

Education Reform Isn't Just About More Money

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Much public discussion has taken place during the past several weeks about how to improve the public education system here in Kentucky. As a longtime reform advocate, I believe we must take strong action right away. But the notion that we need increased taxes and more government spending to transform our schools is not only misguided but reads right from the outdated playbook of the politicians in Frankfort.

An unfortunate example of this approach is the Covington Independent School District, which spent \$13,166 on each student during the 2005-06 school year – the second highest rate in Kentucky – yet ranked last among the state's 175 school districts for its performance on the annual CATS assessment. Spending per pupil in that district has risen 121 percent since 1989, but student achievement has failed to keep pace. The funding is there, but the approach clearly is not working.

In fact, average per pupil spending in Kentucky has risen every year since the KERA reforms, but student performance as measured by a variety of standards is not on the same track. During the 1989-90 school year, for example, Kentucky schools spent nearly \$4,000 on each student, and the average ACT composite score for our school districts stood at 19.6.

By 2006 per pupil spending had more than doubled, but the average ACT composite score had improved less than one point. Likewise, the state's graduation rate during that period inched up just four-tenths of one percent, from 70.3 in 1990 to 70.7 in 2005. Again, more spending failed to deliver the desired results.

And while I'm not suggesting we spend less on our students and teachers, additional funding alone will not solve the serious challenges many of our schools face. Now is the time to ask the tough questions about what's working and what's not. That's why I'm running for governor.

Do we want to fully fund kindergarten and preschool programs to give every Kentucky child a head start, or do we want more unprofitable state-owned golf courses, hotels and lodges?

Do we want to give every child better access to higher education regardless of his or her economic standing, or do we want more museums and exhibits and local pet projects?

Do we want to attract better teachers by paying them more and rewarding innovation and classroom achievement, or do we want more election-year promises and wasteful spending on unnecessary programs?

It's time we ask people outside the political process, beyond Frankfort, to invest in this state's future and help develop inventive ways to improve our schools. As a businessman, I know how to bring people together and build consensus around sound ideas. As a leader in education reform, I've worked to enact more than 50 specific recommendations to improve student achievement put forward by the Business Forum on Kentucky Education. As your governor, I'll take a new approach to solving this state's education crisis and not just spend more money.

The choice in this year's Republican gubernatorial primary is simple: two politicians or a businessman. The future of our state rests with you.