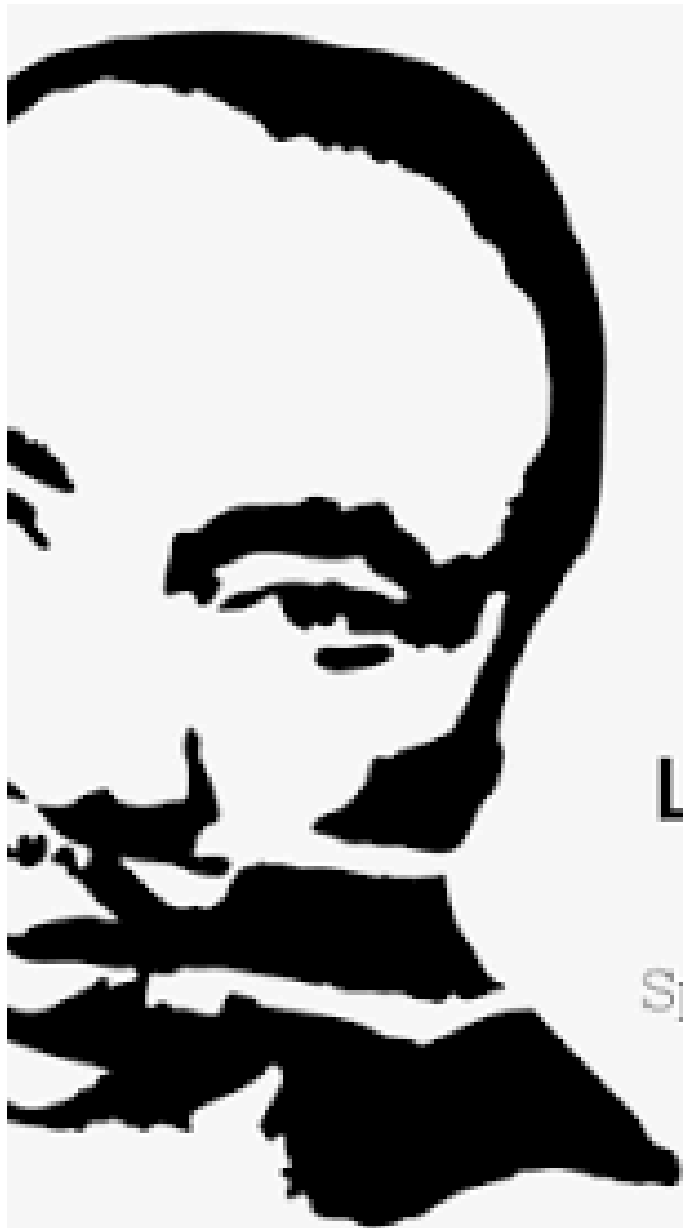




“What Is Your Life’s Blueprint?”

Martin Luther King Jr
Speech on October 26, 1967

The Fredrickia Hargrove Poster and Essay Contest

2026 – 27 JUDGES’ MANUAL

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PART I: WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

A MESSAGE TO OUR JUDGES: YOU ARE HELPING DRAFT A BLUEPRINT

Welcome, and thank you for dedicating your time and insight to the Fredrickia Hargrove Poster and Essay Contest. Your role as a judge is more than a task; it is a profound act of community service and a direct investment in the future of our youth.

This year's theme, "**Blueprint for Tomorrow: Constructing Your Character**," is drawn from a speech Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave to junior-high students in 1967 — students the very age of many of our contestants. He told them to plan their lives the way an architect plans a building: with a sound blueprint. When you read these entries thoughtfully and fairly, you become part of that construction — a validator of each student's voice and a builder of their confidence.

This contest is a proud initiative of the Paducah–McCracken County NAACP, an organization with a long and storied history of empowering communities and fighting for justice. A cornerstone of that legacy has always been the belief in the power of young people to shape a better future. You are now part of this legacy, helping to nurture the critical thinking, creativity, and civic-mindedness of students in our community.

THE ART OF JUDGING: A QUICK GUIDE

Evaluating student work can feel like a significant responsibility, especially if you are not a professional educator. This manual is designed to demystify the process and equip you with the tools and confidence to be an effective, fair, and insightful judge. The goal is not to find fault, but to recognize and reward the skills, ideas, and effort present in each entry.

WHAT IS A RUBRIC?

Throughout this manual, you will see references to a "rubric" or "scoresheet." A rubric is simply a scoring guide — a detailed checklist that breaks a complex project into smaller, more manageable components. Each component, or "criterion," focuses on a specific skill, such as *Creativity*, *Idea Development*, or *Clarity of Message*. Using a rubric ensures that every student's entry is evaluated by the same standards, leading to a fair and consistent process.

