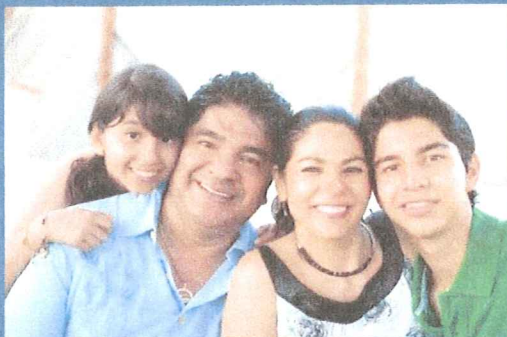
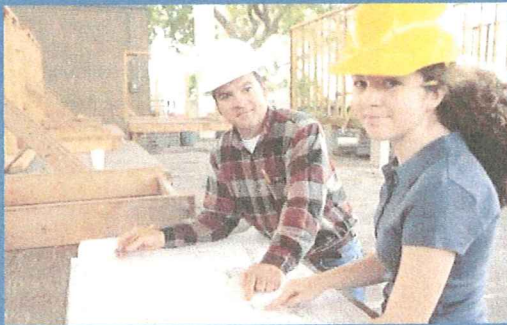
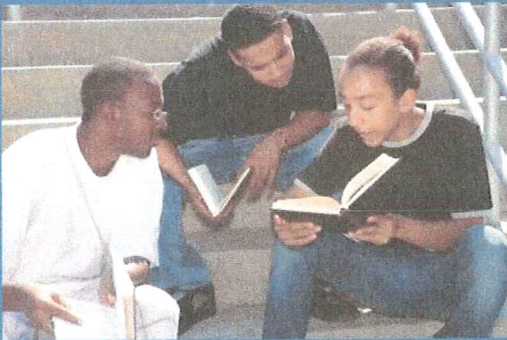




# Ensure Economic Success for Tomorrow: Graduate All Students Today



Kansas Commission on  
Graduation and Dropout  
Prevention and Recovery  
Final Report

January 2011

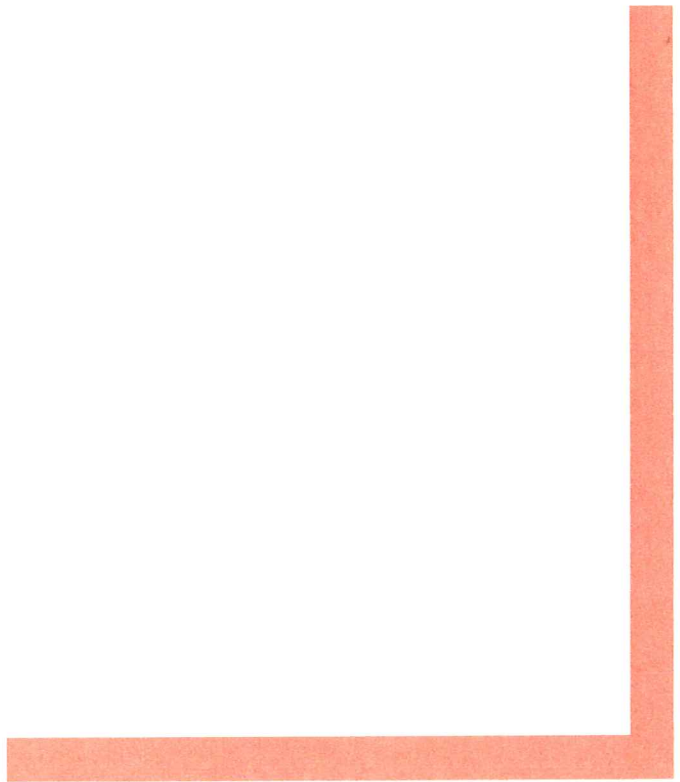
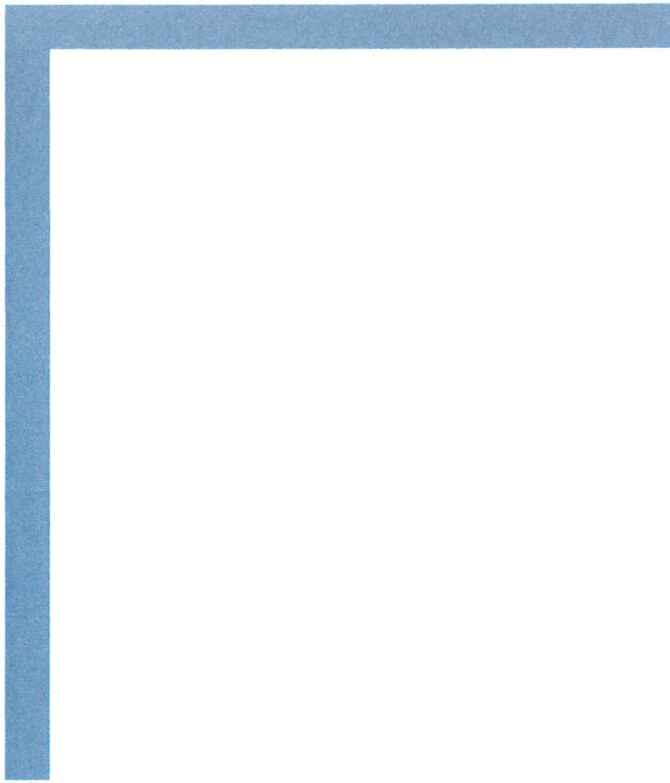
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## Letter from Co-Chairs

