2016 Annual Report

Building a Path to a Larger Life for all Kentuckians through Excellent Education
Leadership

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as of December 31, 2016

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Education Excellence with Equity is Everybody’s Business

The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence was established in 1983 as a nonprofit, nonpartisan, citizen-led organization and is working today to move Kentucky into the top tier of all states for education outcomes from early childhood development through postsecondary attainment.

The work of the founding members of the Committee was guided by a shared mission to increase the quality of education for all Kentuckians. In 2016, we recommitted to increasing achievement for all students and closing persistent achievement gaps with the release of our study group report entitled, “Excellence with Equity: It’s Everybody’s Business”.

The Committee is 112 members strong, with friends numbering into the thousands, representing all regions across the Commonwealth and still unique in the nation for our focus on both policy work and engaging citizens to be voices for excellent education. We study contemporary education issues deeply to understand their relevance and impact, inform others about our insights and engage everyone who cares about educating our young people in conversations and action that transform Kentucky’s education system. You will hear some of those voices echoed in this year’s annual report.

We believe accomplishing our aspiration of moving Kentucky from the middle of the pack to the nation’s top tier of states in education excellence in this generation requires a heightened sense of urgency around policies that drive our state’s system of public schools to ensure all children succeed in school and in life. Increasingly, our work demands deep community engagement that mobilizes citizens to be champions for education in their own schools and districts.

This report highlights four priority areas as we reflect on our accomplishments in 2016: closing persistent achievement gaps, strengthening postsecondary education, lifting student voices and providing high-quality early childhood experiences. In vignettes about these efforts you will learn details about our partnerships and focus.

We honor the original vision of the early Prichard Committee members while charting the course forward to realize that vision within this generation. The Committee’s work is, and always has been, a catalyst for progress. Ultimately, the result of our work will be an education for every student that allows them to contribute deeply to the civic life of their communities and, collectively, to the prosperity of Kentucky.

Reflected in the pages of this report, we hope you find reason for celebration and a promise for the future of Kentucky education.

Brigitte Blom Ramsey
Executive Director
In August 2016, the Prichard Committee published its study group report on achievement gap issues, beginning a tide of discussion and media attention that pushed the issue to the forefront of public policy discussions. The report, “Excellence With Equity: It’s Everybody’s Business,” marked the work of a 30-member group that began meeting in the fall of 2015.

The Study Group called attention to several important findings: that gaps are already visible at the start of kindergarten, making early childhood efforts essential; that most gaps expand from kindergarten to graduation, confirming that improvement is needed at all grade levels; that disciplinary consequences are much harsher for students of some races than for others; that identification of students with disabilities and gifted and talented students appears to lack equity; and that Kentucky’s teaching force lacks sufficient racial diversity.

It is vital that schools realize their crucial role in ensuring students succeed in adult life.

The report called for bold leadership at the state and community levels, improvements in school climate and culture to support students and families, classroom instruction that engages each student, accountability to ensure improvement in student performance, and a clear focus on sustaining the work.

Roger Cleveland, an associate professor of educational leadership at Eastern Kentucky University, said the Prichard Committee’s work helped cast a fresh spotlight on important academic issues in Kentucky schools.

“Concern about achievement gaps has never gone away, but it had lost its way somehow as a statewide issue for the last few years,” he said. “The Prichard Committee report and articles about that work brought it back to everyone’s attention and people realized that if it’s getting that kind of notice, everyone better start focusing on it.”

The report’s emphasis was echoed in Senate Bill 1, the primary education reform bill in the 2017 legislative session. The bill, which cleared the legislature and was signed by Gov. Matt Bevin, made action to reduce achievement gaps a primary focus for Kentucky schools.

“Excellence With Equity: It’s Everybody’s Business” can be downloaded at prichardcommittee.org
The evolution of the Prichard Committee’s Student Voice Team moved beyond expanding the membership of interested middle-school, high-school and college students to include a deep dive into improving transitions from high school to college.

The group was a driving force advocating for legislation in 2016 that produced a $15 million increase in need-based financial aid to college students — making college more affordable for up to 8,000 more students. The Student Voice Team also built on its 2015 report on barriers to college success for high school graduates, calling for the state to consider a broader definition of “college readiness.” Partnering with GearUp Kentucky, the Team made visits to rural and urban Kentucky schools to expand input from Kentucky students about how they define and experience being college ready, beyond a single college-entrance-exam score.

Sahar Mohammadzadeh, a junior at Dunbar High School in Lexington and a member of the Student Voice Team since its beginning in 2012, said its influence continues to grow. “The culture shift toward involving students to improve education has been enormous. At first, we were bystanders listening while adults talked. Now, we are presenters at major conferences and working as partners with all kinds of people and groups. We’re helping draw attention to what’s actually happening in schools and to the disconnects between policy and practice.”

Mohammadzadeh, 17, said that the Team’s ability to speak about the impact of expanding college aid and access was persuasive to lawmakers and education advocates alike. Students’ insights on building a stronger transition between school and higher education are still informing conversations that point toward change.

