

Proposal to Keep the Senior Year Transitional Program in the Kentucky Public Education System

Sent to Commissioner Stephen Pruitt as Recommended by Associate Commissioner for Assessment and Accountability Rhonda Sims

June 26, 2017

I. Overview. In a May 24 email to superintendents concerning 2017-18 testing, Commissioner Pruitt wrote:

KYOTE reading, writing and mathematics will continue to be available through Northern Kentucky University and the University of Kentucky for college placement, dual credit qualifications and other student level purposes. The use of KYOTE in the new accountability proposal has been under discussion. It is not currently listed as a measure for demonstrating academic readiness under Transition Readiness.

One purpose of this paper is to advocate for including KYOTE as a measure for demonstrating Academic Readiness under Transition Readiness. More specifically, KYOTE could be included under the first of five indicators of Academic Readiness:

➤ Benchmarks on a college admissions exam

This could be done explicitly by including KYOTE as part of this indicator or implicitly by informing the high schools about this option.

High schools that help students who fail to make benchmark on the ACT in their junior year become college ready in their senior year by passing the appropriate KYOTE exams deserve to be rewarded through the accountability system. These high schools have made a focused and intentional effort through senior year transitional courses to help struggling students become college ready. These students can then enter college confident that they can take credit-bearing courses without need of remediation at any public college or university in the state.

The primary purpose of this paper is to advocate for keeping Kentucky's nationally unique and highly successful senior year transitional program in the Kentucky public education system. In the short term, this means keeping the current program (using KYOTE testing) as an **option** in the new accountability system so that students who fail to make benchmark on the ACT in their junior year have the **opportunity** to become college ready **and** academic ready in their senior year.

The new accountability system is much richer than the Unbridled Learning system and offers students many more opportunities to achieve Academic Readiness in particular and Transition Readiness in general. Thus the number of students involved in the senior year transitional program would decrease significantly, but

students would at least have an **opportunity** to choose this program as one of many possible options. Students who **choose** this program are more likely to succeed than those who are more or less **forced** to participate. This will make an already successful program even more successful.

The program does not depend on a single college placement testing system. In the long term, one or more such systems could be used to support the program. ACT Compass, for example, was used along with KYOTE to support the program until last year when ACT closed it down. Accuplacer from the College Board is another option.

The many advantages of keeping the senior year transitional program are discussed in more detail below.

II. Opportunity and Access. Opportunity and access is one of five performance categories in the new accountability system and is defined as “*equitable availability to standards, content, programs, quality educators and educational experiences that support and lead to student success.*” The senior year transitional program fits this description perfectly.

Every high school in the state offers transitional courses for seniors who fail to make benchmark on the ACT. High school teachers have been teaching these courses and honing their skills and strategies for seven years in order to get increasingly larger numbers of their students college ready. The KDE has led the development of curriculum for these courses. The results can be found on the KDE website at

<http://education.ky.gov/educational/int/hscf/Pages/HSTransitionalIntervention.aspx>

KYOTE offers free online testing in mathematics, reading and writing. KYOTE offers a college readiness mathematics placement exam, college algebra placement exam and a calculus placement exam together with extensive practice exams for each of these placement exams. A related website, KYOTE at NKU, <https://kyote.nku.edu>, offers a free online textbook, *Transition to College Mathematics*, that is closely aligned to KYOTE mathematics standards and is used extensively throughout the state. A new, more robust reading placement exam and reading practice exam will be available this fall.

The KYOTE writing exam is unique. It is an online essay written in response to a prompt and is scored based on a scoring rubric. Two or possibly three certified scorers from outside the student’s district score each student essay. (A third scorer is necessary if the first two disagree on whether the essay represents college ready writing.) Scorers are high school English teachers who become certified by passing an online scoring exam based on the rubric. Becoming a certified scorer is an excellent professional development opportunity for these teachers. To date, there are nearly 500 certified scorers in Kentucky high schools.

All educational institutions in the state, including all public and private high schools, colleges and universities, have full and free **access** to all KYOTE resources.

The senior year transitional program unquestionably leads to **student success**. It has been instrumental in increasing the college or career readiness rate for Kentucky high school graduates from 34 percent in 2010 to 68.5 percent in 2016 and in increasing the college readiness rate of recent Kentucky high school graduates entering college from 52.0 percent in 2010 to 70.5 percent in 2014.

Data from the 2013 graduating class show that college ready students are much more likely to be successful in college than those who are not college ready. The college ready students in this class had a mean GPA of 2.6 in their freshman year, completed an average of 22 credit hours, and had an 85 percent retention rate into a second year, whereas those not college ready had a mean GPA of 1.7, completed an average of 11 credit hours, and had a 65 percent retention rate. Former Commissioner Holliday called this *“a great validation that our assessments and college-readiness benchmarks are strong predictors of postsecondary success.”*

III. The Plight of the Sixty Percent. Without a senior year transitional program, the approximately 60 percent of high school juniors who fail to make benchmark on the ACT would have a difficult time achieving Academic Readiness. One option would be for them to retake the ACT at their own expense without any instructional support from the K-12 system. This is an equity issue that favors students from more affluent families who can afford the cost of the exam and the private tutoring that may be required. In addition, these students would need to take all four ACT exams even if they needed only one to achieve Academic Readiness. The senior year transitional program is a better and more equitable option for these students.