January 3, 2011

Dear Kansans:

We are pleased to present the *Kansas Commission on Graduation and Dropout Prevention and Recovery Final Report*. In the summer of 2010, Governor Mark Parkinson appointed the Secretary of Health and Environment and the Commissioner of Education as co-chairs to the Kansas Commission on Graduation and Dropout Prevention and Recovery. Our responsibility was to focus on recommendations and issues related to increasing Kansas' graduation rate and decreasing the dropout rate. We were given six months to produce a final report that would provide guidance to key stakeholders on this important issue.

The Commission quickly agreed that these issues impact not only the individual student, but also their school, school district, community and ultimately their state. Most state agencies and non-profit organizations within the state currently target extensive resources and interventions around graduation and dropout prevention. However, there has been little effort to discuss and coordinate energies across Kansas. The state is also facing a challenging economic environment and it is time to be proactive in improving our long term prospects for economic growth in the state, which includes preparing all students in Kansas to be tomorrow's leaders and workforce.

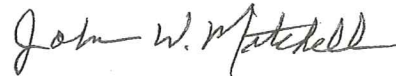
The Commission findings and recommendations are organized around four areas: new statewide expectations, areas for improvement, research opportunities, and moving forward. Each of these sections is vital as we work to reduce the number of dropouts in Kansas. We feel that these recommendations and findings can guide further conversations, study, and actions on the behalf of Kansas students. We sincerely thank the Commission members for their contribution to this important work.

The time is now to have this difficult conversation in our state. The health of our young people and our Kansas communities relies on our ability to collectively come together to solve this problem. Dropout prevention can no longer be treated as a "school problem." Not graduating costs everybody – youth, parents, educators, businesses and communities – so we need everybody involved.

Sincerely,



Dr. Diane DeBacker  
Commissioner  
Kansas State Department of Education



John Mitchell  
Acting Secretary  
Kansas Department of Health and Environment

## Executive Summary

In the past, individuals without a high school diploma had a number of employment options that would permit them a comfortable standard of living. This, however, is no longer the case. By 2018, 64 percent of the jobs in Kansas will require postsecondary credentials.<sup>1</sup> Jobs that are routine are increasingly likely to be automated and the effect of this automation is to reduce the demand for people who are only capable of doing routine work, and to increase the demand for people who are capable of doing knowledge-based work.<sup>2</sup> This means that a greater proportion of people will need to acquire postsecondary credentials to do such knowledge-based work.

Over the next 10 years, Kansas will experience an increase of 99,000 jobs requiring postsecondary education, yet the current rate of credential production does not satisfy the future workforce demand.<sup>1</sup> The state's ability to attract and retain employers is intrinsically tied to how effectively we graduate students today. No one is expendable. When we allow students to leave high school without a diploma we are endangering our state's economic competitiveness and quality of life.

During the 2008-2009 school year, 3,003 Kansas students dropped out of school.<sup>3</sup> That is approximately eight students a day or one every three hours. The dropout rates are disproportionately high among African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students, special education students and students from low-income families. Although the dropout rates have improved among these populations over the past three years, persistent gaps still exist. Similarly, these same student sub-groups experience graduation rates five to ten percent lower than the state average.<sup>3</sup>

Research tells us that high school dropouts are more likely than their graduating peers to: get divorced, be in prison, live in poverty, be unemployed, have poor health, and utilize public assistance.<sup>4</sup> They are less likely to engage in civic activity, including voting and volunteering in their communities. It is easy to see the burden these young people place on themselves when they drop out of school, but few understand that the drag goes far beyond the impact to the individual. High school dropouts influence a community's economic, social, and civic health.<sup>4</sup>

