

# KERA UPDATE

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## CATS' Education Standards — Are They Good Enough?

The Achilles heel with Kentucky's new education assessment program, called the Commonwealth Assessment and Testing System, or CATS, lies in the underlying education standards. By law, CATS must use existing Kentucky standards, called the *Core Content for Assessment*, that date to 1997 and the now defunct KIRIS test. Thus, an unfortunate legacy of mediocrity will transfer from KIRIS to CATS.

*Core Content* never went through the Kentucky Legislature's administrative regulations review process and was never approved by the Kentucky State School Board, either. Instead, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) promulgated *Core Content* entirely on its own. As a result, no-one outside KDE's inner circles had a chance to participate in the development of *Core Content*. With that limited input, the resulting *Core Content* was almost certain to be sub-standard, which recent reports confirm.

By July of 1998, three major evaluations of state education standards were available. The newest is a by-subject set of reports set from the Thomas B. Fordham

Foundation. These join the American Federation of Teachers' *Making Standards Matter 1997* and a report from the publishers of *Education Week* newspaper called *Quality Counts 1998*.

None of these recent reports gives Kentucky's standards particularly high grades, and, taken together, it is very apparent that *Core Content* is seriously deficient when compared to the best state standards. For example, I did a simple averaging of the grades in these reports (calling AFT's "Meets Criterion" a B, "Borderline" a D+, and "Does Not Meet Criterion" an F). Here's how that looks:

**Math:** Scores range from a B- (the average of the *Quality Counts* grades) to a D. Make it a **C-** (at best).

**English:** We get an "F" equivalent from AFT and a D+, at best, from *Quality Counts*. Generously, I'd make that a **D-**.

**Science:** One B, one F. Overall, this is about a **C-** (at best).

**Social Studies/Related Sub-Areas:** F's

### For the full reports:

AFT: Phone 202-879-4400  
Web Site: <http://www.aft.org>

Fordham: Phone 888-TBF-7474  
Web Site: <http://www.edexcellence.net>

Education Week: Phone 301-280-3100  
Web Site: <http://www.edweek.org>

for two critical sub-areas from Fordham, and a D+ from AFT. Overall, this is about a **D-**.

Note: KDE apparently thought *Core Content* was relevant to reviews of geography, but not history, standards. KDE never sent *Core Content* to Fordham's history reviewer!

So, this is the quality of the foundation of CATS. Either KDE and its contractor will have to ignore the law, or our kids are **guaranteed** to get a test based on some of the most inadequate education standards in the country. Because just a few months remain to get CATS going for 1999 testing, isn't it time to call a halt, catch our breath, and start this whole process over?

### Ratings for Kentucky's Education Standards

	Fordham Reviews	American Federation of Teachers <i>Making Standards Matter 1997</i>	Education Week's <i>Quality Counts '98</i>	Approximate Average Grade
<b>Math</b>	D	Borderline Acceptable	Rigor B Clear & Specific C	<b>C-</b>
<b>English</b>		Does Not Meet AFT Criterion (for even borderline acceptability)	Rigor C- Clear & Specific D	
<b>Science</b>	F	Meets AFT Criterion		<b>C-</b>
<b>Soc. Studies</b>		Borderline Acceptable		<b>D-</b>
<b>History</b>	F			
<b>Geography</b>	F			