

KERA UPDATE

October 2000

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No Education Trends With the New CATS? Really? Year 2000 Update

In 1998, the Kentucky legislature passed House Bill (HB) 53. This halted the KIRIS assessment and launched a new program called CATS. HB 53 also required the 1999 and 2000 CATS assessments to use a baseline from components of KIRIS that were retained under CATS. The intent: maintain academic trend reports during the change from KIRIS to CATS. But, when the first CATS scores came out in 1999, KDE said the new test was so different that it was inappropriate to compare results to the old KIRIS. Trends were gone.

Now, let's put this in perspective. After the 1996 KIRIS was administered, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) discovered the performance events were unusable. KDE merely deleted them and recalculated scores. KDE did the same when Math Portfolios died in 1997 and when the grades tested by KIRIS changed. Despite many major changes, KDE happily published KIRIS scores and trends all the way from 1992 through 1998.

It's true that parts of CATS are different; but, the vast majority like writing portfolios, multiple choice questions, and open response questions were used previously. The basic scoring divisions of Novice, Apprentice, Proficient, and Distinguished remain, too. So, a trend

could be reported. But, KDE didn't do that. Never mind KDE's long history of making major changes while continuously reporting scores. This time, our trend line was gone.

Never the less, CATS did keep the same two top performance levels used in KIRIS (Proficient and Distinguished). So, it is possible to get an idea of how Kentucky education is trending by determining the percentage of kids at each of these top two performance levels and comparing to previous years.

When that is done, guess what — the trend does not look good.

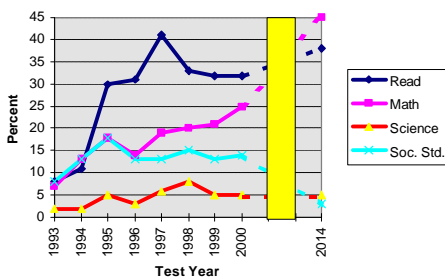
In elementary schools, the percentage of kids proficient or better in the 2000 testing was lower for the key subjects of reading, science and social studies compared to earlier years. Only math improved. Middle schools had a similar trend — down from previous highs in all areas but math. High schools offer a little good news, with somewhat increased performance in reading, math, science and social studies; but, in none of these high school subjects were more than 34 percent of the students scored proficient or better.

By the way, using proficiency trends from 1995 to 2000, it is possible to project the number of students who will be proficient or better in the target year of 2014. In 2014 it appears that well under half our elementary students will be proficient in reading and math. **Only one in twenty elementary students will be proficient in science and social studies!** *Except for math, middle schoolers will do far worse!* In high schools most kids may be proficient in reading, but less than 20 percent will make it in science, and not much more than half will be proficient in math and social studies.

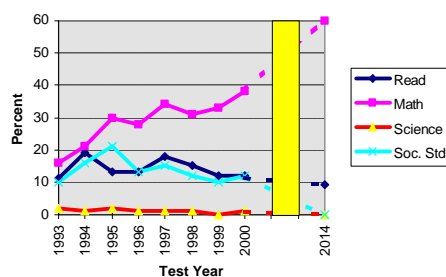
Based on trends in KIRIS/CATS proficiency between 1995 and 2000, Kentucky will not come close to meeting its education goals in 2014.

It's been 10 years since KERA started. That puts us almost half-way to 2014, the CATS proficiency target year. So, this unsettling trend data, especially when coupled with continued flat scores on college entrance tests, rising retentions, high dropout rates, and so forth, is chilling news. **The question now becomes, how long can Kentucky afford to ignore mounting evidence that education progress, even judged by Kentucky's own assessment, is way below target?**

Percent of Students Proficient or Better, Elementary Schools, Projected to 2014



Percent of Students Proficient or Better, Middle Schools, Projected to 2014



Percent of Students Proficient or Better, High Schools, Projected to 2014

