Comments Regarding School Based Decision Making (SBDM) in Kentucky
for the
Kentucky Legislature's Interim Joint Committee on Education
November 19, 2018

To:
Sen. Max Wise [Co-Chair]
Rep. John Carney [Co-Chair]
Members of the Committee

I regret that a conflict in my schedule precludes my ability to appear in person before the committee today, but I offer these written comments in the hope they will enhance the committee's understanding of the issues with Kentucky's School Based Decision Making (SBDM) program.

In January, 2018, the Bluegrass Institute, where I serve as the staff education analyst, published my report about "School Based Decision Making Policy, a Closer Look."[1] In the following comments I briefly review issues discussed in the report and add additional observations made possible due to the availability of more recent data.

Overall, the committee should know that the report and its findings remain solid and worthy of continued consideration despite the availability of some newer information. When the new data somewhat alters the picture, the trend is to strengthen the report's original findings.

To begin, it should be noted that the Institute's 2018 report apparently offers the first examination of SBDM performance in Kentucky since 2001. That nearly two-decades long information vacuum is very disturbing considering the huge impact the SBDM program has on the education of children in Kentucky. The significance of this lack of research is made more apparent by a major finding found in the earlier 2001 report from Professor Jane Clark Lindle that says:

"due to a lack of comprehensive evaluation data on SBDM, no one can answer definitively any questions concerning the reform's effects on any group or agency."[2]

In other words, as of 2001 serious and unresolved questions remained about the performance of SBDM in Kentucky. Those unresolved issues about SBDM performance make the extended information vacuum since 2001 much more serious.

And, we did find a number of still unresolved SBDM issues in our new, 2018 report.

One current issue concerns SBDM performance in Kentucky's officially designated, lowest performing schools. A total of 47 schools were identified between 2010 and 2016 as either Persistently Low-Achieving Schools or in later years as Priority Schools. We found several common problems related to SBDM performance existed in a number of these schools when they were formally identified as low-performing. Those problems include:

- A lack of focus on students, and sometimes on key adults;
- Not using data to inform decisions;
- Failing to adopt needed policies;
- Failing to implement adopted policies;
- Failing to coordinate with other schools and/or the school district;
- Failing to include all stakeholders;
- Poor use of resources;
- Poor focus on goals; and, perhaps most disturbing of all,
- Curriculum neglect.

These are all serious issues that have important, negative impacts on student learning.

The report also examines some serious problems with accountability and a lack of a clear chain of command that are created by the SBDM program. It points out that a continuous stream of locally elected school board members and school superintendents have gotten into trouble for sometimes well-directed concerns related to actions involving the SBDM councils in their districts. The report provides a recent example of a highly regarded school superintendent who got into trouble for SBDM-related issues although it was the SBDMs that actually failed to perform their responsibilities appropriately.

Looking at another SBDM-related question, the report explores disturbing evidence that one of the major goals of the program – increasing parent participation in Kentucky's public schools – has not been effective. Using the most current information available until now, which is for the 2016-17 school year, the report shows the number of parents voting in the school council elections in the vast majority of Kentucky's schools indicates astonishingly low interest on the part of those parents.

In a total of 818 out of the 1,124 Kentucky public schools with council voting information, the ratio of voting parents to school enrollment was only a single-digit percentage. Clearly, astonishingly high proportions of parents don't even care to vote for parent representatives on the school councils.

Finally, the report examines data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to show that claims of great progress in Kentucky's schools under SBDM are not supported. Even worse, the actual rate of progress on NAEP is so slow that it will take many decades, and in some cases more than a century, before our overall average student proficiency rates on NAEP math and reading can be expected to reach an 80 percent level. And, for Kentucky's major minority racial group, the state's black students, NAEP proficiency at the 80 percent level is in most cases centuries away.

Now, with that very quick overview of the report completed, let's update some of the observations with data that became available subsequent to the report's publication.

First, the committee needs to know that the Priority Schools program was summarily and abruptly ended when the new Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) program was launched by the Kentucky Department of Education in conjunction with the September 26, 2018 release of the state's latest assessment results. All the former Priority Schools were completely released from that status although a considerable number never earned their way out of Priority status. Furthermore, all the Priority schools summarily got their school council authority returned – without showing they had developed the ability to successfully self-govern again.

