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# OPINION

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“Work is the rent you pay for the room you occupy on earth.”



Queen Elizabeth II  
1926 - 2022

## New NAEP results show the negative impacts of the Pandemic

This week’s release of results from a special administration of the Long Term Trend version of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) provides the first looks since COVID hit schools of a valid random sample of students’ reading and math performance from all across the nation.

Unlike standard Long Term Trend NAEP administrations, which normally include testing of students in three separate groups, Age 9, 13 and 17, this special administration only looked at results for Age 9 students, who nominally are mostly in the fourth grade.

McGrath’s comments certainly aren’t encouraging.

The “take” by others has also been one of discouragement.

Former Governor Jeb Bush, who has a long history with public education, said:

“Today’s NAEP results are deeply discouraging. In just two years, two decades worth of gains in literacy and mathematics have been wiped away. And, sadly, losses are greatest for our lowest performing students who now face monumental challenges to recover lost learning.”

Opined Patricia Levesque, CEO of the Foundation for Excellence in Education and Executive Director of ExcelinEd in Action, a national advocacy organization:

“School closures, forced remote learning and pandemic-related disruptions have had serious consequences on our nation’s students. Today’s NAEP results are heartbreaking. Policymakers must act quickly to enact comprehensive, student-centered policies to transform education.

We encourage policymakers to continue to hold schools accountable, expand options for families, embrace innovative solutions and immediately leverage evidence-based Science of Reading policies to close learning gaps and create better long-term outcomes for students.”

According to Education Week, Peggy G. Carr, the commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics, which administers the NAEP, called the score drops “sobering.”

Education Week also asks the following question and then provides an answer:

“Is an average loss of less than 10 points in each case really that big of a deal on a scale of hundreds?”

Researchers, both at NCES and outside of the agency, emphatically say yes.”

EdWeek additionally points out that:

“Sean Reardon, a professor at Stanford University, said that a 13-point decline—the amount that Black students lost in math—can be thought of as about equivalent to a year of schooling.

“That doesn’t mean that kids forgot a year’s worth of things, because these are different kids,” he said. Instead, it means that 9-year-old Black students in 2022 are about a year behind where 9-year-old Black students were in 2020.”

Using Reardon’s rule of thumb, overall students across the country now lag about a half a year behind in reading and more than half a year behind in math.

Even local Louisville area reporter Lindsay Allen from WDRB.com summarized the results this way:

“New data released by the National Assessment of Education Progress, also know (sic) as the nation’s report card, shows that the results may be even worse than predicted.

In the first national sample of students comparing achievement from before the pandemic to now, 9 years old across the country showed major declines between 2020 and early 2022.”

## Best practices for a better Kentucky: More work, less welfare

By Jim Waters



The great irony arising out of Covid’s lingering effect is that businesses struggle to fill positions while many able-bodied adults sit it out, unwilling to forego their government benefits by returning to the workforce.

It’s a dilemma Kentucky must solve to take full advantage of the opportunities like the thousands of jobs being created by new electric vehicle battery plants being built in Hardin and Warren counties.

Currently, around 180,000 open positions exist in Kentucky; so, how much sense does it make to continue policies which disincentivize employment?

The Foundation for Government Accountability (FGA) reports Kentucky’s Medicaid program has “exploded in recent years” – increasing by over 150%.

Meanwhile, the labor force participation rate has dropped by 11%; nearly half of all adults in the

commonwealth are now “sitting on the sidelines.”

This isn’t what then-Gov. Steve Beshear predicted in 2013 while announcing his unilateral decision to take advantage of the federal Affordable Care Act allowing states to expand Medicaid eligibility to include individuals who could work but don’t.

“By expanding Medicaid, Kentucky will come out ahead in terms of both health outcomes and finances,” Beshear promised.

Yet there’s little indication that the expansion positively impacted either.

The latest America’s Health Rankings rated Kentucky 44th in overall health while over 600,000 able-bodied adults have enrolled in the Medicaid expansion—more than triple the number Beshear’s administration predicted.

Beshear’s son, current Gov. Andy Beshear, lashed out during the 2019 gubernatorial campaign at incumbent Gov. Matt Bevin’s proposal to require some able-bodied Medicaid recipients to get a job, enroll in school or volunteer to keep their benefits.

The younger Beshear warned that Bevin’s plan would have resulted in thousands of people losing Medicaid coverage.

Which is absolutely as it should be.

Able-bodied adults who get a job will – and should – come off Medicaid as they gain access to employer-provided health insurance or purchase their own low-to-no cost plan on the state’s exchange.

The elder Beshear’s decision to expand Medicaid not only did nothing to incentivize individuals to transition off the public dole and into private coverage, but it’s also a roadblock.

After Kentucky expanded Medicaid eligibility, the federal government made a type of private health coverage available on the exchange known as “silver plans,” which are free or low-cost for working people who need a bridge between Medicaid and employer-provided insurance.

However, because Kentucky had chosen to expand eligibility for the government-run program, anyone who’s on – or eligible for – Medicaid was banned from accessing these private plans.

Despite what opponents of reform claim, there’s no evidence that allowing people to get a job or earn more will cause them to lose access to health care or coverage.

Kentucky offers transitional Medicaid assistance for at least six – and up to 12 – months to families who might otherwise lose their eligibility because of an increase in income.

In fact, since the pandemic’s beginning in early 2020, due to federal law, not a single American has been kicked off Medicaid because of their income.

“What have the results been?” FGA’s Sam Adolphsen asked while testifying at the first meeting of the Kentucky General Assembly’s newly formed Benefits Cliff Task Force in July. “Are people rushing to work like never before, like ‘now I won’t lose my benefits so I can go get that extra job’? Has it solved that problem?”

“It hasn’t, of course,” Adolphsen added. “We have more people than ever sitting on the sidelines not working, despite over two-and-a-half years of not being able to take someone off Medicaid because of their income. So, the solution isn’t more welfare; it’s more work.”

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