in 2016 and began transition to Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation standards
- Hired 100% of college's top administrators due to retirements
- Created **Kansas Educational Leadership Institute**
- Provided multiple professional learning opportunities
  - **Council for Public School Improvement**
  - **Indigenous People's Day**
  - **Rural Education Summit**
  - **School Counseling Camp**
  - **P-12 Recruitment & Retention Summit**
- Created food pantry in response to student need, which became the forerunner to the university's **Cats' Cupboard**
- Established **John E. Roueche Center for Community College Leadership**
- Reimagined the college's connection with rural schools and renamed the **Rural Education Center**
  - Identified new leaders
  - Created rural professional development schools, or RPDS, network
  - Wrote and received grants for telepresence robots
  - Offered **virtual STEAM Institute** online
  - Created monthly e-newsletter **Rural Crossroads: Connections**
- Collaborated with local schools on art project and installed student-painted tiles in first floor corridor
- Provided leadership to the university's budget modernization and budget core team
- Updated classroom and shared spaces in Bluemont Hall, added digital displays near elevators and improved landscaping and student seating areas around the building



Call Me MISTER students Reginald Moore and Byron Lewis IV in front of Bluemont Hall

## Diversity/Equity/Inclusion



- Adopted Joining Forces and Operation Educate the Educator in 2012 and 2021
- Formed **Call Me MISTER** program
- Created **Social Justice Education Graduate certificate**
- Provided sponsorship and ongoing leadership for **Indigenous People's Day**
- Added Graduate Teaching Assistants to support **Call Me MISTER** and diversity initiatives in the college
- Established **Military Initiatives Committee**, which is currently led by a military veteran
- Developed **Osage Nation Leadership Academy** to meet unique educational needs
- Awarded contract for the **Brigade Command Team Spouse Program** at Fort Leavenworth
- Produced 16 documentaries – 13 of which are diversity themed and use diverse voices
- Added social justice student award

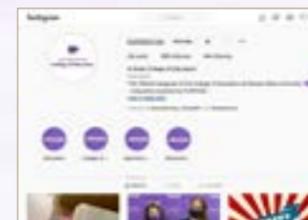


Fort Riley soldiers read to students during a Literacy Alive event at Bergman Elementary in Manhattan



## Communications

- Updated, consolidated and migrated college's 298 pages of web content to new platform
- Established social media presence on **Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube**
- Built a production team with expertise in graphic design, print journalism and video
- Averaged 52 articles a year in *K-State Today*, many of which were distributed as news releases
- Introduced more than three million people to the **K-State College of Education** through documentaries and our YouTube channel
- Reached new audiences as documentaries aired on public access stations
- Produced 250 total marketing/highlight videos with approximately 700,000 views on YouTube
- Produced a total of 284 videos
- Produced e-newsletter "**Before the Bell**" for early-career teachers
- Launched "**Crash the Class**" video series to celebrate early-career teachers



Tiffany Shaheen's class at St. George Elementary poses with Dean Debbie Mercer and Dr. Lotta Larson

*"While we can't see what's coming in the next 10 years, I am confident we are poised to handle any challenge that comes our way, and perhaps even more importantly, we are in a better position than we ever have been to bring the power of K-State to future teachers and administrators anywhere in the world."*

– Dean Debbie Mercer



# Saved by the bell

## Graduation tradition resonates with EdCats

Joy.

That's the best word to describe the emotion swirling around Bluemont Hall's Hohen Courtyard as Forever EdCats and their families rang the Bluemont Bell immediately following commencement, May 15th 2021.

The bell ringing ceremony began in the spring of 2019 as an effort to connect new and returning EdCats and create a symbolic graduation celebration that's specific to teaching.

### COVID takes its toll

It was the first bell ringing celebration in three semesters because all activities on campus were cancelled in 2020 due to the pandemic. However, it was the voices of EdCats, heard through a survey, who expressed a yearning for social interaction that prompted Mercer to consider holding a bell ringing event.

"It was enlightening," Mercer said of the survey comments and results. "Four hundred undergraduates shared elements of their struggles and voiced a sense of loss because they weren't able to celebrate their accomplishment. Knowing we were making progress with COVID – cases were trending down in Manhattan and the bell ringing would be outside – I addressed it with the faculty, and they enthusiastically said "yes."



L-R: Graduates Annie Cortes, Paolo Fabre Merchan, Alexis Carraway with her family, Nick Beasley, and Sally Lopez all take their turns ringing the Bluemont Bell.

***"It's amazing how quickly, ringing the bell became so iconic – a rite of passage, really, that marks the transition from student to professional. It is just a joyful celebration. We all needed that. We're starved for connection and celebration, and the students were so appreciative." – Dean Debbie Mercer***



Graduating students waiting to ring the Bluemont Bell are greeted by a large sign reminding them that the college is thankful that they chose to be EdCats.



Dean Debbie Mercer (center front) stands under the Bluemont Bell with College of Education faculty, staff, and students

## Faculty chimes in

Instructors James Alberto and Angie Messer, the dynamic duo of team teaching, organized the bell ringing event. Typically held immediately after commencement, Alberto and Messer added a Friday bell ringing event and reached out to 2020 graduates who wanted to celebrate with fellow K-Staters.

"This is a great example of how the faculty came together for our students," Messer said. "The survey data really impacted us, and we knew we could help students end their academic careers in a positive way."

Alberto echoed Messer's sentiment, adding that the event also needed to be fun.

"A mom told me that the last year had been really tough and having the bell ringing righted the ship in a way," Alberto said. "It brought a sense of closure, but we also wanted the event to be fun. That's why we had the cardboard cutouts of Dean Mercer and Willie. It was just our way of adding a little levity."

