



# Kansas State Department of Education Insight Podcast Transcript

## Episode 9 – Academically Prepared for Post-Secondary 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:**

Hello, Kansas educators. It's episode nine of KSDE Insight Podcast. I'm Randy Watson, Commissioner of Education. We're so thankful that you tune in and really listen to these series of podcasts as we try to highlight for you many of the state board's outcomes and their vision for education. As you know, we have a guest with us to talk about these important topics. And today we're going to be talking about Academically Prepared for Post-Secondary Success. We'll talk about what that entails in just a second. But we have, as always, a few items we want to bring up to date for all of you. First, as you're listening to this, graduation is taking place all across Kansas. Congratulations to the class of 2022. We are so excited to see what you'll do in the future. And so many of you have shared with us those Kansans can and I am videos. We want to say thank you to a variety of school district from Wellington to Dodge City to Nemaha Central, so many of you have reached out. We want to now listen to several of those outstanding young people in the class of 22 and what their plans are for the future.

### **Kansans Can and I am Campaign messages:**

My name is Dustin Shetler and I go to Wellington High School and after high school I plan on going to the Air Force Academy. And Kansans can and I am.

My name is Bella Karoll. I'm a senior at Derby High School and after graduation, I'll be going to the University of Kansas to study Exercise Science and Spanish, Kansans Can and I am.

My name is Heather Caesar and I'm a senior at Nemaha Central High School and I'll be attending Washburn University to major in radiology, Kansans can and I am.

Hi, my name is Dawn Archer, a senior at Nemaha Central High School I plan on attending Kansas State University and majoring in mechanical engineering. Kansans can and I am.

My name is Lesly Madina and I from Dodge City High School. I will be attending Dodge City Community College to major in nursing, Kansans can and I am.

My name is Lisa, I am from Dodge City High School, and I will be attending Garden City Community College and Major for Photography, Kansans can and I am.

My name is Austin Burnett from Dodge City High School and I'll be attending DC three for diesel tech program, Kansans Can and I am.

**Host Dr. Randy Watson:**

Congratulations to the senior class and every place that you'll be attending come the fall, whether that's directly to work or military two year four year technical for college. Also it's in the month of May we did some shout outs for teacher appreciation week. Our staff members and a lot of our Kansas Teachers of the Year team highlighted many of the wonderful things around teachers so if you get a chance go back and find us at KSDE live media and you can touch base on those again because those are really really good.

Speaking of Kansas Teachers of the Year, you know we get a lot of those people together three times a year and they bring other rock stars teachers together for some professional development and coming up in June, on June 3rd and 4th in Shawnee Mission, we're going to be having the second Kansas leads conference. So if you're interested, you're teacher and say, how do I get hooked up with this well, here's what you do. You just take a moment and go to our website and there you can get all the information for Kansas leads next fall will be going back to central Kansas and then probably having a western Kansas trip and then back to the Kansas City area. So three a year you have to be nominated. But you know what? You can nominate yourself.

It's really good. And we want you to get involved in that going forward. So lots of great things going on in May as we're rapidly heading toward wrapping up the year. But I have with me today Dr. Scott Smith. Scott is the interim deputy commissioner for Learning Services and the director of Standards and Testing Assessment. And we're really honored to have him here with us to talk about academically prepared for post-secondary success.

So we're going to try to go over with you, how we came about and that title, what it means a little bit about the misnomers around grade level and those type of things that get thrown around a lot and why we set the high standards that we did. But Scott, thanks for for being here with us. And I'll let you start a little bit with the history about outcome and kind of how we went about setting the scores the state board said, let's set an academic standard that enables any student to choose their post-secondary plan without remediation. So we had to set that pretty high. So walk us through this is now a few years ago, but how did we go about selecting those standards? And then we can talk about how high those standards are and those cut scores relate to other states.

