



# Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner  
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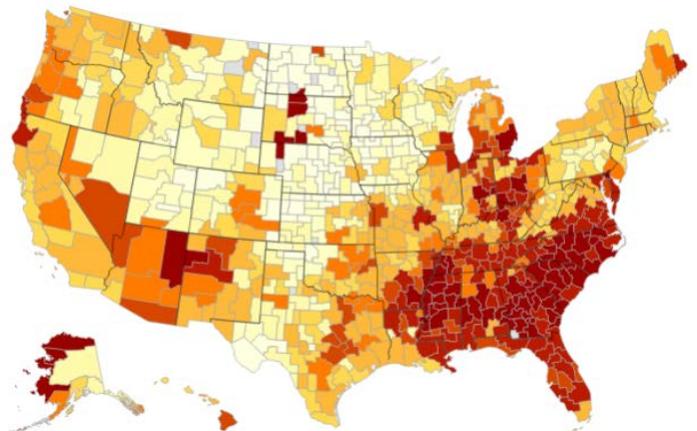
## Equality of access and opportunity for all

As we begin the 2013-14 school year, there is much to be proud of with regard to Kentucky P-12 education. Since the 1990 Kentucky Education Reform Act and more recently with Senate Bill 1 of 2009, Kentucky has made significant improvements in raising graduation rates, lowering dropout rates, increasing college- and career-readiness rates and improving rankings on national assessments. However, as I look to challenges facing our educators, parents and students I am concerned about state and federal budget cuts damaging educator morale and limiting the resources our children are able to access. Perhaps the most concern I have is the continuing gap in equality of access, opportunity, and performance among our schools and our communities.

On a daily basis, I do a quick scan of the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Washington Post, state newspaper highlights, and education highlights from around the state, nation, and globe. Over the past few months, I have seen an increase in articles that deal with the challenges of equality of opportunity and the income inequality facing our country.

Recently, the [Equality of Opportunity Project](#) released a major report. This report measures the likelihood of children from families who are in the bottom fifth of income averages being able to rise to the top fifth.

Of course, education in the United States has always been touted as the way to level opportunity and achieve equality. As educators, we always look to education as the means for children to rise out of poverty and break the cycle of impoverishment into which they were born.



Courtesy: Equality of Opportunity Project

As an educator, this report causes me great concern.

Looking at the largest 100 cities, what researchers found was that there is less than an 8 percent likelihood that children of families in the bottom fifth for family income averages would likely escape poverty and rise to the top fifth. Louisville is our only Kentucky city in the top 100 and the rate there is 6.2 percent.

An editorial from Rebecca Strauss posted June 16, [Schooling Ourselves in an Unequal America](#), talked about the "unequal America." Ms. Strauss' premise is that the wealthiest 10 percent of children in America receive some of the best education in the world and the quality keeps getting better.

However, our rankings among other industrialized countries show that America is losing ground. America is not getting worse, by most measures we are improving. The reason our rankings are slipping is due to the dramatic gains made by other countries and huge increases in poverty and widening equality, opportunity, and access gaps in America.

Ms. Strauss further suggests that money is not necessarily the issue. Her position is that other countries that have surpassed America spend about the same or less on education. She provides evidence that other countries make different choices in spending. She shows that other countries spend MORE on disadvantaged children and LESS on advantaged children.

As we watch our legislators and policy makers make decisions about funding and addressing equality of access, opportunity, and performance of ALL children, we should all be aware of these trends and the increasing gaps highlighted by the two sources referenced in this blog. These are extremely complex issues and some would even call them “wicked” problems. These issues will not be solved by reading a list of talking points prepared by a right or left leaning think tank. These issues can only be solved through honest and open dialogue between decision makers and higher expectations for equality from our communities.

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