

ParentInfo

News for a child's most important educator

September 15, 2016



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All photos by KDE unless otherwise noted

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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: Taking ownership for closing achievement gaps

Achievement gaps have been around for decades. They exist in nearly every school, every school district and every state. The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, a private, nonprofit education advocacy group, recently released a report about gaps in Kentucky. And ACT graduating class data released last month confirms gaps continue to persist.

Everyone agrees we have to do something about gaps – something that will solve the issue once and for all – but then it grows quiet.

For a long time, we have been trying to teach reading and math, testing reading and math, and yet not seeing the gains we want to see. So, what is it that has to change? I have a few thoughts.

First, I think we need to help our most struggling students see they can be successful. They need to see that people like them (in both look and background) are successful. I was very lucky because I had parents who expected me to do well and allowed me to see success. My Dad was a first generation college graduate and my mom was a teacher, both having come from backgrounds in the copper mining area of Copperhill, Tenn.

However, I had a high school counselor who did not see the potential in me. She told me at one point that perhaps I was, “not college material.” Oh, how I would love to give her my business card. Luckily, her opinion of me did not change my destiny, because I could see where I needed to go. I knew I needed to go to college to achieve my dreams, and I knew I could be a success if I worked hard.

Role models play a big part in students’ lives, sometimes even if they never meet face to face. Several weeks ago during the 2016 summer

Olympics, Simone Manuel became the first African-American woman to win gold in an individual Olympic swimming event. Being the first is a huge accomplishment, but knowing the weight of the future was on her shoulders is just as big. Students of color watching the games saw that if she did it, it was possible for them too.

Last month, longtime educator Bill Twyman became chair of the Kentucky Board of Education. He is the first African-American to hold this position. Bill is extremely modest and I am not sure this was on his mind at the time, but by wanting to do what is right for the students of the Commonwealth and agreeing to serve, he has empowered others to reach new heights in education.

One last example, state Sen. Ralph Alvarado is the first Hispanic elected to the Kentucky General Assembly. He chose to step up and become a leader. As a result, he had the opportunity to speak this summer at the Republican National Convention. Whether you agree with his politics or not, he enabled many students to see that they too someday could achieve this level of success.

So how does this help close the achievement gap? It helps because so many of our students cannot see their way to success. Many may never be exposed to success or may never get the opportunities they need in school to become a success. People like Simone, Bill and Sen. Alvarado give students hope and courage to move forward. As educators, we must understand these are not flukes, but that each and every child can realize success.

If we really want to see gaps close and diversity increase, we have to own it. I said this at the release of the Prichard Committee



Stephen Pruitt

report. I publically announced I own the achievement gap and I have to do something about it. I also said if we do not all own it, we cannot begin to see change. It is not just the commissioner and the Kentucky Department Education that has to own it, it's all of us.

It's like in CPR training, you are taught to never call out, “Someone call 9-1-1.” If you do, it is likely that nobody will do it, because each thinks the other person will. Instead, you are supposed to point to someone and say, “You call 9-1-1!” In this case there is ownership, and it's a lot more likely it will be done.

This is somewhat like what we have done in

the past with regard to the achievement gap – we all agree we have an issue, but everyone thinks it’s up to everyone ELSE to find a solution. It is time to own the issue of achievement gaps and the fact that a lack of opportunity is at the root of its existence.

There are incredible things going on around our state, such as the Black Males Working Academy that I attended in Lexington at the invitation of the Rev. and Mrs. C.B. Akins. They are taking responsibility for guiding greater Lexington’s African-American male students toward success in K-12 and on to success in postsecondary. They partnered with the University of Kentucky to provide scholarships to these young men as an incentive to push them to greater heights. But it is not just the young men who participate in this effort. It also is families and a full network of support.

If we are to see change, we must be that change. If we are to close gaps, we must own the fact that in the past, we did not offer opportunity or a vision of success to all students. Achievement gaps do not just exist for our students of color, economically disadvantaged or our special needs community; they exist in different manifestations across the board. But until we are able to deal with and own the issue, we cannot possibly hope that it will change.

Today is a great day to make the difference in the life of a child. We all need to make the commitment to do so.

Make sure your child is present for High Attendance Day



The Kentucky Directors of Pupil Personnel (KDPP) organization sponsors a high attendance day every year to emphasize that consistent attendance is

essential for success in school. This year, Kentucky’s high attendance date is Tuesday, Sept. 20.

On High Attendance Day, Kentucky’s public elementary, middle and high schools compete in small-school or large-school categories. Six winners will be determined statewide based on each individual school’s performance, regardless of its district’s showing. The school in each category with the highest percentage attendance for Sept. 20 will receive a minimum \$500. If the school has more than 500 students, the award will increase based on enrollment.

