

KERA UPDATE

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About The Kentucky Education Reform Act

#61

Which Education Model Really Caused Improvement In Kentucky?

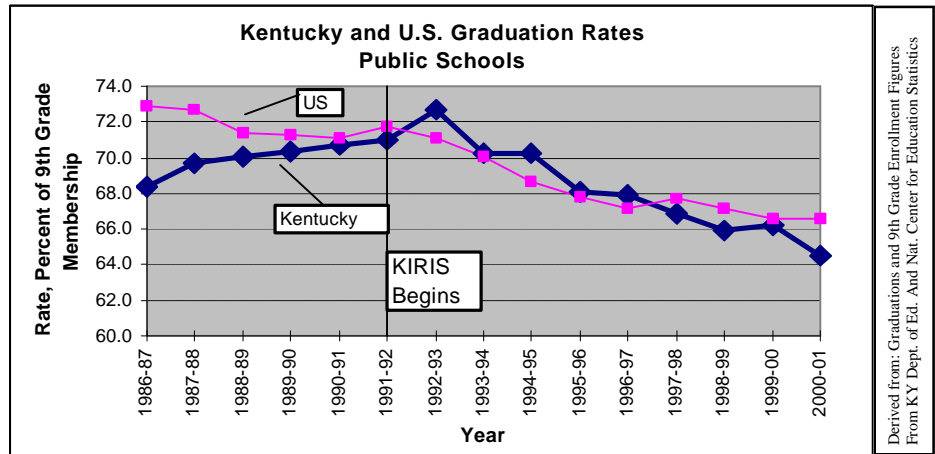
A big problem with US education is the accurate analysis of data. The public gets numbers, but often the real meaning is hidden by illogical, agenda-laced rhetoric. Sometimes, the wrong numbers even are attributed to the wrong education initiative as people claim results that could not possibly be caused by their pet education fad.

A new example is a news article about the Year 2000 Census results. On September 25th the *Louisville Courier-Journal* reported that in the year 2000 Kentuckians in the 18 to 24 year old range had a 74.9 percent high school completion rate. That ranked 36th among the states. Citizens in the 25 to 34 age bracket had an 84.2 percent completion rate, ranking 35th among the states. In fact, the improvement shown in the latter figure led the nation. According to the newspaper, people ranging from data collectors, to educators to the Chamber of Commerce all hail the results as evidence that the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) is

A Plus for KERA?
working.

2000 US Census - Kentuckians Who Completed High School (From <i>Louisville Courier-Journal</i> , 25 Sep 02)		
Age	National Ranking	% of KY Residents
18—24	36	74.9
25—34	35	84.2

Well, let's think about that. Is KERA really a key ingredient in those improvements in high school completions? Or, is this another case of "mistaken identity?" Also, does the Census data really even relate to public school trends in Kentucky?



Derived from: Graduations and 9th Grade Enrollment Figures From KY Dept. of Ed. And Nat. Center for Education Statistics

First of all, Census counts GED recipients as high school completers. We award lots of GEDs in Kentucky, many to people who have been out of school for quite a while. Does inclusion of GEDs in the Census data mask what is happening in Kentucky high schools? You bet it does!

As shown in the figure above, the sad fact is that Kentucky's public high school graduation rate (graduates divided by their class enrollment as 9th graders) fell constantly over the last 10 years. In the year 2000 the public high school graduation rate was only 66 percent. That is below the currently projected national average and almost ten points below the figure Census reported for the 18 to 24 year olds. Obviously, thanks to the GEDs, the Census figures do not closely relate to public school rates.

But, the real situation is even worse. Trends in Census data don't match the trends in public high school graduations either. Kentucky improved its public

school graduation rate constantly from the period preceding KERA right up to the time the reform began to have classroom level impacts around 1992-93. That's when testing with a new assessment, called KIRIS, began. Then, the positive trend reversed. Inaccurate analysis of the Census data could fool you into believing KERA recently improved public school graduations. In fact, the exact opposite is happening.

Next, consider that nation-leading improvement in high school completions for Kentucky's 25 to 34 year old group. **This is a pre-KERA effect.** This group's youngest members were 18 in 1993. Again, that's around the time KERA was just beginning to impact classrooms in any significant way. Basically, all the members of this age group graduated from high school before any appreciable impacts from KERA began. GEDs are a factor here, too, of course, but this Census statistic clearly did benefit from an improving public high school graduation rate. But, that improvement happened before KERA had any impact.

So, there was a time when Kentucky public