Another option would be to take advanced coursework for which they may not be prepared and for which something close to college readiness may be required as a prerequisite. Because of state scholarships for dual credit courses and the difficulty of AP, IB and Cambridge coursework with a uniformly graded final exam, their most likely choice would be two general education dual credit courses in which they would need to earn a B or better. Unfortunately, many of these students would not meet the prerequisites for these courses. NKU, for example, requires an ACT composite of 20 and a 3.0 GPA, and other universities and colleges have similar prerequisites. The senior year transitional program would be a better option for some of these students.

Elimination of the senior year transitional program would result in a sharper divide between two groups of high school seniors. The first group is the approximately 40 percent of seniors who make benchmark on the ACT as juniors. These students would be both academic ready and college ready, and would likely be viewed as “college material.” The second group is the approximately 60 percent of seniors who do *not* make benchmark on the ACT as juniors. These students would be neither academic ready nor college ready, and would likely, and unfortunately, be

viewed as “not college material.” They would probably be strongly encouraged to achieve either Technical Readiness or Military Readiness.

This divide and its negative impact on career and technical education were discussed in detail at the April 11 KBE work session. The prevailing stereotype is that career and technical education is for students who do not succeed academically. This stereotype is of great concern to KBE members as it should be.

The senior year transitional program would be useful in helping to address this problem because it would provide additional ways for students to become college ready and lessen the sharp divide between these two groups of high school seniors.

IV. Workforce Development. The Kentucky Chamber of Commerce participated in the development of the new accountability system and supplied an Essential Skills for Success document for consideration. Many of these essential skills were translated into measurable objectives (“showing up for work” translated to “attendance”) that *all* students must meet to achieve Transition Readiness. The academic skills (listed below) in the Essential Skills document, although not translated into measurable objectives for all students, are essentially the same as the academic readiness skills required to make benchmark on ACT or KYOTE exams. Employers identified these academic skills as “critical to workplace success.”

Exhibits knowledge and the ability to apply it in:

- Reading
- Writing
- Mathematics
- Science & Technology (depending on position)

There are many excellent career opportunities available for students who achieve Technical Readiness in the new accountability system. The Kentucky Chamber of Commerce believes students pursuing these careers should have the academic skills listed above. But these skills are even more important for those numerous careers that require a two-year or four-year college degree.

The senior year transitional program will assist students interested in pursuing these careers to meet workplace expectations for success and, at the same time, assist them in becoming academic ready *and* college ready while still in high school. These students can begin working on their college degree by taking credit-bearing courses without need of remediation at any public college or university in the state.

V. Conclusion. The primary purpose of this paper has been to make the case for keeping the senior year transitional program in the Kentucky public education system. It is undeniably true that this program has been extraordinarily successful in achieving the outcomes for which it was designed. But accountability systems are blunt instruments that have unintended consequences. The Unbridled Learning system more or less *forced* students to take senior year transitional courses in

which they were **not** interested and that, in turn, made it difficult for them to take courses in which they were interested. The fault is not in the program, but its implementation.

The new accountability system provides many more options and opportunities for students. Students will hopefully take senior year transitional courses only if they **choose** to do so. It would be a mistake, however, to **deny** them this **opportunity** by eliminating the program.

Continuing the senior year transitional program as advocated would support and strengthen the new accountability system. Many hundreds of Kentucky students would benefit by becoming academic ready and college ready, and by starting their college careers able to take credit-bearing college courses without need of remediation.

About the Author

Steve Newman is a mathematics professor at Northern Kentucky University who has focused on college readiness issues for over two decades. He has written numerous white papers on these issues and served on many statewide college readiness committees. He is the director of the Kentucky Early Mathematics Testing Program (KEMTP) begun in 2000. He was a member of the national Content Expert/Employer Panel that developed the American Diploma Project benchmarks in mathematics in 2003. He is a founder and a leader of the Kentucky Online Testing (KYOTE) college placement testing and college readiness program that grew out of the KEMTP beginning in 2006. He is lead author of a free online textbook *Transition to College Mathematics* that is aligned with the KYOTE mathematics placement exams and used in high schools throughout the commonwealth. He currently serves as KYOTE contact person for the Kentucky Department of Education along with his long-time colleague Professor Paul Eakin at the University of Kentucky.

Notes

Professor Newman is solely responsible for the opinions expressed in this paper. He receives no financial compensation for his work on the KYOTE program.

Contact Information

Steve Newman
Professor of Mathematics
Department of Mathematics and Statistics
Northern Kentucky University
Highland Heights, KY 41099
(859) 572-5332
newman@nku.edu