Students who are at school every day and are on time have a higher success rate than those who aren’t. Attendance Works is national and state initiative from the Child and Family Policy Center that promotes awareness of the important role that school attendance plays

in achieving academic success. Attendance Works has designated September as Attendance Awareness Month.

The group notes that getting your child to school on-time every day – unless they are sick – is something parents can do to ensure their child has a chance to succeed in school. While others can help, parents are the bottom line. Parents can support good attendance by:

- Establishing and sticking to the basic routines (going to bed early, waking up on time, etc.) that will help your child develop the habit of on-time attendance.
 - Talking to your child about why going to school every day is critical and important unless they are sick. If your child seems reluctant to go to school, find out why and work with the teacher, administrator or afterschool provider to get them excited about going to school.
 - Coming up with backup plans for who to turn to (another family member, a neighbor or fellow parents) to help you get your child to school if something comes up (e.g. another child gets sick, your car breaks down).
 - Reaching out for help if you are experiencing tough times (e.g. transportation, unstable housing, loss of a job, health problems) that make it difficult to get your child to school. Other parents, your child’s teacher, principal, social worker, school nurse, afterschool providers or community agencies can help you problem solve or connect you to a needed resource.
 - Working with the teacher to make sure your child has an opportunity to learn and make up for the academics missed if he or she is absent.
- More information on the importance of school attendance is available [here](#).

Leadership opportunity for high school girls



Kentucky high school girls have the opportunity to attend one of three leadership conferences across the state designed

to inspire young women to believe in their qualities and strengths, and to challenge them to believe in a higher level of personal growth and development.

The Young Women Lead Conferences will be held in northern Kentucky, Louisville and Ashland.

The northern Kentucky conference, sponsored by Toyota in partnership with SOAR, Northern Kentucky University's College of Education and Human Services and Norton Healthcare, will be held Monday, Oct. 17 or Tuesday, Oct. 18.

High school girls can attend either day of the conference. The conference will feature keynote speaker Julia Garcia, founder and president of The TRU Movement.

The Louisville conference is co-hosted by Norton Healthcare and SOAR, a women's professional leadership development program, and will be held Tuesday, Oct. 12 at the Galt House Hotel. This conference will feature keynote speaker Liz Bohannon, entrepreneur and founder of Sseko Designs.

The Ashland conference will be held Oct. 11 and 12 at the Rocky Adkins Pavilion at Ashland Community and Technical College (ACTC). The Ashland event, sponsored by Toyota, SOAR and ACTC, will feature keynote speaker Julie Marie Carrier, a girls' success coach for MTV show, "MADE". Carrier is an Emmy-nominee, national speaker and award-winning author of "BeYOUtiful."

At all three conferences, students will have the choice to attend a variety of interactive discussion panels and breakout sessions. These breakouts will be delivered by successful women that represent a variety of careers and personal choices. These women are experts on issues that high school girls currently are facing. The sessions will teach important skills needed to be successful in the workforce and ways to develop their leadership potential.

Registration is limited and is first-come, first-served. Lunch will be provided and the cost is free.

For more information, visit <http://www.youngwomenlead.com/>



Child Care Assistance Program funding increases

More Kentucky families now qualify for financial aid to pay for child care as a result of an increase in funding approved by the 2016 General Assembly that took effect Sept. 1.

The income guidelines used to determine eligibility for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) have moved from the 2011 Federal Poverty Guidelines to the 2016 Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPG), which increase the number of families that qualify for assistance. The change increases the maximum income for eligibility to 160 percent of the 2016 FPG, which brings eligibility for the program up to \$3,240 per month for a family of four.

CCAP is administered by the Cabinet for Health and Family Services' Division of Child Care. Click [here](#) for more information on CCAP and the Division of Child Care.

Conferences benefit both parents and teachers

Now that the school year is underway, parent-teacher conferences will be starting across the state. The conference is a time when some of the most important people in a student's life can talk about how the student is doing in school.

It's a chance for parents to ask questions about the class or their child's progress. It is also a time for parents and teachers to work together as a team to discuss ways to help the student. Whether the child is in elementary, middle or secondary school, parent-teacher conferences are important.

Here are some tips for parent-teacher conferences from the California State PTA:

Before the conference:

- Schedule an appointment – A parent-teacher conference is not the only time when parents and teachers should make contact. Parents may want to schedule a special meeting with their child's teacher for a variety of reasons. If you need to set up an appointment with your child's teacher, make a phone call or email a quick note to the teacher.
- Talk to your child – Find out which subjects your child likes the best and the least. Ask why. Also, ask if there is anything your child would like you to talk about with the teacher. Help your child understand that you and the teacher are meeting to help him or her.
- Gather input from others – If your spouse, another care-giving adult

or someone with pertinent information or insight (doctor, counselor, other guardian) can't attend the conference, ask for that person's concerns and questions before the conference.

