



# Kansas State Department of Education Insight Podcast Transcript

## Episode 10 –Postsecondary Success

### **Intro:**

You're listening to the Kansas State Department of Education Insight podcast, where we bring you conversations and information on our vision to lead the world in the success of each student.

### **Host Dr. Randy Watson:**

Welcome to the KSDE Insight podcast. I'm Randy Watson. Commissioner of Education. Can you believe Episode Ten? Wow. Where has the time gone? We want to thank you all the listeners and you know, you can get out there with all your friends and say, wow, if you listened to that KSDE Insight podcast, it's rockin, it gives you the terrific information around things that are really important going on in the state of Kansas educationally.

We're going to be talking about postsecondary success, and postsecondary effective rates. Why we look at that and how that goes about. We're going to be talking with Dr. Kelly Spurgeon, our senior research analyst on our Career Standards and Assessment team in just a minute. But as we get into that topic, it's mid-June, and my gosh, are we not doing some great things across the state of Kansas?

Let's first talk about that Kansas Leads conference that we just came off of in early June with some remarkable teachers up in Shawnee Mission. We are sponsoring two to three conferences a year, just bringing teachers together from all across the state post-pandemic to learn about what we need to do in education. To go forward. And my gosh, we rocked that out in Shawnee Mission, had a session earlier in April in Andover.

So what you need to do, it's called Kansas Leads You're going to see some events coming up this fall and this spring. When you see that, you get to nominate a teacher. If you're a teacher, you get to nominate yourself. We want you there. We're going to be traveling all throughout the state. So Kansas leads, thank you to all the teachers putting that together.

You want to know who they are. They're the Kansas Teachers of the Year, Horizon Award winners, Milken Award winners. They're there to serve you and rock things out. Speaking of things that are just phenomenal, have you learned about the Sunflower Summer app? I just received a text before we started the podcast from someone who said, I'm at the Topeka Zoo. I'm taking my kids and my grandkids it's so exciting. We want that excitement too really as of early this week here in mid-June. 90% of Kansas counties have 105 counties have had people attend something where you get to take young people. I say families because obviously we're gearing this to families. Guess what? You're a grandparent. You're grabbing the kids. You're saying, let's go have some fun and let's learn and let's spend some time

together. So we have already over almost 16,000 children that have participated in the first 16 days. So where can you go Too many places to tell you. Download the Kansas Sunflower Summer app on your Google or Android or Apple phone. Download it and give you all the information.

All you have do is take your phone to the Cosmosphere or to the Topeka Zoo or to soon right after the 4th of July Milford Wake Camp out with the commissioner. Oh, that doesn't get any better. Or I'm going to be hanging out with you for a little bit of time with your families as you camp out all kinds of activities.

We're doing it because you get to summer learn, and we're also doing it because we want to engage families. So thank you for everyone involved in Sunflower Summer and looking forward to that July seven-time at Milford State Park. Also, we're excited, I just came off of welcoming thirty-three new superintendents to our profession, meaning they have never been a superintendent in Kansas. Not including the ones that are changing jobs. We're excited about their leadership and what they'll be bringing to the table. But all of those.

Our topic today is Postsecondary Success. We also call that Postsecondary Effectiveness when we measure it. So you'll hear us use those two terms, somewhat interchangeable. And we have someone that's been on the ground floor since day one. Dr. Kelly Spurgeon, our senior research analyst that has gone even on and done road shows around this, Kelly, and about how we calculate it by just starting at the beginning. Why is post-secondary success? Why is it important that we get to what it is?

**Dr. Kelly Spurgeon:**

Sure. It for me, first of all, it's part of the board vision. And the board has laid out that this is something that we value This is something that we believe as a responsible entity here. The board represents the education of all Kansas students, and we understand the responsibility that comes with that. And part of that responsibility is preparing students. Then what happens after then your K-12 experience? How well-prepared are you then to leave this period of time of childhood into early adulthood? What do you have at your disposal then to move into the world? Randy, you're a schoolman. Most all your professional career. I think public education has always been doing this, but seldom has it been the focus of a vision, if you will. Another really focused part of why we really do value this and let's ensure that we're mobilizing our efforts toward this goal. I think it's a recognition of the importance of what a good K-12 education can do for all students is how well then can you take this and go about the business of your life? So I really do look at it that way.

So it's quite important in that regard.

