



Commissioner's Comments

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Kentucky's commitment to education unsurpassed

My first week as commissioner has been incredible. In many ways it is what I expected, learning something new at every turn, meeting new people and drinking from the proverbial fire hose. However, I had the opportunity to participate in two events this week that confirmed for me that, as Kentucky's commissioner of education, I have the second coolest job in the world.

At the first event, we celebrated what I consider to be the coolest job in the world – classroom teacher – during the [2016 Kentucky Teacher of the Year Awards](#) ceremony. For me, having the opportunity to honor and get to know the Ashland Teacher Achievement Award winners was a treat beyond compare. These extraordinary teachers are smart, funny, innovative and dedicated professionals who are making students' lives better. While teachers love their content, the great ones teach because they love their students. The passion for their students as well as their craft that these teachers shared makes me proud to be an educator and a teacher.

On this day, 24 teachers had the chance to shine their light as a beacon of hope and leadership to their 41,500 colleagues across the state. I am grateful for that light and for the key role that teachers play in our children's lives. So, congratulations to all of our Ashland Teacher Achievement Award winners. Special congratulations to Elementary Teacher of the Year, Joshua DeWar; Middle School Teacher of the Year, Karen Mallonee; and our High School and Overall Teacher of the Year, Ashley Lamb-Sinclair.

The second event I attended was called [Early Childhood – A Wise Investment in Kentucky's Future](#), an event sponsored by the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence. Governor Steve Beshear and First Lady Jane Beshear, four former governors, members of the Kentucky General Assembly and many shareholders from the business and political world attended. The meeting focused on helping everyone gain an understanding of how a quality early childhood education translates into better prepared K-12 students and eventually a qualified workforce. You see, when we understand how the brain develops, we can better prepare our students and close achievement gaps by providing every student a quality learning experience before they even start kindergarten right on through high school graduation.

Attending these two events made me glad to be a Kentuckian. I have been asked by friends and colleagues, why Kentucky? The level of commitment to education shown in these two events are prime examples of why I wanted to continue my educational career here.

First, the Teacher of the Year Awards were a big deal, held in the rotunda of the capital – not in some hotel with little fanfare. Governor Beshear, Secretary of Education Tom Zawacki, and members of the General Assembly were on hand to recognize these teachers and celebrate their accomplishment. None of these dignitaries had to do this, but they were all pleased to do so because they recognize the value of quality teachers to our students.

The Prichard Committee event had five governors in attendance. This is unprecedented in other states. Governors Beshear, Fletcher, Patton, Carroll and Collins all gave up their time to attend, which speaks volumes about their commitment to education.

Yet, this commitment to education extends beyond the state's top elected office. Kentucky Chamber of Commerce Chief Executive Officer Dave Adkisson, Toyota Motor Manufacturing President Wil James, and Northern Kentucky University President Emeritus Jim Votruba also shared their commitment to education in their remarks. Prichard Executive Director Brigitte Blom Ramsey and staff did a great job of putting this event together. Clearly the opportunity for Kentucky children to get a high quality education from the beginning is paramount to all who attended.

So, as I conclude my first week, I am honored to be your commissioner of education and excited to be a Kentuckian. Since being here, I have shared with many that I begin each day with the thought, "Today is an excellent day to make a difference." With Kentucky's commitment to high quality education for all students, I believe we can and we will make that difference for our kids.