

BIG BOLD FUTURE

Kentucky's National Rankings Report



In 2020, the Prichard Committee urged all Kentuckians to join the work of creating a Big Bold Future for our Commonwealth. This report is the second update showing Kentucky's progress on our set of indicators.

Bluntly, the new evidence is troubling.

There is some good news. It's especially important that Kentucky is moving back toward 2019 reading and math results, and we're doing that more successfully than most other states.

But we aren't back to our 2019 reading and math levels, and 2019 performance wasn't strong enough. On many other indicators, we've seen declines or very small progress.

The Prichard Committee now calls on our whole state to respond to this hard news with fresh energy and determination. As people who love Kentucky, let's join together and get to work on building deeper insights, deeper engagement, and deeper investment, both at the state level and in each of our local communities. We invite you to explore the evidence on the pages that follow and join us in renewed efforts to make education Kentucky's pathway to a larger life and a Big Bold Future for all of us.



The Prichard Committee

Building a Groundswell for a Big Bold Future

Indicator Summary

★ Bright Spots

- 4th of 50 states in high school graduation rate
- 4th in two-year postsecondary graduation rate
- 12th in grade 4 reading

▲ Strong Trends

(on pace for top 20 states in another decade)

- 25th and rising in voter turnout
- 27th and rising in four-year postsecondary graduation rate

▲ Weak Trends

(not on pace for top 20 states in the next decade)

- 32nd and rising slowly in grade 8 math
- 33rd and rising slowly in babies with healthy birth weight
- 46th and rising slowly in life expectancy

▼ Declining/Flat Rankings

- 42nd and declining in households with broadband access
- 44th and unchanged in residents holding associate degrees or higher
- 46th and declining in children living at or above the poverty line
- 46th and declining in postsecondary enrollment
- 46th and unchanged in household median income
- 47th and declining in preschool enrollment

The pages that follow show:

- Rank changes over time, with notes on how Kentucky compares to the current 20th state (pages 3-7)
- Evidence on whether all groups can thrive (pages 8-9)
- Action recommendations for local mobilization and state policy (pages 10-11)
- Supporting data on each indicator (pages 12-13)
- Sources for the data included in this report (page 14)

Early Childhood

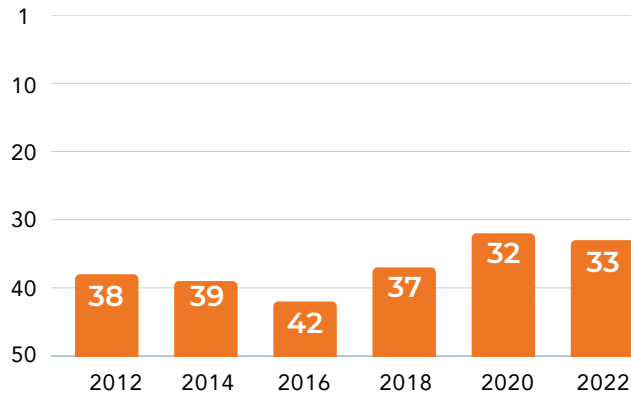
Rank over time

BABIES WITH A HEALTHY BIRTH WEIGHT

Kentucky's ranking
among 50 states

33

In 2012, Kentucky
ranked 38th.



▲ Weak Trend

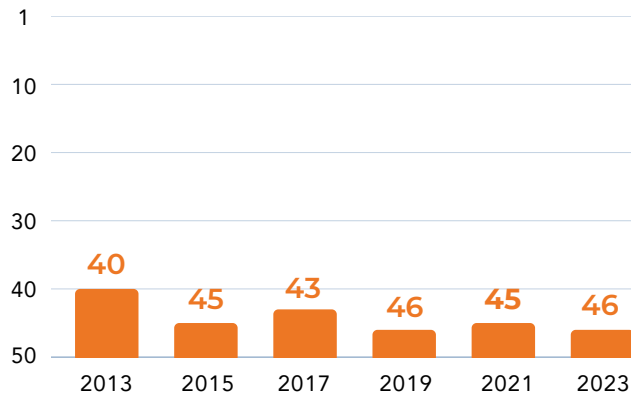
- **91.3%** of babies born in Kentucky in 2022 had healthy birth weight, ranking us **33rd**.
- **92.0%** of babies born in Connecticut in 2022 had healthy birth weight, ranking them **20th**.

