



Perspectives

FALL 2016

NEWS from the PRICHARD COMMITTEE for ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Local Action Urged on Achievement Gaps *'Shared Responsibility' Needed Across Communities*

The achievement gap among Kentucky students persists despite the state's overall academic gains, according to the findings of a Prichard Committee Study Group. The group said that urgency is needed to make sure schools deliver better results to students from poor families, children of color, and those with language barriers or special learning needs.

State testing results break down academic performance by different demographic groups. In addition, educators, advocates and lawmakers often focus attention on performance of students in targeted groups. Still, higher expectations and solutions that will improve achievement are not arriving quickly enough, according to the report, "Excellence with Equity: It's Everybody's Business."

Prichard Committee said that solutions need to include early childhood investments that will reduce school readiness gaps. Organized local discussions and strategies for raising expectations and tracking results should become prominent. Other steps needed to address achievement gaps include better promotions of promising teaching and relationship-building strategies in schools, a review of bias in disciplinary consequences and identification of gifted students, and effective steps to increase racial diversity in Kentucky's teaching force.

"We must recommit ourselves to the vision that all students have the right to equitable opportunities to learn at high levels," said Helen Mountjoy of Daviess County, a former education cabinet secretary and chair of the State Board of Education as well as a current Prichard Committee member. She co-chaired the Achievement Gap Study Group. "These are our students, our schools, and they are our future."

A FRAMEWORK FOR DISCUSSION

Rev. C.B. Akins, a former member of the State Board of Education and study group co-chair, added that academic results translate to opportunities for students to move forward and succeed as adults. "This report rebukes the need for further study of what we should do and challenges all who are



Kentucky Education Commissioner Stephen Pruitt speaks at a Frankfort news conference where the achievement gap report was released.

strategically positioned to make a difference by doing what we already know will work," he said at a Frankfort news conference on Aug. 18 announcing the report.

The Prichard Committee sees the report as a conversation starter and framework for discussions and plans to follow up the report with data updates and support for local action, said Brigitte Blom Ramsey, the group's director, pledging "an aggressive and consistent effort in the months ahead to galvanize support among community and business leaders, advocates, policymakers and others to move with urgency."

"When Kentuckians come together with a shared vision, we make tremendous progress," she added.

■ The report highlights data such as fourth grade reading scores, eighth grade math results and Kentucky's college- and

MORE

Gaps

CONTINUED

career-readiness results showing a 30 percentage-point gap between students based on English language proficiency, a 25 percentage-point gap between African American and white students, a 20 percentage-point gap based on identified learning differences and also family income, and a 10 percentage-point gap between Hispanic students and their white peers.

■ The study group also noted that even as key indicators of student achievement have increased in Kentucky, achievement gaps have persisted and even crept higher. From 2005 to 2015, for example, fourth-grade reading proficiency on the test known as “the nation’s report card,” showed that achievement differences between white and African American students moved from an 8-point gap to 11 points. A 7-point gap between students from low-income families and their peers increased to 18 points. Performance gaps between students with identified disabilities and their peers showed the same trend. While all groups logged improved results, achievement gaps widened.

■ The report noted significant achievement gaps on the state’s kindergarten-readiness screening. Looking at 2015 scores, the results note wide gaps based on English proficiency (a 22-point difference in readiness), identified disabilities (a 26-point difference), and family income (a 30-point spread). Among racial groups, performance was within six percentage points, between 46 percent and 52 percent readiness except for Hispanic students (29 percent) and Asian students (64 percent). The average readiness rate for all students was 50 percent.

■ In addition, the report called attention to a significant difference in out-of-school suspension rates and in-school removals for African American pupils compared to other racial groups. In 2015, almost four times as many African American students were suspended than white students. The rate of in-school classroom removals was well over three times higher for African American students as white students.

■ Data also show large disparities in how students from various demographic groups are identified as gifted and talented. While the overall rate in 2014 was 11.2 percent of the

total enrollment, only 6 percent of students from low-income families were identified, 4.5 percent of Hispanic students were identified, and 5 percent of African American students were identified.

