



Kansas State Department of Education Insight Podcast Transcript

Episode 3 – Graduation Requirements Task Force

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:

Hello, Kansas educators, welcome to Episode three, wow, already in episode three, time just flies by with this our new podcast. I'm Randy Watson, commissioner of education. And we're glad that you tune in to gain insight really on all things going on with Kansas pre-K through 12 education.

We're really glad that you make this podcast one of the ones that you want to listen to and enjoy. As you not only gain information, but hopefully glean some new knowledge about things that are going on. And as we think about the topics, we're going to be really spending some time for the second half of our conversation

today around a really important task force, high school graduation. It's been a number of years since we've taken a look at high school graduation requirements, and we'll be really delving deeply into that work and our second half of our program.

But I wanted to spend a little bit of time highlighting things that have been going on here in the agency and in education for the last week, really starting with our Kansans Can Success tour recap. You know, we highlighted a lot of that work, and I just got off the road with Brad.

We just visited 50 cities in Kansas. And what a terrific turnout. So thank you for everyone that came out. We had a tremendous turnout of around 4000 Kansans, certainly school people, but we had higher education and students, business leaders, board members and a variety of community members.

So I want to thank you for that. Here's what's going to happen now with that data that we've collected from the 4000 people that attended. We're going to have a team of researchers, actually three teams of different researchers looking at that data over the next several months, compiling that data, and then we'll be bringing that back to

the state board sometime in the winter months as soon as they get the report. We'll be sharing that out to everyone that attended one of our sessions. So we collected email addresses from all of you. Thank you for giving us those.

And we'll shoot that information out and then, of course, will be released to the public. So what a what a great tour. And we got a chance just to highlight some of the successes that are going on in Kansas.

Graduation rates at an all time high. Our post-secondary numbers are two years out of high school, an all time high. And then we got to know a lot of the challenges that we still have. We need to really be mindful of our execution of helping kids get to a higher level academically.

We really need to help them with their interpersonal and interpersonal skills or social emotional skills. And of course, we were striving toward a 95 percent graduation rate and 70 percent post-secondary effective rate. So much work to do. But wow, what a great start.

All because you guys have just knocked it out of the park even during a time of a pandemic. You've just done tremendously well, and we appreciate that work. So when we were on the tour, again, we had such a wide variety of people.

And it's so much fun because three of those people decide, hey, I like to talk to you on the podcast. I'd like to share with you the experiences of why it was important for them to come out, why it was important for them to lend their expertise and their voice.

We're going to hear from them right now

Karen Watson. I, I have two children in the district, and it's just always they know that that's their number one job. And I'm going to do everything I can to support them and be involved in everything. And I think civic engagement is important and I want to be a model to them.

Rosa Cavazos. So as a parent and a member of the school board, I felt it was important for me to learn about everything that had been done five years ago and where we were going and what steps we were taking to move forward. So it was exciting. It was kind of like a follow up of everything that had been done before. And so it was exciting because I've had children graduate in twenty fourteen, twenty eighteen and then in a couple of years. And so to see the progression of where we've been way back a few years ago to now is what brought me out here so I could just see the changes.

Caitlin Templeton. So I came out because I, as a member of the community and as a new teacher, really care about our students and. What is going to happen to get them to the point where they're successful in life? And I think it's really important that we focus on their social emotional like especially after coming out of Covid, seeing that the state is caring about that as well. I really want to see that focus continue and see how that can push our work forward as educators to help our students.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

Just in the last few days, we've had a state board of education meeting and we highlighted one of those important pieces of work that came out of the Kansas Can Success tour, and that was individual plans of study got to highlight some of Arkansans can't star recognition recipients at the silver level from DeSoto.

The they came in and they talked about what they're doing in their middle school, around career awareness, career selection, how they take an individual plan, a study meld. The academic requirements are going to be needed to the post-secondary ideas and helping young people, of course, in the middle school level really think about what are all the things

that I could contemplate doing. What are the requirements then about those things? And just starting to formulate what they may want to study in high school and really delve into. So it was great to students from DeSoto Middle Schools and what an awesome job they did.

And then from Piper, who was awarded the gold level recognition, the highest recognition for individual playing a study. And they just again, talked about how they've taken all of the aspect of of Kansas can, and they've just integrated it in such a remarkable way to help students then formulate their own plan and then execute that plan as

they get ready to leave high school. So we're going to be inviting several of our Kansans can star recognition winners to be sharing with the board over the next several months. So for those of you that are we're being recognized through the Kansas can't star recognition program get ready?

