

# KERA UPDATE

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## The KIRIS 8% Dropout Rate Proposal is Child Unfriendly!

Kentucky House Bill 627 and Kentucky Senate Bill RS HB 53 set an 8% dropout rate as the cutoff for schools to receive rewards under Kentucky's educational assessment program. In essence, these bills provide a state seal of approval for this extraordinarily high dropout rate. This is one of the most serious demonstrations to date that *the interests of Kentucky's children are not being properly guarded in Frankfort*. Here is what legislators *obviously* don't know:

Also, the Department of education

### ***In the 1995-96 school year:***

***1. Only 16 of Kentucky's 234 Class A1 high schools had dropout rates of 8% or more.***

***2. The High School average dropout rate was only 5.53%.***

computes high school dropout rates on an annual basis. The entire population of each high school is used in the formula. In a typical Grade 9 to 12 high school with 800 students (200/grade), an annual 8% dropout rate means that **64 kids leave this school, every year**. Over four years, an 8% rate means this typical high school loses 64 of the 200 kids in each class. The real impact of the proposed 8% figure

***An 8% annual rate means dropping out one of three kids!***

goes much farther. In the current accountability formula, dropouts cost schools little. Dropouts are only one quarter of the school's Non-Cognitive Index. And, the Non-Cognitive Index counts for only 16% of the school's overall Accountability Index. So, the dropout rate, by itself, impacts just 4% of the overall

calculation.

In contrast, if a weak student is tested on KIRIS and scores straight Novice, he contributes a "0" score in each of the seven areas. Those seven zeros make up 84% of the student's impact on the school.

In addition, if the student drops out before testing, the only penalty to the school is a higher dropout rate. Aside from having no negative impact on testing results, the dropout won't negatively impact the Non-Cognitive areas of Attendance, Retention, and Transition to Adult Life. In reality, these three areas will probably all improve with the dropout gone.

Thus, the weak student's departure before testing helps the school tremendously with 84% of the overall Accountability Index that is based on test scores; and, he also benefits the school another 12% with parts of the Non-Cognitive score, as well! How much of a difference can this really make? Here is what the impact on that

***The current accountability formula provides STRONG encouragement to schools to push dropping out prior to KIRIS testing.***

typical high school of 800 kids looks like:

**Case 1:** No one drops out. The school works diligently to keep every student. But, these students are weak, so allow for 63 of them (just under 8%) to be retained. Assume Attendance and Transition to Adult Life are perfect (as dropouts don't directly affect these numbers, anyway). All 200 eligible kids test and 60 score Novice, 116 score Apprentice, 20 score Proficient, and 4 score Distinguished. The

school scores 36.00 for each cognitive area and gets a 99.606 for their Non-Cognitive score. The overall Accountability Index is 46.177 (Note: the actual Kentucky high school KIRIS average in 1997 was 50.4).

**Case 2:** Now, 63 students drop out before testing (a 7.875% annual rate). There are no retentions (they all dropped out, first). Attendance and Transition to Adult Life are perfect (again, dropouts don't directly affect these numbers). Only the 137 strongest kids remain to test. None score Novice, 113 score Apprentice, 20 score Proficient, and 4 score Distinguished. The school scores 51.67 for each cognitive area and gets a 97.0467 for their Non-Cognitive score. The overall Accountability Index is 58.930. This moves the school from below to well above the state average!

***If the legislature is really concerned about dropouts, they will back off from the 8% dropout rate proposals. Instead, why not simply say no school can earn a***

***In a worst case scenario, by inducing maximum dropouts prior to testing, a typical high school with 800 students can boost its Accountability Index by more than 12 points!***

***reward if their dropout rate stays flat or increases in any biennium? To be reasonable, some lower limit cutoff should be set (perhaps 3% or 4%) such that schools with rates below the cutoff can always earn rewards.***