■ Finally, the report noted the lack of racial diversity among teachers. For example, 10.5 percent of Kentucky pupils are African American, while only 3.5 percent of classroom teachers are. Another 2,950 African American teachers would be needed to balance those rates. Meanwhile, Hispanics account for 5.5 percent of Kentucky students but only 0.6 percent of classroom teachers. Another 2,096 Hispanic teachers would be needed for equal representation.

FORMULATING SOLUTIONS

The study group also concluded that more effective implementation of existing policies should be attempted before new policies are adopted. Examining a range of state-level policy solutions focused on access and achievement-gap issues dating from the 1990s to 2013, the study group found that their use and effectiveness leaves room for improvement.

Attention to cultural issues involving students of color and those from low-income backgrounds and consistently engaging families as partners in student learning were also pointed out as ways that schools and communities could begin to address achievement gap issues.

“It is time to move past an age of accountability to an age of shared responsibility,” said Education Commissioner Stephen Pruitt, who praised the report’s attention to achievement issues at the news conference announcing the report. He said that the solution involves a hard look at many facets of school, including courses students take. He said that an opportunity gap is created when schools weaken core courses, pointing out that many high schools offer “Algebra I, Algebra I Light, and Algebra I Low-Carb.”

Mountjoy added that finding ways to have candid, productive local conversations will be a key to addressing the issue. “Perhaps the most difficult role that we as community members have is to build trust that allows for difficult conversations about poverty, race, and different ways of learning.”

The report is available online. To find out more visit www.prichardcommittee.org.

‘Perhaps the most difficult role that we as community members have is to build trust that allows for difficult conversations...’

— Helen Mountjoy, study group co-chair

HIGHER EDUCATION

A New Subject: Performance-Based Funding

Lawmakers, policymakers, and higher education leaders are busy studying an important new subject as Kentucky joins a growing list of states working to tie funding formulas to college and university performance and student outcomes as a lever for improvement.

The 2016 legislature mandated that starting in 2018, 5 percent of operating appropriations to public colleges and universities be based on a new performance-based funding

model. To reach that target, a working group of legislative leaders and higher education officials was asked to make recommendations by this December.

That deadline has intensified study and discussion of performance funding and other states’ experience in the relatively new reform.

“The interest is very strong given the amount of dollars at

MORE

Performance

CONTINUED

stake and the immediacy of the policy decision,” said Perry Papka, senior policy director for the Prichard Committee. “Building familiarity and focus is important.”

In late June, the Prichard Committee and Kentucky Chamber of Commerce held a symposium featuring national and state experts to begin to identify and discuss issues, challenges, and approaches on how a shift in funding can steer action toward state and institutional priorities.

At this point, 38 states are developing or implementing some type of performance funding mechanism to deliver part of state funding to colleges and universities. Among the lures of the programs are clarifying higher education goals, making more effective use of data in planning, improving systems that help more students complete degrees, and building public confidence around the state’s investment in postsecondary programs. Finding the right measures, weights, and recognizing ways to avoid unintended consequences is the challenge.

The performance emphasis arrives at a time when colleges — and college students — feel pinched by finances.

In Kentucky, state general fund appropriations to higher education have dropped 16 percent between fiscal 2008 and fiscal 2016. Over the same time, tuition has risen significantly while student loan debt has also increased both in terms of the number of students who owe money after graduation and the amount of debt they carry.

Getting more out of the higher education dollar is a clear priority for states, colleges, parents and students.

CONSIDERING DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The June symposium looked at fundamental steps in moving forward on performance-based funding. Speakers highlighted the importance of design principles — how planning will occur, maintaining strong lines of communication, making priorities clear, ensuring smooth implementation and more. Setting performance measures will involve defining and finding the best ways to measure student progression, completion, how an institution’s mission is met among other considerations.

Other key factors that will influence upcoming discussions include how to ensure access for all students, build collaboration between colleges in the new environment, and assure quality of student learning and experience.

Panelists noted that variations among



Students move between classes at the University of Kentucky in Lexington as the academic year began this fall.

states is already a feature of early performance-funding work.

Kentucky panelists noted interest in the approach. Robert L. King, president of the Council on Postsecondary Education, said colleges proposed tying some new state funding to performance in recent years but lawmakers did not latch on to the program until this year.

