



**PRICHARD COMMITTEE
FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE**

STUDY • INFORM • ENGAGE

Progress in Kentucky Education: Higher Standards, Assessments and Teaching



SPRING 2015

Here's what we want for our children, our state and our future:

A system of education that enables every student to learn deeply, to develop relevant and resilient skills, and to graduate from high school ready to succeed in college, career, and life.

That, in fact, is the education system we continue to strengthen in the Commonwealth, reflecting an approach that recognizes the vital connections among student learning, measuring performance of both students and the system that supports them, and the effective teaching needed to ensure progress. In Kentucky today, the interconnected elements of our education system include:

- academic standards that establish what students should know and be able to do as they move from grade to grade toward graduation
- an assessment system that measures how well our students and schools are meeting those standards
- a professional growth and effectiveness system to ensure that our educators are able to improve their skills every year and equip our students for steadily higher levels of performance

A system of education that enables every student to learn deeply, to develop relevant and resilient skills, and to graduate from high school ready to succeed in college, career and life.



Here is a closer look at each of these key pieces.

Academic Standards

We want our children to be able to thrive here at home and compete in an increasingly global marketplace. So, in 2010, Kentucky started adopting standards that are higher, clearer and more focused on the skills that matter the most for success after high school. English language arts and mathematics standards were changed first, and science standards more recently, with social studies scheduled for revision in 2015.

Why are these standards important? Because our students face a future where jobs will require that they can adapt and learn new skills on a continuing basis. In fact, many jobs of the future have yet to be created – estimates range up to 65 percent and higher. While students in Kentucky's classrooms must gain specific knowledge, they also must learn how to learn. Our standards help them do that.

Kentucky is working with leaders from many other states to develop our new standards, often being the first to put the new guidelines into active use. Having consistent standards across states means our students can be compared to students in other states. The level learning field also gives Kentucky students better opportunities for college and career success.

Three additional, important notes:

- Kentucky's state standards don't set any limits on student learning. In fact, they establish a minimum level of learning, and districts and schools are free to push for even higher levels. Most of them are doing just that.
- Standards and curriculum are two different things. While the standards define what students should know and be able to do, they do not specify the steps students will take to learn those things.
- Decisions about curriculum, teaching methods, textbooks, and instructional materials are still made at the local level by individual schools and teachers based on what works best for students in each community.

Want to know more about Kentucky's Academic Standards or read the actual document?

Visit education.ky.gov for full details.

Measuring Student Progress

Are students truly understanding the content knowledge and developing the skills identified in the standards, including the critical thinking and problem-solving skills they need to be successful? Making sure our schools and students are on the right track is essential, and assessments are a key way to measure progress and identify gaps.

Kentucky uses three sets of state tests to check progress. K-PREP assessments are given in the last two weeks of the school year, and the box below shows the years when students take each test. End-of-course tests are taken when students finish key high school classes, and the Explore, Plan and ACT assessments gauge readiness for high school and college.

Those statewide assessments give all of us—students and parents, teachers and education leaders, voters and taxpayers—evidence about the learning that is taking place in our schools. They are especially important for spotting and addressing achievement gaps. Each school gets an annual report card that shows its results for all tested students and for subgroups that include male and female students, students with disabilities and limited English proficiency, students who have low family incomes, and students from different racial backgrounds. School report cards are available at education.ky.gov.

Other measurement tools can be added by schools, districts, and teachers to ensure students are making progress; these can include paper-pencil tests, computer



diagnostics, and daily classroom observation. Ideally, those added tests and tools will be designed to identify progress toward state standards—including students’ ability to make active use of what they know and can do—and to help teachers, parents, and students understand the best next steps for each student’s learning.

To learn more about assessments used in your schools, ask students and educators about the tests they are using, how they help, and how they might be made even better in the future.

	Reading	Mathematics	Science	Social Studies	Writing	Language Mechanics	Readiness
Grade 3	K-PREP	K-PREP					
Grade 4	K-PREP	K-PREP	K-PREP			K-PREP	
Grade 5	K-PREP	K-PREP		K-PREP	K-PREP		
Grade 6	K-PREP	K-PREP			K-PREP	K-PREP	
Grade 7	K-PREP	K-PREP	K-PREP				
Grade 8	K-PREP	K-PREP			K-PREP	K-PREP	Explore
Grade 10					K-PREP	K-PREP	Plan
Grade 11					K-PREP		ACT
End of Course	English II	Algebra II	Biology	U.S. History			

Grades 1, 2, 9 and 12 have no state-mandated assessment

Measuring School Effectiveness

Kentucky's educators and policy leaders felt it was not enough to just measure student progress, but that a system should be put in place to measure how effectively schools are meeting the needs of its students. Kentucky's assessment system looks at:

- student academic performance
- whether student learning is growing each year
- whether every group of students is learning
- whether a school offers a rich program of instruction in a variety of subject areas
- graduation rates
- the effectiveness of a school's teachers and leaders

Effective Teaching and Leadership

Most people can readily remember their best teachers and the impact those teachers had on their learning and classroom experiences. Effective teachers and leaders in a school hold the key to student success. That's why it is important to provide our teachers and leaders with ongoing feedback and opportunities to develop stronger professional skills—much like we evaluate students' academic performance to help them learn at higher levels.

Kentucky's new Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (PGES) is a big step up from Kentucky's past approaches to evaluating educators. This system looks closely at both the quality of what teachers do and the learning that takes place in the classroom. It identifies areas where each teacher is already effective and where



improvement is needed, and it promises consistent support for making those improvements.

It also sets clear criteria and quick timelines for ineffective educators to improve their practice or move out of the profession. A matching system is in place for principals, and similar approaches are being developed for counselors, librarians, instructional supervisors, and other professional education positions.

Teachers and administrators were instrumental in the development of this evaluation process, and the Kentucky Education Association describes it as an equitable system to measure educator effectiveness while serving as a catalyst for professional growth.

To learn more about Kentucky's Professional Growth and Effectiveness System, visit education.ky.gov or kea.org.

Continuous improvement has been the bottom line in Kentucky education for decades, and it remains so today. We are growing, learning, changing, and improving—whether it is the academic standards that guide student learning, ways to measure school and student performance, or evaluations to ensure high-quality teaching. Evaluating and re-evaluating are fundamental to our system of education. Staying the course and working together, we can make even greater progress and build a strong future for our children, our communities, and our state.

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