



## **ENSURING EVERYONE HAS A SEAT AT THE TABLE**

**From: Lt. Governor Jacqueline Coleman, Kentucky**

Like you, I have intently watched the calls for justice all across our nation over the past six months. As I look into the crowds of people making their voices heard across Kentucky and our country, I notice often it is our young people leading the way.

As a teacher, I am proud that we have so many young people engaging in a peaceful process and demanding that we, their elected representatives, enact positive change in their communities. This study in engaged citizenship reminds me of a phrase common in management circles: “Not about me, without me.” I am a proponent of ensuring everyone has a seat at the table where decisions are made. This leadership axiom applies to our educational systems as much as it does our corporate offices. For too long, our school leaders have not mirrored the communities they serve nor have overlooked communities had equitable input into these systems.

Governor Andy Beshear and I are an “education first administration.” For me, this commitment is personal as I am a teacher, assistant principal and high school basketball coach. In our administration’s first move, Gov. Beshear and I made sweeping changes to the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) by appointing public school advocates and award-winning educators that represent every level from early childhood through higher education.

We placed a current teacher on the KBE (in an ex-officio role). This has never been done in our commonwealth’s history. So often we view job creation and economic development as separate from their true foundation: education. Every classroom in Kentucky is led by our most important job creators, our teachers. Now, the voices of our classroom educators, the people on our front lines who are cultivating Kentucky’s future, will take a prominent role in shaping public policy.

In addition, we became one of only 20 states to place a student on the KBE (also in an ex-officio role). Having a student member gives the KBE new insight into how its plans and policies impact our students by elevating students’ voices.

We also committed to being among the first states to implement training for all school employees to combat implicit bias and promote cultural competency in education. Bias must be confronted and replaced with empathy and understanding especially when it impedes a child’s education. I believe our public schools are the place that can make this happen in a meaningful and lasting way.

We are working to develop new strategies and programs to recruit more persons of color to be teachers in Kentucky. Working with our higher education system, especially Kentucky’s two Historical Black Colleges and Universities (Kentucky State University and Simmons College), our goal is to recruit a more diverse teaching workforce. For many students, the first leader they have outside of the home is their teacher. All Kentucky children deserve to see themselves reflected in their community leaders and

to be exposed to diversity throughout their education for the benefit of their future success.

For me, there is no higher calling than providing **all** Kentuckians with the opportunity of transformational change. All children deserve a world-class education and adequate job training so they can attain a meaningful career, support their families, break the cycle of poverty, and prosper. The steps we have taken in the past year, even while fighting a once in a century pandemic, have brought Team Kentucky closer to our goal of building a better Kentucky for everyone.

Jacqueline Coleman  
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