

Kansas State Department of Education | Region 12 Comprehensive Center Kansans Can Redesign Initiative

Kansas Reunion Tour — Summary of Questions from Onsite Visits July 2021

In spring 2021, two Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) staff completed on-site visits at 11 school districts that are a part of the Kansans Can School Redesign Project. Seven of the districts are in the Mercury 7 project phase and four are in the Gemini I project phase.

The on-site visits included group interviews with teachers and building level leaders from one or more of the schools in each district. A total of 20 group interviews were held with educators from 31 schools. KSDE staff asked the educators to review their journey through the last calendar year (pandemic) and to share their (1) successes, (2) challenges, (3) lessons learned, and (4) other.

KSDE staff took handwritten notes during the interviews. The notes were typed into an Excel template provided by the Region 12 Comprehensive Center (R12CC). The template had a separate sheet for each of the four questions (i.e., successes, challenges, lessons, and other). Each response was entered on a different line in the sheet. R12CC staff conducted a thematic analysis of the responses, where themes were identified using the following process. First, all responses for each question were read. Second, categories were identified based on the responses. Each response was then read a second time and coded according to the identified categories. Some responses contained ideas that crossed multiple categories and, as such, were coded in the applicable categories.

This report includes summaries of the themes for each of the four questions. Due to the fact the group interviews generally included multiple schools, the unit of analysis was at the district level ($n = 11$).¹

Successes

Eight themes were identified for the successes prompt (Table 1). A sample from KSDE's notes to support the top seven themes is included after the table (i.e., themes present in 45% or more of the interviews with the 11 districts).

¹ All notes, categorized by theme, are available in the Kansas Reunion Tour Notes Spring 2021 Excel spreadsheet.

Table 1. Successes (n = 11)

Theme	Percentages	n
Redesign school participation contributed to success	73%	8
Collaboration	64%	7
Family engagement/communication	64%	7
Social-emotional learning (SEL)	45%	5
Staff flexibility/self-directed leaders	45%	5
Success indicators (e.g., assessments, attendance, graduation, dual enrollment)	45%	5
Teacher/student relationships	45%	5
Reduction in behavioral referrals	36%	4

Redesign school participation contributed to success

- » *Going through Redesign helped them immensely in adapting to COVID-era teaching and learning.*
- » *Easier to transition to teaching and learning during COVID because “we’ve been through this before and this is how we do business now” (references to School Redesign).*
- » *Thanks to what they learned through Redesign, staff demonstrated: (1) a growth mindset and (2) rapid action-research that resulted in teachers pivoting quickly on anything that wasn’t working.*
- » *Redesign changed their culture: (1) student voice, (2) fluid student groupings, (3) data driven.*
- » *Used the Redesign Success Rubric – helped them to learn where they need to go next.*
- » *Structured school improvement process, borne out of Redesign, paid dividends during the pandemic.*

Collaboration

- » *More communication and collaboration amongst staff in all schools.*
- » *Increased productivity from staff collaboration this year.*
- » *Better grade band team collaboration. Teachers relied more on each other.*
- » *Kindergarten and art partnership in remote learning.*
- » *Better collaborative culture at the elementary level.*

Family engagement/communication

- » *Much stronger family engagement resulted in easy transition for families if students had to go from in person to virtual learning because of quarantine.*
- » *Home visits by counselors. Teacher-initiated based on students struggling during remote learning.*
- » *Relationships with families: Streamlined communication, and increased communication from both central office and each building.*
- » *Much stronger family engagement throughout.*
- » *Better relationships with parents and families.*

Social-emotional learning (SEL)

- » *Good SEL support for students. Using Panorama data to strategically support students SEL development.*
- » *Doubled-down on SEL for students and staff during remote learning, paid dividends when students and staff came back to in-person learning.*
- » *High school staff seeing improved social-emotional skills in students as they transition to high school.*

Staff flexibility/self-directed leaders

- » *Staff learned to problem solve on the fly.*
- » *Most teachers were very flexible, went with the flow.*
- » *Staff leadership – independently solving problems.*

Success indicators (e.g., assessments, attendance, graduation rate, dual enrollment)

- » *Growth in math on state assessments.*
- » *Great attendance throughout the year at the elementary level.*
- » *Sharp increases in number of high school students taking college courses. (Twelve high school students earned their associate's degree the same time as they earned a diploma.)*

Teacher/student relationships

- » *Staff learned more about students and their home lives, strengthening student connection to school and staff.*
- » *Connecting with students one time per week during remote learning through advisory program.*
- » *Improved relationships between teachers and students.*

Challenges

Twelve themes were identified for the challenges prompt (Table 2). A sample from KSDE's notes to support the top five themes is included after the table (i.e., themes present in 45% or more of the interviews with the 11 districts).