We're probably going to make a phone call to you and say, hey, we need to come for the state board and share exactly what's going on, because they love to hear the great successes that that you're having. We also had a meeting in our second day of the state board meeting with the Kansas Board of Regents.

Our mission together and our work together is centered around one big idea how do we increase post-secondary attainment? We're at 48 percent highest it's ever been. We have to move that to 70 percent. That's our goal here at K-12 Caber.

Kansas Board of Regents and also the Kansas Private School Association. They're keenly interested in how do we help all students really move toward post-secondary attainment. And when we say that, I still think there's a lot of people out there, parents and kids take our thinking.

Well, you're talking about everyone going to CU or Pittsburgh State, and we're not we're talking about any attainment of a certificate or a credential or degree after high school. And I was just looking at a job market study that just came across my desk that said when we look at those jobs in the future there, that over

80 percent of those are going to require post-secondary education of some sort. And the high demand jobs are everything from nurse practitioners and physical therapy assistants. And that's a two year degree. A lot of computer science, energy sector, a lot of renewable wind energy technicians and arms and services.

For that, we're looking to really, really double down with Kansas Board of Regents and our private college friends and having that goal of almost every student attaining something post-secondary. So what you're going to see over the next several months are some initiatives to speed up that goal.

You're going to hear us talking about FAFSA completion. That's that financial aid that's really fairly complicated for students. How do we do that? You're going to hear us talk about open enrollment, meaning school districts can choose the higher ed partner that they would like to partner with.

You're going to be hearing as talk about the first 15 credits. How do we help students get those first gen ed credits while still in high school at little to no cost to them so that we can again speed up the number of kids leaving high school and transitioning after high school toward some kind of post-secondary attainment . So we're looking forward to that. It's going to be a lot of great work, and that'll wear right into the graduation task force that we've got going on. So just stay tuned for all that and to pay attention as we as we get into episodes four and five and six.

And by the way, we're going to be interviewing a lot of people and teachers and principals and superintendents and probably some business leaders over the upcoming episode. So, again, tune in. You're going to get a lot of perspectives on education and what the best thinkers in Kansas are really thinking about as we as we really build Kansas to be the best educated workforce, the best educated people, and a really great place to live. And so. All of us are working hard with that in mind.

Many of you probably don't know at this point, but we've got a lot of really great people across our state working on graduation requirements.

We call this work the high school graduation task force. And the co-chair is Mr. Jarred Fuhrman. He's currently the principal of Basehor Linwood High School. And he's doing a fantastic job, not only a Basehor Linwood, but on this task force.

Jarred, thanks for joining us today and taking some time out of a busy homecoming week, which we know is full of excitement at every school. We just appreciate you taking the time and also volunteering to co-chair a really important task force.

So, Jarred, if you could just talk about the makeup of who's on the task force. You don't have to go through all the names. But just in general, who was who's on it? How long is the task force been meeting? And then we'll delve into some of the specific details.

Jarred Fuhrman:

Yeah. So, Randy, first of all, just thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk today and to be a part of this task force. It's been a great learning experience for me and as being, you know, kind of in the weeds right now and boots on the ground in the high schools and being able

to work with many different people and organizations. And so we we really started this task force this summer. And I specifically remember being lakeside this summer and having some important meetings

as we talk about this important topic and realizing that as we look at our graduation requirements, they haven't changed a lot.

And so for this task force to be able to be charged, to examine them and see where we're at and see how we move forward is has been a great a great opportunity for me. And we're filled with all sorts of representation.

You know, we have state board members on the committee, we have superintendents, we have principals, we have counselors, we have business people from the business world. We have organizations, USA, you know, all the way up from KSB to.

So we tried to reach every piece of the state from larger districts to smaller districts. And it's I feel like it's a very good representation. We've done some, you know, some student surveys. And we had over we had some feedback from over, you know, two hundred and or more students that are on our task force.

So we've had four or five, five or six meetings so far. And I think we're making some pretty good progress as we move forward.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

Excellent, Jarred. So let's talk about then the current status of the task force. What are you looking at specifically? You know, as you know, everyone who to talk about the graduation requirements, either in terms of they made me take its course or why didn't I?

Take this course or why was not allowed to do this, but tell us a little bit more about the charge of the task force and the air is that you're starting to delve into.

Jarred Fuhrman

Right. So I think and Randy, you talk about this all the time that, you know, education's different these days and our kids are different. And so trying to find ways to individualize that education for each kid is a challenge and really leads in to what that charges of the task force.

And so we've heard a lot of information. We've gathered things from different states. We've had other states present to us kind of just their process and steps that they've taken. And we've gathered a lot of info.

And really where we're at right now is we have three subcommittees, and those three subcommittees are taking those different charges and formulating some thoughts and ideas around those. And so the first subcommittee is really looking at what I would say.

