



Commonwealth of Kentucky
Office of the Governor

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Governor, Education Commissioner Present Strong Progress
Report for Kentucky Schools, Students**

Graduation rates are up; so are rates of college- and career- readiness

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Sept. 17, 2013) – As many Kentucky school students prepare for their first report card of the year, Governor Steve Beshear and Education Commissioner Terry Holliday announced dramatic improvement in the state’s graduation and college- and career-readiness rates. The data is the latest proof of measurable, transformational improvement over the past four years in the state’s education system.

For 2013, preliminary figures show Kentucky posted an 86 percent graduation rate. This year Kentucky is using a more accurate way to measure the number of students who graduate – the same way nearly every other state measures graduation rate. Comparing with the most recent data available from other states (2011), even accounting for their improvement, Kentucky’s rate is among the highest.

The college-and career-readiness rate, a measure of whether students are prepared to be successful after high school graduation, is up 20 percent from 2010. While only about a third of high school graduates were considered ready three years ago, initial data now show more than half – 54 percent -- are ready to take the next step into credit-bearing college courses or a postsecondary training program.

State leaders pointed to the passage and implementation of Senate Bill 1 (SB1) in 2009 as the beginning of the latest and most significant round of focused improvements in Kentucky, not

only for student achievement, but also for student expectations, meaningful assessments, and college and career preparation.

“When parents send their children off to school, they want to know that our schools are on the right track. They want to know that not only will their children learn the skills they will need to be successful later in life, they want to know that the schools are making continuous adjustments to enhance and improve the education experience for all students,” said Gov. Beshear. “In reviewing the last four years, we can assure parents that our schools are indeed succeeding, and are becoming models for schools in other states to follow.”

“The passage of Senate Bill 1 in 2009 created a sense of urgency, and set the stage for transforming our education system to meet the needs of 21st-century students,” said Education Commissioner Terry Holliday. “Across the country, educators are rushing to prepare their students to meet the complex and constantly evolving demands of the new global economy. I’m proud that we are on the forefront of that effort here in Kentucky, but I am most excited about what it means for Kentucky students.”

SB 1 requires more rigorous standards, aligned assessments, a balanced accountability system, and support for educators to implement the new system. The goal is to ensure students are ready for college and career. Since that time, Kentucky schools have implemented more meaningful and data-driven assessments, and national organizations have named Kentucky as a standard-bearer in education reform.

Kentucky Earns National Recognition

A recent Harvard study confirms the Commonwealth’s progress, with Kentucky ranking eighth in student performance improvement in the last two decades. Another study says Kentucky has recorded better than expected gains and is leading the way as a high-performing state among those receiving waivers from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

In the annual Quality Counts report of key education indicators, this year for the first time, Kentucky broke into the top 10. The state ranked 10th, moving up from 34th place in 2010. This reflects efforts to improve teaching, raise student achievement and many other variables related to public education.

Emphasizing Success in Early Childhood, Graduation, and College- and Career-Prep

From cradle to career, Kentucky’s education leaders have focused efforts on three main areas: improving early childhood education, raising the graduation rate and increasing the college- and career-readiness of our students, who will become tomorrow’s workforce and upon which Kentucky’s economic future depends.

In each of these areas, the Governor’s Office, the Kentucky Department of Education, the Kentucky Board of Education, members of the General Assembly, and thousands of dedicated teachers and education administrators have worked together to create standards and develop assessments to further student success.

Early Childhood is Key

The Governor's Office of Early Childhood and the reorganized Early Childhood Advisory Council are creating a system of support for students at all levels of kindergarten readiness. Some of those efforts include:

Kentucky Early Childhood Standards – The new standards, first developed in 2003 and revised in 2009, are designed to reflect the range of developmental abilities typical of young children, birth through 4 years of age. The standards, benchmarks, developmental continuum and example behaviors are now linked to the Kentucky Core Academic Standards (Common Core Standards) and to the National Head Start Outcomes.

Common school readiness definition – The common definition, one of the many recommendations out of the Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Development and Education, allows teachers, administrators and families to have a shared understanding of the skills students need to be prepared for school. In Kentucky, school readiness means each child enters school ready to engage in and benefit from early learning experiences that best promote the child's success.

Common Kindergarten Entry Screener – Starting this school year, all incoming kindergarten students are evaluated on their readiness to learn and be successful. The screener is aligned with Kentucky's School Readiness Definition and the Kentucky Early Childhood Standards and provides data in five domains: adaptive, cognitive, motor, communication, and social-emotional. This information provides teachers, child care providers and parents a tool to better inform them on the specific strengths and needs of each individual child.

Raising the Graduation Rate

The Graduate Kentucky initiative spearheaded by Kentucky's First Lady, Jane Beshear, focused the state's attention on the necessity of staying in school and graduating. The effort stressed the benefits for individual students as well as the economic strength of the state. The tools to reach these goals include:

Increasing the compulsory school age to 18 – Senate Bill 97, approved in the 2013 General Assembly, cleared the way for districts to adopt a policy raising the compulsory school age to 18 starting in the 2015-16 school year. To date, 128 of the state's 173 school districts have adopted the "Graduate Kentucky" standard and more are in the process of doing so. The new compulsory school age policy will become mandatory in the 2017-18 school year.

