

Commissioner's Report
Stephen L. Pruitt, Ph.D.
Kentucky Board of Education Meeting
August 3, 2017

Kentucky School for the Blind Updates (KSB)

Summer has been an especially busy time at KSB, as students participated in several exciting programs. KSB sophomores, juniors and seniors, along with other students from Kentucky who are blind or visually impaired, attended the Insight program at Morehead State University (MSU). Insight is a collaboration among MSU, the Kentucky Office for the Blind (KOFB), KSB, the Kentucky Educational Development Corporation (KEDC) and the KSB Charitable Foundation. Insight is a preparation program for students who may want to attend college. During their week at Insight, the students lived in residence halls, dined in student cafeterias, attended classes, explored the campus, and spent evenings in recreational and social pursuits.



In addition, sixty students from across the state participated in three KSB summer programs. The elementary program, “The Great Outdoors,” had 23 students and focused on a variety of skills in the areas of language arts, math, science, art, music, cooking and daily living. The elementary program also featured a guest speaker from the Louisville Nature Center who provided a tactile presentation which afforded students the unique opportunity to work with stamps of animal footprints, a variety of rocks, animal parts and plants (deer hoof, mink coat and mushroom), and even a millipede.



The middle/high school program, “Heroes and Villains” had 19 students and the focus was on academic, self-determination, daily living skills through art, technology and physical education activities. Students participated in a variety of field trips which included visiting a petting zoo, nature trail walk, Louisville Zoo, Ephraim McDowell House (first surgeon in the world, Danville, KY), Kroger (shopping skills, orientation and mobility) and Louisville Science Center.

Each summer KSB also offers a summer work program that provides supervised work experiences for students who are blind and visually impaired. This summer 18 students worked at Kentucky Kingdom, Louisville Zoo and American Printing House. As part of the program, students attended career-related classes prior to work each day. While on the job, students were given the opportunity for KOFB and those students who live locally to interview for a job through the employer.



Kentucky School for the Deaf Update (KSD)

Learning has not been idle at KSD either, as they hosted summer school for two weeks. The elementary and middle school theme was the “Art of Energy” and students worked on academic and daily living skills through field trips, science and art projects. The KSD high school students, from four demographic groups (deaf, hard of hearing, KODA's (kids of deaf adults) and hearing students) participated in “Ag Camp 2017”. The students made carpenter bee traps, participated in a live auction, learned to safely drive a Gator and a Zero Turn mower through obstacle courses, installed a new hen house on campus, visited Alpaca Haven and “Hooves of Hope” Equine Therapy Center, and toured the University of Kentucky (UK) College of Agriculture, Meat Lab and Kroger Field.





Local District Funding Concerns

A combination of economic and demographic factors have negatively impacted the financial stability for several districts in Eastern Kentucky. The steady decline of the coal industry has resulted in a significant decrease in unmined mineral property assessments which, in turn, resulted in significantly less tax dollars for school districts.

As the decline in the coal industry led to a loss of coal-related jobs, the school districts started to experience a decline in student population and tax collections which, in many cases, reached the lowest levels in the last 10 years, further exacerbating funding issues within the district. In some cases, a declining property assessment has led to increased tax rates which has negatively impacted local tax revenue even further. In order to manage through these declines in revenues, the districts often had to use fund balances, essentially a “savings account”. The districts that KDE has spoken with continue to look at cost saving measures such as consolidation of schools, reducing staff, and reducing bus routes.

Property assessments over this same period for those same districts are down 14% and tax rates have increased 28%. Tax collections for those same districts have declined over 20% during the same time period. Using the most recent estimates, Knott, Leslie, Martin, and Pike County Schools are expected to lose, on average, 82% of their unmined minerals tax revenue when compared to fiscal year 2012.

Interim Joint Committee on Education (IJCE) Accountability Presentation (PPT attached)

On Monday, July 10, 2017 I had the privilege of presenting to the Interim Joint Committee on Education (IJCE) regarding the current work underway on the state’s new K-12 accountability system. You may view a recording of the presentation by utilizing the following link:
<https://www.ket.org/legislature/?archive&nola=WLEGP+017015>.

The open dialogue provided a great opportunity for feedback on the proposed system. I am appreciative of the time and attention that this committee has given to this important work.

Every Student Succeeds ACT (ESSA) State Plan

States are required to submit their state ESSA plans to the United States Department of Education (USED) by September 18, 2017. Many states have already submitted their plans and have received a varying degree of feedback from USED officials; however, Kentucky has been intentional about taking adequate time to ensure that the state’s plan truly reflects the values of Kentuckians and the long-term vision of the K-12 education system. Kentucky’s plan will be submitted to Governor Bevin in August for review, prior to final submission to the USED.