Students love ringing the bell. Interestingly, it was love – in more ways than one – that brought the bell to Bluemont Hall.

Instructors Angie Messer and James Alberto pose with the life-size cutout of Dean Mercer.



2021 graduate Emily Hrencher poses with cutout of Willie the Wildcat

The May 15, 2021 College of Education Ringing the Bell Ceremony celebrated both 2020 and 2021 graduates

**"I love this tradition!  
So happy to have been an  
EdCat the last four years."**

Rich and Nancy Hause pose with the renovated Bluemont Bell in 1995



Rich and Nancy at their senior prom

Rich and Nancy on their 50th wedding anniversary

## Legend rings true

It is a captivating tale that spans 160 years and began in December 1861 with the bell's arrival on campus from the East Coast. Decades later, the story jumps to Colorado where a little boy – the third generation of his family to attend a one-room schoolhouse near their dairy farm in Fort Lupton – heard the legend of an early-day teacher who bravely rang the bell and summoned all of her students to safety as an outlaw gang gathered over the hill behind the school. Once he heard that story, the young student only wanted to be a teacher.

In 1966 – one year after **Bluemont Bell** was unceremoniously retired and replaced with an electronic carillon – the impressionable student from Colorado joined the K-State College of Education faculty as assistant professor Rich Hause. He would ultimately become a full professor and ascend to chair of the department of curriculum and instruction.

Hause's wife, Nancy, taught journalism in the College of Arts and Sciences and was looking for a way to commemorate Hause's career and celebrate his impending retirement. She had the perfect idea: relocate the university's cast iron bell to Bluemont Hall and dedicate it to her husband.

Nancy captured the ensuing covert operation – along with the story of the bell's arrival on campus to its dedication at Bluemont Hall – in her narrative-turned-book "Listen and You Can Hear the Call." (Nancy sends special thanks to Cheryl Collins, Riley County Museum curator, for research assistance.)

The bell arrived on campus in December 1861 and was dedicated in front of Bluemont Hall in 1995. EdCats who ring the bell in 2021 will celebrate the 160th anniversary of its arrival on campus, and simultaneously, there will also be a belated recognition of its 25th anniversary at Bluemont Hall.

Hause left an indelible mark on the college with his class "Creativity in Education" that he taught for 25 years through K-State Extension, in workshops around the country and at a summer session at American University in Seoul, South Korea. In fact, the main event of each October's Education Symposium is the Hause Creativity Lecture, which his students started 26 years ago. Hause presented the first and fifth lectures, and attendees were treated to salt water taffy from Colorado when they exited the auditorium.

Hause passed away in 2005, and the Kansas Teachers of the Year now present the Hause Creativity Lecture. Nancy, her children and grandchildren typically attend the event.

## Art project draws reaction

What would a book about Hause's impact on education be without some serious creativity on the part of educators taking part in the project? Enter Cyndi Kuhn's class for elementary art educators.

"Dean Mercer and I were working in the art room and chatting, and she told me the story about the narrative Nancy had written," Kuhn said. "The whole idea blossomed from there. My class was online, so Dean Mercer made a short video and introduced the bell art project to the students. They could use any technique they wanted; however, it had to be a certain size, and we gave them a deadline."

The art education students were given pictures of the bell from several different angles, old newspaper articles and a copy of Nancy's narrative.

That's when Alicia Stott, graduate teaching assistant and K-8 art educator for Wabaunsee USD 329, had a "light bulb" moment.

During one of her drives from Manhattan to Alma, the art educator decided it would be a fantastic project for her art students too. Several of her students' drawings – those that contained elements of artistic creativity – are included in the book.

Nancy said her husband would have "loved how the artwork for the book came about" and the concept of the lesson was on par with his "unconventional" approach to teaching and learning.

"Something similar could be done in any community or school because of the historical aspect," Kuhn said. "It's a great example of how to inject art into your curriculum and how creative assignments like this can make history come to life for students."

Stott agreed. "Art can be tied into so many areas, anything really," she said. "All you have to do is use your imagination!"



Instructor Cyndi Kuhn looks over some of the artwork submitted for the upcoming Bluemont Bell book

"The students learned so much about the history of the Bluemont Bell," Stott said. "They loved that it was tucked away then 'brought back to life.' I hope we can take a field trip to see the bell in person. That would be so cool!"

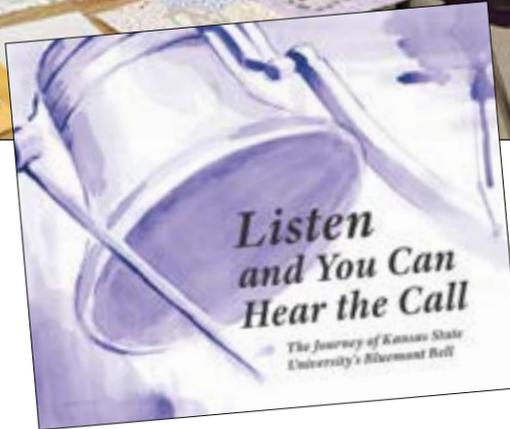
Caroline Wertzberger, one of Stott's first grade students, doesn't need a field trip to see Bluemont Bell. "It's the bell outside of mommy's work," she said, beaming with purple pride.

Caroline's mother is Eileen Wertzberger, coordinator for the Office of Field Experience in the department of curriculum and instruction.

"Caroline was at home working remotely while her classmates were in school, so we actually got to do this project together," Wertzberger said. "I must admit that I smile when I pass by the bell because it makes me think of Caroline and her drawing, which is pink and covered in glitter."



