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## Twitter chat

Parents: Want to chat with educators? A parent/teacher Twitter chat takes place at 9 p.m. every Wednesday. To participate or just follow the conversation, use the hashtag #PTchat.

# Commissioner Stephen Pruitt: My guiding principles in education



Stephen L. Pruitt

I have seen and learned many things since starting as Kentucky's Commissioner of Education in October.

I have met with policy-makers, community leaders, superintendents, principals, parents and students. I have gotten to know every line item of the Department of Education's budget, had the privilege of recognizing

outstanding educators and school districts and have taken every opportunity to step inside classrooms and see our teachers and students hard at work.

It's those visits that re-energize and inspire me. It's visits to Emily Smith's first-grade class in Hickman County or handing out medals at the Kentucky School for the Deaf in Danville that drive home what all of the meetings, the budgets, the policies and the regulations are about – it's about the kids.

So, I'd like to share my education priorities with you, the parents of those children, and let you know how I intend to frame KDE's response to the many challenges it now faces.

I have built my education priorities on three pillars: equity, achievement and integrity. These three pillars make a real difference in the lives of children. That is why I plan to also make them the pillars of Kentucky's education work.

First, there is equity. Equity really is about opportunity. It's about every child having the opportunity for a high-quality education. It's about every Kentucky student being equipped with all the necessary skills to take advantage of any opportunity they may have and make any life choice they want after high school graduation.

While we as a state have provided greater access for students to Advanced Placement courses, higher level coursework and quality instruction, we have not overcome the simple reality that we have a large achievement gap. We must continue to shift our thinking and our instruction to meet the needs of a greater diversity of learners than we have ever had before.

Achievement is about how students perform, but it must be more than that. Ensuring all students achieve at high levels has been a hallmark of Kentucky for years. Kentucky students now outperform the nation as a whole at most levels in reading, math and science on the National Assessment of Educational Progress – also known as the Nation's Report Card – and have realized greater gains in reading and math in the past decade than students in almost any other state. And in the past five years, Kentucky students have made significantly greater gains on the ACT than the rest of United States.

We also cannot solely be concerned with test scores. We must continue to push for more students to graduate from high school. We have made remarkable progress in this area, with an 88 percent graduation rate, among the highest in the nation. And that diploma means something. Among all the states that have rigorous graduation requirements – four years of English language arts and mathematics through Algebra II for every student – Kentucky is number one in its graduation rate.

But student achievement isn't just about test scores and graduation rates. More students graduating with a quality diploma can benefit our state's overall economy. Each high school graduate contributes a net economic benefit to our economy of \$209,000 through increased government revenues and lowered government spending. All students achieving at

high levels is not just a nice tag line, it is a reachable goal with a big payoff for our students and Kentucky.

Finally, let's consider integrity. When I was in the classroom, I had trouble giving extra credit because, if I did, the student's grade would not honestly reflect what he or she knew.

One particular situation stands out in my mind. I overheard a group of my AP Chemistry students talking about me as a teacher. One student, who hadn't had me before, boasted about how she had made 108 in a regular chemistry class the year before and how I could not be that bad. The students that had me the previous year told her I was not "bad" as in hard, I simply believed in being clear about what a student understood. My new student soon realized she did not know or understand as much as she thought because of her prior artificial grade.

We must be honest with our students, teachers and parents about achievement. The same applies to our work with low-performing schools. It requires an honest approach and requires our schools to be honest with themselves. The ones who have improved have held true to this notion. We have had 15 schools come off the priority list over the past six years and none of them have returned – one of the best rates in the country. Why? Because those educators were honest with themselves and dedicated to ensuring their students received a better education.

These three pillars – equity, achievement and integrity – are my and KDE's North Star. We will use these ideals to shape how we work with schools and with parents, how we view our successes and how we approach the challenges that remain. And just like pillars can hold up the roof of a house, these pillars will hold up and boost Kentucky's most valuable resource – its children.

# Kentucky receives grant to improve career preparation for young people

The Kentucky Department of Education recently secured a \$100,000 grant to develop a detailed career-readiness action plan, an essential step to expanding economic opportunity for young people across our state.

“Kentucky’s plan is an employer-led initiative that will enhance the delivery of career and technical education (CTE) by aligning high school pathways to regional and state sector needs,” said Education Commissioner Stephen Pruitt. “It will ensure Kentucky high school students are exposed to rigorous and relevant CTE programs that lead to postsecondary success.”

