

-- Please see the letter below from Commissioner Holliday. I believe he accurately portrays where we are in the budget situation for public schools. KEA has permission to post his letter on our web site for members who would like more information. -- Mary Ann

From: Holliday, Terry - Commissioner, Dept. of Education [mailto:Terry.Holliday@education.ky.gov]
Sent: Wed 3/17/2010 12:00 PM
Subject: Commissioner's and KBE members' position on instructional time and budget issues

Dear Superintendents and Education Partners,

I have become aware of questions/concerns from superintendents and others about my position and that of Kentucky Board of Education members on instructional time and budget issues. Therefore, we are providing clarification on these critical issues today through this e-mail.

Our first priority is to protect the educational needs of children. Reducing instructional time through a loss of instructional days, either due to budget reductions or missed days for weather or other emergencies, is not in the best interest of children's learning.

Our second priority is to protect the resources needed to educate children. We would prefer no cuts to P-12 education; however, due to the current economic realities, we are convinced that state legislative leadership does not see a way to spare education from budget cuts. We likely will be expected to reduce P-12 spending by at least \$68 million over the next two years.

Through the budget process, House leadership reduced instructional time by two days to account for the \$68 million budget cut. This amount is reflected in the line item budget as a reduction in SEEK funding from the FY 10 appropriation.

In conversations with superintendents and school board members, we have tried to develop an alternative to the loss of two days of instructional time. The logical question would then be why we would seek such an alternative. Below are principles that represent our thinking:

- Reducing two instructional days puts Kentucky children at a disadvantage, relative to the amount of time spent in the classroom devoted to student learning, with children from other states and countries as they compete for jobs in a global economy.
- Reducing two instructional days will result in a 1% pay cut to teachers and classified staff, but no pay cut to administrators or state employees.
- Reducing instructional time will jeopardize our Race to the Top application for up to \$200 million in federal funds, since U.S. Secretary Arne Duncan is opposed to reductions in instructional time.
- An option enabling districts to pay for the two instructional days from local sources will exacerbate the inequity among school districts in Kentucky, since some districts will fund the days and others will not.

Kentucky Board of Education members and I are proposing a substitute to cutting two instructional days, which is to split the \$68 million cost between districts (\$17 million per year) and grants controlled by the legislature and administered by the Kentucky Department of Education (\$17 million per year). Two key points should be considered as we work with the legislature on this substitute:

- If they are required to cut budgets, superintendents have requested flexibility with all revenue sources including SEEK, flex focus funds, flow-through grants, days of employment and specific programs.
- Department reductions from flow-through grants from the legislature could be made without losing teaching positions.

Again, the preference would be no cuts to education; however, this will not be possible given the economic situation we find ourselves in at the present time.

The reduction of instructional days made by the House budget proposal did not require a painful analysis of reductions for special interest programs, so it was a popular solution in a difficult time. However, reductions need to be made through careful analysis of local conditions and the actual program results produced by the grant dollars that P-12 education receives.

I hope this clarifies my and Kentucky Board of Education members' intent as we work with you to protect the interests of Kentucky's children and the state's education system.

As always, I am open to questions and discussion of these matters and can be reached at (502) 564-3141 or via e-mail at Terry.Holliday@education.ky.gov.

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The Kentucky Department of Education wants your input on the agency's customer service efforts. Please take a moment to complete an online survey, which may be accessed at http://www.education.ky.gov/FormServ/Default.aspx?ID=kde_customer_survey. All responses will remain anonymous.