Table 1 below, developed from data received following our August 2018 Open Records request for an update on Priority Schools status, essentially provides a closing snapshot of the Priority School program. This new table contains updates from Table 1 found in the institute's 2018 report.

Several things from the closing hours of the Priority program are worth noting in Table 1 below.

In general:

- A total of 47 schools entered Priority status at some point during the program's operation,
- A total of 27 schools never earned their way out of Priority status and an additional four schools were closed while still in Priority status,
- A majority (24 of 47) of the Priority schools came from Jefferson County Public Schools.

Regarding SBDM authority:

- A total of 31 schools lost their SBDM authority at some point during the Priority process,
- Only 11 of the 31 schools that lost SBDM authority ever earned it back,
- Three schools that lost their SBDM authority were closed without ever regaining self-governance,
- A total of 17 schools were still without SBDM authority when the Priority program's ending summarily granted them that authority – unearned – again.

Table 1

N	School	District	Entered priority status	Exited priority status	SBDM authority removed	SBDM authority restored
1	East Carter HS	Carter County	November, 2010	October, 2014	November, 2010	October, 2016
2	Caverna HS	Caverna Ind.	Spring, 2010	October, 2014	April, 2012	October, 2016
3	Christian County HS	Christian County	November, 2010	N/A	January, 2011	N/A
4	Dayton HS	Dayton Ind.	October, 2011	N/A	N/A	N/A
5	Dayton MS	Dayton Ind.	October, 2011	N/A	N/A	N/A
6	Bryan Station HS	Fayette County	October, 2011	October, 2015	N/A	N/A
7	Fleming County HS	Fleming County	October, 2011	N/A	February, 2012	N/A
8	Greenup HS	Greenup County	November, 2010	October, 2015	January, 2011	October 2017
9	Hopkins County Central HS	Hopkins County	October, 2011	N/A	January, 2012	N/A
10	Academy @ Shawnee HS	Jefferson County	Spring, 2010	N/A	March, 2010	N/A
11	Byck Elementary	Jefferson County	October, 2015	N/A	February, 2016	N/A
12	Doss HS	Jefferson County	November, 2010	N/A	December, 2010	N/A
13	Fairdale HS	Jefferson County	November, 2010	N/A	December, 2010	N/A
14	Fern Creek HS	Jefferson County	Spring, 2010	October, 2015	March, 2010	October, 2017
15	Frost Middle	Jefferson County	Spring 2010	School closed 2014	March, 2010	N/A
16	Iroquois HS	Jefferson County	November, 2010	N/A	January, 2011	N/A
17	Knight MS	Jefferson County	November, 2010	N/A	May, 2011	N/A
18	Maupin Elementary	Jefferson County	October, 2016	N/A	January, 2017	N/A
19	Moore Traditional MS	Jefferson County	October, 2015	N/A	N/A	N/A
20	Myers Middle	Jefferson County	October, 2011	School closed 2014	November, 2011	N/A
21	Olmsted North MS	Jefferson County	October, 2011	N/A	N/A	N/A
22	Roosevelt-Perry Elementary	Jefferson County	October, 2015	N/A	N/A	N/A
23	Seneca HS	Jefferson County	November, 2010	N/A	December, 2010	N/A
24	Southern HS	Jefferson County	November, 2010	N/A	January, 2011	N/A
25	Stuart MS	Jefferson County	October, 2011	N/A	N/A	N/A
26	Thomas Jefferson MS	Jefferson County	October, 2011	N/A	N/A	N/A
27	Valley HS	Jefferson County	Spring, 2010	March, 2017	March, 2010	N/A
28	Valley Prep	Jefferson County	August, 2014	School closed in June 2017	N/A	N/A
29	Waggener HS	Jefferson County	November, 2010	October, 2015	January, 2011	October 2017
30	Wellington Elementary	Jefferson County	October, 2016	N/A	N/A	N/A
31	Western HS	Jefferson County	Spring, 2010	N/A	March, 2010	N/A
32	Western MS	Jefferson County	Spring, 2010	N/A	November, 2008	N/A
33	Westport MS	Jefferson County	October, 2011	N/A	N/A	N/A
34	Knox Central HS	Knox County	October, 2011	October, 2015	December, 2011	October 2017
35	Lawrence Co HS	Lawrence County	Spring, 2010	October, 2015	March, 2010	October 2017
36	Lee County HS	Lee County	October, 2011	October, 2015	November, 2011	October 2017
37	Leslie Co HS	Leslie County	Spring, 2010	October, 2013	N/A	N/A
38	Lincoln County HS	Lincoln County	October, 2011	October, 2015	February, 2012	October 2017
39	Livingston Central HS	Livingston County	October, 2011	N/A	N/A	N/A
40	Sheldon Clark HS	Martin County	November, 2010	October, 2014	N/A	N/A
41	Metcalfe Co HS	Metcalfe County	Spring, 2010	N/A	March, 2010	N/A
42	Monticello HS	Monticello Ind.	October, 2011	School closed 2013	November, 2011	N/A
43	Newport HS	Newport Ind.	November, 2010	October, 2015	April, 2011	October 2017
44	Perry County Central HS	Perry County	October, 2011	October, 2015	December, 2011	October 2017
45	Pulaski County HS	Pulaski County	October, 2011	N/A	February, 2012	N/A
46	Franklin-Simpson HS	Simpson County	October, 2011	N/A	N/A	N/A
47	Trimble County HS	Trimble County	October, 2011	October, 2015	N/A	N/A

