



# Doc H's Blog

**Kentucky Education Commissioner  
Terry Holliday**



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## **Breathitt Co. Schools improving under state management**

I visited our schools in Breathitt County this week, and am happy to report they have made good progress under state management.

The district has improved in a number of ways.

- The average daily attendance rate is up by more than 150 students.
- The graduation rate is 86.5 percent, which exceeds the state average.
- The college- and career-readiness rate for graduating students has improved from 16 percent in 2010 to 46 percent in 2013, meaning more students are prepared for life after high school.
- On a scale of 0-100, the overall accountability score moved from 44.9 in 2011-12 to 53.8 in 2012-13.
- Its overall ranking among the state's districts increased. The district moved from among the lowest ranked in the state – in the 5th percentile overall in 2011-12 (meaning only 5 percent of districts in the state ranked at or below Breathitt Co.), up to the 43rd percentile in 2012-13 (43 percent of districts in the state ranked at or below Breathitt Co.).
- Basic algebra and integrated science have been added to the 8th grade curriculum, providing a more rigorous course of study that will better prepare students for high school classes.
- The Next-Generation Academy, a dual credit program in cooperation with Hazard Community and Technical College, Morehead State University and the University of Kentucky through which students can earn enough college credit to graduate with a high school diploma and an associate degree, has been launched.

We are pleased to see the advancement students and staff have made under the guidance of state management. This confirms that the Kentucky Board of Education's decision to approve state management of the district was the right course of action. Breathitt County teachers, administrators and students are clearly responding to the need to improve. But, the state's role is far from over. There still is much work to be done and we have a long way to go to ensure that the Breathitt County school district is providing students with the world-class education they need and deserve.

The Kentucky Board of Education put the district under state management in December 2012 after an audit found “a pattern of a significant lack of efficiency and effectiveness in the governance and administration of the school district” and that the district lacked “the necessary capacity to develop and implement systemic change on its own.”

I appointed Larry Hammond, retired Rockcastle Co. superintendent, as state manager for Breathitt Co. Under his leadership, the Breathitt Co. school district has been able to develop a common vision and set goals. Communication within the district and with the community at-large has also improved and they are rebuilding trust in the schools and a belief by parents and community members that their students will benefit and have a better life as the result of the education they receive.

In addition to academic progress, the district has also taken steps to improve its precarious financial situation by cutting operational costs while minimizing the impact on educational programs. For example, reconfiguring bus routes and disposing of surplus buses will save the district more than \$300,000 in transportation costs each year. State personnel are also working to ensure the district maintains the 2 percent contingency fund balance required by law.

State management of the district will continue through at least December 2015 at which time the Kentucky Board of Education will evaluate whether state management is still required.

While we don't like to put a district under state management, it is for the benefit of the children that such action is taken.

Terry Holliday, Ph.D.  
Education Commissioner