This year the contest uses **two official scoresheets**, both included with your judging packet:

- The **K–3 Poster Scoresheet** — eight criteria (Division 1 only).
- The **Essay Scoresheet** — eighteen components, used for Divisions 2 through 6.

THE 1–10 POINT SCALE EXPLAINED

Each criterion is scored on a 10-point scale, grouped into four performance levels. As you judge, decide which description best fits the work for that specific criterion:

- **Level 1 — Beginning / Ineffective (1 point):** The requirement is not met. The element may be missing, illogical, or so poorly executed that it fails its purpose.
- **Level 2 — Developing / Somewhat Effective (2–4 points):** A clear attempt that has not fully succeeded. The skill is present but underdeveloped, unclear, or contains noticeable errors.
- **Level 3 — Good / Moderately Effective (5–7 points):** Solid, successful work that meets expectations. Generally clear, organized, and effective, with only minor flaws.
- **Level 4 — Excellent / Excelling (8–10 points):** Work that goes above and beyond, showing skill, insight, creativity, or power. Compelling and memorable.

JUDGING PHILOSOPHY: THREE CORE PRINCIPLES

- 1. **Judge the Work, Not the Student.** Evaluate only the poster or essay in front of you. Avoid assumptions about the student’s intent, background, or potential.
- 2. **Reward What Is There.** Score the entry on the strengths it demonstrates, as outlined in the rubric — not on what you think the student should have done.
- 3. **Be Consistent.** Apply the criteria the same way to every entry. Consistency is the single most important key to fairness.

THIS YEAR’S TEXT: ONE SPEECH, SIX QUESTIONS

Every division works from the same source text: the full transcript of Dr. King’s “**What Is Your Life’s Blueprint?**” (Barratt Junior High School, Philadelphia, October 26, 1967). But each division is anchored in a **different passage** and asks a **different question**, so no two divisions produce the same essay. Knowing the passage behind each prompt will help you judge whether a student truly engaged the text.

Div.	Grade	Anchor passage	The question students answer
1	K–3	“Principle of Somebodiness”	What should Paducah look like if every child knows, “I am somebody”?
2	4–5	“Sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures”	What should our school teach students about work?
3	6	“Build, baby, build. Organize, baby, organize. Learn, baby, learn.”	Fixing something wrong: build, organize, or learn first?
4	7	“You need not be lured into purchasing cosmetics...”	How should young people build true character in a digital world?
5	8	“...in spite of your economic plight... stay in school.”	Character, opportunity, or belonging — what keeps students in school?
6	9–12	“This hadn’t always been true — but it will become increasingly true.”	How should Kentucky build a future-ready education blueprint?

A judging note that applies to Divisions 2, 3, and 5. Each of these prompts asks what should come **first**. Dr. King offered his principles and slogans without ranking them, so a student who concludes that “all of them matter equally” has summarized the speech rather than argued with it. Such an essay should not score in the *Excellent* range on the argument criteria (2, 3, and 4), however polished the writing. Reward the student who picks one, concedes the others matter, and explains why their choice makes the others possible.

A note on reading the whole speech. Every division is anchored in one passage, but the strongest essays reach across the speech. A Division 2 student who connects the street sweeper to the poem King reads aloud, or a Division 5 student who connects “stay in school” to the closing poem “Mother to Son,” has understood that these are the same idea in two forms. Reward that under *Idea Development* and *Citations*.

A note on local specificity. Speaking in Philadelphia, Dr. King reached for a Philadelphian — Marian Anderson — and told the students they should know her “because it’s in your own city.” A student who names a real Paducah or McCracken County figure and uses them as *evidence* is copying a move Dr. King made in this very speech. Reward it under *Historical/Cultural Context*.

PART II: DIVISION-BY-DIVISION JUDGING GUIDES

Chapter 1 — Division 1 (K–3 Poster)

1.1 Understanding the K–3 Prompt: “A City Where Every Child Matters”

Our youngest participants create a poster answering one question: **What should Paducah look like if every child knows, “I am somebody”?** The prompt asks them to imagine a city — a park, a school, a library, a neighborhood, the Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club — where children are cared for, included, safe, learning, playing, helping, or dreaming.