Along with release of the 2018 assessment results, the Kentucky Department of Education also released a listing of the first 51 schools to be designated as Comprehensive Support and Improvement schools. Among other things, new rules in KRS 160.346 now automatically require that schools automatically lose their SBDM authority upon entry into CSI status.[3]

Some of the newly designated CSI schools had previously been Priority schools, as shown in Table 2, which is developed from the data in Table 1 and the CSI listing in the department's "BRIEFING PACKET, STATE RELEASE, 2017-2018 Assessment and Accountability Results," Appendix B.[4]

Table 2

Number	School Code	District Name	School Name	Title I	Level	CSI/TSI Reason	Was Priority School:	Never Lost SBDM Authority
			Kentucky 2017-18 Comprehensive Support and Improvement Schools that Had a Former Priority School Status					
1	275620	Jefferson County	Frederick Law Olmsted Academy North	Yes	MS	Bottom 5%	At Program End	Yes
2	275155	Jefferson County	Marion C. Moore School	Yes	MS	Bottom 5%	At Program End	Yes
3	275144	Jefferson County	Stuart Academy	Yes	MS	Bottom 5%	At Program End	Yes
4	275090	Jefferson County	Thomas Jefferson Middle	Yes	MS	Bottom 5%	At Program End	Yes
5	275116	Jefferson County	Wellington Elementary	Yes	ES	Bottom 5%	At Program End	Yes
6	275335	Jefferson County	Iroquois High	Yes	HS	Bottom 5%:	At Program End	
7	275163	Jefferson County	Knight Middle	Yes	MS	Bottom 5%	At Program End	
8	275480	Jefferson County	Maupin Elementary	Yes	ES	Bottom 5%	At Program End	
9	275590	Jefferson County	The Academy @ Shawnee	Yes	HS	Bottom 5%; Graduation Rate	At Program End	
10	275033	Jefferson County	Valley High	Yes	HS	Bottom 5%	At Program End	
11	275084	Jefferson County	Western High	Yes	HS	Bottom 5%; Graduation Rate	At Program End	
12	275051	Jefferson County	Waggener High	Yes	HS	Bottom 5%	Until Oct 2015	
13	452070	Newport Independent	Newport High School	Yes	MS	Bottom 5%	Until Oct 2015	

A number of interesting things are apparent in Table 2.

- A total of 13 of the new CSI schools were formerly in Priority status for at least some period of time,
- Five of the former Priority Schools, all from Jefferson County, never lost their SBDM authority while in Priority but now will lose that authority under the CSI rules,
- Six former Priority Schools lost and never regained their SBDM authority under the old program's rules. They now continue to operate without such authority as CSI schools.
- Two former Priority Schools lost and regained SBDM authority under that old program but now will again lose their authority under the CSI program.

