



Northern Kentucky

Drawing Pictures of Youth with Data

New tools help schools and businesses boost the odds for young people to succeed.



For a young person on the exciting but risk-strewn path to adulthood, the odds of success can be altered by many things: a mentor, a life skills class, an apprenticeship, a chance to dip a toe in college courses ... even being in a safe school where every adult cares enough to greet you by name.

A growing number of youth in Northern Kentucky are getting all of that and more.

That's because educators, business leaders and service providers are using powerful new data tools to get a more complete picture than ever of the region's youth – and to craft services and supports that better meet their needs. The goal: Help all young people succeed in school and be ready for college, career and life.

“We're using data to develop targeted strategies for improving outcomes for our youth,” says Polly Lusk Page, executive director of the Northern Kentucky Education Council (NKYEC). “Public and private organizations are aligning their efforts so they can fill gaps, measure progress and make adjustments based on data-driven decisions.”

A New Commitment to Get All Youth Ready

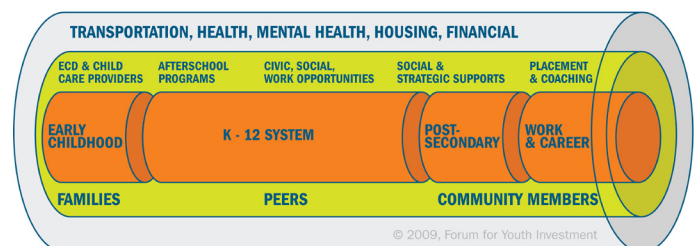
This fundamental shift in how the region works with its young people began four years ago, when the education council expanded its mission beyond

traditional classroom concerns. Its new focus: serve as a catalyst for improvement of all educational services, from birth to career, through more effective collaboration among the myriad organizations that work with young people.

To do that, the NKYEC helped Northern Kentucky win one of six coveted slots in the Ready by 21 Southeast Cities Challenge. Ready by 21® is a set of collective impact strategies that guide communities to determine the impediments to getting all young people “ready for college, work and life,” craft solutions, implement change and measure results.

Page says the tools and technical assistance gave the council the support it needed to expand its focus “beyond the academic day” and follow Ready by 21's Insulated Pipeline approach: wrapping coordinated, high-quality family and community supports around the traditional education pipeline.

The Ready by 21 Insulated Education Pipeline



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Leshia Lyman



Shelli Wilson

Two major moves in the council's overhaul: 1. Recruiting members from other fields, such as social services, juvenile justice and out-of-school time, and 2. Creating six action teams, each focused on a goal (such as College and Career Readiness), to develop strategies and work with partners – from schools and businesses to nonprofits and government agencies – to carry them out.

Because of the council, “All the teams understand what they need to be doing,” says Leshia Lyman, co-chair of the team on Reducing Barriers to Student Learning. “There’s more focus.”

That focus is producing important changes for:

- **Boosting School Connections, Career Dreams**
- **Building College and Career Readiness**
- **Boosting Attendance through Literacy**
- **Building Powerful Data Tools**

Boosting School Connections, Career Dreams

Scores of schools are getting new data about their students beyond academics, and are using that data to overcome barriers to student success.

Through Gallup's partnership with Ready by 21, more than 80 Northern Kentucky schools over the past three years have administered an enhanced version of the Gallup Student Poll, which measures hope, engagement and well-being. The Forum chose Northern Kentucky as the pilot for a new version of the poll that connects the results to individual student identifiers. This past fall alone, more than 20,000 Northern Kentucky students completed the poll.

School leaders value the information provided through this poll because they know that some young people struggle with challenges that slip under the school radar – like health problems, personal conflicts and feelings of isolation. “We did not have a good measure that was valid and reliable to identify students that may be in need of extra assistance, not just academic,” says Connie Pohlgeers, director of school improvement for Campbell County Public Schools.

Schools get an analysis of the Gallup data, which they combine with academic and other data to identify the need for individual student interventions and school-wide initiatives.

“We find that there are some needs that we had no idea the student was struggling with,” says Associate Superintendent Shelli Wilson of Campbell County. “From that, we can start putting various measures in place.”

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Among those measures:

- Officials in the Erlanger-Elsmere Independent School District were concerned by how many middle schoolers felt disconnected from school. The district worked with local nonprofits to create new afterschool programming for middle school students and to expand a leadership development program to include middle schoolers for the first time.
- The district also saw that many of its high school students did not feel confident that they would graduate or find a good job after graduation. So the district created more high school afterschool opportunities that focus on college and career exploration.
- Campbell County Schools combine the Gallup results with other data (such as grades, attendance and demographics) to identify students who might need extra support to stay on track. Students can be matched with a mentor and enrolled in a life skills course that teaches problem-solving, conflict resolution and self-regulation.
- As part of a larger effort to strengthen youth connections to school and to caring adults, Campbell County Schools trained all staff – from

administrators to cafeteria workers – to recognize each student and greet them by name. Associate Superintendent Wilson says her staff took note of student responses to poll questions about having caring adults in their lives, then talked about “the importance of knowing a child’s name, looking them in the eye and saying ‘How are you doing?’ Sometimes what seems to be easy strategies, we overlook.”