Kentucky is among 24 states and the District of Columbia that secured the grants through phase one of the [New Skills for Youth](#) grant opportunity. The grants are one part of a [\\$75 million, five-year initiative](#) developed by JPMorgan Chase, in partnership with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and Advance CTE, aimed at increasing economic opportunity for young people by strengthening career-focused education starting in high school and ending with postsecondary degrees or credentials aligned with business needs.

Kentucky has made college and career readiness a focus of the high school experience for students through the College and Career Readiness (CCR) Accountability system and has seen progress moving from 13 percent of students who were career ready in 2011-12 to more than 32 percent in 2014-15. However, in the 2014-15 school year, only 50 percent of high school graduates concentrated in a career pathway and only a quarter of these students earned an industry-recognized certification or credential.

Through phase one of New Skills for Youth, Kentucky and other selected states each will receive a \$100,000 six-month grant, in addition to expert technical assistance and peer support from other grantees, to perform a diagnostic assessment of their career preparation system and prepare for implementation of a new action plan.

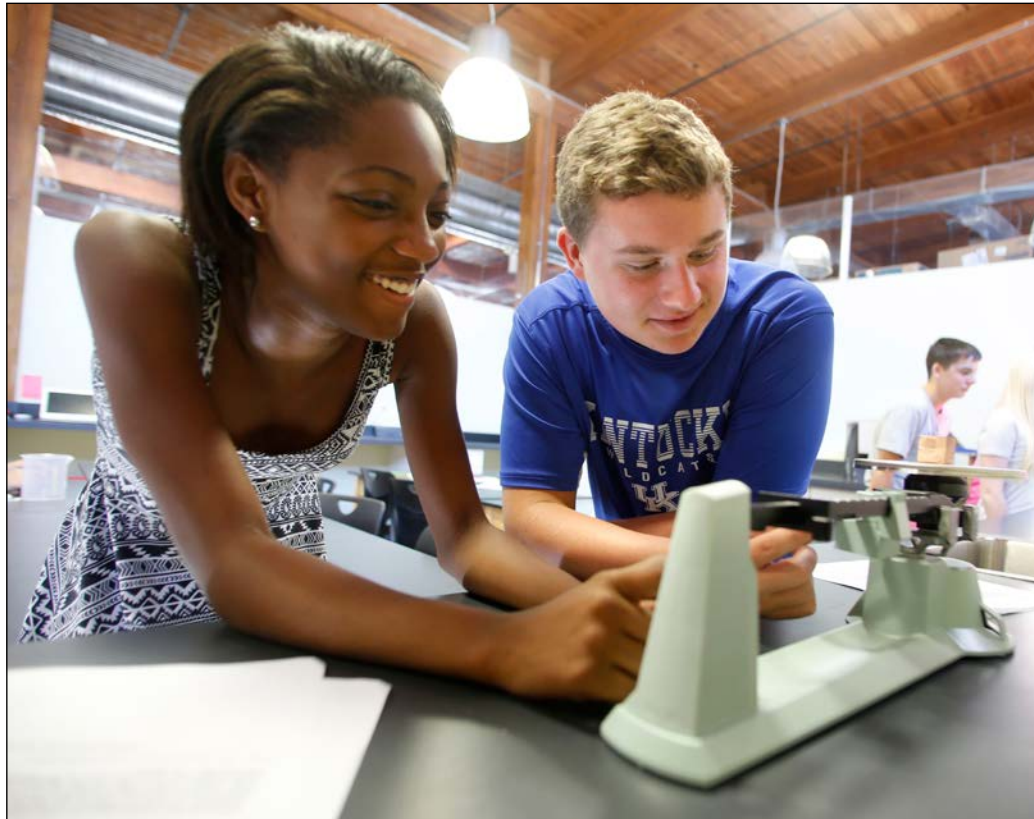
“The overarching goal of the grant is to dramatically increase the number of students in Kentucky who successfully complete industry-recognized credentials in high school and go on to enroll in postsecondary programs,” said Education and Workforce Development Secretary Hal Heiner. “The grant will begin the process of developing a dynamic employer-led system to define the career pathways in greatest demand that will help Kentucky students succeed.”

Kentucky’s Phase One project will create four clear actions: the refinement of current data and data collection processes for career readiness, enhancement of current data collection tools, creation of marketing and communication efforts and the hosting of shareholder forums to build

capacity for the long-term vision.