CHILDREN ABOVE POVERTY

Kentucky's ranking
among 50 states

46

In 2013, Kentucky
ranked 40th.



▼ Declining/Flat

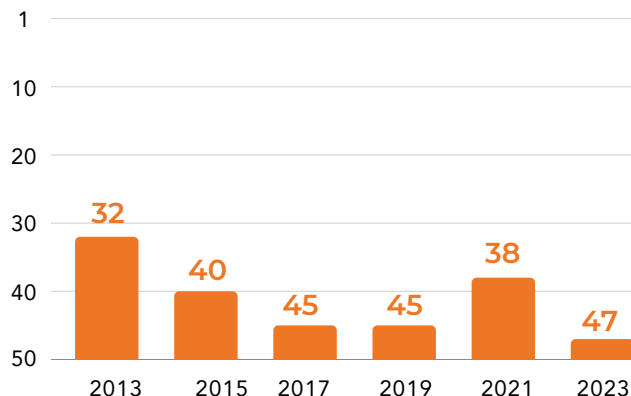
- **79%** of Kentucky children had 2023 household incomes at or above poverty, ranking us **46th**.
- **87%** of Connecticut children had 2023 household incomes at or above poverty, ranking them **20th**.

PRESCHOOL PARTICIPATION (AGES 3-4)

Kentucky's ranking
among 50 states

47

In 2013, Kentucky
ranked 32nd.



▼ Declining/Flat

- **36%** of Kentucky children ages 3 and 4 were enrolled in school in 2023, ranking us **47th**.
- **49%** of South Carolina children ages 3 and 4 were enrolled in school in 2023, ranking them **20th**.

K-12 Learning

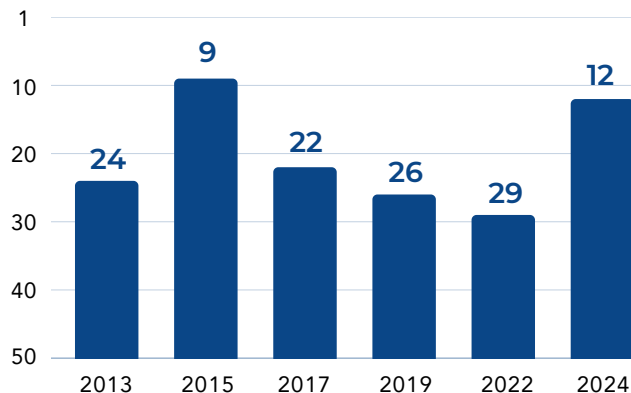
Rank over time

4TH GRADE READING PROFICIENCY

Kentucky's current
ranking among
50 states

12

In 2013, Kentucky
ranked 24th.



★ Bright Spot

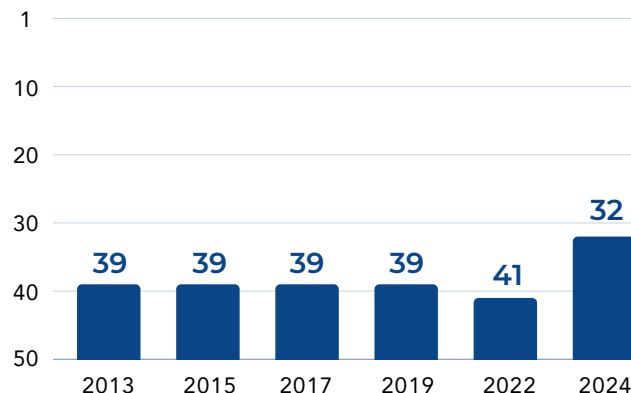
- 33% of Kentucky grade 4 students scored proficient or above on 2024 NAEP reading, ranking us **12th**.
- 32% of Louisiana grade 4 students scored proficient or above on 2024 NAEP reading, ranking them **20th**.

8TH GRADE MATH PROFICIENCY

Kentucky's current
ranking among
50 states

32

In 2013, Kentucky
ranked 39th.



