

From The Editor

Not that long ago, K-12 education and postsecondary education were mutually exclusive clubs. Each set their own agenda, strategies and goals – without input from the other and at times in direct conflict. Occasionally, they blamed one another for failures, yet most of the time they kept to themselves.

In Kentucky, that has changed in recent years in large part due to the passage of Senate Bill 1 in the 2009 regular session of the General Assembly. Senate Bill 1 set the course for the most recent education reform in our state and a focus not only on academic standards, but college/career-readiness for all students.

The legislation charged the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE), the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) and the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) with developing “a unified strategy to reduce college remediation rates and increase the college completion rates of students enrolled in one or more remedial classes.” Specific targets were set for each.

This forced both K-12 and postsecondary education to re-examine everything they were doing separately and start the dialogue on how they could work together toward this common goal so that Kentucky could develop a workforce that could attract new jobs and ultimately raise the standard of living in our state.

Senate Bill 1 also charged the Kentucky Department of Education in collaboration with the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) to “plan and implement a comprehensive process for revising the academic content standards in reading, language arts including writing, mathematics, science, social studies, arts and humanities and practical living skills/career studies.”

A lot of what has been written and said about the Common Core State Standards revolves around their intended impact on students – and rightly so. That is what all of the work is about, and remains very much the focus of myself, the Kentucky Board of Education and educators in Kentucky. Our overarching goal is to provide students in the commonwealth with a world-class education that will prepare them to succeed in college, careers and the competitive, global economy.

The standards, however, have also had another significant effect: They have allowed us to tear down longstanding walls that have existed between K-12 and higher education. Now, not only do we seek each other’s input, but we are collaborating on what goes on in classrooms at both the K-12 and college levels. More rigorous standards aligned with postsecondary expectations, teacher training, principal leadership, and professional learning are all areas where K-12 and postsecondary are coming together. We are collaborating to problem-solve and create innovative solutions aimed at improving learning for all our students.

Senate Bill 1 serves as the driving force behind Kentucky’s involvement with the Common Core State Standards initiative. The Kentucky Board of Education, Education Professional Standards Board and the Council for Postsecondary Education voted to implement the Common Core State Standards in 2010. They were adopted as the Kentucky Core Academic Standards. And for the past two years, Kentucky teachers have faithfully implemented these new standards in their classrooms.

The Kentucky Core Academic Standards present overwhelming positives for our students and state:

- The standards are aligned with college- and career-readiness expectations. Prior to the Kentucky Core Academic Standards, only a third of Kentucky students were ready for college or to enter the workforce. For students who did go to college, the majority had to spend money on remedial courses that didn't count toward graduation for things they should have learned in high school. Many students quit postsecondary education before completing a degree or certificate. Today, with the Kentucky Core Academic Standards taught in all Kentucky classrooms, the percentage of students deemed ready for college/career has increased from 34 percent to more than 50 percent.
- The Kentucky Core Academic Standards provide students, parents and teachers a consistent and clear understanding of the minimum of what students are expected to learn and be able to do at every grade level. Clearer standards help students better understand what is expected of them and allow for more self-directed learning.
- The Kentucky Core Academic Standards are more rigorous than prior standards. Rather than learning facts and regurgitating them on a test, the standards require students to think more critically and be able to apply their knowledge and solve problems. The standards also develop 21st-century job skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity and innovation, critical thinking, and problem-solving – the skills that employers say are needed for today's jobs.
- The new standards are internationally benchmarked against those in countries with top educational performance. The old standards were not adequately preparing our students to succeed in college or the modern workforce. Among the 34 leading industrialized countries, the United States ranks 14th in reading literacy, 17th in science and a dismal 25th in math. The U.S. has fallen from No. 1 in the world in the percentage of young adults with college degrees to No. 10. The new standards aim to solve this problem by raising the bar, equipping Americans with the knowledge and skills they need to compete with global peers.
- The standards were developed through an open, inclusive, state-led process based on the best research available with input from higher education, employers, teachers, content experts and the public including those from Kentucky. Teachers were involved to ensure that the standards are practical for the classroom. The federal government was not involved in the development of the standards.
- The development and adoption of the Common Core State Standards was an efficient and economical way to meet the mandates of Senate Bill 1 (2009). With no money appropriated for Kentucky to develop its own standards, we joined with 47 other states in an initiative spearheaded by the National Governor's Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers to develop new, more rigorous standards in English/language arts and mathematics.
- Kentucky has made the standards its own. Working with educators from both KDE and our universities, as well as our educational cooperatives, teams of educators from every district have come together to break down the standards into classroom learning targets that define outcomes and guide instruction.
- Common standards are good for teachers. Common standards allow for more focused pre-service and professional development and help assure that what is taught is aligned with assessments including formative, summative and benchmarking.

Kentucky's postsecondary institutions have worked hand-in-hand with K-12 on the development and implementation of the new standards, but KDE's collaboration with higher education goes beyond the standards.

Another effort focuses on improving teacher and leader effectiveness. KDE and CPE are collaborating with a variety of other partners on a new evaluation system for teachers and principals called the Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (PGES). It emphasizes continuous improvement for educators and is designed to provide more meaningful feedback that can direct an educator's professional development and address specific professional learning needs.

A recent survey of nearly 44,000 school-based certified educators in Kentucky found that many of our first-year and beginning teachers do not feel adequately prepared in the areas of closing the achievement gap, differentiating instruction, and working with special populations (students with a disability and those who are gifted and talented). This will most certainly inform work between KDE and CPE in the area of teacher preparation.

One of CPE's policy objectives is to increase the effectiveness of Kentucky's P-12 teachers and school leaders. As part of that work, and with a \$1.5 million grant from the Kentucky General Assembly, CPE is working with three university-school district partnerships to improve the effectiveness of how universities provide teacher training.

The partnerships will focus on developing clinical models that aim to improve P-12 student and teacher education candidate learning, facilitate the placement of teacher candidates in model P-12 settings and provide professional development for pre-service and practicing teachers. This work is vital to ensuring all students are taught by an effective teacher who is trained to be a facilitator to student learning, not simply a sage on the stage. Today's students need to be active participants – and even drivers – in their own learning, and our schools need teachers who are prepared to engage students in the learning process, wherever students may be on that continuum.

As they embrace innovation, our schools also need dynamic, innovative leaders. As part of its commitment to create effective leaders, CPE is working to expand the role of higher education institutions in the delivery of professional development programs for teachers, school leaders, guidance counselors, adult education instructors and faculty members. In 2012, KDE, CPE and Jefferson County Public Schools agreed to invest in principal training. Using the National Institute for School Leaders Training program, we are working with leaders in Kentucky's lowest-performing schools; the intensive training is focused on leadership, strategic planning, student stakeholder, measurement and analysis, human resources, processes and results. This program will train a cohort of former principals, superintendents and higher education faculty across the state, who will work with school districts in their areas to train principals and assistant principals in the lowest-performing schools.

The work and changes we are undertaking in public education are tremendous. Higher education's participation in this work is critical and will continue to be as we face the challenges ahead of us. Together, I know we can achieve our goals; we can help our students reach their fullest potential, produce a well-prepared and educated workforce, and ensure our commonwealth's economic prosperity for the future.

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