

KERA UPDATE

June 2001

About The Kentucky Education Reform Act

#55

A Term Like “Proficient” Should Mean Something

The Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) announced in early April that it was proposing new scoring standards for the Novice, Apprentice, Proficient and Distinguished grades (N/A/P/D) used in CATS (CATS is Kentucky’s new replacement for the failed KIRIS assessment of public schools). KBE’s April *Agenda Book* lists sample scoring results for the new standards. These show the percentages of students ranked in N/A/P/D when the new criteria are applied to completed CATS testing materials from the year 2000 test. The *Agenda Book* also shows N/A/P/D percentages from the 1998 KIRIS.

Strangely, the *Agenda Book* does not include the original year 2000 CATS results announced early last Fall. These were scored the old way, and this data is also available.

Using all of this data, I calculated the number of students rated proficient or better for both 1998 KIRIS and 2000 CATS. I then compared the results to those KDE got with the proposed new standard. Table 1 shows the results for elementary schools.

Something is clearly wrong here. Except for math, the new scoring standard causes incredible increases in proficiency. For example, rescoring inflates proficiency figures between actual CATS and rescored CATS by

- ?? 580% for 4th grade science,
- ?? 400% for 8th grade reading and
- ?? 700% for high school practical living

Averaged across the six subjects, the proficiency change from year 2000 actual reported CATS to the rescored CATS was:

- ?? Elementary schools — 23% more students classified as proficient,

- ?? Middle schools — 21% more students classified as proficient and
- ?? High schools — 8% more students classified as proficient

The new scoring standard also alters ranking of schools. Incredibly, middle schools now outperform high schools. Does this seem credible after all that KDE has said in the past about middle schools lagging elementary and high schools?

In addition, the new scoring standard is out of line with Kentucky’s performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (See Table 2).

Serious questions are raised as to how such an inflated system ever got to the point of being formally presented in the *Agenda Book* without any negative comments. KDE’s new scoring program needs a lot more work. It simply isn’t credible to suddenly declare nearly 100% more 4th graders are proficient readers. One of the scoring programs has to be wrong.

Which brings us to the title of this *Update*. What does the term “Proficient” really

mean? Shouldn’t the meaning be independent of any testing program? Most citizens would probably agree. But, because proficiency differences between the old and new CATS often grossly exceed 100%, and because KDE gave lots of assurance in the past that the old scoring was accurate, it appears the education establishment in Kentucky is not proficient at assessing proficiency. So, perhaps it is time to end this expensive program. For, regardless of KBE’s decision on scoring, CATS’ credibility is shot.

Table 2. NAEP Vs. New KY Proposal Students at or Above Proficient

School Level & Subject	NAEP	New KY Proposal
Elem. Reading	29%	57%
Elem. Math	17%	32%
Middle Reading	29%	51%
Middle Math	17%	26%

Table 1. Actual 1998 KIRIS and 2000 CATS Performance Levels Vs. Estimates from New Proposed CATS Standards Percent of Students Rated At or Above Proficient

Elementary Schools	1998 KIRIS	Year 2000 Actual CATS	New Program Estimate	Difference, KIRIS to New	Difference, CATS to New
Reading	33	32	57	24	25
Math	20	25	32	12	7
Science	8	6	35	27	29
Social St.	15	13	39	24	26
Arts/Hum	3	5	14	11	9
PracLiv/Voc	6	6	46	40	40
Averages	14	15	37	—	—
Average of Difference Across All Subjects				23	23