▲ Weak Trend

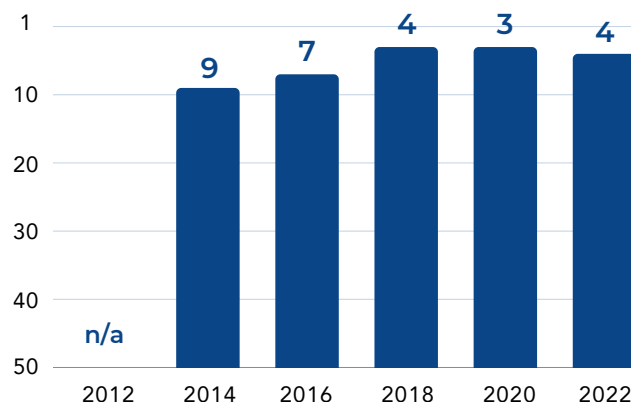
- 24% of Kentucky grade 8 students scored proficient or above on 2024 NAEP math, ranking us **32nd**.
- 30% of Washington grade 8 students scored proficient or above on 2024 NAEP math, ranking them **20th**.

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

Kentucky's current
ranking among
50 states

4

In 2014, Kentucky
ranked 7th.



★ Bright Spot

- 90.1% of Kentucky students who started high school in 2018 graduated by 2022, ranking us **4th**.
- 87.3% of Florida students who started high school in 2018 graduated by 2022, ranking them **20th**.

Postsecondary

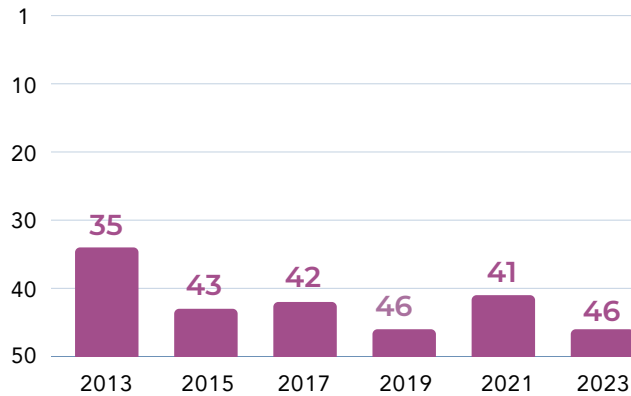
Rank over time

POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT (18-24)

Kentucky's current
ranking among
50 states

46

In 2013, Kentucky
ranked 35th.



▼ Declining/Flat

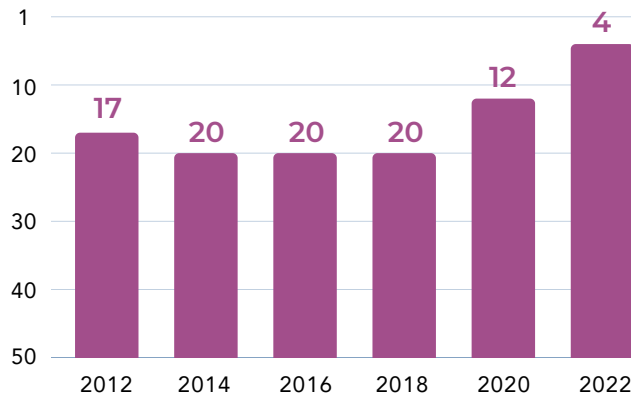
- **44%** of Kentucky residents 18 to 24 were enrolled in school in 2023, ranking us **46th**.
- **50%** of Colorado residents 18 to 24 were enrolled in school in 2023, ranking them **20th**.

GRADUATION RATE FROM 2-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

Kentucky's current
ranking among
50 states

4

In 2012, Kentucky
ranked 17th.