Table 2. Challenges (n = 11)

Theme	Percentages	n
Social-emotional needs	82%	9
Remote learning effects	55%	6
Staffing	55%	6
Academic	45%	5
COVID safety protocols	45%	5
Culture	36%	4
Summit learning	36%	4
Decisions/triage	27%	3
Lack of resources	27%	3
Student engagement	27%	3
Scheduling	18%	2
Student and teacher efficacy	18%	2

Social-emotional needs

- » *Mental health needs of students! Not enough community or district resources to meet mental health needs. High risk students waiting 2 or 3 months for support.*
- » *Social-emotional well-being of students declined, mainly due student deaths and students' families, not COVID.*
- » *Sharp increase in students having social-emotional struggles, especially depression.*
- » *Not equipped to meet the social-emotional needs of families.*
- » *Adult social-emotional needs – need to mend broken adults so they can take care of students.*
- » *Huge need for self-care for teachers. Teachers were stressed more personally because of isolation, not able to see extended family, not able to attend church, etc.*

Remote learning effects

- » *Elective course enrollment was down due to limited contact during remote learning. Will have to rebuild their programs.*
- » *Students came back in the fall with poor work habits after remote-only spring of 2020.*
- » *Synchronous remote learning at K-3.*
- » *Remote learning was hard for families.*

Staffing

- » *Less options for students as far as course offerings due to less staff in building. (Some staff were remote-only due to 25% of students choosing remote learning all year.)*
- » *Staffing – finding qualified teachers. When colleges stopped their in-person job fairs, it really hurt the district/school recruiting.*
- » *Higher than normal teacher turnover.*
- » *Lack of substitutes.*

Academic

- » *Some gaps in student achievement data.*
- » *Academic gaps continue to grow. Seventy percent of students at Tier 2 or 3 academically.*
- » *Some teachers were too rigid with instruction and grading, causing some students to shut down.*

COVID safety protocols

- » *Managing COVID safety protocols.*
- » *No flexible seating in the classrooms because of social distancing and sanitation protocols.*
- » *Protocols of masks, social distancing and cohorting created challenges for project-based learning, students' family times, and other elements that required students to move freely about the building.*

Lessons Learned

Nine themes were identified for the lessons learned prompt (Table 3). A sample from KSDE's notes to support the top four themes is included after the table (i.e., themes present in 45% or more of the interviews with the 11 districts).

Table 3. Lessons Learned (n = 11)

Theme	Percentages	n
Redesign	55%	6
Social-emotional learning (SEL)/relationship building	55%	6
Academic	45%	5
Professional development	45%	5
Competency-based learning	27%	3
Scheduling	27%	3
Vision/goals	27%	3
Culture	18%	2
Student and teacher efficacy	18%	2

Redesign

- » *Taking the best of Redesign (what worked) and expanding it.*
- » *Move from a “school that does Redesign” to a “redesigned school.”*
- » *Feel pretty confident that “redesign” is embedded in their culture. They do not use the term “redesign” anymore. It is just how they are designed.*
- » *Realigning Redesign plans to district strategic plan.*

Social-emotional learning (SEL)/relationship building

- » *Need to ramp up efforts for partnerships for counseling services for students and families.*
- » *SEL support is worth it.*
- » *Keep and grow activities that build relationships.*
- » *Better family relationships are essential.*

Academic

- » *Doubling down on academic preparation with basic math and basic English courses next year. Also added a high-level math class.*
- » *Creating more clear academic targets that all teachers see their work in.*
- » *Focusing on academic gaps by introducing much more structured Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) processes.*

Professional development

- » *Ramping up the mentoring program with more intentional training for staff.*
- » *Professional development focus next year – data literacy.*
- » *Bringing in trauma-informed professional development for all staff.*

Other

Educators from four districts shared additional comments. Three districts expressed concerns related to reporting:

- » *The capacity of small districts to complete ALL of the reporting through COVID and with Kansas Education Systems Accreditation (KESA), fiscal, nutrition and wellness – it is all too much for one superintendent in a small, small district.*
- » *Kansas interim reports are lacking. It's hard to use the data to see which specific standards students are struggling with.*
- » *Strong request to simplify the reporting. KansaStar, KESA, Redesign and now Star Recognition – too much reporting that is too similar – all going to KSDE.*

One district was unsure of how their formative data informs instruction and how the formative data (i.e., MAP) improves summative data (i.e., state assessment). Another district shared that they want to continue to refine their redesign elements.

Summary

There were several common areas of successes identified by educators in the majority of the 11 school districts. Educators often mentioned that participating in redesign helped contribute to successes experienced in the prior calendar year. Staff's collaboration with one another and their flexibility were two other areas cited. Strengthened relationships with families and the SEL supports provided to students were also stated as successes.

Likewise, the educators in these districts identified several similar challenges. The most frequently mentioned challenge related to attending to both students' and teachers' social-emotional needs. Remote learning effects and problems with having sufficient staff or turnover were two other challenges. Academic-related challenges and having to address COVID safety protocols were also shared.

The educators were asked about lessons learned and several themes emerged. The themes were similar to those of successes and challenges. Aspects related to redesign and social-emotional learning were the most frequently cited lessons learned. Academic-focused lessons learned and specific areas where professional development is needed were also mentioned by educators in most of the districts.

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