

KERA UPDATE

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Jefferson County 1995 and 1996 CAT-5 and KIRIS Testing Results Raise

Jefferson County School District's CAT-5 test results raise new questions about the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS).

The CAT-5 is a nationally normed, standardized achievement test. Proponents point out CAT-5 allows parents to compare results to children from other states, something unavailable with KIRIS. CAT-5 supporters also feel these tests provide a good picture of whether a child has mastered basic skills like reading, spelling, addition, multiplication, and work with fractions.

Proponents of KIRIS generally criticize tests like the CAT-5. They believe CAT-5, which is a multiple choice test, cannot evaluate reasoning and "higher order thinking skills." KIRIS' supporters believe CAT-5 primarily tests for memorized facts.

Whether the KIRIS faction or the CAT-5 supporters are correct is a hotly debated topic at present. But, several things are certain: Jefferson County Schools' performance on these two tests varied dramatically during the past two years; and, even compared to itself, the KIRIS results do look questionable.

For example, a very impressive 43.2% of Jefferson County elementary schools were rated in "Rewards" when the second KIRIS two-year evaluation period ended in 1996. But, looking at the latest one-year change in KIRIS shows Jefferson elementary schools had the biggest drop in average scores, a 4.8 point drop compared to drops of 4.5 points for middle schools and just 1.1 points for high schools. Obviously, if the one year changes in scores were used to develop the KIRIS

ratings, Jefferson high schools would look stronger than the elementary schools.

If CAT-5 is used instead of KIRIS, a different picture emerges. Middle schools posted the best performance from 1995 to 1996 on CAT-5. In fact, only Jefferson middle schools improved on CAT-5. But, middle schools were rated lowest in KIRIS with fully 50% of Jefferson middle schools rated in "Decline" or worse during the two-year KIRIS cycle. Did these schools really perform that badly compared to the elementary and high schools? CAT-5 indicates the answer is no.

Certainly, Jefferson test results for 1995 and 1996 raise an issue whether actual KIRIS ratings are fair and accurate. Is CAT-5 a better measure? Is KIRIS reliable? Should we try using both types of tests in the Kentucky assessment program? These and other questions beg for answers. For now, though, KIRIS results look very questionable, even judging the test against itself.

Highlights of KIRIS and CAT-5 Results in Jefferson County

	Elementary Sch.	Middle Schools	High Schools
Schools with KIRIS and CAT Scores	88	24	21
Jefferson County Schools' Second Biennium KIRIS Results (1994 to 1996)(#/%)			
Schools Rated <i>Improving or More</i>	84 95.5%	12 50%	17 81%
Schools Rated in <i>Decline or Crisis</i>	4 4.5%	12 50%	4 19%
Jefferson County Schools' KIRIS Results, 1995 to 1996 (Number/%)			
Schools With Higher/ Same KIRIS Scores	15 17%	1 4.2%	6 28.6%
Schools With Lower KIRIS Scores	73 83%	23 95.8%	15 71.4%
Average Change in KIRIS Scores	-4.8	-4.5	-1.1
Jefferson County Schools' CAT-5 Results, 1995 to 1996 (Number/%)			
Schools With Higher/ Same CAT-5 Scores	39 44.3%	15 62.5%	10 47.6%
Schools With Lower CAT-5 Scores	49 55.7%	9 37.5%	11 52.4%
Average Change in CAT-5 Scores	-1.0	+0.2	-1.2
Correlation of the One Year Average Change in KIRIS and CAT-5, 1995 to 1996 (Expected Value, About +0.8 or Higher, If Both Tests Check Valid Skills)			
NOTE: Scale of Correlation: -1 to +1	.0000442	0.339	0.0581