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**Kentucky Education Commissioner
Terry Holliday**



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Prioritizing education from cradle to career

It was my honor to attend the 2014 State of the Commonwealth [address](#) by Governor Steve Beshear this week. Education was a highlight of the speech (to watch the speech click [here](#); to listen to the speech click [here](#)).

I was very excited about the emphasis on cradle-to-career education. This phrase captures our work with early childhood, Senate Bill 1, college/career-readiness and the recent push from the Council on Postsecondary Education for "[15 to Finish](#)."

The Governor was very clear about the need to reinvest in education in order to ensure a highly skilled workforce for the future. A strong workforce is an educated workforce, and Kentucky has made enormous progress in creating a seamless, cradle-to-career education system that is better preparing students for a complex world.

With special focus on early childhood education, raising the graduation rate, and increasing college- and career-readiness for all students, Kentucky's schools are emerging as national leaders in education reform and measurable student progress.

In 2013, Education Week's annual "Quality Counts" report ranked Kentucky in the top 10 states in student performance and education progress. The state is implementing the Graduation Bill passed last session, which will require students to stay in school until age 18. And last month, Kentucky won a \$44.3 million federal Race to the Top grant to improve early learning programs for thousands of Kentucky preschoolers.

But schools have stretched their dollars as far as they can, the Governor warned, and will lose ground without new investment.

Kentucky has frozen SEEK – the basic funding formula for K-12 classrooms – for six years, even as student enrollment expanded, costs increased and local support in some areas dropped. Plus, budget pressures forced deep cuts in areas ranging from textbooks to teacher training and school safety. Meanwhile, because of impending federal sequester cuts, schools face the prospect of significant layoffs, increased classroom sizes and out-of-date technology.

"We are in danger of losing all of the positive momentum which has been built up. And I am not going to allow that to happen," the Governor said. "I am determined to find money to reinvest in education – even if I have to make harmful cuts in other areas to do so."

Fiscal discipline and aggressive managing of the budget – including some \$1.6 billion in spending cuts – helped Kentucky get through the recession, but in some areas the cuts went deep enough to damage programs and services critical to building a stronger future.

“We cannot continue making progress by paying teachers less than they deserve, by ignoring needs like textbooks and technology, by delaying research into innovative energy production, by pricing college out of reach, by leaving needed cancer screenings unfunded, and by retreating from things like child care and mental health services,” Gov. Beshear said.

The Governor identified two possible sources of new, recurring revenue with which to make investments: tax reform -- increasing competitiveness by broadening our tax base and improving our business climate will help stabilize future budgets -- and gaming.

Gov. Beshear said he would ask the General Assembly again to place a constitutional amendment on the ballot related to expanded gaming.

Over the years several economic studies of various gaming scenarios have projected potential Kentucky tax revenues in the hundreds of millions of dollars – money that is currently crossing the border “to fund roads and schools in Ohio, Indiana, West Virginia and other states.”

Kentuckians “want to vote on this issue,” he said.

Terry Holliday, Ph.D.
Education Commissioner