



# Commissioner's

by Stephen L. Pruitt, Ph.D.  
Kentucky Commissioner of Education

## Comments

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### **Uniting for a common purpose**

This week many of us paused to remember one of the most terrible attacks by a foreign aggressor on American soil. Sunday was the 15th anniversary of a day we now simply refer to as 9-11. Across the internet, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and every other social media platform we saw the words, "never forget." Very fitting and I hope the words hold true.

You may be thinking, why would you pick this to talk about in an education blog? Well, like most things in my career, the answer starts in a classroom; my classroom.

The morning of September 11, 2001 started like any other. I was teaching my first period A.P Chemistry class. At 8:46 a.m., the first plane hit the first tower or the World Trade Center in New York City. Many people thought this was a horrible accident, then just minutes later, the second plane hit the second tower. I was in my first period until 9:15, so I had no clue this had happened. A short time later, our principal came over the public address system to tell us the news. Clearly this was no accident. Little could we imagine, more bad news was to come.

Needless to say, my class and I were horribly shaken. Our principal made the decision to cut all ties with the outside world. There would be no TV or internet. This was due in large part because we had many students who had family members in the airline industry and we did not know what airlines were involved. About 10 o'clock, the principal came back on to announce a plane had crashed into the Pentagon. I remember seeing a dear friend of mine who taught special education sprinting up the hall to get to a phone. Her son worked at the Pentagon. Of course, later we learned a fourth plane had been hijacked and crashed in Pennsylvania.

It was a day of fear, mourning, loss and maybe most of all the realization that as a nation, we were not immune to the evil of the world. While we will truly never forget that day, I am afraid we have overlooked an important part of it. As a result of the tragedy, September 11, 2001 united us as a country.

In the days after 9/11, we saw flags hanging from bridges, neighbors spontaneously hugging, churches filled, Congress from both sides of the aisle singing God Bless America in the Rose Garden. We saw a United States of America disregard what divided us and embrace what united us. We had a sense of country, we celebrated the heroes of that tragic day – from the firefighters to the passengers on Flight 93. Signs of "Let's Roll" and patriotism were everywhere. There were no agendas and no special interests that superseded our need to protect our homeland. This is what should be celebrated, and remember with just as much reverence as the event itself. The fact that we can put aside our differences for the benefit of our nation is what makes us American.

Now, back to education. It is time in Kentucky that we come together for what should unite us – the future of our children. We need to realize that education is complex, diverse in the public's thinking, and ever changing.

What is universally constant however, is that our children are counting on us. They do not always realize they are, but they are. They are counting on us to make good decisions based on data and not on what we think is just a good idea. They are counting on us to do it together regardless of the things that divide us. They are counting on us to provide them with an education that will prepare them to be the next generation of this great country. We have made great progress in many areas, but we have still not provided each child with the opportunity to realize the American dream.

So, as we continue to move forward with crafting education policy and improving education in the Commonwealth, we should “never forget” the circumstances that started us down the road of education reform, the great strides we have made in the past and the fact that we still have not met the needs of each child. But, we also should make sure we remember what unites us, our children and their future. If we focus on that, we can do just as we did after 9/11. We can forget our differences and do something really special for our children and ultimately the Commonwealth and the world.

I hope you took time to honor the heroes and families of 9/11. They deserve it and we owe them a great deal. In that spirit, I hope you will join me in uniting for Our Children, Our Commonwealth.