Building College and Career Readiness

The College and Career Readiness team used Ready by 21 strategies to refocus its mission. Its members



Karen Cheser

“weren’t on the same page about what college and career readiness meant,” says action team co-chair Karen Cheser, deputy superintendent of Boone County Public Schools.

The team determined that “we didn’t mean college entrance test readiness. We

wanted people to be ready for a career, to be excited about a career, to compete in the global economy, to be confident in the digital world.”

To meet that goal, the team:

- Created one-day “EdCamps” to help teachers learn about instilling 21st century skills in young people. “If we’re going to get more kids ready for college, career and life, we really have to help the teachers get ready” to guide them, Cheser says. Topics include new tools for teaching math; creativity exercises; using Google Docs and Twitter; and strategies for administrators to increase productivity.
- Coordinated an effort to get more high school students taking and succeeding in college courses. The effort includes a dual credit Web hub that serves as a one-stop shop featuring the colleges that offer dual credit classes, covering everything from courses and requirements to cost and registration.
- Launched an asset mapping project to get a better handle on the workforce and career readiness resources throughout the region, especially in science, technology, engineering and math. “We need know what’s out there and who’s



Students in Campbell County are aiming for the sky.

working on what,” such as internships and job shadowing opportunities, Cheser says.

Boosting Attendance through Literacy

Students miss school for lots of reasons. The Reducing Barriers to Student Learning action team is helping schools take a closer look at those reasons and explore new solutions.

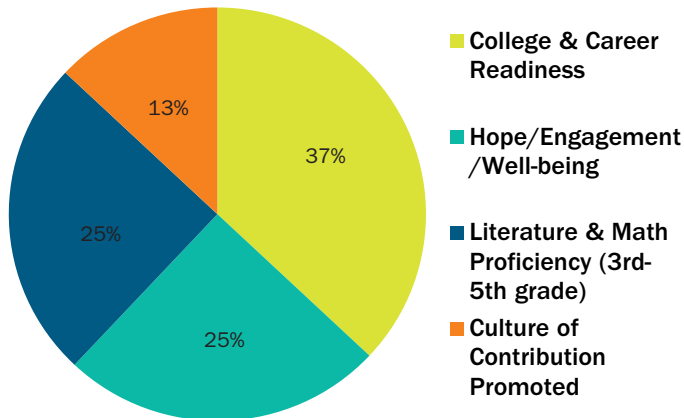
The team guides schools in using multiple sets of data to pinpoint chronically absent students, explore the reasons and develop individual plans to overcome the barriers. “When you go deeper to find that a core group of students are chronically absent, that’s a different way to look at the data in terms of really boosting attendance rates,” says Lyman, the team co-chair. “In some cases, you could be talking about only 15 or 20 kids. That’s much more tangible and easier to get your arms around.”

For example, Lyman notes: “When you start looking at why students are not reading on grade level and you match those students with their attendance, you begin to see connections in the data.”

Last fall the education council helped to launch the Read On! Campaign for Early Grade-Level Reading in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky. The campaign, with more than 70 partners, aims to spread evidence-based best practices in literacy, build community awareness and advance public policies to help the cause.

Building Powerful Data Tools

Two ambitious efforts are underway to help organizations see data like never before so that they

Goal

A look at how businesses volunteered their time.

can assess the impact of their efforts and fine-tune those efforts to meet actual youth needs.

- Northern Kentucky is the pilot site for the Ready by 21 Three-Gear Platform – a Web-based system that brings together fragmented data from across systems to create a visual dashboard. The platform will help leaders make more fully informed decisions by combining multiple data sources and types, including outcome data on children and youth; information about supports related to families, community and schools; and actions taken by leaders.

These data will be used to help guide the work of the NKYEC's action teams, serving as a tool for assessment and continuous improvement. The platform, now under construction, is a partnership between the Forum for Youth Investment and SAS, the world leader in business analytics software and services.

- A new data collection tool developed by the Forum has given Northern Kentucky its first glimpse of the total value of business contributions to local schools. The Business Engagement Team wanted a way to help businesses track those contributions – such as making employees available during work hours to tutor students, raising funds to rebuild playgrounds and providing internships to promote career readiness – so they could quantify their work and assess its impact.

The Forum built an online survey that businesses complete on a regular basis to track their work. The survey generates individual and aggregate reports looking not only at total numbers, but at the ratios of resources devoted to specific goals (such as college and career readiness) and age groups. The education council is building on this tool to create a survey to help assess where these efforts appear to be having an impact and where adjustments should be made.

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For more information, visit www.readyby21.org

The Forum for Youth Investment is a nonprofit, nonpartisan action tank dedicated to helping communities and the nation make sure all young people are ready by 21 – ready for college, work and life. Ready by 21 was created by the Forum based on more than a decade of work with state and local leaders interested in broad scale change. Ready by 21 is a registered trademark of the Forum for Youth Investment. www.forumfyi.org.

The Northern Kentucky Education Council (NKYEC) serves as the overarching organization for the alignment of education initiatives that support our population from birth to career. The Council serves as a catalyst for collaboration, change, and progress toward regional educational goals. www.nkyec.org.