Caroline Wertzberger, first grader at Maple Hill Elementary, poses with her Bluemont Bell artwork



Cover artwork and spreads from the Bluemont Bell book created by EdCats



Artwork by USD 329 students is featured on a spread in the upcoming Bluemont Bell book

## Bell ringing strikes chord with EdCats

EdCats offered unsolicited comments about the bell ringing ceremony when they RSVP'd for the event. Some of their comments can be seen below.

Bluemont Bell saved the spirit of graduation for EdCats, but what would the man who saved the bell think of the ceremony?

"Rich would find great joy in the tradition of ringing the bell," Nancy said. "He would be delighted with the current College of Education and level of creativity. He would think Dean Mercer walked on water and would think the 'EdCats Family' was nothing less than inspired."

It's rare when the past, present and future intersect, but when they do at Bluemont Hall, it's always filled with joy.

**"I'm so glad fall 2020 graduates are getting this chance. I appreciate it more than you know. This is the closure that I need."**

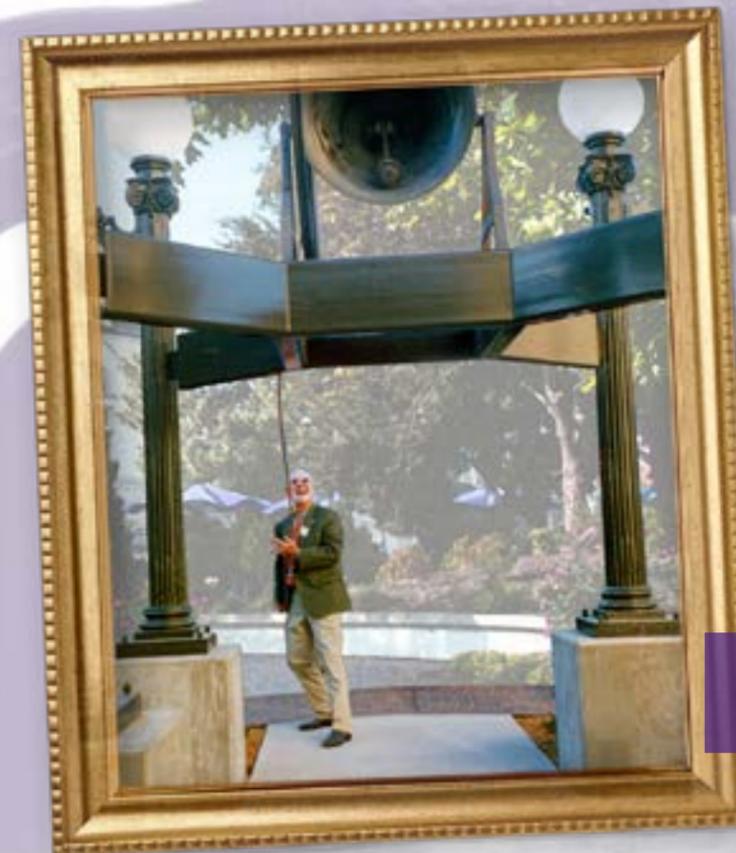
**"I loved every minute I was a part of KSU College of Education. I will definitely miss it."**



Graduating students, family and friends stand in line for their chance to ring the Bluemont Bell

**"I am SO excited to be ringing the bell! Thank you, thank you, thank you for organizing all of this!"**

**"I am very excited that I will be able to partake in this celebration! Can't wait!"**



Rich Hause rings the Bluemont Bell during its dedication ceremony

# Three award-winning college programs take aim at teacher vacancies

What do these people have in common: A young mother whose husband was deployed while she was parenting a toddler and pregnant with twins during the pandemic; a school bus driver, whose husband, lost his job, and faced serious financial issues; and an Air Force veteran who moved home?

All fulfilled their dream of earning a **Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education** from K-State.

The online bachelor's program they completed, along with the college's **Master of Arts in Teaching**, or MAT, and **Kansas Statewide Teacher Education Pathway for Underserved and Place-bound**, or K-STEP UP, were deemed so revolutionary that the three won a national award for exemplary elementary education programming. The college was presented with the Billy G. Dixon Distinguished Teacher Program Award this spring from the Association of Teacher Educators for developing innovative and collaborative programming.



The Billy G. Dixon Distinguished Program in Teacher Education award plaque that the college received from the Association of Teacher Educators in February 2021

*"You can be from any walk of life or in any career field, and if your dream is to be a teacher and work with children, it is possible with K-State's online bachelor's or MAT degree. It is possible." – Lori Levin*



**The bachelor's degree online (B.S. ONLINE) in elementary education** enables students to become a teacher at their own pace. Although classes are completed online, they will complete a field experience in an accredited elementary school nearby. Use of the GoReact platform for distance supervision allows real-time and video classroom observations and evaluation, and permits K-State instructors to review students' teaching and provide feedback. B.S. Online students receive integrated coursework as they complete an innovative yearlong internship. The program prepares students in the areas of K-6 reading, language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, art, music and health and movement.

*"My placement was the BEST experience with an amazing teacher, principal and staff. Having the opportunity to spend an entire year with the same school, allowed me to build relationships with students, understand their strengths and learn how to assess them. It gave me a "big picture" look at a school year." – B.S. Online student*



**The Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT)** enables qualified students to earn a master's degree in 12 months so they can enter the field of teaching. The master's degree combines rigorous online coursework with field experiences in accredited schools convenient to students in the program. The program is designed as a cohort model – students complete the scope and sequence of the curriculum as a group. MAT pathways are available for Elementary, K-6; Modern Languages, K-12; Social Studies, 6-12; English, 6-12; Mathematics 6-12; Agriculture Education 6-12; and a non-licensure international track.