They're looking at the what you know, what are our current courses that we require kids to take, you know, our four units of English, our math, our physical education, fine arts, what are the courses that we currently require?

And are there adjustments that we need to make? That second subcommittee is looking at the how with the competency based, you know, standards, the mastery based and really taking what those courses are and then determining, OK, how do we give credit for those courses?

What does it look like? How do we give that flexibility for those different courses? And then I think there are third subcommittee. The third charge really wraps it all up where we're looking at market value assets. We're looking at maybe potentially a different diploma pathways with diploma pluses and those opportunities and really targeting maybe more of those soft skills that as you go on your tour and businesses and we talk to different communities, they talk. Kids are missing these. And so that really wraps it all into one. And with that, sir, third subcommittee.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

Absolutely. We have some remarkable people, including yourself, the co-chair in this effort with Mr. McNiece from the State Board of Education. You know, I think it's really valuable to talk to those juniors and seniors and maybe those young people just out of high school for a year or two as they enter the job market or the college

market. They usually are able to give us really good insight on what we could have done better to prepare them for that next part of their life. And maybe the more of the of the aha's is when Randy calls you to volunteer, like would you volunteer?

You're saying, well, let me think about that, because it's so time consuming and we don't even give you any peanuts or anything that the, you know, any compensation. It's just that we drive you do the really produce these outstanding results.

And we just appreciate that everyone has volunteered for this work.

Jarred Fuhrman:

The one thing I do like and this is not just an aha. But, you know, something that makes me, you know, excited moving forward is I do think there is a general direction that, hey, we're going to do what's best for kids with this, with the whatever we come out with, it's going to be best for all kids. And we've talked a lot about, you know, you look at different size districts, you look at different socioeconomic. You know, people come from different backgrounds. And we've talked a lot about equity and trying to make sure that whatever we do proposed to our state board is equitable for all.

And so it's exciting to me that we have the right people, I think on the on the committee.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

Jarred, talk to me about why we have this committee and they're going to make all these decisions. Right. But that's really not true. So tell me lay out for everyone the flow of what the committee will do.

You know, the timeline when someone can be expected to see a draft from committee, how do I make sure that my voice is heard and then what the final product timeline will be?

Jarred Fuhrman:

Yeah. So we like you said earlier, you know, we're still we're still in the weeds right now. And I think that we're giving a lot of time to the subcommittees. You know, like I said, we've had visitors from other states.

You know, I've spent a lot of time connecting with the senators and with, you know, representatives, policymakers from other states to try to get all the information that we can to our subcommittees. And so our goal right now, our timeline is in January, the expectation is that we will have something from the subcommittees to present to

the task force. And, you know, at that point, obviously, the task force tears it apart. And so, no, we like this. We don't like this. And we have those discussions. And so I would I think our timeline right now is maybe towards the end of January and February is when really, you know, we'll have to get

out on the road and we'll. I have to, you know, hit all corners of the state and talk to stakeholders. You know, you mentioned Jim McNiece. That's something that that he's kind of taking charge of, is really starting that connection with those stakeholder groups.

And so, you know, our goal is in February, March, April, we're giving those drafts. We're talking those things to people, and they're going to tell us what's right and what's wrong. And then, you know, our plan is to bring that back to the task force and then be ready to present to the state board and in May and whatever those recommendations might be. And so I'm excited about that journey. It seems like it's going to get here quick, and I know that it will. But I again, I come back to it's valuable and I think it's important for our kids.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

Some excellent work already gone on and a lot of planning in the long days and a long road ahead. But by the way, if you need any advice on where to go as you're thinking about spreading the word of the graduation task force, Jarred I've done a 50 city tour and I'm your guy.

I can tell you all the back roads in Kansas and just how to do that very ambitious tour that's going to take place. But you have to do that. You've got to get feedback from the field. And it will be a great opportunity for people to come out and say, this is what we're really trying to do.

This is this is what we would like to see a variety of people that you'll get input from. I know from legislators to school people, parents and anyone that really wants to look at this through the lens of graduation from where they sat and give us a lot of different viewpoints.

Jarred, I can't thank you enough again for the work that you're doing. This task force is the culmination of the Kansas can vision. And we're trying to work on graduation, the expectations of what Kansans want from their schools and for their students.

Jarred Furman, the principal, Basehor Linwood High School in the middle of homecoming week, serving as co-chair of the graduation task force, Kansas State Department of Education. Thank you again for joining us. And we appreciate all of you tuning into this episode of the Ksd Insight podcast.

Until next time, thanks. And have a great day.