



Commissioner's

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Comments

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If you are from Frankfort, bring evidence

What constitutes evidence? As a former science teacher, this question has always been an important consideration for me. The dictionary defines evidence as the available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid.

So why am I writing about evidence when this is an education blog? Well, when we talk about policy it is a critical point – one that we, as a society and as a Commonwealth, need to embrace. This will be essential as we embark on creating a new accountability system for our schools.

First, there is a difference in data and evidence. Data are the things you collect. They can be qualitative or quantitative. They can be descriptive and even predictive. However, all the data in the world does not constitute evidence. Evidence is only achieved when the data are put into a logical order that reveals patterns or trends AND reasoning is applied to address the phenomena.

I am a pragmatic guy who likes things simple. But I am also a person who does not accept the things people say as true without data AND evidence. In education, we have heard too many times, “Research shows....” What research? Who did it? Was there bias? What does the data say? WHAT is the evidence?

I believe evidence is a key principle to make one’s thinking visible. Evidence explains not just the data, but how decisions are made and the logic behind them.

I have a sign in my office that states, “In God we trust, all others must bring data.” I love my sign and its intent, but I think we may need to amend it to include providing evidence.

So, what does this have to do with what is going on in Kentucky education? It is about our education shareholders holding everyone in Frankfort accountable, including me. I challenge you to hold our policymakers, educators and all of our partners accountable by demanding evidence. I call on our citizenry to not respond to education work based on hearsay or rhetoric, but to require that we present evidence that backs up the reasons for proposed and final decisions.

In short, it is my belief that in all we do in Frankfort, we should make our thinking visible. We should not be allowed to stand on anecdote or just data. We cannot be allowed to give simple one liners that attempt to justify our decisions. Rather we should be able to provide data that shows patterns or trends toward the things we value in education. But again, the key is that we make our thinking visible. It’s said the devil is in the details. So also, I would call on all Kentuckians to inform themselves with the facts and thoroughly read everything that is produced regarding proposed changes in education.

We have an incredible opportunity ahead of us in developing Kentucky's new accountability system. It will be hard work with a lot of feedback and moving parts.

Shortly, you will see announcements about my town hall tour to hear from all Kentuckians about what we value in schools so we may begin shaping Kentucky's vision for accountability. I am looking forward to meeting a lot of people, hearing their views on what we value in education, and developing a system that will be the envy of the country.

If we are to build Kentucky's public education system on equity, achievement and integrity, we need all of our shareholders to hold Frankfort accountable for providing evidence and visible thinking about all of our decisions, but especially this one.

Data is valuable, but evidence is critical to good and transparent decision making. So, perhaps every Kentuckian needs a sign that states, "In God we trust; if you're from Frankfort, bring evidence."