



THE CAMERON CATCH-UP PLAN

THE PROBLEM: ANDY BESHEAR'S SCHOOL SHUTDOWNS HAVE SET OUR KIDS BACK DECADES

National math and reading proficiency are at their lowest levels in decades with lower scores across the board than pre-pandemic levels. Last year, the decline in math scores was the largest in 50 years.¹ Between the 2019-2020 and 2022-2023 school years, the average math scores for 13-year-olds declined by nine points. The average reading scores for 13-year-olds declined by four points in the same period. U.S. History proficiency is at the lowest level in measured history.²

Kentucky parents and teachers are begging for a way to get our kids caught up.

THE SOLUTION: THE CAMERON CATCH-UP PLAN

The Cameron Catch-Up Plan creates the largest targeted investment in math and reading instruction in Kentucky history through a voluntary summer and after-school program for students who have experienced learning loss because of Andy Beshear's reckless school closures and draconian COVID-19 measures.

Parents will be able to opt-in to individual and small group tutoring which prioritizes students who have fallen below grade level and proficiency metrics in core subjects. Additionally, the plan addresses both short-term and long-term school needs to improve reading instruction, reinstitute classroom discipline, and ensure talented individuals enter and stay in the teaching field.

UNDER ANDY BESHEAR, TEST SCORES HAVE FALLEN EVERY SINGLE YEAR

According to Kentucky Department of Education data for the 2021-2022 school year, approximately 45% of students scored proficient or above in reading and only 40% scored proficient or above in math. Only 29% of elementary school students scored proficient or above in science, which was still a higher percentage than middle or high school students.³ Reading proficiency scores declined by approximately eight percentage points from their pre-COVID levels. Measurements in the 2022 nationally administered NAEP test (the most trusted and highly regarded standardized metric) show even more serious problems in Kentucky, finding

¹ Schwartz, Sarah. "Students' Math and Reading Plummet, Erasing Years of Gains, National Assessment Finds." *Education Week*, 6 Sept. 2022

² Doherty, Erin. "U.S. History Scores Hit All-Time Low among 8th Graders - Axios." *Axios*, 3 May 2023, www.axios.com/2023/05/03/history-civic-test-results-covid-schools.

³ Kentucky Test Scores Reveal Struggles for Many Students Caused by Pandemic." *Whas11.Com*, 19 Oct. 2022, www.whas11.com/article/news/education/kentucky-test-scores-struggles-pandemic-many-students/417-b1ea8d5d-4234-4ad5-8d40-7138b0170022.

lower proficiency rates than reported by the Commonwealth's standards. Between 2019 and 2022, NAEP scores went down in every single category for 4th and 8th grade students (the two measured groups).⁴

Perhaps even more alarming, thousands of school age students have never returned to school or are chronically absent. Between 2019 and 2022, the percentage of chronically absent students has increased from 18 percent to 28 percent.⁵

Nationwide, COVID-19 lockdowns and school closures played a major role in the learning loss trend that the United States is experiencing. From worsening mental health to students who left school in 2020 only to never return, the long-term detrimental impact of school closure policies will take decades to fully measure. Few states suffered longer or more severe school shutdowns than Kentucky under Andy Beshear, who forced the closure of Kentucky schools at the outset of the pandemic and again in the second half of 2020, even after considerable data showed that the risks to learning outcomes outweighed the risk over COVID-19 for school aged children. When Beshear allowed schools to reopen, he enforced draconian and unproven policies that further undermined the learning and social environment inside schools.

THE CAMERON CATCH-UP PLAN WILL GET OUR KIDS CAUGHT UP

Daniel Cameron is proposing a robust plan aimed at mitigating the learning loss caused by Andy Beshear's lockdowns. The three-part plan will provide additional individualized and small group instruction for students who have fallen behind, improve the day-to-day environment for students and teachers alike, and get more resources into the classroom, to increase teacher pay, and make sure money is contributing to academic outcomes.

While drawing inspiration from programs implemented in Arizona and Tennessee, where aggressive learning loss efforts have resulted in improved test scores and increased resources for teachers in the classroom, The Cameron Catch-Up Plan is the most robust and innovative plan that has been proposed anywhere in the United States to address learning loss.

AFTER-SCHOOL AND SUMMER INSTRUCTION PROGRAM

- Develop an optional 16-week tutoring program for math and reading instruction giving first priority to students who have fallen behind grade level.
- Pay current teachers a healthy stipend to participate in summer and after school tutoring.
- Partner with state universities to recruit qualified students to tutor in the program.
- Recruit professionals and other willing adults with the time and capacity to participate as tutors in the program.

⁴ "NAEP State Profiles." The Nation's Report Card

⁵ Dee, Thomas S. "Higher Chronic Absenteeism Threatens Academic Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic." OSF, Aug. 2023, osf.io/bfg3p/.

Peer reviewed research has found that tutoring programs can be highly effective to assist students who have fallen behind as long as the programs are in individual or small group formats and for an extended period of time, with quality instruction, and limited absenteeism.⁶⁷⁸ Summer is the optimal time for individual and small group instruction to take place but does not provide enough weeks to see lasting results. The Cameron Catch-Up Plan will allow parents to opt-in to a combination after school and summertime program that provides up to 16 weeks of additional math and reading instruction. Peer reviewed research has also shown that these programs can be effective when led by either teachers or by qualified volunteers. In his first budget, Daniel Cameron will ask the General Assembly to set aside funds to provide bonuses for teachers who volunteer to serve as after-school and summertime tutors. The Cameron Administration will partner with state universities to allow students in all disciplines, but with priority for education majors, to serve as tutors and provide stipends for those that do.

