



# Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner  
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## Learning from other countries

Last week, teams from Kentucky, Colorado and New York City participated in the semi-annual meeting of the Global Education Leaders' Program ([GELP](#)). The Kentucky team included several Kentucky Department of Education folks, two local superintendents and a member of the Kentucky Board of Education. Travel and expenses for the U.S. teams were covered by a grant from the Gates Foundation.

The purpose of GELP is to learn from each other about education initiatives across the globe and to discuss ways to lead innovation to ensure more students are successful. The semi-annual meetings are led by the Innovation Unit from the United Kingdom.

I thought readers might be interested in a few of the insights we gained from the meeting.

**Standards** – When we discussed learning standards with other nations, it was apparent that most of the nations that are recognized as leaders in education have national standards. Finland made a presentation on the development process for their national standards. The process is driven by the Ministry of Education, however, local schools and teachers have a lot of flexibility in adopting curriculum and implementation of the standards. Australia has national standards that were developed using a similar process. The other nations or states present included British Columbia, China, South Korea, Victoria, New Zealand, and India. All of these provinces/nations also use national standards as a way to set expectations for student learning and ensure that graduates are globally competitive.

**Teacher Effectiveness** – One of the most respected countries in the world for the preparation and support of teachers is Finland. During the meeting, we were able to spend a great deal of time learning the details on how Finland changed teacher preparation, selection, and professional development. A key word for Finland is trust. Finland does not have a national testing system and there is no accountability system in place. Finland trusts teachers and local municipalities to provide an excellent education for all children. Finland and South Korea are well known for the selectivity of teacher candidates. South Korea draws teacher candidates from the top 10 percent of graduates and then provides full funding for a college education. Finland also recruits from the top 10 percent and has 10 applicants for every one position in teacher preparation.

**Assessment** – One of the most striking things we learned came from the Chinese delegation. China (Shanghai) is well known for being number one in math and reading on the Program for International Student Assessment ([PISA](#)) tests. However, China is not very happy with its education system. The Chinese are pushing for more creativity and problem solving skills for students. The Chinese recognize that their schools do a great job in preparing students for assessments that measure basic skills, however, they also understand that in order for their economy to continue to grow they must have graduates who have the 21st-century skills of creativity, collaboration, communication and problem solving.

The collective work of the GELP community has led to publication of an excellent book that I highly recommend – *Redesigning Education: Shaping Learning Systems Around the Globe*. It is interesting that we in the states are still debating things like common core standards, teacher preparation and standardized testing

while the nations we compete against globally have moved well beyond this debate. When you get outside of the United States, you see a world that understands this century will probably be the “Asia Century” due to the rapid expansion of economies in China and India.

When I talk to key business leaders in Kentucky, most of them tell me that their business interests are spread globally and the Kentucky education system must increase the focus on preparing students for the 21st century and global competition. Our General Assembly got that message when they passed [Senate Bill 1](#) in 2009. By participating in the GELP program, we are keeping Kentucky at the forefront of education not only in the U.S. but also across the globe. Many countries were very interested in our implementation process for common core standards and districts of innovation.

It was very satisfying to see that Kentucky is keeping up with the world!

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