King said that it will take time to build effective measures of quality and student learning.

Panelists from Tennessee, which began work on performance funding in 2010, explained their work and eventual system, which was phased in over three years and is now reviewed annually.

Other panelists said that work on the system is likely to turn up data that may be needed but is not currently collected and will open important discussions on topics like how to best measure the success of non-traditional students or how to look at student debt within the overall picture of what colleges deliver.

The symposium is summarized in the report from the Prichard Committee and Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, “Performance & Outcomes-Based Funding: Lessons for Postsecondary Progress in Kentucky,” pictured below.

PRICHARD SETS HIGHER ED FOCUS

In June, the Prichard Committee released a framework defining its goals for resuming advocacy work in the postsecondary realm — a return to an area that defined the group’s earliest work in the 1980s before turning to a focus on elementary and secondary education.

“It’s critical to ensure our entire education system presents a seamless web of opportunity for all Kentuckians,” said Brigitte Blom Ramsey, executive director of the Prichard Committee. “Renewing focus on access to affordable, high-quality postsecondary education will support efforts to ensure Kentucky has an educated citizenry and talented workforce.”

The Prichard Committee will focus its attention on issues of access, affordability and quality and encouraging parents, students, business and community leaders, institutions and policymakers to work toward a strong higher education system.

The document describing the group’s priorities is “The Pursuit of Excellence: Principles to Guide Kentucky’s Future Postsecondary Success.” Find out more at www.prichardcommittee.org.

A new report explores the basics of performance funding.



Report Seeks Roles for Student Input

Student perspectives go untapped and unheeded in schools across Kentucky, ignoring a highly valuable take on improvement and motivated individuals who could help to improve culture, instruction and achievement, according to a new report from the Prichard Committee Student Voice Team.

Nearly all schools lack a mechanism for student feedback, “allowing students to slip through the school system as passive consumers rather than engaging them as active partners in governance and learning,” according to the report. “Students as Partners: Integrating Student Voice in the Governing Bodies of Kentucky Schools” was released Aug. 9 at the new Eminence Schools’ EdHub, a facility planned with student feedback in a district that includes a student as a school council member.

The report found that Kentucky is behind states like California and Maryland in incorporating student voice into school-improvement efforts. A tiny fraction of schools in Kentucky have students who serve on school councils, where most often students are allowed as advisory members rather than having a vote. Only a few school districts have students who serve as advisory members of the local school board. However, the Student Voice Team found in its survey of 89 districts and 189 schools that about half of the districts and school councils would be open to including student members.

The report recommends discussions aimed at adding student representatives on governance bodies. In addition, it calls for schools and districts to strengthen a culture of respect for student input, create formal platforms where students can share their input, and enlist students to design and disseminate



Ashanti Scott, a sophomore at Butler High in Louisville, was one of 20 students who gathered in Eminence, a leader in student involvement, to release their report.

surveys on meaningful local policy issues that directly affect students.

“The goal of the education system is to prepare students to be productive members of society,” the report notes. “Integrating students in school governance helps to realize this goal by engaging students in democratic processes from a young age and teaching students the importance of civic engagement.”

The group’s report includes examples of student participation in other states and documents steps the Student Voice Team has taken to elevate student input in Kentucky. It also spotlights districts that are leaders in student voice in Kentucky, such as Eminence.

Beyond governance structures led by adults, the report found ample room for improvement in student-focused structures. While nearly three quarters of the middle and high schools surveyed for the report have student councils, only one in three was described by the school principal as having meaningful duties beyond fundraising and social-activity planning.

“We hope this report will encourage Kentucky to recognize that in strengthening the partnership between young people and adults, we have a valuable opportunity to improve our school system,” said Eliza Jane Schaeffer, a recent graduate of Henry Clay High School in Lexington who led the team that produced the report. “I attribute that to the fact that it is nourished by the Prichard Committee and continues to draw a dynamic array of young people and older allies who understand on a visceral level that students can and must be partners in the work to improve our schools.”