★ Bright Spot

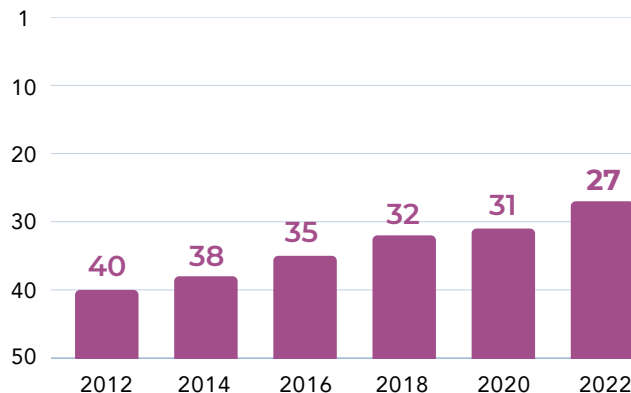
- **41%** of undergraduates who entered Kentucky two-year public higher education in 2019 graduated by 2022, ranking us **4th**.
- **34%** of undergraduates who entered New Hampshire two-year public higher education in 2019 graduated by 2022, ranking them **20th**.

GRADUATION RATE FROM 4-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

Kentucky's current
ranking among
50 states

27

In 2012, Kentucky
ranked 40th.



▲ Strong Trend

- **57%** of undergraduates who entered Kentucky four-year public higher education in 2016 graduated by 2022, ranking us **27th**.
- **62%** of undergraduates who entered South Carolina four-year public higher education in 2016 graduated by 2022, ranking them **20th**.

Quality of Life

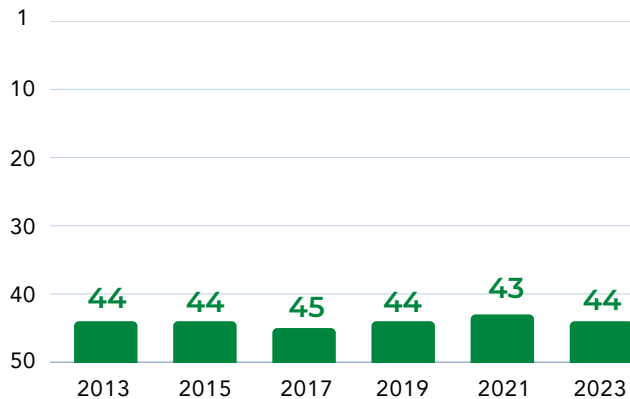
Rank over time

ASSOCIATE DEGREE OR HIGHER (25-64)

Kentucky's ranking
among 50 states

44

In 2013, Kentucky
ranked 44th.



▼ Declining/Flat

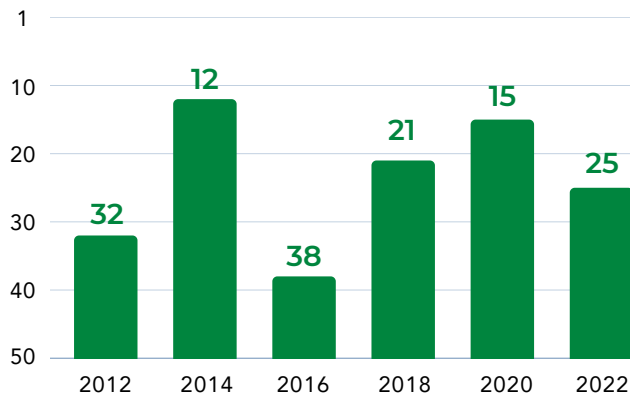
- **40%** of Kentucky residents ages 25-64 held an associate degree or higher in 2023, ranking us **44th**.
- **49%** of Rhode Island residents ages 25-64 held an associate degree or higher in 2023, ranking them **20th**.

VOTER TURNOUT

Kentucky's ranking
among 50 states

25

In 2012, Kentucky
ranked 32nd.



▲ Strong Trend

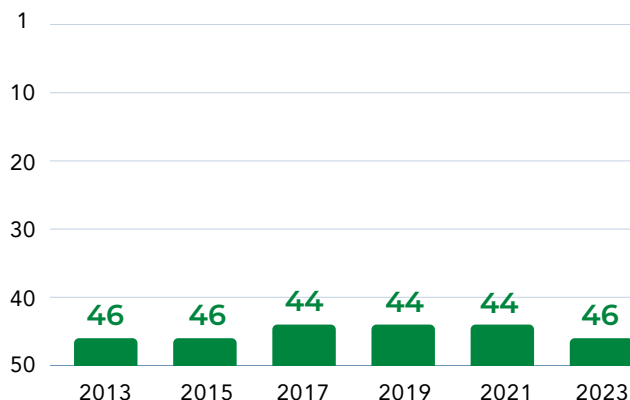
- **49%** of Kentucky residents 18 and over voted in the 2022 general election ranking us **25th**.
- **50%** of Massachusetts residents 18 and over voted in the 2022 general election, ranking them **20th**.

