



Doc H's Blog

**Kentucky Education Commissioner
Terry Holliday**



October 3, 2014

Moving in the right direction

The Kentucky Department of Education just released the third year of results under the Unbridled Learning College/Career-Readiness for All accountability model, and while we still have much work to do, the data show we are moving in the right direction and there is much reason to celebrate.

The eyes of the nation have been focused on Kentucky since we became the first state to adopt new English/language arts and mathematics standards, as mandated by Senate Bill 1 (2009). While we saw a big drop in student performance that first year, as expected due to the increased rigor of the standards, we are starting to see some significant progress, as predicted, in student performance evidenced by results on the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP). Kentucky students are proving to the rest of the nation that the standards are working and helping to better prepare them for college and careers.

Since teachers first taught the new Kentucky Core Academic Standards in the 2011-12 school year, the percentages of students performing at the Proficient and Distinguished levels in reading and mathematics are up between two and nine percentage points, with the largest gains coming at the elementary level, followed by middle school. Gains at the high school level, however, have not been as strong and, in fact, are nonexistent in math. We believe there are several reasons for this. First, we have only one test in reading and one in math at the high school level through our End-of-Course system. Second, these classes are not as well aligned with the new standards as those at the earlier levels. And finally, students have not benefited from the strong foundation laid by more rigorous coursework in elementary and middle school, so there may be some learning gaps. We will be addressing all of these issues in coming months.

We also saw some positive news with our student groups that traditionally underperform compared with their peers. The percentage of students in this “gap group” (African American, Hispanic, Native American, special education, poverty and limited English proficiency students) scoring at the top levels of Proficient or Distinguished is up in most cases from when we implemented Unbridled Learning three years ago. Granted, we still have a long way to go, but we are moving in the right direction.

In addition, the four-year high school graduation rate is up from 86.1 percent in 2012-13 to 87.4 percent in the 2013-14 school year – another positive move.

As the name states, our ultimate goal under this system of assessment and accountability, created as a result of Senate Bill 1 (2009), is to ensure all of our students graduate from high school ready for the next step in life – whether that is a two-year or a four-year college, a postsecondary training program, the military or the workforce. We’ve made great progress toward that goal in the past five years.

When we first started measuring the readiness of our students, only about a third (34 percent) had the knowledge and skills needed to be successful at the next level. Today, I’m happy to report that we’ve nearly

doubled that number, with a college/career-readiness rate of 62.3 percent. We estimate that this amounts to a cost savings for students and parents of nearly \$15 million – money they'll save by not having to enroll in non-credit-bearing postsecondary remedial courses.

Readers can see all the results for the state and any school or district through the online [School Report Cards](#). I invite you to take a look for yourself.

Public education in Kentucky is moving in the right direction – thanks to the hard work of our teachers, administrators and students. We all should take time to celebrate their success, but also consider what the data tell us about how we can help even more students become proficient and prepared for success – college- and career-ready – in the coming year.

Terry Holliday, Ph.D.
Education Commissioner