Key concept for judges — “Somebodiness.” This is Dr. King’s own word, and it is the heart of the prompt. In his speech, he told students to have “a deep belief in your own dignity, your own worth, and your own somebodiness,” and never to let anybody make them feel they are nobody. For a K–3 poster, interpret this through a child’s eyes. A kindergartener will not draw “human dignity.” Still, they might draw children of different backgrounds playing together, an adult helping a child, a welcoming place where no one is left out, or simply a child who looks proud and happy to belong.

Your task is not to look for a *definition* of somebodiness, but for a *picture* of it: friendship, sharing, helping, inclusion, safety, and joy for every child. A concrete local touch — a recognizable Paducah park, or a helper like Oscar Cross, who built a club so children would have somewhere to belong — shows especially strong engagement.

1.2 A Guide to Scoring K–3 Posters

Division 1 is scored on the eight-criterion **K–3 Poster Scoresheet**. Each criterion includes its analysis question and examples to help you distinguish low, mid, and high entries.

Table 1.1 — K–3 Scoring Criteria at a Glance

Criterion	Analysis Question	In Simple Terms
Use of Color	Does color convey emotion, create interest, and enhance the poster?	Are the colors thoughtful, and do they help tell the story?
Composition	How well are the elements arranged?	Is there a clear main idea, or is it messy?
Creativity	How original and creative is the poster?	Is the idea fresh, or common and predictable?
Application of the Theme	How well does the poster adhere to the theme?	Does it clearly show a city where every child matters?
Clarity of Message	How clear is the poster’s message?	Can you grasp the “big idea” at a glance?
Use of Space	How effectively is the space used?	Is it balanced, or too empty or too crowded?
Visual Appeal	Is the composition pleasing and balanced?	Is it attractive and interesting to look at?
Overall Impact	What is the poster’s overall impact on you?	Does it make you feel that every child matters?

Criterion 1 — Use of Color. *Look for intentional color that supports the message.* - **High (8-10):** A poster showing a welcoming park uses warm, sunny colors to convey belonging and joy; bright, varied colors on the children signal that *everyone* is included. Color carries meaning, not just decoration. - **Mid (5-7):** Neatly colored and pleasant — blue sky, green grass — but the colors don't add meaning to the idea of every child mattering. - **Low (1-4):** One or two colors, or scribbled coloring that makes the poster hard to read.

Criterion 2 — Composition. *Look for a clear focal point and balance.* - **High (8-10):** A central image — a child standing tall and proud, or a group playing together — anchors the poster, with supporting details arranged around it so everything points to the main idea. - **Mid (5-7):** Several ideas at the same size fill the space, but there is no single powerful focal point; it reads like a list. - **Low (1-4):** Drawings scattered randomly, with awkward space; hard to tell the main idea.

Criterion 3 — Creativity. *Look for a fresh, imaginative vision.* - **High (8-10):** An imaginative image of belonging — a “welcome wall” with every child's name, a buddy bench where no one sits alone, a place built so a child who uses a wheelchair plays right alongside everyone. - **Mid (5-7):** A pleasant, common image — children holding hands, a playground — well executed but predictable. - **Low (1-4):** A generic scene with no clear idea about children mattering.

Criterion 4 — Application of the Theme. *Look for a clear picture of “every child matters.”* - **High (8-10):** The poster excellently interprets somebodiness — for example, diverse children playing together with a hand-lettered caption like “Everybody belongs here.” A concrete place is tied to the feeling of being valued. - **Mid (5-7):** The poster shows a nice community scene; the connection to *every child mattering* is implied but not made explicit. - **Low (1-4):** The theme is unclear — a drawing of a pet or an unrelated scene, with no connection to children belonging.

Criterion 5 — Clarity of Message. *Can you grasp the idea instantly?* - **High (8-10):** The message is unmistakable — for instance, a lonely child on one side and the same child welcomed into a group on the other. The idea lands immediately. - **Mid (5-7):** Understandable but requires interpretation. - **Low (1-4):** Confusing or too abstract to read.

Criterion 6 — Use of Space. *Look for a balanced, intentional layout.* - **High (8-10):** The whole canvas is used deliberately — a central image with supporting details filling the space without crowding. - **Mid (5-7):** Most of the space is used, but the balance is slightly off (everything clustered low, an empty top). - **Low (1-4):** One small drawing in a large empty field, or everything crammed into a corner.

Criterion 7 — Visual Appeal. *Look for care and intentional design.* - **High (8-10):** Neat lines, vibrant complementary colors, a thoughtful design you want to keep looking at. - **Mid (5-7):** Pleasant and neat, but lacking a “wow” factor. - **Low (1-4):** Messy or smudged, hard to engage with.

