



NEWS

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Kansas Education Commissioner shares new Vision during KSDE's 2015 Annual Conference

WICHITA – “Kansas leads the world in the success of each student,” Kansas State Department of Education Commissioner Randy Watson said Tuesday before a crowd of more than 1,000 educators.

Watson shared the Kansas State Board of Education's new Vision during the 2015 Annual Conference at the Hyatt Regency in Wichita.

“As a board, we recognize the need to be flexible because the needs of our students are always changing,” board chairman Jim McNiece said. “Several months ago, as the board was considering changes to its strategic plan for Kansas education, we charged Education Commissioner Randy Watson with finding out what Kansans want in their state education system. Based on this feedback, our board has developed an exciting new vision for education.”

In January, Watson, Deputy Commissioner Brad Neuenswander and board members began the first in a series of more than 20 Community Conversations. During those stops across the state, they spoke with Kansas residents and members of the business community to find out what they want from their state education system. That information was analyzed by Kansas State University and the KSDE research department to help develop the board's vision for K-12 education in Kansas.

Watson and board members from Sept. 16 to Oct. 8 went back out into 10 communities and shared some of the data.

Kansans said education must be flexible to meet the needs of today's students and the future workforce. By 2020, it is estimated that 71 percent of all jobs in Kansas will require some post-secondary education.

Kansans said they want the educational system to place equal focus on helping students attain non-academic skills in order to be successful in the workforce.

While academics are and will remain very important, students who lack non-academic skills, such as conscientiousness, perseverance and the ability to collaborate and communicate, will struggle both in the pursuit of post-secondary education and in the workforce.

The board and KSDE intend to look at every requirement to determine if and how they are supporting or impeding Kansas schools' abilities to address the needs of each child. During the Community Conversations, Kansans said:

- Our children need quality pre-school, including all-day kindergarten.
- Changes need to be made to address school culture. The student who chooses to pursue a technical education or a two-year college has to be valued and supported as much as the student pursuing a four-year degree.
- Counselors and social workers need new, dynamic roles. They should be able to focus on helping individual students explore career paths and develop individual plans of study.
- Businesses should play an integral role in a student's education. Internships and job shadowing are important.
- Community service should play a larger role in education.
- School should be reorganized around the student, not systems. Equity and common sense should coexist.

"With the shift in the direction of education, we need to focus on new outcomes," Commissioner Watson said.

KSDE and the board are currently considering several areas, such as kindergarten readiness; increasing graduation rates; increasing the percent of students completing a credential or pursuing post-secondary education; decreasing the percent of students who need remedial coursework when they attend post-secondary schools; and increasing the percent of students with an individual plan of study focused on career interest.

“We listened to you,” Watson said. “The department and board are ready to lead the change. Going forward, we are going to be focused on how every student, K-12 and beyond, can be successful. Kansans have never backed down from a challenge, especially where our children are concerned. We have top educators in this state. We have great leadership throughout our schools, and we have a robust business community. The pieces are there – we just have to get them all working together. Kansans Can!”