



One-man band plays the same tired tune

By Jim Waters

No single politician, legislative committee or special-interest group should stand in the way of real reform in Kentucky's education system.

Yet, that's exactly what Kentucky faces.

House Education Chairman Rep. Carl Rollins, D-Midway, arrogantly declared on Kentucky Educational Television's "[Kentucky Tonight](#)" recently that he did not intend to allow in the upcoming legislative session a hearing – much less a debate or a vote – on charter schools.

"I know we're one of 10 states in the nation that don't have charter schools, and I think we're probably going to remain one of the states without charter schools," Rollins said. "Nobody's convinced me, yet, anyway that they are really going to help us make progress."

Don't confuse Rollins' statement as a skeptical but open-minded stance, such as "Let's have a healthy debate so we can do what's best for students." That would come from a true policy leader.

Instead, envision an ideological, hubris-laden politician determined to defend an education system in which 59 percent of its high school students remain deficient in math.

On the same "Kentucky Tonight" show, Brent McKim, top union boss for the Jefferson County teachers union, declared, "We've made remarkable progress in our state."

Rollins chimed in: "We are making progress."

They define "progress" as this:

- Fewer than 30 percent of Kentucky's black students, as well as those enrolled in the free or reduced lunch program, are proficient in math, science, social studies and writing.
- Barely half of Kentucky's high school sophomores from low-income households — and only 44 percent of blacks — are proficient readers.
- In Rollins' Woodford County, more than half of all high school students — and less than 30 percent of all free or reduced lunch high school enrollees — are proficient in key academic areas.

"Remarkable?" Oh, yeah.

"Progress?" Oh, no.

Another "remarkable" development: Rollins pre-filed a bill for the 2011 legislative session that directs the Legislative Research Commission to "study the factors impacting the academic achievement of African-American male students in the public schools of the Commonwealth and the characteristics of schools that are effective in producing high levels of achievement for this population."

So, Rollins wants another LRC study on why one out of two black males fail to graduate high school in Kentucky. While Rollins and the teachers unions “study,” black students get academically whipped by a one-size-fits-all education monopoly that denies parents a choice and kids a chance.

This ploy shows that Rollins and politicians of a similar ilk remain committed to defending the status quo. They deny the validity of, or completely ignore, numerous studies that show charter schools help the very group Rollins wants to study as much or even more than any other student group, black males.

A very important reason for charter school success among low-income household, black male students involves establishing great expectations.

Yet, Rollins and McKim yammered on during “Kentucky Tonight” about expectations being too high and demands of the federal [“No Child Left Behind Act”](#) being too stringent for Kentucky schools. Meanwhile, in the “Knowledge is Power Program,” charter schools and academies dominate the education scene because they know that black males from poor households can meet and exceed high expectations.

Charles Kettering, who gets credit for inventing the electrical ignition system, said: “High achievement always takes place in the framework of high expectations.”

I caution, though, against raising your expectations too high when it comes to whether politicians in key areas of education policy can put the interests of students before that of union bosses’ threats and re-election campaigns.

Perhaps an LRC study could focus on the low expectations of our political leaders when it comes to raising chances for the neediest students to succeed.

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