There are some important messages in Table 2. First, five schools were operating under their own SBDM authority while Priority Schools, but they now will lose that authority as CSI schools. The question must be asked if it was ever appropriate to allow those schools to self-govern while in Priority Status.

All of the schools listed in Table 2 raise another concern. Their Priority status essentially just disappeared when the CSI program started, but all of these schools have clearly had a long-term history of highly troubling performance. Shouldn't that extensive history of poor performance – which preceded the CSI program – be recognized by the new CSI program? Don't these "Priority/CSI" schools show more significant, long-term problems than the other CSI schools demonstrate? Don't these schools warrant extra attention?

The listing of Jefferson County's Valley High School in Table 2 is particularly problematic. The institute's 2018 SBDM report discusses the unusual situation surrounding this school's former release from Priority status. Valley High entered Priority School status in the Spring of 2010 and was released from that status under highly questionable conditions in March 2017. As discussed in the 2018 report, Valley technically didn't meet the exit criteria, but the school was released from Priority status, anyway.

Flash forward to the new CSI era and Valley High finds itself right back in serious trouble as one of the state's 51 officially-designated lowest performing schools. Arguably, Valley High should not have been released from Priority status in the first place. The school certainly didn't stay out of trouble for long.

Finally, regarding the SBDM report's section about "Kentucky's educational performance in the SBDM era," the NAEP data used for most recent information was from 2015. The 2017 NAEP data is now available, and in general the predicted times to reach 80% proficiency have generally increased in almost every case -- usually dramatically.[5] This is because Kentucky's NAEP proficiency rates in 2017 were mostly notably lower than in 2015.

Figures 1 and 2 and Tables 3 and 4 below update the information shown in the report.

There are only a few cases, just Grade 8 Math for all students and Grade 8 Reading for black students, where the 2017 NAEP proficiency rates improved from 2015.

In many cases, there actually were declines in Kentucky's NAEP picture from the situation shown in the SBDM report's Figures 1 and 2.

This reflects in the revised projections in Table 3 below for the number of years it will take before Kentucky can expect to hit 80% proficiency rates on the NAEP.
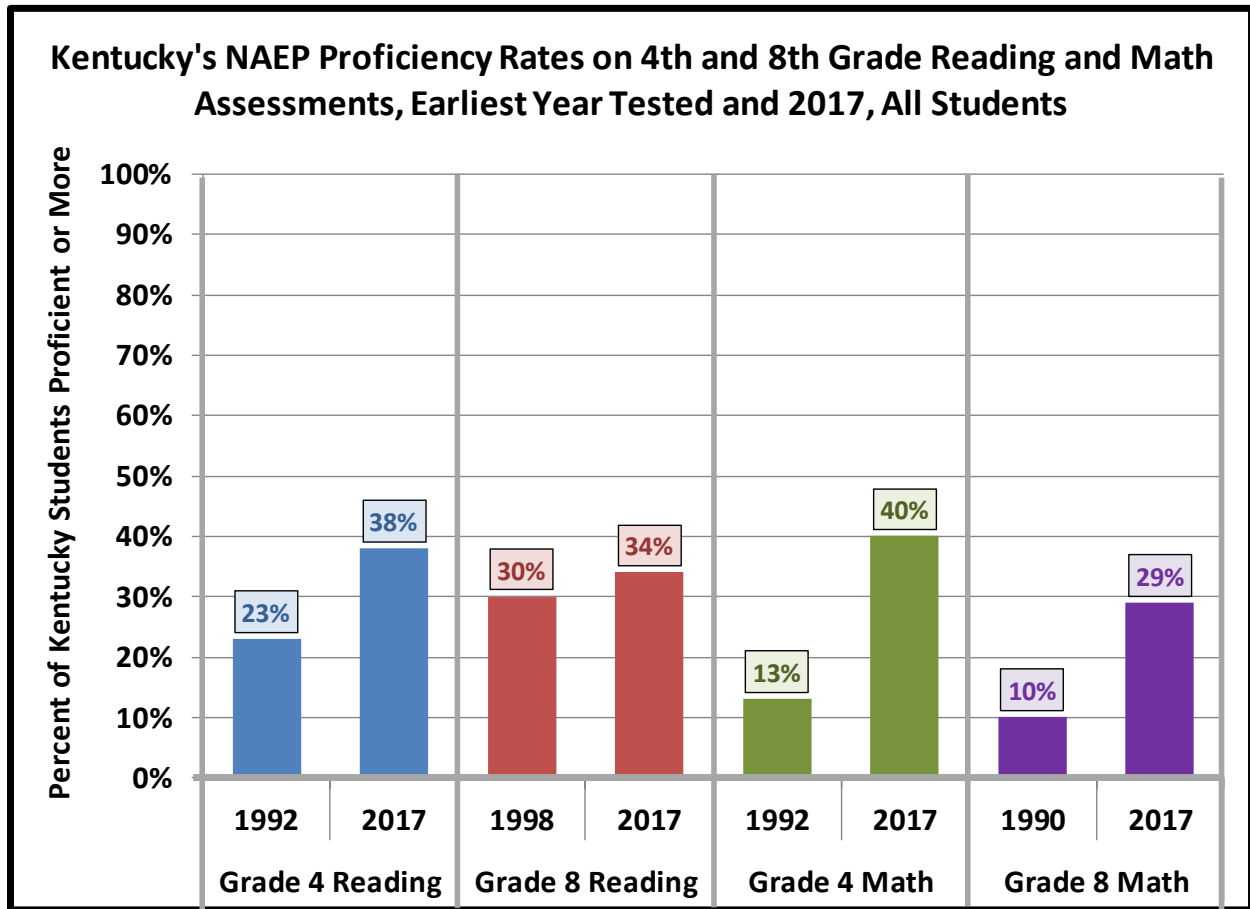
Figure 1

