

Commissioner's Monthly Message



A collective sigh...

On June 1, I am fairly certain I heard a collective sigh come from 286 school districts across Kansas. To say that the 2014-15 school year was busy, may just be the understatement of all times. In addition to an active legislative session that resulted in several school-related bills being passed and the Kansas Supreme Court announcing its ruling on the Gannon school finance case, Kansas schools juggled a full schedule while piloting the new state assessment and the assessment's new delivery platform.

This is the first time in eight years that Kansas has introduced a completely redesigned assessment aligned to the Kansas College and Career Ready Standards and for many educators and parents, this is the first time they have ever experienced this process. With any pilot program, hitting a few bumps along the way is par for the course and the Kansas state assessment pilot was certainly no different. For the first time, Kansas students were introduced to interactive assessment questions delivered using a browser-based platform. While many schools experienced frustrating delays that disrupted schedules and created last-minute changes to classroom instruction plans, our Kansas educators and students demonstrated an extraordinary level of commitment to the process that makes me proud to represent this state. Thanks to this commitment and feedback, the Center for Education Testing and Evaluation was able to identify and correct issues to improve Kansas' state assessment moving forward. In the end, more than 520,000 assessments were completed.

Now comes the important work of experts who are analyzing the data to learn how particular test questions performed or "interacted" with students and what data can be reported validly. Members of Kansas' Technical Advisory Council represent some of the most distinguished experts in the field, including James Pellegrino, co-director of Learnings Sciences Research Institute; Michael Kolen, University of Iowa, President of the National Council on Measurement in Education; Paul Holland who has held faculty positions at the Graduate School of Education, University of California Berkeley and the Harvard Department of Statistics; James Popham,

emeritus professor in the Graduate School of Education at UCLA; Martha Thurlow, director of the National Center on Educational Outcomes; and Robert Linn, distinguished professor emeritus of Education in Research and Evaluation Methods program, University of Colorado. Educators and parents can be assured that these experts uphold the highest standards to ensure no data is released unless 100 percent validity can be verified.

Ultimately, this new assessment will better assist teachers, parents and students in understanding how prepared the student is to enter whatever post-secondary track they choose; whether that be attaining a four-year degree, a technical certification or entering the workforce.

As we continue to work through this critical transition period in Kansas education, I am particularly grateful for the patience and commitment our educators, parents and students have demonstrated. Together, we are building a leading education system to support the dreams of all Kansas children.

Thank you, Kansas!



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brad Neuenswander'.

Brad Neuenswander
Kansas Commissioner of Education