

## Profiles Spotlight ‘Meaningful Diploma’

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Visits to seven school districts highlight diplomas to empower students

## Parent Sparks Equity Efforts In Clark County

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Parent Donna Carter has brought together families to launch a new equity coalition.

## Appalachia Report Details Unique Challenges

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The 2024 report notes that educators are eager for help and better results.

### COMMUNITY EMPHASIS

## COMMUNITY SCHOOLS DELIVER STRONG FIRST YEAR

Expanding community outreach in 20 school districts across Kentucky is already sparking productive new partnerships and increased involvement from families and school supporters, according to local leaders.

A five-year effort coordinated by the Prichard Committee to build deeper community support is logging many early successes, organizers said in reviewing work in 2024.

“There is a mindset shift that we want to see, where conversations deepen and questions from the community get better,” said Brooke Gill, director of Prichard’s Collaborative for Families and Schools. “Thinking and working collaboratively in the right way — that’s the goal for sustainability, and it’s already started happening.”

Twenty districts across Kentucky are the focus of Prichard’s work. Under the federal Full-Service Community Schools grant, \$30 million will directly support work in those communities over the five-year program.

The effort is designed to improve the coordination, accessibility, and effectiveness of services for children and families, focusing on high-poverty schools. Addressing social, emotional, physical, and mental health are key compo-

nents as well as assuring well-rounded learning opportunities and attention to students’ academic needs.

Reaching those goals means targeting out-of-school barriers while expanding enriched learning opportunities,

family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership practices.

Examples from local work in 2024 cover a range of priorities:

\* A new after-school arts program is being offered in Hopkins County, reaching more than 40 students.

\* A partnership with the University of Pikeville provided free eye exams for more than 170 elementary students in Rowan County.

\* Plans in Bracken County call for transforming an empty building into a new student and family center. Meanwhile, new services are being offered to students who are unsupervised at home between school dismissal and the end of the work day.

For Warren County, the grant has become an opportunity to expand attention and services for students and families in an economically distressed area where numerous international families reside.

The past year provided an



KCSI CONTINUED PG. 4

## SCHOOLS URGED TO PROMOTE ADVANCED COURSES

Kentucky schools and state policy-makers should take steps to increase access to advanced coursework for high school students, education leaders urged this summer.

At a July meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Education, Prichard CEO Brigitte Blom testified along with Julia Roberts of Western Kentucky University and Anthony Mires, director of AdvanceKentucky. The groups recommended automatic enrollment into Advanced Placement, or AP courses, and other advanced options for students who meet eligibility requirements.

“Participating in advanced coursework has been shown to increase high school graduation and college enrollment rates,” Blom said. “Automatic enrollment and incentives for advanced students and teachers will put more Kentucky students on the path to a successful life post-graduation.”

Advanced Placement course enrollment declined across all Kentucky student groups between 2018 and 2022. Over the same span, dual-credit enrollment through Kentucky’s community college system rose from 27 percent to 32 percent of high schoolers, according to the Kentucky Center for Statistics in Frankfort. Dual-credit increases were also

ADVANCED CONTINUED PG. 4

## VIEWPOINT

### COMMUNITY SCHOOLS INITIATIVE

#### *Proof Positive That Engaged Communities Increase Student Success*

A great school is one that sits at the center of an engaged and supportive community, in which caring adults both inside and outside the classroom work together to remove nonacademic barriers to success. When the school and community collaborate to leverage assets in support of students, kids can be more engaged in the classroom and educators can focus on high-quality instruction.

That is what we are seeing take shape in the schools participating in the Kentucky Community Schools Initiative. Communities are coming together, implementing plans, building trust and deepening relationships.

A review of efforts in the 20 Kentucky school districts devoting resources to engaging community partners with the support of the federal Full-Service Community Schools Grant shows early, but strong, returns on investment. The grant is funding a five-year endeavor, spearheaded by the Prichard Committee, to bring community members and businesses into the fold to support local schools in an ongoing and intentional way.