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Kentucky's ranking
among 50 states

46

In 2013, Kentucky
ranked 46th.



▼ Declining/Flat

- **\$61,118** was Kentucky's median household income in 2023, ranking us **46th**.
- **\$77,315** was Arizona's median household income in 2023, ranking them **20th**.

Quality of Life

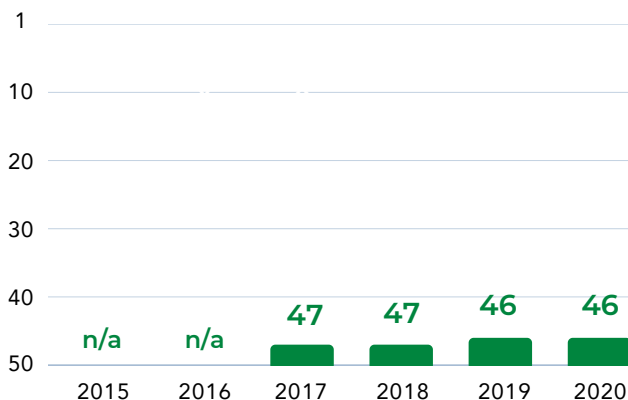
Rank over time

LIFE EXPECTANCY

Kentucky's ranking
among 50 states

46

In 2018, Kentucky
ranked 47th.



▲ Weak Trend

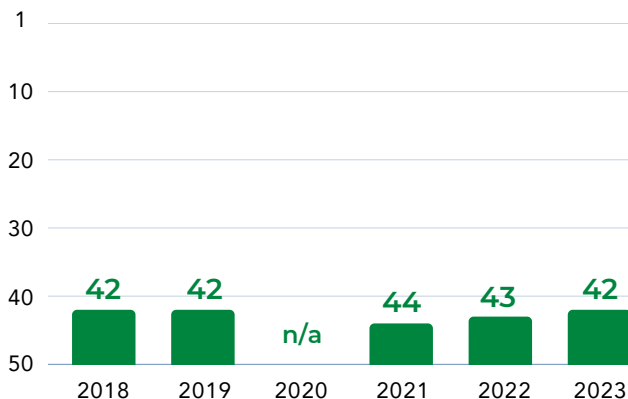
- **72.3 years** was the average life expectancy for Kentucky residents in 2021, ranking us **46th**.
- **77.2 years** was the average life expectancy for Illinois residents in 2020, ranking them **20th**.

BROADBAND ACCESS

Kentucky's ranking
among 50 states

42

In 2018, Kentucky
ranked 42nd.



▼ Declining/Flat

- **90.1%** of Kentucky households had high speed internet access in 2023, ranking us **42th**.
- **92.3%** of Arizona households had high speed internet access in 2023, ranking them **20th**.

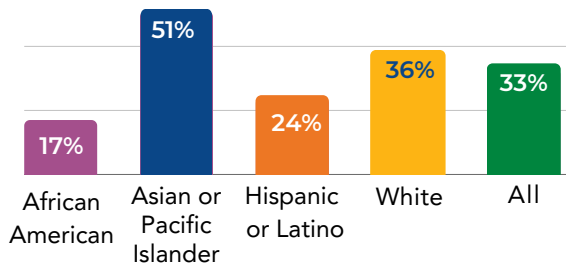
Have we built a commonwealth where all can thrive?

No, we have not completed that work.

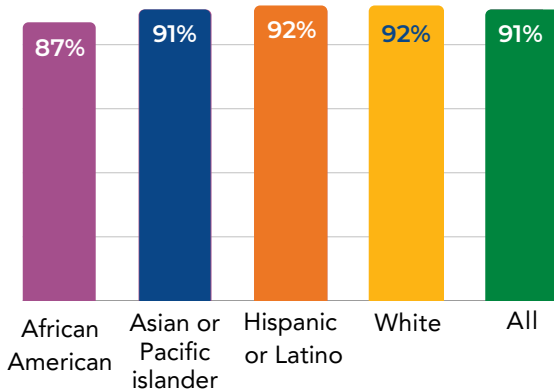
These five charts show that clearly.