BEVERLY RAIMONDO, 1946-2016

A Force in Recognizing Parents’ Potential

Beverly Raimondo, a 22-year member of the Prichard Committee leadership team who created the Governor’s Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership, died on June 23 after fighting cancer. She was 70.

The GCIPL program has produced 2,450 fellows since it launched in 1997 with more parents involved in institutes across the state this fall. The program was such a success that for several years, Raimondo also led a consulting enterprise that helped other states and localities replicate the program.



Prichard Committee’s work.”

“Bev touched so many lives by empowering parents all across Kentucky to help support and expect school improvement,” said Brigitte Blom Ramsey, director of the Prichard Committee and also a GCIPL fellow in 1999, several years before her involvement with the organization. “Bev’s passion and vision for citizen engagement in service to our schools and our students will live on in all aspects of the

MORE

Raimondo

CONTINUED

In 1991, Raimondo left a career in management at IBM in Lexington to join Bob Sexton at the Prichard Committee and to coordinate community and grassroots support for implementation of the recently enacted school reform efforts. Her own experiences as a parent sparked an interest in improving the link between schools and families.

Upon joining the Prichard Committee, she organized more than 60 Community Committees for Education in more than 90 school districts to build understanding and support for the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990. She later coordinated and implemented the dialogue process called Parents and Teachers Talking Together (PT3), which has reached more than 12,000 participants.

DELIVERING SERIOUS INFORMATION, INPUT

In 1996, Raimondo proposed the idea of in-depth parent leadership training and by 1997 was leading development of the training curriculum and recruiting parents for the new Prichard Committee initiative. In 2000, Women Leading Kentucky presented her with the Martha Layne Collins Leadership Award for her professional achievements, contributions beyond her job and serving as a role model to other women. She continued to lead the parent leadership institute through her retirement in 2013.

In November 2012, the program was renamed the Governor's Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership in recognition of its efforts to support and raise awareness about parent leadership in education. Gov. Steve Beshear said at the ceremony in the state capitol, "We know how important it is to invest in education for the future of Kentucky, and we can't overlook parents as a critical resource."

Raimondo said the program was built on the idea that parents want detailed information and serious ways to be involved in school, which proved to be true. "Every year, parents have told me 'it changed my life,'" Raimondo remembered in a 2013 interview. "We've kept a laser focus on student achievement and engaging parents. We've seen conversations change when parents are together — less complaining and more discussion about how to help schools and students."

"Bev built the institute from the ground up and it has impacted a multitude of families in Kentucky and beyond," said former Prichard Committee director Stu Silberman. "Working with Bev during my time as a superintendent of schools and on staff at the Prichard Committee, it was quite obvious that she had enormous passion for the work."

"Bev was the most firm, resolute, and determined person I ever had the pleasure to work with," said Anne Henderson, a senior fellow at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University in Rhode Island. "She saw that conversations changed when parents worked together and came to realize their power."

"Bev added such tremendous value to the Prichard Committee's work and goals for school improvement," said Cindy Heine, retired associate executive director of the Prichard Committee. "She was also a dear friend and will be missed terribly."

Services and burial were held in Lexington in June. Raimondo's family asked that memorial contributions may be made to: Dana-Farber Cancer Institute (www.dana-farber.org), Hospice of the Bluegrass, (www.hospicebg.org/lexington), The Lexington Children's Theatre (www.lctonstage.org/support-us/give-online/), The Salvation Army, Lexington, (ky.salvationarmy.org/lex-kentucky) or the Prichard Committee GCIPL Program, (prichardcommittee.org/donate/).

JOIN OUR MAILING LIST: The Perspectives newsletter is published electronically and as a print edition during the year. It is designed to call attention to important education issues for an audience of citizens, advocates, business leaders, educators and more. To join our mailing list or learn more about the Prichard Committee's work, find us online at www.prichardcommittee.org.

WHO WE ARE: The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence is an independent, non-profit, nonpartisan group of volunteers who have worked since 1983 to improve education. The group provides information and materials to educators, policymakers and citizens across the state on a variety of student achievement and public school issues. The committee is not affiliated with Kentucky state government. It is named for the late Edward F. Prichard, a lawyer from Paris, who in 1980 led a citizens' committee on improving Kentucky's universities.