

## The Early Results Are In

By Michael Morella

Since 2010, 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the Common Core State Standards for reading and math, a new set of K-12 education benchmarks designed to better prepare students for college and careers after high school. Kentucky, the first state to agree to the standards in 2010, also led the way in bringing them into the classroom that year and testing students on them during the 2011-12 school year. In data released this month, the state saw high school proficiency scores in reading and math fall, but the percentage of students ready for college or the workforce rise from 38 percent for the class of 2011 to 47 percent for 2012 graduates. **Terry Holliday**, Kentucky's commissioner of education, recently spoke with *U.S. News* about how the Bluegrass State is responding to the new standards. Excerpts:

### What is the value of the Common Core standards?

There are fewer of them, and they go deeper. They're internationally benchmarked, so that's another good advantage. And they were developed in partnership with higher education, so these are the standards that two-year, four-year colleges are expecting kids to know and be able to do. I think the other great advantage is all the states are playing kind of on the same level playing field.

### This month, your state released results of the first Common Core-based tests. What did the data show?

It was an immediate 30- to 40-point drop in proficiency. Our old assessments, they were kind of basic skills assessments. These new assessments are assessments against a college- and career-ready standard.

### Did the results surprise you?



A little bit. Having had the advantage of studying and implementing the Common Core almost two full years before the Common Core were assessed, we think that helped our kids get ready. But we're not going to see large increases in proficiency right away. For instance, if you're a 10th-grade student taking Algebra 2, the assessment you took this year was much more rigorous than anything that you've had before. It takes three or four years for the teachers and the kids to catch up.

### As tests get more rigorous, do you expect proficiency scores to fall further?

Everybody who does this the first year of assessment of Common Core should see numbers very similar to what we saw. But I'm very confident that as each year moves forward, as the kids close the gap and the teachers close the gap, we'll see scores go back up. I don't think that there's any

truth that our kids can't do this work. I think it's just they rise to whatever we expect. And the teachers will too.

### How have students and teachers responded to the new standards?

Teachers have responded very positively. Before, they were just rushing through to cover the content. Now they're able to teach the standards and then go a little bit more in depth. And the kids seem to like it because the content, the standards, they're more problem solving, they're more engaging, they require more student responsibilities.

### What concerns have they expressed?

The biggest thing that worries teachers and principals is that during this time of increased standards we've also seen very large budget cuts. We've had tremendous reduction in professional development dollars. It's a critical time for states to invest in resources for teachers.

### What lessons would you share with education leaders in other states?

I think the No. 1 thing is communication. Back in 2009, we began working on communication to certainly educators, but also parents and we got the business community and parent associations to help us. Make sure you've got great partnerships. ●