

## Reducing the Achievement Gap



A number of times in this forum and in others, I've had the opportunity to share how Kansas students have demonstrated a long-term improvement trend on our state assessments. It's just one of the things that makes me so proud of our state's education system and the educators who are a part of it.

As proud as I have been of that progress, I have also been acutely aware of the persistent gap in achievement among our minority populations and between our advantaged and disadvantaged students. Over the past decade, we have made great strides in narrowing the achievement gap that exists between students who pay full price for school lunches and those who qualify for free school lunches, as well as between white students and African American students and white students and Hispanic students. Despite those successes, significant gaps still exist among all of those populations.

Recently, we received the results of our 2012 state assessments, and for the first time in in the past decade we saw a significant widening of the achievement gap among minority populations and our disadvantaged population in both reading and math. There have been times over the course of the past 10 years when we have seen a slight widening of the gap from one year to the next among one or two populations in one content area or the other. Those were isolated, one-year events. This year is the first time we have seen the gap widen among many populations and in both reading and math.

It would take several years to determine if this widening of the gap is a trend sustained over time, but I'm not willing to wait for that data before acting. We need to address this issue at the state level now. For that reason, I am forming a task force to study those factors that are contributing to our state's achievement gap and to make recommendations to the Kansas State Board of Education on how we can best work to reduce and eliminate the gap.

It is my hope to include representation from a variety of organizations and constituencies in our state on the task force. Already I have commitments from representatives of the Urban League, the Kansas African American Affairs Commission, the Kansas Hispanic and Latino American Affairs Commission and the Midwest Equity Assistance Center to serve on the task force. I'm working to secure participation from others, as well.

It is my expectation that the task force will be prepared to make recommendations to the State Board in the spring of 2013. It is important work the task force will undertake, and I look forward to sharing this experience with the task force members and learning from their insights.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diane". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Diane DeBacker  
Kansas Commissioner of Education