



Smoke clears for students, not for nicotine nannies

By Jim Waters

Results matter when it comes to educating Kentucky's 671,466 public-school students. So this week, kudos go to an educator who makes results a priority.

Liberty Lover: new education commissioner Terry Holliday

Too many of Kentucky's 1,249 public schools aren't getting the results needed to ensure students succeed in the rapidly changing global marketplace. I'm hopeful that changes with the selection of **Holliday**, North Carolina's Superintendent of the Year in 2009.

The Kentucky Board of Education's incompetence in making previous choices gets tempered some with Holliday's selection. Credit goes to the board for picking a results-oriented, proven leader.

In less than seven years, Holliday turned the struggling Iredell-Statesville, N.C., school district into an **education powerhouse**. And more government money didn't drive that change. The transformation occurred despite the fact that only eight of North Carolina's 115 school districts showed lower per-pupil expenditures than Holliday's.

Between 2002 and 2008:

- Student achievement in Holliday's district improved from No. 55 to No. 9 in the state.
- The reading proficiency gap between blacks and all other students narrowed from 23 percent to 12 percent.
- The reading gap between special-needs children and all students dropped from 42 percent to 21 percent.
- Graduation rates improved from 61 percent to 81 percent.
- The district's average SAT of 1,056 moved it from No. 57 in the state to higher than the national average.

No one can argue that **Kentucky needs dramatic improvement** in each of these areas.

Whether Holliday can stand his ground in the face of likely stiff opposition from lazy bureaucrats, paranoid teachers-union bosses and their political cronies in the Legislature remains a question.

If he cannot, the "Liberty Losers" side of the ledger awaits his name. But for what he did for N.C.'s students, he gets this edition's "Liberty Lover" award.

Liberty Losers: proponents of government smoking bans who claim restaurant workers don't have choices

I've participated in three [forums](#) this summer on tobacco and government-imposed smoking bans. Al Cross, former Courier-Journal political columnist, moderated the events hosted by the [University of Kentucky Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues](#) and the [Kentucky Youth Advocates](#).

I learned: If you've never smoked, don't; smokers should quit; and cigarettes and the smoke they produce contain 250 toxic chemicals, including carbon monoxide, arsenic, butane and ethanol – not the kind of stuff to put in your lungs.

But I also learned that anti-smoking zealots produce some ideological pollution far worse than any of the carcinogens found in a room full of second-hand smoke on a Saturday night at a Bingo hall in Prestonsburg.

For example, during my forum exchanges with Ellen Hahn, director of the [Kentucky Center for Smoke Free Policy](#), she said that smoking bans offer “justice” for restaurant servers “forced” to work in smoke-filled diners.

“Is it OK if we force workers to choose between their life and livelihood?” Hahn said.

My response to Hahn and the forum audience: “To hear some of these claims would make the unknowing think that Kentucky has the equivalent of concentration camps set up where resident bar-and-restaurant employees are being held. This, of course, is nonsense.”

Waffle House restaurants in northern Kentucky [voluntarily](#) went smoke-free earlier this month, bringing to 360 the number of smoke-free restaurants in that region alone.

Among the restaurants that have voluntarily enacted smoking bans, plenty of opportunities exist for food-service workers — from high-end establishments to fast-food stores — who don't want their lungs turned to chimneys.

Hahn argues it's “unjust” for employers to coerce food servers into breathing second-hand smoke as part of their working conditions.

It might be — if that were true.

— *Jim Waters is director of policy and communications for the Bluegrass Institute, Kentucky's free-market think tank. Reach him at jwaters@freedomkentucky.com. Read previously published columns at www.bipps.org.*