Criterion 8 — Overall Impact. *Your holistic response.* - **High (8-10):** A creative idea, a clear message, and strong visuals combine into something memorable that makes you feel *every child should be seen this way*. - **Mid (5-7):** A solid entry that communicates its idea and leaves a favorable impression. - **Low (1-4):** Too confusing, generic, or rough to leave a lasting impression.

Chapter 2 — Division 2 (Grades 4–5 Opinion Essay)

2.1 Understanding the 4–5 Prompt: What Should a School Teach About Work?

Students write an opinion essay to their school’s **Site-Based Decision Making (SBDM) Council** and **The King Center**, arguing what their school should teach students about work and greatness. The prompt is anchored in the most famous passage of the speech, in which Dr. King says that a person called to be a street sweeper should “sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures.” He also urges students to be ready when “doors of opportunity” open, and he reads a poem ending “Be the best of whatever you are.” The three positions are:

- 1. **Aim for the top** — be ready when the doors open.
- 2. **Do any job well** — greatness is in *how* you work, not which job you hold.
- 3. **Be the best of whatever you are** — discover who you are and become the best version of that.

The prompt requires more than picking a favorite. Students must build a case for why their choice is what a school should teach *first*. A strong essay defends its choice and shows why it makes the others possible.

2.2 A Guide to Scoring the Opinion Essays

Division 2 uses the eighteen-component **Essay Scoresheet**. **Two important scoring rules for this division:**

- **Components 7 (Opposing Views) and 8 (Rebuttals) are marked N/A.** This is an *opinion* essay; the prompt does not ask 4th–5th graders to include or refute a counterclaim. Do not penalize students for omitting one. Score the remaining sixteen components. *(Confirm with the Contest Manager whether your office prefers “N/A” or a total computed out of sixteen, and apply it uniformly.)*
- **Component 18 (Citations) does apply.** This year the prompt asks even our youngest essayists to quote or paraphrase Dr. King’s speech. Score younger writers generously here: for Grades 4–5, a single accurate, attributed reference (“Dr. King said...”) earns the *Good* band; skillful, integrated use earns *Excellent*.

Table 2.1 — Grades 4–5 Scoring Criteria at a Glance

Category	Criteria
Content & Ideas	1. Introduction/Hook · 2. Opinion/Argument · 3. Thesis Relevance · 4. Thesis Points · 6. Idea Development · 13. Persuasive Strategies · 14. Historical/Cultural Context
Organization	5. Idea Transition · 9. Conclusion/Call to Action
Audience & Purpose	10. Purpose · 11. Audience · 12. Voice/Tone
Writing Quality	15. Grammar/Spelling · 16. Sentence Variety · 17. Vocabulary
Evidence	18. Citations
Not scored	7. Opposing Views · 8. Rebuttals (<i>N/A for this opinion essay</i>)

Criterion 1 — Introduction/Hook. - High (8–10): “My uncle drives a garbage truck, and he is the proudest man I know.” An engaging, on-topic opening. - **Mid (5–7):** “There are many ways to think about work.” Clear but flat. - **Low (1–4):** Opens directly on the thesis with no attempt to draw the reader in.

Criterion 2 — Opinion/Argument. - High (8–10): “Our school should teach us that *any* job can be great, because Dr. King said greatness is about *how* you work, not which job you get.” - **Mid (5–7):** The opinion is present but hedged — “Doing your best is good, and so is aiming high.” - **Low (1–4):** The reader cannot tell which of the three the student has chosen.

Criterion 4 — Thesis Points. - High (8–10): “Schools should teach ‘do any job well’ because it respects every family’s work, it takes the pressure off students who don’t want a famous job, and it matches what Dr. King actually said about the street sweeper.” Three distinct, logical reasons. - **Mid (5–7):** “Because it’s good to work hard, and working hard is important.” Repetitive rather than distinct. - **Low (1–4):** A claim with no supporting reasons.

Criterion 6 — Idea Development. - High (8–10): Doesn’t just assert, but illustrates: “Oscar Cross was ‘only’ a juvenile officer — not a famous job — but he did it so well that Paducah named a club after him. That is what Dr. King meant: the job was ordinary, the way he did it was great.” - **Mid (5–7):** Explains the idea generally without a specific example. - **Low (1–4):** Repeats the point without explanation.

Criterion 14 — Historical/Cultural Context. - High (8–10): Uses a real figure as evidence — Oscar Cross, Shirley Bunch, or Dr. Dennis Anderson — and ties them to the chosen position. - **Mid (5–7):** Mentions “some people work hard” without a specific example. - **Low (1–4):** No real-world connection.

