



**KANSAS ASSOCIATION
OF SCHOOL BOARDS**
Serving Educational Leaders, Inspiring Student Success



KASB Statement on KSDE Consolidated Plan for Federal Programs

August, 2017

The Kansas Association of School Boards (KASB) supports the Kansas State Department of Education's (KSDE) ambitious Consolidated State Plan to comply with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

KASB also believes this consolidated plan, to reach its goals by 2030, requires much broader strategies in four areas:

- Adequate funding to support additional programs, services and personnel to reach these unprecedented goals. States with higher overall outcomes spend more than Kansas.
- Appropriate staffing to provide greater student support. Schools are struggling to find qualified educators and salaries are becoming less competitive.
- School redesign to create a system more responsive to student needs and choices.
- Public awareness and commitment by Kansans at all levels to support the changes required to achieve these goals.

We are committed to helping develop that plan and achieving those goals.

Goals

The plan's long term high school graduation goal is for 95 percent of all students to graduate by 2030. In 2016, 86 percent of all Kansas students graduated. While White and Asian student subgroups showed graduation rates of 88 percent and 93 percent respectively in 2016, many student subgroups that will also be held to the 95 percent standard in 2030 graduated with rates in the low to upper 70 percent range.

The academic proficiency goals based on the state's reading and math assessments appear equally daunting. The long-term goal for 2030 is for 75 percent of all students to score at Level 3 ("effective") or Level 4 ("excellent") combined on the state's English and math assessments. In 2016, the all-student combined achievement rate was 42 percent for English Language Arts (ELA) and 33 percent for math. White students were at 48.4 percent for ELA and 38.7 percent for math; Asian students scored 55.7 percent on ELA and 54.6 percent on math. Other demographic subgroups showed substantially lower achievement rates.

It should be noted no other state has attained a graduation rate of 95 percent for all students. Using the National Assessment of Education Progress "proficient" benchmark as an equivalent for Level 3 on Kansas assessments, no other state has exceeded even 50 percent for all students. In short, the goals set forth in this plan are far beyond what any state has accomplished.

These goals, therefore, support the Kansas State Board of Education's broader vision that Kansas lead the world in student success, allowing Kansas students to be prepared to meet projected future employment needs and provide financial security for individuals and their families. As such, they are a moral imperative. However, if Kansas is serious about reaching these unprecedented goals, it will require commitments far beyond the scope of this plan.

Funding

To achieve these goals of significantly higher graduation rates and of doubling, tripling (and even quadrupling, in some cases) the academic achievement rates for all student demographic subgroups, the State Board will need to continue and significantly strengthen its advocacy with state and federal lawmakers for the additional finances required to accomplish such ambitious outcomes.

The Kansas Legislature, in 2017, enacted a new school funding formula that adds nearly \$300 million in operating funds over the next two years, and allows some additional local revenue. While \$300 million is a welcome increase, per pupil funding will remain lower than 10 years before when adjusted for inflation and is only committed for the next two fiscal years. The future of school funding in Kansas over roughly the next decade reflected in the ESSA plan timeline is dependent not only on the state legislature and a slowly growing state economy but also the approval of the state supreme court's pending ruling in conjunction with the Gannon school funding lawsuit.

The State Board's two-year budget request to the 2017 Kansas Legislature for roughly \$900 million to comply with the Rose Standards for student success (recognized by the state supreme court and endorsed by the legislature and the state's governor) appears to be a funding level that is more likely to enable the state to reach its Consolidated Plan goals. Furthermore, in 2017 [testimony](#) to the state legislature's school funding committees, KASB suggested a figure of roughly \$780 million to fund specific items to improve student success, including more competitive salaries, replacing lost positions, expanding preschool programs and significantly increasing programs to help low achieving students.

Preliminary data for the 2017 KASB Annual State Education Report Card, which relies on U.S. Census and other national data sources, showed Kansas ranked 10th overall in educational achievement over 15 indicators. The nine states ("aspiration states") that outperformed Kansas all provided more total K-12 revenue per pupil. Furthermore, Kansas ranked 25th in overall per-pupil funding when adjusted for inflation. While the state's educational achievements could be considered noteworthy given this level of financial investment, from 2008-2014 Kansas increased funding by 4.7 percent – 38th in the nation – while the average aspiration states increased by at least 10 percent. Kansas outperformed peer states in educational attainment by 18-24-year-olds and in high school graduation rates, but other states improved faster than Kansas.

Most concerning, drops in fourth and eighth grade national reading and math scores may mean attainment levels and graduation rates will decrease as those students move through the system. Kansas ranked in the bottom 10 states in improvement in postsecondary attainment by young adults since 2005, suggesting that the state's workforce is in danger of becoming less competitive with other states. Those states which are most successful spend more per pupil than Kansas and have increased spending more.

Staffing needs

KSDE's aggressive goals will also likely require a substantial increase in the number and type of personnel who teach and otherwise serve Kansas public school students.

