



Doc H's Blog

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Did a focus on teacher evaluations work?

As I approach my retirement date of August 31, my last few blogs will focus on my thoughts about education initiatives at the state and national levels over the past six years. I caution readers that these blogs will reflect my thoughts and not those of the Kentucky Board of Education or the Kentucky Department of Education. My hope is that these last few blogs will encourage others to reflect and prepare for the future of education in Kentucky and across the nation.

As part of the Race to the Top (RTTT) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waivers, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan promoted improvements in teacher and leader (principals) evaluation programs across the nation. With a little more than one year left in President Obama's and Secretary Duncan's terms, there will be a lot of debate as to whether the emphasis on teacher and leader evaluation programs has paid any dividends in improving educator effectiveness and/or improving student learning.

As I reflect on the last six plus years, there were several different approaches that states took to improve teacher and leader evaluation programs. There were states that took a fast track. Overnight, it seemed that several states had a plan for new teacher and leader evaluation programs. Some states, like Kentucky, took a slower approach and asked for delays from the United States Department of Education (USED) until the state had time to review research and make the transition to new standards and assessments.

States took different approaches as to components of teacher and leader evaluation systems. A number of states were quick to develop a weighted model for teacher evaluation. Many states interpreted the federal requirements as requiring student achievement to be weighted at least 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation rating. Other states, including Kentucky, took a matrix approach that did not use weights but relied on principals and teachers to review the evidence from student learning and then using a matrix developed by the state come to agreement on the teacher's rating for student achievement.

States took different approaches as far as the major purpose for new teacher and leader evaluation systems. Some states felt the new evaluation systems would drive a focus on student achievement and failure to improve student achievement would allow the state and school districts to dismiss ineffective teachers. Other states, like Kentucky, focused on teacher professional growth and effectiveness and did not see the new teacher evaluation system as primarily being an instrument for dismissal of ineffective teachers.

The time is fast approaching where every state will be reporting out the results from teacher and leader evaluation systems. USED has required a focus on distribution of effective teachers across school districts to ensure students in low performing schools have equal access to effective teachers as those in high performing schools.

Teacher preparation programs will be completing accreditation processes that require them to report on how well their graduates are doing on state teacher evaluations and with student achievement.

State tests will soon be reported across the nation. The 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress results will be released this fall.

There will be TONS of articles and opinions about the impact of Race to the Top and No Child Left Behind waivers.

I have a prediction about what we will see from all the data. Those who supported RTTT and NCLB waivers will present data to support the positive impact of these programs. Those who did not support RTTT and NCLB waivers will present data that show these programs did not have a positive impact.

As the results are reported, here are a few things to watch for:

- Will every state report that they have over 90 percent of their teachers rated effective or highly effective?
- Will NAEP student achievement results show any improvement?
- Will state student learning results show any improvement?
- Are there large gaps between state achievement results and NAEP results?
- How many state evaluation programs will be challenged in court as the impact of these programs start to impact teacher assignments?
- As Governor's change and chief state school officers change, will the evaluation systems fall away and be replaced by more local control?
- Will teacher preparation programs utilize accreditation results to improve their programs?
- What role will the teacher evaluation debate play in local, state and national elections?

I caution educators as they prepare for the bombardment of information this fall. In 43 years of education, I have learned that there will always be someone who thinks they have the latest and greatest answer to the perplexing problem of closing achievement gaps and improving student learning. However, my warning to those who will lead education for the next generation is that there is no silver bullet.

Education issues are very complex. Poverty, unequal opportunities, leadership, inadequate preparation programs, low morale, low teacher pay, community expectations, lack of parental involvement, and many other issues impact student learning. My advice? Education leaders should never focus on just one of these challenges. Instead, they must recognize that the public education system is multifaceted with many interconnections and they must work to improve the entire system in order to realize real progress.

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