



Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner
Terry Holliday



April 12, 2013

Raising the Dropout Age

At the Kentucky Board of Education meeting this week, the board adopted a [resolution](#) encouraging local boards to approve policies that raise the dropout age from 16 to 18 starting in the 2015-16 school year. This resolution was in support of [SB 97](#) that passed in the recent legislative session. As board member Brigitte Ramsey stated, along with SB 97 this resolution is a signal to all children in Kentucky that we are not giving up on you and we believe you can be successful.

There are many that do not believe raising the dropout age will have an impact on increasing graduation rates and raising the percentage of students who graduate with college/career ready skills. It is now our responsibility as educators, parents, community members, and state leaders to prove them wrong.

As I have said many times during the debate over raising the dropout age, simply raising the age will not be enough. We must have clear plans, actions, measures, and interventions to help all students reach college/career readiness and graduation. As I have visited every school district in Kentucky, I have seen many excellent programs that provide the services to help all students graduate. Educators across Kentucky strongly support raising the dropout age, however, they also know we must have programs and services in place to help students.

In our budget at the Kentucky Department of Education, we have an annual line item of \$570,000 for dropout prevention. I can think of no better use of those funds than to provide these dollars to local school districts to develop/modify plans to ensure more students graduate from high school prepared with college/career-ready skills. We are going to allocate these funds to school districts where the local board adopts a policy that raises the dropout age from 16 to 18 beginning in the 2015-16 school year. The funds may be used to develop a clear plan with the all stakeholders to provide the programs and services to ensure the policy actually increases graduation and college/career readiness rates. The grants will be for \$10,000 per district; we hope that regions will work together to develop regional solutions. The math works out that we will only be able to award 57 districts in 2013-14 and hopefully continue the grants in 2014-15, however, this will be dependent on the state budget. We are also working to secure external grant funding to provide for up to 92 school districts in the 2013-14 school year, however, we have not secured funding at this time. KDE will be providing guidance on the grant process in the following weeks but local boards can start laying the groundwork now. However, they are reminder that SB 97 does not take effect until late June, so any policies passed before then would need to be re-ratified once the law goes into effect.

I know that those who doubted the impact of raising the dropout age would be delighted to be proven wrong. If we prove them wrong, we will make a positive impact on our state's economy, local economy, and individual economy. We will make a positive impact by lowering the cost of social services and incarceration rates. We will make a positive impact on state tax revenue. However, the most significant impact will be on the children that we serve. We will help provide hope to many young people who felt the future for them would not be positive.

Let's get it done Kentucky!!!

Terry Holliday, Ph.D.
Education Commissioner