

KERA UPDATE

April 2000

About The Kentucky Education Reform Act

#46

Results Matter, But Only If You Have The Real Results

The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) recently published *Results Matter*, a tenth anniversary report on the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). This *KERA UPDATE* is the fourth in a series of critiques on specific data presentations in *Results Matter* and deals with KDE's totally inaccurate and misleading portrayal of the funding equity issue in Kentucky public schools.

Figure 1 is an exact copy of a table from page 47 in *Results Matter*. This table proposes to show that funding differences between poor and rich school districts in Kentucky have been significantly narrowed since KERA began.

First, KDE's table has errors. The titles for "low-wealth" and "high-wealth" districts got flip-flopped during printing (score that a High Novice). KDE also does not identify what these figures are (change that score to a Low Novice). Some digging reveals these are something called "Total Revenue Per Pupil" computed by "Pupil Weighted Averages for Revenue by Wealth Quintile." Wow! I doubt many people understand that one. But, I do understand Figure 1 is totally misleading even after the missing and misprinted label problems are fixed.

Let's see what really happened to total average per pupil funding between the 1989-90 and 1997-98 school years. And, we'll keep it simple. Look at the average per pupil total funding for the top 35 and bottom 35 school systems for the two years in question as shown in Figure 2. Those are the top and bottom 20 percent of the 176 school systems in Kentucky, the 'quintiles,' as it were.

Figure 1. Exact Reproduction from Page 47, Results Matter, With

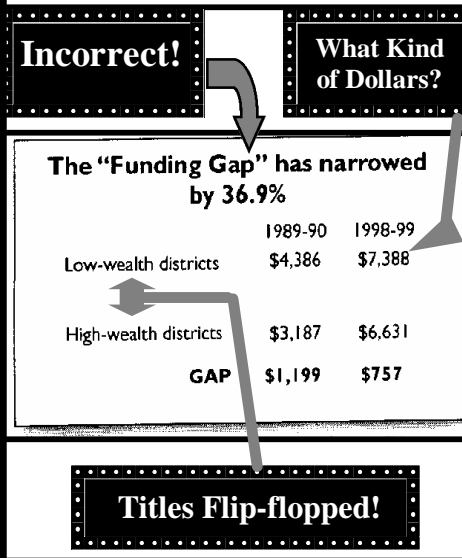


Figure 2. Comparison of Top and Bottom School System Total Funding, 1989-90 to 1997-98 School Years

	1989-90	1997-98
Average Per Pupil Funding, Top 35 School Systems	\$3,964	\$6,774
Average Per Pupil Funding, Bottom 35 School Systems	\$3,011	\$5,222
The <u>REAL</u> GAP	\$954	\$1,552

happening. There has been a dramatic shift in the schools that make up the top 35 best funded schools in the state. Half of the schools that were in this list in 1989-90 are not there now. In fact some, like Beechwood Independent, Erlanger Independent, Lyon County, Murray and Ft. Thomas Independent now rank in the bottom 35 districts in the state for total funding! Even more outrageous, Beechwood, Erlanger, Lyon, Murray, and Ft. Thomas DO rank in the top 35 systems for percentage of total school funding that comes from LOCAL taxes.

It would be fine if Kentucky funding allowed school systems with low property wealth to build up to funding levels enjoyed by higher wealth districts. But, high wealth districts already support low wealth ones with disproportionate contributions to state taxes. Then, they highly tax themselves again with local levies to support their local schools. Still, they can't keep even! **Clearly, we have a highly inequitable system on our hands.**

And, those are the real 'results.'

The funding 'gap' has WIDENED, NOT NARROWED