The deepened collaboration leads to improved and expanded services for students and families, particularly in schools with high populations of children from low-income families. Removing non-academic barriers to achievement—such as physical and mental health, food insecurity, and transportation issues—allows educators to focus on the work of teaching and students to focus on the work of learning.

Deep family and community engagement and collaboration are key to achieving that goal. However, engaging the

community in their local school districts requires a shift in perspective around who has a role in ensuring the next generation of Kentuckians gets the best education possible. The answer to that question is simple—all of us have something to contribute.

We've traditionally left the full responsibility for educating children in the hands of teachers and parents. However, the quality of Kentucky's education outcomes affects the entire commonwealth, regardless of if you have school-aged children or work in a school building. The future of our economy and our quality of life in Kentucky hinges on what we do now to prepare young people to be active citizens who contribute to their communities.

That idea of collaboration and shared responsibility is the basis of our Groundswell Initiative, which stands at the core of all of our work, including community schools. The initiative is all about communities responding to the unique needs of students and families locally, to realize better outcomes in education—early childhood through postsecondary. Groundswell members are the boots on

the ground in a campaign to realize a Big, Bold Future for Kentucky—with education at the core.

Another way we are putting this concept into action at the Prichard Committee is through our Meaningful Diploma work. This year, we've surveyed hundreds of business leaders from across the state to find out what skills and competencies are most important to

them and what knowledge gaps they see in the newly-graduated workforce. The results of the survey will give us the data we need to start closing those knowledge gaps and making high school diplomas more meaningful for both graduates and employers. We will continue to work closely with the business community to develop and implement strategies for improvement.

If you are reading this column, you're likely deeply invested in Kentucky's education system already. If you're inspired to continue to get involved at a hyper-local level, we are in the process of developing additional resources for our online toolkits to help schools and community members

connect and collaborate in a meaningful, sustainable way.

The Prichard Committee staff and I are always available to share best practices and guide you in the work of supporting families, students, and educators.

### ABOUT THE PRICHARD COMMITTEE

We believe in the power and promise of public education—early childhood through college—to ensure Kentuckians' economic and social well-being.

We are a citizen-led, nonpartisan, non-profit, established in 1983 with a singular mission of realizing a path to a larger life for Kentuckians with education at the core.

We study pressing education issues, help inform the public and policymakers of our findings, and engage communities to celebrate success and to design unique local solutions to our challenges.

We track nation outcomes in education and quality of life. Our focus is to move Kentucky into the top rankings of all states in these areas.



**Attendance**  
**Behavior**  
**Coursework**  
(Test Scores)



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## 2024 PRICHARD COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

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### New Members Join Prichard

The Prichard Committee added three new members at its Annual Meeting in Owensboro: Donna Carter of Winchester, Chase Carson of London, and Cole Rains of Harlan joined the group.

In addition, Susan Perkins Weston of Danville was nominated and approved as a Life Member at the June meeting.





## POLICY

### SCHOOLS URGED TO PROMOTE ADVANCED COURSES

ADVANCED CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

reported for public universities and private Kentucky colleges.

The Council on Postsecondary Education has adopted a goal for 2030 that half of all public high school graduates complete at least one dual-credit course, noting Kentucky is the first state to set such a target.

In 2023, the state education department shared policy guidance with school leaders about expanding advanced coursework for middle school students.

The state noted that application for one of the two STEM academies on college campuses requires students to complete Algebra I, geometry, and Algebra II by the end of 10th grade, making middle school access to high-school level math advantageous.

Students from low-income backgrounds are underrepresented in advanced

courses, advocates said at the hearing. They added that parents are often unaware of the advantages offered by taking more challenging courses.

"Kentucky has many students ready to learn at advanced levels," said Roberts. "Many of them have few, if any, opportunities in their schools to learn at advanced levels."