*"The online format of the MAT program is a valuable benefit. It allows students to work and learn at any time of day convenient to them individually, but a less obvious benefit is the opportunity to "meet" and collaborate with other pre-service teachers across the globe, right where they are at, in the midst of their experiences in different geographical locations and school districts and cultures –rather than in one homogeneous campus setting." – MAT student*



**Kansas Statewide Teacher Education Pathway for Underserved and Place-bound Students (K-STEP UP)** is a site-based program that allows future teachers to earn associate's degrees at their local community colleges and complete their education degrees through K-State Online. The program targets underserved populations, individuals who want to teach in rural areas, and others who are unable to move to the main campus for their degree and who want to teach in their local communities. Students can earn community college credit as they participate in the Career Pathways program while still in high school. High school participants may attend K-State's successful weeklong immersive summer camp, the Kansas Advanced Teacher Academy.

*"We always talk about hope with our students so I think that's a big piece...it gives them hope that they have a direction for the future. They may not be able to leave [the community] for a certain amount of time because of whatever reason, but I think it gives them hope or a plan for the future or that they can have a future and be successful, and have a career." – K-STEP UP student*

"The needs of our students and profession are constantly changing," Vontz said. "Professional colleges like ours must be nimble enough to remove traditional barriers, design innovative systems, and consistently improve the teacher preparation pipeline from teacher recruitment to mentorship and job placement. The MAT was designed with these goals in mind."

K-STEP UP is an innovative teacher pathway program that charts a student's path from high school to their local community college and to K-State's online bachelor's program. It is targeting underserved and place-bound students in Kansas City, Kansas, and Liberal. One of the program coordinators is Tonnie Martinez, assistant professor of curriculum and instruction.

"It has been quite a construction project but building this particular pathway to teaching has been a winning effort for each partner," Martinez said. "Numbers are up in the high school teaching career pathways courses and both community colleges are seeing an uptick in their education program enrollment. We all have to work together to come up with creative solutions for teacher shortages across the state, and we feel really good about the number of students beginning to join the pathway, whether at the high school or community college level. Not only will these students fill vacancies in hard-to-fill areas, they will diversify the teaching force in their communities and we're pretty excited about that."

"These programs reflect the efforts of our exceptional faculty who always seek ways to make our programs available to as many students as possible," said Todd Goodson, professor and chair of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. "As a result, we are attracting the caliber of professional who has always wanted to teach, but for a multitude of reasons, was not able to participate in a traditional teacher preparation program at a four-year university."

Lori Levin, assistant professor and coordinator of the online bachelor's of science degree in elementary education, said this program has allowed military spouses and non-traditional students, such as single parents, the opportunity to teach.

Levin said when the online bachelor's program was launched in 2016, eight students enrolled. Today, there are more than 100.

"Much of the success can be attributed to the incredible flexibility online programming offers students," she said. "They complete a nine-month apprenticeship, and we hear over and over how much future teachers learn by being in a school for an entire school year."

The online master's in curriculum and instruction, which includes the Master of Arts in Teaching, is ranked 10th in the nation by U.S. News and World Report. This is K-State's highest-ranked online program, and the Master of Arts in Teaching is the university's largest master's degree program. The program is led by Tom Vontz, professor and the program coordinator.



# NACADA thanks Nutt and welcomes Anderson as executive director

The idiom “bloom where you’re planted” means to do your best. But what if your best inspired those around you to plant hundreds and hundreds of trees in your honor?



**Dr. Charlie Nutt**

“Under Charlie, the association has garnered worldwide recognition for its leadership in academic advising as well as several other areas vital to higher ed, such as student success, research and scholarship, assessment, administration and engagement,” said Debbie Mercer, dean of the College of Education. “Tenures are quantifiable, right? What’s so impressive about Charlie’s – yet difficult to define – is the quality that’s rooted within the academic and membership expansions he initiated.”

What was then known as the National Academic Advising Association, or NACADA, began 41 years ago as an idea -- an idea that professional and faculty advisors could positively impact

student success. The association, which was largely run by volunteers, hired a professional staff and established its headquarters at K-State in 1990. The College of Education is its host institution.

Under Nutt's leadership, noteworthy achievements include:

- Formalizing global focus in 2009 with international partnerships and subsequent name change to NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising;
- Making history in 2014 as the first organization to hold a conference on academic advising in the Middle East;
- Doubling membership;
- Surpassing the number of annual conference attendees to 3,500 annually from 37 countries;
- Establishing the Inclusion and Engagement standing committee then expanding the initiative by forming a working group to focus on equity and inclusion across the association;
- Doubling attendance to its 10 region conferences;
- Initiating the Emerging Leader Program, which has produced more than 100 leaders for the association;
- Developing the **Graduate Certificate in Academic Advising** at K-State;
- Offering a **Master’s Degree in Academic Advising** at K-State;
- Creating the **Ph.D. in higher education with an emphasis in Academic Advising** at K-State;
- Founding the **NACADA Center for Research**, the first global think tank dedicated to research in academic advising;
- Increasing online learning opportunities – both pre- and post-pandemic – to include webinars and eTutorials;
- Serving as inspiration for an international award in academic advising; and
- Honoring Nutt, NACADA volunteers in Region 6 and 10 planted 423 trees as part of their service project.

“I am immensely proud of all that has been accomplished for students, institutions of higher education and NACADA members during this time, and these efforts have solidified NACADA’s position as a global leader in academic advising and student success,” Nutt said. “None of these accomplishments are the result of one person’s efforts. They are the collective result of the ongoing work of NACADA’s volunteer leaders, its members – many of whom will become our future leaders – and an exceptional professional staff whose work has been invaluable in so many successes.”

