



Doc H's Blog

**Kentucky Education Commissioner
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May 23, 2014

Kentucky's chapter in the education reform story

This week I had the opportunity to speak to education writers from across the United States at their national seminar in Nashville. The Education Writers Association includes journalists, researchers, teachers, policymakers and others with an interest in improving the public discourse surrounding education. The organization is dedicated to improving the quality and quantity of education coverage to create a better-informed society. Several of the journalists who regularly cover education in Kentucky were in attendance.

The organization asked me to share Kentucky's education reform story. By all accounts it is a success, though we still have a long way to go to achieve our goal of college/career-readiness for all. The following are some of the thoughts I shared with them as the reasons for our accomplishments.

When they write the Kentucky chapter in the book describing education reform, they will certainly mention the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990. I hope they will also highlight the era of Race to the Top, Federal Stimulus Funds and No Child Left Behind Waivers. Kentucky's leadership in education reform is well documented and is part of the culture for education in Kentucky.

The Kentucky chapter documenting the reform period from 2008-2016 should begin with the foundation that was developed through the passage of major legislation in 2009. Senate Bill 1 (SB1) passed with no dissenting votes. SB 1 required new college-ready standards, assessments, accountability systems, and support for educators in implementing. Perhaps the most unique part of the legislation was the requirement for collaboration between higher education and K-12 education on setting college-ready standards.

When the Kentucky chapter is written, a few key initiatives should be highlighted.

1. It really helps to be the first. Kentucky was first to adopt and implement common core state standards, first to assess the standards, and first to implement an accountability system based on the standards. By being first we were able to chart our own course. There was no major opposition since we had 100 percent support from legislators and the Governor. Also, there were no other states for people to compare us to.
2. We worked to develop a broad base of support. We developed a strong communications plan with key partners. Our educators stayed involved and informed through every phase. Parents received communication on why we needed more rigorous standards and assessments and how this would impact their children. Business leaders received packets of materials from the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce to help them lead the reform efforts in their communities.
3. From the very beginning we made a decision to involve teachers in every step of implementation. We pulled more than 1,300 teachers, principals, and district leaders together every month for two years to help us plan for implementation and monitor and adjust implementation plans. Every school and

every school district developed a comprehensive plan for implementation and support for the new standards

4. We made a decision not to rush the teacher, principal, and superintendent evaluation procedures. We heavily involved educators to develop evaluation models linked to the new standards and assessments. As a result, we have widespread support this year as every district piloted the new evaluation systems and next year, all teachers, principals, and superintendents will utilize the state evaluation procedures.
5. Finally, our state is committed to a continuous improvement approach. We know we must continue to listen and learn from students, parents, teachers, and community leaders. Just one example of our continuous improvement approach is our Kentucky Core Academic Standards Challenge which will launch in August. We are asking every citizen in Kentucky to read the standards and provide comments and suggestions on how to improve the standards so we reach our goal of every student reaching college- and career-readiness.

Finally, I hope the Kentucky chapter will close with the record of success we have enjoyed. Our high school graduation rate is among the top in the nation and our college- and career-readiness rate has improved from 34 percent to 54 percent since we adopted common core standards.

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