Together, we must change our institutions and our communities so that all of us can flourish.

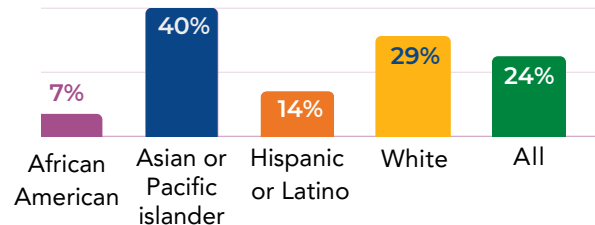
4TH GRADE READING PROFICIENCY



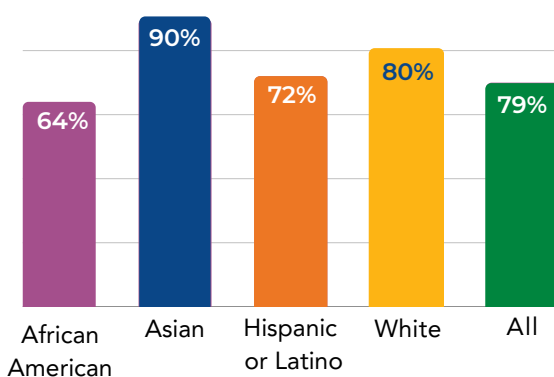
BABIES WITH A HEALTHY BIRTH WEIGHT



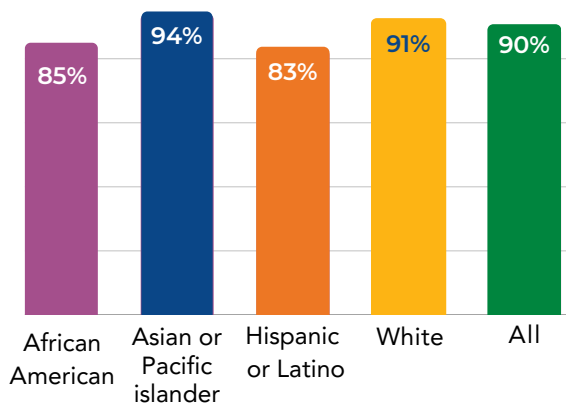
8TH GRADE MATH PROFICIENCY



CHILDREN AT OR ABOVE POVERTY



HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

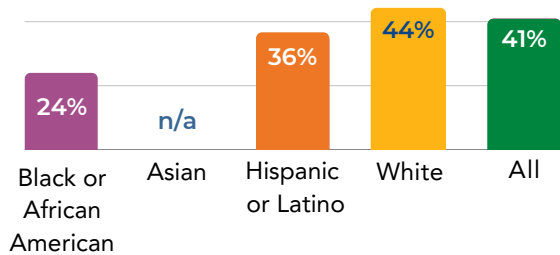


Have we built a commonwealth where all can thrive?

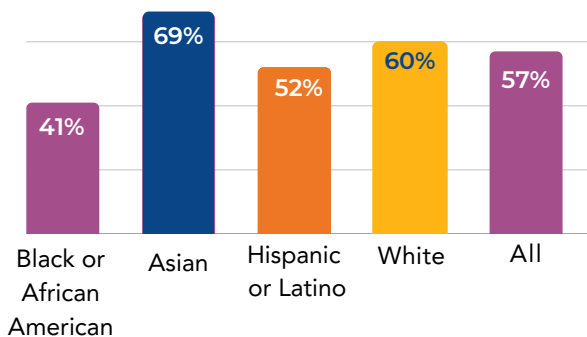
Here are five more charts showing clearly that we have not yet met that challenge.

Together, we must build approaches that offer larger lives to all the children and all the adults in Kentucky.

