



KENTUCKY

STATE OPPORTUNITY ANALYSIS

EVIDENCE

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Strategy Area Four:

ENSURING QUALITY

As systems become personalized and locally contextualized, states must rethink the education system to drive equitable implementation. By rethinking learning frameworks, new possibilities for academic assessment and accountability systems emerge. In the same way that personalized learning sees the value of and requirement to develop every child, assessment and accountability in personalized systems emphasize the development of each school to its fullest potential.

Three policy conditions support states in ensuring quality:

- Quality Frameworks for Student Success
- Balanced Assessment
- Measuring Success

Key Takeaways

- **Further integrate Kentucky’s statewide vision for personalized, competency-based learning into existing systems and structures.** The Kentucky Department of Education already provides some supports and resources for schools and school districts engaging in personalized, competency-based learning. Notable resources include initiatives run through the Office of Innovation housed within Kentucky Department of Education and the Kentucky State Board of Education’s Profile of a Learner. The state could seek to build on this existing work by considering how best to ingrain its collective vision more deeply throughout the state’s existing systems and structures in areas such as graduation pathways and assessment and accountability. Field insights and community needs will likely be key to this work.
- **Continue building local capacity to scale and sustain innovation.** Kentucky has already seen considerable interest in locally designed assessment and accountability policy and practice to support personalized, competency-based learning, notably through the work of the Local Laboratories of Learning. The state could draw on learnings from this work to further build capacity for local data collection and analysis and expand its various communities of practice to center on scaling innovative practices for ensuring school quality.
- **Leverage existing policy opportunities to provide students with personalized options to demonstrate competency.** Students in Kentucky already have the opportunity to actively pursue a more personalized learning experience as part of their Individual Learning Plans and through the state’s personalized graduation requirement options. To maximize the outcomes of this support plan, the state might consider how to further leverage Individual Learning Plans and performance-based credits to ensure students have a range of options to demonstrate mastery of key knowledge, skills and dispositions.

Evidence of Quality Frameworks for Student Success

Description

The state has a learning framework, or set of standards, that represents the full range of knowledge, skills and dispositions students need to graduate ready for postsecondary education and a rapidly changing workforce. This framework provides transparent learning expectations that help organize a personalized education system, empowering local leaders and educators to create or leverage aligned competencies and empirically-based learning progressions that map how students learn so educators can more effectively address learning needs.

To ensure quality, states leverage quality frameworks for student success by:

- Grounding learning frameworks in a set of statewide competencies
- Helping educators operationalize statewide competencies
- Ensuring consistency and customizability with appropriate depth and breadth of skills and content
- Aligning resources and policies to deepen implementation and support continuous improvement

Graduation Requirements

Description: State graduation requirements enable students to explore career interests and are aligned to statewide competencies, enabling students to be ready for postsecondary and workforce success regardless of pathway(s) chosen.

The Kentucky State Board of Education (KBE) is required by statute ([KRS 158.142\(3\)\(b\)](#)) to establish minimum [administrative regulations](#) related to graduation requirements that “comply with the expected outcomes for students and schools.” They must also establish requirements for an alternative high school diploma for eligible students, including requirements for early graduation from high school. Regulations have been in effect since October 20, 2022, and have already been subject to a series of amendments. The state has also created multiple pathways to graduation through its graduation requirements as well as options that schools and students can use to personalize student learning experiences.

Under the state’s minimum requirements for graduation, every student must earn at least 22 credits. These span five areas – English, math, social studies, science and other – in the two categories of foundational and personalized. Personalized course choices are based on a student’s [Individualized Learning Plan](#) (ILP), as well as individual needs. Courses taken for course credit must be aligned to the [Kentucky Academic Standards](#) (KAS). Students must also pass a state-mandated civics test, successfully complete a course or program in financial literacy, receive instruction in essential workplace ethics and demonstrate competency in technology using district-created competency requirements based on the KAS for technology. In addition, the state provides for an alternative high school diploma for eligible students with disabilities. See “[Kentucky Minimum Graduation Requirements For Students Entering High School 2019-2020 and Thereafter](#)” and “[Kentucky Department of Education Minimum High School Graduation Requirements Frequently Asked Questions](#)”).

Within the Foundational and Personalized categories of the state’s graduation requirements, Kentucky has several potential opportunities for personalization. First, a local board has the ability to substitute an

integrated, applied, interdisciplinary, occupational, technical or higher-level course for a required course. Second, students have the option to earn performance-based credit in lieu of Carnegie Units for a wide range of course types using a variety of different mechanisms. Examples include coursework that allows satisfactory demonstration of learning, standards-based portfolios, dual credit or other equivalency courses and standards-based internships and other cooperative learning experiences. See Administrative Regulations [704 KAR 3:303](#) and “[Performance-Based Credit](#).”

The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and schools already support students in exploring career interests and achieving readiness for postsecondary and workforce success through implementation of state-mandated ILPs. Administrative regulations require every district to implement an advising and guidance process to support each student in the development and implementation of an ILP beginning no later than grade six. This plan must address career development and awareness, financial planning for postsecondary education and standards-based learning experiences each student will complete. Beginning in the student’s eighth grade year, the plan must set learning goals based on academic and career interests and identify academic courses and extracurricular opportunities aligned to postsecondary goals. See “[Kentucky Department of Education Minimum High School Graduation Requirements Frequently Asked Questions](#).”

In addition to ILPs, the statutes, administrative regulations and frequently asked questions cited earlier in this section establish the following pathways to high school graduation:

- **Traditional Pathway:** Students pursuing this option complete all required credits in four or more cohort years, as well as all state and district minimum high school graduation requirements. Students may use the course substitution and Performance Based Credit options as noted previously.
- **Graduate Early:** Students seeking to graduate early must meet minimum credit requirements and any additional requirements established by a local board of education. Once they have done so, they may be awarded a diploma from the district, in under four academic years from the start of grade nine. Students also have access to the course substitution and Performance Based Credit options.
- **Early Graduation Program Option:** Students using the Early Graduation Program (EGP) option may receive a high school diploma, Early Graduation Certificate and a scholarship award from the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority upon successful completion of all program requirements provided in [704 KAR 3:305](#) in three academic years or less. Under the regulations currently in effect, a student who elects to participate in the EGP is required to satisfy the state’s minimum graduation requirements, at least in part, through achievement of college-readiness benchmarks. As with other pathways, the course substitution and Performance Based Credit options are available. Benchmarks, called [Academic Readiness Indicators](#), include specific performance thresholds on a number of measurement instruments (e.g., ACT, SAT, Accuplacer) in English/writing, reading and math. The math option may include quantitative reasoning, college algebra and/or calculus.

A recent amendment to regulation 704 KAR 3:305, focused on minimum requirements for high school graduation, would make significant changes to the EGP, taking effect for school districts on July 1, 2023, and impacting EGP participants beginning with the 2023-2024 academic year. Changes would include:

- Meeting college entrance exam benchmarks for placement in credit-bearing courses without the need for remediation
- Earning ten foundational credits
- Completing the essential workplace ethics program requirements established by the school district
- Completing a financial literacy course requirement

In addition, beginning July 1, 2024, an EGP student must complete a performance-based project, portfolio or capstone. These must be based on a local board policy establishing performance descriptors and evaluation procedures and must give students the opportunity to demonstrate attainment of critical skills required for postsecondary and career success (see "[Early Graduation Program](#)").

Kentucky's performance-based credit option and EGP option also elevate the use of competencies by districts and schools. The EGP's performance-based project, portfolio or capstone requirement will put the state in an even stronger position of giving students more opportunities to benefit from personalized and deeper learning. They also require strong district policies and procedures to support student demonstrations of competency. These options and other state efforts such as the state's [Portrait of a Learner](#) and work of the [KY Competency Education and Assessment Consortium](#) are elements of the broader [United We Learn](#) vision and strategies.

Although work to support local use of competencies is ongoing, the state does not currently require their use as part of the minimum requirements for high school graduation. However, a KDE official indicated that KDE and the KBE may eventually consider ways in which to expand graduation requirements to include use of the competencies. This work could, for example, extend to the development of additional guidance and other resources to expand use of opportunities for students to earn competency-based credits. State-defined competencies are not currently found explicitly in state graduation requirements beyond the incorporation of global competencies/21st century skills in KAS, described below, which must be covered by courses taken for credit toward graduation. Though not required under state law, this could present an opportunity for Kentucky to further integrate its competencies with graduation requirements.

