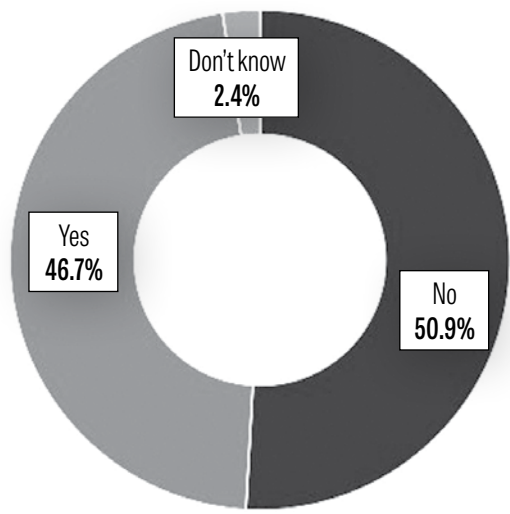


ONLINE POLL:

The Kentucky General Assembly passed a joint resolution to restore the Ten Commandments monument on the Capitol grounds. Do you think Gov. Andy Beshear should sign it?



This poll reflects the opinions of 212 respondents.
Visit www.state-journal.com to take part in today's poll.

EDITORIAL

Students should have free access to feminine hygiene products

Of the 138 seats in the Kentucky Legislature, only 41 or 29.7% are held by women and perhaps that is one reason why lawmakers continually fail to pass bills that provide free access to feminine hygiene products for elementary and secondary students.

Despite a failure to pass the measures, similar bills have been filed for the past 30 sessions. This year's version, House Bill 74, is sponsored by Rep. Matthew Lehman, D-Newport, and would require public schools to provide free menstrual products for students in grades four through 12 as well as give the local board of education the authority to create policies for the distribution of the products. HB 74 stalled in the House Appropriations and Revenue Committee.

We agree with Second Street School Principal Samantha Sams, who is in favor of the legislation. "Feminine hygiene and menstruation may be taboo topics in some circles, but they are an undeniable reality that schools must be prepared to address. Making these products freely available eliminates any additional burden on teachers and staff and ensures students never feel embarrassed or distracted from their studies," she told Kentucky Health News recently.

Sadly, 23% of Kentucky teens have had difficulty obtaining feminine hygiene products and 51% admitted to wearing menstrual products for longer than directed, which "could produce negative side effects such as urinary tract infections, vulvar contact dermatitis, yeast infections, bacterial vaginosis and even toxic shock syndrome," according to a 2022 Kentucky Medical Association resolution. Additionally, 80% of students said they either missed school or knew someone who did because of lack of access to feminine hygiene products, another study found.

The legislature has also repeatedly failed to pass a measure making menstrual products as well as baby and adult diapers tax-exempt. In fact, Kentucky is one of only 20 states that still charge sales tax on feminine hygiene products, the Alliance for Period Supplies states.

Period poverty — the inability to afford menstrual products — is real and even though we know it won't happen this session, we urge lawmakers to continue to push for the passage of bills that would end taxation on feminine hygiene products, as well as supply these products free of charge for students in our public schools.

HB 4 misses the point

As teachers, whether in K-12 classrooms or higher education, our most valuable resource isn't our textbooks, technology, or even our classroom space — it's our time. Every day, we make decisions about how to allocate that time, tailoring our instruction to meet the needs of our students. Some need extra help with reading comprehension; others may require guidance in navigating college as first-generation students. The reality of teaching is that students are not the same, and treating them as if they are ignores the fundamental principles of good pedagogy.

This is why House Bill 4 (HB 4), currently being debated in Kentucky's legislature, is so flawed. The bill recognizes that first-generation and military-connected students may have different needs, but it suggests that teachers and institutions cannot consider race, gender, or nationality when supporting students. Indeed, it calls for the dismantling of existing structures to do so. The implication is clear: some forms of differentiated instruction are acceptable, while others are not.

But teaching has never been a zero-sum game, and differentiating instruction and support does not mean unfairly advantaging one group over another. It means meeting students where they are.

