

**From:** [Wilkerson, Donnie](#)  
**To:** [KDE KBE](#)  
**Cc:** [Glass, Jason - Commissioner of Education](#)  
**Subject:** Public Expression Pursuant to Agenda Item XV. at Wednesday's Board Meeting  
**Date:** Monday, February 1, 2021 3:21:39 PM

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*Below you will find my public comments for the board meeting on Wednesday. I have endeavored to comply with all directions as I did in December when, though my short comments were the only ones received, they were not made public. I thought that was the nature of "public comment"? I must respectfully now request that both these comments and those submitted in December (re-submitted below) be read at this month's meeting. I am more than happy to join your meeting electronically and present myself if that is preferred? Had the meeting been in-person I would have gladly traveled to Frankfort for that purpose. You may reach me at the contact information below with any questions.*

Public Comment for KBE Meeting February 03, 2021 RE: Agenda Items X., XVI.A. and XVII.B.

From : Donnie Wilkerson [REDACTED]

Just this month, Kentuckians fittingly honored the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., but Kentucky students are no longer required to learn about this most important, impactful, and iconic leader. For two decades Kentucky social studies standards have explicitly included Dr. King and his *I Have a Dream Speech*, but Kentucky's most recently adopted standards do not. In a further slight to the African American community these new standards include specific references to only two U.S. presidents, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, both owners of enslaved people while the second president and non-slaveholder, John Adams, is left out as is Kentucky's favorite son and author of the *Emancipation Proclamation*, Abraham Lincoln! The Civil Rights Movement itself is not included until high school. People of color, indeed all Kentuckians, should be outraged and embarrassed! For this reason alone, the current Kentucky Board of Education and the Kentucky General Assembly should act immediately to rescind these ill-conceived standards but there are even deeper systemic problems.

Tragically, the American history progression at the elementary level stops at 1791! Under the new standards elementary school students will no longer study Lewis and Clark, the War of 1812, the Trail of Tears, the Underground Railroad, the Oregon Trail, the Civil War, Ellis Island, Women's Suffrage, World War I, the Great Depression, the Holocaust, World War II, the Cold War nor anything else from the last three centuries! Previous elementary standards did include all these seminal events. Unbelievably the study of Kentucky history stops before Kentucky even becomes a

state (1792)!

Most egregiously, these new standards are wholly predicated on a high sounding but non-evidence-based approach to teaching called inquiry learning. This so-called “progressive” or constructivist educational philosophy where teachers are seen primarily as “guides on the side” while students, usually in small groups, “discover” and “control their own learning” has long been pushed by teacher education programs and government education bureaucracies. The focus is on stand-alone skills and process rather than factual knowledge or content. Though cool sounding this so-called “student-led”, skills based, discovery education approach has limited efficacy, is not supported by research and has been anything but progressive. Instead, it has impeded academic growth and widened oppressive socio-economic and racial gaps. Fortunately, states around the country and countries around the world have recently begun to abandon this failed approach, opting instead for strong teacher-led, knowledge-based systems as supported by the science of how we learn and the overwhelming body of research. Unfortunately, Kentucky has not . . . instead doubling down, diving even deeper into this failed methodology as evidenced by the disastrous results of its current science standards and test. Now, with these new social studies standards the “edu-acracy” obviously wants to do to social studies what it did to science!

Former Kentucky Board of Education members recently wrote this current board acknowledging their own error in adopting these standards and encouraged you to revisit them. The board and the General Assembly should heed the advice and correct this travesty! Apologists will cite “standards not curriculum”, throw up the strawman of “rote learning and memorization”, counter that other states are “doing the same thing”, talk at length about “21<sup>st</sup> century skills”, “deep dives” and “thinking like a historian”, and claim research to support inquiry-based learning. My research clearly refutes each point. I implore you; Allow me the time to present the research, evidence and data in support of these arguments and those submitted (albeit not publicly!) at the December meeting. At least listen; Kentucky’s kids and our commitment to equity deserve no less.

I thank you once again for your time and service to this great Commonwealth.

Public Comment for KBE Meeting December 02, 2020 RE: Agenda Items XVI.C. and XVII.A.

From : Donnie Wilkerson [REDACTED]

Kentucky has great schools, great teachers and best of all great students! Why then are most

measures of academic performance declining or stagnant with disturbing ever present and growing racial and socio-economic gaps? It could be that we have largely ignored the research of how we learn . . . the brain science that should be informing not only teacher education programs, classroom pedagogies and curriculum but also standards and the accountability and assessment models on your agenda today.

For decades we have largely embraced and promulgated one pedagogical model based on constructivist theories popularly espoused by John Dewey. “Inquiry based”, “student led”, “discovery learning”, “problem and project-based learning”, all done in “small groups” with a teacher/facilitator as “guide on the side” have been the mantras. Though high sounding and appealing, research supporting their superior efficacy is sorely lacking. Even more disquieting are the findings showing statistically significant negative correlations for these methodologies with struggling learners. The bulk of the research, rather, informs an explicit content driven instruction model delivered by a highly skilled and engaging teacher . . . that oft maligned “sage on the stage”. Meta-analysis’s comprising hundreds of studies involving thousands of students clearly shows that “teacher as activator” yields far greater effect sizes than does “teacher as facilitator”. Recent literacy research now documents the need for early phonics instruction followed by strong content knowledge-based instruction in the core disciplines. The research additionally points to lack of background knowledge as one of the biggest factors causing reading levels to languish after third grade along with a precipitous decline in growth, not only in reading but in math and other subjects. Academic standards as well as accountability and assessment systems must embrace this reality!

We must stop the focus on flawed, high stakes testing models that are often neither valid nor reliable (KPREP) and an accountability system that changes almost yearly, requiring a skilled psychometrician to explain. Whether we use stars, dash boards or color-coded boxes makes little difference. Weighing the pig using different scales will not make him grow! Instead, we must focus on systemic pedagogical change if we truly wish to embrace equity and insure growth for all students! We must avoid, though, a return to the equally flawed and failed KIRIS or "Program Review" models which rely on so-called "performance based" assessments. These are not evidence based and are ambiguous, highly subjective and fraught with opportunity for manipulation. Instead, there are proven, valid and reliable instruments readily and commercially available, immediately. An ITBS modeled, norm-referenced\* exam could be given at every grade level and every content area every year at a fraction of the cost of the time-consuming criterion-referenced\* KCCT/KPREP

models we have fallen prey to. These assessments allow longitudinal tracking of growth and provide almost instant valid and reliable data to address our ever widening socio-economic and racial gaps. All learners can then spend less time preparing for and taking tests and more time learning! Standards must be concomitantly designed and aligned to reflect strong CONTENT based instruction. What a disaster we've foisted on the students of this state with the last few years of science standards and assessments. At least former board members now acknowledge their mistake in the equally tragic adoption last year of Kentucky's content-devoid social studies standards.

The high sounding and well-meaning but largely non-evidenced based constructivist methodologies of the last three decades have "left behind" the most vulnerable and held stagnant most of the rest. Kentucky's education community should immediately begin to focus on systemic pedagogical reform especially in guidance to colleges of education and in all professional learning initiatives. The overwhelming evidence, based on hundreds of studies involving thousands of students, points to the superior efficacy of strong teacher led, explicit instructional models. The research further concludes that a content rich core curriculum yielding extensive background knowledge is the most important factor in advancing reading ability especially with those most at risk, caught in those ever widening socio-economic and racial gaps. If we are truly committed to equity our accountability and assessment systems must be designed accordingly.

Thank you for your time and service to Kentucky's kids!

Donnie Wilkerson [REDACTED]

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