**Dr. Scott Smith:**

Thank you, Commissioner Watson. This has been actually this can be a source of quite a bit of confusion for some people. Well, let's take a step back and think just very generally about the fact that we are talking about in general science standards, mathematics standards and language arts standards. The responsibility that the board has is to build state assessments that align to those standards, that

measure them with some validity. And one of the first things that we can put on the table is the fact that every single question on the Kansas State assessments is grade level there are no off grade level questions on the state assessments. So the question for teachers and for educators is supposing we're talking about a 10th grade math student who is sitting for the state assessment in mathematics and he or she is presented with a series of questions, supposing it's 50, so they are taking 50 math questions that are all aligned to the standards that presumably the teacher is teaching in his or her class.

Well, how many of these questions should a student be expected to answer correctly? And you can imagine that a lot of us are familiar with classrooms where a teacher simply relies on a percentage, correct? Well, in my class you have to answer say 40% of these questions correctly. 50% of these questions correctly, or 60%. And often we say, Well, 100% of the questions have to be answered correctly. This is not the way we do things in Kansas. And this can be somewhat of an in the weeds issue, but what we do know is the difficulty of these questions. So each of the questions that the student answers has a certain difficulty level based upon how many of the students answered them correctly. So as we begin setting cut scores, we ask ourselves, well, should a student answer correctly this test question that I'll say, 90% of the other students answered correctly, well, OK, yes, but what kind of student should a student who wants to simply to move on to the next grade level answer this question correctly, that 90% of his or her peers answered correctly what we in Kansas decided was we were thinking about postsecondary success and in particular the success that students would have, the ability that they would have to have as they moved into some sort of post-secondary setting, especially college. So our decision or our challenge, I should say, was to think about the student who wants to move into a post-secondary setting, in particular college and answer and move into a credit bearing course and have some guarantee of success not needing remediation.

So that particular student, what we decided was one who would have to answer a certain number of questions correctly for us to have some assurance they would have that ability to succeed and that guided our ability or our decision to where to set those cut scores. It has absolutely nothing to do with a certain percentage, correct? And it also has nothing to do with placing particular students at a certain grade level. What we know is this aligns perfectly with our ACT expectations. For example, a student who scores, I'll just say in Category three on the state assessments, that aligns perfectly with what we know to be true about students as measured by the ACT. I apologize, Mr. Watson, if that was a long worded response.

**Host Dr. Randy Watson:**

No, that's great.

Because people can play this back over and over, and that's what's really good. And so what we know empirically, based upon match pairs of data, is that if you score at level three and four on the science or in mathematics or an English language arts/reading, you are doing academic work relative to any post-secondary plan that you could go after appropriate at that grade level. Because we know that based upon the ACT, which we can talk a little bit about later. So, Scott, one of the things that people ask me all the time, well, hey, now you've set that so high for college maybe, you know four years going to Washburn. I'm planning to go to North Central Kansas Tech and and be a heavy equipment operator or I'm planning to go into the military join the Army, and I want to be in the infantry or I'm going to a

community college. But what we want everyone to know is we don't know that, nor does any student know that in fourth grade or fifth grade or sixth grade. So we had to build this so that students had all of the academic options available to him or her when they graduated. And as we get closer to graduation, the 11th and 12th grade, obviously, they start to make those decisions but our state assessment ends in 10th grade.

So from 3rd grade to 10th grade, we had to align that, that all of those options would be available and no door would be shut. So it's really important for everyone to understand that. Scott, you mentioned grade level, all the items are at that grade level expectations or again, what would a student need to know in 6th grade in mathematics to be on track to execute their post-secondary plan?

That is so hard to understand because we throw out well, is that student on grade level can they can they read at a 6th grade level? Tell everyone why this really doesn't measure whether you can read at sixth grade. It's a much higher standard than that.

