

Commissioner of Education's Report
August 5-6, 2015 KBE Meeting
by
Commissioner Terry Holliday

Kentucky to Participate in CCSSO Career Readiness Tier 2 Initiative

At the recent Council of Chief State Officers in Boston, I signed the MOA for Kentucky to participate in the CCSSO Career Readiness Tier 2 Initiative. This MOA makes a commitment to work with a set of peer states to improve career readiness programming. Associate Commissioner Dale Winkler will lead this work.

The background on this initiative is as follows:

“CCSSO launched its Career Readiness Task Force in the spring of 2014 to address the concern that career education in too many of our secondary schools reflects an outdated model that tolerates low expectations and is often misaligned with the evolving needs of the current labor market. As a result, there is an increasingly pronounced skills gap that plagues American businesses as they struggle to find qualified workers and too many dead ends for our students who rely on career preparation programs as their ticket into the middle class.

The Task Force determined that states could make substantive improvements to their career-readiness by taking the following steps:

1. States must make their high school programs more responsive to the labor market by enlisting the employer community as a lead partner. States need a new “demand-driven” system for determining which programs and pathways warrant continued development and investment, and which should be scaled down or phased out. This will require a new partnership with the employer community, one that gives them the responsibility for identifying high-demand, high-skill industries and developing a suite of authentic work-based learning experiences so that schools can align career preparation with the specific needs of business and industry.
2. States must significantly raise the threshold for quality career pathways in secondary schools. States must develop and make available to all students an array of high quality career pathways spanning secondary and postsecondary levels that combine rigorous academics with an applied curriculum and work-based learning opportunities, supported by focused career planning and guidance. These pathways must result in credentials that are valued by employers and aligned with current and emerging market needs so that completing a pathway opens real doors of opportunity in the job market.
3. States must make career preparation matter to schools and students. What’s measured gets valued by schools, but most state accountability systems today don’t measure or value career readiness as part of their school improvement metrics. Given the critical role that accountability systems play in signaling priorities and driving resources, states must expand these metrics to emphasize readiness for both college and careers. States also need to re-examine their high school graduation requirements and scholarship programs to

consider whether there are opportunities to give credit for career-focused courses and credentials.”

“The recommendations of the Career Readiness Task Force covered three major areas, each of which included specific policy action steps. To participate in Tier 2, state chiefs must commit to developing a comprehensive shared strategy – including scope of work, partners’ roles and responsibilities, timeline, and specific goals – to advance the Task Force recommendations. . .”

In return for the state’s commitment to this initiative, CCSSO will provide the following:

- “Develop an online best practices resource center for states that provides resources such as strategies, case studies, self-assessment tools, communications materials and models of best practice.
- Provide Tier 2 states with implementation support, including one-on-one coaching support, to assist them in the development of their state plans.
- Host “problems of practice” calls and webinars with Tier 2 states, which are designed to help states work collectively to address the challenges of advancing the Task Force recommendations.
- Bring Tier 2 states together for cross-state convenings up to twice a year, during which states can share their work and access experts to assist in the development and implementation of their state plans. . .”

Staff will keep you apprised of this work as it moves forward.

Op-Ed on Dropout Legislation/GED Issue

I am sure you have seen the coverage in the media on the consequences the dropout legislation is having on some students who had already dropped out and were pursuing their GEDs. To deal with this issue, I wrote an Op-Ed that was distributed recently across the state and spoke about it at the Kentucky Association of School Administrators Annual Conference. Below is the content of the Op-Ed:

Recovery of dropouts should be seen as opportunity

Senate Bill 97, which the Kentucky General Assembly passed in 2013, raises the compulsory school attendance age from 16 to 18 for all Kentucky public school districts once 55 percent of districts voluntarily adopt such a policy. This took only two weeks in 2013. Because of the vision and leadership of these local boards of education, now all Kentucky school districts have adopted a policy to raise the dropout age to age 18, with the vast majority of districts implementing the policy in the upcoming 2015-16 school year.

As a result, local districts are contacting students between the ages of 16 and 18 who have dropped out of school so the students can re-enroll in school this fall.

The recovery of young adults who have made the unwise decision of dropping out of school is an economic, moral, and civil rights imperative for Kentucky. For too long, Kentucky has chosen to forget about these students and hoped that they were able to find

their way in life. For too many of these students, the path forward has led to unemployment, dependency on social programs and for some, incarceration. More than 70 percent of the inmates in our nation's prisons are high school dropouts.

