

October 5, 2010

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**Prichard Committee report shows KY schools moving closer
to nation's top 20, but still losing ground in some areas**

LEXINGTON, Ky. – Kentucky has made important progress toward reaching the nation's top tier of states on several indicators of education performance, but is flat or losing ground on others. The result: clear evidence that the state needs to work harder to deliver for its children and future.

Those findings are included in a new report from the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, "Achieving the Top 20 by 2020: An Update." The report assesses the progress Kentucky has made since the committee set a "Top 20" goal for the state's schools two years ago. The report released at that time, and updated this year, identified 20 indicators of academic performance, specified Kentucky's ranking and defined what level of performance would be needed to reach the Top 20 among the states.

Most of the new results are good, showing Kentucky on track to reach the top tier of states:

- Both 4th- and 8th-grade students reached the Top 20 for the first time in reading.
- Results are moving up quickly enough to reach the Top 20 goal by 2020 in 4th-grade math, high school Advanced Placement credit, students starting higher education and the rate of completing associate's degrees.
- Kentucky is moving forward in teacher salaries, higher education funding and the family share of college costs.

Areas of concern:

- Improvement was too slow in the levels of high school and bachelor's degree attainment by young adults.
- No ground was gained in 8th-grade math scores.
- Ground was lost in preschool enrollment, bachelor's degree completion, STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) degrees and P-12 funding.

“As is often the case in Kentucky education, there is cause for both celebration and concern,” noted Cindy Heine, interim executive director of the Prichard Committee. “We think it is important to keep focusing attention on just how well we’re doing in these key areas and to keep pushing for improvement.”

The report noted that reaching the ambitious Top 20 goal will require a sustained focus on key objectives. These include:

- Implementing new standards, assessments and accountability procedures as mandated under legislation passed in 2009 (Senate Bill 1).
- Expanding funding for preschool.
- Providing stronger teacher preparation and support.
- Improving the high school completion rate and better preparing students to succeed in college and the workplace.
- Adequately funding education.
- Closing achievement gaps between groups of students.
- Increasing the number of STEM graduates.
- Engaging more parents and citizens in support of school improvement.

“Above all, we must know that the Top 20 is within Kentucky’s reach, and we must summon the commitment to move up to that level,” the report noted. “We must be guided by the clear words of Robert F. Sexton, who told an interviewer in 2009: ‘We’ve spent the last 100 years near the bottom. Let’s spend the next 100 years much closer to the top. We’ve shown we can do this.’” Sexton, the committee’s long-time executive director, died August 26, 2010.

“Bob’s leadership played a key role in moving Kentucky ahead in education,” Heine noted. “The Prichard Committee and staff are committed to honoring his legacy by continuing this important work for improvement, in particularly on expanding preschool for more low-income children and working at the secondary and postsecondary levels to improve college and career readiness.”

The report is available online at <http://www.prichardcommittee.org>.

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