



Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner
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A Discussion on Telecommuting

I read an interesting article this week from the [Phi Kappa Phi](#) Forum. The article was titled “Working through Telecommuting” and discussed the rising interest among employees and employers to “telecommute” for work.

Over the last few years, I have conducted focus group meetings with randomly selected employees at the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE). Usually the focus group numbers five to six employees, and they are free to discuss working conditions at the department and what we can do to value our employees and improve the working conditions. One of the key topics that comes up at every focus group meeting is telecommuting. The article from Forum gave me some more information to use as we push for more telecommuting options in state government.

According to the Forum article, almost 3 million Americans telecommute for work. While this is a small number compared to the 140 million in the workforce, 85 of the 100 best companies to work for in the nation [allow](#) telecommuting as an option.

According to the article, some of concerns about telecommuting are the requirements of self-discipline when working from home. Temptations to get off-task are huge in the home environment. Also, the workplace requires lots of social interaction – meetings, face-to-face time with supervisor and individuals, impromptu meetings at lunch and more – that may not always be possible with telecommuting. Also, the isolation stemming from telecommuting has been documented as a concern.

However, there are many positives to telecommuting. Several studies have shown increases in productivity. Also, employees benefit due to reduction in commuting costs. Families benefit, since the cost of child care may be lowered, and employers benefit when an employee does not have to take a sick day to stay home with a sick child.

The technology will eventually drive the decisions on telecommuting. At KDE, we are poised to continue our migration to cloud-based technology. Employees will be able to have their home phones connected to their cell phones so they do not miss calls. Employees will be able to link through video conference capacity with fellow workers and school district staff. Employees can

share documents and work products through our technology rather than shuffle e-mails with attachments.

There will be much discussion over the coming months about the pros and cons of telecommuting within state government; however, I do see unlimited possibilities for KDE employees. Certainly, if we can overcome the barriers for telecommuting for teachers and students, we can figure this out for state government.

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