



The Commissioner's Blog

Thoughts from
Kentucky's Commissioner of Education
Kevin C. Brown, Interim Commissioner



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More than numbers

On October 1, the Kentucky Department of Education publicly released the most recent results from Kentucky's assessment and accountability system, Unbridled Learning College/Career Readiness for All. The reporting of results always comes with an energy of anticipation and excitement whether in a school faculty meeting or a media story. As Associate Commissioner for the Office of Assessment and Accountability Rhonda Sims explains in this week's guest blog, now that the results are available, the important work begins of analyzing the numbers to learn what story the results tell and how that story can inform future action.

*Kevin C. Brown
Interim Commissioner*

Kentucky's accountability system includes multiple measures to provide a broad picture of performance and Kentucky's online School Report Card has many data elements to add to the story. But there is much more to this data release than just numbers. First though, it's important to understand what the numbers mean.

In this fourth year of data reporting, Next-Generation Learners (individual student data from tests and graduation) makes up 77 percent of the system and Program Reviews (school evaluation of specific content area) is 23 percent.

Next-Generation Learners reports data in five categories: achievement, gap, growth, college- and career-readiness (CCR) and graduation rate. As a state, Kentucky showed improvement in the CCR and graduation rate. Overall, achievement data can be described as flat with content areas and grade levels showing mixed results. Looking at the percent of typically at-risk students scoring at the highest levels of proficient and distinguished, we again see mixed results. Growth, measured with a student growth percentile, shows some schools have 80 percent or more of their student showing growth while others have only 20 percent.

In the Program Review (PR) state data, each individual program area is scoring Proficient or above, with Kindergarten-3 Program Reviews scoring highest.

Whether you are an educator, parent or community member, as you analyze your local results, celebrate success but look for the areas where performance can improve, and most importantly, where each student's success can be enhanced. State level data has both positive areas to celebrate and areas that require attention. Although pleased with the improvement in CCR and graduation rate, there are concerns with the percent of students still performing at the lowest level of novice and the achievement gap that exists, where some students or groups of students are below the goal of proficiency.

A greater emphasis is now being placed on reducing the number of students in the novice performance level. This emphasis is reflected in changes in the accountability calculations for gap and growth. The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) has developed [novice reduction strategies](#) to share with schools and districts. Also, novice reduction coaches will work directly with staff in schools or districts during the 2015-16 school year.

One misunderstanding about the data in the School Report Card (SRC) came to light this year. Confusion about what the Percentile in Kentucky means – a value found on the Profile and Accountability Profile tabs of the SRC. Percentile in Kentucky allows the school or district to see how it performs compared to the standard locked in November 2013, not how a school or district compares to others based on current year data. The overall score and how it corresponds to specific percentiles determines whether the school or district is classified as “distinguished, proficient, or needs improvement.” The process ordered the overall scores by level (i.e., elementary, middle and high) and districts from highest to lowest to create a percentile rank. The overall score that aligned to the 70th percentile became the overall score required for Proficient. The 70th percentile is the point on the rank where 30 percent of schools/districts scored above and 70 percent of the schools/districts scored at or below. Once an overall score is associated with a specific percentile, the relationship is locked and the overall score becomes the target/standard. Achieving a specific overall score, not the 70th percentile, determines whether a school or district is proficient.

To see how the overall scores of schools or districts compare for the current and prior year and their associated rank by level, please visit the Open House section of the KDE website and choose the Accountability tab at: <http://openhouse.education.ky.gov/Data>.

Once the story of the data has been told, the work of improvement begins. While the data are complex, the most important action needed is not. The single most important thing an educator can do to improve assessment results is to keep the focus on students and keep each on track for improvement every day. The process is simple yet powerful: implement the standards with rigor, expect high performance from every child, use a formative assessment process to determine what students know and can do, and adjust instruction to provide students any extra support they need to reach the expectations.

After all, assessment and accountability isn't really about the numbers – it's about what the numbers tell us and from that determining how we can help more children learn and be successful.