



# Commissioner's

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# Comments

April 4, 2016

## Challenging ourselves to move beyond our comfort zones

I have said many times that our teachers have the greatest job on Earth. Not a day goes by that I do not miss being in the classroom. In fact, I'm pretty sure the Kentucky Department of Education staff wish I would stop explaining the science behind various phenomena that come up around us. Once a teacher, always a teacher.

While teaching is the greatest job, it is also one of the hardest. The realities of the job such as designing and delivering quality instruction, dealing with students with many different needs, feeling pressure over assessment, keeping up with endless changes and filling out form after form bear this out. But, there are some challenges that we don't often acknowledge.

Education has an odd culture. Teachers are constantly surrounded by other humans, yet the job can be very isolating. The realities of the profession do not foster teacher collaboration, review of research or even sharing of best practices. How do teachers break out of this isolation to work more toward what is best for their students? To really serve our students, we must create a culture that not only allows, but encourages all teachers to move outside the four walls of their classrooms to discuss method, technique, knowledge and practice. And in doing so, challenge themselves to move beyond their individual comfort zone.

This past week for the first time in many years, I missed the National Science Teachers Association annual conference. I really struggled with not being there. I realize some people think these types of gatherings are just fun things for teachers to do, yet in my experience they were much more. Yes, I had fun, but I also always left with new ideas and additional resources – including teachers from outside my district. I also left with a certain level of discomfort. The reason for this was that in listening to others, I sometimes realized that what I was doing in my classroom was not always in the best interest of my students, was not supported by research, or I learned that there was just a better way to do things.

I am not endorsing that all of our teachers go to every conference available, but I am saying that if we do not support our teachers with quality professional learning that pushes them and makes them uncomfortable, we will not see change or improvement in practice in Kentucky. To be clear, I am not saying a "one and done" conference is good professional learning. I am saying it should be part of our offerings to move outside of our comfort zones in order to learn what else is out there.

As commissioner, I am constantly learning. I spend time with all sorts of shareholders in order to push myself to break out of my comfort zone. If I get too comfortable, I am more likely to make decisions for the Commonwealth that are easy, yet not right by students, unsupported by research or shareholders, and

most likely better for the adults than our students. Our students cannot afford those kinds of decisions by me or by any adult in their lives.

So, I am encouraging all of our educators to embrace the idea that we do the best for our students by being willing to grow and challenge ourselves with a certain level of discomfort from time to time. We know learning is a struggle, and we should never stop learning. As we move forward in this new age of shared responsibility and accountability, I implore you to come to our [town hall meetings](#), participate in the discussion, and also be willing to consider new and innovative ideas about how to help our students.

As always, I am proud to serve Our Students, Our Commonwealth.

