

KENTUCKY'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990 was one of the most sweeping education initiatives ever undertaken by any state. Being the most comprehensive education reform of its time, many things were changed. These changes included how schools were financed, how decisions were made and who made them, what kind of learning was expected from students, and what kind of performance was expected of teachers, administrators, and school boards. A critical aspect of Kentucky's educational reform is local control. The new public education system includes:

- providing equitable resources for all schools and districts
- providing extra resources to those districts and schools with many children who come to school with disadvantages
- setting high standards for performance of all students, teachers, schools and districts
- empowering local schools to make decisions that affect their own learning environments
- holding schools accountable for reaching new standards
- rewarding successful schools
- assisting unsuccessful schools

School-Based Decision Making

KERA changed how governance was handled through the introduction of School-Based Decision Making Councils (SBDM) by KRS 160.345. The SBDM initiative puts responsibility for making decisions in the hands of those most affected by them –principals, teachers and parents. While local school boards are still responsible for setting overall district policies, school councils empower parents, teachers and principals to make the decisions about what happens in their school buildings.¹⁵

Making these key players the decision makers ensures their interests and concerns are considered in the policy-making process. In Kentucky, school councils have the authority over each school's budget, staffing assignments, professional development, curriculum, instructional materials and techniques. Therefore, the school council has a unique role and opportunity in affecting the school's learning climate.

Comprehensive School/District Improvement Plans

The mechanism both schools and districts use to ensure students receive quality and equitable education is the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP)/Comprehensive District Improvement Plan (CDIP). This document outlines a strategic plan a given school will follow to address issues that impact student achievement. These may include such issues as physical and mental health barriers, safety, instructional deficiencies or family involvement. Funding, staff responsibilities and timelines are designated within the plan to assist with implementation. Each SBDM is responsible to ensure that the CSIP is implemented, reviewed and updated on an annual basis. The CDIP's primary purpose is to improve student achievement, including school and district strategies and services to address deficiencies and/or sustain or strengthen current efforts. The CDIP should reflect priorities and funding streams consistent with the local school plans. Both schools and districts are required to conduct a thorough needs assessment prior to developing these plans. To view a specific school and/or district improvement plan, visit their website.



Next-Generation Education in Kentucky

With the passage of Senate Bill 1 in the 2009 session of the Kentucky General Assembly, Kentucky is at a new era in public school assessment accountability. Content standards are being revised; this includes practical living, which will provide a new balanced assessment and new state accountability system. This will be in the form of an annual program review.

The Next-Generation Learning is “a personalized system of education that prepares each child for life, work and citizenship in the 21st century” states Dr. Terry Holliday, Commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Education. Next-Generation Learning includes critical attributes such as:

- Personalized learning
- Comprehensive systems of learning supports
- World-class knowledge and skills
- Performance-based learning
- Anytime, anywhere opportunities
- Authentic student voice

Program Review

With the passing of Senate Bill 1 in 2009, practical living, which includes health and physical education, was removed from the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS). Also removed were career studies, arts and humanities, and the writing portfolios. The accountability for these areas has been replaced with program reviews. KRS 158.6453 (1) (i) states that a program review is “a systematic method of analyzing components of an instructional program, including instructional practices, aligned and enacted curriculum, student work samples, formative and summative assessments, professional development and support services, and administrative supports and monitoring.”

The goals of the program reviews are:

- To improve teaching and learning for all students in all programs
- To allow equal access for all students to the skills that will assist them in being productive citizens
- To allow students to demonstrate their understanding beyond a paper and pencil test

Beginning in the 2012-2013 academic year, the Kentucky accountability system will include program reviews for the arts and humanities, practical living and career studies, and writing programs. The results of the program review required under this subsection shall be included in the accountability system required by KRS 158.6455. Through careful review, schools will be able to identify strengths, which can be shared with other programs in the building. A careful review will also allow for the identification of weaknesses and areas of growth. The review of a program is an on-going, year-round, reflective process. New tools and resources will be provided in the future through the Kentucky Departments of Education’s website at:

<http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Instructional+Resources/Program+Reviews>

