



Commissioner's

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Kentucky Commissioner of Education

Comments

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We need your help!

Communication, ironically, is something we always seem to be discussing. Whether you are a Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) employee, a teacher, an administrator or in the business sector, communication is a big deal. So, why is it that communication can be so difficult? And quite frankly, how is it that as a whole, the profession of education tends to be so bad at it?

Perhaps part of the reason is that educators are typically neither taught the art of communication beyond pedagogy, nor are we given a sense of urgency around it. Here at KDE I am lucky that I have a staff that focuses on communication, but admittedly we do not always get it right. I think that sometimes the issue in education is that we tend to think of communication as a one-way street or maybe even a one-party obligation. If the communication is to be effective, it's not that easy. The communication must be two-way and that, like everything else, takes effort and intentionality on everyone's part.

The case in point is our new accountability system under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). We have tried to communicate two major issues to this point. One, we are working on a new system with lots of diverse individuals; and two, the deadline for commenting on many of U.S. Department of Education (USED) proposed regulations that would govern implementation of ESSA and a new accountability system is coming to an end on August 1. **Kentuckians must comment if we want to do what we believe is right by our students.** We have communicated through social media, emails, news releases, the KDE website, articles in *Kentucky Teacher*, held a dozen town hall meetings (one virtually, available [on demand](#)) on the subject, and I have blogged about both of these issues almost non-stop. Yet still, I received a few emails over the weekend telling me about the new ESSA and how they "heard I might be considering making changes to the accountability system."

How is that possible? How is it that we are still having Kentuckians who do not know about this work? After some reflection, I think the answer is threefold.

One, we at KDE, have to redouble our efforts to communicate with the key people who can help distribute our messages, such as the Kentucky Association of School Administrators to whom I had the honor to speak last week.

The second, we need folks to meet us half way. We need Kentuckians to want this knowledge and be willing to sometimes seek it out, but sometimes simply to open an email. I was told recently when I was being scolded by an educator for not communicating enough that he "doesn't read email unless it looks interesting." This is one of the most historic times in our careers, nothing should be more interesting right now than making sure our accountability system is the right thing for our students. We must stop living in a world of "I heard that..." or "Someone told me..." without doing our own research. Rumors only hurt the truth. It was the same in middle school as it is as an adult.

Third, we need everyone to communicate what they know about the process and eventually the system itself. We are posting PowerPoints that keep everyone up to date on process and key milestones as the work progresses. I have asked all administrators to take 20 minutes at the end of each faculty meeting to update staff on the process, but people do not have to wait. They can go to the website <http://bit.ly/ESSAKY> to get all the information they need.

We all may not be happy when this is over, but at the very least, we all need to be informed.

Finally, I need to make one more plea about the proposed regulations from USED. August 1 is the deadline for comment on the portion of the regulations dealing with accountability, state plans and data reporting.

I know we are all busy, but this is a critical time. I am challenging Kentuckians to make their feelings known to USED and lawmakers on these regulations – my goal is for at least 1,000 Kentuckians to share their thoughts – positive or negative through the [Federal Register website](#). As the State School Officer for Kentucky, I will be submitting my thoughts, as I have shared with Congress on two occasions. But my comments count as only one voice and hold no more value than anyone else's. **We need everyone to comment by the August 1 deadline.** You do not have to agree with me, but if you do, feel free to use a portion of my [written testimony](#). As with everything, if we do not take the opportunity to voice our opinion, we will be stuck with what we have, with no one to blame.

Thank you all for what you do for our students in your various roles. Now is the time for courage and communication, we can do this together. Remember, it may take a village to raise a child, but it takes a Commonwealth to educate one.