

TASK FORCE TO REVIEW STATE'S ASSESSMENT & ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

(FRANKFORT, Ky.) - A statewide task force of policymakers and experts in the field will review Kentucky's Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS), with the primary goals of providing a blueprint for the system's progress in the future and ensuring that the system meets the best interests of public school students.

Education Commissioner Jon E. Draud will convene the task force, which will be formed after the 2008 session of the General Assembly ends. Draud will ask key legislative leaders from both major parties, higher education representatives, experts from groups such as the Southern Regional Education Board and other individuals to serve on the task force.

"A major objective is to achieve consensus by Democratic and Republican policymakers on the makeup of the assessment and accountability system," Draud said. "All policymakers want what's best for students, and this task force will provide the means to achieve that.

"There are many good components in CATS, and there's no need to throw out the entire system," said Draud. "There are legitimate concerns about some aspects of CATS. Any high-stakes system needs periodic review, and I want to ensure that we're engaged in activities that are in the best interests of students."

The task force will seek input from teachers, administrators, parents, businesspeople, elected officials, education advocacy groups and others. The group will analyze individual components of CATS and determine the effectiveness of those in meeting the needs of students.

More information about the task force will be available as individuals are named to serve. A timeline for the task force's work has not yet been set.

The Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) was implemented in 1999, as the means to carry out the requirements of Kentucky Revised Statute 158.6453, which charges the Kentucky Board of Education with the responsibility to create and implement an assessment and accountability system for the state's public schools.

CATS includes the Kentucky Core Content Tests in seven subject areas; nonacademic data, including dropout, graduation and attendance rates; writing portfolios; alternate assessments for students with severe disabilities; and ACT, PLAN and EXPLORE. The Core Content Tests include multiple-choice and short-answer questions for each subject area.

CATS provides unique goals for each of the state's public schools and districts to meet, and schools and districts are held accountable for meeting those goals.

Data from CATS is used to inform parents, teachers, administrators and the general public about schools' progress. Results from subject-area testing in CATS are approved by the U.S. Department of Education for use to comply with the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.