



KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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EDUCATION SECRETARY PRAISES KENTUCKY PROGRESS

(LOUISVILLE, Ky.) – Today during a trip to Louisville, United States Education Secretary Arne Duncan saw firsthand, some of the progress Kentucky has made in public education in recent years and praised the state and for a job well done.

Duncan, along with Kentucky Education Commissioner Terry Holliday, started the day at Fern Creek Traditional High School, once a persistently low-performing school and in the bottom five percent of high schools in the state. It is now at the 73rd percentile and classified a Proficient-Progressing school. During a roundtable discussion, district administrators, teachers, students and a parent told Duncan how the school was able to turn things around: academic rigor and building relationships among faculty and students. According to school leaders, when Fern Creek started the turnaround process more than a third of its freshmen were failing. That's now under ten percent. If progress continues, Fern Creek High School is scheduled to exit Priority status in the fall.

Improving low-performing schools is one of the goals of the state's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) flexibility waiver. Last month, the United States Department of Education granted the state a four-year extension of the waiver, which allows Kentucky to use a single system for state and federal accountability, among other things.

Throughout the day, Duncan repeatedly stressed the importance of building a strong Pre-K through 14 education system. At a community conversation on early learning, Duncan said, "Early childhood is an investment, not an expense; working with parents on how to prepare their children for learning and success in school and expanding access to quality programs is critical if Kentucky is going to continue to make progress," he said.

In recent years, Kentucky has expanded access to state-run preschool and is currently revising and expanding its childcare provider rating program with the help of a Race-to-the-Top early learning grant.

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A stop at Jefferson Community and Technical College focused on college/career-readiness and the transition from high school to postsecondary education and training. Duncan talked with the leaders of several innovative career pathway programs including Kentucky FAME program, which in partnership with the business community provides an apprenticeships for postsecondary students in a manufacturing career path; the Toyota T-Ten program, a national model career training program for postsecondary students; and dual credit/early college programs that give students the opportunity to earn postsecondary credit before they graduate from high school.

“Every kid has to graduate from high school and that should be seen not as an end, but a beginning,” Duncan said. “It’s vital that we give students options for college and career. They need some sort of postsecondary education or training that leads to jobs.”

During a news conference Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer, Commissioner Holliday and Gov. Steve Beshear, all echoed that goal.

“By making sure our children get a good start and graduate ready for the next step, we ensure a vibrant economic future for our state.” Beshear said.

Commissioner Holliday cited Senate Bill 1 (2009) as laying the groundwork for the state’s progress.

“More rigorous standards, rethinking the way we deliver instruction, and providing students choices so they can find their passion has led to a dramatic improvement in the state’s college- and career-readiness rate and graduation rate,” Holliday said.

Duncan said he was impressed with what he saw in Kentucky. Acknowledging that the state still has work to do, he said, “Kentucky is progressing faster than most states, and it’s important the state not lose its momentum.”

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