If the 2030 goals appear aspirational even for the relatively well-off, higher-performing student groups, raising the academic achievement and high school graduation rates of subgroups in poverty or with other economic and family challenges appear almost unattainable without the addition of teachers, counselors, social workers, paraprofessionals and administrators to deliver the programs those students need, and keep classes sizes small.

National data indicates the nine "aspiration states" that exceed Kansas in performance employ 160.7 total staff per 1,000 students, while Kansas districts employ 143. Kansas lags these states in instructional

staff 105.8 to 94.4; principals and student and instructional support staff 26.3 to 23.6; all other support (from custodians to cooks to bus drivers) 22.2 to 21.6; and district administrative staff 6.3 to 3.8. As noted, even the most successful states have not achieved the goals in this plan.

As of mid-August, 2017, many Kansas public schools are struggling to fill positions for the 2017-18 school year. College teacher preparation programs have seen declining enrollment, resulting in fewer new teachers graduating and entering the employment pipeline. Years of stagnant teacher salaries combined with increasing numbers of high-needs students have resulted in increased class sizes. Finally, many teachers report low morale due to what they say is a decline in societal respect for the profession.

Kansas school boards have also been forced, over the past several years, to cut or eliminate positions that help support student achievement. School districts across the state report a need for more counselors to address social and emotional needs in addition to supporting the college and career planning vision set by the State Board. Additional paraprofessionals and other support staff are needed for students who require classroom support.

Attracting qualified, effective and committed individuals to the teaching profession and keeping them should be a significant part of any long-term strategy to increase student success and that will require increasing teacher pay. In 2015, average teacher salaries in Kansas ranked 36th in the nation, also ranking behind “aspiration states.”

Recent funding increases have enabled Kansas school boards to increase teacher salaries for the 2017-18 school year and begin planning to add necessary programs and positions in 2018-19. The State Board has begun a public relations campaign to increase teacher recruitment. These initiatives, however, will require sustained philosophical and financial support to achieve the department’s aggressive goals under ESSA.

School Redesign “Moon Shot”

On August 8, 2017, KSDE announced its Kansans Can School Redesign project. Harkening to President John F. Kennedy’s call for America to reach the moon, Education Commissioner Randy Watson refers to the school redesign effort as Kansas’ “moonshot,” naming the project after America’s first astronauts, the Mercury 7. Commissioner Watson said the project seeks to “deconstruct the traditional school system and build what Kansans believe best meets the needs of today’s students.”

To be considered for the Kansans Can School Redesign project, districts had to agree to redesign one elementary and one secondary school. They also had to have approval of their local school board, faculty support with a vote of 80 percent, and support from teacher professional organizations. The districts had to be willing to launch a new school redesign in the 2018-2019 school year and serve as a demonstration site for other districts in Kansas to study, learn from and visit.

KASB has specifically endorsed and pledged resources to this project, along with the Kansas Board of Regents, United School Administrators of Kansas, the Kansas National Education Association, the Jayhawk Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts of Kansas Heartland and 4-H Youth Development.

The power of this project is not simply the impact on seven districts, but on all districts. The progress of the redesign effort must be shared quickly and openly so all the state’s 286 school districts can learn from its successes and failures and work to scale the project’s innovations to a statewide level.

Stakeholder and community education and commitment

KASB believes achieving the goals of this plan will require a commitment far beyond the State Board and Kansas Department of Education. Sustained efforts must be made to engage the community of each school district.

Local boards of education will play a critical role in implementing changes to improve student success. They must understand and explain the new vision, adapt and enhance state goals to the unique needs of their community, appropriately allocate resources to achieve those goals, and set accountability standards for students and employees.

Educators will have to implement these changes at the classroom, building and district level. They will need to adopt innovative ways of teaching and operating schools to help students who have not been as successful, while continuing to provide what works for students who are already reaching high standards.

Students will have to be engaged in learning and begin an earlier focus on a plan of study for life after high school. Parents will need to understand why schools will look different in some ways, and be actively involved in their student's learning plan and the school community through site councils, parent organizations and programs.

Improving educational outcomes can't be achieved by schools alone. Businesses and employers must help define needed skills and partner with schools for internships, job shadowing and support. Local governments must integrate schools into broader community development plans. Helping more students succeed will require additional support of social services. Colleges and universities must work with schools to help students better transition from high school to postsecondary programs and other training opportunities.

Under the state constitution, the State Board is responsible for general supervision of public schools, including accreditation. The legislature is responsible for suitable provision of finance, including requirements for budgets and spending. Both bodies must support a consistent educational vision at the state level, while giving local districts the flexibility to achieving that vision. They must also ensure all districts can achieve the goals, considering the significant difference in local student needs, resources, and population.

Conclusion

KASB looks forward to working with the State Board and Department, and all other stakeholders, in developing comprehensive strategies to truly accomplish the goals set forth in this consolidated plan for federal programs.