Change is inevitable, and with Nutt’s retirement, NACADA welcomed its third executive director, Melinda Anderson, who assumed the leadership position in June.

“I am so honored and thrilled to have this opportunity to work with very talented colleagues at Kansas State University and the association,” Anderson said. “I am so excited I joined NACADA’s executive office and will continue to raise the profile of our work focusing on student success through excellence in academic advising.”

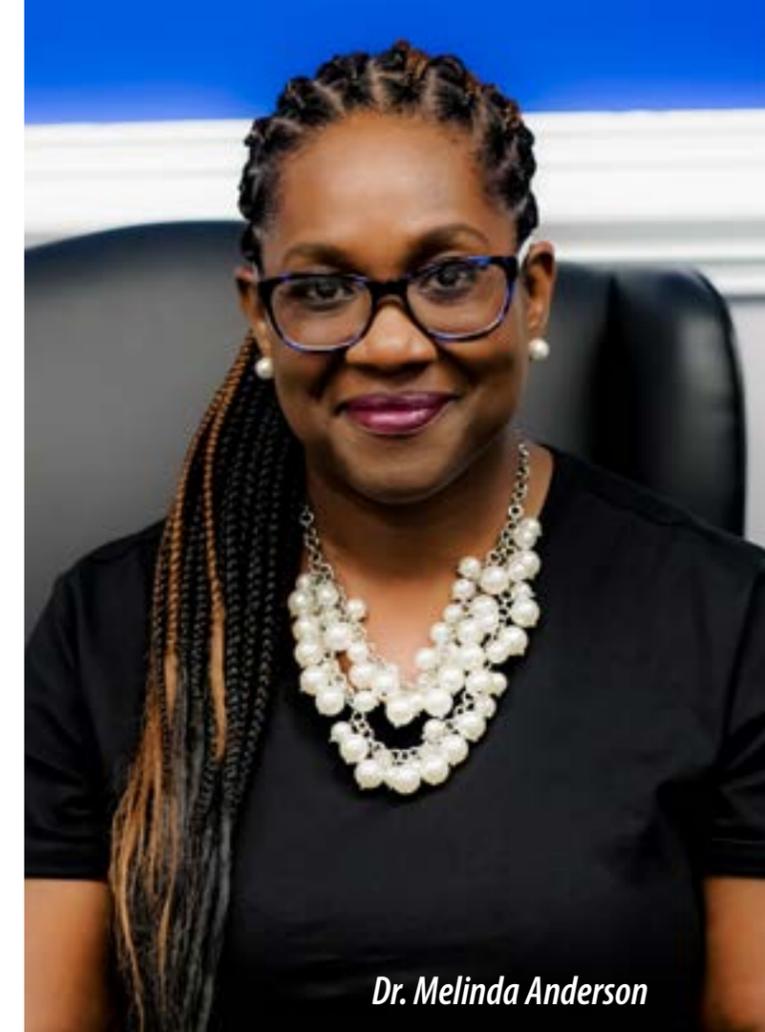
An active NACADA member since 2009, Anderson was a regular presenter at regional, national and international conferences and served as NACADA Region 2 chair and emerging leader mentor.

Her leadership was clearly in demand as she had just been elected by the association’s global membership to a one-year term as board president, a position she vacated when she accepted the position of executive director.

Mercer said Anderson’s exceptional leadership abilities and skill set were apparent.

“Dr. Anderson is phenomenal – so much so it bears repeating: phenomenal,” Mercer said. “What stands out about Melinda is her intense focus on student success. She’s a systems thinker, true collaborator, data driven, energetic and has a strategic vision about NACADA’s global orientation. She is absolutely the dynamic, well-rounded scholar we were searching for.”

Now, it’s Anderson’s turn to bloom at NACADA.



**Dr. Melinda Anderson**

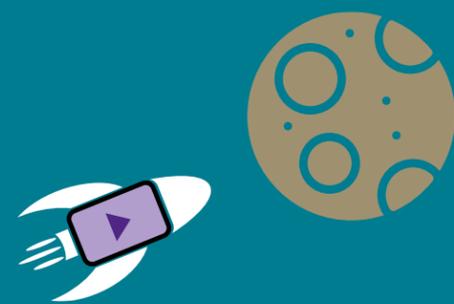
*“Dr. Anderson is phenomenal. What stands out about Melinda is her intense focus on student success. She’s a systems thinker, true collaborator, data driven, energetic and has a strategic vision about NACADA’s global orientation.” – Dean Debbie Mercer*

***“I am immensely proud of all that has been accomplished for students, institutions of higher education, and NACADA members during this time, and these efforts have solidified NACADA's position as a global leader in academic advising and student success.”***

**– Charlie Nutt**



# College's video team shoots documentary about KSDE moonshot



Who are the stars of the college's soon-to-be-released documentary about school redesign? The educators who took "one giant leap" for their students and communities.

The mission began with a listening tour in 2015 when Kansas Commissioner of Education Randy Watson '81, '84, '90 and Deputy Commissioner Brad Neuenswander '94, '18 traveled to 20 communities across the state and asked three questions. 1. What are the skills, attributes, and abilities of a successful 24-year-old Kansan?; 2. What is K-12's role in developing this successful Kansan, and how would we measure success?; and 3. What is higher education's role in developing this successful Kansan, and how would we measure success?

"That resulted in some really great responses from more than 2,000 Kansans," Watson said. "We shared that data with the faculty at Kansas State and they, along with our researchers, compiled the information and interestingly, what came out of that was some great research and data that formulated what we needed to do to meet what Kansans said is a successful young person."