### COMMUNITY SCHOOLS DELIVER STRONG FIRST YEAR

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opportunity to rethink how schools approach students and families about academic success as well as assisting with community assimilation, said Ben Kirtley, the district's community schools director.

"The data showed we were not forming good relationships in this area — whether that's involving students, families, or the community," he said. "Our first community meeting was about defining what ideal would look like for students, parents, and community — how can we let them get to know us and show that we care."

A Community Block Party with food and activities proved popular with families while allowing educators and community partners to interact with families in a casual setting. The school district now sees helping international families adapt to American customs and raising awareness of local resources as steps that will build better ties to schools. The grant has also funded a new student success liaison position to work with students and families on school achievement at Jennings Creek Elementary, one of the two focus schools in Warren.

Kirtley said the new emphasis has attracted community partners.

"People want to see that part of the community elevated and raised up," Kirtley said. "I've been blown away by the interest that's come to me rather than me going out."

In Rockcastle County, the community schools program is focused on reducing chronic absenteeism at the county's high school and middle school. The district is also aiming to enhance support for teachers.



Success in both areas hinges on boosting family involvement, said Jessie Mahaffey, the Rockcastle community schools director.

The first step is building a stronger connection with families. That began this fall with a high school Parentpalooza event and a middle school back-to-school fair offering free food, prizes, and booths promoting community resources. At each event, school leaders explained to families their desire to connect in more effective ways with both students and adults.

"We want them to be part of this journey with their child," Mahaffey said. "It's not just a meet-and-greet. We need our families more, and we want them to have a voice about classes and career pathways."

Across the state in Paducah, the community schools initiative led to re-starting a summer work program for high school students, better linking career options and job experiences. In addition, an elementary after school program was launched with community groups to boost family and student support.

"We've found huge success because of partnerships," said Allen Treece, community schools director in Paducah. "This opportunity is unique because, upfront, it is looking outside the box and about trying new approaches. We are asked to define a vision, find support, and bring down barriers."

Travis Marcum, Prichard's senior director of community schools, said that the past year has seen ambitious initiatives take hold across the state.

"We are connecting to what's already happening, but with more people working together toward the same goal of student achievement," Marcum said. "There are more people at the table, more partnerships, and more people seeing the ultimate goal."

## BRIDGING THE GAP

### PROFILES SPOTLIGHT 'MEANINGFUL DIPLOMA' PRIORITY

Visits to seven school districts across Kentucky showcase an increasing emphasis on durable skills like collaboration, problem-solving, and communication — part of expanded local outreach to employers and communities.

Educators and students in Allen, Boone, Carter, Floyd, Rowan, Shelby, and Warren Counties described their approaches to having students apply



academic concepts through real-world challenges and increase their focus on success beyond high school.

"It is important to elevate the work Kentucky educators are doing to make sure students are gaining the skills they need to pursue their dreams and live a big, bold life," said Prichard CEO Brigitte Blom. "I hope these stories serve as an example of what can be achieved when educators, the business community, and families come together to design programs and curricula that set students up for success."

Some examples:

- \* Increased exposure to local employers for students and teachers in Warren County;
- \* Expanded mentor-ship and community input on needed skills in Carter County;
- \* Growing classroom use of real-world skills in Rowan County, and



\* Widespread teacher training in project-based learning in Allen County.

The profiles are gathered as part of a new toolkit of resources and examples for schools and communities working to make the school experience more meaningful. Reports from the seven districts are collected at [www.prichard-committee.org/meaningful-diploma](http://www.prichard-committee.org/meaningful-diploma).

### APPALACHIA REPORT DETAILS UNIQUE CHALLENGES

A new survey of teachers in Appalachia looks more deeply at how the pervasive combination of drug addiction, generational poverty, and adverse childhood experiences will require a stronger response in order to reach educational goals in the region.

