



Bluegrass Beacon BY JIM WATERS

Even a bumbling agent can uncover shady business in the schools

By Jim Waters

Your public-policy Secret Agent — Maxwell (you really don't need to be that) Smart — has uncovered the following “intelligence” decisions regarding Kentucky schools: “Educrats” trying to appease spineless leaders in Louisville’s school district and labor bosses at the city’s teacher unions want to exempt the district from charter school requirements.

The Kentucky Department of Education is circulating a draft charter school bill with a provision that keeps Jefferson County Public Schools outside the law’s requirements.

You don’t need a shoe phone to make this call: It stinks. If *any* system needs charters, it’s **JCPS** — the state’s largest school district — where thousands of children are in failing schools.

JCPS Superintendent Sheldon Berman and the KDE probably hoped no one would notice. But your Agent Smart has developed a nose for sniffing out endeavors to circumvent accountability and improvement in our public schools — things charter schools produce.

Berman shows little willingness to stand up to teachers-union demands that hinder improvement and harm students. It’s too bad if legislators allow one overpaid educrat to block doorways of failing schools and prevent students from leaving for a better education.

Berman recently admitted to the KDE that he couldn’t get enough highly experienced teachers to meet the needs of the extremely underserved students at Frederick Law Olmstead North and South middle schools. The reason? Union contracts allow tenured teachers to refuse placement in tougher schools, even if they could make a huge difference in students’ learning.

It might be different if Berman had demonstrated a real plan for change and a record of improvement. But the Alliance for Excellent Education reports that seven of the 20 Kentucky high schools with graduation rates less than 60 percent — considered “dropout factories” by the Johns Hopkins University — sit in Berman’s district.

Charter schools have proven to be one of the most effective tools in increasing graduation rates — particularly for minority students and those from low-income households — in Boston, Los Angeles and Chicago. Berman must spend a lot of time under the “Cone of Silence” to not know this — especially since he came to Kentucky from Massachusetts.

Only 40 percent of Chicago public schools black males graduate. Yet 100 percent of the 107 students in the all-boys Urban Prep Charter School not only graduated but have been accepted at four-year colleges.

And these were *not* the “cream of the crop” students. They came from the city’s tough Englewood neighborhood. As freshmen, only 4 percent could read at grade level.

Berman has yet to share a comparable success story in his district. Instead, he seems determined – along with the help of enabling union leaders and politicians – to defend the continued failure to provide an adequate education for far too many children in the same circumstances.

Meanwhile, a favorite gripe of defenders of the status quo is that teachers remain underpaid.

But are they?

Agent Smart took a closer look and — worthy of any agent dedicated to fighting the evil KAOS (Keeping Against Our Students) — found some damning evidence.

A [report](#) by the prestigious John Locke Foundation revealed: Kentucky teachers rank among the most highly paid in the nation.

Considering salaries, pension contributions, years of experience and the Cost-Of-Living Index, the average adjusted compensation rate for Kentucky teachers is \$66,270, third-best in the nation. That's more than \$11,000 above the U.S. average of \$55,166 and higher than all Kentucky's border states except Illinois.

Hmmm. Seems the purveyors of the “underpaid” myth, “missed it by that much,” as agent Smart frequently says.

Join us next time for another edition of Kentucky Super Sleuth when we will again uncover important, little-known facts about governments and school systems — and boldly go where others fear to venture.

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