KANSAS STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NEWS RELEASE

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State assessments: Math scores rebound to near prepandemic levels; English scores decline

Kansas' 2022 NAEP results follow national trend

TOPEKA — Kansas state assessment results for math have rebounded to near prepandemic performance levels while English language arts have not, Kansas Commissioner of Education Dr. Randy Watson shared with the Kansas State Board of Education earlier this month.

Watson presents an annual report to the State Board every October during its regular meeting in Topeka.

The Kansas assessment student performances are scored using four levels:

- A student at Level 1 shows a limited ability to understand and use the skills and knowledge needed for postsecondary readiness.
- A student at Level 2 shows a basic ability to understand and use the skills and knowledge needed for postsecondary readiness.
- A student at Level 3 shows an effective ability to understand and use the skills and knowledge needed for postsecondary readiness.
- A student at Level 4 shows an excellent ability to understand and use the skills and knowledge needed for postsecondary readiness.

Kansas leads the world in the success of each student.

Each year, students in grades third through eighth and 10th are assessed in English language arts and math.

In 2022, 7.57% of students assessed in ELA scored at a Level 4, compared to 8.07% percent in 2021. In 2022, 33.94% of students assessed in ELA scored at a Level 1, compared to 30.3% of students in 2021. In 2019, 8.72% of Kansas students scored at a Level 4 and 29.45% scored at a Level 1.

In 2022, 8.66% of students tested in math scored at a Level 4. In 2021, 7.82% of students tested in math scored at a Level 4. In 2022, 34.19% of Kanas students scored at a Level 1, compared to 34.35% of students in 2021. In 2019, 9.39% of students scored at a Level 4, and 28.29% scored at a Level 1.

The Kansas State Department of Education now has enough longitudinal data to correlate Kansas assessment performance levels to graduation rates, postsecondary effectiveness and mean ACT scores (rounded up).

This data emphasizes that Kansas students who have a performance level of 2 on Kansas assessments aren't failing, Watson told the board. However, there are still too many students in the Level 1 performance area.

"We need to move more students out of Level 1," Watson said. "However, students in Level 2 are not failing. We have empirical evidence that shows they aren't. Anyone perpetuating the false narrative that Level 2 is failing needs to cease immediately."

KSDE staff members were able to take assessment data from 10th graders in 2017 – who graduated in 2019 – and correlate it with graduation, postsecondary effectiveness

rates and mean ACT scores (rounded up). Next, for greater accuracy, the four performance levels were separated into Level 1 (Bottom); Level 1 (Top); Level 2 (Bottom); Level 2 (Top); Level 3 (Bottom); Level 3 (Top); Level 4 (Bottom); and Level 4 (Top).

There were about 35,000 students involved in the new data.

Data shows that students who scored in the Level 2 (Top) category in ELA had a 94% graduation rate, and students who scored in the Level 2 (Top) category in math had a 92% graduation rate. Those who scored in the Level 2 (Top) category in ELA had an ACT mean score of 20.8, and those who scored in Level 2 (Top) in math had an ACT mean score of 21.5. In Kansas, the average composite ACT score is 19.8.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation's Report Card, shows that the 2022 Kansas public average scale scores in math and reading for fourth and eighth grades showed some decline but remained mostly flat, which follows the national trend.

In 2022, the National Center for Education Statistics administered the NAEP math and reading assessments to fourth and eighth graders in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Department of Defense Education Activity schools, Puerto Rico (math only) and in 26 urban districts. Results are for public schools only.

Nationwide, about 224,400 fourth graders from 5,780 schools and 222,200 eighth graders from about 5,190 schools participated in the 2022 math and reading assessments. In Kansas, about 7,300 fourth and eighth graders participated in the 2022 NAEP math and reading assessments.

While there are many factors that could have impacted student assessment performance in some way, there isn't one definitive answer. However, the COVID-19 pandemic did impact student success, Watson said.

Fourth grade students have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic for three out of their five years in school. It has been three years since NAEP was last administered as students weren't able to be tested in 2021 because of the pandemic, so it isn't known if the decrease would have been greater in 2021 and 2022 scores actually reflect a rebound. And although Kansas school buildings reopened in August 2020 ahead of other states, the disruptions caused by the pandemic (quarantines and staff and student illness) were extensive.

Chronic absenteeism also increased – from 13.9% in 2020 to 25.7% in 2022. Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% or greater of the total number of days enrolled during the school year. It includes both excused, unexcused, out-of-school suspensions and in-school suspensions that last more than one-half of the school day.

Children who are chronically absent in preschool, kindergarten and first grade are much less likely to read at grade level by the third grade, Watson said. Students who are chronically absent are missing critical instruction time and are at the greatest risk of falling behind and dropping out of school.

The Kansas State Department of Education and the Kansas State Board of Education have been putting supports in place during the past year to address student learning loss, including investing $15 million into early literacy training for elementary teachers; implementing the FastBridge initiative to provide a screening tool for identifying students who are struggling in reading and math; and partnering on the development of a math proficiency project that will provide training for educators.

Watson told State Board of Education members there also are steps that school systems can do to help the state reach its vision for education – Kansas leads the world in the success of each student.

At the pre-K through elementary school level, systems can:

- Lower chronic absenteeism immediately.
- Move students academically out of Level 1.
- Help students develop self-regulation skills.

At the middle school level, systems can:

- Lower chronic absenteeism immediately.
- Move students academically out of Level 1.
- Help students develop perseverance skills.
- Raise the level of rigor and have high expectations for all students.

At the high school level, systems can:

- Lower chronic absenteeism immediately.
- Move students academically out of Level 1.
- Help students develop a robust Individual Plan of Study (IPS).
- Raise the level of rigor and have high expectations for all students.

“What we see here is consistent with what we were told when we did the cut scores,” said Jim Porter, chair of the State Board of Education. “It is proof that kids below Level 3 are successful, and it reemphasizes the point that we should not be letting others … control the message.”

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