



Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner
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August 21, 2015

The future of PGES

During the August Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) meeting, Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) Associate Commissioner Amanda Ellis provided the board with an update on results from the 2014-15 implementation of our Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (PGES). This was the first year that every district implemented the system for teachers and leaders. Also, every local school board implemented the Superintendent Professional Growth and Effectiveness System. In my [June 26 blog](#), I discussed the national perspective on this issue.

The results from Kentucky mirrored those that have been released in most other states. More than 90 percent of our teachers and leaders received ratings of accomplished and exemplary. Some will take this as good news and others will say that Kentucky has wasted five years and significant resources to implement a state evaluation system that has a mismatch between student performance and teacher performance.

The group that calls the PGES a waste of time and resources will point to the student achievement distribution in Kentucky. This distribution shows that slightly more than 50 percent of our students are achieving proficient and distinguished performance on state tests while more than 90 percent of teachers and leaders are receiving the highest ratings of performance.

The Kentucky Board of Education made a key decision to not include the PGES results in the state accountability model for 2015-16. Key reasons for the decision were the concern about the results and concerns about time to implement the system and problems with the technology system used by PGES.

The key question should not focus on the past but on the future. Certainly, the KDE team agreed with KBE that the PGES system was not ready for inclusion in the accountability model. However, it is critical to be clear about the purpose of PGES. The purpose was not to rank and rate teachers. The ranking and rating system was a federal requirement. Most major corporations have learned that evaluation systems that rank and rate do not lead to a more productive and engaged workforce. The basic purpose of the PGES was to promote professional growth and elevate the teaching profession.

Moving forward, I hope the KBE and KDE will focus on a couple of key issues.

Issue #1) – Ask teachers if the feedback they receive from PGES helps them improve their instruction. We know that many of our principals struggle to provide feedback to teachers since the principals may not have the content knowledge in a specific area. However, PGES allows for peer observers and also student feedback. These two sources in addition to the principal could provide excellent suggestions on how to improve. Also, it is very important that Kentucky focus time and effort on training principals on how to provide solid instructional feedback.

Issue #2) – KDE must partner with our universities, leadership training programs and other partners to provide coaching and feedback on how to develop rigorous but fair student growth goals. Every teacher in

Kentucky should have student growth goals. Every principal will be evaluated on how well the teachers meet those student growth goals. KBE and KDE should look closely each year at the correlation between student growth goal performance and teacher/principal performance on PGES.

Issue #3) – KDE and districts must address time and technology concerns. The amount of time required of teachers and principals to complete the PGES measures must be manageable. The technology must be user-friendly and be seen as a time saver rather than a time consumer.

Issue #4) – This year the PGES data represents only the tenured teachers who were in their evaluation year cycle. The PGES data did not include statewide data from first year teachers or teachers not in their evaluation cycle year. It is still too early to make any long-term decisions on the future of the PGES system.

Issue #5) – KDE must focus training and support not only at the teacher and principal level, but also at the district level. Too often, central office administrators do not have the capacity to coach principals on how to provide instructional feedback to teachers. There are excellent models in our districts and KDE needs to identify those best practice districts and provide those models to all districts.

If any state in the nation can serve as a model for the implementation of a teacher and leader effectiveness system that improves student learning outcomes, it will be Kentucky. We have all the necessary ingredients: terrific teachers, strong leaders, terrific collaboration among partners and a focus on children.

Hopefully, everyone will give our schools and KDE the time needed to make the necessary adjustments in training and support.

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Education Commissioner