Statewide Competencies

Description: A set of statewide competencies, developed and maintained by diverse stakeholders and aligned to the knowledge and skills of the state's vision for student success, grounds all learning in the state.

The Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) has promulgated administrative regulations "establishing standards which school districts shall meet in student, program, service and operational performance" as required by statute ([KRS 156.160](#)). As described by the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), "[T]he "Kentucky Academic Standards (KAS) contain the minimum required standards that all Kentucky students should have the opportunity to learn before graduating from Kentucky high schools." KDE is charged by the legislature with conducting a review of academic standards and the alignment of "corresponding assessments" on a six-year rolling scheduling. See [KRS 158.6453](#) and [KYstandards.org](#).

Building on the KAS, KBE's Portrait of a Learner, adopted in 2022, "articulates a statewide commitment to the knowledge and skills all students in the Commonwealth should be competent in by the time

she/he graduates.” The six competencies adopted by KBE incorporate the [anchor competencies](#) developed separately by the Kentucky Competency Education and Assessment Consortium (KCEAC). Portrait of a Learner competencies cover the following:

- Critical thinker
- Effective communicator
- Empowered learner
- Productive collaborator
- Engaged citizen
- Creative contributor

The KCEAC involved a diverse group of districts in developing anchor competencies. Similarly, KBE’s Portrait of a Learner work also appears to have provided opportunities for stakeholders throughout the state to provide input. KDE is continuing to engage a broad range of districts as it seeks to identify and profile ways in which the Portrait competencies, which are inclusive of the Anchor Competencies, can be implemented.

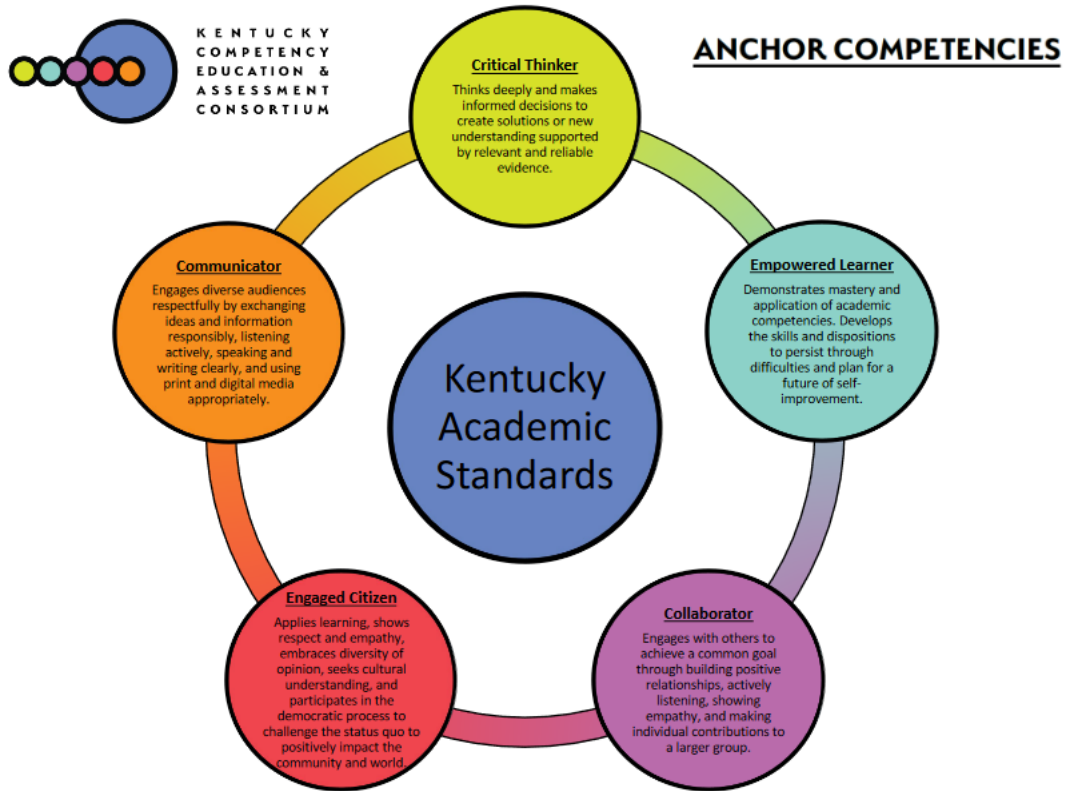
The state also recognized the importance of global competency/21st century skills and included them within the KAS. As described in a KBE [resolution related to global competence](#), [Kentucky’s Global Education Position Statement](#) and in [“Global Competency: Preparing Kentucky’s Globally Engaged Students”](#) from KDE:

“[G]lobal competence takes the 21st Century skills and infuses global awareness into everyday classroom practices by expanding student’s learning of cultural, historical, political and economic understandings about how our current, and their future, world work. Creating a relevant, immediate and engaging learning environment conducive to deepening exploration and knowledge of the ways that culture, including World Language, influences identities and worldviews is a first-step toward global competency.”

Spurred by the development of anchor competencies, KDE is facilitating the work of a group of teachers toward the development of a set of performance outcomes which are expected to be published as a resource in June 2023. These will describe progressions of student mastery at benchmark years.

Districts ultimately have the choice of whether or not to implement the Portrait of a Learner. However, there are extensive efforts underway to help educators integrate competencies into their practice and to create opportunities for students to design Individualized Learning Plans and earn graduation credit, if desired, using the learning progressions and benchmarks outlined in Performance Level Descriptors. KDE is also supporting district efforts to use formative assessment practices in designing personalized learning pathways, though information is not readily available to indicate the extent of district work in this regard. As stated in the November 30, 2022, issue of the [Standards Newsletter](#): “At the heart of the formative assessment process is the use of descriptive and actionable feedback that allows students and teachers to make adjustments in order to close the gap between students’ current level of understanding and the intended learning outcomes...The Meaningful Feedback module, which can be

found online in the [Evidence-Based Instructional Practices](#) collection, along with a “[General Introduction Evidence-Based Instructional Practices](#),” is intended to be facilitated by a school leader in professional learning communities.”



Source: [CEA Consortium Anchor Competencies](#)

Evidence suggests that state leaders have a history of engaging a broad range of stakeholders in these types of efforts. For example, in carrying out the required review and revision of academic standards, KDE is required to ensure that standards “focus on critical knowledge, skills and capacities needed for success in the global economy” and are aligned “elementary to high school to postsecondary education so that students can be successful at each education level.” There is also evidence that the state’s standards identify strategies to improve postsecondary and career transitions. For example, some standards documents include “capacity and goal statements that frame instructional programs” for all students. Capacity and goal statements are established in statute [KRS 158.645](#) and [KRS 158.6451](#). These include:

- Communication skills necessary to function in a complex and changing civilization
- Knowledge to make economic, social and political choices
- Core values and qualities of good character to make moral and ethical decisions throughout life
- Understanding of governmental processes as they affect the community, the state and the nation
- Sufficient self-knowledge and knowledge of their mental health and physical wellness
- Sufficient grounding in the arts to enable each student to appreciate their cultural and historical heritage
- Sufficient preparation to choose and pursue their life’s work intelligently
- Skills to enable students to compete favorably with students in other states

In spite of these efforts, the KAS do not fully span the learning continuum from preschool through postsecondary education. While not required in law, this represents an opportunity for further systems alignment. One possible route for greater systems alignment rests in the potential to connect the Portrait of a Learner and the Council on Postsecondary Education’s [Kentucky Graduate Profile](#), which is described as “a set of career-focused learning outcomes each graduate should demonstrate as part of their college curriculum.” The Council on Postsecondary Education Graduate Profile “focuses on the workforce skills, as well as the specialized content knowledge they acquire from their major, that graduates need to thrive in their careers.” The Profile contains 10 essential skills, with skills such as effective communication, critical thinking and adapting to challenging circumstances, overlapping with KBE’s Profile.

Kentucky already has noteworthy efforts focused on supporting culturally responsive instruction, such as [“Culturally Responsive Instruction Articles and Lesson Plans for Culturally Responsive Instruction.”](#) KDE school improvement resource [“Resources and Strategies for GAP Closure”](#) also includes culturally responsive teaching strategies. That said, the state does have an opportunity to provide additional guidelines in a culturally responsive manner and that aligns to state standards. For example, neither statute nor administrative rule appear to contain an explicit reference to culturally-responsive instruction. Both do, however, acknowledge some of the components of “a culturally inviting classroom” listed above. For example, the academic standards provisions of statutes include a focus on preparing students to use skills to “[C]onnect and integrate experiences and new knowledge from all subject matter fields with what they have previously learned and build on past learning experiences to acquire new information through various media sources.” While opportunities for strengthening culturally responsive guidelines exist, it is important to acknowledge that existing resources do offer considerable guidance to educators.