Kentucky's NAEP Proficiency Rates on 4th and 8th Grade Reading and Math Assessments, Earliest Year Tested and 2017, All Students

Table 3

All Kentucky Students: Calculation of Years Remaining to Reach 80% Proficiency Rate on NAEP	
	Years to reach 80% Proficiency
Grade 4 Read	70
Grade 8 Read	219
Grade 4 Math	37
Grade 8 Math	72

For black students, Figure 2 and Table 4 below show the updated changes based on the 2017 NAEP results look even worse.

The SBDM report estimates it would take 91 years to reach 80% proficiency in Grade 4 reading. The revised estimate using the 2017 data is now 200 years! In fact, for Kentucky's blacks the estimated time to reach 80% proficiency for NAEP Grade 4 Reading and Grade 8 Math and Reading now exceeds two centuries! For Grade 4 math, the time required will be 135 years!
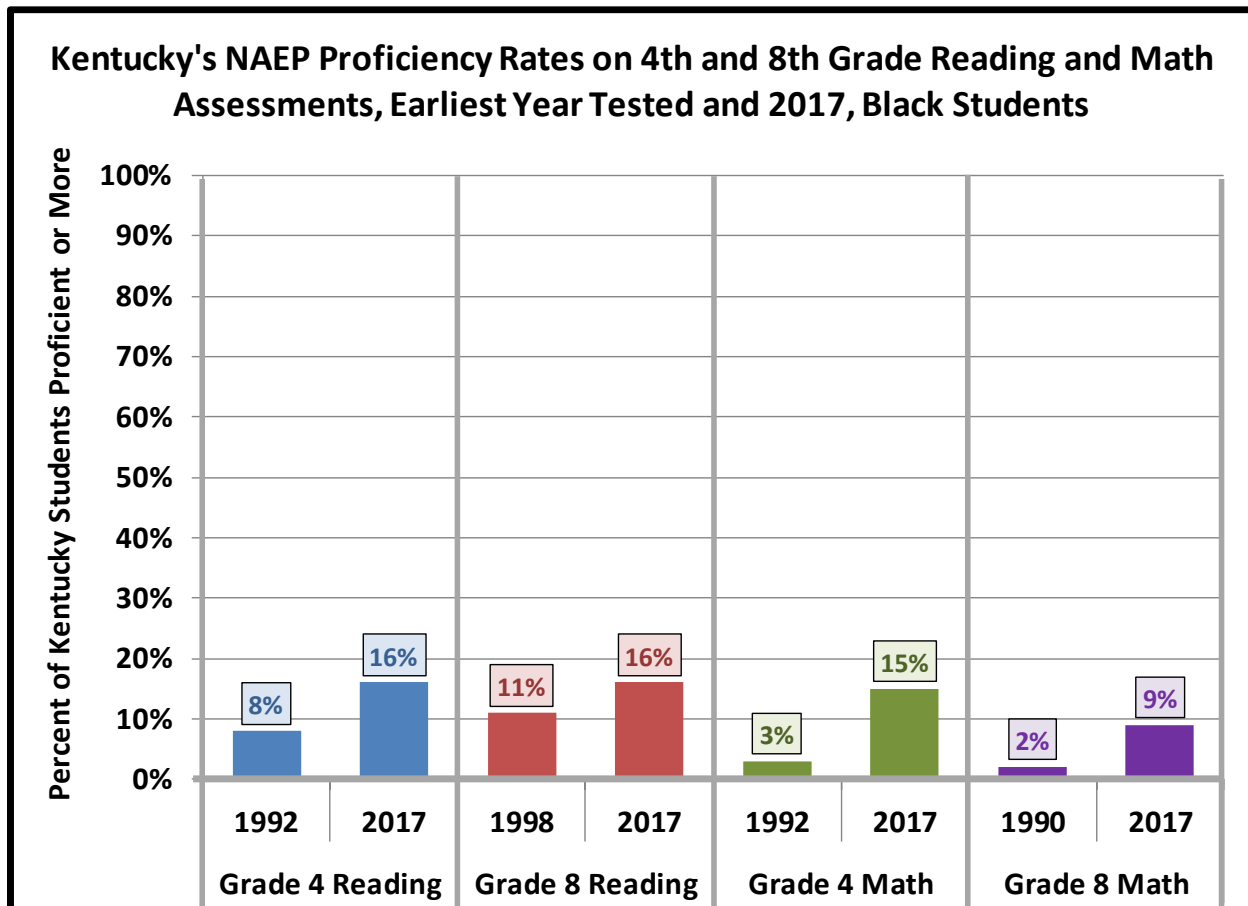
Figure 2

Kentucky's NAEP Proficiency Rates on 4th and 8th Grade Reading and Math Assessments, Earliest Year Tested and 2017, Black Students

Table 4

Black Kentucky Students Only, Calculation of Years Remaining to Reach 80% Proficiency Rate on NAEP	
	Years to reach 80% Proficiency
Grade 4 Read	200
Grade 8 Read	246
Grade 4 Math	135
Grade 8 Math	273

So, Kentucky needs to put aside comments about "all the progress" Kentucky's public education system has made in the SBDM era. Kentucky's actual educational progress hasn't been all that great, and recently the state has been moving backwards in most NAEP testing.

So, the message from NAEP seems clear: Kentucky needs to try something different in education governance.