Kansans Can came from this research analysis. The vision of the Kansas State Board of Education is for Kansas to lead the world in the success of each student. Outcomes measured include social-emotional growth, kindergarten readiness, individual plans of study for students based on career interests, and increases in high school graduation rates and postsecondary success.

The college's video team of Rusty Earl and Kyle Wilson also crisscrossed Kansas – from Beloit to Coffeyville, Dighton to Leavenworth, and Liberal to Wellington – to capture six districts' redesign journeys. Then, the pandemic hit, which very easily could have aborted the redesign mission. But that's not what happened.

"Covid shocked the system," Watson said. "What it caused – the accelerant part of it – forced every school district to think about multiple ways they're going to engage students and how to enhance their lives." In fact, educators in redesign schools reported the changes they'd made better prepared them for the swift transition to remote learning, and they identified the benefits.

Watson said they discovered that some students – like those with high anxiety levels – learn really well at home, and the education system needs to capitalize on that while meeting that student's social-emotional needs. He expressed concern about what students miss out on when school is delivered completely remotely, such as social interaction and civic engagements.

The documentary will premiere at the Kansas State Department of Education's redesign conference in October. Plans include airing the documentary over a six-week period – one episode dedicated to each district – on KTWU beginning in October. Check your local listings for availability.

*"Covid shocked the system. What it caused – the accelerant part of it – forced every school district to think about multiple ways they're going to engage students and how to enhance their lives."*

– Randy Watson, Kansas Commissioner of Education

## TRAUMA From Sesame Street to Anderson Avenue

In the documentary, *"Becoming Trauma Responsive,"* K-State's College of Education explores the effects of trauma on learning, behavior, and developing relationships. Throughout the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, schools across the country strained to meet the social and emotional needs of students. School lockdowns, remote learning, and isolation were just a few of the challenges that almost all students experienced. Most schools reported large increases in reported depression and general anxiety throughout the 2020-2021 school year from students and educators in their buildings. As one interviewee stated, "Never has there been a time where trauma informed care was needed more. All of us need it."

Sesame Street and the College of Education partnered to create this documentary to inspire and encourage anyone affected by trauma. Sesame Street is known for being encouraging, genuine and entertaining, but they do so much more for children than people may initially realize. Our film documents the experiences of three different schools, pre-school through high school, in Kansas and Missouri during the pandemic to see how each has adapted and changed to meet the needs of their students. Sesame Street has also partnered with the Children's Place to create programs to aid with trauma. With two amazing platforms working toward ending child trauma, we wanted to highlight this impactful work in this documentary. We also interviewed trauma experts who have spent decades in the field of therapy, brain science, and counseling to learn how to teach kids resiliency and inspire hope despite hardships and traumatic events in their lives.

One individual showcased, Nathan Ross, was a victim of one of the most high-profile cases of child abuse and neglect in Missouri how he was able to channel his experiences to help others in foster care and adoption. His message to teachers and counselors provides a unique look at what we can do help kids even when we don't know their stories. While his story may start out hopeless, he never gave up hope and uses that to encourage others.

*"Never has there been a time where trauma informed care was needed more. All of us need it."*

Our goal in making this documentary is help educators face the challenges of teaching children and youth that have been affected by trauma and general anxiety. If you can identify the signs of trauma, you can help. You can be that beacon of hope they need in their lives. We should discuss the importance of self-regulation, how to teach it to your students, and how your own self-regulation directly impacts your students. You can create an environment that helps students deal with stress and create change in their lives.

We want people to know about trauma informed care and to be equipped to face the challenges associated with helping more and more of our youth suffering from it," said Rusty Earl, Video Producer for the K-State College of Education. "The beauty of becoming trauma responsive, is that you are helping everyone in room including yourself. It benefits everyone."

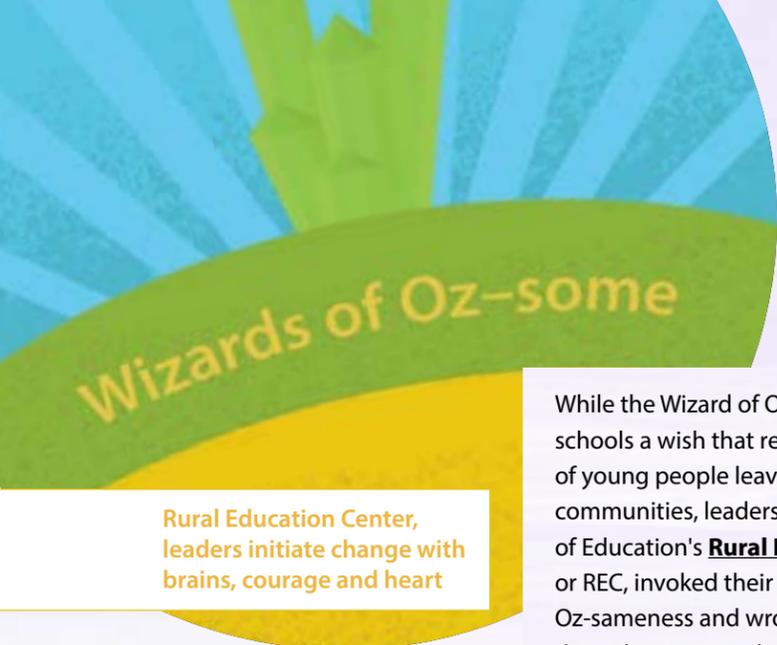
We invite educators everywhere to watch this film and to get on the path to becoming trauma responsive. "Becoming Trauma Responsive" will hold its first premiere this fall on campus and then on KTWU.