The value of student voice in state-level and local settings is growing because of the team the Prichard Committee has nurtured, Mohammadzadeh said, “Our goals are simple: we want the best education possible, and we are willing to work for it. Every student has a story to tell. We encourage our peers who are interested that they shouldn’t just be consumers of our schools. This is a chance to be contributors, too.”
Building Momentum for Early Childhood

A partnership with child care is a place we can reach them and build a nurturing relationship in a safe place.

The Prichard Committee has been making the case for greater funding and higher quality in Kentucky’s early childhood programs for well over a decade. In an era of tight funding, the focus on building the ranks of advocates for early childhood education and development continues, as do the steps forward in building a better system for Kentucky. The Committee’s Early Childhood Education Study Group completed updates to their work late in 2015 which led to a more intentional focus on birth to third grade practices and concentration on early childhood reading and math proficiency beginning in early 2016.

Over the past year, the Strong Start Kentucky campaign has continued to add to the ranks of early childhood champions across the state while work with local and regional partners presented information about strong early childhood programs and brain development. In addition, the Committee will lead an Early Childhood Provider Cost of Quality study in Kentucky to give policymakers and legislators new information about targeted long-term investments and the importance of adequate fees and reimbursement rates to ensuring the high quality of early childhood programs.

Earlier in 2016, the Prichard Committee saw the growing advocacy for early childhood score important victories in the state budget: the two-year spending plan passed in 2016 strengthened investments in early childhood and maintained P-12 funding, including state-funded preschool. Lawmakers increased the income eligibility level of the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) to 160% of the current federal poverty level. The budget bill also established a grant pool to incentivize public-private partnerships between public preschool and childcare. The investments safeguarded the building blocks of education for Kentucky’s children.

Beth Schaeffer, preschool consultant for Warren County Schools, whose district worked with a Bowling Green community center to win a state Preschool Partnership Grant, said the Prichard Committee has been a key source to building momentum for expanding and improving early childhood services across Kentucky. “Everybody wants facts and numbers, which we at the local level don’t always have,” she said. “The Prichard Committee provides that and is so very reputable. When I am able to share information from them with my legislators or people in my community, they know they can believe it.” The programs help young families and young children, but Schaeffer said they also create an important early link for schools. “For families that we have a hard time reaching and building relationships with — who may not always think of schools as a place where they’ve had a good experience — a partnership with child care is a place we can reach them and build a nurturing relationship in a safe place.”

“Progress and Next Steps for Early Childhood in Kentucky: Birth through Third Grade” can be downloaded at prichardcommittee.org
In June 2016, the Prichard Committee released a report outlining the key elements of its renewed focus on postsecondary education, defining areas of access, affordability and quality are key, along with adequate investment in higher education. Specifically, the Committee has been an early leader in helping build awareness about awarding a portion of the state’s higher education budget through a new performance funding system.

The Committee partnered with the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce on a symposium titled “Performance and Outcomes-Based Funding” in the summer of 2016 to build awareness and shared understanding about the issue.

Dave Adkisson, president and chief executive officer of the Chamber, said that the Prichard Committee’s return to postsecondary education issues was well timed to help build understanding and outreach on a major new step for colleges and universities.

“The Prichard Committee and Chamber were able to bring in national experts and focus on best practices and potential pitfalls that could help chart a course for Kentucky to implement this in a positive way,” Adkisson said. The resulting symposium also produced a report from the two groups, “Performance & Outcomes-Based Funding: Lessons for Postsecondary Progress in Kentucky,” a document intended to inform a wider dialogue about how the state could proceed, and continue to bring those new to funding discussions up to speed.

In 2016, lawmakers mandated that starting in 2018, five percent of operating appropriations to public colleges and universities be based on a new performance-based funding model.

Legislation crafted in 2017, Senate Bill 153, addressed this mandate and followed December recommendations by the Postsecondary Education Working Group. The Committee worked energetically on SB 153 to ensure that issues of access, affordability and quality were addressed. Properly structured and adequately funded, advocates say the new comprehensive funding model represents an opportunity to move toward a more transparent and accountable system of postsecondary education.

“It’s been very positive,” Adkisson said. “Because so much homework had been done, legislative action was somewhat anticlimactic — it was significant, but there was not a lot of intrigue.” He credited the Prichard Committee’s involvement as a significant player in building understanding and informing legislative action. “They bring a 30-year track record of independent, objective, dispassionate research. The Prichard Committee is a trusted source of solid information and brings that intellectual integrity to the table.”

“Performance & Outcomes-Based Funding” can be downloaded at prichardcommittee.org
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- Prichard Committee Members
- Other

2016 Revenues
$2,009,635

*2016 Financials are based on unaudited numbers as of December 31, 2016.
View our most recent audited financials at prichardcommittee.org

2016 EXPENSES*
- Program Services
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- Fundraising

2016 Expenses
$1,551,653

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About the Prichard Committee

The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence is an independent, non-partisan, nonprofit citizens’ advocacy group. The Committee continuously studies priority issues, informs the public and policymakers and engages citizens, business leaders, families, students, and others in a shared mission to move Kentucky to the top tier of all states for education excellence and equity for all children.

Thanks to the efforts of the Committee and dedicated citizens, Kentucky has moved from the bottom of the national rankings in education to the middle and above. Our ambitious goal is to move to the top tier of all states within this generation.