Operationalize Statewide Competencies

Description: An actionable framework helps educators integrate the statewide competencies into their practice as a continuum of expectations, bringing together aligned learning progressions and the state’s content standards to drive student success.

The Kentucky Department of Education’s (KDE) efforts to help educators integrate competencies into their practice is crucial to maximizing the impact of Individual Learning Plans, as well as expanding use of the performance-based graduation credit option. Through the [KY Innovative Learning Network](#), the state is working with educators to develop guidance and tools that support the use of the Portrait of a Learner and KDE’s Performance Outcomes. KDE has also facilitated the development of Content Area Resources

and General Resources to support implementation of the Kentucky Academic Standards (KAS), some of which provide guidance on creating personal learning plans and using learning progressions. In addition, [The Kentucky Multi-Tiered System of Supports Self-Assessment Tool](#) includes elements focused on the alignment of instruction, instructional resources and local curriculum to the KAS. However, at present there is no specific inclusion of the Portrait of a Learner competencies or KDE Performance Outcomes. See also [Kentucky Multi-Tiered System of Supports Implementation Guide](#). While not required under state law, this does represent an opportunity to further integrate this vision into the state’s systems and structures.

[Collaborative Response to Reimagine Schools for All](#) is an initiative started with federal COVID-19 relief funding. This initiative provides Kentucky schools and districts with support teams that are focused on providing high-quality professional learning, coaching and feedback for districts that emphasize vibrant, innovative and student-centered learning experiences. Each Collaborative Response to Reimagine Schools for All support team is tasked with collaborating with regional partners to support the academic achievement and social emotional development of Kentucky’s students.

KDE’s High Quality Instructional Resources [effort](#) is designed “to equip and empower local schools and districts in providing educators access to [High Quality Instructional Resources] and High Quality Professional Learning (HQPL) so they are better prepared to support all students with engaging, relevant, standards-aligned grade-level assignments.” KDE is working to align state support to districts and educators as described in the Culturally Responsive Teaching Strategies within Resources and Strategies for GAP Closure. Supplementary materials address communication and related efforts to promote the [definitions and rationale for high quality instructional resources and high-quality professional learning](#). They also provide local leaders with a consumer guide that includes selection criteria and evaluation tools.

New funding is being used to significantly further these efforts. As described in KDE’s application for the [Competitive Grants for State Assessments](#) (CGSA) program, and related materials, KDE “will support the cultivation and scaling of local innovations in assessment and accountability (A&A) that drive Kentucky toward a statewide competency-based education (CBE) model.”

As part of its statutorily-required review of academic standards and the alignment of “corresponding assessments” that take place on a six-year rolling scheduling, KDE is required to provide or facilitate statewide training for teachers and administrators on, among other things, how to integrate the revised content standards and performance assessments into classroom instruction. The Education Professional Standards Board is required to “coordinate information and training sessions in the use of revised standards in all teacher preparation programs” and “ensure that each teacher preparation program includes use of the academic standards in the pre-service education programs and that all teacher interns will have experience planning classroom instruction based on the revised standards” ([KRS 158.6453](#)). This is required to be accomplished in cooperation with the KBE and the Council on Postsecondary Education. These requirements do not specifically address the effective use of competencies and empirically-based learning progressions to personalize instruction.

KDE-led professional learning on KAS revisions, as well as updates Model Curriculum Framework Resources and the Multi-Tiered System of Supports were announced in February 2023 and are designed to help strengthen instructional coherence at the local level. A series of three-hour sessions were held in March 2023 that will be delivered in partnership with regional education cooperatives. As these sessions conclude, Kentucky policy makers and stakeholders have an opportunity to examine the results and

identify whether and how the Portrait of a Learner and Performance Outcomes were included. (See: [KDE Standards Newsletter - February 15, 2023](#).)

Researchers sought to determine whether evidence existed that these strategies prioritize the development and use of a process for ensuring districts are implementing high-quality competencies – either those articulated in the Portrait of a Learner or comparable district-created competencies. As this is not a legal requirement for any of these programs, no evidence was collected to this effect.

Appropriate Depth and Breadth of Skills and Content

Description: The framework is specific enough to guide equitable learning systems across the state while maintaining room for communities to contextualize the framework to serve the full range of diverse learners and communities.

Resources and frameworks including the Kentucky Academic Standards (KAS) and statutorily-required goals are all positioned as pillars of the state’s work. Additionally, the recently passed Portrait of a Learner has the potential to become another pillar. Moving forward, Kentucky has an opportunity to present these critical elements as a comprehensive and transparent P-16 learning framework for student success. Doing so would enable the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) and the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) to strengthen coherence across the state’s deeper learning initiatives. The state could build on the success that it has had in establishing clear expectations regarding the appropriate depth and breadth of skills and content students need. As it does so, Kentucky might also consider how to do so in ways that are specific enough to guide equitable learning systems across the state while also providing the flexibility needed to give each community room to adapt the framework to its full range of diverse learners.

KBE and KDE appear to be balancing potential tension between state specificity and local flexibility. With regard to the KAS specifically, some standards documents include a section titled “Kentucky’s Vision for Students,” in which students’ knowledge of a specific academic area is described as being aligned to KBE’s [vision](#) that each and every student is empowered and equipped to pursue a successful future. KDE notes that the “standards address what is to be learned, but do not address how learning experiences are to be designed or what resources should be used.” See: [Kentucky Academic Standards](#).

Deference to local decision-making is evident in the absence of a state requirement or expectation that all districts work with community partners to leverage the Portrait of a Learner, Performance outcomes and culturally-responsive practices being supported by KDE. This approach is further evident in statutory provisions that prescribe critical responsibilities for KBE, KDE and local education officials. For example, the legislature requires KDE to disseminate to districts and schools “a model curriculum framework which is directly tied to the goals, outcomes and assessment strategies...[and which] shall provide direction to local districts and schools as they develop their curriculum.” ([KRS 158.6451](#)). (See the [Kentucky Model Curriculum Framework](#).)

At the time of this analysis, no public evidence was identified suggesting that KDE or KBE plan to evaluate and refine the Portrait of a Learner competencies and performance outcomes over time, or to develop new growth mechanisms to ensure students farthest from proficiency experience the greatest learning gains. However, it does appear there is some support for districts in ensuring that curriculum represents diverse perspectives. As part of its support for [Local Laboratories of Learning](#), KDE has

indicated that it will create a tool kit so all school districts can use a similar collaborative approach with local stakeholders to continuously improve student experiences in the classroom.

Continuous Improvement

Description: Resources and policies are aligned statewide to support the development, implementation, ongoing review and adjustment of frameworks for student success.

The Kentucky Department of Education's (KDE) prioritization of continuous improvement is evidenced by its focus on research, reflection, performance monitoring, evaluation and the use of evidence to refine aspects of the system. This spans everything from standards to assessments and accountability and general innovation. It is also evidenced by the [Strategic Planning and Research Team](#)'s mission to "comprehensively understand how well KDE is performing on all strategic initiatives through the use of evidence by coordinating with internal and external partners and analyzing data."

The [Model Curriculum Framework](#) provides guidance on creating a culture of continuous improvement through the implementation of Professional Learning Communities.

The 2022-2023 [Kentucky Innovative Teacher Cohort](#) involves eleven Kentucky educators in professional learning, teacher leadership opportunities and innovative project development and implementation. As described by KDE, "[T]eachers in this pilot cohort will craft innovative experiences that connect to the Three Big Ideas of the United We Learn vision. The teachers' projects will work to provide vibrant learning experiences, will innovate in the classroom, especially as it relates to assessment and will create community engagement and partnerships to further student learning."

KDE supports [continuous school improvement](#) through the Office of Continuous Improvement and Support by providing numerous resources and guidance on topics such as the use of evidence-based practices and innovation. A set of resources focused specifically on assisting "schools and districts in their efforts to reduce the number of students scoring below proficiency and improve overall student achievement" highlights The Key Core Work Processes. This process should "serve as the qualitative component of the needs assessment process and help schools and districts identify strategies to be deployed through the continuous improvement plan." KDE also provides a tool to "assist schools and districts in evaluating the components of effectively deploying standards" called the [Kentucky Academic Standards Diagnostic](#). KDE also notes that "[I]n order to create meaningful learning targets, teachers must have a solid understanding of standards deconstruction and target types." ("[Take a Closer Look: Learning Targets](#)" can be used to support work with daily learning targets.)