With that observation – it is time for Kentucky to try something different in education governance – I'll close. Again, the findings and recommendations in the January 2018 SBDM report remain valid even after consideration of the new information in this letter. In fact, if anything, the new data urges us even more strongly to move forward with a more intelligent and accountable school governance system, one where locally-elected school leaders and their chosen professional executive once again have both the authority and accountability necessary to move the state forward.

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Endnotes

[1] Innes, Richard G., "School Based Decision Making Policy, A Closer Look," Bluegrass Institute, January 2018. Available online from a link in: http://www.bipps.org/school-based-decision-making-research-report/.

[2] Lindle, Jane Clark, "School Based Decision Making," Clemson University Tiger Prints, 2001, Page 5. Online here: http://tigerprints.clemson.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1055&context=eugene_pubs.

[3] See Kentucky Revised Statute 160.346, Para (7)(b). Online here: http://www.lrc.ky.gov/Statutes/statute.aspx?id=45624.

[4] Kentucky Department of Education, "BRIEFING PACKET, STATE RELEASE, 2017-2018 Assessment and Accountability Results," September 28, 2018. Online at: https://education.ky.gov/comm/news/Documents/R18-146%20Media%20Briefing%20Packet%20State%20Release%202017-2018%20FINAL%202018_09_24.pdf.

[5] The new NAEP data was obtained from the NAEP Data Explorer web tool. Online at: https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/landing.