



# Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner  
Terry Holliday



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## Preparing students to be globally competent

Ever since the General Assembly passed Senate Bill 1 in 2009, the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) has strongly supported the addition of world language to the state accountability model. On June 4, the board took action to do so approving implementation of the World Language Program Review for high schools in 2014-15 with accountability in 2015-16. Elementary and middle schools will follow a year later with accountability in 2016-17.

There has been much consternation over the World Language Program Review from the time the idea was first mentioned. Lawmakers worry that world language was added to the list of Program Reviews even though the content area was not specifically mentioned in Senate Bill 1. Of course, SB 1 allowed the KBE to add to the accountability those areas that were of importance to prepare students for college- and career-readiness.

Local superintendents have not been supportive of the World Language Program Review either. The key areas of concern have been funding, time, resources, availability of certified teachers and professional learning.

However, the reasoning behind the board's action was driven home in its recent meeting. David Karem, former chair of the KBE and former state senator during the time of KERA, said the idea that our students need an understanding of the world is not a new one.

"We were talking about world language and global competencies over 26 years ago when we recruited Toyota to Kentucky and we have not made much progress," he said. "It is past time for action."

Secretary of the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet, Tom Zawacki, echoed Karem's sentiment – based on his employment experience at Toyota and now as cabinet secretary. Zawacki said a running joke with international executives was, "What do you call a person who can speak two languages?" Answer: bilingual. "What do you call person who can only speak one language?" Answer: American.

The need for global competency is real. Karem cited a recent article in the state bar association magazine that supports his argument. The article, titled "Kentucky's Global Economy: 96% of your market may be outside the US," shares some interesting facts.

- Kentucky exports in the past three years have increased, with over \$25 billion in sales in 2013.
- Kentucky's exports growth rate of more than 14 percent translates to the 2nd highest growth in the nation
- 96 percent of potential consumers reside outside the U.S.
- U.S. exports reached an all-time high of \$2.2 trillion last year
- Kentucky exports created 47,000 in 2010

As Commissioner, I support the KBE's decision. It is time for our schools to clearly understand the global economy and better prepare students for the future marketplace. We have known for some time that many of our lost jobs in Kentucky will not come back due to scientific advances and international competition. It is time to turn those conditions on their head and focus on selling Kentucky products and services to the international community.

It is imperative that our high school and college graduates who will be obtaining work in firms that are exporting products and services understand the language, culture, business climate and geopolitical issues they will be facing. This work must be integrated with existing programs in our schools. It cannot be seen as an "add on" or just another program. We must integrate in language, social studies, math and other content areas. Yes, we should make certain our students have opportunities to become bilingual, however, it is even more important our students understand the global competition they will be entering upon graduation.

Look for more details about grants and support programs for this work in the coming months. We will have many partners in this work – from economic development, to universities and many education groups.

At last, after more than a quarter of a century, Kentucky has seized the opportunity for our students to become globally competent. It is a decision that will serve them and the state's economy well.

Terry Holliday, Ph.D.  
Education Commissioner