



Doc H's Blog

**Kentucky Education Commissioner
Terry Holliday**



December 19, 2014

Education issues and the 2015 General Assembly

Season's greetings! I hope that readers of this blog will take time over the next couple of weeks to relax and spend time with family and friends. The holiday season is an excellent time to recharge your batteries. I plan to do just that, so this will be my last blog for 2014, but will return to the keyboard for a January 9, 2015 entry.

As we look forward to the New Year, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) is preparing for a busy legislative session. Here are some of the hot topics we predict will be on the education agenda for the upcoming General Assembly.

- 1) Charter Schools – we will again see legislation to create charter schools in Kentucky. Our state is one of only eight states without charters. I am hearing about the possibility of a small pilot of 5-6 charter schools in districts that have very low-performing schools with significant achievement gaps.
- 2) Teacher Pension Plan – the Kentucky Teacher Retirement System has asked the General Assembly to consider a plan that would require a \$3.3 billion bond to shore up the underfunded retirement system. This system is critical for recruitment and retention of high quality teachers.
- 3) School Funding – while 2015 is not a budget session, there are a number of funding issues that could surface. The Council for Better Education report recently released at the Kentucky Association of School Superintendents' winter meeting will garner a lot of attention. The \$2 billion-plus price tag is sure to get attention. Also, KDE will be releasing a report on funding of the career and technical education programs in Kentucky. Finally, we may see discussion of impact of revenue shortfall and SEEK shortfall.
- 4) Dual Credit – a recent set of recommendations from the dual credit task force will generate discussion about how to ensure quality, access, funding, and transferability of courses.
- 5) Merging County Systems – several county school systems have been identified for state assistance and state management. Some county systems are very close to not having a 2 percent fund balance. The General Assembly previously enacted legislation that allowed a financially insolvent independent district to merge with a county system; however, currently there are no statutes that allow for the merger of an insolvent county system to merge with another system.

- 6) Closing Achievement Gaps – this issue will be part of the charter school issue but will also be an overarching theme of the Education Committees. The achievement gap in Kentucky begins before students enter kindergarten, continues throughout P-12, postsecondary, and is very obvious when we look at labor and salary studies for adults.

At the national level, KDE will be working to support reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) – most recently dubbed the No Child Left Behind Act – and the Carl Perkins Act which is the primary vehicle for federal funding of career and technical education. We are very excited about the potential of both bills moving forward very quickly under the leadership of Sen Alexander of Tennessee and Majority Leader McConnell.

Terry Holliday, Ph. D.
Education Commissioner