- 1 *Beyond a High School Diploma, Keeping Kansas Competitive*. 2010. Governor's Forum Workgroup: Kansas Board of Regents, Kansas Department of Commerce and Kansas Governor's Office.
- 2 *Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Lessons from PISA for the United States*. 2010. Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD).
- 3 Data obtained from the Kansas State Department of Education. For more information about dropout and graduate data for the state, individual districts, and student subgroups, visit the Data, Media and Reports tab on the KSDE website : <http://www.ksde.org>
- 4 Amos, Jason. 2008. *Dropouts, Diplomas and Dollars: U.S. High Schools and the Nation's Economy*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

The Alliance for Excellent Education reports that each high school dropout costs the nation approximately \$260,000 in lost earnings, productivity and wages over the course of their lifetime.<sup>5</sup> Additionally each student who graduates from high school rather than dropping out will save the state an average of \$12,939 in Medicaid and uninsured healthcare expenditures over the course of their lifetime.<sup>5</sup> Over the past five school years (2004-2009), 17,699 students have dropped out in Kansas; equaling an economic loss of \$4.8 billion.<sup>6</sup> To put that number in perspective, the fiscal year 2011 budget that Governor Mark Parkinson recommended for Kansas totaled \$5.8 billion.<sup>7</sup> If Kansas had graduated 100 percent of its high schools students over the past five years, the money the additional graduates would have put back into the economy could have nearly covered the proposed 2011 budget.

The formation of the Commission was timely as graduation will be a key issue in the upcoming year. The U.S. Department of Education has mandated that all states use a four-year adjusted cohort calculation for the graduates of 2010 (see appendix A). This new method provides a more accurate assessment of graduation rates because it tracks the movement of individual students. However, it is likely that this will result in decreased graduation rates across the state. When coupled with increasing graduation goals, many high schools may be struggling to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in 2011.

Governor Parkinson established the Kansas Commission on Graduation and Dropout Prevention and Recovery to examine and make recommendations on issues related to graduation and dropout prevention. This was an important step in ensuring that dropping out is no longer an option and that every young Kansan can and will graduate prepared for life, work and/or postsecondary education/training. This report includes findings and recommendations regarding the specific topic areas cited in the Commission's charge and is not an exhaustive list of the action steps that may need to be taken to reduce the state dropout rate. In total, the Commission developed 38 recommendations which have been divided into four categories: new statewide expectations, areas for improvement, research opportunities and moving forward. Implementation of these recommendations will set Kansas on a path to academic and economic success.

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5 Amos, Jason. 2008. *Dropouts, Diplomas and Dollars: U.S. High Schools and the Nation's Economy*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

6 Data obtained from the Kansas State Department of Education. For more information about dropout data for the state, individual districts, and student subgroups, visit the Data, Media and Reports tab on the KSDE website : <http://www.ksde.org>

7 *Fiscal Year 2011 Governor's Budget Report: Volume One*. 2010. Kansas Division of the Budget.

## Introduction

The Kansas Commission on Graduation and Dropout Prevention and Recovery was established by Governor Mark Parkinson in 2010 with the publication of Executive Order 10-04 (See Appendix B). The Commission met a total of eight times between July 2010 and January 2011. The release of the Commission report is very timely as the P-20 Council and the Kansas Education Commission have recently released their reports as well. Similar recommendations can be found among the three separate reports.

Governor Parkinson named the following individuals as original members of the Kansas Commission on Graduation and Dropout Prevention and Recovery (See Appendix C):

### ***Voting Members***

Melissa Ness	Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund
John Heim	Kansas Association of School Boards
Blake West	Kansas National Education Association
Brian Black	A representative of business or industry
Donnovan Karber	A representative of the faith community
Mike Erwin	A representative of the armed forces
Miriam Krehbiel	A representative of a non-profit agency
Malissa Martin-Wilke	A community representative
James Mireles	A high school principal
Keil Eggers	A youth representative
Nancy Keel	A representative of a parent organization
Denise Wren	A superintendent
Tom Webb	A district court judge
Jo Ann Pottorff	A representative of the Kansas legislature
Barbara Ballard	A representative of the Kansas legislature
Steve Morris	A representative of the Kansas legislature
Anthony Hensley	A representative of the Kansas legislature