PARENTS DON'T TREAT ALL THEIR CHILDREN THE SAME — NEITHER SHOULD TEACHERS

Parents instinctively understand what HB 4 gets wrong. No parent treats their children the same because no two children are identical. Some kids need more structure, while others need more freedom. Some need extra help with math, while others struggle with social skills. A good

parent adjusts their parenting to each child's needs — not because they are playing favorites, but because they want each child to succeed.



Jacob Gross
Guest columnist

student is unfamiliar with office hours, we explain how they work. Yet HB 4 implies that considering race, gender, or nationality in these decisions is unfair. It ignores that these factors — like first-generation status or military service — can shape how students experience education. Ignoring these realities does not make them disappear. It just makes it harder for teachers to do their jobs.

Teachers do the same thing. If a student is struggling with course material, we spend extra time with them. If a student is excelling, we challenge them with advanced content. If a first-generation college student is unfamiliar with office hours, we explain how they work.

DIFFERENTIATED SUPPORT IS GOOD TEACHING—NOT DISCRIMINATION

Opponents of HB 4 are not arguing that teachers should discriminate — far from it. No teacher should. But differentiated instruction is not discrimination. It's the foundation of good teaching.

Imagine a classroom with three students. One is a first-generation college student struggling to navigate office hours and research assignments. Another is an international student learning to write academic English for the first time. A third is a military veteran balancing coursework with a demanding job. Would any good teacher look at these three students and say, "You all get the same support because that's fair"? Of course not.

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT MATTERS TOO

Just as teachers must differentiate instruction within the classroom, institutions must also develop policies and programs that support students equitably. Teaching is only part of the solution. Campus resources, school policies, and student support programs also affect student success.

Consider the programs that have long helped first-generation and military-connected students succeed in higher education. Initiatives such as mentorship programs, first-year experience courses, and financial aid counseling provide essential guidance to students who may not otherwise have access to these resources.

If we acknowledge that first-generation students benefit from tailored support, why should it be different for other students facing systemic barriers?

Yet HB 4 threatens this approach, treating institutional efforts to provide equitable support as unfair advantages. Supporting different groups of students in different ways does not disadvantage anyone — it strengthens the learning environment for everyone.

Good teachers do not treat every student the same — we treat them fairly. We allocate time and resources strategically, ensuring every student gets what they need to thrive. HB 4 ignores this reality and, in doing so, undermines the very principles of good education.

Differentiated instruction is not discrimination. It's just good teaching.

Jacob P. Gross is an associate professor of higher education and student affairs at the University of Louisville and has taught for 15 years. He can be emailed at jacob.gross@louisville.edu.



SUBMIT LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The State Journal encourages readers to submit letters to the editor. Letters should be the original work of the author, no form letters, and be fewer than 330 words. The State Journal reserves the right to edit letters for grammar and brevity. To submit a letter email letters@state-journal.com. Please provide an address and phone number with the submission for verification purposes only.

LETTER

'APPROVE COLEMAN'S SETTLEMENT AND DELIVER RELIEF'

Dear editor,

Our pension system needs relief. For over seven years, millions of dollars that should have been allocated to Kentucky's Public Pensions system have been caught up in litigation, and the ones who suffer are those who rely on these pensions. That's Kentucky's officers, school administrators and staff, and government employees.

Fortunately, Attorney General Russell Coleman has a solution. Recently, AG Coleman announced a \$227.5 million settlement with the defendants in the ongoing pensions litigation. This settlement

would finally end this case and help fund our pensions system.

This is a win across the board. For pension beneficiaries and future beneficiaries, it delivers peace of mind and greater benefits. For the state's legal system, it allows precious resources and valuable time to be directed toward other issues, keeping Kentucky safe and upholding law and order.

As the courts consider the settlement this month, these benefits must take priority over arguments against the settlement. We have had enough of waiting. Approve AG Coleman's settlement and deliver relief now!

*Brenda Hackett
Frankfort*

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