*Sesame Street characters, Rebecca Chow, and young children, interacting through various educational play.*



*Teachers and students from schools across Kansas participating in the school redesign.*



# Wizards of Oz-some

Rural Education Center, leaders initiate change with brains, courage and heart

While the Wizard of Oz can't grant rural schools a wish that reverses the trend of young people leaving their home communities, leaders with the College of Education's **Rural Education Center**, or REC, invoked their inner Wizard of Oz-sameness and wrote grants to address that issue and a few more.

### Lions and tigers and bears, and Ohmni robots?

How can you address teacher vacancies, bring new content to schools, improve online learning opportunities, and allow for distance student teaching? With technology, and more specifically, telepresence robots.

REC director Spencer Clark and REC assistant director Lori Goodson were awarded two STEM grants - totaling nearly \$600,000 - by the Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant. Administered by the Rural Utilities Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the combined grants support 29 schools in 18 districts.

The grants are for the center's Rural Enhancement of STEM Education through Tele-Presence, or RESET, program. They purchased 118 Double Robotics and 23 Ohmni robots, microphones, and laptops for the school districts included in the grants, and the REC serves as the hub for providing training, curriculum, instructors and additional resources to assist its partner rural schools.



Debbie Mercer, dean of the K-State College of Education, said these grants address a critical need in schools across Kansas - one that came into sharp focus with the emergence of COVID-19.

"This is a phenomenal example of how College of Education faculty are positively impacting some of the most complex issues in our profession," Mercer said. "This RESET program addresses two at the top of the list: finding STEM teachers and providing schools with technology that level the playing field for rural schools or those in underserved or low socio-economic communities."

Clark agreed. "These grants are an important part of our vision to create a distance learning network across the state," Clark said. "It is another step toward creating more equitable access to educational opportunities for rural and underserved students."

### There's no place like home

It has long been observed that the most valuable export of rural communities is not a crop or animal product, but rather, its young. "As a product of a small rural school in northwest Missouri, I know the value of those small districts, and I'm glad to be a part of this effort," Goodson said. "That's why this is so important to me. We have the chance to support rural and underserved schools, and we hope this effort ultimately translates into jobs at home for these intelligent, hard-working students."



A Clay Center student and her teacher using the Ohmni robot.

Kansas schools participating in the grant are Andale High School, Andale; Axtell High School, Axtell; Cheylin High School, Bird City; Buhler High School and Prairie Hills Middle School, both in Buhler; Garden Plain High School, Garden Plain; Jackson Heights High School, Holton; F.L. Schlagle High School, J.C. Harmon High School, Sumner Academy, Washington High School and Wyandotte High School, all in Kansas City; Blue Stem High School, Leon; Ness City High School, Ness City; Osage City High School and Middle School, Osage City, Troy High School, Troy; Sabetha High School and Sabetha Middle School, Sabetha; Wetmore High School, Wetmore.

### Somewhere over the rainbow

Approximately 120 people attended the REC's virtual 2021 Rural Education Summit: Homegrown Solutions that focused on teacher recruitment, reinforcement and retention. The half-day summit was March 26th, and topics included STEM, community food needs, and agriculture in the classroom.

Kansas Commissioner of Education Randy Watson shared, "The State of Rural Education in Kansas: Recruiting and Retaining teachers throughout the State," and K-State assistant professor Tuan Nguyen shared his research on rural teacher retention in schools.

### I'm melting! Melting!

Using lessons learned during the pivot to online learning, the REC offered a Virtual STEAM Institute this summer. No witches - good or bad - were harmed by the 110 students enrolled in the three-week adventure. STEAM is an acronym for science, technology, engineering, arts and math. Students across Kansas and the country were invited to attend.

Organized by Goodson, the institute offered hands-on, high-engagement activities for middle schoolers. The topics were Wild, Weird and Wonderful Writing;

M.U.S.I.C. (Music Using STEM is Cool); Sports Science; Stop Motion Animation; and Planet Podcast.

"We learned so much last year about online learning because of COVID-19, and we didn't want to lose that momentum," Goodson said. "That experience provided the perfect platform for creating this virtual academy and allowed us to better serve schools and students beyond our immediate area. Summer 2021 is only the starting point for our virtual academy."

Rural and underserved schools are facing difficult and multifaceted issues, and Clark and Goodson certainly qualify as wizards - and a whole lot more - because they're educators with brains, courage, and heart.



"It is another step toward creating more equitable access to educational opportunities for rural and underserved students."



Staff and students attending the 2019 STEM Showcase.

# Excerpts of a Survey: The COE Student Experience During the Pandemic

Haden Botkin, Todd Goodson, Tonnie Martinez and Dean Mercer

When our world was suddenly gripped by the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, many aspects of our lives changed. We went from face-to-face interaction, to remote learning almost immediately following the announcement from President Myers. The intensity and speed to which everything was decided and orders given could give anyone whiplash. To truly understand how this pandemic was affecting their students, the Dean of K-State's College of Education, Debbie Mercer, and Dr. Tonnie Martinez started surveying, researching, and asking students how they felt mentally, physically and emotionally. The facts don't lie.

The College of Education students' lives were disrupted and changed when the pandemic hit last year. A college emphasis on technology provided a familiar tether to both the college and university other students may not have experienced; however, understanding the COE student experience in the midst of the pandemic is important. In this study, we focused on understanding the perceptions of 396 COE students and how insight from their experiences might inform college planning, programming, and support in the new normal. Here are highlights of the study:

Students were asked to reflect on their experiences as undergraduates participating in an unprecedented pivot from face-to-face classes to completely online learning environments. When asked as to what extent the college responded proactively to the pandemic and associated challenges, over half of the respondents reported very proactively (n=239), while others responded neutral (n=113 and less than 2 percent felt the response was not very proactive (n=11).

