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TO: Board of Education
FROM: Dale Ellis
DATE: December 3, 2012
SUBJ: INFORMATION ITEM (Kentucky Accountability Results)

Attached is a news article regarding the results achieved by Kentucky in their first round of Common Core aligned assessments. As can be evidenced in the article, the results declined significantly. I am presenting this information to you in an effort to begin the discussion with our community that a new curriculum and new assessments have historically meant lower achievement results. This item is presented for your information.

I am available to answer any questions you might have.

Scores Drop on Ky.'s Common Core-Aligned Tests

By [Andrew Ujifusa](#)

Results from new state tests in Kentucky—the first in the nation explicitly tied to the Common Core State Standards—show that the share of students scoring “proficient” or better in reading and math dropped by roughly a third or more in both elementary and middle school the first year the tests were given.

Kentucky in 2010 was the first state to adopt the common core in English/language arts and mathematics, and the assessment results released last week for the 2011-12 school year are being closely watched by school officials and policymakers nationwide for what they may reveal about how the common standards may affect student achievement in coming years. So far, 46 states have adopted the English/language arts common standards; 45 states have done so in math.

Two federally funded consortia are working on assessments based on the common standards, and those tests are not slated to be fully ready for schools until 2014-15. But Kentucky’s tests are generally understood to be linked to the common core.

“What you’re seeing in Kentucky is a predictor of what you’re going to see in the other states, as the assessments roll out next year and the year after,” said Gene Wilhoit, the executive director of the Washington-based Council of Chief State School Officers, which spearheaded the common-core initiative along with the National Governors Association. Mr. Wilhoit was also previously Kentucky’s education commissioner.

Falling Scores

The drop in Kentucky’s scores conform to what state education officials had expected: that students in grades 3-8 taking the new, more-rigorous Kentucky Performance Rating of Education Progress, or K-PREP, would not be able to reach their achievement levels of prior years. Kentucky began implementing the common standards in the 2011-12 school year.

The biggest drop came at the elementary level. On the previous Kentucky Core Content Tests, 76 percent of elementary students scored proficient or higher in reading in the 2010-11 school year. That percentage plunged to 48 percent for the K-PREP results in the 2011-12 school year, a drop-off in proficiency of more than a third.

In 2010-11, 73 percent of elementary students were proficient or better in math, but that fell to 40.4 percent. That drop represents a 45 percent decline in the share of proficient students.

Middle schoolers’ decline was a little less steep. In reading, they dropped from a 70 percent proficiency level in 2010-11 to 46.8 percent in 2011-12, a decline of a third. In math, proficiency-or-better levels declined slightly more than that, from 65 percent in 2010-11 to 40.6 percent in 2011-12.

Overall, students in grades 3-8 demonstrated somewhat higher proficiency levels in reading than in math.

When new tests are introduced, states can expect scores to fall in most cases, said Douglas McRae, a retired assessment designer who helped build California’s testing system. “When you change the measure, change the tests, then you interrupt the continuity of trend data over time. That’s the fundamental thing that happens,” he said.

Kentucky developed its tests in conjunction with Pearson, the New York City-based education and testing company, which is also crafting curricula for the common core.

K-PREP does not represent the final, polished version of common-core assessments. The [Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers](#), or PARCC, and the [Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium](#) are designing the tests that most states have signed on to for gauging students' mastery of the common standards nationwide beginning in the 2014-15 school year. (Kentucky belongs to the PARCC consortium.)

But Mr. Wilhoit said K-PREP represents the state's best effort, along with Pearson's, "to develop an assessment that was representative of the common core."

Proficiency drops also occurred in the end-of-course tests in reading and math Kentucky administered to high school students. But those declines were smaller than those in the earlier grades, and a state study shows that while the K-PREP tests are completely aligned with the common standards, the high school end-of-course tests (from the [ACT QualityCore program](#)) are only about 80 percent to 85 percent aligned to the standards.

The proficiency level in high school reading dropped from 65 percent to 52.2 percent (a figure 6 percentage points higher than the state's prediction), based on the end-of-course tests, while proficiency in math fell from 46 percent to 40 percent on the Algebra 2 test, beating the state's prediction by 4 percentage points.

Commissioner's Take

Kentucky Education Commissioner Terry Holliday said that students beat the state's [predictions](#) for both the K-PREP and end-of-course exams. Using a statistical model that predicted ACT performance based on academic results in reading and math in 2011, for example, the state estimated a 36 percentage-point drop in elementary reading scores in 2011-12, instead of the actual 28-point drop.

"We're just a little bit above our prediction, which I think is a pretty good testament to our teaching," Mr. Holliday said.

Earlier exposure to the common standards, he suggested, would help younger students at first.

"It's going to take a little longer to see middle and high school growth on these tests," Mr. Holliday said. "It'll take about five years to see an overall growth of significance at all levels."

But based on national benchmarks, the new K-PREP tests may not have been rigorous enough, said Richard Innes, an education policy analyst at the Bluegrass Institute, a conservative-leaning Lexington, Ky.-based think tank.

In a report released the week of Oct. 29 for the institute, Mr. Innes [compared](#) the K-PREP math scores for 8th graders this year (41.5 percent proficient or better) with the results on the ACT Explore test this year (30.5 percent) and the National Assessment of Educational Progress proficiency levels in 2011 (31 percent).

"There are questions in my mind as to whether they are rigorous enough in several areas," he said. Different subject tests appeared to have been more rigorous in different grade levels, Mr. Innes said. The math in middle schools appears to be the subject where K-PREP is less rigorous than NAEP or Explore tests, he noted. He drew the same conclusion about K-PREP reading results at the elementary school level.

One number that went up: the proportion of students qualifying as college and/or career ready, which rose to 47 percent in 2011-12, from 38 percent the previous year. Mr. Holliday attributed that rise to the state creating

more career pathways and bringing more introductory college courses to high school seniors to prevent the need for postsecondary remediation.

“To get that much improvement in the first year is extraordinary, I think,” said Bob King, the president of the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, based in Frankfort, Ky.

Preparing the Public

To combat a potential public backlash from the lower scores, Mr. Holliday noted that he had enlisted the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce as part of a yearlong [public relations campaign](#).

Florida schools earlier this year endured a significant backlash when proficiency rates on its state writing tests dropped by two-thirds after a tougher grading system was introduced, forcing the state school board to change the test’s cutoff score retroactively.

“We knew the scores were going to drop, but this is the right thing for our kids, our schools,” he said. “You’re going to see quite a different reaction in Kentucky because we watched what happened everywhere else,” Mr. Holliday said.

But the transition for schools can be disappointing for some, especially in the short term. Carmen Coleman, the superintendent of the Danville Independent district, said she was proud of how the school system had progressed over the past three years from a ranking of 110th to 24th among the state’s 174 districts, only to tumble back to the middle of the pack in the newest rankings of school districts.

“It’s a tough blow for teachers and students,” she said.

The Kentucky PTA has received grant money from the National PTA to educate parents and others about the new standards, but the state group’s president, Teri Gale, said it doesn’t mean people won’t be caught off guard by the lower-than-usual results.

“They’ve heard us talk about it. They’ve seen the newscasts and everything,” Ms. Gale said. “But until they actually see the scores, I don’t think it’s going to hit home that this is what we were talking about.

Coverage of the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the common assessments is supported in part by a grant from the GE Foundation, at www.ge.com/foundation.