Criterion 18 — Citations. - High (8–10): Quotes or paraphrases King accurately and names him: “Dr. King told students to ‘sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures.’” - **Mid (5–7):** References the speech loosely or without attribution. - **Low (1–4):** No use of the source text at all.

Apply this same approach to the remaining scored criteria (3, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17), always using examples specific to the debate over what a school should teach about work.

Chapter 3 — Division 3 (Grade 6 Argumentative Essay)

3.1 Understanding the Grade 6 Prompt: Build, Organize, or Learn

Students write an argumentative essay to the **McCracken County Public Library Board**, the **McCracken County Fiscal Court**, and **The King Center**. When young people want to fix something wrong in their community, which should come **first**? The three positions are Dr. King’s own slogans, offered near the end of the speech when he rejects “Burn, baby, burn” and replaces it with:

1. **Build, baby, build** — make the thing that is missing.
2. **Organize, baby, organize** — bring people together so change lasts.
3. **Learn, baby, learn** — gain the knowledge that makes real change possible.

Because all three are King’s, the essay is not about which is “right.” It is about which comes **first** and why starting there makes the others possible. Your task is to evaluate the strength and clarity of that argument, not which slogan the student picks.

3.2 Context for Judges: Three Verbs, Three Paducah Heroes

Two things will help you recognize strong engagement.

First, King calls his own method “militant.” He rejects violence (“Burn, baby, burn”) but insists his approach “can be militant” — forceful and determined — while not destroying life or property. A student who notices that King is *not* counseling passivity, and who distinguishes forceful constructive action from destruction, has read the passage closely.

Second, Paducah answered this question three different ways, and all three worked. The strongest essays ground their argument in one of these local examples:

- **Oscar Cross built.** As Paducah’s first African American juvenile officer, he saw children with nowhere to go and, in 1949, built them a club that still bears his name.
- **W.C. Young organized.** A labor and civil-rights leader, he understood that one person asking is ignored while an organized group is answered; a community center now carries his name.
- **Dr. Dennis H. Anderson taught.** When Black students in western Kentucky were shut out of higher education, he founded the West Kentucky Industrial College rather than wait for a door to open.

A subtle bonus: King *opens* the speech with a “commercial” for that evening’s freedom festival and recruits the students to fill the seats. That is organizing, happening live — an observant student may notice King practicing a slogan before he preaches it.

3.3 A Guide to Scoring Grade 6 Argumentative Essays

Division 3 uses the full eighteen-component **Essay Scoresheet**, including Opposing Views (7), Rebuttals (8), and Citations (18). Expectations rise from the opinion division: judges should look for a genuine counterclaim and use of the source text.

Criterion 4 — Thesis Points. - High (8–10): “Young people should *learn* first, because you cannot build the right thing or organize the right people until you understand the problem — and knowledge is the one tool no one can take back.” - **Mid (5–7):** “We should build first because building is good and it helps people.” Logical but thin. - **Low (1–4):** “We should organize because organizing is important.” Circular.

Criterion 6 — Idea Development. - **High (8–10):** “Oscar Cross did not write a report about kids with nowhere to go — he *built* a club. That is why ‘build first’ works: a finished building is something no one can argue with. It simply exists, and children walk into it.” - **Mid (5–7):** Explains the slogan generally without a concrete local example. - **Low (1–4):** Repeats the slogan across paragraphs without new reasoning.

Criterion 7 — Opposing Views. - **High (8–10):** Fairly states a rival slogan: “Those who say *organize* first are right that one person’s project can be undone, while an organized community endures.” - **Mid (5–7):** Names another view briefly and a little dismissively. - **Low (1–4):** Ignores the other slogans entirely.

Criterion 8 — Rebuttal(s). - **High (8–10):** “But organizing takes time a struggling child does not have. Oscar Cross could have spent years building a coalition; instead he opened a door that year. When the need is urgent, building first is the more compassionate choice.” - **Mid (5–7):** “Organizing is slower, so building is better.” A fair point without development. - **Low (1–4):** No rebuttal offered.

Criterion 14 — Historical/Cultural Context. - **High (8–10):** Uses Cross, Young, or Anderson as direct evidence for the chosen verb, and ties the local figure to the slogan. - **Mid (5–7):** A general reference to “the civil rights movement” without the local tie. - **Low (1–4):** No relevant context.

Criterion 18 — Citations. - **High (8–10):** Quotes King’s slogans accurately and uses them to anchor the argument. - **Mid (5–7):** References the speech loosely or with citation errors. - **Low (1–4):** No use of the source.

