

KERA UPDATE

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About The Kentucky Education Reform Act

#73

Schools Are Suing Us, AGAIN!!!

Recent news reports say the Council for Better Education (CBE), a consortium of school districts from around Kentucky, has launched a new lawsuit against the taxpayers of the state, claiming that funding for public schools is still unconstitutionally low. The CBE is a resurrection of an earlier group of the same name that sued in the 1980s over the same issue. That earlier suit succeeded and brought about the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990. The restructured CBE hopes the same tactic of using the courts to bypass the legislature will work again.

Let's discuss that a bit. We know a lot more about education today than we did back in 1990, and we also have the evidence from 13 years of reform to see how the extra money we provided actually performed. Table 1 shows the most recent data available from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) on how per pupil funding changed in Kentucky after 1990.

School Year	Funding, Constant Dollars	National Rank
1989-90	\$4,993	42
1999-00	\$6,784	30

Dollar data from *Digest of Education Statistics 2002*, NCES, Table 168.

Despite this impressive real improvement in per pupil funding, and its corresponding 12 place improvement in ranking, Kentucky's family income did not increase by very much, particularly when you consider the figures in Table 2 are NOT inflation adjusted. In fact, Kentucky's median fam-

Table 2
Kentucky Median Family Income

Year	Family Income	National Rank
1989	\$27,028	46
1999	\$40,939	43

Income Data from US Census FactFinder Databases SF-3, 2000, Table P77 for 1999 and STF-3, 1990, Table 107A for 1989.

ily income ranked way below the state's per pupil funding rank by the end of the 1990s. Kentucky's taxpayers were really performing for schools!

But, did the schools perform for taxpayers? Previous *KERA Updates* discuss a wide variety of test and non-test data that shows the 1990s were stagnant. And, Table 3 shows the ratio of classroom teachers to other education staffers degenerated alarmingly in Kentucky, moving us to the lowest ranking in the country for this education "tooth to tail" ratio.

Year	Teacher/Staff Ratio	National Rank
Fall 1989	50.1	42
Fall 2000	44.1	50

Ratio Sources: *Digest of Education Statistics 2002*, NCES, Table 83, and *Digest of Education Statistics 1996*, NCES, Table 84.

Finally, new data released by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) show that over a fairly similar time period our teachers got a surprisingly small share of the rapidly increasing Kentucky education dol-

Table 4
Kentucky Data From AFT and Derived from Table 1

	Percent Change	National Rank
Change in Teacher Salary, 1991-92 to 2001-02 per AFT	22.9%	43
Percent Change in Real Per Pupil Funding from Table 1, 1989-90 to 1999-00	35.87 %	2

American Federation of Teachers, *Survey and Analysis of Teacher Salary Trends 2002*

lars. Table 4 shows that while teacher salaries rose just 22.9 percent in the past 10 years, over a generally similar timeframe total education funding in Kentucky increased almost 36 percent. Simply put, during the 1990s Kentucky produced the second best real funding increase for education in the nation; but, Kentucky teachers didn't get a proportionate share of those big funding increases. It is no wonder teachers are unhappy. And, even great staff can't overcome unhappy teachers.

Is overall education spending inadequate in Kentucky? I don't think so. The data presented here indicate the problem is bad senior management that swelled bureaucracy and staff while limiting benefits at the classroom level. We don't have a money shortage, we have a management failure. So, if the schools want more money, they better take the issue up with their own state leadership, not the taxpayers. With family incomes ranking well below both teacher salaries and overall education funding, quite frankly the taxpayers are doing more than their share already.