At a time of widespread teacher shortages, COVID learning losses, and strained financial resources, the teachers said that schools in Appalachia must overcome challenges unlike any other area of the state. Without a targeted response and additional support, teachers expressed concern that Appalachian students may be unable to catch-up with their Kentucky peers.

The 2024 survey collected feedback from 567 educators from 50 of 54 Kentucky counties in the nationally recognized Appalachian region. Kentucky's Appalachian counties are considered the heart of Central Appalachia — a region that registers some of the most dire health, income, and education conditions in the country.

Among the survey results:

\* 99 percent of respondents agreed that education in Appalachia takes place amid unique circumstances and characteristics not seen in other parts of the state.

\* More than 80 percent said that the drug epidemic and generational poverty impact their daily activities and education experiences with students.

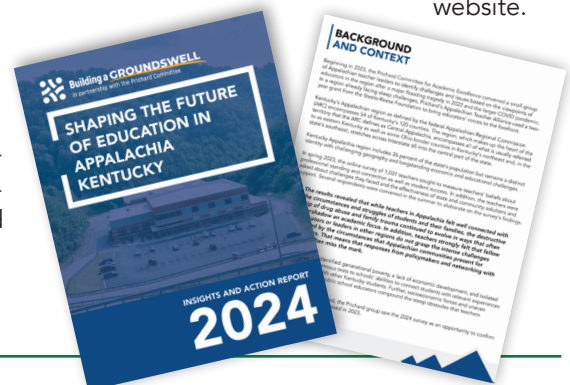
The report offers detail describing challenges and potential solutions, including a wider menu of career pathways, improved community infrastructure, grants to fund local improvement work, and more one-on-one student technology.

It also includes individual teacher responses about classroom experiences and compares the recent results to a companion 2023 teacher survey. Both surveys were designed by a group of Prichard Committee Teacher Fellows from the Appalachian region.

The 2024 report notes that educators are eager for help and better results.

"Across the region, Appalachian educators — though stretched very thin — serve as an economic, social, and professional backbone for the counties and towns they serve," the report states. "They are available to offer leading and advisory voices on how schools can better reach students and prepare them for success."

The survey and report, produced by the Prichard Committee and funded by the Steele-Reese Foundation, is available on the Prichard Committee website.



# Perspectives

Winter 2024

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

### PARENT SPARKS EQUITY EFFORTS IN CLARK COUNTY

Seeking a productive way to deepen connections among minority students and families and schools in Clark County, a Winchester parent used resources from the Prichard Committee's Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership to open new doors.

Since 2023, parent Donna Carter has brought together families to launch a new equity coalition to work with educators. In recent months, the group and school district have held in-depth community conversations, started an achievers group for Black and Hispanic students, and launched a medical interpretation curriculum for bilingual high school seniors to work in local hospitals.

"We are trying to really change mindsets," Carter said of the parents leading the equity coalition. "None of us work in school, and we had to take time to build relationships. We wanted to look at what was possible with our kids and county, not what was wrong."

Carter said she saw a chance for parents to encourage wider conversations. "We have been able to provide a space where people feel free to ask questions and address equity looking at socioeconomic issues as well as gender, race, and hunger." She said that guidance and resources from the Prichard Com-



mittee helped create a forum that has brought families and educators closer.

The achievers group, led by local volunteer Vache King, has exposed students to career opportunities, coping skills, college readiness, and meetings with professionals. A community service project and a trip to colleges and memorials in Washington, D.C., were part of the program last school year.

The coalition also provided a program connecting seven high school seniors with a medical interpretation curriculum that links to national certification. That experience included hospital visits and career exploration.

"With a clear vision and a deep commitment to her cause, Donna quickly mobilized a diverse group of parents, educators, and community members," said Laura Beard, senior director of CIPL. "Together, they formed a united front to tackle pressing issues within the school system, and the superintendent and school board welcomed the opportunity to collaborate."

