



School choice would bring quality — and accountability

By Jim Waters

For the first time in history, lawmakers and education officials in Frankfort indicate they are considering [charter schools as an alternative](#) for Kentucky students mired in failing schools — and that’s a lot of students.

Bluegrass Institute research shows that the Jefferson County schools alone – the state’s largest district – enroll 23,818 students in schools that have failed to meet their annual “No Child Left Behind Act” goals for at least three years.

A [report](#) by the institute indicates that among 34 “Tier 5” schools in Kentucky – the worst schools – 22 are in Jefferson County. These worst-performing schools have failed to meet their NCLB goals for at least six years. The institute estimates more than 10,000 students attend these schools throughout the state.

In response, education officials offer nearly as many excuses as there are Tier 5 schools. Their favorite: “No Child” expects too much.

Following release of the institute’s report, Bob Rodosky, Jefferson County’s director of Planning, Research and Accountability, [blamed the “flawed” law](#) with its unreasonable expectations.

“No Child” isn’t perfect, but it does attempt to hold schools accountable. Besides, our education officials have offered nothing better.

Can you really blame the law for causing 50 percent remediation rates among entering freshmen in Kentucky’s colleges and universities?

When listening to their defensive statements, it sounds like those in charge of our public-education system want to convince taxpayers, parents and political leaders that you cannot create a viable way of holding public schools accountable for their performance.

“Trust us,” they say in so many words. “We’re the experts. We know what’s best for your children.”

That’s what the former Soviet Union wanted us to do, too.

“Trust us,” said the Soviets. “We will keep our word.”

But our president at the time – Ronald Reagan – wasn’t buying it. A significant part of his leadership that helped end the Cold War and get America’s economy back on track, all at the same time was “trust but verify.”

Do you trust your congressman? Fine, but open the checkbook to taxpayers anyhow. They deserve to know how their hard-earned tax dollars are being spent.

Trust those policymakers and bureaucrats in charge of our kids? Fine. But warm fuzzies aren't enough – especially in light of previous promises by officials to fix things, which rarely happens, while using questionable data and logic to support their views of “progress.”

If the bureaucrats don't like “No Child,” fine. But understand, having no accountability plan is not acceptable. And hiding behind the act's less-than-perfect system in hopes of maintaining the status quo is no longer tolerable.

Surely, if we can develop credible, acceptable ways of determining whether sophisticated weapons treaties are being honored by communist enemies, then we can develop an effective accountability system to ensure that the public schools in Kentucky properly prepare our children for college and the future.

How can we determine whether officials, politicians and teachers unions really have legitimate concerns about accountability or whether their primary interest involves protecting adults in the system at the expense of our students? Look at their response to the idea of providing parents a choice of where their children attend school.

To determine which of the women was the baby's real mother, King Solomon threatened to cut the baby in half. The real mother was revealed by her willingness to acquiesce. She would rather give up the baby than see it harmed.

Those who really care about our kids are willing to drop their worship of a system and fear of change and say: Let's give parents a chance to choose.

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