The [School Curriculum Assessment and Accountability Council](#) is charged with the study, audit and review of the state's standards, assessments and accountability system and with making recommendations for their improvement, among other things.

[Encouraging innovation](#) is a core focus of the United We Learn initiative, which, as described by KDE "means addressing the challenge to find better approaches to both teaching and assessments." Local Learning Laboratories (L3s) represent a core strategy for encouraging innovation and continuous improvement. Three L3 cohorts have been established by KDE with support from Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) and the [Center for Innovation in Education](#) (CIE). Each participating district involves both district staff and community members in the creation of "a system of assessment and accountability that reflects the diversity of the students, families and communities it represents."

At the time of this report, minimal information is publicly available regarding the state’s engagement of educators, both within and outside of the Kentucky Competency Education and Assessment Consortium districts, or the research community in the development of performance level descriptors, beyond a high-level description in KDE’s application for the Competitive Grants for State Assessment program. Competitive Grants for State Assessment funds are being used to operationalize key aspects of the United We Learn vision.

Evidence of Balanced Assessment

Description

The state supports the development and implementation of balanced systems of formative, benchmark, interim and summative assessments at the state and district levels that empower educators; deepen student learning; and validate student mastery of complex knowledge, skills and dispositions. These systems empower educators to focus instruction where it is needed most while providing important information to help states and districts better target resources to close achievement gaps and improve student success.

To ensure quality, states leverage balanced assessment systems by:

- Clarifying the purpose and roles for assessments
- Networking educators to refine approaches and ensure quality assurance
- Enabling classroom-level ownership of performance assessment tasks
- Aligning resources and policies to ensure equitable statewide implementation

Roles for Assessments

Description: Authentic, curriculum-embedded performance assessments gauge and inform instruction while state-level assessments evaluate the quality and equity of implementation across the state.

The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) demonstrates an express interest in supporting local communities in moving toward innovative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment grounded in competency-based models. The state has statutory language noting that the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) is responsible for creating and implementing a balanced statewide assessment program ([KRS 158.6453\(3\)\(a\)](#)). This language also notes that the statewide assessment program could include a combination of multiple competency-based assessment and performance measures. KDE clearly defines the summative assessments it administers on its [website](#) and provides support for other types of assessments as described in more detail in this section. Over the past several years, KDE has launched various efforts to support district leaders and communities in moving toward competency-based models. This has implications for thinking differently about assessment and provides an opportunity for more balanced systems. Building on its commitment to competency-based education and community engagement, Kentucky is well positioned to continue the process of reimagining its approach to assessment.

In support of this work, KDE recently launched the United We Learn initiative. The basis for this initiative started in the spring of 2021 when Commissioner Jason E. Glass conducted extensive stakeholder engagement and identified assessment as one of many priority areas for growth. KDE worked to engage a broad range of stakeholders, deliberately ensuring they heard from an intentionally diverse and representative group of constituents across the state. In an effort to maintain stakeholder engagement coming out of the initial listening tours, the [Kentucky Coalition for Advancing Education](#) (KCAE) was formed. KCAE is described as a group with diverse perspectives from across the Commonwealth and whose goal is to bring together the lessons learned from the listening tours. The stakeholder feedback was summarized in a culminating report from United We Learn, "[Hearing Kentucky's Voices on the Future of Education](#)," which included the request to "make assessments go beyond a snapshot of a

whole child to reflect what communities need to do to cultivate learning.” Stakeholder feedback in the report encourages the state to move to a more balanced system of assessment, though that term is not used explicitly, and the report describes the desired state for assessments, ideating that:

“Assessment systems help students, communities and schools feel known in their full context and valued for their full range of assets and capabilities. Assessments help educators maintain a deep focus on improving outcomes for those who have been least served without constraining the outcomes we value to those we can most easily measure by standardized tests. The statewide system cultivates and honors local visions for success and local processes for improvement and supports communities learning from each other in meaningful ways.”

In addition to publishing the report, KDE, KBE and KCAE responded to the stakeholders’ feedback by embarking on a process to work with local communities to develop locally designed assessment and accountability systems aligned to competency-based models as part of its Local Laboratories of Learning (L3s). L3 member districts are engaging in a collaborative improvement process in their communities to design new assessment and accountability models. The vision as articulated in the state’s [CGSA application](#) is for the locally designed systems to work collectively as a part of a “system of systems” across the state. Ultimately, the objective is to have greater coherence across state and local requirements, ensuring that federal and state requirements do not impede innovation at the local level. Central to the state’s theory of action is the notion that local communities must serve as co-creators of both assessment and accountability systems. KDE uses an inclusive co-creation process which involves leading teams through a deliberate and iterative design process.

KDE’s work with the L3s began in the fall of 2021 and built off of the state’s Innovation Network. This work is being undertaken by a collaboration between KDE, KBE and the Center for Innovation in Education. Some L3s are already piloting new assessment processes and ideas to reimagine the student experience through more equitable and deeper learning opportunities. While work in the L3s is ongoing and continually evolving, this analysis does not include information that is not publicly available at the time of writing. However, the L3s [application and agreement](#) includes the purpose of and the process of participating in the L3 communities. Districts involved are asked to consider “their internal commitment to practice and strengthen core habits of empathy, co-creation, inclusion and reciprocity. L3s should have a strong commitment to these goals and values at all levels of leadership across the district and local Board of Education.” L3 districts also participate in a community of practice to support district leaders in engaging in the co-design process.

Building on the L3s and in connection with the United We Learn initiative, the state secured funding from the US Department of Education through the Competitive Grants for State Assessment (CGSA) funding opportunity to “advance a system for building local capacity to advance innovations in competency-based [Assessment and Accountability (A&A)] while also bringing state A&A policies into alignment and coherence to create a ‘state system of local A&A systems’ for CBE.” The grant application specifies that funding will be used to “build a system that creates stronger structural coherence, technical quality, practical utility and long-term sustainability across Kentucky’s state ‘system of A&A systems’.” As part of the grant, the state is targeting its support towards two critical issues – ensuring

technical quality and creating policy conditions to support innovation. In doing so, the state is working to balance the desire for community ownership in the development process with long-term feasibility for the system to revisit and rethink current state requirements. All of this is with the goal to advance a third critical issue, “supporting local communities to transform the student learning experience.”

Because local co-creation of the assessment system is such an important part of the process, local communities have autonomy to determine what to include in their portion of a balanced assessment system to best meet their needs, which can in turn inform how the state supports all communities in this development process. As part of the CGSA deliverables, the [Building a Bold New Future with Communities Committee](#) is scheduled to develop “a roadmap for design and implementation of a statewide ‘system of A&A systems’ for CBE that can meet federal Title 1 requirements.” This roadmap could ultimately serve as a comprehensive vision for what a balanced assessment and accountability system might potentially look like across the state. In the CGSA application, KDE summarizes key feedback from stakeholders that they anticipate will shape the direction of this work, including things such as:

- A desire to move away from a narrow competency scope in standardized assessments used for accountability that focuses exclusively on core English language arts literacy and science, technology, engineering and mathematics centered competencies
- A desire for more timely, granular, formative and multimodal feedback that is intelligible and actionable by multiple stakeholders who are actively working closely on the ground towards learner success, especially learners and parents

The grant application includes an appendix, “Technical Considerations and Resources for A&A System Design,” which lays out a series of questions and resources intended to support local communities in their assessment system design. Though it does not define a balanced assessment system, the appendix does note different types of assessments that may become part of the system, such as formative and interim assessments. It also notes that participants in this work may “critically analyze and synthesize the design specifications and technical properties of frequently used commercial assessment suites and collaborate with local leaders to curate a bank of instruction and assessment tools that are vetted at the local and state level.” However, it does not include specifics about how this will be done.

The work KDE is doing as part of the United We Learn initiative and CGSA grant represents the next step in the state’s evolution in its approach to assessments. While the initiative and the grant are relatively new to KDE, they build on the state’s history of working to support balanced assessment systems as articulated in existing law. For example, there is language in state statute noting the role of interim and formative assessments as part of the assessment system ([KRS 158.6453\(8\)](#)). On its [website](#), KDE clearly articulates the state-level assessments that are currently used to evaluate the quality and equity of implementation across the state and provides relevant information about each. As described by a KDE official in an interview, KDE anticipates that the state summative assessment system will remain a core part of any locally-developed system for the time being, with local communities then adding in other locally-selected assessments to create the comprehensive system of assessments.

