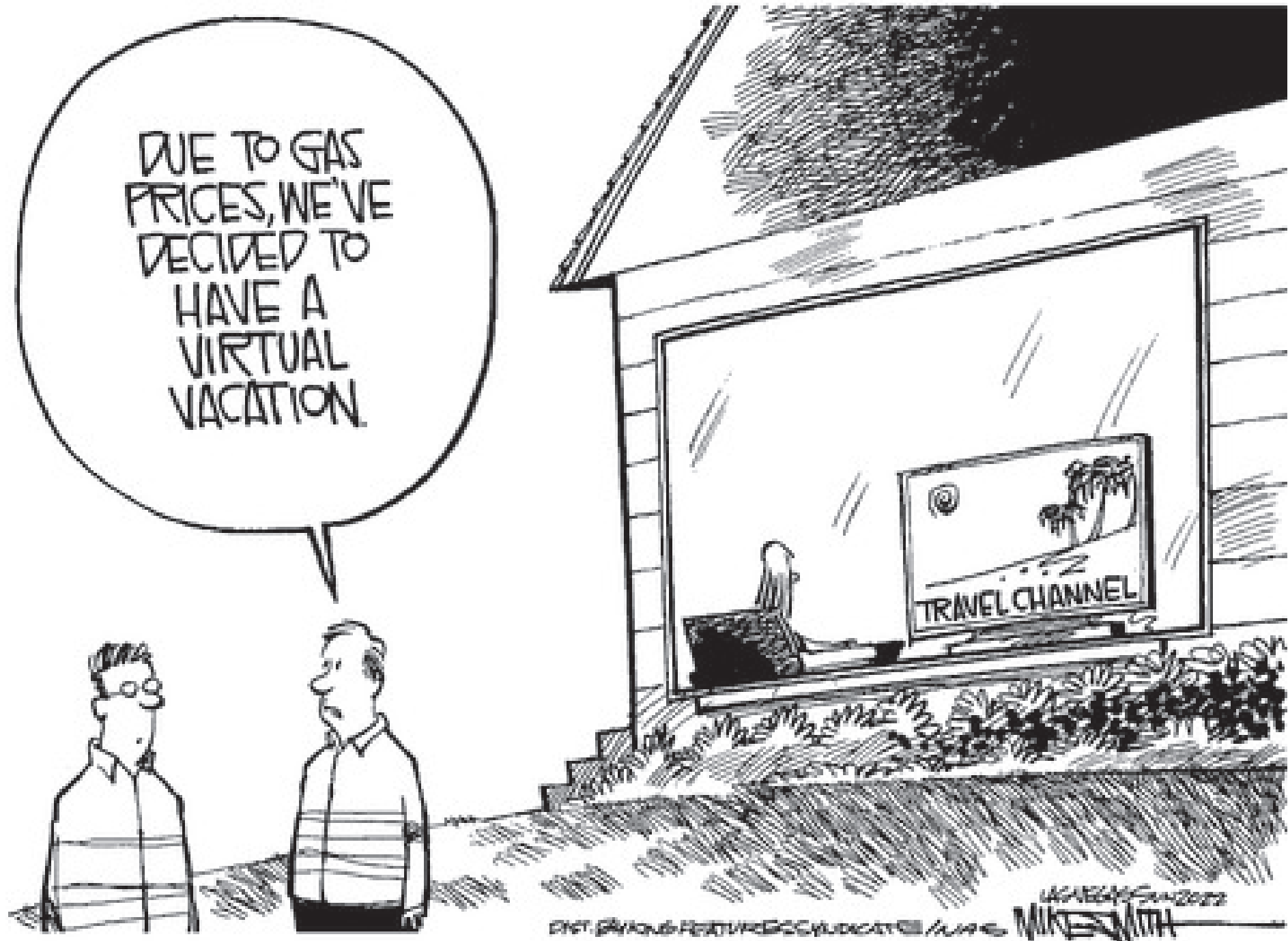


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The Times Journal

OPINION

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Study: Is Kentucky's public education system significantly improving?

By Sarah Durand

For years, Frankfort has spun a tale claiming Kentucky's public education system has made huge strides in its academic performance since the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) was passed in 1990, climbing from the bottom to the "middle of the pack" when compared to other states.

However, "While Kentucky's education system was sleeping ...," a new Bluegrass Institute Policy Point authored by education analyst Richard G.

Innes, tells a much different story.

"The truth is, when we look at past National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results – back during the early years of KERA – and compare them with the most recent pre-Covid data for 2019, Kentucky hasn't done well and certainly hasn't moved up to the middle of the pack," Innes said.

Rather than comparing Kentucky's academic performance to that of other states based on overall NAEP scores

– an approach favored by apologists for the status quo which often inflates Kentucky's performance – Innes takes advantage of recommendations for analyses in the NAEP's own reports. Employing the NAEP's powerful data tools, he conducts several analyses of disaggregated scores that also consider the statistical sampling errors in those results.

When scores for Kentucky's two predominant student racial groups – Black and white students – are analyzed separately, a

much-different picture from the popular tale becomes quite evident.

White students by far comprise the largest percentage of any demographic in Kentucky's schools, including having a 29-point higher white enrollment than the national public school percentage.

Kentucky's whites also have an enrollment over 30 points higher than the percentages of white students in states like Florida and Mississippi, where, as the report shows,

disaggregated scores reveal both Blacks and whites in Kentucky being left behind in key academic areas assessed by the NAEP.

"In fact, while Kentucky's education system largely slept, even Mississippi, a state too many in Kentucky inappropriately hold in low esteem, moved ahead – often by a lot," Innes said. "And public school students in Florida, which is sort of the poster-child state for school choice, also left Kentucky's public school system very

solidly in its wake, as well."

As Kentucky policymakers consider reforming the way schools are governed and giving parents more control over their children's education – both policies badly needed if we're going to see the kind of academic improvement experienced by other states – they should not be misled into believing that Kentucky has made great strides.

Evidence from the NAEP shows it simply hasn't happened.


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