Kentucky’s long-term vision involves regional employers and educators creating rigorous career pathways with seamless transitions from secondary settings to postsecondary programs that culminate in valuable industry certifications and credentials recognized by the state and regional workforce.

For more information on the New Skills for Youth grant opportunity or CCSSO’s Career Readiness Initiative, visit [http://www.ccsso.org/Resources/Programs/Career\\_Readiness\\_Initiative.html](http://www.ccsso.org/Resources/Programs/Career_Readiness_Initiative.html).



# Get ready for Camp Wonderopolis

Camp Wonderopolis is a free online summer-learning website designed to help kids and their families learn together throughout the summer and during out-of-school time.

To enhance your camp experience, the [National Center for Families Learning](#) (NCFL) has created special Campsite Kits for kids and families as well as programs.

These kits help bring Camp Wonderopolis to life with information and materials to build hands-on learning experiences through the summer and beyond. Youth and family kits are packed with goodies, learning tips and fun ways for families to learn together.

Program kits provide online training and support materials. [Download kit information](#) or contact [Sara Ulliman](#) to learn more.



## Kentucky Youth Storytelling contest open to students

The Kentucky Youth Storytelling competition, a statewide effort to develop, encourage and highlight the talent of young storytellers, is open to children ages 7-17.

Video entries of a solo storyteller or a tandem team telling a single story should be submitted on DVD or via an electronic link. Winners will receive a \$100 cash prize, a one-year membership in the Kentucky Storytelling Association, admission passes to two storytelling festivals and the opportunity to tell their stories on stage at the Kentucky Storytelling Conference and other events.

The entry deadline is June 1. Click [here](#) for more information.



## Program targets future law students from diverse backgrounds

The Kentucky Bar Association and Northern Kentucky University will host “Why Choose Law: Diversity Matters” on June 16-17 on the NKU campus in Highland Heights.

The program is geared toward high school juniors and seniors from groups that typically are underrepresented in law school classes. It is designed to encourage these students to become lawyers and to practice in Kentucky by exposing them to practitioners, law school professors and judges.

The program is free to accepted participants; the application deadline is April 15. Email [Mark Flores](#) or call him at (859) 244-7529 for more information.

## Governor's Downtown Derby Celebration sponsors art contest

Students in grades K-5 are invited to celebrate the Kentucky Derby by showcasing their artwork in the Governor's Downtown Derby Celebration.

Students will create an 8 1/2-by-11 inch work of art from a template of a jockey's silk. This is not a competition; all artworks will be displayed during the Governor's Downtown Derby Celebration on May 7 in Frankfort.

Entries must be in a one- or two-dimensional form and must be received by April 25. Email [Donna Melton](mailto:Donna.Melton) or call (502) 564-1473 for more information or to request a template.



## Save money by taking more classes each semester

Taking more classes each semester may help your child cut the cost of college, according to the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority (KHEAA). That's important if your family needs student loans to help pay for a college education.

A full-time load for undergraduate students is usually 12 credit hours per semester. Associate degrees usually require 60 credit hours to finish, bachelor's degrees 120 hours. At 12 hours each semester, students need five semesters to finish an associate degree and 10 semesters to finish a bachelor's degree.

But if students take 15 hours per semester, they can finish an associate degree in four semesters and a bachelor's degree in eight semesters. Most colleges won't charge any more for 15 hours than they do for 12 hours. That might save thousands of dollars in tuition and fees.

When your student is planning his or her schedule, it may help to think

about taking that extra class each semester. The sooner your child earns a degree, the sooner he or she can start job hunting.

KHEAA is the state agency that administers Kentucky's grant and scholarship programs, including the Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarship (KEES). KEES awards generally can only be used for eight semesters, another good reason to finish college in four years.

KHEAA provides financial literacy videos at <http://itsmoney.kheaa.com>. KHEAA also provides free copies of "It's Money, Baby," a guide to financial literacy, to Kentucky schools and residents upon request at [publications@kheaa.com](mailto:publications@kheaa.com).

To find links to other useful education websites, go to [www.got-college.ky.gov](http://www.got-college.ky.gov). For more information about Kentucky scholarships and grants, visit [www.kheaa.com](http://www.kheaa.com); write KHEAA, P.O. Box 798, Frankfort, KY 40602; or call (800) 928-8926, ext. 6-7214.