Apply the same approach to the remaining criteria, always using examples specific to the build/organize/learn debate. Reward the essay that names which comes first and defends the priority — not one that concludes “all three matter.”

Chapter 4 — Division 4 (Grade 7 Argumentative Essay)

4.1 Understanding the Grade 7 Prompt: Character in a Digital World

Students write an argumentative essay to the **Paducah Human Rights Commission** and **The King Center**, arguing how young people should build true character in a digital world. The three positions are:

1. **Teach digital responsibility** — safety, privacy, and respectful online habits.
2. **Teach inner character** — a strong foundation of “somebodiness.”
3. **Teach digital citizenship for justice** — using technology to protect dignity and build community.

4.2 Context for Judges: A 1967 Warning That Reads Like Today

This prompt turns on a passage most people overlook. Dr. King warns the students not to buy “cosmetics advertised to make you lighter,” and not to “process your hair to make it appear straight” — he is describing an *industry* that profited by convincing young people their real appearance was the wrong one, and then selling them the correction. His answer was to say, out loud, “I Am Black, But Beautiful.”

The strongest essays recognize that this warning did not disappear — it moved onto the phone, where filters lighten skin and reshape faces, and where a number tells a teenager how many people approved of them today. King also gives students a different measuring stick, quoting a poem: “I must be measured by my soul; the mind is the standard of the man.” And he warns, “Don’t allow anybody to pull you so low as to make you hate them” — a hard instruction to follow in a comment thread.

Paducah offers models of character under pressure. **Dr. William Stuart Nelson**, raised in Paducah, studied nonviolence with Gandhi in India (1946) and marched with Dr. King at Selma. **Rev. W.G. Harvey**, the first Black person elected to public office in western Kentucky, once led a group to confront a Klan meeting — and did not become what he opposed. Essays that connect King’s warning to modern digital identity and use a local figure as a model of dignity show the deepest engagement.

4.3 A Guide to Scoring Grade 7 Argumentative Essays

Division 4 uses the full eighteen-component **Essay Scoresheet**. Expect more sophisticated arguments and stronger use of the source text than in Grade 6.

Criterion 6 — Idea Development. - High (8–10): “Dr. King told students not to buy creams to lighten their skin. Today an app does it for free, in one tap. Teaching *inner character* matters most because a filter only hides the face — it cannot give a student the belief that the face was never the problem.” - **Mid (5–7):** “Social media can make people feel bad about themselves, so character is important.” True but undeveloped. - **Low (1–4):** “Be responsible online. It is good to be responsible.” Repetition without reasoning.

Criterion 7 — Opposing Views. - High (8–10): “Those who argue for digital responsibility are right that a twelve-year-old facing a harassment campaign needs rules and safety, not philosophy.” - **Mid (5–7):** Names a rival view briefly. - **Low (1–4):** Ignores other positions.

Criterion 8 — Rebuttal(s). - High (8–10): “But rules can only stop a student from *posting* something cruel; only somebodiness can stop them from *believing* they need a filter to be enough. Responsibility guards behavior; character guards the person.” - **Mid (5–7):** “Rules are not enough, so character is better.” A fair claim without support. - **Low (1–4):** No rebuttal.

Criterion 13 — Persuasive Strategies. - **High (8–10):** Effective contrast or rhetorical framing — e.g., pairing King’s 1967 warning with a present-day filter to make the argument land. - **Mid (5–7):** A simple appeal (“two protections are better than one”). - **Low (1–4):** No persuasive technique beyond stating an opinion.

Criterion 14 — Historical/Cultural Context. - **High (8–10):** Uses Nelson or Harvey as a model of courageous, non-hateful character and ties it to online conduct. - **Mid (5–7):** A general reference to civil-rights history without a clear tie. - **Low (1–4):** No relevant context.

Criterion 18 — Citations. - **High (8–10):** Accurately quotes King’s cosmetics passage or “measured by my soul,” integrated into the argument. - **Mid (5–7):** References the speech loosely. - **Low (1–4):** No source use.

Apply the same approach to the remaining criteria, always using examples specific to the digital-character debate.

Chapter 5 — Division 5 (Grade 8 Argumentative Essay)

5.1 Understanding the Grade 8 Prompt: What Keeps Students in School

Students write a formal argumentative essay to the **Paducah Independent** and **McCracken County Boards of Education** and **The King Center**, arguing what schools should focus on **first** to keep students present and building. The three positions are:

1. **Character and perseverance** — responsibility, persistence, and excellence.
2. **Opportunity and barriers** — removing the obstacles that make staying difficult.
3. **Belonging and connection** — making every student feel they are somebody who is missed when gone.

