



Kentucky can...

Invest in services that promote student success, health, safety, and well-being

During the pandemic, public schools have been critical in connecting families to the resources needed to continue learning, accessing meals, and receiving school-based health services and other supports. Schools will continue to be a critical pillar for students, families, and communities as COVID-19 continues to impact the Commonwealth. The pandemic has also shed light on the deep digital divide, as many parts of Kentucky lack access to quality internet service. The Kentucky General Assembly continues to demonstrate their commitment to student success and health – including clarifying statutory language in the School Safety and Resiliency Act about school-based mental health providers and including budget investments for schools to tap into the Expanded Care Services policy in 2020. Kentucky can continue to build on that progress.

Too many Kentucky kids are struggling to learn and receive the school supports and other services they need. Many policy and practice changes are needed to set kids up for success and on a path towards a brighter, healthier future.

Among the many budget investments that Kentucky can make, the Blueprint for Kentucky's Children hopes to see the following included:



1. Invest in infrastructure to close the digital divide so that kids can access the educational resources and telehealth services they need

Students need affordable and accessible internet connections to fully engage in learning, and school closings due to the COVID-19 pandemic have made internet even more crucial for succeeding in school. In addition, quality internet access is important for kids' health as many healthcare providers are now offering telehealth services. Yet Kentucky faces a digital divide with too many families in both rural and urban areas lacking quality internet access. A gap in infrastructure impacts rural communities, and lack of affordability drives gaps in access in cities, which results in fewer families of color having strong internet connections. Kentucky can close these gaps by investing in the infrastructure needed to access more affordable, higher speed internet services.

2. Ensure dedicated funding to implement the Expanded Care Services Policy

With recent federal approval, school districts are now able to bill Medicaid for health services provided to Medicaid eligible students within the school building or virtual school setting, an opportunity known as the Expanded Care Services policy. During this time of heightened social and emotional needs,

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In 2018
16%
of 10th graders
seriously considered
attempting suicide

schools, healthcare providers, and other entities interacting with children and families must elevate efforts to identify signs of stress, anxiety, and depression. School districts can use this new funding stream to connect students with necessary physical and behavioral health screenings, counseling, immunizations, and preventive dental care. Kentucky can ensure school districts have the information and resources needed to leverage this opportunity to improve student health and well-being.

3. Sustain investment in Family Resource and Youth Service Centers

Family Resource and Youth Service Centers (FRYSCs) enhance student success by making referrals to health and social services, connecting families to afterschool care, supporting kinship caregivers, and more. As demonstrated in school districts across the Commonwealth during the pandemic, they are integral in providing tools for families to remove barriers to student learning. For a school to be eligible for a FRYSC, 20% or more of enrolled students must be eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. While the number of students receiving free lunch has risen, the FRYSC-per-student allocation has not kept up.

From March 16-June 30 of 2020, FRYSCs:

-  Coordinated **49,000** home visits
-  Supported more than **10,000 parents** through support groups
-  Made referrals for **mental health services, food assistance, and NTI support**

Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Solution:

Invest in infrastructure to close the digital divide, ensure school districts have necessary resources to implement the Expanded Care Services policy, and sustain investment in Family Resource and Youth Service Centers.