



The Independent Voice for Kentucky's Children

KENTUCKY
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INCREASING KENTUCKY'S HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE WOULD SAVE STATE MONEY

Raising Compulsory Attendance Age Important Step towards Goal of Fewer Dropouts

Louisville, KY – Leaders across the nation are realizing the importance of increasing graduation rates. Rather than just a problem for individuals who drop out, a growing body of evidence shows that failing to graduate has long-term negative consequences for society as well. Legislation on the House Floor attempts to address the problem by increasing the compulsory schooling age to 18.

“HB 189 brings Kentucky to a point where we must decide whether we want to educate our children or stay in the 19th century,” says bill sponsor, Representative Brent Yonts. “The technology skills required to function in the 21st century environment and the educational background requirements that are necessary today make it imperative for us to include all of our children in the educational process.”

Increasing the compulsory schooling age is one of the priorities on the Blueprint for Kentucky's Children, a shared agenda of over 70 groups across the state. A new issue brief released today, “Increasing the High School Graduation Rate” details the costs that Kentucky incurs due to students dropping out of high school. It finds that Kentucky spends \$2,113 more per capita on support programs such as food stamps, Medicare and Medicaid for high

school dropouts than for high school graduates. Crime-related costs are also estimated to be \$3,000 higher for dropouts than their peers.

The brief finds that while it would cost Kentucky \$17,678 per pupil to educate its students for two additional years, it would experience a net benefit of \$205,418 over the lifetime of each additional graduate. If Kentucky were to decrease its dropout rate by just 10 percent, the state would see \$423 million in benefits in the form of increased earnings, economic growth, and cost avoidance.

“Any opposition to HB 189 based on increased costs to Kentucky’s state budget are based on faulty reasoning,” says Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates. “There is no investment that has more leverage for the prosperity of our state than making sure kids graduate from high school. If we keep waiting for the economy to improve to invest in our young people, we are going to be our own worst enemy.”

“The school districts will continue to receive SEEK funds for every student, so any budget concerns are at the state level,” says Dale Brown, Superintendent of Warren County Schools. “However we will see huge increases in employability which will lead to increased tax revenues that will benefit all of us.”

According to the brief, 22 states and the District of Columbia have passed legislation requiring school attendance until age 18, while 7 others have raised it to age 17. In the meantime at least ten other states are considering raising the compulsory attendance age in their 2009 legislative sessions.

In addition to raising the compulsory age, the brief recommends 2 other proven strategies to raise graduation rates:

1. Offer opportunities in all high schools for students to combine part-day schooling with employment.
2. Ensure that all high school offer their students access to early college credits through dual enrollment courses in either 4-year colleges or technical or community colleges.

Advocates of raising the compulsory schooling age concur that it is no silver bullet –schools must also take steps to make school more relevant, appropriate, and specialized to

children's needs. However, they see it as a door-opening catalyst to addressing a serious problem.

“Kentucky’s ability to compete in the global economy depends on increasing our educational attainment,” says Louisville Mayor Jerry E. Abramson. “There’s no better way to send the message that education is important than to say we expect kids to stay in school until they turn 18 or graduate.”

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***Kentucky Youth Advocates** is a non-partisan, non-profit, children's advocacy organization. KYA represents a voice for Kentucky's most precious asset – its youth. We believe that Kentucky's youth deserve the opportunities and resources necessary to ensure their productive development and health.*