

# KERA UPDATE

April 1998

#24

## Where'd They Gooooooooooooooooooooo????!!!!

House Bill 53 was the most significant education legislation from Kentucky's 1998 legislative session. This bill *may* result in a number of changes to Kentucky's KIRIS assessment for schools. No-one really knows, because HB 53 is remarkably vague about the new assessment, titled the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System, or CATS. Instead, HB 53 gives the Kentucky Department of Education and the Kentucky Board of Education very wide authority to design CATS. CATS won't start until the 2000-2001 school year. Elements from KIRIS will continue to be used for accountability until then.

In spite of its overall vagueness, one part of HB 53 was remarkably clear and direct. During the period from 1997 to the year 2000, **HB 53 PERMITS OTHERWISE ELIGIBLE SCHOOLS TO RECEIVE REWARDS IF THEIR DROPOUT RATES REMAIN UNDER 8 PERCENT — EVEN IF THEIR RATE IS INCREASING!**

That is a bad provision. Here's why: **HB 53's dropout rate cutoff is nearly 50% higher than Kentucky's latest high school dropout rate!**

Yes, that's right! In the 1995-96 school year, Kentucky's average high school dropout rate was only 5.53 percent (see table at top of next column). HB 53 blesses a much higher rate. In fact, an 8% rate *puts us near the very bottom* of the latest state dropout list provided by the National Center for Education Statistics. **That 8% figure is not "National-Class!" It's not even "Kentucky-Class!"**

But, this gets worse. The 8% figure is an *annual* dropout rate. Under HB 53, it

**Recent Kentucky High School Dropout Rates**

Year	Rate
1992-93	5.06
1993-94	5.14
1994-95	5.53
1995-96	5.53

***Compare our most recent dropout rate to HB 53's 8% rewards cutoff!***

***How can we reward such poor***

appears this rate is in effect until the new CATS starts up in the 2000-2001 school year. **From now until the year 2000, we could loose over 4,500 extra kids, every year, while our schools get rewards!**

*And, it gets still worse!*

**Our high schools are a dropout time bomb.** In the 1994-95 school year, Kentucky high schools saw a dramatic increase in retained kids. Most of the increase came in 9th and 10th Grade. Those extra kids, about 4,000 total in the two most recently reported years, were not promoted at the end of the school year. Most are still in the system. They are now old enough to drop out, and retained kids are more likely to drop out.

The last thing we need is any incentive for our high schools to stop doing everything they can to help these kids. Unfortunately, HB 53 provides precisely such negative stimulus.

**Kentucky Grade 9 to 12 Retentions**

Year	Total Retained
1992-93	8,773
1993-94	9,343
1994-95	11,288
1995-96	11,140

Note Jump

You see, under the current KIRIS formula (a formula which probably won't change much until CATS is up and running), it pays a high school if a weak kid drops out before he takes the KIRIS test in 11th Grade. Dropouts count for a mere 4% of the KIRIS score. If the kid leaves, the high school gets a benefit in all the other 96% of the KIRIS score elements. This far outweighs the dropout's 4% factor.

HB 53 *could* be easily fixed. We could say: *No school with a stable or increasing dropout rate may receive a reward unless the latest dropout rate is one point or more below the state's average dropout rate.* That restores proper motivation.

But, right now, courtesy of HB 53, schools have a green light to run their dropouts up to 8%. Only the professionalism of our high school administrators stands in the way of this happening. HB 53 sorely tempts them — temptation that isn't appropriate. We are going to have to totally rely on our educators to avoid that temptation. But, if our educators don't come through, we'll be asking:

***"WHERE'D THEY GO?"***