



Keeping Our Education System and Our Country Strong

Why Kentucky's education standards and aligned assessments
are crucial for national security

Acknowledgements

Council for a Strong America is a national, bipartisan nonprofit that unites five organizations comprised of law enforcement leaders, retired admirals and generals, business executives, pastors, and prominent coaches and athletes who promote solutions that ensure our next generation of Americans will be citizen-ready.

Mission: Readiness

Retired admirals and generals strengthening national security by ensuring kids stay in school, stay fit, and stay out of trouble

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year-olds are ineligible
for military service

While you do not often hear the words “national security” and “the Kentucky Academic Standards” in the same sentence, there are a couple of key reasons why they are clearly linked. First, retired military leaders know the standards and aligned assessments are vital for ensuring we have well-educated individuals who are prepared to defend our nation. Second, military families depend on consistent standards for students who typically attend schools in many different districts during their K-12 years.

Maintaining high standards and implementing aligned assessments will also address military recruiting challenges. Although Kentuckians have a proud history of serving in our military, currently an estimated **73 percent of the state's 17-to 24-year-olds are ineligible for military service**.¹ Many cannot qualify as a result of educational deficits. One study of high

“ Maintaining rigorous and consistent academic standards will ensure that students will be better prepared for postsecondary education, the civilian workforce, or the military, if they choose to serve.



Major General (Ret.)
Michael Davidson, U.S. Army

school graduates who tried to join the Army found that, in Kentucky, **23 percent could not pass the military entrance exam that tests mathematics, literacy, and critical thinking skills.**²

For these reasons and more, the Kentucky Academic Standards and aligned assessments are critical components of an educational experience that prepares young people to meet the demands of the 21st century economy and military.

Failure to solve our educational deficits will put our economy as well as our national security at stake.

Young adults lack the education the military needs

The Department of Defense reports that 71 percent of young Americans are currently unable to join the military, including 73 percent in Kentucky.³ This is due in part to the epidemic of childhood obesity and

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crime or substance abuse problems, along with the fact that 12 percent of young people in Kentucky do not graduate from high school on time.⁴

Even among high school graduates, one study found that 23 percent of Army applicants in Kentucky could not pass the military's entrance exam to qualify.⁵ One reason young adults are not passing? A DoD analysis found that 38 percent of male students and 21 percent of female students are averaging grades of C or lower in high school.⁶

Kentucky's Academic Standards and Aligned Assessments

Kentucky's Academic Standards (KAS) establish the skills that children must achieve at each grade level, but they do not tell teachers how to teach, nor do they specify a curriculum; these important decisions remain under teacher or local control.⁷

State leaders, working through the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, developed the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English language arts and mathematics. Most states around the country then reviewed them according to their own processes and incorporated them into their own standards. In 2010, Kentucky adopted the CCSS by integrating them into their Kentucky Academic Standards (KAS). Implementation started in the 2011-12 school year.⁸ Assessments aligned to the standards have also been adopted by many states, including Kentucky.

In addition to essential academic content, **Kentucky's Academic Standards focus on critical thinking, complex problem solving and effective communication**—key skills needed in today's military and many other careers.

Rigorous academic standards and aligned assessments can strengthen educational outcomes

Helping schools improve and more students succeed

There has been a lot of confusion about student achievement levels because, prior to the development of the Common Core, each state developed its own standards and assessments. For example, **in 2015, only 40 percent of Kentucky's fourth graders scored at or above proficient in both math and reading** on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) or Nation's Report Card, compared to 33 and 52 percent on the state test, for math and reading, respectively.⁹

Maintaining Kentucky's Academic Standards and continuing aligned assessments are crucial to improving our education system.

Results from Massachusetts, ranked first in the nation on the Nation's Report Card, demonstrate the importance of rigorous academic standards and aligned assessments. In 1993, Massachusetts passed standards-based education reform and created the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) to accurately measure progress toward achieving those new educational standards. Results are reported for individual students, allowing teachers and parents to see how each child is faring, and allowing schools and districts to learn from each other which approaches are producing the best results. Experts credit the combination of rigorous standards and aligned assessment for the best-in-the-nation results Massachusetts achieved in recent years.¹⁰

This matches our experience in the military, and it is standard operating procedure among many successful businesses across America.



Our military has become the strongest fighting force in history in part by using accurate data to continually improve our operations.

Far from crushing innovation, common rules and ways to measure results help foster competition. Each school, district, or state can see where its problems are, discover who is more successful, and continually strive to learn new ways to do better. That is how America's schools will become stronger.

Good for military children

After careful consideration, DoD decided to adopt the Common Core for schools they run on military installations (Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) schools) "to make it easier for its students when they relocate to other military or public schools."¹¹ The adoption of new standards first began in the 2015-2016 school year, in the form of new math standards for kindergarten through fifth grade. For the current school year (2016-2017), DODEA implemented new College and Career Readiness Standards for sixth through 12th grade.¹²



Kentucky is seeing results from its standards and assessments

To have an impact on student outcomes, there must be accountability. Standards must be accompanied by assessments aligned to the standards, and a system for reporting results so everyone will know how students are really faring across schools, districts, and states and what approaches are delivering the best results.