Similar to the CGSA grant referenced earlier, research did not identify a clearly articulated vision for a balanced assessment system as part of the assessment section of the KDE website, or the use of performance assessments, and their role in gauging and informing instruction. While not required under state law, the potential creation of such a vision represents a potential opportunity to further emphasize

the state’s movement in this direction. The work being undertaken as part of the United We Learn initiative is intended to lead to the roadmap resource that will help guide local communities in designing these balanced assessment systems. Therefore, it seems likely there will be more explicit clarity on a vision for balanced assessment as the work pursuant to the CGSA continues, though the fully-developed roadmap may not be completed for several years.

As part of the work pursuant to the CGSA, KDE will ensure that these new systems are able to meet federal requirements, as well as allow for greater alignment and coherence among the district, state and federal systems.

Quality Assurance

Description: Rich professional learning communities ensure classroom assessment literacy while statewide networks ensure technical quality through educator collaboration, feedback and spot checking.

The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) is planning to provide opportunities for educators to work together to advance critical assessment changes. In the Competitive Grants for State Assessments (CGSA) grant application, for example, KDE notes that the state plans to engage in communities of practice related to this work, notably the Local Laboratories of Learning (L3s), stating they will use a “Community of Practice’ model to help districts with co-creation and [competency-based education] implementation.” Another example of opportunities for collaboration is the [Kentucky Innovative Learning Network Innovative Teacher Cohort](#). This group is intended to support collaboration among teachers and provide them with an opportunity to participate in professional learning, collaboration, project planning and implementation to support the ideas set forth in the United We Learn report, including innovation in assessment. The first cohort of teachers was announced in November 2022.

The state identifies specific deliverables focused on providing more professional development resources as part of the work being undertaken pursuant to the CGSA. As a consequence, this is likely another area where the work of KDE will continue to evolve. The grant application notes they will develop “professional development resources for the design, implementation and evaluation of local [assessment and accountability] systems for [competency-based education] that local leaders can use to adapt these models to their contexts. These resources will build on the full suite of 27 draft modules that have already been created and are currently prototyped to support inclusive design in the L3s project (National Center for Innovation in Education, 2022), and implementation will be supported by the [communities of practice].”

Prior to the United We Learn effort, the state had in place a number of resources intended to support educators' use of different types of assessment as part of a more balanced system. The state supports the implementation of these types of assessments through guidance and training, including the [Leadership Trainings on KY standards](#). The [standards section](#) of the KDE website has several resources intended to support district and school leaders in developing balanced systems of assessment. [KDE’s Model Curriculum Framework](#), the most recent version of which is dated August 2022, has a section on balanced assessment, including information about different types of assessments and how they work together. Page 85 of the Model Curriculum Framework states, “A comprehensive, balanced system of assessment serves a variety of purposes, uses multiple measures and meets the decision-making needs of all stakeholders from the classroom, building and district levels (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2017).”

The state also has a series of training modules related to balanced assessment systems as a whole. These also provide support for how to use different types of assessments. For example, one [module toolkit](#), and related module, is intended to take local leaders through the steps to develop comprehensive, balanced systems of assessment. It articulates the steps from setting a vision, doing an inventory of current assessments, to implementation of a new system.

The standards section also includes examples of different types of assessments and resources educators and others can access. For example, the state makes available:

- A [guide](#) for parents that gives definitions of different types of assessments, including formative, diagnostic, interim and summative
- The [series of training modules](#) focused on balanced assessment systems that include recorded training, facilitators' guides, presentations and teacher activities, among other things, focused around multiple forms of assessments
- Examples of formative assessments educators can use, particularly in [math](#) and [science](#), through course-based tasks and classroom-embedded activities
- A [task bank for science](#)
- Assessment literacy [resources](#) for principals, including support on designing and delivering assessment literacy
- A training and clear descriptions about the [summative assessments](#)

Some of these resources are structured to encourage collaborative professional learning at the local level. There are training videos, presentations and facilitation guides that can be used amongst small groups of educators. However, it is not clear from publicly available information whether the state provided any other technical assistance or opportunities for professional development or communities of practice explicitly on the development of different types of assessments prior to the L3s and proposed work under the CGSA.

The state had also engaged in work in innovation in 2018 through the Kentucky Innovative Learning Network, a partnership between local school districts and the KDE focused on innovative learning experiences. KDE also formed the Kentucky Competency Education and Assessment Consortium (KCEAC). The consortium's vision is "to create a collaboration among districts committed to a systemic approach to competency education and assessment and, with the support of KDE, design and implement a competency education and assessment system." Districts interested in participating must be committed to a shared set of beliefs about competency-based education and the anchor competencies. KDE's website does not contain a description on the of the outcomes of KCEAC or specific reference to a vision for assessment.

Classroom-level Ownership of Performance Assessment Tasks

Description: Educators, in partnership with students and families, have a sense of ownership in both local and statewide assessment systems and play an integral role in designing, administering and scoring rich performance assessment tasks.

Assessment system co-creation is a fundamental element of the work being undertaken in Kentucky. Starting with the Kentucky United We Learn Council and associated committee work, educators, students and families have deliberately been engaged in discussing assessment issues. Building on the Local Laboratories of Learning (L3s) and moving to expand this work in more districts, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) appears intent on continuing to deeply engage educators, students and families in the development process to work towards classroom and community-level ownership of the assessments.

As part of the [Competitive Grants for State Assessments](#) (CGSA) application, the state anticipates the possibility of developing assessment tasks as part of the assessment systems that are being designed. KDE includes as one of its deliverables in the CGSA application as “a bank of high-quality, scalable [assessment and accountability or] A&A systems for [competency-based education or] CBE with supporting resources and documentation for implementation that can be effectively used and managed within the state “system of systems.” Based on the examples included in the CGSA application, the state seems to be moving toward creating meaningful types of assessments as part of this process.

This builds on work that is referenced on KDE’s website about involving educators in the review of performance assessment lessons. KDE’s website [specifies](#) that the performance assessment lessons in math and science were developed by KDE and field tested by educators in the state. However, no evidence was identified that indicates that educators had an opportunity to work on the design and scoring of assessment tasks. As described by a KDE official in an interview, KDE also received federal funding to support action research of interim assessments in reading and mathematics. Using [Transcend™](#), described as “a new generation of advanced assessment tools,” educators can tailor their assessments based on what they have taught and where students are in their learning. While this tool does not allow educators to explicitly design assessments, they are able to use it to customize the assessment experience. The research is intended to both discover if these types of interim assessments can efficiently measure student achievement and growth on Kentucky content standards, within and across school years, as well as gauge the level of interest from the field, testing the technology and understanding how a customizable interim assessment program is implemented.

At the time of this analysis, no evidence was identified of Kentucky educator preparation programs focusing on assessment literacy for student-centered learning.

Equitable Statewide Implementation

Description: State policies and resource allocation are aligned to support research, design, implementation and evaluation of high-quality, equitable, locally-embedded assessment systems in every district and across the state.

Moving toward equitable statewide implementation of locally designed, high-quality assessment systems represents a core goal of the work of the Local Laboratories of Learning and of the Competitive Grants for State Assessments work. CGSA project deliverables include “a comprehensive set of resources and modules to support local co-creation, scaling and implementation of [competency-based education] programs and their [assessment and accountability] systems with quality.” In addition, they plan to establish a “[s]ustainable and effective co-creation and governance structure for the [Kentucky United We Learn] Council and associated standing committees that supports effective, inclusive co-design processes for CBE models with their constituent A&A systems.”

The state also established three committees as a part of the Kentucky United We Learn Council:

- [Creating Vibrant Learning Experiences](#): The purpose of this committee is to provide tools, resources and direct technical assistance to ensure the quality of local innovations.
- [Accelerating Innovation](#): The purpose of this committee is to determine the essential features of the design, prototyping and implementation approaches for these local systems to ultimately support their success and potential replication, all of which is intended to support scaling.
- [Building a Bold New Future with Communities](#): The purpose of this committee is to develop recommendations for statewide infrastructure that supports the creation, improvement and sustainability of local assessment systems, ensuring that state policy is aligned to allow for success. Their recommendations will be embedded in the state's *Roadmap for Statewide Competency-based Assessment and Accountability*.

Through the work of these committees, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) seems to have established the pieces necessary to create a clear vision for how the state intends to support statewide implementation of high-quality, equitable, locally-embedded assessment systems in every district and across the state. KDE has built into the CGSA application discussion about sustainability and scalability, though it will likely need to seek additional resources to see this work come to fruition statewide.

