



# Commissioner's Comments

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## The most effective test prep is good teaching

Well, it's that time of year again. The weather is getting warmer, the days are getting longer, the grass is greening, the trees and flowers are blooming and the Commonwealth is emerging from a cold, gray winter and bursting to life once again. Yes, spring has sprung in Kentucky.

Yet, many in the education world view this as the season of dread. It is, after all, the time of year when our students sit for state exams. Testing is a hot topic across the country. We worry about over testing, "teaching to the test" and the stress our students incur as the result of testing. Assessment and accountability have become interchangeable words and both have made us change our perspective on education.

As we move forward into a new era of assessment and accountability, I believe it is time to change this mindset from one of testing trepidation back to a demonstration of the learning that has taken place over the course of the school year. There are several things we need to remember for this shift to happen so that we can be most effective educating all of our children.

First, testing is not new. Students have taken tests since education began. All industrialized countries test students and participate in international assessments. I took tests as did anyone who ever went through K-12. However, since accountability has focused so intently on state test results, it seems to have created a loathing and opposition to all testing. We always need to be mindful of why we are testing. Assessment has its place; it is needed to ensure all students are learning and getting an equitable education. However, assessments must be high quality, aligned to rigorous standards, and must not be the only measure we use to determine the excellence in education. That last point is key.

I often speak of my three pillars of education: equity, achievement and integrity. All of these relate to assessment, but are not defined by it. In fact, many think when they see the word achievement, it is determined solely by assessment. Of course assessment is part, but not all of the equation. I believe our students must be able to demonstrate achievement in many areas.

Closing the achievement gap starts with closing the opportunity gap. Access to various opportunities for learning must be available to students both within and outside of tested subjects. Opportunities in the visual and performing arts, STEM, science, social studies, career tech education, and any non-tested or limited-tested subjects have value, can increase student engagement and will lead to a well-rounded, educated and employed populace. It is why our new accountability system must look at the inputs into the system and not just the outputs.

Additionally, we must remember that the most influential factor in all of education is the teacher. It is unfortunate we often forget this. In my opinion, we spend way too much time and money on test prep programs and not enough on one single, simple truth – the most effective test prep is good teaching. I

understand not wanting students to walk into a high stakes test unawares. As a former AP teacher, I would have students practice problems periodically. What I did not do is stop instruction for a month to “prep” my students.

It is time we realized that waiting until the end of the year and cramming their heads with information they didn't relate to or get the first time around, going over the same material slower, and with additional worksheets is not the answer. It's our teachers who are.

I strongly believe, and research supports this, that if teachers do what effective teachers do and give great instruction and reteach when necessary along the way, the test is just an opportunity for students to demonstrate what they know. So again, the best test prep is a great teacher giving great instruction throughout the school year. I am hopeful we can change the narrative in the future of Kentucky education. Great learning opportunities for all students plus great instruction equals great achievement – that is the equation for education success.

We have a lot of work ahead of us, but there is no where I would rather be than here in Kentucky working with our educators for Our Students, Our Commonwealth.