ParentInfo

News for a child's most important educator

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KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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It's a big year for Kentucky schools

Terry Holliday

The 2013-14 school year is upon us, and one thing is certain: It's going to be an exciting and busy school year for Kentucky public school students, educators and parents.

Many new and continuing initiatives will require the time and attention of the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), school districts, schools and educators. All of these efforts support our ultimate goal in Kentucky: college- and career-readiness for ALL students.

The 2014 Kentucky General Assembly also will convene during this school year with discussions and decisions on the biennial state budget. As in the past, I will continue to advocate for additional funding and resources for our schools as they undertake major changes aimed at benefiting their students and Kentucky.

Here is a look at some of the major initiatives and undertakings this coming school year.

Professional Growth and Effectiveness System

We have elevated the expectations of our students with the Kentucky Core Academic Standards (KCAS) and corresponding assessments, and we have the same high expectations of our teachers, principals and superintendents. The Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (PGES), which will eventually provide all Kentucky educators with standards-based, consistent and fair feedback on their practices linked with personalized professional learning opportunities, is our mechanism for doing that.

PGES for teachers and principals is being implemented in at least 10 percent of the schools in each district this year with overall statewide implementation without consequences in 2014-15. There will be statewide implementation with consequences and accountability in 2015-16.

Next-Generation Science Standards

At its June 5 meeting, the Kentucky Board of Education adopted new science standards, incorporating them in KCAS.

These Next-Generation Science Standards (NGSS) are internationally benchmarked, rigorous, research-based and aligned with expectations for college and careers. They provide for a deeper understanding of content and application. (For more information about the standards, visit www.nextgenscience.org.)

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Next-Generation Student Council accepting applications

The Next-Generation Student Council is a year-long program for Kentucky public school students in grades 10-12.

The council will play a vital role in providing input regarding issues that face education in Kentucky and work with Education Commissioner Terry Holliday and Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) staff to develop ideas that will work to improve and transform education.

This group meets with the commissioner and KDE staff in person and virtually.

The council seeks students with refreshing ideas and thoughtful insight into how KDE can further improve schools and student achievement. All students are encouraged to apply to better represent the diverse academic, geographic, demographic and school-size variables particular to Kentucky.

Students can click here to access the application and read FAQs for the council. KDE will accept student applications from Aug. 1-30, 2013. Applications with a postmark date on or before Aug. 30 will be considered.

Appointments to the council will be based on how well the applicants communicated their ideas and goals. A KDE committee will then select six students to serve on the 2013-14 council alongside the five returning student council members.

For more information, contact Stephanie Siria at (502) 564-2000, ext. 4614.

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The NGSS are scheduled to be launched in schools through regional science networks in 2013-14. The plan is to assess the new science standards for the first time in spring 2015.

Arts, social studies standards

This spring Kentucky had a hand in publishing a framework for new social studies standards.

Based on the framework, Kentucky teachers, postsecondary educators and social studies organization partners are writing new standards that will be open for public review when completed. Revisions and edits will be based on the feedback received with the final social studies standards document due to be released late this fall.

The National Coalition for Core Arts Standards (NCCAS), a partnership of national arts and education organizations and media arts representatives, is developing the arts standards. A public review of the draft art standards is expected in early 2014, with final standards being released in spring 2014.

Once the arts and social studies standards are finalized, the Kentucky Board of Education will consider their adoption.

Kindergarten screener

This year, all incoming public school kindergarteners are being assessed with the Common Kindergarten Entry Screener. The data collected from this screener gives kindergarten teachers specific knowledge of what their students know and can do at the beginning of the school year and is especially helpful in guiding instruction. The screener is aligned to Kentucky's School Readiness Definition and Early Childhood Standards.

The screener was administered to almost 32,000 incoming kindergarteners as part of a pilot last year. Of those, only 28 percent were ready to succeed without some additional supports.

I can't stress enough how critical it is that early learners are exposed to high-quality learning environments and developmentally appropriate experiences at home, in child care settings and in preschool to ensure their success in kindergarten and throughout their school experience. School readiness is the beginning of the continuum toward college/career-readiness, which is the goal for all our students.

Many more initiatives and efforts are underway at KDE and in Kentucky's schools and districts, but I hope these highlights give a glimpse of the work that is taking place. None of this work would be possible without the ongoing work and innovation of educators and the support and collaboration of parents and the community.

We are doing great work in Kentucky – work that is gaining Kentucky national attention and, more importantly, benefitting our students. Please join me in continuing this work in the 2013-14 school year and ensuring that all our students are college- and career-ready.

Check these lists more than twice

Guidance counselors offer tips to help students make the most of their back-to-school goal lists

Along with buying those back-to-school clothes and school supplies, parents can do more to help a child prepare for the upcoming year. Goal setting is a great way to get a child thinking about expectations. It also helps with opening the lines of communication between you and your child when discussing what he or she is doing in the classroom and at home.

