



Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner
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Raising the Dropout Age

In his State of the Union [address](#), President Barack Obama called on every state to require students to stay in school until they graduate or turn 18. In Kentucky, this issue has been at the forefront of legislative sessions for at least three years.

This year, we have seen Rep. Jeff Greer and First Lady Jane Beshear support legislation ([House Bill 216](#)) to raise the dropout age to 18. Governor Steve Beshear has made raising the dropout age one of the key elements of his education [agenda](#). In the Senate this week, Sen. Jack Westwood proposed and the Senate Education Committee passed [Senate Bill 109](#), which would allow school districts the option to raise the compulsory attendance age to 18 if they have appropriate programs for dropout prevention in place. Sen. Westwood also gained support for [Senate Bill 38](#), which promotes career pathways for students (which many believe is a key component to dropout prevention programs).

As commissioner of education, I want to make certain that, during the debate on which dropout bill will pass the House and Senate, we do not lose sight of the main issue. The main issue is that over 25 percent of entering high school freshmen will drop out of school before they reach 18. From an economic standpoint, that means 25 percent of the workforce will be competing for less than 8 percent of the jobs available. From many reports, we know that fewer than 8 percent of the jobs in 2018 and beyond will require less than a high school diploma. We also know that more than 60 percent of the jobs will require some training beyond high school.

Addressing the dropout issue is the major economic issue of our generation. If we do not address this issue, then we will continue to see escalating incarceration costs, health care costs and overall increases in social program costs. According to recent reports from the [Alliance for Excellent Education](#):

What could happen to economy if we lower dropouts and increase college and career readiness?

- If we decreased by half the dropouts -- \$68 million in increased savings, \$54 million in increased spending, \$121 million in increased home sales, \$7.1 million in increased auto sales, 450 new jobs, \$80 million increase in gross state product, \$5.9 million increase in state tax revenue.

- If we increase the percentage of college- and career-ready to 60 percent, and they earned credentials or degrees -- \$103 million in increased earnings, \$77 million in increased spending, \$211 million in increase home sales, 700 new jobs, \$123 million in increased state product, \$8.9 million in increased state revenue.

Raising the dropout age is a first step in impacting the economy of Kentucky and the future of individual students. Raising the dropout age then must be accompanied with programs and support for teachers and students.

My hope is that we not get bogged down over a debate of “requiring” versus “optional” raising of the dropout age. And, we have many things that we can do right now to lower high school dropout rates. I hope readers will volunteer for [Operation Preparation](#) during the week of March 12-16 and help our students chart their path toward and after graduation.

The Kentucky Department of Education’s (KDE) Unbridled Learning: College/Career Readiness for All initiative is designed to ensure that all students are prepared for college and/or career by the time they graduate from high school.

Advising is a key strategy for reaching this goal, and as part of Operation Preparation, trained volunteer community advisors will meet with every 8th- and 10th-grade student.

Log into KET Teachers’ Domain to explore [Kentucky’s Unbridled Learning: Operation Preparation](#), two modules that prepare community volunteers for their individual advising sessions. Module 1 provides an overview of the role of community volunteer advisors. Module 2 details the components of an advisory session.

Operation Preparation is a joint effort of KDE and the Department of Workforce Development and provides an opportunity for schools, students, parents and communities to collaborate on effective advising and focus attention on the importance of planning for college/career.

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