



Commissioner's

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Comments

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Overcoming what seems impossible in education

This past week, I, like many others, mourned the loss and celebrated the life of Kentucky native son, Muhammad Ali. He was an incredible individual, showman and athlete. But even more than that, he was an incredible human being.

When you strip away all of the politics and perceptions that often generated controversy, Ali stood for people who often could not stand for themselves. He was a spectacle, and even after Parkinson's took away his voice and bravado, he still commanded a presence because of his genuine care for people.

Last week, I heard a quote of Ali's that I do not remember hearing before. I would like to share it because it is not only a testament to the man that Ali was, but also appropriate for what some people say is the impossible job of public education.

"Impossible is just a big word thrown around by small men who find it easier to live in the world they've been given than to explore the power they have to change it. Impossible is not a fact. It's an opinion. Impossible is not a declaration. It's a dare. Impossible is potential. Impossible is temporary. Impossible is nothing."

Some say we face an impossible task with the implementation of the new [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#) and collaboratively developing a new accountability system. Our goal is to create a system that reflects what Kentuckians value in education and moves us past a mindset of competition and compliance with a law, so that we may create an attitude of excellence and improvement in our schools that will benefit of all of our students. Difficult and challenging – yes. Impossible – NO!

I believe, to paraphrase The Greatest, the law gives us the opportunity to "explore the power we have to change" the system. We need greater focus on students, more guidance from research and to change our perceptions of equity and opportunity. Now with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the opportunity to make some of those changes is at hand.

Earlier in June, the United States Department of Education (USED) released draft regulations that would govern the implementation of ESSA. While unlike Ali, I am not a fighter, I do believe in standing up for what is right for kids. That's why already I have been in contact with USED about several issues that I see as potential problems with the draft regulations for implementing ESSA.

As we move forward, we need everyone to submit their thoughts through this [website](#) on proposed ESSA regulations. I'll be honest with you, the regs are dense, detailed and sometimes their meaning isn't entirely clear, but we owe it to our kids to plow through, devote the time and understanding, and make sure the regulations reflect the best interest of students.

Also, as the new accountability system develops, we need everyone to continue to provide us with their thoughts on the new system, as you did so well during the Town Hall listening tour. You need to hold us and USED accountable to move past mere compliance with a law to develop a system that will promote an equitable and quality, well-rounded education that will encourage each and every student in Kentucky to reach his or her true potential and graduate from high school ready for college, career and life.

While the task for meeting the needs of our students is huge, as Ali said, nothing is impossible. It is a dare – a dare I embrace. I hope you will all take that dare with me as we push to change an accountability system so that it will be meaningful and bring about genuine school improvement for the benefit of all of Kentucky's children.