Carter became a Commonwealth Institute fellow in 2024, and the Clark County Equity Coalition received one of Prichard's Groundswell Action awards this summer. Find out more about the institute at [www.prichardcommittee.org](http://www.prichardcommittee.org).

### WESTERN KY. PARENT WINS RAIMONDO AWARD



Pictured from left at the award presentation are Wynn Radford, Suzetta Creech, Ruth Lynch, Laurel Raimondo Martin, Brigitte Blom, and Clay Ford

A Christian County parent whose work with local schools has included involvement with community organizations — and is continuing into retirement — was honored with the 2024 Beverly Nickell Raimondo Award at the Prichard Committee's annual meeting this summer.

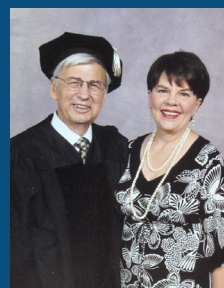
Ruth Lynch was presented with the award by Laurel Raimondo Martin, a daughter of its namesake. Lynch was recognized for a career in the Christian County Schools and work in the community that included partnership with schools as an advisory committee member for the Inner-City Residential Enterprise Zone in Hopkinsville and more than a decade of spearheading youth leadership efforts for the Christian County

### PRICHARD PARTNERS, SEXTON SOCIETY RECOGNIZE GIVING

The Prichard Committee is revamping recognition categories for donors, seeking to encourage charitable giving to sustain the group's mission.

The group will now recognize individuals who make gifts totaling \$1,000 or more annually through its new Prichard Partners program. Longtime member William

H. Wilson of Lexington is volunteer chair of the group to encourage regular giving at the leadership level. The Prichard Committee also designated new



levels for all donors, from Participating Donors who give up to \$99 a year to Bronze, Silver, and Gold donor levels.

The group also established the new Robert and Pamela Sexton Society, honoring Prichard's first director. The Sexton Society will recognize individuals who include the Prichard Committee in their estate plans. Lois Weinberg, a founding Prichard Committee member, is serving as the volunteer chair of that group.

For more information about giving options or recognition for one of the contribution categories, contact Shawn Lyons by email at [shawn@prichardcommittee.org](mailto:shawn@prichardcommittee.org)

Chamber of Commerce. Lynch became a fellow of the Prichard Committee's Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership in 2000. In retirement, Lynch has continued her interest in student achievement by working with the Kentucky Community Schools Initiative in Christian County.

The award honors the late Beverly Raimondo, who launched the Prichard Committee's Commonwealth Institute and guided its growth.

The group noted the importance of Lynch's efforts "championing Kentucky students and recruiting more teachers of color to work within her local public school system" and her experience and passion for equipping all students to succeed.



## GROUNDWELL

### AWARDS HONOR SANDERS, OWENSBORO

The Prichard Committee honored longtime member Keith Sanders with its Award of Excellence for a career spent promoting education and community advancement. The award was presented at the group's annual meeting in Owensboro, Sanders' home base.

"Keith has a deep passion for education and an unwavering commitment to improving the educational system," Prichard CEO Brigitte

Blom said in presenting the award. She noted his work as director of the Hager Educational Foundation. "He led the organization in enhancing educational opportunities for students and educators in Owensboro and the surrounding areas by providing scholarships, supporting educators, enhancing educational programs, promoting equity in education, and fostering community involvement."



Sanders has served as a member of the Prichard Committee for more than 20 years, including as the board's secretary/treasurer.

In addition to Sanders, the Prichard Committee also recognized leaders from various organizations in Daviess County for work related to early care and education improvement. Greater Owensboro was recognized with the inaugural Groundswell Community Action Award for efforts supporting a deeply engaged community working together to improve outcomes for families and students.

### 2024 Groundswell Summit Showcases Local Action

Parents and educators from across Kentucky promoted their local efforts to boost student achievement and widen



community support for education at the Prichard Committee's Groundswell Summit and Annual Meeting, held in June at the Owensboro Convention Center. Local efforts were on display in the Great Schools Showcase.



