



Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner
Terry Holliday



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A moral imperative

This week, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) presented several regulations for final review by the Interim Joint Committee on Education. The regulations are the final step in revisions to the Unbridled Learning Accountability Model that was developed 5 years ago as a response to requirements in Senate Bill 1 (2009). One of the major changes to the regulations was the addition of a new measure called novice reduction. Several legislators had questions about this new measure and I thought you might be interested in understanding why the new measure was added.

For the past 3 years, KDE has used the Unbridled Learning accountability model. One of the concerns we have heard from education groups, civil rights groups and conservative groups is that the accountability model was not pushing hard enough on closing achievement gaps. While the accountability model did have a measure of efforts to close the achievement gap, many groups felt that individual groups of students were not as evident as they had been under No Child Left Behind. As I looked at the results from 2014 assessments, I became convinced that we needed more focus on the performance of individual groups of students.

With our state assessments, students receive ratings of distinguished, proficient, apprentice, or novice. The novice level is very low and represents student performance that is several levels below college- and career-ready work. Here are some startling numbers.

Percentage Novice Students

Group	Elementary Reading	Elementary Math	MS Reading	MS Math	HS English II	HS Algebra II
All students	21	17	21	17	34	24
African American	38	31	40	33	54	37
Hispanic	28	22	29	22	43	28
Migrant	32	25	39	27	58	35
Limited English	43	32	61	43	88	45
Free/Reduced Meal	27	23	29	23	45	32
Individual Education Plan	40	38	51	45	73	55
Gap Group	27	23	29	23	45	33

While the percentages are very concerning, the real numbers are even more alarming. We have more than 80,000 students performing at the novice level in reading and more than 60,000 students performing at the novice level in math. These are the students who will be challenged to complete high school.

These are the students who will not reach college- and career-readiness. These are the students who will need social services. These are the students who have a high likelihood of incarceration. These are the students that Kentucky must care more about and provide intervention for before it is too late.

KDE will be focusing efforts on helping schools and districts implement specific strategies to address this high percentage of novice students. We will provide specific support around reading and numeracy programs. We will provide support for positive behavior interventions to address student behavior that interferes with learning. We will provide support for culturally responsive instruction. We will also provide a significant focus on accountability and incentives for schools, districts, and educators for helping move novice students to apprenticeship levels or above.

This issue is moral imperative for our Commonwealth and a major civil rights issue for our communities.

Terry Holliday, Ph.D.
Commissioner of Education