Persistence to Graduation Tool – This data-driven tool identifies students who may be off track for promotion to the next grade level or to graduate on time. Drawing information from the current and prior academic year, the tool calculates a risk value for each student. Each school may then determine the necessary and appropriate supports and interventions for students who may be off track for graduation.

Preparing All Students for College and Careers

SB 1 recognized the economic imperative of having more students graduate from high school that had achieved college- and career- readiness in addition to basic skills

proficiency. Since 2009, Kentucky schools have made great strides in aligning curriculum and training with the goal of preparing every student for college and career after high school graduation. Some of those initiatives include:

Aligned, rigorous academic standards – More rigorous standards, aligned with college expectations, will better prepare students to compete globally and equip them with the knowledge and skills like critical thinking and problem solving that they need in the 21st-century.

Kentucky was the first state to adopt, implement and test the Common Core State Standards in English/language arts and mathematics (known as the Kentucky Core Academic Standards) in the 2011 school year.

Additionally, in June 2013, the Kentucky Board of Education was the second in the nation to adopt the Next-Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Kentucky educators are in the process of writing new social studies standards based on a framework developed by a coalition of states and national social studies content organizations. Arts and humanities standards will be considered by the Kentucky Board of Education once they are finalized in spring of 2014.

Career and technical education – Kentucky is in the process of developing and implementing a new model of secondary career and technical education with an emphasis on innovation and integration of core academics, 21st-century skills, project-based learning and the establishment of full-time career and technical education (CTE) programs. This effort recognizes career and technical education as a viable alternative career pathway for students. In addition to increasing graduation rates, this effort also supports increased college- and career-readiness.

Innovative approaches to raising student achievement – The Kentucky General Assembly enacted House Bill 37, which created “Districts of Innovation”. Its intent is to offer Kentucky public school districts the opportunity to come up with new or creative alternatives to existing instructional and administrative practices, while providing relief from certain administrative regulations and statutory provisions in an effort to improve student learning.

Earlier this summer, the Kentucky Board of Education approved Danville Independent, Eminence Independent, Jefferson Co. and Taylor Co. school districts as the first cohort of Districts of Innovation.

Better Assessments and Accountability for More Effective Teaching and Learning

Finally, the best reforms are driven by reliable data, which can determine what’s working in a school and what’s not. Kentucky has developed a new aligned assessment and accountability system that provides a wealth of data that can be used to drive improvement.

New college- and career-ready assessment system – Educators are stressing the use of formative assessments that can drive instruction and can address an individual child’s learning needs in a more timely way than using only traditional exams.

In grades 3-8, an assessment system has been built that measures college/career-ready standards and reports on the progress of individual students, classrooms, schools and districts toward the goal of college/career-readiness for all students. In 8th grade, students take a high school-readiness exam and in 10th grade, a college-readiness exam; as juniors all students take a college-entrance test the results identify students who need additional help that is provided so they can become college/career-ready. Results from end-of-course exams in English II, Algebra II, Biology and U.S. History count as part of a student's grade and help hold them accountable for their learning.

Publicly available school and district "report cards" for accountability – Kentucky developed a single system for both federal and state accountability that focuses on all areas that impact a child's educational experience. This system also provides accountability for the public, so citizens can understand how and where a school is succeeding.

The new accountability system is called Unbridled Learning: College/Career-Readiness for All. It includes multiple measures of school effectiveness that cover all areas of a school's work.

Scores for the various measures and components are weighted and tallied to produce an overall accountability score from 0 to 100. To encourage continuous improvement, each school and district has an annual goal to reach – an annual measurable objective (AMO) – based on how much improvement is needed to reach the ultimate goal of 100. Data for these areas are publicly reported each year through the [School Report Card](#) on the Kentucky Department of Education website, and any weaknesses must be targeted for improvement.

Improved Educator Effectiveness – One goal of the Kentucky system is to have every student taught by an effective teacher and every school led by an effective principal. That vision led to the new Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (PGES), which is designed to create a fair and equitable system to measure teacher and leader effectiveness and act as a catalyst for professional growth.

The teacher system is based on research-based standards for effectiveness against which teachers are evaluated, using multiple measures including observation, peer observation (used only to improve practice), self-reflection and professional growth, student growth and student voice.

During the 2012-13 school year, more than 50 school districts in Kentucky participated in a field test of the new system. The 2013-14 school year is the statewide pilot, in which at least 10 percent of the schools in each district are implementing the PGES.

In 2014-15 the system will be fully implemented statewide. The following year, PGES can be used to assist in personnel decisions. A superintendent effectiveness system is also being created to ensure sound district operations, a strong academic focus and improvement based on specific targets.

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