



Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner
Terry Holliday



May 30, 2014

Creating thinkers or test-takers?

With the implementation of our new Professional Growth and Effectiveness System this fall, I have been closely monitoring the national conversation concerning student growth and pay for performance. We have been lucky in Kentucky to have leadership by teachers, principals, and superintendents to develop a balanced system of effectiveness that focuses on the professional growth of educators NOT getting rid of them. While the overall goal is college/career-readiness for all, our success in improving student outcomes will be determined, in a large part, by getting the system RIGHT!

I have long been a systems thinker and have been heavily influenced by the work of Edwards Deming. In his book *Out of the Crisis*, Dr. Deming had some astute observations about annual performance evaluations that were connected to merit or performance pay. Here is an excerpt from page 101:

Evaluation of performance, merit rating, or annual review... "The idea of a merit rating is alluring. The sound of the words captivates the imagination: pay for what you get; get what you pay for; motivate people to do their best, for their own good." Deming says that may be fine in theory, but "the effect is exactly the opposite of what the words promise."

Deming went on to say that 90-95 percent of the variation in an individual's performance and the performance of the organization (in our case a school) could be attributed to the system. Implementing a teacher evaluation system that focuses solely on student performance is a simplistic answer to a very complex system and is WRONG!

We must ask ourselves, are we trying to develop a system that will result in students learning to think or simply take tests?

In Kentucky, we are focused on the entire system of professional growth and effectiveness to support teachers, principals, and superintendents which will result in student success.

The system includes a focus on working conditions that impact student learning. Another key focus is providing access to professional learning that is customized to the needs of the teacher, principal or superintendent. A very large part of the system is teacher preparation. In collaboration with the Education Professional Standards Board and Council on Postsecondary Education, our state is working closely with universities to improve the teacher recruitment, preparation, placement and the retention of great teachers. There are many more parts of the system we are working on.

Quite often the Kentucky Department of Education is criticized for working on too many things at one time. However, if you truly want to reform a system, you cannot work on only one part of the system until you perfect

it and then move on to the next part. Every action you take has a ripple effect on other parts of the system. System work can be hard and very frustrating; however, if we want to reform our education system to help more children achieve college/career-readiness and success, then it is our responsibility to do the work and to get the system RIGHT!

Terry Holliday, Ph.D.
Education Commissioner