5.2 Context for Judges: King Argues Both Sides in Twenty Seconds

The heart of this prompt is a remarkable moment in the speech. Dr. King tells students, “Don’t drop out of school.” Then he immediately adds, “And I understand all of the sociological reasons why we often drop out.” Then: “But I urge you in spite of your economic plight... stay in school.” In about twenty seconds, he names the barriers as real *and* tells students to persevere anyway — holding both sides of an argument adults still fight about. A strong essay recognizes that King refuses to choose, and treats that tension as the assignment rather than a contradiction.

Judges should know the current Kentucky reality behind the prompt:

- Chronic absenteeism rose from **17.8% (2018–19) to 29.8% (2022–23)** and has since improved to about **25%**; the graduation rate stands at **93.5%**.
- Kentucky’s own response was a campaign built on a single phrase — “**You belong**” — with the state’s education commissioner explaining that a student who misses school “misses connection.” That is Dr. King’s word, *somebodiness*, appearing in state policy — powerful evidence for the “belonging” position.

Paducah supplies both halves of the answer: **Curlee Brown Sr.** did not out-persevere segregation—he sued Paducah Junior College in 1951 and changed conditions. **Oscar Cross** and **Shirley Bunch** built a sense of belonging and mentored young people. Kentucky adds **Lyman T. Johnson** (who sued to integrate the University of Kentucky) and **Georgia Davis Powers** (first Black member of the Kentucky Senate).

5.3 A Guide to Scoring Grade 8 Argumentative Essays

Division 5 uses the full eighteen-component **Essay Scoresheet**, with Opposing Views (7), Rebuttals (8), and Citations (18) fully in force. Expect a real counterclaim, use of at least one interpreted statistic, and multiple cited sources.

Criterion 4 — Thesis Points. - High (8–10): “Schools should focus first on *belonging*, because the state’s own ‘You belong’ campaign — not stricter rules or new buses — is what began to reverse a 30% absenteeism rate; because a student who feels invisible will not return; and because King placed *somebodiness first* in the blueprint.” - **Mid (5–7):** “Belonging matters because kids like feeling included and it helps them stay.” Sound but generic. - **Low (1–4):** Points that restate the opinion without reasons.

Criterion 6 — Idea Development / Use of a Statistic. - High (8–10): Interprets a number rather than dropping it: “A 25% absenteeism rate means one in four students misses nearly a month of school. You

cannot lecture your way out of that; the state didn't try to." - **Mid (5-7)**: Cites a statistic without explaining what it means. - **Low (1-4)**: No data, or data misused.

Criterion 7 — Opposing Views. - **High (8-10)**: "Those who prioritize opportunity are right that telling a student to persevere through a barrier you could remove is not encouragement — it is an excuse. Curlee Brown Sr. did not out-persevere segregation; he sued it." - **Mid (5-7)**: Names a rival position briefly. - **Low (1-4)**: Ignores other views.

Criterion 8 — Rebuttal(s). - **High (8-10)**: "But Kentucky did not reduce absenteeism by ending poverty or by lecturing. It built a message about connection. Opportunity and character both matter — yet a student who does not feel they belong will not walk through the door to reach either." - **Mid (5-7)**: A logical counter without evidence. - **Low (1-4)**: No rebuttal.

Criterion 18 — Citations. - **High (8-10)**: Integrates at least three sources — King's speech, a Kentucky School Report Card figure, and a local or Kentucky historical example — each attributed. - **Mid (5-7)**: Uses sources but loosely, or with format errors. - **Low (1-4)**: Makes claims requiring support with no citations.

Apply the same approach to the remaining criteria. Reward the essay that chooses one focus and defends the priority, not one that concludes all three matter equally.

Chapter 6 — Division 6 (Grades 9–12 Argumentative Policy Essay)

6.1 Understanding the High School Prompt: A Future-Ready Blueprint

High school students write a formal policy essay to the **Kentucky General Assembly’s Interim Joint Committee on Education** and **The King Center**, proposing a specific, workable Kentucky policy to help students construct a future-ready life blueprint grounded in dignity, excellence, and justice. The three approaches are:

1. **Digital and career readiness** — technology, AI literacy, and workforce preparation.
2. **Character and civic responsibility** — digital ethics, identity, civic education, and service.
3. **An equity-based future blueprint** — combining future-ready skills, character, civic responsibility, and equal access to opportunity.

Students here operate as policy analysts. A strong essay does not merely name a value; it names a **policy**, defends it with interpreted data, anticipates objections (including cost), and explains how it would be funded.

