

**March 29, 2019**

**Friday, March 29, 2019**

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## **Building Groundswell of Support for Education by Engaging Parents, Communities Focus of New Campaign**

CARROLLTON, Ky. – A statewide campaign to engage families and communities in effective and sustainable efforts to improve schools and student achievement was launched Friday (March 29, 2019) by the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence.

The Groundswell Initiative for engagement in public education will give families and communities the knowledge and training they need to become academic advocates for the benefit of all students and the schools they attend. It also will provide technical assistance and training to schools and community-based organizations in effective family engagement policies, programs, resources and activities.

The initiative is supported with a five-year \$5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The Prichard Committee has engaged key geographic partners to deliver direct services and resources with a special focus on traditionally underserved families in rural, urban and suburban communities:

- Children, Inc., Covington, a nonprofit provider of child care, family support and school age services in Northern Kentucky.
- The National Center for Families Learning (NCFL), Louisville, which works to eradicate poverty through education solutions for families.
- Partners for Education at Berea College, which focuses on ensuring the success of all Appalachian students.

“This is a movement for better education, not just a grant project,” said Brigitte Blom Ramsey, executive director of the Prichard Committee.

The overarching goal of the initiative is to build support for better academic outcomes through family and community engagement. Research shows that such engagement leads to improved school and student outcomes and helps meet the needs of all students, especially those in poverty or who historically have been underserved, Ramsey added.

The Groundswell Initiative will:

- build families' and communities' capacity to support student learning
- remove barriers to family engagement in school improvement efforts
- build families' capacity to increase early learning success
- help families understand the importance of choosing the right areas of study for students' academic and career advancement
- increase opportunities for parents to lead at the school, local, regional and state levels, including in the development of local and state policies that support family engagement.

"This project will provide parents access to opportunities and resources that are essential to school and career success. And, it will empower parents to undo the stereotype that Appalachian families don't support their children's success," said Dreama Gentry, executive director of Partners for Education.

Ramsey noted that the Prichard Committee's initial work more than three decades ago focused on engaging citizens to support better schools.

"Success means galvanizing Kentuckians to take action, going back to our roots of mobilizing citizens. They, in turn, create a groundswell demand for better education for each and every student – ultimately leading to the success of our entire state," she said.

Families statewide will receive parent leadership training through the committee's long-standing Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership. In addition, the committee and partner organizations will identify, develop and disseminate resources for families and educators that support family engagement in student learning and policy decision-making.

"Family engagement is key to a student's success," said Sharon Darling, NCFL president and founder. "These high-impact programs will lead to incredible changes for families, their schools and communities in Kentucky. When families are engaged and empowered in their children's education, we see both parents and children better able to meet their potential and consequently closing the achievement gap."

"Family-school engagement is the secret ingredient that builds sustained parent investment in their children's education," said Tom Lottman, Senior Director of the Innovation Lab at Children, Inc. "We are pleased to join our partners in this effort to help Kentucky school systems lead the nation in family engagement."

The Groundswell Initiative is a long-term commitment to engagement in public education, emphasizing the critical need to build a movement of families and communities for better schools and student outcomes.

“We know that engaged communities – with families at the center – are vital to improving student and school outcomes,” Ramsey said. “The Prichard Committee’s Groundswell Initiative was created to help build and sustain engagement support and resources for Kentuckians in this critical work. Hand-in-hand with partners across the state, we are working to inspire change, one community at a time.”

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**The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence** is an independent, nonpartisan, citizen-led organization working to improve education in Kentucky – early childhood through postsecondary.