**Dr. Scott Smith:**

It is a much higher standard. And as I said, there are tests out there that would be, I think, much longer than our state assessments. That have as a part of their purpose the goal of placing students at a particular grade level. Your student happens to be enrolled in the sixth grade, but they are reading at a third-grade level or a fourth-grade level. That is not what these tests are, you mentioned the fact that we might not know and neither does a student really what their future will hold. We believe that options are good. And the greatest number of doors that are open for a student as he or she leaves high school, I think is the best, options are good.

And so when we talk about grade level questions, all measuring say that back to the 10th-grade math example this is a way to help the teacher and the student, everyone involved in that, students education to get the most out of that class. How do we set the highest bar that helps the student have as many options as possible, post-secondary options in particular when they leave and when we talk about grade level questions, that's why I, I flinch a little bit when someone says students are reading below grade level. That's just not a part of our state assessment at all.

**Host Dr. Randy Watson:**

Right. And that's again, what's I think so hard for laypeople because if it's one of those things that we've thrown around for over a hundred years, can you read a grade level? Can Johnny read at grade level? And it's just not how we went about building the state assessment. So to make that those bases, it really isn't an appropriate test to make those basis because we're trying to judge whether or not a student can execute any of the post-secondary plans, which is a much higher level as we as we've talked about. Now, Scott, you mentioned the ACT, so let's jump right into that because I think it speaks to the limitations that we can even predict relative to future success rate academics. So we know in mathematics, for example, if you score a level three and four, you are academically prepared for that post-secondary endeavor and ACT and our matched pair analysis would say, yes, your level three and four spot on with scoring what would be an entry-level for college algebra?

Now, ACT says if I score 22 on the test in mathematics, I have a 50% probability of getting an A or B in college Algebra, which is typically the gatekeeper course for most disciplines. I've heard it said across the state by some people, it must not be a very good test Dr. Smith. You don't want it always 50% predictable of you getting an A or B in college algebra. Can you just speak to why this is important? And then we can talk about why the State Board looks at other things other than academics?

**Dr. Scott Smith:**

Well, I think it's exactly as you said, this is an academic measure. And when we talk about those matched pairs, what we're really saying is we know that the students with this assessment score and this particular ACT score, how they did, what their performance was. But there are a lot of other factors that are involved. So, you know, anyone who's ever been to college or any post-secondary experience knows that we're human beings and life happens. And so the best we can do at this point is to try to identify a particular ACT score with a particular assessment score and make certain that our standards are high and that there are no false positives. And by a false positive, say that we know for certain that our students who with this particular score on the state assessment had this experience in high school or who were able to score this on the ACT, we want as much validity as possible when we match those pairs.

**Dr. Randy Watson:**

Now, so just give a couple of of examples. What we know is even students that score a level four in mathematics that 100% of them do not go on to the post-secondary and are successful. We know that the higher you score from level one to level four, the more success you have. But it never it never gets to 100% because there are other factors.

Same as I could score some X score and qualify to go into the armed services and to the army and I could get to the army and basic training and not make it through basic training. I could even be physically fit and not make do basic training. Why is that? Well, because some students go into the armed services and find out, Oh, I'm not cut out to do this, I don't like this, and I need to not do this. Same thing happens. You go off to college or to technical school and things get in the way. I may fall in love. I may not go to class, I may not take good notes, I may not self-regulate myself. I may not set appropriate goals. There are all kinds of other factors that the state board wants to also enhance to make that other 50% probability go way, way up. So what we can say is you're academically prepared, but you may not be prepared. And the other things that we call social emotional areas that we've talked about in the past doesn't mean we shouldn't be academically prepared, though, right? Dr. Smith. We want to be academically prepared, and we're trying to do that as much as we can.

Can you also speak, though, to then when teachers are using curriculum standards our standards and then buy textbooks and buying other materials, maybe that always isn't a match. And why that's important to teach to the Kansas standards in order to get the best outcomes for students.

