



Kentucky can...

Invest in the Education and Wellbeing of Every Student

Kentucky will have the strongest economy and financial stability for families when all children have the opportunity to achieve their full potential through education. Every student can succeed academically when provided trauma-informed and supportive school environments and access to sufficient resources. Yet there are multiple factors, like lack of cultural understanding and differing teacher expectations, contributing to large numbers of Black and Brown children being left behind. In Kentucky, 84 percent of Black and 83 percent of Latinx students are graduating on time, compared to 91 percent of White students.

During the pandemic, public schools have been critical in connecting families to the resources needed to continue learning, access meals, and receive school-based health services and other supports. Schools will continue to be a critical pillar for students, families, and communities as the Commonwealth recovers from the impacts of COVID-19.

Only about HALF of all students in Kentucky reach the critical milestones of 4th grade reading and 8th grade math proficiency; systemic factors contribute to even lower rates for many youth of color.

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:

Full-day kindergarten can:

- ✓ Significantly increase basic skills test scores in the 3rd, 5th, and 7th grades, compared to half-day or no kindergarten
- ✓ Help to narrow achievement gaps
- ✓ Promote literacy development
- ✓ Ensure access to a nutritional breakfast and lunch

- **Continue funding for full-day kindergarten.** In 2021, the General Assembly invested in the early education outcomes by allocating funds to support full-day kindergarten for the next school year. Full-day kindergarten boosts students' academic achievement and strengthens their social and emotional skills. It allows teachers more quality time to engage in constructive learning activities with students. It gives parents access to better learning and care for their children, and fewer disruptions than half-day programs. Kentucky can allocate funds to ensure earlier learners have access to full-day kindergarten and are set up for success.
- **Increase per-pupil funding to ensure public schools can help all kids learn.** As Kentucky looks for what our students need, the primary school funding formula – or SEEK funding – needs to be protected from any budget cuts and investment dollars should be adjusted to keep up with inflation.

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- **Increase funding for school-based health providers and access to school-based behavioral health services.** The Expanded Care Services policy, enacted in Kentucky through the 2019 School Safety and Resiliency Act, allows school districts to now bill Medicaid for health services provided to eligible students within the school building or virtual school setting. During this time of heightened social and emotional needs, 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 funding stream to connect students with necessary physical and behavioral health screenings, counseling, immunizations, and preventive dental care. Kentucky can ensure school districts, especially in rural areas and for communities of color that often lack access to behavioral health providers, have the information and resources needed to leverage this opportunity to improve student health and well-being.

In 2020, the Kentucky General Assembly funded school-based mental health service providers in all 171 school districts. According to updates to the School Safety and Resiliency Act, a school-based mental health provider is defined as an EPSB certified school psychologist, school counselor, or school social worker, among other licensed professionals. While this funding was an important catalyst, school districts have experienced difficulty finding qualified mental health practitioners to fill these positions. Kentucky can increase funding to attract qualified professionals, and to be more equitable and sustainable for districts.

In the 2020-21 school year, FRYSCs:



Coordinated more than 85,000 home visits



Supported more than 20,000 parents and nearly 7,000 grandparents through support groups



Made referrals for mental health support for more than 4,000 students

- **Increase 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.

Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Solution:

Continue funding for full-day kindergarten, increase SEEK funding, increase investment for school-based mental health providers, ensure dedicated resources to implement the Expanded Care Services policy in schools, and increase investments in Family Resource and Youth Service Centers.