In 2008, the Prichard Committee challenged Kentuckians to move the education system to the Top 20 among the 50 states by 2020. It is time to report out on that challenge: our Commonwealth gained ground on many indicators but has not, overall, moved into the upper tier of states.

Celebration should come first: science scores in fourth and eighth grade, high school graduation rates, and graduations from two year institutions have reached the top 20.

In reading, fourth and eighth grade scores were in the top 20 for our 2016 report, but those rankings have slipped in the years since.

Kentucky improved six other indicators more slowly, moving up among the states in fourth grade math scores, students earning AP college credit in high school, graduations from four year institutions, bachelor degrees earned in STEM fields, and young adults’ attainment of high school diplomas and bachelor degrees. That movement, not strong enough to reach top 20, suggests a loss of educational momentum in recent years.

Two declining indicators raise extra concern: Kentucky’s preschool enrollment rank has dropped dramatically, and eighth grade math results are lower now than in our first report.

Elementary and secondary education have seen some small progress in funding per-pupil and average teacher salaries, but higher education, Kentucky’s rankings for funding per pupil and family share of education costs have declined. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, concerns were already swirling about the lack of new revenue to sustain the scale of investments necessary to ensure education excellence. These concerns are now amplified by the global recession.

More broadly, the education progress that moved Kentucky to the middle of national rankings since 1990 has appeared to lag in recent years. As early as 2015, lags in NAEP and K-PREP scores and widening achievement gaps signaled that it was time to re-engage Kentucky’s citizens in a new battle for education excellence.

Now, as we enter unknown territory caused by COVID-19, our mission is more urgent. Inequities abound in education access for our most vulnerable students, with or without a pandemic. With it, the situation is dire. Citizens and communities must unite, putting politics aside, to promote excellence, equity and innovation for all students as we navigate this new normal. We invite all Kentuckians to join us in the critically important work of building Kentucky’s big, bold future.
READING THE CHARTS

Each category shows Kentucky’s current standing among the 50 states in the most recent data, highlighted with the blue bar. The green bars show Kentucky’s position in our 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2018 reports. The red circle and dotted line mark the goal of reaching the top 20. Gray dotted lines mark 10th, 30th and 40th position.

REACHED THE TOP 20 BRIEFLY AND THEN DROPPED OUT AGAIN

FOURTH GRADE READING

MAINE is 20th at 221.2
Kentucky scored 220.9


EIGHTH GRADE READING

MINNESOTA is 20th at 264
Kentucky scored 263


IMPROVED TOO SLOWLY

ADULTS 18 TO 24 WITH HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA OR EQUIVALENT

PENNSYLVANIA is 20th at 88%
Kentucky’s rate is 87.7%


FOURTH GRADE MATH

OHIO is 20th at 241
Kentucky scored 239


STUDENTS EARNING AP COLLEGE CREDIT IN HIGH SCHOOL

RHODE ISLAND is 20th at 22%
Kentucky’s rate is 18%

SOURCE: 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017 & 2019 graduates scoring 3 or higher (on a 1-5 scale) on at least one Advanced Placement test (College Board)

POSTSECONDARY GRADUATION: FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

NEBRASKA is 20th at 59%
Kentucky’s rate is 52%

SOURCE: 2006, 2008 & 2009 completions within six years from highered.info; 2013 from collegecompletion.chronicle.com; 2016 & 2018 from IPEDS Trend Generator

ADULTS 25 TO 34 WITH A BACHELOR’S DEGREE OR HIGHER

OREGON is 20th at 36%
Kentucky’s rate is 28%


SCIENCE, TECH, ENGINEERING, MATH SHARE OF BACHELORS

VIRGINIA is 20th at 20%
Kentucky’s rate is 16%

A NOTE ON DATA & INDICATORS

Three indicators from the 2008 report are omitted here: the National Assessment of Educational Progress did not provide state-level reports on writing after 20xx, and 2014 was the last available year of data on high school graduates going on to college within a year. Also, the 2008 report did not include high school graduation data: that indicator was added after Kentucky began reporting a cohort rate.