

Kansas Families for Education

Statement on State Assessment Results for Kansas Schools

September 11, 2009

The results of the state assessment tests for the 2008-09 school year, released on Sept. 10, will almost certainly become a source for political grandstanding. Like far too much politicking these days, unfortunately, we can expect much of it to be misleading at best, downright dishonest at worst.

In this environment, we must study closely and critically the statements of those who continually seek to sacrifice our children and our schools on the altar of a failed ideology that claims that tax cuts are a magic elixir that can solve any problem.

Is it true that the number of Kansas schools and districts meeting federal achievement targets declined from the year before? Yes.

But beware statements that this is somehow “proof” that there is no relation between school funding and student achievement. Such statements belie the facts.

First and foremost, **student achievement continued to improve last year**, as it has every year since the infusion of additional financial support driven by the Supreme Court ruling in the *Montoy* case. Student achievement increased among almost all student groups, according to official data from the state department of education.

So, why did the number of schools and districts meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets go down? **Because the target was raised**. The reading target increased from 71.9 proficient to 76.6 percent, an almost 7 percent jump. The math target jumped almost 10 percent, from 63.2 percent to 69.3 percent. **The *Montoy* funding increases made, and continue to make, a significant positive impact on student achievement**, and no amount of political spin can deny that fact.

Another fact that the right-wing spinmasters, and Americans for Prosperity and the Flint Hills Policy Center will try, but fail, to refute: **There is a direct, proven relationship between school funding and academic performance**. Following the July 2006 state Supreme Court ruling, the legislature boosted school funding by \$755 million for the 2005-06 through 2008-09 school years. The percentage of the state’s public schools meeting the AYP standard rose from 84 percent in 2005-06 to 89 percent in 2006-07 to 90 percent in 2007-08. The achievement gap for targeted populations -- students with disabilities, bilingual, and free lunch – narrowed significantly. An official study of the impact by the legislature’s professional auditors, the Legislative Post Audit Division, found that “A 1.0% increase in district performance was associated with a 0.83% increase in spending - almost a one-to-one relationship. This means that all other things being equal, districts that spend more had better student performance.... we can be more than 99% confident there is a relationship between spending and outcomes.”

Remember: *achievement continued to increase this past year*. It just didn't increase as fast as the targets did.

What can we look forward to next year and the years that follow? **Tragedy**. The legislature and Governor cut state school funding by \$215 per pupil for the 2009/2010 school year. Because of those cuts, 3,700 positions have been eliminated from schools throughout the state.

We fully expect AYP rates to continue to fall next year and beyond because of the impact of these cuts. Those aren't just numbers on a bureaucrat's spreadsheet; they represent the crushed dreams and unrealized potential of thousands of children who have had their futures robbed from them by politicians with an ideological axe to grind.

Many of the schools and districts failed to meet AYP targets this past year because of lower performance by targeted sub-groups within the student body. These subgroups are composed of children with significant disadvantages such as poverty or physical or mental disabilities. It was these very same subgroups that suffered the greatest impact of the budget cuts.

Many districts tried to preserve classroom teaching positions to keep class sizes manageable. As a result, the personnel and program cuts fell heavily on areas such as paraprofessionals, social workers and on before- and after-school and summer programs – all of which are designed to boost achievement among these subgroups.

A small number of as little as 30 students in a sub group can cause an entire school to fail AYP. So we can expect the bottom to fall out of AYP compliance in future years as we raise the bar and decrease the financial support.. And every indication is that the politicians will seek even more school budget cuts, instead of restoring the opportunities they have so cruelly taken away from our children.

Conservatives will clamor that private industry has to do more with less in a recession, so why shouldn't public schools be expected to do the same?

Here's why: No private business in this state – Thank God – employs 8-year-olds and demands that they “do more with less.” And that's the age of the youngest children who take these assessment tests – third grade students.

The state government, not our schools have failed these children. With their scorched-earth budget-slashing policies and refusal to even consider reversing some of their special-interest tax break giveaways (like the special exemption granted to a *Missouri-based animal shelter*) the politicians robbed these children of the opportunity to realize their full potential.

They should be ashamed.