

A message to Wayne Lewis: Every teacher knows why Kentucky kids are failing

Allison Slone | Opinion contributor Updated 4:48 p.m. EDT Apr. 26, 2019



An open letter to Kentucky [Education Commissioner Wayne Lewis](#):

Recently you stated “novice, scoring at the very bottom, means that students demonstrate minimal to no understanding of the content at grade level.”

Novice is not a representation of content knowledge. We must understand every reason a child scores at the bottom, and there is no one who can explain it better than those who spend every Monday

through Friday with Kentucky's youth.

I won't waste time asking for a seat at your table. It's obvious there are no empty seats left. Instead I'll share with you what most every public educator feels and says from the cheap seats ... you know the ones, they have broken legs, leave black marks on the floors, squeak, have holes in the back, and are two sizes too small.

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Novice, in a nutshell...

1. There is not enough funding to provide students with necessary resources to increase to proficiency.
2. Many of our districts can't provide the needed technology nor the internet necessary to keep up with today's growing needs.
3. No matter what research tells you, anyone who spends a moment in a classroom that has 34 students, including four with behavioral disorders, two with autism, two with learning disabilities, one non-reader, four more on ADHD meds, two with diabetes, one with PTSD from watching his dad shoot himself, three in foster care, several living with grandparents, and two who are so gifted the class can't keep up with them, will tell you they can't provide the needs for all to help them achieve their goals.
4. Unidentified and unrecognized dyslexia impacts 1 out of every 5 students.

5. Lack of purposeful professional learning for teachers due to no funding impacts learning.

6. Teacher preparation programs are not providing our preservice teachers with instruction that is relevant and necessary in the area of literacy. Our teachers do not know how to teach children to read using structured multi-sensory literacy strategies.

7. School climate is at an all-time low. The demands put on educators are overwhelming and unrealistic. Teacher burnout is at an all-time high.

8. Administrators often feel pressured to get those elusive high test scores, no matter what it takes. Pressure of that magnitude sometimes creates divides between them and their staff. What is truly determination can be misinterpreted.

9. Parents are becoming less supportive of teachers. Not only do we have students who don't listen, don't follow the rules, curse us, throw things at us, and have little respect, we have parents who blame us rather than back us.

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10. We have more teachers being assaulted by students and less that can be done to prevent this behavior.

11. The [attack on public education](#) is turning the public against us. We are bursting at the seams with no relief in sight. A charter school or [tax returns](#) to help "square pegs fit in round holes" does NOT solve the

problem.

12. Lastly, but most importantly, we are using only the state end-of-year assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of the system. It is unreliable and unjust. Success should be measured by the smile on a child's face and growth. Success is the child who read 10 words independently. Success is the child that survived three days without a meltdown. Success is the child who scored a passing score for the first time. Success is the child who made his first friend in the eighth grade. Success is giving a presentation in front of classmates, even when your voice shakes. Success is reading your first chapter book, as a freshman. Success is the child who came to school simply for the safety and free food, after watching mom "shoot up" before the bus arrived that morning.

Yes, Commissioner Lewis, as educators we would love to see our students score above novice, but we are the only ones who seem to understand that novice is an explanation, a result, a reason... not a label.

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