### ***Ex Officio Members***

Bill Thornton	Kansas Department of Commerce
Roger Haden	Kansas Department of Corrections
Roderick Bremby*	Kansas Department of Health and Environment
Dorothy Stites	Kansas Department of Labor
Tanya Keys	Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services
Russ Jennings*	Kansas Juvenile Justice Authority
Diane DeBacker	Kansas State Department of Education
Christine Downey-Schmidt	Kansas Board of Regents
Jana Shaver	Kansas State Board of Education
Harriett Johnson	Kansas African American Affairs Commission
Linda Kotich	Kansas Hispanic and Latino American Affairs Commission
Jennifer Knorr	Governor's Office
Jessica Noble	Kansas DropINs
Nicolette Geisler	Kansas Mentors

\*Due to transitional changes at state agencies, the following replacements were made on the Commission:

*Kansas Department of Health and Environment:*

John Mitchell was named Acting Secretary, November 2010, replacing Roderick Bremby.

*Kansas Juvenile Justice Authority:*

Dennis Casarona was named Acting Secretary, November 2010, replacing Russ Jennings

Designees that attended meetings on behalf of members and served on the Commission include:

Bobbie Bower (Nancy Keel)

Diane Gjerstad (Denise Wren)

Gary Alexander and Dianne Glass (Christine Downey-Schmidt)

Julie Ford (Diane DeBacker)

Karen Godfrey and Kevin Riemann (Blake West)

Kathy Hund (Bill Thornton)

Randy Bowman (Dennis Casarona)

Terry Rolfs (Linda Kotich)

Tolla White (Harriet Johnson)

Will Libeer (Keil Eggers)

## The Governor's Charge for the Commission

On June 15, 2010 Governor Parkinson established the Kansas Commission on Graduation and Dropout Prevention and Recovery to examine and make recommendations on issues related to graduation and dropping out. The Kansas Commission aims to bring a comprehensive solution to the issue through a collaboration of businesses, schools, community organizations, parents, state agencies and youth. The Governor directed the Commission to establish a vision statement, mission statement and guiding principles that reflect the needs of Kansas youth and to provide findings and recommendations on the following eight specific topic areas:

- Setting a goal and timeline for reducing the state-wide annual dropout rate;
- Further developing early indicator systems to identify students who are at risk of dropping out, or who are not likely to graduate on time from high school without receiving additional support, and school policies that exacerbate dropping out;
- Expanding the definition of structured learning time to include internships and work-study programs and exploring ways to encourage school districts to incorporate quality internships, work and learning programs into structured learning time to engage all students in relevant and rigorous curriculum;
- Exploring state policies and practices relating to attendance, discipline, grading, retention, promotion, credit recovery, compulsory attendance age, the awarding of the General Equivalency Diploma (“GED”) and the use of alternative schools;
- Providing financial incentives for districts that are effective in graduating at-risk students and recovering high school dropouts;
- Establishing a threshold annual dropout rate for each school district such that rates in excess of threshold levels would establish a mandatory requirement on districts to adopt and implement a district-wide action plan to reduce dropout rates and effectively track students;
- Identifying additional areas for improvement and multi-sector collaboration; and
- Exploring funding sources (public, private and non-profit) and identify resources that may be available to sustain the work and recommendation of the Commission.

## Mission, Vision and Guiding Principles of the Commission

### Mission Statement:

The Commission will establish clear recommendations that engage all key stakeholders in comprehensive solutions to ensure the graduation of all Kansas P-12 students.

### Vision Statement:

By 2020, all Kansas students will graduate from high school with the skills to be successful.

### Guiding Principles:

- All students are capable, deserving and should receive a high school education.
- Multi-sector collaboration is essential to success.
- Recommendations must speak to equal, equitable access to resources and support.
- Current regulations and barriers can be changed.
- Policies and regulations must support the creation of positive and engaging learning environments.
- Student, family, school and community involvement is essential.
- Schools must demonstrate cultural awareness and responsiveness.
- Stakeholders, particularly policy-makers, must provide the necessary financial support and other resources to implement the Commission's recommended solutions.
- Stakeholders, particularly policy-makers, need a deeper understanding of the connection between school investment and the economic future of the community and Kansas.
- Our recommendations must be realistic/finite yet impactful and measurable.
- Our recommendations must be systemic in nature.
- The Commission will be sensitive to and take into account cultural differences.

## Scope of the Problem

A country's ability to compete in the world economy significantly depends on a highly educated workforce. The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) baseline qualification for reasonable earnings and employment prospects is a high school diploma. Of the thirty-four OECD countries, only eight have a high school graduation rate lower than the United States.<sup>8</sup> It is disconcerting that so many American students seem underprepared for work and higher education.

