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**KY. STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT STRONG AS SUPPORT LAGS, REPORT SHOWS**

LEXINGTON, Ky. -- Solid student achievement is fueling Kentucky's efforts to move into the top tier of states on key education measures, even as overall state funding, preschool enrollment, and earning four-year college degrees show long-term challenges for the state, according to a new Top 20 by 2020 report from the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence.

The report targets 20 key measures across the education system where national organizations use consistent reporting to rank states. Launched in 2008, the report provides a dashboard for determining whether Kentucky is moving from its historic spot as a low-performing state in education to among the nation's leaders. The message from the 2012 update is that while student achievement stands out as a big plus, key measures that will determine long-term success are among those where the state's performance is low or slipping, said Stu Silberman, executive director of the Prichard Committee.

"This report offers reason for a real sense of pride and also a real sense of urgency," Silberman said. "I don't think many people realize that in the most recent national ranking, Kentucky fourth graders moved up to fourth in the nation in their knowledge of science. At the same time, we need to recognize that doing better on overall funding for education and enrollment in preschool are keys to seeing our state move forward."

Silberman said that Kentucky's per-pupil funding for K-12 education, which now ranks 41st in the nation — more than \$2,200 per student behind 20th place Wisconsin — includes key losses in areas like teacher training, extended supports for struggling students, instructional materials, and other areas that directly support student achievement.

Per-pupil K-12 funding was one of only three categories flagged in the report as being flat or losing ground since 2008. The other two are higher education funding, where Kentucky dropped from 15th in 2008 to 21st in the current report, and preschool enrollment, where Kentucky fell from 24th in the country in 2008 to 29th in the most recent national report.

However, the encouraging news from the report is that in 10 of the categories, Kentucky is on target for reaching the Top 20 by 2020. In five areas, the state is already in the Top 20:

- \* On the test known as “the nation’s report card,” Kentucky fourth graders moved from ninth to fourth in the country in science. Kentucky eighth graders ranked 17th on the science exam.
- \* In the same testing program, Kentucky fourth graders ranked 11th in fourth grade reading. Kentucky eighth graders ranked 13th on the reading exam.
- \* Kentucky also made a strong move in the percentage of full-time community and technical college students completing an associate’s degree in three years, now ranking 16th in the nation, up from a ranking of 33rd when the data was compared in 2008 and 28th when Prichard’s Top 20 report was published in 2010.
- \* While not yet in the Top 20, Kentucky fourth graders have shown strong progress in math compared to other states, moving from a ranking of 40th among the 50 states when the report debuted in 2008 to 30th in 2010 to the current ranking of 25th.

Other measures labeled on track for reaching the Top 20 by 2020 included the share of higher education funding paid by families (now at 21st in the nation), average teacher salary (now 28th, which is up from 34th in 2008 but a drop from 22nd in 2010), adults with a high school diploma or equivalent (now 30th), high school graduates going on to college (now 31st, also marked by improvement since 2008 but a decline from 2010, when Kentucky ranked 26th).

“Kentuckians should take a sense of pride in the progress we are making,” Silberman said. “At the same time, we need to step up to the plate and join together to address the measures that still need attention.”

The report labels five categories as improving, but moving too slowly to reach top 20 in the next eight years. They include the percentage of high school students earning AP college credit (now at 29th in the nation), eighth grade math scores (now 32nd), percentage of full-time college students completing a bachelor’s degree in six years (now 35th), percentage of adults age 25-34 with a bachelor’s degree or higher (now 38th), the share of bachelor’s degrees awarded in science, technology, engineering or math (now 43rd).

Two categories are unchanged because no new data was reported since the 2010 report — nationwide exams in writing for fourth graders, where Kentucky ranked 20th the last time the test was given in 2002, and eighth graders, who ranked 36th based on 2007 data.

Detailed reports showing sources of data, Kentucky’s performance compared to the state currently ranked 20th, and trend data from the two previous reports are now available from the Prichard Committee at <http://www.prichardcommittee.org/our-advocacy-focus/top-20-by-2020>. The next update will be published in 2014, when the state will be halfway toward the 2020 goal set in 2008.

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, policy-makers 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.

Regular updates from the Prichard Committee are available on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/prichardcommittee](http://www.facebook.com/prichardcommittee) or on Twitter at @prichardcom.

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