

...news release...

# KENTUCKY

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**NOTE:** *An electronic version of this press release is available at the Center's web site:*  
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## Reducing Obstacles Will Yield Even Higher Academic Returns to Educational Investments

FRANKFORT, KY (April 22, 2008) — What kind of return does Kentucky get on its investments in elementary and secondary education? Among the best in the nation given Kentucky's poverty and undereducation, according to a new report from the Kentucky Long-Term Policy Research Center.

Center researchers calculated how much academic achievement each state gets, as measured by 4th and 8th grade reading and math performance on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), for every \$1,000 spent per pupil. Kentucky gets about 3.6 NAEP proficiency points for every \$1,000 spent per pupil, ranking 25th nationally. Utah leads the nation at 6.1 points and New Mexico is last at 2.3.

However, the researchers caution that it is difficult to compare states this way since some states face problems that other states might not face. In other words, the educational "playing field" is not level from state to state. Some states have more poverty, less educated parents, less native English speakers, less healthy students, or a larger rural population, any one of which can make it more difficult and more expensive to educate a student.

As a way to get around this problem, the researchers combine eight factors into a single Index of Obstacles to Cost-Effective Educational Spending, and use this Index to statistically "level the playing field" between the states. With a high percentage of students receiving free or reduced priced lunches, low percentage of parents with higher levels of education, high proportion of rural students, and a student population that is generally unhealthy, Kentucky faces many obstacles to cost-effective educational spending, resulting in the 4th highest rank on the Index of Obstacles.

After taking into account the effect of these obstacles, the researchers found that Kentucky ranked as high as 8th on their measure of cost-effective educational spending.

According to the study author, Michael Childress, “these results show that states with fewer obstacles generally get much more educational bang for the taxpayer buck. If we want even higher returns from future educational spending, then it will be vital for Kentucky to focus on the achievement of less-advantaged students, improve the health of all children, and continue to encourage more of our adults to pursue postsecondary education.”

A copy of the study, *Reducing Obstacles Will Yield Even Higher Academic Returns to Educational Investments*, is available on the Center’s Web site at [www.kltprc.net](http://www.kltprc.net). The Kentucky Long-Term Policy Research Center is a state agency dedicated to research into trends and issues that are likely to influence the future of the state. Created by the General Assembly in 1992, the Center is governed by a 21-member board and has a mandate to increase knowledge about issues on Kentucky’s horizon, guide planning efforts throughout state government, and engage citizens and policymakers in preparing for the future.

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