

Editorial & Opinions ENOUGH

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KERA architect spreads fake news

By JIM WATERS



David Hornbeck, an architect of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) who describes

himself as a "consultant to the Kentucky legislature, 1989-1990," claims in a recent op-ed: "Kentucky's children have made more progress than those of any other state in the nation."

For such a claim to hold up under scrutiny of the evidence – something Hornbeck fails to provide even in the least amount to support his sunshiny analysis – it must totally disregard what happened to Kentucky's black students, the commonwealth's largest racial minority, after KERA came along.

Only four of the 28 states with the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) eighth-grade math data needed to compare progress among black students from 1990 – the earliest available – to 2015 improved less than Kentucky's blacks.

Meanwhile, other southern states – North Carolina, Louisiana, Georgia and Arkansas – matched or exceeded the national-average increase in black students' math scores between 1990 and 2015.

Can it just be coincidence that each of those states has for years allowed primarily minority, low-income parents the opportunity to choose what's often a better education alternative for their children: charter schools?

It's not coincidental that Kentucky never came close to any of these states in terms of academic improvement among its poor black children without allowing that option, which the General Assembly has now made available with passage of charter-school legislation during the waning days of this year's legislative session.

Neither is it happenstance that KERA's most ardent defenders – including teachers-union representatives and longtime members of the education establishment – provide the most zealous opposition to school choice and feverishly hope the charter-school movement fails in the Bluegrass State. At the very least, Hornbeck's claim of "more progress" made by Kentucky's children than in "any other state" shatters once you realize the commonwealth's eighth-grade blacks improved by only one paltry point on NAEP reading scores between 1998 and 2015.

Is Hornbeck unaware of the performance of black students in Tennessee, which ranks fourth nationally for its increase in eighth-grade reading scores during that same 17-year period?

Might this be a good place to mention that Volunteer State parents have had the option of charter schools during all but four years of that 17-year period?

Travel further south to Florida, which offers a multitude of school-choice options in addition to charter schools, including vouchers, tax-credit scholarships and open-enrollment choices.

There you will find a state where black students, who trailed their fellow blacks in Kentucky by 10 points in 1998, are now four points ahead.

Hornbeck's claim that Kentucky is a nation-beater doesn't even hold up among Kentucky's white students.

Whites comprise 80 percent of the commonwealth's public-school population but only statistically significantly outscored their fellow whites in just two other states in eighth-grade math scores in 2015.

House Bill 940, which passed in 1990 and is better known as KERA, declares in Section 3: "Schools shall expect a high level of achievement from all students."

Did Hornbeck, operating in his "consultant" role, get paid to write that sentence?

If so, doesn't he owe taxpayers a refund considering the lack of progress among our neediest students since KERA became law 27 years ago?

These are the very kids who most need charter schools and are the primary reason why House Bill 520 -- which finally opens the doors to charters in Kentucky -- made it through this year's legislature.

Disadvantaged kids also are the reason why we must make sure local boards of education, which HB 520 designates as sole authorizer, in 171 of Kentucky's 173 school districts, give charter-school applicants a fair shot – something too many of these students haven't found in our commonwealth's KERA-based, one-size-fits-all public education system.

Jim Waters is president of the Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions, Kentucky's free-market think tank. Read his weekly Bluegrass Beacon column at www.bipps.org. He can be reached at jwaters@freedomkentucky.com and @bipps on Twitter.

Senator David Givens Op-Ed

Charter School Fact vs. Fiction



By SENATOR DAVID GIVENS
9th District

Kentucky students and families scored a victory this week as public charter schools moved closer to becoming a reality through legislative action. Advocates and opponents have shared various opinions. From my front row seat as your State Senator, I wish to share some facts with you. First, you should know that House Bill 520 creates the charter framework and House Bill 471 provides for the funding process.

Opinion: Charters have happened too fast and Kentucky has not studied them enough.

Fact: After eight years of passing charter policy through the Kentucky Senate only to watch it die in the House, our Commonwealth became the 44th state to offer charters as a publicly funded option for educating our children.

Opinion: Charters privatize education, giving power to far-off corporations at the expense of our local decision makers and 'cherry pick' only the best students.

Fact: House Bill 520 requires a nonprofit charter school to file a detailed financial, academic, and district impact plan with the local school board, which acts as the authorizer. From the charter's mission and vision statement to its enrollment lottery, we built in many protections in our model to prevent charters from selectively enrolling students in ways that do not benefit the school district as a whole.

Opinion: Charters do not use quality teachers and cut corners.

Fact: Our model requires that only Kentucky-certified teachers with the same credentials as current educators can be used for student instruction. The lengthy contract between the charter and the authorizer spells out continual oversight and reporting requirements. In addition, the charter is rigorously reviewed every three to five years by the authorizer and either reauthorized or shut down.

Opinion: Charters can ignore all regulations and, since that is the goal, we should just let current public schools avoid the same burdensome regulations.

Fact: While charters are exempt from many current state education regulations, public charter schools must follow the same health, safety, civil rights, and

disability rights requirements that are applied to all public schools. In addition, a Kentucky public charter can adopt any and all of the regulations of current schools if they wish. Finally, local boards can choose to convert a current building into their own charter if they wish. In fact, education leaders in my Senate district have spoken with me directly about conversion charters after they visited examples in other states.

Opinion: Charters divert funds from public schools.

Fact: House Bill 471 addresses funding for charters. School districts currently use an allocation model that promotes educational equalization, equity, and adequacy based on the needs of its schools. For charter funding, a similar allocation model distributes a proportionate student allotment to the charter school based on the same factors. No siphoning away of public school funds occurs, as money follows the students to whichever public school they choose to attend. In addition, districts keep three percent of charter funding for administration, and all capital funds stay with the district.

Opinion: Charters are a partisan, political effort that demonizes public teachers.

Fact: Charter advocates range from former President Barack Obama to current Kentucky Governor Matt Bevin. I have been proud to support and champion the Kentucky effort for public charter schools. I am equally proud of the work current teachers, like my wife, do every day in changing children's lives. Pending the signature into law by Governor Bevin, I firmly believe that Kentucky charters will benefit children and families through bold and innovative teaching and learning models. Charters will flourish where they are demanded with oversight by local school boards and through the continued work of quality Kentucky teachers.

If you have any questions or comments about these issues or any other public policy issue, please call me toll-free at 1-800-372-7181. You can also review the Legislature's work online at www.lrc.ky.gov.

Senator David Givens (R-Greensburg) represents the 9th District including Allen, Barren, Green, Metcalfe, Monroe and Simpson Counties. Senator Givens serves the Kentucky Senate as the President Pro-Tempore. He is the Vice Chairman of both the Senate Committee on Committees and the Rules Committee, and he serves as a member of the Appropriations and Revenue Committee, the Agriculture Committee, the Education Committee, the Enrollment Committee, and the Health and Welfare Committee.

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