

KERA UPDATE

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#16

Education Committee Approves Increased High School Graduation

Increasing requirements *sounds good!*

Mr. Roger Marcum, one of two principals to speak at the July 2nd meeting of the Joint Interim Committee on Education, offered glowing predictions about increased graduation requirements.

Mr. Marcum is also a member of the Commission on High School Graduation Requirements. He indicated his school, South Laurel High School, was an example of the positive impact of increased graduation requirements, a key high school restructuring item.

South Laurel, according to Mr. Marcum, requires 28 credits for graduation. Among the mandatory requirements are 3 math courses including algebra, geometry, and data/measurement. The school requires 3 science courses including physical and life science. US history plus an additional social science course, keyboarding, and health are mandatory, too.

South Laurel requires students to develop individual education plans. A Senior Project is mandatory, including an oral presentation. Seniors take exit exams.

Summarizing his program, Marcum said, "We are preparing students to make a successful transition to adult life regardless

of which direction they choose to go in high school."

Lofty claims, but KIRIS shows *Transition to Adult Life decreased 1.2 points at South Laurel!*

From 1992-93 to 1994-95 (latest data available from KDE), successful Transition dropped from 92.59 to 91.39 at South Laurel.

What does ACT show?

Check the table below for South Laurel's ACT performance between 1993 (when the district added a second high school) and 1996. South Laurel's scores dropped across the board in every area ACT examined — by very impressive amounts.

The colleges figured this out. South Laurel graduated 243 in 1993 and 244 in 1995. But, 118 went to college from the Class of 93. Just 99 went to college two years later!

How about dropouts?

Dropouts are a hot topic in Kentucky. South Laurel's dropout rate went from 9.66 in 1992-93 down to 7.84 in 1993-94. The rate then jumped up dramatically to 10.29 in 1994-95, the year South Laurel started

restructuring. The Laurel District indicates the unofficial 1995-96 dropout rate for South Laurel is 9.95. This remains well above the rate before South Laurel restructuring began and is almost twice the state average.

What does South Laurel tell us?

South Laurel shows that paperwork increases in graduation requirements are not enough. If mandatory new courses are inadequate, real academic progress can still suffer. Dropouts may also be adversely impacted.

Shortly, the Legislature will look at new course descriptions to go along with the increased credit requirements they approved on July 2nd.

This is the really critical issue. Those course descriptions need very careful analysis. There is no room for a rushed job here. If the courses are watered down, forcing our schools to teach to them will actually make Kentucky education worse.

Could that really happen? It certainly seems like this happened at South Laurel.

South Laurel County High School, ACT Changes From 1993 to 1996

Year	Students Tested	English	Math	Reading	Science Reason.	Composite
1993	159	20.4	19.2	21.4	19.9	20.3
1996	167	19.2	17.9	20.0	19.5	19.3
Change	8	-1.2	-1.3	-1.4	-0.4	-1.0

South Laurel Dropout Rate

School Year	KIRIS Dropout Rate
1992-93	9.66
1993-94	7.84
1994-95	10.26