**Host Dr. Randy Watson:**

It is. Kelly And, you know, we look at history in education, in our state and across the nations, always been responsible to the workforce needs, the demands of the time. And for a long time, after the, you know, the creation of the common school or man's common school. And we started looking at that in the 1840s and fifties grades one through eight in a one room schoolhouse seemed to serve our needs of a basic let's get people literate.

Yeah, let's make sure they can read. Let's make sure they can just do basic math Very few people are going to go to high school and college, and those are going to be your lawyers and teachers. But everyone needs to have basic skills and that that school in Kansas, where 10th thousand one-room schoolhouses and we tend to end in eighth grade and a few kids went on and then we ended World War one and two and we said the economy really shifted well we're humming economy coming out of the war.

We think kids ought to graduate high school and we started shifting in mass. You're not going to into the eighth grade. You're going to go to high school. So my grandparents early 1900s eighth grade was all they needed. And then my parents they thought high school I need high school coming out of that. But I remember them saying, you're probably going to need more than that, Randi.

And as we look at the economy now, Kelly, we look and say, wow, the economy again keeps shifting. Most of our kids are going to need something beyond that high school, maybe a certificate, maybe multiple degrees. And then how do we prepare for that? So that's what we're trying to do, like the kind of the what? And so let's talk about then what makes up post-secondary success.

Kelly, because it's not just college. We need about 40% of our people to go get a baccalaureate degree and a Ph.D. and a master's professional degree like a doctor. Well, we don't need 100%. Right if they want 100%, great. What are all the things then that not only qualify, but the things we're trying to do right would be Post-Secondary, successful.

**Dr. Kelly Spurgeon:**

And part of what frames that the answer to that question is, of course, what is at our disposal. So there are some limitations to that. But within those limitations we're trying to recognize, just like you said, that it isn't just exclusively one pathway if you will, or one way then of life beyond high school.

But what we look at and what we think is the responsible approach is recognizing the differences that exist. And what we can also then provide. So, for instance, we look at things like can a student earn an industry, recognize certification while they're in high school, while they're in high school? This is something that the field of work is valued.

And we as educators also value that. And we know for a lot of students then that that becomes an only then a certification, and that allows them to move into the world of work, but it also allows them to maybe find greater relevance about their time in high school. And I think that in and of itself is also quite a benefit because it probably helps them complete their high school experience.

So that's, of course, is one we also want to look at then students then can they earn or go on and earn a two-year or four-year degree? Right. And because what we look at is two years we look at we collect information on students two years after they graduate high school. And within that two years that any of them were they able to earn a four year.

Some students do, but many of them earn two-year degrees within that time after high school. So we want to give recognition. We want to give recognition to that. So we look at it in terms of those types of lenses, if you will. What happens to a student? Can they be enrolled in college for two consecutive years?

Right. We also look at that. We're hoping then or the research will show then if you can make it to your second year of college your chances of persisting and earning, then what you set out to do then greatly increase. So that's where we kind of set that bar.

So those are kind of the markers we gather information on and go, this is what we're looking at in terms of what happens to students after they graduate and indicators and if you will, then, of what we're we're terming success and effectiveness, knowing full well, knowing full well that there are other things, other realities.

And we understand that. We acknowledge that, but there are limitations to what we can collect as a state entity with. We're not oblivious to the reality of students moving into the military. We're not oblivious to the fact that many students then take a gap year to attend to realities of home. Right. Or they go on to perhaps they do a mission year based upon their faith culture and that sort of thing.

So, many students, you know, especially in a state where agriculture is such a big part of our industry here, many students, then it's natural and right for them to move right into the family business, family ranch, family farm. Those are all just things that we can't quote, if you will, collect information about. But you know, there is nothing about what we try to do that diminishes that reality.

Because I would go as far as to say, Randy, that for those students that aren't in our what, we catch those four ways that we try to get information is the role of the responsibility of the school still remains the same. Right. I want to work on my parent's ranch. What is good for me to know about that in the modern ranching business?

I want to go into the Air Force as a high school student. OK, what can we do while you're here to help you do that? You and I have had conversations about, Randy, you know, military. In the absence of that piece of information and the conversation always ends up, we end up talking about what's their physical fitness we always end up talking about because that is a key part of going on for that.

So it would be a responsibility of the school then to go, well, let's address that need because we can address that while you're here.

**Host Dr. Randy Watson:**

Yeah, absolutely. No, absolutely. Which, you know, is, is why the individual plans, the studies tie so much into this in metric that we're trying to measure.

And as you mentioned, not only do we have limitations of what we can measure the economy of our states says we don't need everyone to have that certificate because we know some are going to go military. We know some will pursue an entrepreneur type thing or take over a family business. So what we're saying is let's follow the numbers.

