

Focus Must Remain On Excellence



Last month we inaugurated a new governor and welcomed both new and returning legislators back to the statehouse for the start of another legislative season. Our elected representatives have an extremely difficult job ahead of them, attempting to guide the state through the difficult economic times we face while maintaining vital services. While we hope and trust that all decisions made today will be with an eye toward what is best for our future, we know all Kansans will be required to make continued sacrifices to help our state overcome its current challenges.

In the face of these challenges, it is more important than ever for educators across our state to remain focused on providing the very best education possible to each of our students. That means ensuring that we're doing all we can, at the state, district, school and classroom level, to advance educational excellence.

This month, I'll have the pleasure of participating in the Kansas Exemplary Educators Network (KEEN) State Education Conference. This annual conference brings together Kansas educators who have been recognized as the best in their field for two days of professional development and the opportunity to examine and offer input on the leading education issues in our state and country. This year's conference theme is "Ready...Set...Go! Winning the Race to Educational Excellence." Participants will have the opportunity to learn more about the U.S. Department of Education's Blueprint for Reform related to the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and to participate in a community conversation on managing change in schools.

I'm always excited by the prospect of this conference because I never fail to be awed by the creativity and diversity of ideas I find there. Being around the very best educators in our state reminds me yet again how important it is to surround our children with these talented and effective teachers, coaches and mentors. As we struggle with shrinking budgets, I hope we're all mindful of our responsibility to ensure the adults we put in the classroom are the best our state has to offer.

During the KEEN Conference, we'll recognize the 2011 Kansas Horizon Award winners. These are beginning educators who have already distinguished themselves as outstanding classroom teachers. These are the individuals we want to be sure are still engaging and enlightening students 10, 20 and even 30 years from now. Whatever challenges we face now, we must be creative and single minded in our determination to keep these talented educators in the teaching profession, for the good of our schools and, more importantly, for the good our students.

I want to thank all of the administrators, teachers and staff at our Kansas schools, as well as the parents, volunteers and community members who are working tirelessly to ensure the financial challenges we face today do not seriously disrupt the educational future of our children. Working together, we can continue the march toward educational excellence, even in this rocky terrain.



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

Dr. Diane Debacker
Kansas Commissioner