

Kentucky Board of Education
Good News

Oct. 8, 2026

Kentucky Department of
EDUCATION

No Kid Hungry Announces Marion County's Jennifer Wheeler As Summer Hunger Hero



- Kid Hungry has announced Jennifer Wheeler, nutrition director for Marion County Public Schools, as a 2026 Summer Hunger Hero.
- This annual celebration of those who go above and beyond in efforts to end childhood hunger shines a light on extraordinary individuals and agencies from across the nation. This year's list of heroes includes 10 honorees from nine states – a diverse array of celebrants, but all united in their commitment to ending childhood hunger during the summer months, and throughout the year.
- Wheeler has been a big sponsor of rural non-congregate summer meals in Marion County, serving more than 122,000 meals to families last year. She goes the extra mile to serve families who don't have access to transportation or might fear attending an in-person site.
- Wheeler's also been key to expanding Summer EBT outreach in the county, ensuring that all kids have access to summer nutrition, regardless of where they live.

Kentucky ranks in top 10 nationally for Gains in reading and math

- Kentucky ranked fifth out of 35 states in reading and eighth out of 38 states in math between 2022 and 2025, according to the 2026 Education Scorecard.
- Several school districts across the state were designated as “on the rise,” a distinction given to districts that have shown exceptional progress compared to other schools. Those districts include Perry County, Pike County and Corbin Independent School.





- Commissioner of Education Robbie Fletcher attributed the gains in part to grants awarded to counties from the Kentucky General Assembly.
- He said, “There’s also been an investment of time for the Kentucky Department of Education, time for our administrators, and most importantly time for our teachers that have really invested in the trainings you’ve seen throughout the Commonwealth.”

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Kentucky excels with Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool Reliability Training

- The Kentucky Department of Education's (KDE's) Office of Special Education and Early Learning celebrates the success of its Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) Reliability Training initiative, with 100% of participants meeting reliability standards, which is scoring within 80% accuracy when compared to the creators of the tool. This program ensures a statewide network of qualified professionals for conducting TPOT observations.
- The TPOT is an evidence-based non-evaluative tool that assesses the implementation of Pyramid Model practices in preschool settings, supporting high-quality early childhood education. The Pyramid Model is a framework of evidence-based practices that promotes young children's healthy social, emotional and behavioral development through nurturing relationships, supportive environments, targeted social-emotional instruction and individualized intervention when needed. Its significance lies in helping early childhood programs strengthen positive relationships, prevent and address challenging behavior, improve children's social skills and create inclusive learning environments where all children can participate and thrive.
- Over the last four years, KDE has been able to provide training for 333 individuals through these workshops, which have been offered at no cost to participants. The training is intended for professionals who support and guide preschool teachers in strengthening their instructional practices around the Pyramid Model Framework, including coaches, consultants, trainers, administrators and other early childhood specialists who assist with completing TPOT observations.

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Student-led Individual Learning Plan promotional project unveiled

- The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) has unveiled a new project aimed at promoting Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) with direct input from students and educators.
- An ILP is a comprehensive framework for advising students in grades 6-12 to engage in coursework and activities that best prepare them for college and career success.



- Members of the 2025-2026 Commissioner's Student Advisory Council were interested in helping students prepare to transition out of high school and developed the ILP Video Showcase to highlight how important ILPs are for students.
- As part of the showcase, KDE is seeking videos from students across the state, ranging from 30 seconds to two minutes long, showing how the ILP helps students explore careers, set goals and map out their futures. Some of the students on the Commissioner's Student Advisory Council produced a video promoting the ILP Video Showcase.
- The ILP Video Showcase is open to all middle and high school students, teachers and counselors. Submissions will be accepted between Aug. 17-Oct. 23. More details, including how to submit a project, can be found on KDE's ILP webpage.

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New Blog Series: Chronic Absenteeism in Kentucky

- The Kentucky Department of Education's (KDE's) Strategic Planning and Research team is excited to launch the KDE Research Blog, a new online resource dedicated to sharing research, data and strategic insights on the issues shaping education across the Commonwealth.
- New articles will be published approximately every two weeks, offering research-based perspectives, practical resources and data visualizations designed to support educators, school and district leaders, policymakers and anyone interested in Kentucky education. The KDE Research Blog webpage will serve as a central hub where readers can explore the latest posts as well as past blog series and archived articles.
- The inaugural series explores one of Kentucky's most pressing educational challenges: chronic absenteeism. Through research, data, and real-world examples, the series examines how attendance has changed since the pandemic, the factors driving chronic absenteeism and the statewide efforts, partnerships and policy changes helping schools reconnect students and improve attendance outcomes.
- The first post, "Beyond a Definition—The True Scale of Kentucky's Attendance Crisis" by Leslie McKinney, researcher and strategic data analyst for the Kentucky Department of Education, examines how high levels of chronic absenteeism has evolved from a concern affecting a relatively small number of schools before the pandemic into a statewide challenge impacting nearly every community across the state.
- Read more of the blog series on the KDE Research Blog.



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