



## Bluegrass Beacon

BY JIM WATERS

### **‘Reciprocal’ re-run puts students on losing continuous loop**

By Jim Waters

I don’t believe in reincarnation. Neither did Yogi Berra. But it felt like “déjà vu all over again” to him.

What’s happening in Corbin feels that way to me, too.

Once again, hardworking Kentucky families and their children must pay the price for an expensive — but failing — school district. A longstanding reciprocal agreement between the [Corbin Independent School District](#) and the [Knox County Public Schools](#) has ended. The agreement allowed children living in either district to transfer to the neighboring district with state Support Education Excellence in Kentucky (SEEK) money to follow.

Parents don’t want it to end. Students don’t want it to end. The community doesn’t want it to end. The Corbin Board of Education doesn’t want it to end. Even some parents from the Knox County district don’t want it to end.

So, who’s left? Oh, yeah — money, power and control.

The agreement is ending because those entrusted with educating Knox County children worry more about propping up an ineffective system than asking: “Hmmm. Why do more than 400 students want to transfer out of our district?”

For Knox Co. board member Sam Watts, it’s all about protecting the system.

“I hate it for the parents who sent their kids over (to Corbin), but I feel it’s the best decision for the Knox County school system,” he told [the Times-Tribune](#).

Compare that defense of the system with parent Thusann Hensley’s letter to that paper’s editor showing the top concern should be about the kids: “Our government is suppose to always do what is best for the children, so therefore I feel this is a time that those who make the rules and regulations have failed our children.”

It’s déjà vu all over again: Parents took on the system in Breathitt County and Calloway County and lost, too.

In all three counties, reciprocal agreements ended because one district had more students — and state money — going out than coming in.

Misguided priorities of large school systems have led to the demise of the reciprocal agreements, aided and abetted by state laws allowing any school district involved in such agreements to end them for any reason. Add to this equation of failure: Kentucky, unlike most other states, does not have options — like [charter schools](#) — for escaping lousy school systems.

And I suspect Knox County board members believe Frankfort's leftists, teacher unions, politicians and head "educrats" will back the decision.

They always have. It's déjà vu all over again.

The only hope is that the new education commissioner, Terry Holliday, might quit playing political patty-cake with the education establishment long enough to have a meeting with Kentucky Board of Education chairman Joe Brothers that would have only one agenda item: What's best for families and students in this situation?

They could fix this — *if they wanted*.

More déjà vu: In each of these situations, parents were not the naïve and unsophisticated ogres that education elitists portray them to be.

Some parents apparently found out about the sizeable graduation-rate gap between [Knox Central](#) and [Corbin High](#) schools. Using the formula that the Kentucky Department of Education is getting ready to use — because the state auditor determined the current one highly inflates graduation rates — more than nine in 10 Corbin High students graduate while one in three Knox students don't.

Perhaps they also found out about the 2.6-point difference in ACT Composite scores — a sizeable gap — between juniors at Corbin High School and those at Knox Central High School.

But even if these academic gaps didn't exist, parents should always have the right to make choices about their children's education.

And in déjà vu-like fashion, you will hear that from me over and over again.

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