

## Looking ahead to growth



Normally at this time of year I like to look back over the just completed school year to gauge the accomplishments of Kansas schools and students. This year, I'm having a hard time looking back, not because I'm fearful of what I might see, but because this year I feel the true gauge of our school performance lies in where we're going rather than where we've been.

The education community is in the midst of a great deal of change. We are three years into the implementation of college and career ready standards for math and English language arts that promise to prepare our students with the content knowledge and critical thinking skills that will make them globally competitive. We are just beginning to implement college and career ready history, government and social studies standards and are considering a set of science standards designed to ensure science literacy for all Kansas students. Our state assessments are changing to align with these new, more rigorous standards and will challenge our students to go beyond finding answers to demonstrating problem solving skills.

At the same time, we're implementing a new accountability system for Kansas schools based on multiple measures of student performance, and are developing a new school accreditation system that will take a holistic look at schools and school districts to determine if all the pieces that make for successful students are in place. It's easy to believe that we are experiencing unprecedented change, but that would not be true. We have been here before.

In 2001, when No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was implemented, we went through many of the same changes. We were revising standards, our accountability system changed and that, in turn, changed our accreditation system. It was difficult, and there was a lot of resistance to the changes. More than a decade later we can look back and recognize that, despite the very real problems in the NCLB accountability system, a number of good things came from the process. The focus on preparing all students led to a decade of continual performance growth for Kansas students and a narrowing of the achievement gap between our advantaged and disadvantaged students.

During that time, we also identified the flaws in the system. The changes we're going through today are an effort to address those flaws, while maintaining those aspects that led to improvements in student performance. In our new system, we'll continue to focus on building the achievement of all students, but we'll eliminate incentives to lower expectations. We'll still set challenging goals, but not create arbitrary and unrealistic measurements for those goals. We will struggle with the implementation of this new system, just as we struggled with the implementation of NCLB. But if we persevere, I believe we will be able to look back in the coming years and see a record of achievement for students and for schools that will make us glad for our struggles and proud of our state.



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

Dr. Diane DeBacker  
Kansas Commissioner of Education