The recovery of these young adults presents a tremendous opportunity for our schools and communities. The Kentucky Department of Education provided planning grants of \$10,000 to assist school districts with this transition. Implementation grants also were provided to assist districts. And it should be pointed out that students who re-enroll are included in federal, state and local per pupil funding.

As with any new initiative there have been some missteps with implementation of the recovery system. Recent media articles have drawn attention to isolated cases of students caught in the middle of the transition to raising the dropout age.

One of the transition issues is related to the GED. For many years, high school dropouts looked to the GED as an alternative to a high school diploma. The GED was not intended for students between the ages of 16-18. The GED was intended for adults who were seeking to re-enter the education system to gain credentials that could help them gain better employment opportunities.

A leading economic researcher, Dr. James Heckman, has well documented evidence that 16-18 year old high school dropouts who seek a GED have no better economic future than high school dropouts. Today's economy does not support high school dropouts. There is substantial research to show the earnings difference between a high school dropout and students who move forward to a high school diploma and postsecondary credentials.

Also, the GED has made a major shift in the level of performance expected to pass. The GED transition was based on the academic and career skills that students need in order to be competitive in the current economy. Very few of the students who have dropped out would be able to pass the new GED without significant support in literacy and numeracy skills. What better place to receive this support than in our public schools?

While Kentucky is shifting to a higher dropout age, there will be a number of students caught in the transition over the next two years. We must seize this opportunity to be creative and innovative. School districts must look at innovative ways to provide educational opportunities to these students. Educators must use common sense. It makes no sense to tell a 17-year-old who will turn 18 in December and has only a handful of high school credits that he/she must return to school and enter traditional credit coursework. Instead, educators should look for creative alternatives. Educators should utilize the plans created as the result of the planning and implementation grants provided by the Kentucky Department of Education. Educators should look for community-based solutions that would provide academic skills in a competency-based model and career and technical skills in work-based learning model that would provide the students caught in the transition with an improved hope of job readiness.

The alternative is doing nothing and continuing to ignore these students. This alternative would only serve to sentence these students to an outlook based on poverty, despair and hopelessness.

Terry Holliday, Ph.D.
Education Commissioner

Letter to Local Board Chairs and Superintendents on SPGES

On July 17, Kentucky School Boards Association Executive Director Mike Armstrong and I sent a joint letter out to all local board of education chairs and local district superintendents regarding the Superintendent Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (SPGES). The purpose of the letter was to remind them that the system must be fully implemented this year and to offer assistance and support. The complete message appears below:

Dear Local Board of Education Chair and Superintendent:

We hope this e-mail finds you well and working toward the opening of the 2015-16 school year.

Beginning this year, all Kentucky districts are required to fully implement the approved Superintendent Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (SPGES) for superintendent evaluation. The approved system for superintendent evaluation in Kentucky can be found at:

<http://education.ky.gov/teachers/PGES/SPGES/Pages/default.aspx>.

As of December 31, 2014, all Kentucky School districts notified the department and indicated that they had adopted the SPGES process for superintendent evaluation. SPGES is the only approved superintendent evaluation system in Kentucky according to the requirements of KRS 156.557.

In addition to the use of the SPGES process and documents, every local board of education and superintendent are asked to continue to incorporate three specific components into their current superintendent evaluation process: district delivery targets/Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (PGES), budget/support systems and facilities/support systems. The local board should review and discuss these with the superintendent in an open board meeting and document the discussion in the board meeting minutes.

During the 2014-15 SPGES statewide pilot, all Kentucky districts and local boards were asked to become familiar with the tools and process developed by the SPGES steering committee. The Kentucky School Boards Association (KSBA) offered a series of trainings for local boards and is planning to continue those opportunities in the months ahead. KSBA continues to partner closely with the department in developing the needed training on SPGES for school board members. Please do not hesitate to contact KSBA staff for updates or additional clarifications on the approved superintendent evaluation process. Questions on training should be directed to Kerri Schelling, Director, Board

Team Development, at (502) 695-4630, ext. 1276, or via e-mail at kerri.schelling@ksba.org.

The goal continues to be a common set of statewide superintendent effectiveness standards and a process to maximize feedback for the continuous professional growth and effectiveness of all Kentucky superintendents.

KDE is not requiring that actual superintendent evaluations be submitted to the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), but reminds you that they are subject to the Kentucky Open Records Act.

Questions on SPGES can be directed to Dr. Tommy Floyd, KDE Chief of Staff, at (502) 564-3141, ext. 4810, or via e-mail at tommy.floyd@education.ky.gov.

Sincerely,



Terry Holliday, Ph.D.
Commissioner
Kentucky Department of Education



Mike Armstrong
Executive Director
Kentucky School Boards Association