

Local school leaders learn from others

"Threats to an Independent Judiciary" will be the subject of the first in a series of Law and Justice Forums Tuesday, April 4, at Eastern Kentucky University.

The event, at 7 p.m. in Posey Auditorium of the Stratton Building, is free and open to the public. Upcoming forums on an annual or semi-annual basis are planned to improve the public's understanding of the role of the judiciary system in American government. They will explore such issues as: ways to improve citizen access to legal services and the courts; racial, gender and other inequities in the administration of justice; courtroom security and the growing need to protect judges, witnesses, jurors and others; increasing use of and access to alternative dispute resolution mechanisms; the role of law enforcement training; and the court system's treatment of juveniles and the mentally ill.

The April 4 Forum will feature Joseph E. Lambert, of Mt. Vernon, chief justice of the Kentucky Supreme Court, and three other presenters/panelists: Penny White, former justice of the Tennessee Supreme Court and professor at the University of Denver; Professor Bright of the Southern Center for Human Rights and Dr. Bankole Thompson, a professor at EKV's College of Justice and Safety (formerly College of Law Enforcement) and formerly a judge in West Africa.

The four will address such issues as the importance of judicial independence to fairness and justice, litmus tests for judicial appointments,

lawyer contributions to judicial campaigns, the impact of elections and other political influences on judicial independence, the growing threat of political interest group money to fair judicial elections and a foreign perspective on judicial independence. The Forum will include a question-and-answer session.

Dr. Jim McCord, director of EKV's paralegal program and chair of the planning committee for the event, said the Forum is "timely for several reasons. We have seen an increasing amount of evidence of attempts to influence the judiciary through campaign contributions, litmus tests prior to appointment or other threats to their impartiality. The American public is, essentially, unaware of this threat so the more we talk about it, the sooner, the better."

The College of Justice and Safety is sponsoring the Forum along with the College of Arts and Sciences and its programs in the Department of Government.

The program will be especially beneficial to students, according to McCord.

"This will give them an opportunity not only to hear from some leading authorities on the subject, but to meet and talk with them personally. Students, as voters, need to be better aware of the importance of our judicial system and those factors that impact upon its decision-making process."

Refreshments will be served at an open reception for the presenters at 6:15 p.m.

ics, has gone up significantly since 1982.

• The percentage of all students taking tougher math and science courses also has gone way up. For example, in 1982, 36 percent of high school graduates completed algebra II and 14 percent completed physics. In 1994, 58 percent completed algebra II and 24 percent completed physics.

• More students with disabilities are being educated in regular classrooms - 26 percent in 1986, compared to 45 percent in 1996.

• Achievement in mathematics and science is improving among whites, blacks and Hispanics for 9, 13 and 17-year-olds. For example, the average mathematics score for nine-year-olds on the National Assessment of Education Progress rose from 219 in 1982 to 231 in 1996.

• Average SAT scores in mathematics for college-bound seniors increased from 494 to 502 in 1989, to 511 in 1999. Scores on the verbal SAT increased during the same period, but not as much. During this time, the population of test takers has grown larger and more racially and ethnically diverse.

• The number of Advanced Placement exams taken by high school

students rose from 50 exams per 1,000 12th graders in 1984 to 131 in 1997. • U.S. students receive more instructional time than European students. For example, in 1994, U.S. primary schools provided an average of 958 teaching hours per year, compared with 923 in France and 760 in Germany.

• The school crime rate is declining. In 1993, there were 155 incidents of school-related crimes per 1,000 students ages 12 to 18. By 1997, there were 102 such incidents.

• Public school teachers are well educated. Virtually all (99.3 percent) have a bachelor's degree, 45 percent have a master's degree, and one percent hold a doctorate. Among private school teachers, 93.4 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher. Public school teacher have more experience (an average of 14.8 years) than private school teachers (12.2 years).

• More students are entering higher education. Especially noteworthy are the higher college rates among blacks and women. In 1993, 53 percent of high school graduates ages 16 to 24 were enrolled in college. In 1997, that rate increased to 67 percent.

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Lambert to speak at EKV Forum

February 11-13 was a routine weekend at home for most Kentuckians, but not for members and staff of the Rockcastle County Board of Education. They spent the weekend with colleagues from across the state learning how to strengthen Kentucky's public schools.

Terry Burton, Sherry Isaacs, Sam Stallworth, Martin Vannant, Larry Hammond, Richard Bray, Charles Napier and Kathy Allen were among the estimated 1200 school board members, superintendents, school administrators and others who took part in the 64th annual conference of the Kentucky School Boards Association (KSBA), February 11-13 in Louisville.

More than 40 conference sessions and specialty clinics revolved around the theme, *Sharing Leadership for Student Achievement*. Board members, who are required annually to receive approved continuing education in school board service, attended sessions that covered such topics as religious issues and public schools, financial management, using student test scores in long-range planning, student discipline, staff evaluations and school safety.

School board members also received updates on bills before the 2000 General Assembly and an overview of a new technology-based learning tool, the Kentucky Virtual High School.

Participants in the 2000 KSBA Annual Conference heard addresses from Speaker of the House of Representatives Jody Richards, Dr. Ed Ford, deputy secretary of Governor Paul Patton's Cabinet and Dr. Freeman Hrabowski III, the president of the University of Maryland-Baltimore County and a nationally recognized advocate on increasing student stud-

ies in the sciences.

There's plenty of good news about public education

While much has been written lately about the "failures" of education, too little has been reported about the successes. The dropout rate has declined, for example, test scores are up and more students are taking more rigorous courses.

To counter all the negative publicity about public schools, the Center on Education Policy and the American Youth Policy Forum issues a report outlining the improvement in public education since the early 1980s, when the nation began seriously focusing on school reform.

According to the report, *Do You Know the Good News About American Education?*

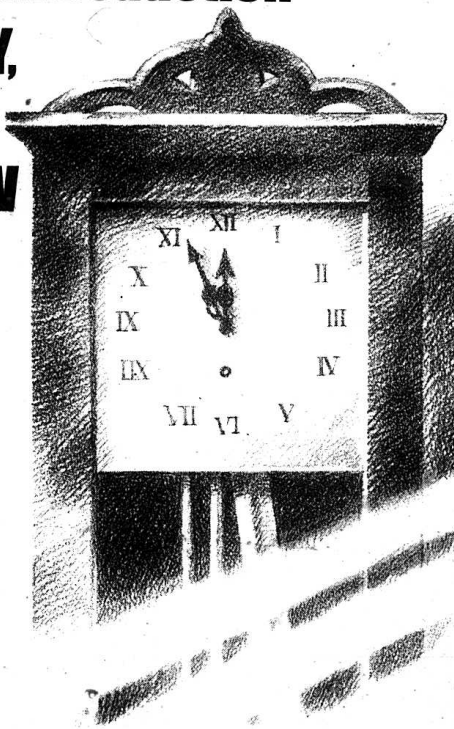
• Dropout rates are lower today than they were in the 1970s and 1980s. The percentage of 16 to 24-year-olds who were not enrolled in school or had not completed high school or a GED was 15 percent in 1972, 14 percent in 1983 and 11 percent in 1997. The decline in dropout rates is particularly noteworthy for African Americans: 21 percent in 1972, 18 percent in 1983 and 13 percent in 1997.

• High school students are taking more challenging courses. The percentage of students completing a core academic curriculum that includes four years of English and three years each of social studies, science and mathematics more than tripled between 1982 and 1994, with large increases among all racial and ethnic groups.

• The percentage of girls taking rigorous high school mathematics and science courses, such as algebra II, trigonometry, chemistry and phys-

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