Here are some tips from several Kentucky educators to help parents and children together lay the groundwork for the school year. These lists of goal-setting do's and don'ts were compiled with the help of Sharla Six, Franklin County school district director of elementary schools, and guidance counselors Wanda Brown, A.B. Combs Elementary School (Perry County); Vicki Fowler, Ballard County Elementary School; Kelly M. Rich, Edmonson County Middle School; and Kaye Stewart, Trigg County Intermediate School.

Do: post goals on a refrigerator or somewhere prominent.
Do: monitor goals daily with a smiley face, checkmark or some indication that progress is being made toward reaching the goal.
Do: make room for flexibility. If the goal is too low and is attained too soon, then a new, higher goal can be set.
Do: encourage academic and personal goals, but not too many. Goals related to responsibility and organizational skills are very important to younger students.
Do: with each goal, have a child write down or discuss with you good action steps needed to meet the goal.
Do: check your child's agenda book (student handbook) nightly and encourage him/her to use the agenda book to organize dates and keep track of homework.

Don't: put too much pressure on a child with goals. Keep goals simple.
Don't: focus too much on grades. Focus more on improvement.
Don't: create an unattainable goal. If it's too high, the child may become frustrated and give up altogether.
Don't: make up all the goals yourself. Give a child ownership of the goals by allowing him or her to come up with some of them independently.
Don't: quit on the goals. Always follow through with monitoring them.
Don't: reward your child for every accomplishment. Encourage intrinsic satisfaction. If you reward a child for meeting a goal, make it an activity that encourages family time together like a movie night. If you need a reward that's more affordable, go for a play date at the park, or let the child pick the menu one night for dinner.

Important information to know

10 questions parents should get answers to as the new school year approaches

As students return to school over the next few weeks, it's important that parents take in as much knowledge and information as possible about the rules, expectations and best options for their child.

While parents will understandably have questions for a teacher specific to testing, grades and classroom environment, here are some other questions to ask school faculty.

1. How may I volunteer?

2. If my child has a cell phone or other electronic device, is he or she allowed to bring it to school?

3. What kind of technology is the school using this year that it might not have before?

4. What kind of physical does my child need for entering kindergarten, middle school, high school or for playing sports this year?

5. What after-school activities are available for my child this year?

6. Where can I find the school lunch menus online?

7. What check-in/out policies are in place or are different this year?

8. What school safety measures are in place this year?

9. What is the school procedure for walkers, bus riders, drop-offs and pickups?

10. Will the school provide flu shots this year?

Eight sure-fire tips for smoother school days

From Scholastic.com

Start your day the night before. Prepare snacks and clothes and solidify the next day's plan at night. Wake up earlier. Give yourself and your child extra time in the morning – even 15 minutes will help. Try using an alarm clock that plays soothing nature sounds or happy music to make wake-up time more fun.

Send only teacher-approved items to school. Talk to your child's teacher about classroom rules before sending in anything. Most teachers do not want children bringing in valuable items or toys that encourage aggressive play, but they likely will encourage a favorite book or photograph.

Create a special drop-off ritual. Come up with a loving, memorable way to say goodbye – a kiss on the hand, a secret handshake or a special phrase that you create with your child.

Set aside after-school downtime. Some children experience a meltdown at the end of the day. To avoid this, try to build in some time to unwind after school. Allow your child to visit the playground, spend time alone curled up with a book or engage in quiet activities such as painting, building with blocks or solitary imaginative play. Some might benefit from a short nap, too.

Make dinnertime family time. Whenever possible, eat together as a family. Kids benefit from spontaneous dinner-table conversations. Ask your child to tell you about his day and share interesting things that happened to you. He or she will feel more grown up when included in the conversation.

Follow the school's rules. Teachers count on families to support the classroom rules and routines – such as sick-child policies, authorized escorts and arriving on time.

Give your child undivided attention. Set aside uninterrupted time each day just to be with your child – even if it's just 20 minutes. Follow his or her lead. You will learn a lot about your child.

Help your child adjust to new environment

For parents of students attending a new school, here is a do and a don't from Wanda Brown, guidance counselor at A.B. Combs Elementary School (Perry County):

DO prepare young children for attending school for the first time by making sure that they have prior experience with being away from parents/guardians. We have MANY children (and parents, for that matter) who start the school year in tears because mom and dad have always kept them at home, and they have no prior experience to draw from. Attending daycare or spending time at a relative's home without a parent present … these types of experiences teach young children the coping skills necessary for their first day of school.

DON'T show up on the first day of school expecting to enroll your child without the proper documentation. You must provide a copy of a certified birth certificate, a current Kentucky physical and an immunization record. We often see parents who are irate that their child can't begin school on the first day because he or she doesn't have the necessary documents. If a child attended another school, it's a good idea to notify the new school in advance so it can request the records. However, remember that just because the records are requested doesn't mean that they are sent.

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