As the work of the L3s as well as work pursuant to the CGSA proceeds, the state will continue to work on aligning its accountability, reporting, graduation requirements and assessment systems to support next generation teaching and learning models and to ensure student performance results are comparable across the state. In the CGSA application, for example, Kentucky explicitly notes alignment of state graduation requirements, alignment of state accountability and reporting policies with local competency based education models as policy priorities they will consider. Also built into the CGSA is funding for an evaluator to “conduct ongoing formative and summative evaluation of how co-creation processes impact local ownership of CBE policy and practice and the technical quality of created A&A solutions.” The CGSA states that the Building a Bold New Future with Communities committee will “articulate avenues and recommendations for a state legislative agenda and a federally-compliant system of A&A.” While it is clear that the state wants these assessment and accountability systems to be federally compliant, it has not yet clearly articulated a strategy to engage the US Department of Education through the development process.

Evidence of Measuring Success

Description

The state has a robust performance measurement system, including accountability and reporting tools, that aligns to its vision for student success, helps prioritize schools for additional supports and empowers stakeholders to design strategies that ensure continuous and sufficient progress on student learning outcomes. This system provides useful, timely and appropriate information to support the individual success of students, measuring personalized growth in academics, social-emotional development and educational opportunity.

To ensure quality, states measure success by:

- Providing a clear picture of progress through aligned performance measures
- Creating an information-rich public-facing dashboard
- Enabling shared accountability for monitoring progress
- Ensuring secure data sharing and privacy
- Investing in research and development to improve measurement

Aligned Performance Measures

Description: The state’s accountability and reporting measures align to the statewide vision for student success, providing stakeholders with a clear picture of state progress.

In the 2021-2022 school year, Kentucky implemented a [new accountability system](#) that included updated performance measures and identified long-term goals. This accountability framework is supported by a reporting system with new measures that, with additional refinement through continued collaboration and work, will ultimately provide stakeholders with a clear picture of student progress within the state’s education system. Through recent work under the federal Competitive Grants for State Assessments (CGSA) program, steps are being taken to strengthen the accountability system with an eye to considering how it could be reoriented around the state’s interest in a competency-based approach to education. This model will more effectively serve all students, schools and districts by encouraging and supporting the development of local accountability systems and working collectively with the state quality system to incorporate local indicators and establish a more robust reporting framework.

Kentucky’s accountability and reporting measures align in many ways to the state’s vision for student success. Kentucky has established a new vision for the state through the United We Learn Initiative. This vision is centered around three main ideas:

- Creating a more vibrant experience for every student
- Encouraging innovation in schools
- Creating a bold new future for Kentucky’s schools through collaboration with communities

As stated by [KDE](#), “these three big ideas – students, innovation and community – form the future of public education in Kentucky.” The state has acknowledged that stakeholders must come together to

move this [vision](#) forward and create a new, student-centered education system where all students can succeed. Through interviews with KDE officials, it is clear this vision is grounded in local involvement and authority, and it allows the state to create an ecosystem that is conducive to transformative change.

In addition to this new vision for the state that has emerged from local stakeholders and the extensive work being done through the United We Learn initiative, both the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) have adopted separate visions for student success. [KDE's vision](#) is as follows: "Each and every student empowered and equipped to pursue a successful future." [KBE's vision](#) states that "each and every Kentucky learner will become a productive, engaged citizen, prepared for school, work and a happy life." Through the recently adopted Portrait of a Learner, KBE has also begun operationalizing their vision by further defining and explaining the characteristics of a learner in Kentucky.

The new accountability system uses indicators that focus on current year performance, called "Status," combined with improvement from the prior year to the current year, labeled as "Change." State statute ensures the state's alignment to federal requirements by specifying that the state's accountability framework must include "annual meaningful differentiation" that utilizes multiple measures to describe overall performance of districts, schools and students ([KRS 158.6455](#)). To ensure this meaningful differentiation, the KDE and Local Superintendents Advisory Council must approve percentile cut scores for status and change that are valid for six years. The state makes clear that [students are at the center](#) of this accountability system, "ensuring they are well-rounded, postsecondary ready and prepared with knowledge, skills and essential dispositions to successfully pursue the pathway of their choice after graduating from high school." This system is working toward certain goals, including:

- Promoting higher levels of student learning and achievement
- Reducing achievement gaps and ensuring equity
- Building a culture of high expectations and continuous improvement
- Communicating a clear and honest understanding of strengths and areas for improvement in schools and districts

Through amendments to [703 KAR 5:270](#) in response to legislative action taken in 2020 through [Senate Bill 158](#), Kentucky now uses six state indicators to measure school performance. These indicators are publicly reported to stakeholders and include:

- State assessment results in reading, mathematics, science, social studies and writing
- English learner progress
- Quality of school climate and safety
- In high school only, graduation rate and postsecondary readiness

Postsecondary readiness can be measured by performance on such assessments as college admissions examinations, completion of dual credit courses and others. Despite accountability flexibility through other initiatives in the state, an interview with a KDE official suggests that the list of these indicators within state law is exclusive and is likely to be very limiting to schools and districts that may want to make changes to their local accountability system.

The indicators that are used to calculate accountability ratings each have a corresponding accountability weight, which communicates information that will be used to target interventions, resources and personalized supports for schools and districts. Current indicators being used to calculate accountability ratings each for elementary, middle and high schools, the state currently uses the following [indicator metrics and weights](#):

Indicator Metrics	Weight
State assessment results in reading and mathematics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accountability weight in elementary schools: 51% Accountability weight in middle schools: 46% Accountability weight in high schools: 45%
State assessment results in science, social studies and writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accountability weight in elementary schools: 40% Accountability weight in middle schools: 45% Accountability weight in high schools: 20%
English learner progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accountability weight in elementary, middle and high schools: 5%
Quality of school climate and safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accountability weight in elementary, middle and high schools: 4%
Postsecondary readiness (high schools only)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accountability weight in high schools: 20%
Graduation rates (high schools only)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measured by both 4- and 5-year cohort rates Accountability rate in high schools: 6%

To ensure the state continues to strive for student improvement as measured by the accountability system and to meet current federal requirements, Kentucky has established rigorous goals and interim benchmarks for academic achievement for both reading and mathematics for all students and all subgroups, as well as long-term goals for improved graduation rates, as outlined in the state’s [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\) Plan](#). These goals are ambitious, so schools and districts only report on these metrics. According to an interview with a KDE official, achievement of these goals is not tied to accountability ratings.

While these goals and interim benchmarks have clearly been defined, at the time of this analysis there was no evidence identified that these have as yet been aligned to the state’s evolving vision for personalized learning. As noted in the [CGSA application](#), the newly implemented accountability system still contains considerable incoherence between state and local systems. Kentucky also noted that the

state system of accountability does not align with local competency-based expectations for student learning, which “sends inaccurate and confusing messages to students, families, educators and community stakeholders about the progress of their learners.” In order to address this incongruity, the state has begun to identify strategies that may move the state forward in creating a stronger accountability system through activities such as Kentucky United We Learn, the CGSA application and the Local Laboratories of Learning.

The state has now released an updated ESSA state plan for public comment that reflects recent changes to the accountability system and ensures continued implementation of a system that is in compliance with state and federal laws. In interviews with KDE officials, it is clear Kentucky did not place student-centered or personalized learning at the front of the conversation when updates were recently made to the current accountability system. However, Kentucky appears to be taking steps to place student-centered learning more in the spotlight with the work of the CGSA and other initiatives in the state.

The state accountability system is reported to parents and the community through a statewide report card (discussed in further detail below). After incorporating [changes in the 2021-2022 school year](#), stakeholders have access to the following information:

- Student performance within the accountability system
- Information on economically disadvantaged students and student demographics
- Various options for educational opportunity
- Transitions within the system
- School safety
- Financial transparency

Beyond simply reporting on the data of student populations, KBE has articulated goals around equity for all students, especially those from historically underserved communities, and KDE has demonstrated commitment to equity through their vision for diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. Additionally, Kentucky has demonstrated a commitment to equity within the accountability system by improving the school quality system to identify a range of measures that communicate certain information relating to equity. First, measures in the school report card communicate continuous growth and mastery of academic content through use of the overall performance rating which includes results from six indicators that include state assessments and progress on English Language proficiency, as discussed above. Second, the state uses a school climate and safety survey to ensure students have access to safe, healthy and high-quality learning environments, which is reported through the accountability system. Kentucky also reports on certain indicators of school safety that include behavior events, resolutions and legal sanctions reported by schools - note that these indicators are not part of the accountability system. These also include “precautionary measures in place to promote the safety of students in schools.”

