



# Commissioner's

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## Comments

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### Every Student Succeeds

On Thursday, November 19, a potentially historic event occurred. A bipartisan conference committee made up of members of the U.S. House and Senate, including Congressman Brent Guthrie from Kentucky's 2<sup>nd</sup> District, agreed on a framework for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), most recently known as No Child Left Behind.

This is a big deal for so many reasons. In fact, I was doubtful it could happen this year. But, if things go as planned, the actual bill, known as the Every Student Succeeds Act, will be filed by the end of the month, with a House vote the first week of December and a Senate vote shortly thereafter.

Another reason this is a big deal is that, if passed, it will give a lot of accountability control back to the states. The framework includes some significant changes and some things that will hold steady. Annual assessment in English/language arts and mathematics for students in grades 3-8 and once in high school remains the same as the old law. So does testing once per grade band in science along with a few more items. However, determining big pieces of accountability – including how we determine our lowest five percent of schools – will be left in large part to the states. This is both exciting and scary. We, and when I say “we” I mean all shareholders in Kentucky, have a moral obligation to develop a system that represents a quality education for all students.

We do not yet know the timeline for implementation, but it will be my intent to take our time and take deliberate steps to gather feedback before, during, and after development of the system. I am not saying I know how we will do this – that is why shareholder engagement and guidance is so important.

However, there are a few things that I think are non-negotiables. First, we cannot back away from disaggregating the data to ensure all students, including our at-risk and struggling students as well as our gifted and talented students, are getting a quality education. This cannot only be just in mathematics and reading. Another non-negotiable for me is that the system must not narrow the curriculum in a way that does not support the whole child or a student pursuing his or her interest. If our goal is to ensure that every student has the opportunity to choose his or her own direction after high school, we must provide them with all the opportunities we can including the arts, career-technical education, science and social studies, just to name a few.

As I said in [last week's blog](#), the opportunity gap is a major issue that must be addressed if we hope to close the achievement gap. I do not believe we should develop a system that looks only at outputs (state assessments) and does not look at inputs. So, we have to consider how we will evaluate the quality of the

student experience. This means we will need to find ways to leverage collected data and evaluation at the school level in a way that supports good decision making for students.

Finally, I think it is critical that we create a system that holds districts and schools accountable, but also it should celebrate schools that are innovative and are finding creative ways to meeting their students' needs.

Again, I am not saying I know how to do all of this. I have some ideas, but we as an education community have a moral imperative to ensure a quality education for **ALL** students. For me, that means that every child that walks across the stage at graduation has the choice of where their life will take them. I believe we have the intellectual and compassionate capital to do this.

In my first month on the job, I have been validated in my reasons for wanting to be a part of the Kentucky education community. I do not know of another state with a group of educators and partners who are more committed to the welfare of our students than we have in Kentucky. I am looking forward to all of us uniting and working together for all of our children and the good of the Commonwealth.

