

Kentucky bill targets teachers for student achievement

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Legislation in the Kentucky General Assembly targets teachers with evaluations of student achievement on standardized tests. The bill, currently pending in the Senate Education Committee, will increase the workload of teachers in the state and scapegoat them for a crumbling public education system.

The Democratic-controlled state House passed a bill on January 20 to establish a statewide evaluation system based on student performance. Midway Democrat Rep. Carl Rollins sponsored the legislation, House Bill 40, which was approved 95-0.

The legislation would be the first of its kind to tie student achievement to teacher evaluations in the state. However, Kentucky, like 10 other states, has been granted waivers by the Obama administration from meeting federal education “reform” criteria because the Democratic administration of Governor Steve Beshear has gone out of its way to signal that it will aggressively pursue attacks on teachers and schools above and beyond federal guidelines.

That this legislation is even considered in a state with unrelenting poverty, widespread unemployment, family dysfunction and other crippling social ills is a testament to the hostility and indifference of the political establishment in Kentucky and more broadly.

Deborah, a third grade teacher living and working in eastern Kentucky, spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* on the implications of the bill. She noted the ambiguity of the new proposal, the unfounded burden that will be placed on teachers, and the scapegoating of teachers that is manifest in the new proposed standards.

House Bill 40 would place greater workloads on teachers. Deborah explained that it will also provide a means by which government bureaucrats—unaware and indifferent to the difficulties that teachers face in the

barebones public education system—can fire teachers based on “a test score” which is “simply a brief snapshot of one test, one day, one student, one moment of time.”

The bill is part of a larger effort by the US Department of Education that seeks to scapegoat teachers for a crumbling socio-economic system. The US Department of Education is pressuring states to create “initiatives” that will factor in student achievement as a means of evaluation.

Exactly how large a role student achievement will play has not been spelled out. However, Rep. Rollins has suggested that it be given 30 percent weight, according to the *Lexington Herald-Leader*.

There is reason to believe that the legislation will be ripe for corruption. The *Herald-Leader* revealed that neighboring Tennessee, which launched a similar evaluation system last fall, is already rocked by significant problems. The system is presenting wide variations in teachers’ scores. Some districts are giving almost half of their teachers the highest possible score, while as few as 1 percent of instructors in other districts are getting such high evaluations. Achievement counts for about 35 percent of a teacher’s score in Tennessee. There is no doubt that if such a system were implemented in Kentucky similar problems would emerge.

Deborah expressed her frustration with the new proposal. “The only thing this new accountability system will create is academic barriers and an individualist school culture. No longer will teachers be working toward a common goal and shared vision. I believe that there should be a system of accountability, but holding teachers responsible for variables beyond their control is ludicrous.

“I welcome anyone into my classroom any time to

see what and how I am teaching,” she stated. “Please, come watch me teach ... watch what my children are able to do. Listen to them analyze problems and apply higher order thinking techniques. Don’t judge my ability based upon skewed data of biased tests.”

Deborah expressed contempt for the heavy burden that this will place on teachers and the financial burden they must incur to educate the country’s children. “The Department of Education has simply said, ‘You [teachers] have a goal. We’re not going to tell you what the goal is or give you any resources to aid you. We are making it as hard as possible to reach this goal, but good luck ... because if the goal is not met, the \$40,000 in student loans for classes (that we require you to take) have been a waste of money and time.’”

“The Department of Education should focus on student achievement, and that means removing barriers that impede learning,” Deborah said. “In this individualist culture, blame is seemingly placed on one factor (i.e., teacher, school, home) when in reality it is a combination of these that create struggling students.

“But blame must be placed somewhere and that somewhere appears to be the grunts,” she noted, “the ones that do all the work, create all the ties, motivate, inspire, empower, and care. The teachers. We should pass laws of accountability that destroy power, not people. People should be empowered to achieve and succeed, not threatened.”



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