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Community Challenge I Kentucky can be proud of its schools

Kentuckians have much to be proud about in their public schools. Our schools are good and getting better.

Regardless of our schools' past achievements, we will not be satisfied until each student in Kentucky has the best opportunity in the country for a great public education. We encourage all other Kentuckians to get involved in your local public schools. Feel free to call a public school and see for yourself our strengths and how you can help us make sure our students learn even more. We think you will be impressed at the quality of teaching and learning going on daily in every community in the state in Kentucky's more than 1,200 public schools.

We represent more than 125,000 Kentuckians — teachers, parents, superintendents, principals, school counselors, local school board members, and education supporters. We ask our fellow Kentuckians to examine the facts when they hear that our schools are failing or that our schools don't compare well to our neighbors Tennessee, Ohio and Indiana. The facts just don't support those inaccurate assertions.

Recently, Quality Counts compared the 50 states' schools. Kentucky ranked 14th overall, well above Tennessee (ranked 21st) and Indiana (22nd). Ohio slightly outranked Kentucky at 10th among the states.

When it comes to national comparisons of student achievement, Kentucky's rankings are also very respectable compared to other states, though not as high as any of us would like. The National Assessment of Educational Progress compares student scores in every state. Our fourth-graders scored fourth in the nation in science, and outpaced Tennessee, Ohio and Indiana in both science and reading. Fourth- and eighth-graders outperformed Tennessee students in both reading and math. Our eighth-graders' reading scores surpassed both Indiana and Tennessee and tied Ohio.

Not only are our schools good; they are getting better. Between 2003 and 2011, Kentucky fourth- and eighth-graders' scores improved at higher rates in both math and reading than students in Ohio,

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Indiana and Tennessee on results of the NAEP.

Some analysts are critical of some portions of NAEP. However, the most recent Annual Economic Report from the University of Kentucky shows Kentucky's schools making progress. That report found that Kentucky has moved from 48th in 1990 to 33rd or 34th in 2009, even when the disputed portions of NAEP are excluded.

The final evidence that should make Kentuckians proud comes from a study conducted in 2010 by the Kentucky Long-Term Policy Research Center. That study took into account states' investments in public schools, student characteristics, and student achievement. The study's conclusion was that Kentucky's public schools provided the Commonwealth with the fifth-greatest return on investment, when compared to other states' schools.

The results of elementary and secondary schools' success can also be seen in higher education, where our students are doing much better. According to the National Center on Higher Education Management Systems, Kentucky is the only state to rank in the top five in improvement for several key indicators of college attainment.

The stakes for Kentucky of providing our children a good education are immense. Those without a high school diploma have an unemployment rate of 14.9 percent; those who do work earn an average of only \$444 weekly. That's in stark contrast to workers with four-year college degrees,

whose unemployment rate is 5.4 percent and who average earning \$1,038 weekly.

Kentuckians entrust the next generation into our hands every day. We take that responsibility seriously, dedicating our best knowledge, caring, and time to our students and the Commonwealth's future. We invite you to get involved and help us in this most important work.

LONNIE BURGETT

Superintendent –

Mayfield Public Schools –

President –

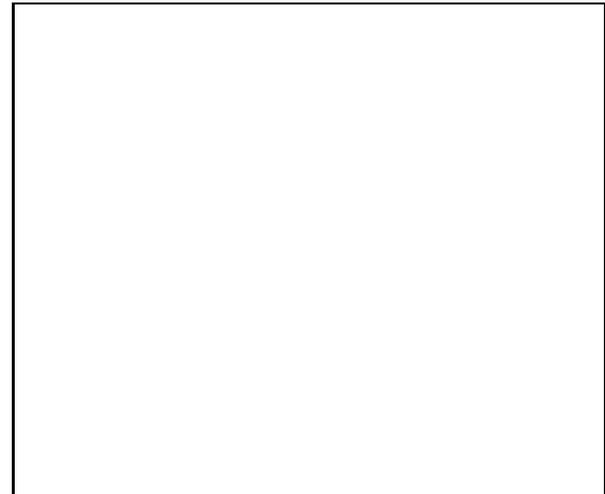
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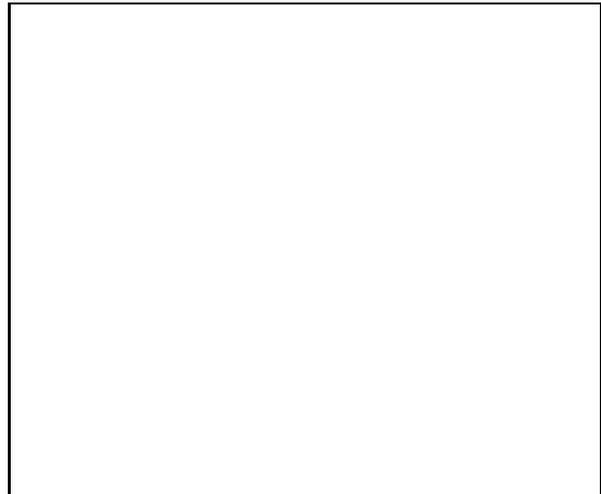
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