



Commissioner's

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Comments

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A tough, yet passionate bunch; and thoughts about testing

Week two is complete and it was another exhilarating week. I am still learning about the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), our various initiatives and listening to our shareholders.

Over the past week, I had an opportunity to meet many district superintendents. At the Kentucky Education Development Corporation (KEDC) Board Meeting, I met more than 60 superintendents, provided an introduction and listened to the biggest issues facing them today. In addition, I was able to share in the victories as KEDC gave banners to celebrate their districts' and schools' achievements from the past school year. On Wednesday, I met with 16 members of my Superintendents Advisory Committee. Also, I had the chance to meet briefly with some new superintendents as they were undergoing training.

Superintendents are a tough bunch, but they should be. They have the responsibility for every child in their district. They also are not a shy bunch. During these meetings, I heard a lot of concerns and challenges that superintendents are facing every day and their priorities as we move into our biennial budget legislative session. I appreciate that input.

Later, when I was talking with a completely different group of people, I mentioned these three meetings. The people I was meeting with asked if superintendents gave me a tough time. My answer was simple, 'No, they are just taking care of their teachers and kids. Isn't that what we should all be doing?'

You see, when in meetings with people passionate about their work, sometimes you hear things that are not very comfortable or that you do not want to hear. And if those people have lost sight of the end goals because they have their own agendas, it makes for a painful meeting. But that was not the case with these superintendents. They love their students and their educators – and that leads to them loving a very tough job. So, it is my privilege to work alongside superintendents who work hard to make sure their district will improve the lives of their charges. In taking the position as commissioner, I had hoped that would be the case, and now after spending time with them over the last week, I am sure of it. I am excited about spending time with more superintendents next week at the Green River Regional Education Cooperative.

As a final note for this week, I feel the need to address the issues raised last weekend at the federal level regarding testing time. There is no doubt our students participate in many tests during an average school year. From a philosophical standpoint, I believe we must focus on instruction first, then use assessments to aid the teacher in making the instructional changes necessary to support their students. Quality, focused instruction that engages the students' ability to think, apply and build their knowledge in a way that supports understanding of concepts is paramount to a student's ability to be college-, career-, and life-ready.

As with all of our programs in the coming weeks and months, we will be discussing the state assessment system and how we can best support our districts and teachers. I believe this is something we should all do. Simply testing students does not tell us anything if we are not confident that any assessment administered is aligned to the standards of a particular grade or subject area. So, as we move forward, I hope we will all evaluate our assessment systems to ensure that teachers are allowed to be the innovators they were born to be and work to cut down on testing that does not give us the information we need to support a child's learning. We must not forget, that is why we are here.

As always, I am honored to be your Commissioner.

Stephen Pruitt

