

## **Kansas Public Schools: Beating the Odds**

As we take time at the end of the school year to offer congratulations to students who have successfully achieved their goals of graduation, scholarships or awards, we seldom take the time to thank our schools and teachers. But in the face of a growing movement that questions the value of public education, I think it's important to say congratulations to Kansas schools and educators for all they've accomplished in recent years.

One of the remarkable stories in Kansas education is student achievement. For 10 years straight Kansas public school students have shown improvement on state reading and math assessments. This trend is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our students and our Kansas educators. It's too early to know what 2011 assessment results will be, but early indicators favor a continued improvement trend.

An equally compelling story is the ability of Kansas schools to meet increasing performance targets for accountability. The federal No Child Left Behind legislation requires schools to meet annual targets for student performance to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The performance targets increase each year, with a requirement to achieve 100 percent student proficiency in reading and math by 2014.

With just three years remaining until the 100 percent proficiency target, Kansas' performance targets are unquestionably high. And because every student subgroup – low-income students, minority students, English language learners, students with disabilities – is required to meet the same level of performance for the school to make AYP, it becomes increasingly easy for schools to miss the mark. And yet, the vast majority of our schools continue to make AYP. In 2010, 81 percent of all Kansas public schools met AYP targets, a figure that defies expectations.

In September, we'll release 2011 AYP results. Performance targets have increased yet again, and it stands to reason there will be some schools, even ones that have shown improvement from the prior year, that will not have improved to the levels required under the state's AYP accountability plan. Despite that, I fully expect that Kansas will continue to have more schools that meet the AYP targets than do not.

The love for learning and achievement instilled in our K-12 students results in many of them pursuing their education after high school. According to the most recent figures from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), Kansas is among the top 20 states in the nation for the percent of high school graduates going directly to college.

As our world continues to expand, I know we'll be challenged to meet the changing needs of our students to ensure they are both college- and career-ready, but we start from a good foundation. Seventy-five percent of Kansas graduating seniors take the ACT college entrance exam, and their scores are among the top in the nation for states with similar levels of participation. NCHEMS ranks Kansas sixth in the nation for high ACT and SAT scores per 1,000 high school graduates.

When I meet with education leaders from other states, I'm proud to say that I'm from Kansas. I'm proud to share the performance of Kansas students and schools, because I know we will compare favorably with others around the nation. Kansas schools and educators have done much to ensure the success of our students and they have done it while facing significant financial and educational obstacles. I know we'll continue to face challenges to providing a quality education for every child in the years ahead, but given the track record of our public schools, I'm confident they will be up to the task.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diane M. DeBacker". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline.

Dr. Diane M. DeBacker

Kansas Commissioner of Education