



# Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner  
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## What state testing tells us

There has been a lot of controversy over state testing in the last year.

Fortunately, Kentucky has not seen much of this controversy thanks to the leadership of our General Assembly. In 2009, the Kentucky General Assembly passed Senate Bill 1 which required Kentucky to develop college- and career-ready standards, assessments based on these more rigorous standards and an accountability system aligned to both the standards and assessments.

What has happened in other states?

While most other states adopted college- and career-ready standards in 2010-11 time frame, the adoption of the standards was voluntary. Major push back on college- and career-ready standards occurred after President Obama and Education Secretary Duncan supported adoption and implementation of the standards through the Race to the Top grants and No Child Left Behind Waivers.

Most states moved slowly to implement the standards and relied on the Race to the Top (RTTT) assessment consortia – the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) or Smarter Balanced – to develop new assessments. The first administration of these consortia-developed state assessments took place during the 2014-15 school year, and only now states are beginning to report the results.

Major push back on the state assessments happened within the last 12 months primarily due to opposition to the college- and career-ready standards; opposition from teachers who were concerned about being evaluated based on student test scores (a Race to the Top and No Child Left Behind waiver requirement); and opposition from parent organizations who were concerned about over testing of students and narrowing of curriculum due to an emphasis on tested subjects.

At one time, almost 40 states belonged to one or more of the assessment consortia. Very early in 2010, Kentucky belong to both. However, it became apparent to us that the consortia would not be able to provide an assessment that met our budget or timeline.

Kentucky worked with classroom teachers and assessment experts to develop a Kentucky-specific assessment that was aligned from 3-8 through high school with the college-readiness expectations based on the ACT. Kentucky parents and teachers are able to determine as early as 3rd grade if a student is on track to reach the ACT college-readiness benchmark in the 11th grade. Since the ACT is a state-required assessment and is widely recognized by parents and colleges, this alignment seems to have given Kentucky an advantage with helping parents understand the importance of annual testing.

As I reflect on events since Senate Bill 1 in 2009, the key reasons that Kentucky has successfully navigated the rough political waters that have sunk other states are:

- 1) General Assembly support and action on a comprehensive college- and career-ready agenda
- 2) Overwhelming support and buy in from educators and parents for the college- and career-ready agenda.

Moving forward, I believe that we will continue to see other states struggle with state assessments.

I predict the RTTT assessment consortia will have difficulty providing an assessment of college- and career-readiness that is comparable to accepted measures such as ACT. The consortia also will struggle to provide an assessment that is cost effective for states. Due to the political environment, we will continue to see more states drop out of the assessment consortia (currently the majority of states do not belong to an assessment consortium).

I am very proud of the leadership of the General Assembly and the work of Kentucky educators to make a smooth transition to a college- and career-ready agenda. I predict that the Kentucky economy will continue to improve due to the education focus on college- and career-readiness.

Just this week, I reviewed data for the Class of 2013 that revealed students who graduated from high school, met the Kentucky college-readiness benchmarks and attend postsecondary out performed students who were not college ready. According to the data, in their first year of postsecondary, college-ready students

- have a much higher GPA (2.6 vs 1.7)
- complete nearly double the number of college credit hours (21.9 vs 11.1) and
- return for a second year of postsecondary at a higher rate (85 percent versus 65 percent)

This is great validation that our assessments and college-readiness benchmarks are strong predictors of postsecondary success.

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