Kentucky has created some pathways in the education system that allow students to explore interests as well as transition into college and career. Note that reporting on some of these pathways is for stakeholder information only, and not part of the accountability system. First, the state provides information to stakeholders on student transition in elementary school years. Specifically, the state’s [Early Childhood Profile](#) provides information on kindergarten readiness and third grade reading proficiency.

Kentucky's high school graduation requirements provide support for students to successfully transition from middle and high schools through the creation of an Individual Learning Plan for each student. State administrative regulations require this plan to include career development and awareness, in addition to addressing content within the state's academic standards ([704 KAR 3:305](#)). In order to remove certain time-based barriers, established through credit requirements in administrative regulations, the state gives local boards of education the option to award performance-based credit and Kentucky regulations further provide flexibility for students to participate in internships, cooperative learning experiences and other learning experiences in order to further progress in their individual learning plans and receive credit for these flexible opportunities for high school graduation.

The state has established multiple [pathways to graduation](#), including the traditional pathway, a locally defined graduate early option and the state's Early Graduation Program option. Further, Kentucky has created a [career and technical education pathway](#) and an education career pathway through a [teaching and learning career pathway](#). Refer to the quality frameworks section for additional details on graduation pathways.

Through the accountability system, Kentucky is taking some steps to incentivize the further development of other K-12 pathways. As an example, the state annually compiles a list of industry-recognized certifications, licensures and credentials relating to the state and regional workforce area, which may be used for the postsecondary readiness indicator. State statute provides that the KDE will pay for assessment-related costs for high school students that are attaining an industry-recognized certification, credential or licensure so long as the student has consecutively completed at least two related career pathway courses that were approved by the KDE ([KRS 158.6455](#)). A KDE official also noted in an interview that the state is in the early stages of creating an initiative focused on micro-credentialing, which could allow flexibility in assessing standards, rather than through assessments.

Kentucky's accountability system is striving to allow stakeholders to evaluate how the state is preparing graduates for success and working to take into account student access and completion of pathways throughout a students' education. However, while this system is only now being implemented, further changes to more closely align the state's accountability system with the emerging vision centered on the Portrait of a Learner are being considered through the work of the state with the CGSA funds. It remains to be seen how successful this new system will be in evaluating how students are prepared and whether decision makers will be able to use the information to address needs of students as they arise. As the state acknowledged in the CGSA grant, there are certain "on-the-ground realities that the current model for [assessment and accountability] are likely not going to be sufficiently transformational to help the state achieve its desired equity goals." It is important to highlight, however, that CGSA work will now focus specifically on how the system can be retooled to create a "system of systems" and become more coherent with a broader system of accountability.

Public-facing Dashboard

Description: A transparent dashboard, disaggregated by student subgroups, combines rich information on school and system performance that drives ongoing stakeholder analysis and decision making.

Kentucky has created a robust, public facing state longitudinal data system that incorporates data from PreK through the transition to adulthood. While the dashboard includes all of the information needed for the accountability system, the state also reports data for transparency and stakeholder interest - as the [state](#) notes, this is done to “provide a more complete picture of education in Kentucky.” Results from the [accountability system](#), including at the state- and local-level, are reported in an online [report card](#). The state has created a public facing transparent [dashboard](#). Through this, Kentucky is able to provide all education stakeholders with context on performance on a variety of indicators so that diverse stakeholders can better design and advance personalized learning strategies. The easily-accessible dashboard is linked through the state’s [Open House](#) data system, a “one-stop-shop for Kentucky’s public education data” which offers downloadable data sets. Additionally, in order to provide stakeholders with even more transparent data to be used to inform recommended changes to the accountability system, the [Kentucky Center for Statistics](#) houses the state’s longitudinal data system. Here, education and workforce data is integrated so that information can be used to make informed cross-sector decisions. Data for this system is collected from the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), the Council on Postsecondary Education, the Education Professional Standards Board, the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority and the Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Cabinet.

The information in the [report card](#) dashboard is disaggregated by student subgroups and combines information on school and system performance that drives ongoing stakeholder analysis and decision making. The data can then be used to monitor disparities in academic achievement based on race, income, language or special needs. The state’s report card provides detailed information on the following student groups:

- English learners
- Gifted and talented
- Homeless
- Migrant
- Students with disabilities with an IEP
- Economically disadvantaged students

The report card provides information on status and change levels for each indicator and overall performance within the accountability system. Status and change levels are combined to come up with an indicator performance rating. The state then aggregates all available indicator data into an overall performance rating, which is reported using a color rating system. The report cards do not currently have a location to report on local indicators.

Kentucky has worked to provide stakeholders with information on students’ entire educational career, including PreK. Through the Early Childhood Profile and the Kentucky Center for Statistics, in collaboration with the Governor’s Office of Early Childhood and Early Childhood Advisory Council, uses

data from the Kentucky longitudinal data system to establish a yearly early childhood profile. This profile provides information on kindergarten readiness, providing a key transition point that is actionable by schools and districts to better help students as they enter kindergarten. This profile also includes information on third grade proficiency, which represents another key transition point in which action can be taken to ensure students are continuing along their educational journey prepared. The profile also includes other general information, including students living below poverty, the rating system for early childhood education programs and kindergarten readiness by prior enrollment, among others.

Kentucky has created a [High School Feedback Report](#) using data from the longitudinal data system maintained by the Kentucky Center for Statistics. This report compares state, district and high school outcomes. This includes data on ACT scores, high school GPAs, graduation rates and college and/or career readiness, among other indicators. Early postsecondary opportunities are also reported, including career and technical education certificates, enrollment in Advanced Placement classes and dual credit options. Finally, this report includes postsecondary outcomes, such as the percentage of high school graduates working within the state, and average yearly wages earned by high school graduates.

The [school report card](#) also includes information on students' transition to adult life, which reports information on how many students are involved in continuing education, employment or military service after graduation. Further Kentucky provides a variety of resources for [students with disabilities](#) to help them as they transition into life after school.

Kentucky reports information on student retention in grades 4 to 12 and dropout rates of students. The state conducts the [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) as part of the national effort by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to monitor students' risk behaviors. However, this is voluntary and administered only to a random selected sample of middle school and high school students in the state.

Shared Accountability for Monitoring Progress

Description: Decision-makers at each level of the system collaborate to establish performance measures, goals and benchmarks that center community voices and provide stakeholders with the information necessary to support effective school improvement efforts.

Kentucky created the Local Laboratories of Learning (L3s) which allows districts to pilot new accountability approaches, including locally-established indicators. The L3s were established through a collaboration between the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) and Center for Innovation in Education, with a goal of creating a system of assessment and accountability that “reflects the diversity of the students, families and communities it represents.” The L3s received additional American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funding in order to design, develop, test and scale implementation of innovative accountability models. The L3 districts are engaged in strategic work that could be scaled statewide to enhance the accountability system and incorporate local measures into their larger accountability framework. These communities involved in the L3s initiative have “developed their own inclusive coalitions to co-create local A&A systems around local needs and priorities.” For example, some counties are working on [prototypes](#) of dashboards to make it easier for students to follow their own academic growth and career exploration.

The state notes in the Competitive Grants for State Assessments (CGSA) application, however, that Kentucky has yet to create a system in order to promote adoption and adaptation of innovations from

the L3 communities, which presumably would include innovations relating to adoption of local measures that would be used in a local accountability system. In that sense, while the state has built the capacity of districts and communities to identify local measures in limited circumstances, it is not clear in statutes or practice whether or how the state is encouraging or supporting all districts in the development of local indicators in their local accountability systems. The Department’s responsibility is to ensure that the accountability system is implemented in compliance with state and federal laws; however, as the state highlights in the CGSA application and confirmed through interviews with KDE officials, so much effort has been placed on the new state system of accountability, including focus on the performance indicators within that system, that local needs and community-developed visions for competency-based education, and ultimately related local measures, have been sacrificed. The state has identified a goal of achieving “vertical coherence between local and state systems” through an innovative, governance structure. However, this new structure has yet to be designed.