6.2 Context for Judges: Readiness, Character, and the Equity Gap

The prompt is anchored in King’s architect metaphor and in a striking prediction: quoting Emerson’s line that the world beats a path to whoever builds a better mousetrap, King adds that this “hadn’t always been true — but it will become increasingly true.” He made a falsifiable claim, in 1967, about whether merit would be rewarded. A sophisticated essay may test that prediction against the present.

Judges should be familiar with the current Kentucky landscape:

- **Kentucky is a national leader on AI in schools.** It was among the first states to issue AI guidance to every district, and roughly **80% of districts (about 140)** report an intentional AI plan. Nationally, FutureEd has tracked **71 AI-in-education bills across 27 states** in a single session.
- **The opportunity gap is real and quantified.** Nationally, about **57% of households earning under \$30,000** have home broadband, versus **95%** of households above \$100,000. Kentucky has invested heavily to close the gap (a **\$386 million** expansion across 46 counties), but affordability remains a barrier.
- **Presence underlies both.** Chronic absenteeism rose from **17.8%** to nearly **30%** before improving to about **25%**; the **\$3.2 billion** in federal pandemic relief that Kentucky received has now expired, so “use the federal money” is no longer an available answer.

King’s speech supplies a three-part test any policy can be measured against: does it protect **dignity** (somebodiness), prepare students for **excellence**, and advance **beauty, love, and justice** (equal opportunity)? Local history proves opportunity must be built intentionally: **Dr. Dennis H. Anderson** founded a college when doors were closed; **W.C. Young** linked labor, education, and civic power; **Curlee Brown Sr.** forced a college to integrate. Kentucky adds **Lyman T. Johnson** and **Georgia Davis Powers**.

6.3 A Guide to Scoring High School Policy Essays

Division 6 uses the full eighteen-component **Essay Scoresheet**. Expect analytical rigor, command of evidence, a genuinely specific policy, and a formal tone suited to lawmakers.

Criterion 2 / 4 — Argument & Thesis Points (Does it name a policy?). - High (8–10): Names a concrete, workable policy: “Kentucky should create a Future Blueprint Grant requiring participating districts to provide AI literacy, career-connected learning, civic education, mentoring, and an annual

equity audit of who can access advanced coursework and broadband.” Distinct, defensible points follow. - **Mid (5-7):** Names a value (“Kentucky should focus on equity”) without a mechanism. - **Low (1-4):** Vague or purely emotional claims.

Criterion 6 — Idea Development / Data Synthesis. - **High (8-10):** Interprets data and ties it to King: “An AI plan in 80% of districts means little to a student who cannot get online at home — where a low-income household is nearly 40 points less likely to have broadband. King’s ‘excellence’ cannot be equal until access is.” - **Mid (5-7):** Cites figures without interpreting them. - **Low (1-4):** No data, or data misapplied.

Criterion 8 — Rebuttal(s) (including cost). - **High (8-10):** “Some legislators will object that this is unaffordable now that federal relief has expired. But an equity audit costs little, and a phased grant funded by redirecting existing technology dollars front-loads the least expensive reforms first.” Anticipates the audience’s real concern. - **Mid (5-7):** A counter without evidence or a funding answer. - **Low (1-4):** No rebuttal.

Criterion 14 — Historical/Cultural Context. - **High (8-10):** Grounds the argument in Kentucky and local history — Anderson building a college, the state’s AI leadership, the broadband expansion — as evidence, not decoration. - **Mid (5-7):** National trends without the Kentucky tie. - **Low (1-4):** Abstract, context-free discussion.

Criterion 18 — Citations. - **High (8-10):** Weaves attributed evidence from multiple sources — King’s speech, a Kentucky School Report Card or KDE figure, a policy or historical source — into the argument. - **Mid (5-7):** Drops in statistics without integrating or fully attributing them. - **Low (1-4):** Unsupported claims; no citations.

Apply the same approach to all eighteen criteria, always using examples specific to the future-ready-blueprint debate. A high-scoring essay names a real policy, funds it realistically, and measures it against King’s test of dignity, excellence, and justice.

PART III: CONCLUSION

A FINAL WORD OF THANKS

On behalf of the contest organizers and the entire community, thank you once again for your invaluable service. The time, care, and intellectual energy you have devoted to this process are a powerful testament to your commitment to the youth of Paducah and McCracken County.

By providing thoughtful, fair, and constructive evaluations, you have done more than select winners. You have shown each student that their voice matters, their ideas have value, and their efforts are seen and respected by the adult community. You have helped a young person begin to draft the blueprint of a life. We are immensely grateful for your contribution.

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