Presenters included Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership fellows, leaders of Family Friendly Schools and Early Care Centers, Groundswell Action honorees, and districts participating in Prichard's Full-Service Community Schools initiative.



### SMITH BECOMES PRICHARD BOARD CHAIR

Felicia Cumings Smith of Frankfort, a longtime education administrator and leader in Kentucky, was chosen as chair of the Prichard Committee board at the group's June meeting in Owensboro.

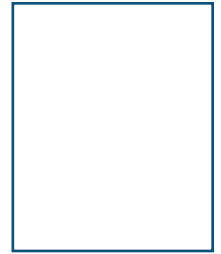
Smith currently serves as president of the National Center for Families Learning, based in Louisville. She began her education career as an elementary



and reading resource teacher in Jefferson County before joining the state education department as a literacy consultant and eventually rising to become an association commissioner. She was an administrator in Jefferson County and held other regional and national positions prior to her current position.

Smith succeeded Clay Ford of Owensboro, whose term ended. Other officers approved at the June meeting were Julia L. Roberts of Bowling Green as vice chair, and Leo Calderon of Bellevue as secretary/treasurer.

**The Prichard Committee For  
Academic Excellence**  
2285 Executive Dr., Suite 120  
Lexington, Ky. 40505



## SUPPORT THE PRICHARD COMMITTEE

Use this form or the QR code below to make a tax-deductible gift to help the Prichard Committee improve educational outcomes for all Kentucky learners. All 2024 gifts beyond 2023 gift amounts will be matched dollar-for-dollar by the Double Your Difference Challenge! Contact Shawn Lyons at 859-227-0987 or at [shawn@prichardcommittee.org](mailto:shawn@prichardcommittee.org) for more information about the Challenge.

- ☐ My check payable to the Prichard Committee is enclosed  
☐ I would like to make my gift using the following credit card:

Card # \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. \_\_\_\_\_ Security Code \_\_\_\_\_

My gift amount is:

- ☐ \$25      ☐ \$50      ☐ \$100      ☐ \$250      ☐ \$500  
☐ \$1,000      ☐ \$2,500      ☐ \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I would like my gift to support:

- ☐ Unrestricted      ☐ Family Friendly Schools      ☐ Early Childhood Education  
☐ Equity Coalition      ☐ Parent & Family Engagement      ☐ Meaningful H.S. Diploma  
☐ Endowment      ☐ Beverly Nickell Raimondo Award

Please contact me:

- ☐ I would like information about including the Prichard Committee in my estate plans.  
☐ I have already included the Prichard Committee in my estate plans.

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State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Email \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

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2285 Executive Dr., Suite 120, Lexington, KY 40505  
(859) 233-9849 | [prichardcommittee.org](http://prichardcommittee.org)



### Dear Friends,

As a founding member of the Prichard Committee, I'm proud of how far we've come in improving educational outcomes for all Kentucky learners. We've risen from the bottom of national performance measures to the middle — but that's not our goal. There's still more work to do.



The Prichard Committee continues to bring communities together — administrators, teachers, and families — to support schools. The challenges we face are immense, and our commitment to strengthening public schools is as critical as ever.

To sustain our efforts, we need your support. In addition to private gifts and grants, individual donations play a vital role. That's why I ask you to join me in helping to grow our endowment. Income from the endowment provides stability, ensuring our work continues year after year.

Please consider including the Prichard Committee in your estate plans or make a gift today to qualify for the \$50,000 Double Your Difference Challenge. Every increase over your 2023 donation will be matched dollar for dollar. Bob and Pam did their share, now it is our turn.

For questions, contact Shawn Lyons at [shawn@prichardcommittee.org](mailto:shawn@prichardcommittee.org). Together, we can continue this important work.

Best regards,  
Lois Combs Weinberg  
Chair, Robert F. and Pamela Sexton Society