IMPROVING STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

- Reintroduce Disciplinary Suspension Practices.
- Support the Science of Reading/Phonics Based Instruction.
- Ensure Districts Comply with State Laws Requiring School Resource Officers.
- Add a Reading Interventionist to every school district to assess district data and assist school administrators and teachers in implementing reading intervention programs.
- Focus on getting Chronically Absent Students Back in School.

After-school and summer school programs won't be enough to fix the learning loss problem. The day-to-day practices of instruction and the learning environment must both improve to address the new and profound needs caused by COVID-19 school closures.

Teachers report that the single largest classroom challenge to the post-COVID learning environment is classroom discipline. At the same time, many students struggled to reacclimate to the in-person learning environment. Several tools for removing disorderly students had been taken away. During the 2023 Kentucky General Assembly, lawmakers began the process of reversing unintended consequences of past legislation and the Cameron Administration will lead in supporting and implementing those changes.

Under Daniel Cameron, the Department of Education will develop best practices for addressing behavioral issues and provide guidance for districts that remove distractions while preserving opportunities for students to receive instruction.

⁶ Steiner, Robert Slavin, David, et al. "Tutoring as an Effective Strategy in Our Troubled Times." The Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 8 Nov. 2023, fordhaminstitute.org/national/commentary/tutoring-effective-strategy-our-troubled-times.

⁷ Pellegrini, Martha, et al. "Effective Programs in Elementary Mathematics: A Meta-Analysis." Sage Journals, 13 Jan. 2021, journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2332858420986211.

⁸ Effective Programs for Struggling Readers: A Best-Evidence Synthesis, www.researchgate.net/publication/222069702_Effective_programs_for_struggling_readers_A_best-evidence_synthesis..

This must be coupled with a proven approach to reading instruction. Quality reading instruction must reflect the science of reading, rather than unproven and experimental theories. For several years, reading instruction in the United States and Kentucky have abandoned time-tested phonics learning methods. The Kentucky General Assembly has once again been a leader, recently ending a longstanding relationship with programs which did not reflect the science of reading and did harm to Kentucky reading proficiency. This was the right move, and the Cameron Administration will work to develop and support quality phonics-based reading instruction that provides students with the necessary foundation to learn.

School Resource Officers (SROs) are important components of improving behavioral outcomes in schools. The Jefferson County Public School (JCPS) board has actively worked against SROs since 2019 when LMPD officers were removed from JCPS schools. The JCPS board ended contracts with other law enforcement officials in 2020 and established a plan to develop a non-armed SRO unit managed by the board. State lawmakers passed legislation which required SROs to carry firearms as a response. JCPS has continued to delay an SRO plan that would comply with additional state laws, increasing discipline challenges for schools throughout the system. At the same time, other districts have worked in good faith to comply with state law but have struggled with the necessary resources to do so. Working alongside the General Assembly, the Cameron Administration will look for ways to assist these districts.

The sudden increase in chronic absenteeism is one of the most alarming statistics that Kentucky faces. Even with the rise of additional opportunities for instruction such as virtual learning, thousands of students (nearly 30 percent of the total K-12 population in Kentucky) are chronically truant or have failed to return to school altogether. Under the Cameron Administration, the Kentucky Department of Education will work with local districts to track down these young people and develop the tools necessary to get them back in the classroom.

GETTING MORE RESOURCES INTO CLASSROOMS

- Reduce Administrative Bloat to Ensure More Money Goes to Teachers and Classroom Instruction.
- Reduce Red Tape and Bureaucratic Headaches for Teachers.
- Recruit New and Retain Current Teachers
 - Increase the base starting rate for new teachers to \$41,500.
 - Introduce Stipend for Student Teaching.
 - Discretionary Fund for Superintendents to Pay Experienced Teachers.
 - Recruit Former Teachers Back to Profession and Add New Mid-Career Professionals into the Mix.

The average starting salary for teachers in Kentucky is 44th in the United States and is below the starting salary for teachers in Tennessee, Indiana, and Ohio, our direct competitors.⁹ While salary is only one factor among many that impacts teacher quality, it is a major determinant.

⁹ "Educator Pay Data." NEA, www.nea.org/resource-library/educator-pay-and-student-spending-how-does-your-state-rank.

Under this plan, no one will be paid less, and the pay scale across the board will be able to increase, allowing every teacher to increase their salary. Nationally, since February 2020 more than 300,000 teachers and school staff have left the field nationwide and fewer and fewer students are choosing to go into the field.¹⁰ Kentucky will not be bested by our neighbors in recruiting and retaining talented teachers, in every corner of the commonwealth.

Since the primary, Daniel Cameron has stated that he supports teacher pay increases, and this is an important and needed step. It will be coupled with improved efficiency. Kentucky's K-12 spending remains among the worst in the nation for its return on investment (ranking 41st according to the Heritage Foundation¹¹), and this is far from the fault of our teachers. Reducing administrative bloat will allow more money to go to teacher salaries and classroom instruction. This must be coupled with reducing the bureaucratic load that overly burdens our teachers and takes them away from doing what they love – working with our kids. A guiding light for the Cameron Administration will be to recruit talented people into the classroom, make sure they are well compensated throughout their career, and make sure they have the tools they need to help students learn once they get there.

¹⁰ Dill, Kathryn. "School's Out for Summer and Many Teachers Are Calling It Quits." The Wall Street Journal, 20 June 2022, www.wsj.com/articles/schools-out-for-summer-and-many-teachers-are-calling-it-quits-11655732689.

¹¹ "Education Freedom Report Card: Kentucky: The Heritage Foundation." Education Freedom Report Card , www.heritage.org/educationreportcard/pages/states/ky.html.