Let's follow what we can track. And that means ideally 73%, we say 70 to 75 knowing that that other 25 to 30%, you follow that individual plan of study, and that's going to be military, that's going to be family ranching, and that's going to be I'm just I think I'm going to go on a mission trip and I'll come back and, and all of those things and then we average it over five years is which Mark we're going to get to.

So Kelly, let's take us now into really where you spend your time. I mean, you you've obviously spent your time thinking about this as a great researcher does, and then you got to put it to work. You have to calculate how we're going to do that. And does that calculation, how we do it actually mesh then with what we're trying to get as the outcome?

So can you walk through with people then? How do I calculate this? What I'm really trying to what are you looking at? How does it work?

**Dr. Kelly Spurgeon:**

Right. You know, when you when you talk about this live, this is people often well, this is their chance for a coffee break oftentimes. But other people are you know, they're keenly interested because it's also then it's part of the responsibility that's part of our responsibility as a state entity then to kind of well, this is a value that we have.

We recognize it through our star recognition program. And this is something that we want to encourage. This is what policy does, does it not we policy is at a certain point behavior change, right? So what we do then is, is when we initiated this project four or five years ago, we needed a data source.

Well, how do we collect information on where our high school graduates go? You know, we used to collect handwritten types of reports that come in on the principal's building report and people would write, well, you, Randy, you probably filled some of these out as a superintendent, but intentions of graduates, you know, I think it was called something post-high school graduation plans or something like that.

Well, it's really hard to run a fair type of initiative where you have a measurement that's kind of fuzzy like that. So we partnered with the national student clearinghouse, and that's their job since the early nineties is collecting information, student-level information. What happens to high school graduates in terms of their enrollment in higher ed? All right.

So that gave us then access to a large percent of students then that take the higher ed route again in this one, the big chunk of information is students then that go on to two year and four-year institutions. So part of our challenge was is when we brought that on board is looking at it and realizing then that as good as it is and it's capturing 95 plus percent of students, we realized here in the state of Kansas that there are some institutions that aren't being caught.

And if I remember correctly, Randy, when one of those will be brought to your attention, I think the very next day there was a request for a motor pool car to drive out to Colby or to drive out to wherever like and say, hello, my name is Randy Watson. I'm the commissioner of Education. Could I please interest you to participate in National Student Clearinghouse data?

I'll never forget the time a colleague and I were out in Colby and we were talking. This was early on and we were talking about this, you know, data collection. And it was not a friendly crowd, but their questions were fair, their questions were right. And a gentleman stood up and said, well, this is inaccurate and it's not fair.

And we said, well, Colby College is where most of your students are going, but we don't collect their data or no, is Northwest Tech pardon me? And the gentleman got a really kind of sheepish look on his face. And during a break, my colleague and I were outside in the hallway going, oh, boy, you know, this is, you know, start the car, you know, but he comes up to us and says "My wife is on the board of, you know, the governing board of the community college

and I'm going to visit with her about perhaps participating in this data". So it turned into a really great problem-solving experience where a big chunk of schools and districts out in that part of the state, we were collecting their data. So we were then reporting their numbers were lower than they should have been. Next thing you know, then they're participating and we collect that number.

Over the years, we've gotten better and better at refining how we collect. We ensure that DG are our collection of high school graduate information is accurate. We double-check then and triple-check then the information we get from the National Student Clearinghouse and we've expanded our ability to utilize the Kansas Board of Regents data, and that's new.

**Host Dr. Randy Watson:**

Very important data to help kind of fill in those gaps.

**Dr. Kelly Spurgeon:**

Absolutely, because there were gaps oftentimes, Randy, in some of the times the phone calls would come to you where Student X isn't showing up. I know the student is going to Barton County Community College because he's my neighbor's kid. You know, he's got stickers on the back of his car, but for multiple reasons, then whether it's time issues or FERPA opt-out or whatever.

So we just we made a decision then to look at like what happens if we can bring in information from Kansas border regions? And sure enough, it allowed us then we widened in our scope of catchment, if you will. We're recognizing and catching more students then that go into these career path earned certificates in high school. That was a real that was a blind spot we had because National Student Clearinghouse wouldn't catch that student because they hadn't graduated high school yet.

So that was really important. I think it's doubly important then that the greater confidence we have in our ability to collect the information and report it, the more confidence we have we build with schools because then they feel more confident that we're being right and fair and I think that's appropriate. I think those are fair questions.

