



# Commissioner's

by Stephen L. Pruitt, Ph.D.  
Kentucky Commissioner of Education

# Comments

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## **Making good on the Commonwealth Commitment**

Five years ago, my predecessor, Terry Holliday, asked superintendents and local board of education chairs to sign a pledge. It was called the Commonwealth Commitment to College and Career Readiness and the goal was to dramatically increase the number of high school seniors who graduated equipped with the knowledge and skills to take the next step in their life journey, whether that be attending a 2-year or 4-year college, or postsecondary training program that would lead to a lifelong career.

Each district had a specific goal – to increase its 2010 college and career readiness rate by 50 percent by 2015. Every one of the state's P-12 school districts signed the pledge and started work to encourage and support students to achieve the goal of graduating college- and career-ready.

This was not just some public relations stunt, but a real collaborative effort to develop a stronger economy for our state and a brighter future for our children. The effort grew out of legislation, Senate Bill 1 of 2009, that had a defined focus – to improve postsecondary student success, and create a more educated and skilled workforce that could compete with the best and draw new business and better paying jobs to Kentucky.

In 2010, only 34 percent of Kentucky's public high school students were considered ready for college and careers, as measured by student performance on the ACT – the only measure Kentucky had at the time. In subsequent years, other measures such as student performance on college placement tests, military and career-readiness tests, and obtaining an industry-recognized certificate were added. The Kentucky Department of Education took some heat for this – claims that with a change in measures, the numbers from year to year weren't comparable. But critics were missing the point. The bottom line was about kids, options for their future and improving the quality of the state's workforce.

In 2015, the state's college and career readiness rate stood at 67 percent. What that means is that at least 15,000 more kids a year have a better chance for success in life than they would have had in 2010. Our districts stepped up to the plate and delivered. A total of 111 out of 168 districts met their Commonwealth Commitment goal. They are being recognized at the Kentucky School Boards Association annual conference this weekend. A good number of the rest made dramatic improvements, but came up a little short. Still there is reason to celebrate!

A recent report from the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education pointed out that in the past five years, there was a 19 percent increase in the total number of degrees and credentials awarded in Kentucky. This occurred at a time when tuition was at its highest in history. Some might claim the improvement is coincidental, but I have to believe that the concerted effort that elementary and

secondary education has made to improve the readiness of our students over the past five years has had something to do with it. I'm sure the students who saved thousands of dollars in tuition because they did not have to pay for remedial classes for which they didn't earn credit would think so.

While the 2015 deadline for the Commonwealth Commitment has come and gone, and many of the school, district and state leaders involved in it have moved on, the Kentucky Department of Education and school districts statewide must not become complacent in their efforts to continue the push for even more students to graduate college- and career-ready. The focus needs to continue to be on students.

I implore our districts to continue to support ALL students, encourage them to work hard and take the rigorous courses they want and need to achieve their dreams. And when they struggle, we must be there to help. Every student should graduate from high school ready for college or to step into the world of work. If they do, we know we have done our jobs well.

