

# SCHOOL EFFORTS PAY OFF IN STATE

## Graduation, readiness rates are sharply higher

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Kentucky's high school graduation rate jumped to 86 percent last year, among the highest in the nation, and college readiness among those graduates climbed above 50 percent for the first time, according to preliminary figures state officials released Tuesday.

Gov. Steve Beshear and Kentucky Education Commissioner Terry Holliday both hailed the findings as indications that state education efforts have shown "measurable transformational improvement over the past four years."

"We are doing this to reassure parents and businesses that our schools are producing graduates who are equipped to succeed in this increasingly sophisticated world," Beshear said during Tuesday's news conference. "It's a story that needs to be told."

The figures, based on testing data from the 2012-13 school year, show that Kentucky's graduation rate increased 7 percentage points from last year, and the state's college- and career-readiness rate, a measure of whether students are prepared to be successful after high school graduation, improved 20 percentage points from 2010, when only 34 percent of students were considered ready for college or the workforce.

Graduation rates and college- and career-readiness data for individual schools and districts won't be released until next week, but officials said they wanted to release the state results early because they are so promising.

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Kentucky graduation and college-readiness rates at high schools climbed last year. BY ANTOINETTE KONZ, THE COURIER-JOURNAL

## EDUCATION: Data shows increases

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"Years ago, Kentucky's national story when it came to education and school performance was cause for some embarrassed cringing," Beshear said. "Scores were poor, and on most measures, we lagged behind. But thanks to decades of hard work and aggressive policy changes, Kentucky has carved out a new reputation — a reputation as a reform-minded state that is innovative, bold and relentless in moving forward."

During the news conference, Beshear and Holliday pointed to the passage and implementation of Senate Bill 1 in 2009 as the beginning of the latest and most significant round of focused improvements in Kentucky.

The bill requires more rigorous standards, aligned assessments, a balanced accountability system and support for educators to implement the new system. Since 2009, Kentucky schools have implemented more meaningful and data-driven assessments, and national organizations have recognized Kentucky's education reforms.

"Across the country, educators are rushing to prepare their students to meet the complex and constantly evolving de-

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**GOV. STEVE BESHEAR**

mands of the new global economy," Holliday said. "I'm proud that we are on the forefront of that effort here in Kentucky, but I am most excited about what it means for our students."

This is the first year Kentucky is using a different way to measure the number of students who graduate — the formula nearly every other state uses to measure graduation rates — allowing the state to compare itself with its peers, Holliday said.

The new formula tracks individual students who enter ninth grade for the first time and revisits their status four years later.

"Everyone predicted that our graduation rates would go down with this new measurement, so we were just elated to see these numbers," Holliday said.

Between 60 percent to 70 percent of Kentucky's

high school graduates go on to pursue post-secondary opportunities each year, Holliday said. Three years ago, 80 percent of those enrolled in community colleges and 30 percent enrolled in four-year colleges or universities needed remedial courses, he said.

"It used to be that only a third of our graduates were ready to move on to college-level work, now we are at over half," Holliday said. "We want to put our colleges out of the remediation business."

And while Holliday said he couldn't provide specific numbers in regards to Jefferson County Public Schools, he said he is "so impressed" with the increases some schools have posted that he will be attending a news conference with Superintendent Donna Hargens Sept. 27 to discuss the results.

"We've seen some schools in Jefferson County jump from a 50 percent graduation rate to 80 percent graduation rate and college- and career-readiness numbers that have doubled," he said. "There are going to be quite a few good stories coming out of Jefferson County next week."

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