Does that cover that?

**Host Dr. Randy Watson:**

And I think so I think a couple of things. One, in the early days, we had to we had to tell people the why is this important?

And everyone needs to get their data in the pool. So we have good data and we've done a really good job of that over time. Right. People saw that. And so right now today, the three important pieces of data are coming out of the high school report, meaning I completed that certification while I was in high school.

The Board of Regents, which is I completed some college credit or something before I graduated and National Student Clearinghouse, which then tracks I went to rice and then I oh, I transferred school to Southern Cal and then I came back to KU and it just it follows that you mentioned, Kelly, we look two years. So in just about two weeks, I always say July one and I know that's not quite the day, but in July we're going to take a look back through the class of 2019.

And what questions are we going to ask. I mean what's, what's, what are we looking at when we look back to the class of 19 that's going to make up then this data set that we're going to call the post-secondary success rate in 2021.

**Dr. Kelly Spurgeon:**

That's right. We're going to what happens then as we go back two years and the reason there's a two year lag is because we purposely set out we want to know what happens two years after high school because we think then again for college enrollment many students didn't have a chance then to earn their degree.

**Host Dr. Randy Watson:**

And, and I say this what I think people understand a kid says I'm going to go enlist in the Army OK? And they just graduated a month ago and now what are they doing? They're arriving to basic training. What we know is over half of those kids never complete basic training, but we want them just to complete whatever they're going to go do.

And that's why we're looking at that two years out gives a better indication.

**Dr. Kelly Spurgeon:**

Right. And then well, then same would apply for college. Right. A student thinking of applying and then they don't come back the second year and any regents institution and retention is part of their livelihood. They have a vested interest in retaining students, too, because that increases the likelihood of them graduating and going on and fulfilling what they need to do.

But so we look out two years and we have two set of metrics or two set of ways of looking at what happens to a student two years afterwards. One we call the success rate and that's when we exclusively

look at a particular district, just their graduates, just the students that graduated, right. So Randy in your district., you got 1000 students and 900 of them graduate.

90% graduation rate, right? I think eight state average is what? 88 now I think something like that. 90% of your kids graduate. We look just at what happened to the students that walked across the state. And then we do that, if you will. We look and what can we gather about that two years out, you know, earned a high school certification in high school, enrolled two consecutive years, earned an AA or or a BA, right.

So we look at that just for the just for the kids who graduated. So that's the success rate. And then we also look at this other thing called the effect of this rate. And that one's a little bit more revealing because to me anyway, because it tells us then, well, what happened then to those other students in your case, an example, Randy, you had a thousand students than in that group, but 100 of them didn't graduate.

Right. So what do we know? What do we know about that? How do we calculate into that? Because that challenges with us with the following question, and that is how well are we doing for all students? How well are we doing for all students? I think in the example of Silver Lake Salina Diocese, when you look at their success and their effectiveness rates, my goodness, they're getting closer together.

I mean, that would be a desired state when you can kind of see then that good things are happening for more students. Right. We want to see more of that good things happening for Morrisons. So we look at those two things and we kind of place a value as an agency on the effective rate because we're concerned about all students, right?

We want to see students graduate, but we're also concerned about all students. So that's what we do with the effectiveness rate.

**Dr. Randy Watson:**

Yeah. And it's so important because as you mentioned, it's takes a look at those that started as freshmen that did not graduate and those that did graduate. It's our start to look at that equity piece because all students or each student, as we say in our vision, the other part of that which we won't get into much because it gets pretty complicated as we calculate it, but we do calculate risk factors for every school district and we give them based upon your risk factors.

Here's our prediction of how well you would, and then we somewhat measure against that because that also was an equity piece that we want to make sure that we're doing, because we all know that if I have a supportive family home life and they value higher education I'm probably going. And the school does a nice job of facilitating that. But we also know for us, for us to grow students opportunities economically, first generations students and students, maybe in foster care, students that don't have a home life that encourages pursuit of post-secondary, we've got to do better with that group. And so, as you said, one of our measures that effective rate, the other is compared that against our predictive rate as we go forward.



**Dr. Kelly Spurgeon:**

Yeah, I think I probably consciously or subconsciously avoided that just because I didn't know if we wanted to get into that. But that's a critical part of it is recognizing that especially poverty, especially poverty, and that any educator, any time during our history would focus on that.

**Host Dr. Randy Watson:**

When we say poverty, I just want to be these are the number of students.

**Dr. Kelly Spurgeon:**

On free reduced lunch.

