

'Rally 4 Education Excellence' planned

By VICTORIA GRABNER

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Grab your friends, your family and even those you don't know so well — a rally is taking place March 21, and everyone has a stake in its goals.

“Sustained economic development efforts are paralleled virtually all the time with high-performing educational systems,” said Jon H. Sights, chairman of the Northwest Kentucky Forward Education Committee, at a gathering Tuesday at Henderson County High School. Registration for the Rally 4 Education Excellence event will take place from 8 to 8:45 a.m. at the Henderson Fine Arts Center. The program will be from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., and a free lunch will be provided.

Gov. Steve Beshear will be one of many on a panel that will discuss the need for change. Others on the panel will include Kati Haycock, president of the Education Trust; Dr. Jim Ramsey, president of the University of Louisville; Michelle Reynolds, the principal of Lincoln County McGuffey Sixth Grade Center; and Dr. Cheryl King, president of Kentucky Wesleyan.

Also participating will be David Adkisson, president and CEO of the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce; Jerome S. Bowles, founder and CEO of the Bowles Center for Diversity Outreach; Robert Sexton, founding executive director of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence; Joseph W. Craft, CEO of Alliance Resource Partners; and Gary Keller, school improvement consultant for the Southern Regional Education Board's High Schools That Work initiative.

The moderator will be Education and Workforce Development Cabinet Secretary Helen Mountjoy.

The goal, as Sights explained, is to create awareness about the need to change the community's culture toward one of academic success.

“If we are going to be successful and have a high-performing school system, we must have serious, serious commitment from the community,” he said.

The goal is “real, grass-roots community involvement,” that will be led by four advocacy groups in Henderson, Union, Webster and McLean counties.

These groups are in the process of being formed, though some people have already become involved, said Katie French, coordinator of the Regional Education Initiative of Northwest Kentucky Forward.

Public meetings will be held in Henderson and Union counties on March 31.

In Henderson, the advocacy group meeting will be held at 6 p.m. at the Henderson County Cooperative Extension Office. In Union County, the advocacy group meeting will be held at 7 p.m. at the Senior Citizens Center in Morganfield.

Webster and McLean counties have not yet set a time for their meetings, French said.

She added that the groups will be aided by someone who will help them better reach their communities. This person would have a role as a community organizer.

“That person has not been identified yet,” French said. “It’s just an idea that we have run by our steering committee. Everyone has agreed it would help to have training for our advocacy groups.”

Meanwhile, she said people are being asked to pre-register for the March 21 rally. More information on the rally can be found on the Web at www.rally4education.com, which will be launched later this week.

A link on the Web site will provide local residents with information on how to donate and become a sponsor of the rally, and how to pre-register.

“We all are bound by a common problem,” said Henderson County Schools Superintendent Tom Richey. “How do we educate our workforce to increase our quality of life?”

He said he has never been so encouraged and excited by Northwest Kentucky Forward’s attempts with the March 21 rally and its goals to continue the effort to foment change.