

May 19, 2015

The following was sent to the KYAE listserv.



## **Important: Compulsory Attendance Law**

The article below from today's *Lexington Herald-Leader* discusses the impact of the new Compulsory Attendance Law [Senate Bill 97 (KRS 159.010)] on 16-and-17-year-old high school dropouts. (The article features Franklin County program director Dani Smith-Thorne.)

**Have you connected with your local school district's Director of Pupil Personnel (DPP) and students ages 16 and 17 you currently serve about the new law? Time is running out!**

To review the information distributed to the KYAE listserv on April 14, 2015, [click here](#).

## **Kentucky school districts are tracking down teen dropouts to tell them they must return to school**

BY VALARIE HONEYCUTT SPEAR

School districts across Kentucky are tracking down 16- and 17-year-old high school dropouts to tell them they are required to return to school this fall if they don't get a GED by June 30.

A new law that increases the dropout age from 16 to 18 puts the onus on Kentucky pupil personnel directors to notify dropouts younger than 18 that they must re-enroll, said Mike Ford, president of the Kentucky Directors of Pupil Personnel board.

Ford said most dropouts affected by the new law would get letters from district officials.

Fayette County sent letters to every student who withdrew this year, and officials also made the announcement about the new law on the district webpage.

District spokeswoman Lisa Deffendall said the court system also has been sending the message to dropouts whom court officials have encountered.

In June, 276 dropouts who are 16 or 17 will be notified by letter how to re-enroll in school, Deffendall said.

Each of the state's school districts received a \$10,000 grant from the Kentucky Department of Education to implement the law.

Ford, director of pupil personnel for Boone County schools, said he would reach out to students based on their last known addresses in the district's database.

"I believe that will be very consistent across the commonwealth," he said.

Ford said Diana Cromer, Fayette County director of pupil personnel, who is on the Kentucky Directors of Pupil Personnel board, was among those who met Friday about the new law.

"Our focus ... was to have a discussion with the Department of Education to make sure that everybody was on the same page as far as interpreting the law," Ford said.

He said the pupil personnel directors talked about action plans to reach out to students and follow up with them.

"This first summer is going to be a challenge," said Ford. He said pupil personnel directors would talk to principals about what programs could be offered.

"What are you going to do this summer to help students start catching up?" Ford said.

For most students, he said, if "they don't get back in school, then they are breaking the law."

In 2013, the Kentucky General Assembly approved Senate Bill 97, which allowed each school district to adopt a policy raising the dropout age from 16 to 18. As of January, all 173 public school districts in Kentucky had approved the policy.

Fayette County is working to develop programs so students who return will be successful, Deffendall said.

In Franklin County, Dani Smith-Thorne said she and other adult education staff members at Thorn Hill Education Center have helped many high school dropouts get GEDs through a high school equivalency program.

But Thorne said under the new law, Kentucky adult education programs cannot serve dropouts who are younger than 18.

The law takes effect in most school districts for the 2015-16 school year. It takes effect in 2016-17 for the Newport Independent school district.

Ashland Independent, Caldwell County, Hickman County, Laurel County, Letcher County and Rockcastle County make the transition in 2017-18.

Under the law, students cannot drop out before their 18th birthdays.

The state's dropout rate in 2013-14 was 2.3 percent of public high school students in grades 9-12, according to statistics on the Kentucky Department of Education website. Fayette County's dropout rate was 2.6 percent.

Kentucky Education Commissioner Terry Holliday said in February that the state was going to start tracking high school students who withdraw to attend home school to make sure they aren't just dropping out.

As of May 18, the number of students who withdrew from public schools to be home-schooled in 2014-15 was 5,129, said Nancy Rodriguez, a spokeswoman for the state education department.

Holliday said he had heard a complaint that some school officials, in an effort to keep dropout numbers low, were encouraging students to withdraw and say they were in home school when, in actuality, no home school existed.

To determine if the concerns are valid, he said, a new annual report will monitor the number of high school students who withdraw each year to attend home school.

Holliday said in an interview that he had no problem with parents who think home-schooling is appropriate for their children.

But he said in February that districts with an increase in numbers might need additional support with alternative programs, student support programs, and career and technical education.