



KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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PRUITT ISSUES STATE OF P-12 PUBLIC EDUCATION REPORT

(FRANKFORT, Ky.) – Kentucky must do more to ensure all students receive the same educational opportunities and access to rigorous coursework, Commissioner of Education Stephen Pruitt said during his State of Education news conference today.

During the event, Pruitt released *The State of P-12 Education in the Commonwealth of Kentucky*, a report that highlights statewide educational successes and challenges. With the report as a starting point, Pruitt called on Kentuckians to join him in focusing future education efforts on equity, access to quality programs for all students and making decisions that are in their best interest.

“In the past year we’ve concentrated on three pillars – equity, achievement and integrity. Each of these pillars is crucial to the work we do and none can be taken for granted,” said Pruitt, during the news conference at the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE). “But after a year in my role as commissioner, it is becoming clear that equity needs to be a special focus for the state and the lens through which we consider all things moving forward.”

While Kentucky has made steady progress on traditional measures of education success, the difference in performance among various student groups in public schools is still too wide, Pruitt said. A special KDE research analysis, *A Focus on Equity for All*, shows that despite the state’s top 10 graduation rate and drastic improvement to college/career-readiness rate, too many students are not adequately prepared for the rigors of college or the workplace.

The analysis, which examined student math performance between middle and high school from 2012 to 2016, found that even students with the best grades are falling short in reaching Kentucky’s college readiness standards in math. Additionally, substantial inequities exist between different groups of students when it comes to reaching those standards. Specifically, African American and low-income students have substantially lower chances of scoring proficient on state assessments or meeting the Council on Postsecondary Education’s math benchmark score of 19 on the ACT than their white or wealthier peers who earned the same average letter grade in their courses. (Achieving that benchmark allows students to enter credit-bearing courses in college without taking non-credit bearing remedial courses.)

The analysis also found:

- For every letter grade category, an African American student's chance of scoring proficient in math was the same as that of a white student who earned the next grade lower.
- Low-income students were shown to have a lower chance of scoring proficient on state assessments than their wealthier peers. For low-income students who earned an average letter grade of an A in their middle school math courses, the chance of scoring proficient was about 12 percentage points lower than that of their wealthier peers.
- The gap between male and female students develops in high school across all letter grade categories with female students facing lower chances of meeting the ACT benchmark than their male counterparts who earned the same average letter grade. However, the impact of gender is smaller in magnitude than that of race or income.
- The gap also can be seen in AP participation between different groups of students. During the 2015-16 school year, 1,461 students – or 4.1 percent – of white students took at least one AP math course during their 9th-, 10th- or 11th-grade years, whereas only 62 – or 1.4 percent – of African American students took an AP math course.

These differences or achievement gaps point to barriers for African American and low-income students in accessing rigorous instructional experiences in math. Pruitt said addressing these gaps – and their root causes of opportunity, access and low expectations – must be the state's priority in the years ahead.

“Staying with the status quo is not good enough for the Commonwealth,” Pruitt said. “We need a system of public education that will generate better outcomes for all of our students and will support economic development in Kentucky.”

Over the past year, Pruitt said the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) has continued to push forward on improving education for the 650,000 children across the Commonwealth who attend public schools.

That includes taking advantage of the increased flexibility offered by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to create a new accountability system that will allow schools and districts to build on their successes while meaningfully addressing their shortcomings and raising all students to higher levels of achievement.

Last spring, Pruitt heard from thousands of Kentuckians at Town Hall Meetings who said they wanted a system that promoted education of the whole child, greater equity and didn't place so much emphasis on test scores. Hundreds of Kentuckians – educators, parents, community members, business leaders and others – have created a draft accountability system that reflects Kentucky's values and provides more clarity and transparency on school performance and which can serve as the basis for improvement.

“The newly proposed system will hold schools – and all of us – accountable for ensuring equity. Schools will be tasked with moving all children’s academic achievement forward every year, but they will be expected to move children who fall into one traditionally low-performing student group forward faster to help shrink the achievement gap,” Pruitt said. “The system is one of continuous improvement and is designed to ensure all students have access to rich learning opportunities, regardless of a student’s zip code, school assignment, family income, language, learning disability, nationality or skin color.”

The current timeline calls for the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) to submit its plan for accountability to the United States Department of Education by September 18, with schools being held accountable under the new system for the first time in 2018-19. Starting next month, the commissioner will hold Town Hall Meetings around the state to garner feedback on the proposed system from Kentuckians.

During his speech, Pruitt stressed there are many great things going on in education across Kentucky, including increased participation in AP and dual credit courses; strengthening of Career and Technical Education, in part through a new exciting New Skills for Youth grant; improvements at the Kentucky School for the Blind and Kentucky School for the Deaf; and the success and national recognition of KDE’s turnaround efforts with its lowest performing schools. He said the state will continue to celebrate and build on those successes in the years ahead.

At the same time, however, he said the state must face its challenges head-on.

“As we move forward in the weeks and months ahead, we must put away the ideas of what we have always done and focus on equity, access to quality programs for all students and making decisions that are best for kids,” Pruitt said. “Our ultimate goal is to provide each and every child with an excellent, world-class education that will lead to success in his or her postsecondary endeavors, in the job market and in life.”

A complete copy of the *State of P-12 Education in the Commonwealth of Kentucky* report is available online:

<http://bit.ly/KYStateofEd2017>. Click [here](#) to see a video of the press conference.

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