Since the adoption of the Kentucky Academic Standards, in 2010, there have been reports of student progress in Kentucky schools. An analysis conducted by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) followed three-cohorts of Kentucky students from 8th through 11th grade who started high school with similar assessment scores.¹³ AIR looked at the students' ACT scores—used to measure college-readiness and a determining factor in college admission.¹⁴ **They found that cohorts that took the ACT one year and two years after the Common Core was implemented outperformed comparable students.**¹⁵ Overall, students who were exposed to the Common Core standards “made faster progress in learning than students who were not exposed to the standards.”¹⁶

Kentucky has seen a steady increase in high school graduates' college and career readiness scores: The current rate is 69 percent, up 22 percentage points from 47 percent in 2012, according to data from the Kentucky Department of Education.¹⁷ **In the 2015-2016 school year, Kentucky's fifth and sixth grade students improved by six and seven percentage points in math since the prior school year, and also improved two to nearly three percentage points in English language arts, respectively.**¹⁸ Kentucky also saw slight improvements for fourth graders in reading and math on the Nation's Report Card from 2011 to 2015, and a slight decline in eighth grade math. For example, the percentage of fourth grade students proficient in reading rose from 35 percent in 2011 to 40 percent in 2015, while the percentage of eighth graders proficient went from 31 percent to 28 percent.¹⁹

Kentucky is home to the 11th largest active military population in the U.S. and has an estimated 25,000 school-aged children whose active duty military parents are temporarily assigned to facilities in the state.²⁰ Military families move as often as every year and military children attend an average of six to nine different schools during their K-12 school careers.²¹ Differences in standards and assessments can negatively impact the academic experiences of students who move frequently. For example, they might learn algebra for two years in different schools but never learn geometry. Military parents express concern about having to move to states where rigorous common standards are not used because it is harder for their children to adjust.²²

Many of these children are also likely to follow in their parents' footsteps: Children of military veterans are far more likely, compared to the general public, to join the military.²³ Common standards also matter for other non-military families, who also move across state or county lines—more than 2.5 million children moved out of their home county in 2011.²⁴

Finally, the military is concerned about the quality of public schools in many communities where bases are located



because most (nearly 80 percent) children of military families attend schools off-base. Since many children of military families join the military, it is important to ensure states with large bases are making strong progress in improving education, especially in the nearby schools. This is often not the case, but rigorous, common standards and aligned assessments can help.

Conclusion

Kentucky's Academic Standards, along with aligned assessments, are the clearest way to demonstrate Kentucky's commitment to a world-class education and show measurable results.

Kentucky will be well-served by sticking with the Academic Standards and by retaining assessments aligned to those standards. Reverting to earlier standards cannot be an option when it comes to providing children with a quality education and preparing the next generation of Americans to contribute to our nation, including in the military if they choose to serve.

Kentucky High School Graduation Rate (2012-2013), State & County Data²⁵

KENTUCKY GRADUATION RATE: 88

County	Graduation rate	County	Graduation rate
ADAIR	93	GALLATIN	93
ALLEN	91	GARRARD	93
ANDERSON	96	GRANT	91
BALLARD	93	GRAVES	92
BARREN	86	GRAYSON	93
BATH	88	GREEN	98
BELL	88	GREENUP	93
BOONE	92	HANCOCK	98
BOURBON	92	HARDIN	90
BOYD	94	HARLAN	87
BOYLE	90	HARRISON	90
BRACKEN	96	HART	98
BREATHITT	88	HENDERSON	89
BRECKINRIDGE	91	HENRY	87
BULLITT	85	HICKMAN	N/A
BUTLER	93	HOPKINS	88
CALDWELL	93	JACKSON	88
CALLOWAY	94	JEFFERSON	77
CAMPBELL	92	JESSAMINE	81
CARLISLE	98	JOHNSON	96
CARROLL	88	KENTON	89
CARTER	97	KNOTT	88
CASEY	93	KNOX	88
CHRISTIAN	81	LARUE	98
CLARK	90	LAUREL	79
CLAY	83	LAWRENCE	98
CLINTON	83	LEE	88
CRITTENDEN	83	LESLIE	98
CUMBERLAND	98	LETCHER	92
DAVISS	91	LEWIS	98

County	Graduation rate	County	Graduation rate
EDMONSON	93	LINCOLN	90
ELLIOTT	88	LIVINGSTON	98
ESTILL	98	LOGAN	90
FAYETTE	84	LYON	98
FLEMING	93	MCCRACKEN	87
FLOYD	90	MCCREARY	93
FRANKLIN	84	MCLEAN	88
FULTON	N/A	MADISON	92
MAGOFFIN	93	POWELL	93
MARION	93	PULASKI	90
MARSHALL	92	ROBERTSON	N/A
MARTIN	93	ROCKCASTLE	92
MASON	93	ROWAN	92
MEADE	94	RUSSELL	89
MENIFEE	93	SCOTT	84
MERCER	97	SHELBY	85
METCALFE	88	SIMPSON	92
MONROE	98	SPENCER	93
MONTGOMERY	92	TAYLOR	99
MORGAN	88	TODD	93
MUHLENBERG	88	TRIGG	93
NELSON	86	TRIMBLE	78
NICHOLAS	93	UNION	88
OHIO	88	WARREN	92
OLDHAM	96	WASHINGTON	98
OWEN	88	WAYNE	88
OWSLEY	98	WEBSTER	83
PENDLETON	91	WHITLEY	92
PERRY	86	WOLFE	93
PIKE	91	WOODFORD	N/A

Endnotes

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