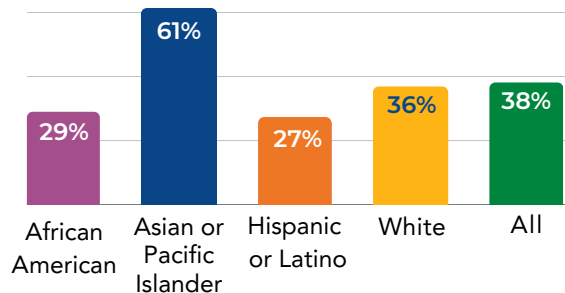
GRADUATION FROM 2-YEAR INSTITUTIONS



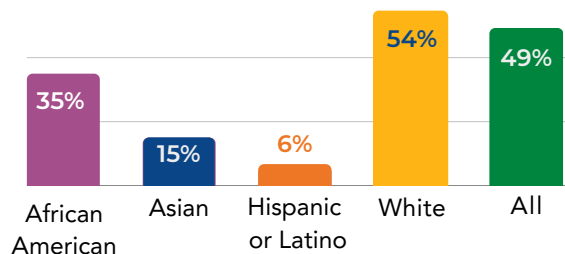
GRADUATION FROM 4-YEAR INSTITUTIONS



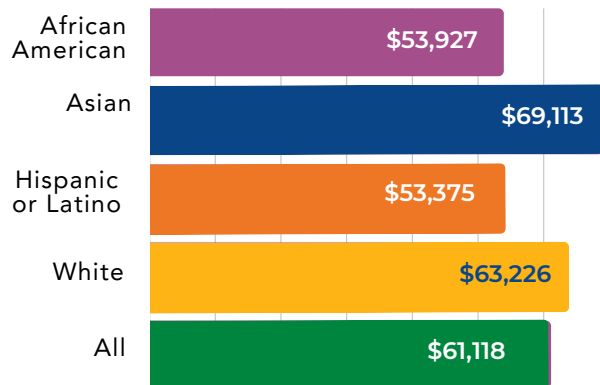
ASSOCIATE DEGREE OR HIGHER (25-64)



VOTER TURNOUT



MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME



Action Recommendations

Community Mobilization

To build Kentucky's Big Bold Future, create a groundswell of engagement in public education, using local strengths to meet local challenges. That engagement can include a wide array of approaches to improving student outcomes, including examples like these:

- Kindergarten readiness campaigns
- Reading and math tutors recruited by civic organizations
- Real-world learning opportunities through partnerships with local businesses
- Community-driven FAFSA completion efforts
- Locally-developed expectations for meaningful high school diplomas
- Parent-led and student-led projects to enhance school climate and culture
- Coordinated and aligned community services to remove non-academic barriers to learning

State Policy

Early Childhood

- Invest more deeply in the quality and affordability of childcare
- Implement strategies to deliver quality preschool and quality childcare in shared locations
- Expand HANDS, Kentucky's voluntary home visiting program for families with children under age 3

K-12 Learning

- Ensure that all students have access to rigorous coursework
- Sustain statewide initiatives to build educators' literacy and math teaching skills
- Deepen attention to teaching quality, working conditions, and shortages
- Strengthen SEEK funding, including meeting full transportation costs
- Provide robust transparency, accountability, and community participation in public education decisions

Postsecondary Education

- Expand quality college-level work opportunities in high school
- Invest more heavily to make undergraduate credentials affordable
- Focus performance-based funding on enhanced enrollment, persistence, completion, and impact

Shared Effort for All

Do everything needed to ensure that *every student is welcomed, respected, and empowered*. With our history of high poverty and low educational attainment, Kentucky needs to strengthen each and every learner.



The Prichard Committee

Building a Groundswell for a Big Bold Future

Join us to build a Big Bold Future

This year's report shares some troubling trends, summoning us all to new commitment.

If we work together, steadily and collaboratively, Kentuckians can build a commonwealth where everyone can flourish.

We invite you to join us in that work!

The Prichard Committee believes 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, non-partisan, solutions-focused nonprofit, established in 1983 with a singular mission of realizing a path to a larger life for Kentuckians with education at the core.

