



# Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner  
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## Supporting Kentucky's future – or not?

This week, I was reading the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) [legislative update](#) and received an e-mail from Stu Silberman over at the Prichard Committee. Stu had been reading the same update. Here is the body of his e-mail.

*The Southern Regional Education Board has released its most recent legislative update. As you will see in the chart below, Kentucky funding is falling behind and steps must be taken in this next session so we can be competitive.*

| State          | K-12 Budget                | Higher Ed Budget  |
|----------------|----------------------------|---|
| Alabama*       | Up 3 %                     | Up 2.4%   |
| Delaware       | Up 4 %                     | Up 4% (approximate)   |
| Florida        | Up 13.9%                   | Up 34.2%<br>(state universities)<br>Up 3.1%<br>(state colleges)             |
| Louisiana*     | Down 1.7%                  | Down 10.0%  |
| Oklahoma       | Up 3.3%                    | Up 3.5%   |
| South Carolina | Up 8.5%<br>Charters up 40% | Up 9.4%<br>(4-year colleges &<br>universities) Up 3.1%<br>(2-year colleges) |
| Tennessee*     | Up 4.3%                    | Up 9%   |

\*Also provided pay raises for teachers

In Kentucky, base student funding (SEEK) has remained flat in recent years, but an increase in the number of students has effectively cut per pupil spending. Basic grants (Flexible Focus Funds) that are used to implement Senate Bill 1 (2009) have been reduced by more than \$61 million per year. The SREB report, however, shows other states are re-investing in education.

The Kentucky Board of Education is currently reviewing priorities for FY15-16 budget request. At a **minimum** KBE wants to see restoration of SEEK funding and Flexible Focus funding to 2008-09 levels. For SEEK, this would require an additional \$60 million in FY15 and \$90 million in FY16. This level of funding would only get us back to \$3,866 per student which is woefully inadequate when compared to other states. To restore Flexible Focus Funds would require an additional \$61 million in both FY15 and FY16. Flexible Focus Funds provide textbooks, digital resources for teaching/learning, extended school services, pre-school funding, and professional development to help educators implement Senate Bill 1 (2009).

Here is the big problem facing our legislators: there is no new money! Recently, the Consensus Forecasting Group, a non-partisan team of economists, predicted that FY15 state revenue would be fairly flat and indicated that with state obligations such as pensions and debt retirement, there is no new money for education.

Our schools have made remarkable progress in the last 25 years. More students are graduating from high school and reaching college- and career-readiness than at any point in our history. Our educators are taking money out of their own pockets to support children. Our parents are doing more fund raising to support basic needs in schools than ever before. However, this heroic effort by educators and parents cannot continue without a negative impact on morale. Teachers and parents will become extremely frustrated (if not already so) because they are being asked to fund items for students that should be provided through state and local funds.

The answer to this issue is NOT to pass on the reduced state funding costs to local property owners. Funding basic education needs through local property tax only exacerbates the inequities in education funding across 173 school districts (remember the Rose case). The answer to this issue is bold leadership from our state legislators.

As commissioner I am using this blog to announce my strong support for state legislators to address two possible funding sources during the 2014 session. I strongly support efforts at tax reform and also strongly support expanded gaming. These are not popular issues and they are extremely difficult to deal with during an election year, however, my job is to alert decision makers that without adequate funding, Kentucky educators will not be able to maintain current levels of student performance and certainly will not be able to continue improving student performance.

It is apparent from the SREB Report mentioned above that other states are re-investing in education because they know that education will have a positive impact on employment and the economy.

The upcoming session will be a make or break year for education in Kentucky. There are basically two choices – support restoration of funding for education so we can continue to make progress or don't support restoration of funding. By not supporting restoration of funding, decision makers will be supporting the decline in outcomes for children that will have long term negative impacts on the futures of our children and the future of the Commonwealth.

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Education Commissioner