Kentucky convened a variety of [advisory groups](#) to develop the current accountability system. These advisory groups include educators, citizens, legislators, testing and measurement experts and legislative staff. Advisory groups include the following:

- [Kentucky Technical Advisory Committee](#)
- [School Curriculum, Assessment and Accountability Council](#)
- [Education Assessment and Accountability Review Subcommittee](#)
- [Office of Education Accountability](#)
- [Local Superintendents Advisory Council / Legislative Research Commission](#)
- [ESEA State Assessment Peer Review](#).

Kentucky has engaged a variety of stakeholders to make changes to the accountability system over the last several years. Through [Senate Bill 158](#) in 2020, significant changes were made to the state’s school accountability system. In 2021, in response to this bill, KBE made changes to the state’s regulations focused on the accountability system. The state uses the [Local Superintendents Advisory Council](#) to “advise the chief state school officer and the Kentucky Board of Education...concerning the development of administrative regulations and education policy,” which includes any changes to regulations regarding the accountability system. The state has also created the School Curriculum Assessment and Accountability Council to study, audit, review and make recommendations concerning holding schools accountable through the state-established processes.

Through the United We Learn initiative, Kentucky convened stakeholders to work towards improving outcomes for all students in the state. The state has made clear this initiative involves educators, families, students, community members and business leaders. In the United We Learn initiative, the state specifies that schools must “genuinely involve entire communities to contribute to student success.” United We Learn was created to give stakeholders a voice in the education of students and the group works to “evaluate and recommend strategic practice, policy and investment ideas to state policymakers and the citizens of Kentucky.” The state created the Strategic Planning and Research Team, as part of the United We Learn initiative, which established certain goals, including to: “...Continue to develop and add to both the equity dashboard and the dashboard of PreK-20 indicators and long-range goals established in 2020-2021, including the establishment of baselines for new non-academic measures.”

The state also engaged, and continues to work with, stakeholders on the work related to the CGSA grant. The [state identifies](#) the need for including diverse state and local actors in the creation of a new accountability system, as this system must reflect the needs of “locally-designed, competency-based systems,” in addition to meeting federal and state requirements.

Secure Data Sharing and Privacy

Description: Data sharing policies enable schools, students, parents, community partners, higher education and workforce partners to report on and leverage data seamlessly to inform the acceleration of student performance without jeopardizing student privacy.

Kentucky has created a [Kentucky Student Information System](#) (KSIS), which provides the avenue for districts to report all data that is required to be collected. According to the state, this system provides a “secure and seamless integration for collecting data.” The state has created a variety of resources for districts in order to build their capacity to collect and then communicate data to stakeholders. For example, the state provides guidance to help school districts with data standardization and data quality through [KSIS Data Standards](#). The state also provides [KSIS School Report Card Resources](#) to assist districts with the collection, validation and submission of data for the school report card. Districts and schools also have access to in-depth [training](#) on the KSIS, including training on student privacy. Kentucky provides [resources](#) to districts regarding public release of accountability information. This includes a presentation template for releasing results, information on preparing for public release, template letters for parents and others.

Kentucky has established a variety of processes to ensure student information is protected and secure. Kentucky’s Center for Statistics houses the Kentucky longitudinal data system. This system “collects and links data to evaluate education and workforce efforts” in the state. State statute requires this Center to comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and all other relevant federal and state privacy laws ([KRS 151B.133](#)). This Center also has a dedicated page to explain the importance of maintaining [security and privacy](#) in the collection and reporting of data.

Kentucky has also clearly created a cross-agency [data governance](#) structure. This team is led by the chief data officer and is responsible for data collections, including new collections and changes to existing collections, as well as training and direction. The team is made up of the following offices:

- Office of Career and Technical Education
- Office of the Commissioner, Office of Continuous Improvement and Support
- Office of Educator Licensure and Effectiveness
- Office of Education Technology
- Office of Finance and Operations
- Office of Legal Services
- Office of Special Education and Early Learning
- Office of Teaching and Learning
- Office of Assessment and Accountability

The KDE also has a dedicated page for [data requests](#). Data requests may be submitted through the Center. If the data requested is not available through standard reports or de-identified public use data files, individuals can request data, which would require signing a Data and Information Sharing Agreement. All internal and external requests for information that is not personally identifiable may be made through an online data request form. The KDE may grant these requests on a case-by-case basis, and the state will consider alignment of the research to the department’s research plan and availability of staff resources. Similarly, a memorandum of understanding is required for all requests that include confidential or personally identifiable information.

Through the state’s data request website, Kentucky also provides links to reports and documents on student data privacy and security. The Kentucky Department of Education has a dedicated webpage for [data privacy and security](#), as well as links to the state’s policies and best practices, such as:

- [Data Collection, Access and Use](#)
- [Data Governance Policy](#)
- [Data Management checklist](#)
- [Top Secret Personal Information and Data Breach Awareness Guide](#)

The state also provides data privacy information for parents, schools and districts on their website and districts and schools can receive support through the [K-12 Data webpage](#).

Once accountability data are collected and reported, the Division of Assessment and Accountability Support provides opportunities for [meetings and training](#) on score interpretation, data analysis, test administration and the regulations governing the Assessment and Accountability Program.

Research and Development to Improve Measurement

Description: Leaders at all levels of the system collaborate on ongoing research and development of the state’s accountability and reporting systems including development of new indicators that strengthen alignment to the statewide vision for student success.

The Kentucky Department of Education’s (KDE) Division of Innovation, through the Kentucky Competency Education and Assessment Consortium, created a set of [anchor competencies](#), which define what students across the state should be able to do by the time they graduate. The state then established performance level descriptors for each of the competencies to describe the mastery that students must achieve. These competencies were then incorporated into Kentucky’s recently adopted Portrait of a Learner. Schools and districts have the option to incorporate this statewide Portrait into their own local portraits of learners/graduates. Kentucky is currently considering whether, and how, to incorporate the competencies within the Portrait of a Learner into the state’s graduation requirements, according to an interview with a KDE official. However, at the time of this analysis no evidence of systemic research-based methods to evaluate the impact of adopting the portrait or competencies was identified. For additional information on the Kentucky Portrait of a Learner and the anchor competencies, please see the Quality Frameworks for Student Success policy condition section.

The state clearly engaged in a major process of change to the accountability system in 2021, which included the voices of educators and stakeholders and extensive research and development to improve the system. The state has created two groups that engage in research and review of the state’s

accountability system, including the Kentucky Technical Advisory Committee and the School Curriculum Assessment and Accountability Council, which was established through a mandate ([Executive Order 2021-729](#)). Most recently, the state is taking action to make additional change by leveraging the voice of stakeholders to determine direction and barriers to success through the United We Learn initiative and the ongoing Kentucky United We Learn Council. The Council has specifically been tasked with having a voice in policy change.

Additionally, the state has explored additional barriers that may impede competency-based learning systems as articulated in the CGSA application. In working to overcome these barriers, the state plans to establish recommendations that will be explained in a Roadmap for Statewide Competency-based Assessment and Accountability which will provide districts and schools with information on creating a federally-approved accountability system. The [state will consider](#) restructuring KDE to “align and support the on-going sustainability” of the accountability work within communities and at the state. Further, the state plans to develop additional policy recommendations and legislative agendas for 2024 and 2026 to further advance competency-based education implementation. All of these actions have, and will be, undertaken through collaboration and stakeholder involvement.

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KnowledgeWorks is a national nonprofit organization advancing a future of learning that ensures each student graduates ready for what's next. For more than 20 years, we've been partnering with states, communities and leaders across the country to imagine, build and sustain vibrant learning communities. Through evidence-based practices and a commitment to equitable outcomes, we're creating the future of learning, together.

FORESIGHT LAW+POLICY

Foresight Law + Policy is a national education law and consulting firm. Our professionals support education leaders, nonprofit organizations and entities of all types that are working to strengthen public education and prepare all kids for success. Established in 2014, Foresight provides the education policy insights, expert counsel and visionary supports that public and private sector leaders need to identify and promote innovative ideas for better serving the nation's diverse learners and their families.

GLOSSARY

A&A = Assessment and Accountability

CGSA = Competitive Grants for State Assessments

EGP = Early Graduation Program

KAS = Kentucky Academic Standards

KAR = Kentucky Administrative Regulations

KCAE = Kentucky Coalition for Advancing Education

KCEAC = Kentucky Competency Education and Assessment Consortium

KY ILN = KY Innovative Learning Network

KRS = Kentucky Revised Statutes

KBE = Kentucky Board of Education (State Board)

KDE = Kentucky Department of Education

KSIS = Kentucky Student Information System

L3s = Local Laboratories of Learning

PLCs = Professional Learning Communities