Additional Data

Rates over time

BABIES WITH A HEALTHY BIRTH WEIGHT

2012	91.3%
2014	91.2%
2016	90.9%
2018	91.1%
2020	91.5%
2022	91.1%
Change	-0.2%

CHILDREN AT OR ABOVE POVERTY

2013	75%
2015	74%
2017	78%
2019	78%
2021	78%
2023	79%
Change	+4%

PRESCHOOL PARTICIPATION (AGES 3-4)

2013	42%
2015	40%
2017	40%
2019	38%
2021	37%
2023	36%
Change	-6%

4TH GRADE READING PROFICIENCY

2013	36%
2015	40%
2017	38%
2019	35%
2022	31%
2024	33%
Change	-3%

8TH GRADE MATH PROFICIENCY

2013	30%
2015	28%
2017	29%
2019	29%
2022	21%
2024	24%
Change	-6%

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

2012	n/a
2014	88%
2016	89%
2018	90%
2020	91%
2022	90%
Change	+2%

POST-SECONDARY ENROLLMENT

2013	48%
2015	46%
2017	46%
2019	44%
2021	44%
2023	44%
Change	-4%

GRADUATION RATE FROM 2-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

2012	25%
2014	23%
2016	27%
2018	31%
2020	36%
2022	41%
Change	+16%

GRADUATION RATE FROM 4-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

2012	46%
2014	48%
2016	49%
2018	52%
2020	55%
2022	57%
Change	+11%

Additional Data

Percentages over time

ASSOCIATE DEGREE OR HIGHER (25-64)

2013	33%
2015	34%
2017	35%
2019	36%
2021	38%
2023	40%
Change	+7%

VOTER TURNOUT

2012	58%
2014	46%
2016	55%
2018	52%
2020	65%
2022	49%
Change	-9%

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

2013	\$43,399
2015	\$45,215
2017	\$48,375
2019	\$52,295
2021	\$55,573
2023	\$61,118
Change	+\$17,719

LIFE EXPECTANCY

2016	n/a
2017	n/a
2018	75.3 years
2019	75.5 years
2020	73.5 years
2021	72.3 years
Change	-3.0 years

BROADBAND ACCESS

2018	82%
2019	83%
2020	n/a
2021	87%
2022	89%
2023	90%
Change	+8%

Sources

BABIES WITH A HEALTHY BIRTH WEIGHT

Kentucky's ranking
among 50 states

33

100% minus percent low birth weight babies from kidscount.org

CHILDREN AT OR ABOVE POVERTY

Kentucky's ranking
among 50 states

46

American Community Survey results from census.gov, Table B17001, 1-year estimates

PRESCHOOL PARTICIPATION (AGES 3-4)

Kentucky's ranking
among 50 states

47

American Community Survey results from census.gov, Table B14003, 1-year estimates

4TH GRADE READING PROFICIENCY

Kentucky's ranking
among 50 states

12

National Assessment of Education Progress results from nationsreportcard.gov

8TH GRADE MATH PROFICIENCY

Kentucky's ranking
among 50 states

32

National Assessment of Education Progress results from nationsreportcard.gov

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

Kentucky's ranking
among 50 states

4

Four-year cohort rate from Common Core of Data at nces.ed.gov/ccd

POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT (18-24)

Kentucky's ranking
among 50 states

46

American Community Survey results from census.gov, Table B14003, 1-year estimates

GRADUATION RATE FROM 2-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

Kentucky's ranking
among 50 states

4

Graduation within three years of enrolling as a full-time student reported by nces.ed.gov/ipeds

GRADUATION RATE FROM 4-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

Kentucky's ranking
among 50 states

27

Graduation within six years of enrolling as a full-time student reported by nces.ed.gov/ipeds

ASSOCIATE DEGREE OR HIGHER (25-64)

Kentucky's ranking
among 50 states

44

Degree attainment reported by luminafoundation.org

VOTER TURNOUT

Kentucky's ranking
among 50 states

25

Voting and Registration, Table 4b, from census.gov

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Kentucky's ranking
among 50 states

46

American Community Survey data from census.gov, Tables B19013, 1-year estimates

LIFE EXPECTANCY

Kentucky's ranking
among 50 states

46

Life Expectancy at Birth data from the National Center for Health Statistics at www.cdc.gov/nchs

BROADBAND ACCESS

Kentucky's ranking
among 50 states

42

American Community Survey results from census.gov, Table B28002, 1-year estimates