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All photos by KDE unless otherwise noted



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.

Kentucky Board of Education discusses budget situation

At its February meeting in Frankfort, the Kentucky Board of Education discussed impending budget cuts and how to best handle them.

Office of Administration and Support Associate Commissioner Robin Kinney told the board that at the governor's direction, the state budget office has instructed the department to cut nearly \$18 million dollars between now and June 30.

"As we consider the different budget categories, we look at three main areas: personnel, monies paid by the department on behalf of districts and payments to outside partners. The problem is that many of these funds already have been paid out," Kinney said, "so the options on what and where to cut are limited."

Board members voiced grave concern about the 4.5 percent reduction as well as the proposed 9 percent cuts in each year of the upcoming biennium as outlined in the governor's proposed budget.

The governor has said that the cuts are to shore up shortfalls in state pension funds, including the Kentucky Teachers' Retirement System.

While the governor vowed not to cut basic SEEK funding, department staff indicated that more than 90 percent of the education budget is comprised of pass-through funds to districts for programs outside the SEEK formula. Less than 1 percent of the budget supports Frankfort-based operations.

Board members said they would like to see the preservation of funds to districts made a priority and Commissioner Stephen Pruitt agreed, citing that has been the approach in prior years.

"The reality is though, if the reductions do come to pass, there will be cuts to districts in funds they are counting on," Pruitt said.

Pruitt also discussed the proposed cuts in a recent [blog](#).



Department working to move all students out of novice category

The Kentucky Department of Education is moving full speed ahead on its plan to work with schools and districts to close the achievement gap through proven, research-based strategies to reduce the number of novice learners in the state.

The Kentucky Board of Education heard an update on the plan to make sure all students are proficient at its February meeting.

"Unlike the past, we have a model for continuous improvement and a systemic, intentional process in place," Office of Next-Generation Learners Associate Commissioner Amanda Ellis told the board. "Schools are embracing this work and are hungry for the tools we are providing."

In 2014-15, nearly 81,000 students performed at the novice level in reading and more than 62,000 did in math.

"Rather than targeting one particular group of students, our focus is on strengthening instruction for all students and improving achievement for all students," Ellis said.

She indicated the achievement gap has persisted for a long time and will not disappear overnight, but the department clearly understands the sense of urgency.

"While we are using proven, research-based strategies, the needs of each school are different. There is no silver bullet," she said.

Pictures show that Kentucky kids can do anything



Kentucky kids can do anything. Fayette County teacher Duane Keaton believes it. Now he's hoping that more than 1,000 other people will show him and his students that they believe it too.

Photo provided

Keaton, an art and drama teacher at Southern Middle School, and his students are trying to collect 1,000 pictures of people holding a sign that reads "Kentucky Kids Can Do Anything."

The project is part of Keaton's after-school film making club, which also serves as the school's chapter of the Student Technology and Leadership Program. The idea, he said, is to "inspire, remind, encourage and strengthen

kids across Kentucky with one single message – we believe in you."

So far, the pictures have come from as far away as Oregon and from a wide variety of people, including a Jimmy Johns delivery driver and a U.S. congressman.

Once Keaton reaches 1,000 pictures, he plans to turn them into one picture – a collage that reads "We believe in you."

As of late January, Keaton had collected more than 400 pictures, which can be emailed to him or uploaded to the Kentucky Kids Can Do Anything [Facebook page](#) or tweeted to [@room24filmclub](#).

There are also some famous names, including television actor Peter Breitmayer; Mike Rowe, host of "Dirty Jobs" and the "Deadliest Catch;" and several local television anchors and reporters who have all posed for pictures.

But probably the most famous name so far is Jordan Smith, Harlan native and winner of

NBC's "The Voice."

But it's not just celebrities that Keaton wants to show that they believe in Kentucky's kids.

"People think that they have to have achieved some great fame in order to send in a picture and that's not true," he said. "We want anyone who simply is a good role model or who believes in Kentucky kids. That's it."

Keaton hopes to reach 1,000 by the end of February.



Nominations being accepted for the Outstanding Civic Education Leadership Award



Photo Provided

The 2015 Kentucky Outstanding Civic Education Leadership Award recipient was Michael Rodenberg, president of Murakami Manufacturing U.S.A. in Taylor County. Rodenberg and the other finalists received their awards on the floor of Rupp Arena during last year's Sweet 16.

The Kentucky Outstanding Civic Education Leadership Award highlights and rewards individuals for their extraordinary efforts to promote civic engagement among Kentucky students.

Any preschool through college teacher, school administrator, education leader, legislator or community organization leader who has made notable contributions toward promoting or implementing civic learning to prepare students to be engaged and responsible citizens is eligible for the award, which is sponsored by the Kentucky Secretary of State's Office.

One finalist is selected from each Kentucky Sweet 16 region. Prizes include a plaque for each finalist and a \$1,000 award to be used toward resources or equipment for the winner's school or program. The awards will be presented at a ceremony during the Whitaker Bank/KHSAA Men's Basketball Sweet 16 Tournament in Lexington.

This opportunity to recognize leaders who are devoted to ensuring a bright future for the Commonwealth is also made possible by co-sponsors, including the Administrative Office of the Courts and the Kentucky Department of Education.

To apply or nominate someone for the award, download the application/nomination [packet](#). The deadline is Feb. 26. Contact the Secretary of State's Office at (502) 564-3490 or via [email](#) for more information.

Why the early years matter



School readiness happens long before kindergarten. It begins in a child's first classroom, the home. As your child's first and most important teacher, you provide the building blocks your child needs to thrive. Many families provide the tools children need to have a great start. The key is being intentional. Brain building can be as simple as talking, reading and singing to your child daily.

To see the monthly message from the Governor's Office of Early Childhood, click [here](#).

KET announces annual Young Writers Contest

Does your child have a story to tell? Help them enter the KET Young Writers Contest. The contest is designed to promote the advancement of children's literacy skills through hands-on, active learning.

The contest empowers children in grades K-5 to celebrate creativity and build literacy skills by writing their very own stories. Children in kindergarten through 3rd grade are invited to submit [illustrated stories](#), while students in 4th and 5th grades are invited to submit [short stories](#).

All submissions must be postmarked by April 15. KET will select winners and award prizes at each grade level. Winning entries will be published on the KET website.

For more information and entry rules, go to KET.org/education/writerscontest/.



The Cat-Fairy, by Sophia S. of Louisville, won first place in the kindergarten category in 2015.

Tips to help your child do better on the ACT



Juniors in Kentucky public high schools will take the ACT on March 1, with March 15 set for a make-up day. These tips from the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority (KHEAA) may help your child do better on the test.

- Read, read, read. Most of the ACT is based on reading. The more your child reads, the better he or she will do.
- Take advantage of any free ACT prep courses offered by your child's school or by local colleges and libraries.
- Have your child take practice tests online or buy practice tests for use at home.
- Make sure your child is familiar with the sections and directions.
- See that your child gets plenty of rest the night before, and eats a good

breakfast that morning.

- Remind your child to take No. 2 pencils and a calculator if the school doesn't provide them.
- One strategy for students is to do the questions they can answer easily first, then come back to the harder questions, especially in the math portion.
- Tell your child to guess if he or she has no idea what the answer should be. Guessing doesn't hurt the score.

KHEAA is the state agency that administers KEES, need-based grants and other programs to help students pay for college.

To learn how to help your child plan and prepare for higher education, go to www.gotocollege.ky.gov. For more information about Kentucky scholarships and grants, visit www.kheaa.com; write KHEAA, P.O. Box 798, Frankfort, KY 40602; or call (800) 928-8926, ext. 6-7214.