



Commissioner's

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Comments

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It really is a wonderful life

As we come to the end of the calendar year, I always take time to reflect and rejuvenate, and this year is no different.

This time last year, I was preparing for another joyous Christmas with my family. My son was home from his first semester in college; my daughter was midway through her sophomore year; and my wife and I were proud and so thankful for a healthy and happy family. We were happy; we did not sit and fret about the future, but we always were ready for what life brings us. We had no idea what was in store for us in the coming year, especially the last few months.

My favorite movie is *It's a Wonderful Life*. I know some of you think it is really cheesy. But I have always loved it. As a family, we watch it twice each year. I am not sure that the rest of the family likes it as much as I do, but it is a family tradition. I suppose in some ways, I have always identified with George Bailey. No, I have not ever lost a lot of money or had to deal with anyone as evil as Mr. Potter, but I have always been aware of how important it is to realize a person's life impacts others.

The impact that teachers can have on their students is one of the things that drew me into the profession. As with most educators, I did not teach for the money, the notoriety, or the fame, because as we know, that's just not part of the profession. I did it because I felt I could help make a better life for my students, not just by teaching a subject I loved, but by preparing them to be good people. My career took so many twists and turns from the classroom, but it is the classroom where I find my center and my value. I really have had a wonderful life, and I am so glad that it has brought me to Kentucky.

My second favorite movie, also a Pruitt family tradition, is *A Christmas Carol*. I am glad to report that I do not have a Scrooge in my family however, the three ghosts of Christmas do provide some important lessons in education for us as we move into 2016.

The Ghost of Kentucky's Education Past should not be forgotten or revert a simple reminiscent trip down memory lane. Rather as in the book, it should be carried with us as a light that guides our way now and into the future. Our past has made us what we are. I have joked that we cannot have an education meeting in Kentucky without mentioning the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) and Senate Bill 1 (2009). Yet, those very important legislative measures set us on a course to make incredible progress over the past 25 years and are much to credit for the reasons we have done so.

From the *Rose* decision and KERA, through Senate Bill 1 and federal waivers, Kentucky's progress did not happen by accident. It happened because of the commitment and dedication from many shareholders to work together to improve the lives of our students.

The Ghost of Kentucky's Education Present allows us to renew our commitment by coming together to work on our new accountability system and seek the best methods for moving our system forward. We have made incredible

gains in graduation rate and in the system in general. But we are not perfect. We still have large achievement gaps and we still see inequities in opportunities for our students. We recognize it here and now, so we must embrace the opportunity presented to us at this time to work together to develop a system that will ensure every student receives a quality education. It is our obligation, our moral obligation, to guarantee a quality education for every child.

Charles Dickens recognized the danger of ignorance and the greater danger of ignoring it, when in *A Christmas Carol*, Christmas Present revealed to Scrooge two wretched, frightful, miserable children, about which he asked,

“Spirit are they yours?”

“They are Man's,” said the Spirit, looking down upon them. “And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased.”

Finally, we come to the Ghost of Kentucky's Education Future. Rather than being a dark specter full of foreboding, I believe this ghost is bright and full of opportunity and promise. To be clear, if we do not listen to the Ghosts of the Past and Present, our future will dim. I believe our best days are ahead of us. Why? Because we have the shareholders across the state who are willing to work together to build a better future and because we see the need in the eyes of our students. We will take on this quest not because it's easy, but because it is the right thing to do.

I am so thankful for the opportunity to live in Kentucky and to work with such passionate people to improve the lives of our students.

I wish you the happiest of holidays and encourage you to take time to reflect on our education's past and present, as well the future. By doing so, I hope you will better understand the “wonderful life” we have and the even more wonderful life that our children will enjoy as the result of our efforts.