



Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner
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The importance of teacher planning time

One of the issues most important to Kentucky educators is time. Recently, Representative Rita Smart filed [HB 202](#) to require teachers be provided a minimum of 150 minutes per week for non-teaching activities. Below is a letter I sent to her in support of this legislation.

Dear Representative Smart:

Thank you for bringing HB 202 relative to teacher planning time forward. This is an issue that is critically important to Kentucky's educators.

In 2011 and again in 2013, education partners in Kentucky asked our teachers to respond to a working conditions [survey](#). More than 86 percent responded to the survey, representing the voices of more than 43,000 teachers. Teachers are very positive about the working conditions in their schools with one major exception – time. Teachers feel they do not have adequate time for individual or collaborative planning, both of which have proven to be the most effective in improving student learning outcomes.

While many of our schools are doing an excellent job providing teachers with individual and collaborative planning time, the results show that more than 33 percent of our teachers do not feel that planning time is adequate. More than 26 percent of our teachers have less than one hour of individual planning time per week and more than 58 percent of our teachers have less than one hour of collaborative planning time per week.

I applaud you for being very clear that teacher planning time is essential to improve student learning outcomes. I am very supportive of your wording in the legislation that the nonteaching (planning) time should be "teacher-directed and SHALL be used for common planning time to collaborate on curriculum development and articulation, examine student work and review student performance data, and plan instruction and discuss instructional strategies for struggling students" The nonteaching time also will provide teachers with opportunities for job-embedded professional development.

I am very supportive of HB 202 because this legislation will provide teachers with time to improve their professional practice, learn from colleagues, and improve student learning outcomes. Throughout the last few years, Kentucky has asked much from its teachers. Senate Bill 1 of 2009 required teachers to implement new and more rigorous learning standards and more rigorous assessments. Our teachers have done a remarkable job without resources and without adequate time for planning and professional learning. While they have done a terrific job in improving college- and career-readiness rates, there still is much work left to do. Too many of our minority and disadvantaged children are not achieving success. Through HB 202, teachers will have more time to focus on the challenges of closing achievement gaps and helping all children reach college and career readiness.

In my analysis of schools and the working conditions survey data, I believe that many of our schools are already providing teachers with individual and collaborative planning time. Should HB 202 become law, the Kentucky Department of Education will certainly work with all school districts to identify best practices in scheduling and staffing to meet the required minutes. As a matter of fact, numerous states already have legislation like HB 202 that has been successfully implemented. Also, the top performing countries in the world focus on collaborative planning time as described in HB 202.

As a former local superintendent, I implemented legislation similar to HB 202 and was able to do so without additional funding as is the current case in Kentucky with the majority of our school systems. The only caution I would offer is there may be a few small districts that would not have adequate funding to achieve the required minutes. In those few cases, I would offer that the Kentucky Department of Education could work with those districts to identify resources and waive implementation of the 150 minutes until resources could be identified.

Thank you again for supporting the needs of our teachers and students in the Commonwealth.

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Education Commissioner