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Kentucky Education Commissioner
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June 8, 2012

Setting Standards and Moving Past Basic Skills

This week, the Kentucky Board of Education reviewed the steps for the standard-setting of the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP) system of assessments. (See [background](#) on this item and the related [presentation](#) for more details.) Many readers may think of this as a rather boring statistical process; however, the standard-setting process has significant long-term effects on students, parents, teachers, schools, school districts and the state.

The standard-setting process is necessary due to the implementation of the Kentucky Core Academic Standards ([KCAS](#)) that are based on the Common Core State Standards that were adopted as required by 2009's Senate Bill 1 (SB 1). The implementation of these standards required new assessments (also a requirement of SB 1). With new assessments, states have to go through a standard-setting process to determine cut points for classifications of student results. In Kentucky, we have historically used the terms novice, apprentice, proficient and distinguished (NAPD) as the classifications for students.

In determining the cut points for NAPD for the new assessments, Kentucky is changing from our historical focus on proficiency to a focus on college and career readiness. We will compare 8th-grade students' performance on the college readiness benchmarks for the EXPLORE test to student performance on the K-PREP 8th-grade reading and math. In other words, the proficiency cut score on the 8th-grade K-PREP will be set at a similar level to the percentage of students meeting the EXPLORE benchmarks.

What does this mean for students and parents? For the last 20 years, proficiency scores in Kentucky have steadily improved to the point where, in most grade levels (3-8), 70-80 percent of students receive proficient/distinguished scores. With the new tests, this will change dramatically. For grades 3-8, the percentage proficient/distinguished will drop to between 35 and 50 percent.

Why the big change? The expectation has changed from simply proficient on basic skills to college/career-ready. The analogy I use is one from golf. I enjoy playing golf on occasion, and sometimes I play from the senior tees. My score is usually pretty good, since the course is shorter. However, I have a few friends who like to play from the professional tees, which make

the course much longer, and since I do not hit the ball that far, the course is much tougher. So my score gets worse.

That is what we are doing in Kentucky. We are asking teachers and students to raise performance from basic skills proficiency to college/career readiness. We are fully expecting our scores to look worse for a few years; however, we have full confidence that if we provide our teachers and students with the supports they will need, then we will see more students rise to the challenge.

Every parent wants their child to graduate from high school ready to succeed at college/career opportunities. Every teacher, school and community wants more children to graduate from high school ready to succeed. I encourage all readers to not panic when the new assessment results are announced. I hope everyone will rally to support our students and teachers as they work to meet this new challenge, which in turn will improve employment opportunities and have a positive impact on the economy of the Commonwealth and ensure a brighter future for every high school graduate.

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