



Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner
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Restoring Faith in Public Education

A good friend and professional colleague, Malbert Smith, sent me this [article](#) from *Education Week*. Malbert co-authored the article and the white paper that supports it. Malbert is research professor for early childhood, special education and literacy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I encourage readers to review the article, but here are a few highlights.

The premise of the article is that America is losing faith in public education. Gallup's June 2012 Confidence in Institutions [survey](#) shows confidence in public schools has eroded from 58 percent who have a "great deal" or "quite a lot of confidence" in public schools in 1970 to 29 percent in 2012. Of course, the good news is that public schools rank much higher than the U.S. Congress, but, that is indeed a low bar.

Malbert shows the interesting paradox between public confidence and actual school performance. Measures such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress ([NAEP](#)) show significant gains in math and reading scores since 1970. Dropout rates are down, and graduation rates are up. While many think that our international [rankings](#) were once among the top in the world, this assumption is incorrect, and actual international rankings have actually improved in a few areas and remained flat in others. Certainly, there are many who debate the international rankings and the national test scores; however, the bottom line is that public faith in public education has eroded as has public faith in most institutions. The real question is what can we do to restore public faith in education? Malbert suggests a couple of strategies.

- 1 – To remain economically and politically relevant, our high school graduates must be prepared for the demands of a global economy. Adoption of college- and career-ready standards for all graduates is a good first step. Kentucky has led the way in these efforts with Common Core State [Standards](#).
- 2 – Implementation of the Common Core Standards will help restore confidence. Again, Kentucky has led the way with the implementation of Common Core in 2011-12 and with testing and accountability models implemented in 2011-12. Readers should look to the results of our measures for college and career readiness to be released at the end of the month.
- 3 – Our leaders of both political parties have to take responsibility for restoring confidence in public education by being clear about priorities and strategies to improve public education.
- 4 – Educators must improve outcomes for children, and we must share not only our areas for improvement but also our success stories.

From my experience this week at the Kentucky Board of Education meeting, I would add another strategy. The media has to become more balanced.

This week, the Kentucky Department of Education reported the results from our field test of a common kindergarten screener and estimates of the number of 2012 graduates who reached college- and career-ready standards. The media only picked up on the kindergarten screener results, since the numbers indicated that only one in four students are ready for kindergarten. The media completely ignored the great news that we had seen double-digit gains in students graduating college/career-ready.

We increased the number of high school graduates who met college/career-ready standards by over 4,000. We helped parents and students save more than \$5 million in cost avoidance for developmental courses. We doubled the chances of these students to graduate from a two- or four-year college. As we prepare our communities for the release of the new accountability results, hopefully this article will help you in addressing public confidence in public schools.

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