

Kansas Leading The Way



Last month, Kansas received some good news from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE). Thanks to a Kansas school district with not quite 2,500 students, our state is going to be the first in the nation to experiment with an alternate means of achieving adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation.

The McPherson School District sought a waiver from the NCLB requirements related to how AYP is determined and the district has been granted that waiver for the current school year. Under the waiver, students in grades six through 12 in the district will not participate in state reading, math and science assessments. Instead, those students will take one of a series of ACT assessments to determine AYP performance. Those assessments include the ACT Explore for students in grades six, seven and eight; the ACT Plan for students in grades 10; the ACT WorkKeys for students in grade 11 and the ACT college entrance exam for students in grade 12. The Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) is working with the district now to determine what the appropriate accountability measure will be for AYP purposes.

This is exciting for a number of reasons. It's the first time the USDOE has granted any type of waiver as it relates to AYP performance, which means Kansas will be on the forefront of potentially helping to implement new policy. Also, the granting of the waiver signals a willingness on the part of the USDOE to look at other, better means of determining school and student success. That is welcome news, particularly as we approach the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), more commonly known as NCLB.

It is hoped that the reauthorization of ESEA can retain the positive aspects of NCLB, such as the focus on achievement gaps and performance of sub groups, while correcting some of the less effective requirements, such as using a single measure to determine performance and requiring 100 percent proficiency by a set time. Allowing schools and districts the latitude to try other methods of documenting and demonstrating academic progress can only help in the effort to address the shortcomings of the current legislation.

I'm grateful to the leadership of the McPherson School District for its commitment and perseverance in seeking this waiver, and to the staff at KSDE who assisted in seeing it through the process. I'll be anxious to see what we can learn from this endeavor.



Dr. Diane Debacker
Kansas Commissioner of Education