



Commissioner's

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Kentucky Commissioner of Education

Comments

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Do not give in to despair

This was a big week in Frankfort as the governor released his proposed budget. I do not want to spend a great deal of space waxing philosophical about politics or the legislative processes. However, I could not let the week pass without saying something about what is ahead of us.

In his address to the General Assembly, the governor made clear that proposed budget cuts are meant to provide resources to shore up our underfunded state and teacher pension systems, a problem that needs to be addressed. The governor and I agree that we need to protect our districts and state funds for education, so Governor Bevin indicated that SEEK would exempt from the proposed cuts. However, even with keeping the per pupil rate the same, while appreciated, will still leave districts short of the money they need as the costs of items continue to increase. Still, the governor deserves props for trying to protect our districts and ultimately our students from the reductions. Yet, there are reductions.

Like other state agencies, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) is required to cut 4.5 percent or about \$17.9 million from its current year spending before June 30. Since we are more than half way through the fiscal year, this is going to be difficult, at best. At KDE, we have long had the priority of trying to absorb as many of the reductions as possible so more money can go to classrooms to support actual teaching and learning. This will continue to be the priority.

Still, if this budget passes it will mean a further tightening of the belt for everyone. The department will be required to cut 9 percent in each of the next two years – amounting to about \$72 million in reductions over the biennium.

I tell you this not to worry or scare anyone. Rather, it is to inform. We know there will be reductions in any budget that is passed and we must be prepared. This is a reality. In light of the situation, I look forward to working with our districts and partners to find ways to continue to offer excellent education to all of our students.

We know that in many ways we are victims of our own success. We continue to do what is right for kids in our state even when things are tough financially. That's not just my personal opinion, it is backed up with evidence. A recent report from the Gatton College of Business and Economics showed Kentucky was one of eight states that outperformed the rest of the nation academically when obstacles to cost-effective educational spending are taken into consideration. Those obstacles include poverty, parental education, missed school days, rural population and high obesity rates. This should be the impetus for more spending on education not less. No one wants more cuts, but I am also sure that Kentuckians will do what is right by their students. We have for 25 years, and we will continue do so.

We all have a right and cause to be nervous about the proposed budget. However, do not give in to despair quite yet. The legislative process is long and there will be time after that to evaluate what actually needs to be done.

Over the next few months, KDE will be proactive in our communications and in providing guidance and support to all of our districts and partners. I will not panic and I urge you not to do so either. Let's work together to inform one another, all of our partners and policymakers about the next best course of action.

Our priorities at KDE, and mine specifically, will be to minimize reductions in money going to local school districts in areas such as Flex Focus funds and other grants; Area Technology Centers; and the Kentucky School for the Blind and Kentucky School for the Deaf.

We will get through this. We will all work together, we must.

Stephen