- Make a list – Before you go to the meeting, make a list of topics to discuss with your

child's teacher. Along with questions about academics and behavior, you may want to talk to the teacher about the child's home life, personality, concerns, habits and hobbies, and other topics that may help the teacher in working with your child (e.g., religious holidays, music lessons, part-time jobs or a sick relative).

During the conference

- Establish rapport – As an icebreaker, take notice of something that reflects well upon the teacher. For example, thank the teacher for having made thoughtful notes on your child's homework or for the special attention in helping your child learn to multiply.
- Ask questions – Questions you ask during the conference can help you express your hopes for the student's success in class and for the teacher. It's a good idea to ask the important questions first, in case time runs out.
- Addressing problems – Parent-teacher conferences are a good time to discuss any difficulties (either academic or behavioral) your child might be having at school. When problems arise, parents will want to avoid angry or apologetic reactions. Instead, ask for examples. Ask what is being done about the problem and what strategies seem to help at school. Develop an action plan that may include steps that parents can take and steps the teacher will take. Schedule a follow-up conference and decide on the best way to stay in touch (phone, email or letters sent to the home).

After the conference

- End the conference by reviewing what you discussed and restating your action plan. This is also a good time to set up your next meeting. When discussing the conference with your child afterward, stress the good things that were covered and be direct about problems that were identified.
- Stay in touch with the teacher to discuss your child's progress. Express appreciation as progress is made. A good way to promote a continuing relationship with the teacher is to say "thank you" with a note or a telephone call. When a child knows his or her parents and teachers are regularly working together, they will see that education is a high priority requiring commitment and effort.

Questions to ask during the conference

- What subject does my student like most? Least?
- What can I do to help my student with subjects he finds difficult?
- How can I help my student study? Prepare for class? Improve his work? A good time to ask these questions is when the teacher gives you samples of your son's or daughter's work.



- Is my student trying as hard as he can?
- Does my student participate in class discussions and activities?
- Is my student in different classes or groups for different subjects? Which ones? How are the groups determined?
- How well does my student get along with others?
- Has my student missed classes?
- Have you noticed changes in the way my student acts? For example, have you noticed squinting, tiredness or moodiness that might be a sign of physical or other problems?
- How are you measuring my student's progress? Through tests? Portfolios? Class participation? Projects?
- What kinds of tests do you give? What do the tests show about my student's progress? How does my student handle taking tests?

Students can start filing new FAFSA in October

One of the biggest changes in the college financial aid process begins soon, according to the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority (KHEAA).

Students who will file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, most often called the FAFSA, for the 2017-18 school year can do so beginning Oct. 1. Until this year, they could not do so until Jan. 1.

The change will make it easier for students and parents to complete the FAFSA because they can use their 2015 tax information instead of waiting until they have their 2016 tax information.

Students should file the FAFSA as soon as possible because some student aid programs have limited funding. Those who submit their FAFSA early have a better chance of receiving aid from those programs.

The best way to file the FAFSA is online at www.fafsa.gov. Students and their parents should first visit <https://fsaid.ed.gov> to set up separate user names and passwords.

KHEAA is the state agency that administers Kentucky's student financial aid programs, including the Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarship (KEES). Its sister agency, the Kentucky Higher Education Student Loan Corporation, offers Advantage Loans to help students and parents pay for college or to refinance student loans. For more information about Advantage Loans, visit www.advantageeducationloan.com.

For more information about Kentucky scholarships and grants, visit www.kheaa.com or call (800) 928-8926, ext. 6-7214.



Education specials on KET this week



KET is airing special programming on the status of education in American in a special "Spotlight Education" slate of primetime programming airing through Sept. 19.

On Thursday, Sept. 15 at 9 p.m. ET on KET2, "Time for School: 2003-2016" introduces viewers to children from seven different countries who were struggling to get what all Americans take for granted – a basic education. The film catches up with the seven subjects, now adults, to see how their lives have turned out.

On Saturday, Sept. 17 beginning at 2 p.m. ET on KET, "American Graduate Day" focuses on organizations and individual champions whose work is helping keep students on the path toward high school graduation.

Finally, on Monday, Sept. 19 at 9 p.m. ET on KET, "Class of '27: America Reframed" features three stories from rural American communities – including Booneville, in Owsley County – where teachers and local

leaders are joining forces to beat the odds and guide their children toward the goal of high school graduation.

Parents also can stream KET's Education Matters "College Financial Aid Call-In 2017" on KET's website. The show features tips and answers questions for parents and students navigating the sometimes intimidating financial aid application process.