**Dr. Scott Smith:**

I think that is often a difficult issue, especially for those teachers who may not feel or if they feel that they maybe weren't a part of the process for textbook adoption. One of the things and this is just me speaking as a former educator, I firmly believe that if you have a facility and this takes a fair amount of work with the academic standards for language arts and mathematics and science, they will help you get the most out of whatever curriculum you have in front of you. And if it's the case that, for example, in light of these ELA standards, maybe the resources that I have in front of me are, or maybe they're weak or maybe they have extra information in them that I might not use, you will best be in the position to know that the more you understand the standards. I had the good fortune of visiting earlier this month or last month, rather with some first, second and third-year teachers, and they had some really valuable insights into everything that's going on right now in education.

They referenced the, you know, the board goals and, you know, the definition of a successful Kansas high school student. The Vision for success. One of the things that I took careful notes on, they organized their lives, their professional lives, I should say, with two general categories. One was the educational setting. And the idea was whether we're talking about work-based learning or any kind of entrepreneurial situation. Or personalizing things, all the things that are a part of the current conversation, especially with regard to redesign. One way to make certain that that setting that educational setting is fully educative in the best way is by understanding the standards. And I'm more confident that this student who might be released for some work-based opportunity, I can have a conversation about what my expectations are for that setting.

And so that's the one area is the educational setting. And the other side of the coin that they said was just about the student, him or herself. They said any time we're talking about academic preparation or cognitive preparation or technical skills employability, civic engagement, whether the student has an individual plan of study, whether they're engaged or they have some social emotional goals, we're all talking about the student.

So those two halves of that coin I thought were really valuable. One is the educational setting, how to think in a creative way about that. And then the other about the student and academic preparation has been a part of that since day one of our vision.

**Dr. Randy Watson:**

Yeah, absolutely. And we just want to then acknowledge which the state board did just a few months ago, a school district that was awarded the Silver Star in our star recognition for achieving at a really high-level ft. Leavenworth. So we want to give USD 207 alot of congratulations is really setting the highest of standards academically. But Dr. Smith, as you mentioned, read a great book recently that said it was relating learning to playing baseball. And they said and this was an older professor said when I grew up, everyone in my neighborhood wanted to play baseball. It was just the sport growing up. So you learn to play baseball and you love it. It's just camaraderie of this game and all these things.

But you don't get very good playing the actual nine-inning game of baseball because you don't get the bat enough and you don't get enough opportunities to field grounders or flies that when they happen, it's really hard. So you love playing the game but you need some repetition. So therefore you have to do

batting practice and you have to do pop flies and but no one wants to go and just do batting practice. They want to play the game. And so we always try to say there's a balance between we want students to put these standards into a context of real-world application, but they're going to have to practice that over and over and over again so that it really takes. So I think all of us can remember flashcards and around the world, at least I can. Ms. Bonham's third-grade classroom I loved around the world because I was good at it. That's probably why I loved. And if you could go around and beat everyone in the whole room, you get a gold star on the chart board and Kase Small if you're listening. I know you were a formidable foe in around the world, but we loved it.

What I found was that didn't transfer very well when I got to algebra and had to solve for X because now I couldn't memorize all that. I had to start thinking. So it's this combination that we have to do really, really well within the standards within practicing the standards that are so important. And again, Fort Leavenworth doing an outstanding job in that area.

So there's so much to unpack around academically prepared for post-secondary, which is the goal in all of our standards. And Dr. Smith, thanks for joining us today. This has been a really good conversation. I think we're probably going to have to have another one where maybe we even do some call in or something or people just post questions because I think it's hard for people to understand we have misused test data for so long that we make generalizations around things that that the test, whatever test isn't meant to do. And so, yeah, thanks for helping us understand what our assessments do relative to our standards.

We want to thank you for joining us for episode nine. I can't believe we're already at episode nine and we look forward to talking to you around episode ten around the great things going on in Kansas education we look forward to talking to you in the future.

Take Care.