



## Comical education standards prompt movie memories

By Jim Waters

Near the end of the movie “Animal House,” Kevin Bacon as the character Chip Diller tries to calm a panicking homecoming parade crowd.

Diller, an ROTC officer, stands in the middle of Main Street offering reassurance to the crowd fleeing the chaos caused by fraternity brothers from the Delta house. They turn a 1964 Lincoln Continental into a machine of mayhem to get even with the Faber College president for suspending the fraternity because of low grades and moral bedlam.

Diller, facing a rushing mob, yells, “Remain calm. All is well.”

Seconds later, the screaming swarm of parade-goers flattens him.

The scene mirrors Kentucky’s public-education system as an important federal deadline for improving student performance approaches. While bureaucrats and politicians parade sanitized feel-good tales before unsuspecting parents and taxpayers, a new report by the Center for Education Policy suggests all is not well with Kentucky’s education system.

The report includes Kentucky among states taking a “back-loaded” approach toward making the annual progress demanded by the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which was signed into law in 2002.

NCLB requires states to establish “Annual Measurable Objectives” in order to determine whether schools make adequate progress each year toward fulfilling the act’s requirement that all students become 100-percent proficient in core subjects by 2014.

At the halfway point of the 2014 deadline – thanks to lowball standards – Kentucky has fallen further behind. For example, in 2000, as debate on No Child Left Behind started, our fourth graders’ math-proficiency rate lagged behind the national average by 5 percent on federal academic tests. By 2007, the gap increased to 8 percent.

The report shows that Washington, D.C., and 25 states, including neighboring Tennessee, Virginia, Illinois and Missouri, set much higher annual goals in order to meet the 2014 deadline without trying to cram too-little-too-late reforms into their systems on the eve of the deadline.

Meanwhile, Kentucky seems bent on replicating the angst I felt during my college days when procrastination forced me to stay up all night cramming for tests. I usually passed the tests, but at a cost.

By dragging its feet at the outset of NCLB, Kentucky put off the inevitable – or hoped it wouldn’t happen.

Education analyst Richard Innes says Kentucky set very low goals for the first several years following 2002, hoping NCLB would get significantly watered down or done away with before the bureaucracy would finally be held accountable.

"When the Kentucky Board of Education was debating how to comply with the law, it was evident that they expected it to go away in a couple of years," Innes said. "In fact, Kentucky lowered its standards the year before the act passed, so it wasn't as apparent what was going on."

Not much has changed. The release of the 2007 state test scores confirmed that Kentucky's standards continue to plunge. But rather than confront the problems, the state's "educrats" hunt for a "get-out-of-jail-free" card or a government bailout for slackers. They continue to use every available loophole to avoid meaningful reform, including providing the public with the most inflated test results possible.

The upsetting irony here is that states which established higher standards at NCLB's outset to improve the education of their kids on the way to 2014 may end up getting the short end of the stick. While these states come to grips with their education shortcomings, Kentucky continues to resist raising its standards while using every available loophole to doggedly avoid meaningful reform.

When it comes to loopholes, Kentucky could borrow another line from Chip Diller in "Animal House."

"Thank you, sir! May I have another?" Diller utters, during a fraternity initiation spanking.

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