**Host Dr. Randy Watson:**

Yeah, that's right.

Over time, it's cumulative. And the cumulative over time are the ones that are hardest to break that cycle.

**Dr. Kelly Spurgeon:**

That's absolutely right and again, those are critical points because we're looking at the entire student history. Like you said, it's like if you just look at free and reduced lunch rates, you just get this one year snapshot of something. But as soon as you go, well, what has been the history? What has been the duration and of the students life where they perhaps that had been their highest levels quite low right eligible for free or reduced lunch?

Well, all educators know that that has a tremendous impact then on students. You know, what kind of background that they come from, as you just got them mentioning what kind of expectations they have, what is the educational level, the parents, these are all realities that unfortunately we know then create barriers if you will, and make it harder than for certain gains to be made.

So we want to take that into consideration. When we look at then this overall calculation of success and effectiveness because we understand that the greater the concentration of poverty in the students that you're serving, the more difficult the task then is of not only learning content, but also then of the prospects then for what life is like post high school.

Right. So we want to try to take that into consideration as opposed to just an arbitrary line that says 70%, 80%, regardless of what it is you're trying to do in terms of helping students out in the reality. One real quick sidebar. Randy, I'm first generation, I'm first kid off for going on to college. I mean, it wasn't discouraged, but at the same time, it was kind of like, OK, first kid off the farm.

So I did not enter into that world then with that as a history, you know, so that made a little bit more difficult for me. And one of my first jobs as a college educated person was I worked in a trio program helping first generation students work through the barriers that are confronted by first generation students like I was.

So I learned a lot about it in during that time period. But a lot of our students that we serve, that, too, was part of the barriers. And I think that's part of our responsibility. And I think what this success and effect of this measure challenges us to do then is how do we remove and minimize those barriers and create opportunities, remove barriers, create opportunities.

To me, I, I kind of buy myself into when I want to simplify this whole thing is removing barriers, creating opportunities.

**Host Dr. Randy Watson:**

Excellent. So again, I'm going to kind of go back to the history of it. First hundred years of school, basic skills, grades one through eight basic skill or may make you a literate person so that you can read the Bible. You can help kids out, you can read, you can get a job and you can do those things next 50,60, 70, maybe we'll even call that another hundred years graduate high school with basic skills and employability too. You know, you could go into a factory you could basic skills and you could work. And now maybe the last ten years, 15, it's you're going to need something beyond that high school to have the same type of advantages all of those other generations have.

That's what we're measuring it. I mean, that's really what we're trying to do and then enact policies and procedures to help families. As you mentioned, I'm working with some a few young people around that same thing, first generation. And for people that aren't first generation, you have trouble understanding this is a foreign language. When you get there, you arrive on the campus of Washburn Technical or you arrive on the campus of KU.

There's an assumption that you know what's going to happen. And that's an environment. If you've never been to the Dentist, for example, and you show up at the Dentist and the Dentist just says "open your mouth", why am I opening my mouth? What? Because we're going to do something? Oh, I don't know that. And so I've been reminded when I'm trying to help these young people, they don't know how to do financial aid.

They don't know I get to live on campus. They don't know that there's a dorm system. They don't know what do I get my food. They don't know. I don't go to school every day. All of those things and so, as you mentioned, we have to then explicitly teach. So those have the same students have the same advantage then to end up where you are as the student that has a family says, let me say that you down and tell you how this is going to work.

And that's what we're trying to do is give every student the opportunity.

**Dr. Kelly Spurgeon:**

Right. You know, when you when you do that kind of historical kind of trend where the themes are, again, I in my mind when I look at the work of it's related to this, again, it's like it's our responsibility to then address then the reality of the economy. Right. And the world of work and the degree to which than we are accurately or as best as we can, preparing for the modern workplace.

And that's like, as you said, that's been the responsibility of public education and it's had to adjust as we are now in this reality. Opportunities remove barriers.

**Host Dr. Randy Watson:**

Absolutely. Dr. Kelly Spurgeon, senior research analyst on our Career Standards and Assessment Services, obviously made plain a major role in the development or Postsecondary Success. And, you know, in April, we had the opportunity, as you mentioned, Kelly, to honor this on a diocese in Silver Lake is just to examples at the top level doing's over 70% success and effective rate.

We want to again thank them for that and the kudos and the hard work they're doing and thank you for tuning in to episode ten of our KSDE Insight podcast. We look forward to you jumping in on episode 11 next month and tuning in as we continue to highlight many of the great things going on in Kansas, education and how we're moving forward.