FIGURE 1

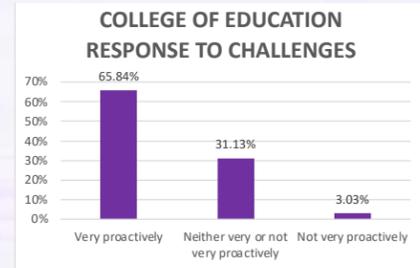
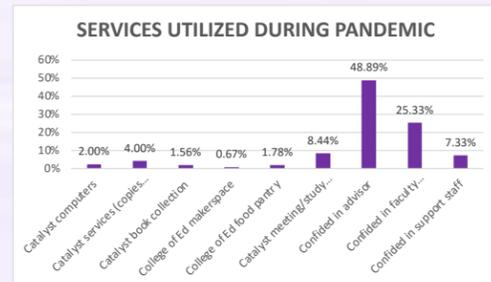


Figure 2 represents the students' use of College of Education resources during the pandemic. Categories included Catalyst services, confiding in advisors, confiding in faculty, and confiding in support staff. Access to the building was limited during the pandemic but spaces were maintained under university social distancing and sanitizing protocols. At the time of the survey, the university buildings were beginning to open and 8.4% of students began to access Catalyst meeting spaces. Over half of the respondents indicated they had reached out to their academic advisor or a faculty member, underscoring the important, nurturing role college personnel played in maintaining students' human connections to the college.

FIGURE 2



Mental health is always important and with the pandemic separating us from our normal, everyday lives, we thought it was extremely important to understand if students were struggling with it more than usual. As seen in Figure 4, student mental health had the highest response rate of the survey. The results of the survey revealed 77% of College of Education students experienced mental health challenges. With the majority of our students admitting that they have been experiencing mental health challenges we are confident we can adapt to their mental health needs more effectively.

FIGURE 4



### Looking Towards the Future

Looking ahead to post-pandemic teaching and learning, participant responses were distributed across multiple categories. We wanted a broad area to which each student could identify with and choose the survey answers that best suited them.

FIGURE 6

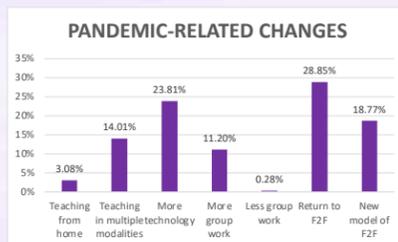


Figure 4b illustrates that less than half of the students (44%) shared their mental health challenges with anyone, 29% reached out to private resources, 12% reached out to university services, and 8% reached out to an advisor. What we interpreted from this research was that we need to figure out a way to bridge that gap. With the pandemic not completely in our rearview mirrors, making sure we are doing everything we can to aid our students with their challenges is a priority. The point of this research is to help us make informed decisions that benefit our students and help them on their journey here at K-State College of Education.

FIGURE 5



The pandemic has provided an opportunity for the K-State College of Education to examine what is most crucial to achieve our mission in the college in the post-pandemic era. The results of our study indicate the important role faculty and advisors play in the undergraduate student experience, the need to address mental health challenges, and the encouraging signs of student confidence in their future as educators. Data analyses is on-going and these highlights along with the full survey report will provide a student perspective to rethinking what is necessary and possible in providing the best teacher preparation experience for undergraduates.

# KSU Foundation Spotlight

My wife, Katie, and I moved to Manhattan last year from Kansas City, my hometown, to be closer to Paxico, her hometown. One month after our big move, we welcomed our third child, Harold! We love living in Manhattan and all that this great college town has to offer.

My first job out of college was as a financial advisor. Five years ago, I transitioned to a career in philanthropy after witnessing the impact of philanthropy on my clients. As I helped people chart a path to their financial goals, it struck me how much "giving back" meant to people, and what it meant to the recipients. Their desire to make the world a better place inspired me to apply my skills and talents to the world of philanthropy – just from the other side.

When I met Greg Willems, president of the Kansas State University Foundation, he shared how he looks for people who have strong belief in and passion for philanthropy, and his team's guiding goal is to be the best foundation in higher education. That early conversation makes perfect sense now.

Working with Dean Debbie Mercer, who proudly told me she has four degrees from K-State, has been remarkable. She is a strong, dynamic and innovative leader, and best of all, her love for K-State and the education profession is evident in all she does. The college has grown in many ways, and as a father of three, I have a new appreciation for teachers and their commitment to their students.

The best part of my day is working with members of the EdCat Family and gaining a greater understanding of the many ways teachers and education have changed lives. I truly appreciate hearing educators' stories because it has opened my eyes to the many aspects of teaching, I would have not known otherwise.

I look forward to meeting with you in person, but until then, if you'd like to discuss a gift to the College of Education, please call or email me. It would be my pleasure.

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*Frank Willems*



"The BEST part of my day is working with members of the EdCat Family..."

Frank, Katie, Joann, Simon & Harold



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## **EDCATS**

EdCat Lindsey Bergner gave new meaning to the terms ag in the classroom and screen hog.

A pandemic coupled with an Artic blast weren't enough to keep Bergner, a secondary English language arts major from Pratt, from attending Vicki Sherbert's hyflex/hybrid/redesign model Block 2 class while tending to her family's sows and piglets.

"Lindsey logged in from a straw-filled stall in the farrowing house, using her iPhone as a hotspot and was online with us for the full two hours," Sherbert said. "She presented her assignment by sharing her screen, and we were, in turn, treated to a tour of the stall, and we oohed and ahhed over the adorable piglets and sow. Place-based, place-conscious education at its best!"



## ***This little piggy went to...class!***

