



Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner
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Education and the State of the Commonwealth

It was my honor to attend the State of the Commonwealth speech this week when Governor Steve Beshear made his 8th and final such address. A written copy of the [full speech](#) is available online, as is a [video](#) and [audio](#) recording courtesy of KET.

It was very exciting to have the Governor list the amazing accomplishments in Kentucky that have taken place over the last seven years. He emphasized health care, workforce development and business climate accomplishments in the speech. And when citing progress, he often mentioned education, which has been realized with the vision and hard work of many – from the Capitol to the classroom. Some of the education highlights can be found below.

“In education, we have energized reform efforts to focus on rigorous standards, aligned assessments and better preparing students for life after high school. Unfortunately, for decades our education performance was cause for embarrassment. And universities and employers alike were sounding the alarm: Kentucky students, they warned, were simply not prepared. Today, student performance has improved tremendously, college and career readiness has skyrocketed and our graduation rates are climbing.”

“Back in 2011, education experts measured our college and career readiness rate at 38 percent. In 2012, it jumped to 47 percent ;in 2013, 54 percent; and in 2014, to 62 percent. Meanwhile, our high school graduation rate in 2013 improved to 86.1 percent. That’s 12th, nationwide. And it’s better than all but two of our neighbors.”

Note: In 2014, our graduation rate climbed to 87.4 percent and most certainly will place KY in top 10 of states.

Gov. Beshear went on to talk about the significance of early childhood initiatives and the importance of education to the state’s economy.

“Step one in building a stronger workforce has focused on our youngest children. Too many Kentucky children were getting a poor start in life. Too many children were entering school with preventable health problems, undeveloped minds and little engagement in life around them. And as we all know, kids who start out behind rarely catch up.”

“So we worked to create an environment where every child – regardless of whether he or she is born in the inner city, in a mountain hollow, on a farm or in the suburbs – every child is given the opportunity to succeed.”

“To do this, we dramatically improved access to health care for children in low-income families. We targeted dental problems. We increased enrollment in preschool programs. And we developed a screener to gauge whether early education programs were preparing our kids to hit the ground running on day one of kindergarten.”

“In this session, we need to continue our momentum by adding accountability and transparency to all of our early childcare facilities. I will again seek legislation to implement the goals of what’s called the All-STARS plan – Accelerating Learning Statewide Through an Advanced Rating System. All-STARS addresses safety, continuing education for staff members, nutrition and age-appropriate curriculum. Look, we have health ratings for restaurants. Aren’t our children just as important? All parents deserve to know the quality of the place where they drop off their kids.

“Step two in building a stronger workforce has been improving our schools so every graduate is prepared for success. That means tougher classes, and keeping kids in class. We were the first state to adopt rigorous Common Core academic standards. We were the second to adopt the Next Generation Science Standards. With Senate Bill 1 in 2009, we changed our testing system to make our schools more accountable. And we raised our graduation age from 16 to 18. We’ve also smoothed the transition from two-year colleges to four-year degree programs to save students time and money.

“And recognizing that the four-year university path isn’t the best route for everyone, we’ve made our career and technical programs more rigorous and applicable to real-life jobs that demand high-level technical knowledge. These aren’t the so-called ‘shop classes’ of yesterday but modern training with a tough academic foundation.

“We’re also working to improve the talent pipeline through modern apprentice programs like KY FAME, which combines work experience in advanced manufacturing with college classes. More than a dozen Central Kentucky manufacturers are participating in KY FAME, and it will be expanding soon.

“We need to move quickly to implement the recommendations of the Dual Credit Task Force, helping students earn their degrees quicker and at less cost.”

In closing, the Governor talked about how to build a stronger Kentucky and the excitement about the progress Kentucky has made.

“A stronger Kentucky is also why the First Lady and I worked with Representatives Jeff Greer, Carl Rollins and Derrick Graham and Senators Mike Wilson, David Givens and Jimmy Higdson to raise Kentucky’s drop-out age and keep our kids in school. ...

“My friends, we can hold our heads high once again, because Kentucky is back, and we’re back with a vengeance. Once again, we are the talk of the nation. And I’m not referring only to things like basketball, bourbon and horse-racing. In the public and private halls of power, where the issues of today are being hammered out, Kentucky has become – once again – a national example of leadership and success.

“In education, we’re the state that has completely turned its school system around – and other states continue to seek help in following in our footsteps. ...

“So during this legislative session, we have a choice.

“We can let ourselves get way-laid by things like partisan bickering, pending elections and Twitter-feed rhetoric. We can retreat, back-track or second-guess our progress. Or we can accelerate Kentucky’s considerable momentum by remaining focused on the job before us. Join with me in continuing to improve our health, our workforce, our families and our economy. Join with me in continuing to build a Kentucky that is strong, vibrant, competitive and innovative.

“Kentucky is back – and we’re not going to let up now.”