

All students deserve opportunities to find their passion

In a week that kicks off with many of us participating in trick or treat, I got a real treat on Saturday night. I got to attend the Kentucky Music Educators Association's (KMEA) State Marching Band Championships. It was an incredible event and I was honored to be a part of it.

I had the chance to watch these bands' astonishing performances. The sound, the presentation and the sheer majesty of each performance showed all the hard work that each student and adult put into it. It was clearly hard work, but I want to spend a little time on something bigger and more inspiring.

These kids and adults (I say adults because in addition to band directors/teachers, the parent commitment is incredible) do not spend time on this just because of hard work. They do it because they love it. And when I say they love it, I do not mean that in the way that the term is overused today. I mean they LOVE it. There is a real passion for what they do. You can see it in their faces, their actions, and in their performance.

One of the most impressive parts of the evening was the closing ceremony. The bands marched into the stadium and lined up across the football field. The pageantry and pride as they marched in and took their positions was on the scale of the closing ceremony of the Olympics. I was struck by the look of pride and joy on each student's face as they marched past me. They did this because they love it, not just because it's hard or they wanted something to do.

Some will read this column and think my observations are obvious. I wanted to write about it because it inspired me to think about how important opportunity is for all of our students. As we are working on our new accountability system, we must remember the importance of providing a rich, well-rounded education to each student. We have to realize that a well-rounded education not only shows an increase in assessment scores in tested subjects (which is supported by research), but it also gives students the chance to do something they love, which makes them appreciate and engage in their school and education.

We must move past the test and compliance and into quality education. We owe it to our students across the Commonwealth. Education is about more than a test score, it is time we all realize that.

The days of "if it's not tested, it's not taught" must end. As an education professional, I am appalled when I hear this. It is no different than having a brain surgeon walk past a person having a heart attack and refusing to help because "they don't do the heart." It is shameful and we cannot afford this attitude any longer.

The reality is we teach children and those children need the opportunity to experience music, art, career and technical education, science, social studies, languages and all the other aspects of school. If we want to see our achievement and opportunity gap close, we must start with a change in mindset.

My time this weekend inspired me. I am thankful to John Stroube and KMEA for allowing me to participate and see some of Kentucky's best marching bands in action. Those students showed me their passion for their music. We need to keep that enthusiasm in mind as we go about making sure their education and opportunities to excel are second to none.