

Don't Wait to Transition to Kansas Common Core



As I talk with educators around the state, I sometimes hear concerns about the Kansas Common Core Standards. The concerns are not about the standards themselves - about whether the standards will appropriately challenge students or whether they will provide students with a solid educational foundation. Instead, the concerns are around accountability and the fear that transitioning to the Kansas Common Core Standards now, before we have an assessment aligned to those standards, will jeopardize a school or district's ability to meet accountability requirements, specifically Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

I want to share the reasons why that fear should not keep schools from transitioning to the Kansas Common Core Standards as soon as possible.

First - and what I consider to be the most important - is because transitioning to the Common Core Standards is the right thing to do for students. The Common Core Standards were designed in alignment with college and career readiness standards and have been internationally benchmarked to ensure Kansas students will be competitive with students from around the world. The standards build on the excellence Kansas has pursued for decades and I would argue that providing solid instruction aligned to the Common Core Standards will prepare students to be successful on whatever state assessment they take and - far more importantly - provide students with the best opportunity to be prepared and successful in their lives beyond our classrooms.

There's also the state's NCLB waiver request. Not only does the accountability plan outlined in the request provide multiple pathways for achieving annual objectives, it does away with lists of schools not making AYP and schools on improvement. The state's new accountability plan will give teachers and administrators the freedom to focus on what assessment results can tell them about student learning, instead of how they may result in artificial labels assigned by others.

Our efforts toward developing a new accreditation model are another reason accountability concerns should not hinder transition to the Kansas Common Core Standards. While student results will continue to be considered in accreditation decisions, under the new model it will be just one piece in a much larger puzzle.

I understand the impulse causing so many to focus on the assessment rather than the standards, for more than a decade we've been programmed to think that way. But it's time to put our focus back where it belongs - on quality instruction. And the changes taking place in our state will allow us all to do that without fear of accountability reprisals.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diane".

Dr. Diane DeBacker
Kansas Commissioner of Education