



Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner
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The GOOD! The BAD! And the UGLY!!!

The annual [School Report Card](#) on school and district performance and accountability has been publicly available since last Friday. Over the past week, I have been reviewing the data to find the good news and the areas for improvement. Of course, the terrific news is the increase in our college/career ready rates 20 percent in 3 years and the results from our first year with cohort graduation rate 86 percent. However, there are many areas for improvement.

We are not improving proficiency in math and reading (combined reading and math proficiency rates) as fast as we need to. Also, our various No Child Left Behind student groups are not improving as much as we need them to. Here are some summary numbers;

- Combined reading and math gap groups for elementary schools – we improved in 7/8 groups
- Combined reading and math gap groups for middle schools – we improved in 8/8 groups
- Combined reading and math gap groups for high schools – we only improved in 2/8 groups

Why the low performance in high school? This was a result of having only one math test at the high school level. We only test Algebra II for proficiency and gap group purposes. In 2012, we had 40,628 students take Algebra II and in 2013, we had 44,117 students take Algebra II. This increase of over 3,500 students had a negative impact on our high school math proficiency and gap scores.

Reading Gap Group Scores

Elementary schools – 2/8 improved

Middle schools – 8/8 improved

High schools – 6/8 improved

Math Gap Group Scores

Elementary schools – 8/8 improved

Middle schools – 5/8 improved

High schools – 1/8 improved

Writing Gap Group Scores

Elementary schools – 8/8 improved

Middle schools – 6/8 improved

High schools – 7/8 improved

Overall in reading, math and writing, gap group scores improved in 51/72 cases which is 71 percent of gap groups. Clearly, we have concerns with elementary reading and middle/high school math. While we can explain a drop in high school math due to the increased number of test takers, it is imperative that we figure out how to support all students in meeting Algebra 2 expectations at the high school level. Also, the foundation for all learning is elementary reading and if our students are not progressing in reading at the elementary level, then we will see declining performance throughout their school careers.

All in all, we are making progress with the implementation of our Kentucky Core Academic Standards. The strong improvements in college/career-readiness and strong performance of our cohort graduation rate are indications of our strong interventions with high school students through transition courses, dual credit, credit recovery, and numerous others. However, our long term success in helping every child reach college/career-readiness upon graduation depends heavily on our ability to improve proficiency in reading, math and writing in grades 3-8. While we made improvement in 71 percent of the gap groups, we did not meet our expectations for improvement.

As a result, I am asking our KDE team to revisit our proficiency and gap plans for improvement and to develop specific Response to Intervention strategies and professional learning opportunities that are proven to work. This will impact districts and schools since every district and school must write improvement plans to address lack of progress with gap groups in reaching proficiency in reading, math and writing.

Soon parents will be receiving individual score reports for their children. It is critical that parents review the reports and see if their child has reached the proficient or distinguished level in reading, math and writing. A student in grades 3-8 and in high school courses that has reached proficient/distinguished is on target to reach college/career-readiness by graduation. If your student is not at the proficient or distinguished level, you should not panic since many children will take longer to reach these higher expectations. Also, it may take students 3-5 years to gain the background knowledge and skills required by the Kentucky Core Academic Standards that they may have missed in earlier grades. However, you should have a conversation with your child's teacher about what actions you can take as a parent to support your child's teacher and help your child at home.

Reaching college/career ready requires collaboration between student, school and parent. All three must take responsibility and be accountable for the results.

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Education Commissioner