During the 2008-2009 school year, 3,003 Kansas students dropped out of school.<sup>9</sup> That is approximately eight students a day or one every three hours. At first blush, a 1.4 percent dropout rate may not seem alarming, but when the economic ramifications of not graduating are reviewed, it becomes clear just how significant a problem it truly is.

The *Dropouts, Diplomas and Dollars* report issued by the Alliance for Excellent Education points out that each high school dropout costs the nation approximately \$260,000 in lost earnings, productivity and wages over the course of their lifetime.<sup>10</sup> For the 3,003 young people who dropped out in Kansas that equals \$780 million in lost revenue.

The report further indicates that each student who graduates from high school rather than dropping out will save the state an average of \$12,939 in Medicaid and uninsured healthcare expenditures over the course of their lifetime.<sup>10</sup> Kansas would have saved \$38 million in health care costs had they been able to graduate those 3,003 students. Over the past five school years (2004-2009), 17,699 students have dropped out in Kansas; equaling an economic loss of \$4.8 billion.<sup>9</sup>

Research tells us that high school dropouts are more likely than their graduating peers to: get divorced, be in prison, live in poverty, be unemployed, have poor health, and utilize public assistance.<sup>10</sup> There is strong evidence that this is the case in Kansas as well. The Kansas Department of Corrections reports that 76.3 percent of inmates in their facilities do not have a high school diploma.<sup>11</sup> Of those 76.3 percent, 32.0 percent do possess a GED, but there is no way

8 *Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Lessons from PISA for the United States*. 2010. Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD).

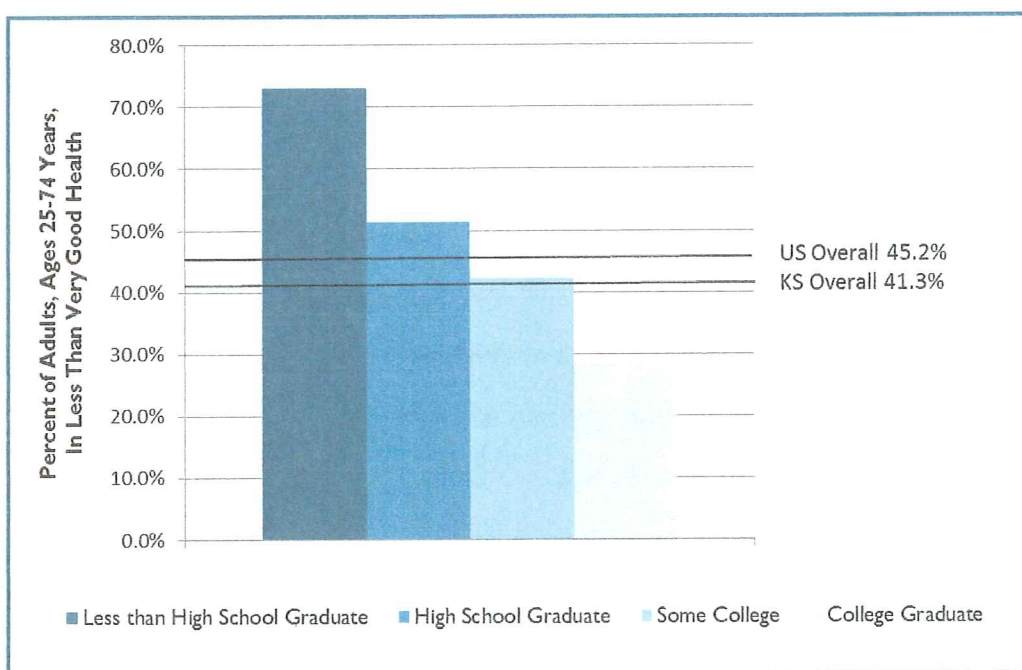
9 Data obtained from the Kansas State Department of Education. For more information about dropout data for the state, individual districts, and student subgroups, visit the Data, Media and Reports tab on the KSDE website : <http://www.ksde.org>

10 Amos, Jason. 2008. *Dropouts, Diplomas and Dollars: U.S. High Schools and the Nation's Economy*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

11 *Statistical Profile: FY 2010 Offender Population*. 2010. Kansas Department of Corrections.

to know whether it was obtained prior to or during their incarceration. The average annual cost per inmate in a Kansas Department of Correction facility was \$24,938 in fiscal year 2010.<sup>12</sup> That equals \$213 million in inmate expenditures for that one year alone. Further, according to some estimates, juvenile offenders who become career criminals incur millions of dollars over a lifetime in public costs associated with emergency response, investigation and criminal justice.<sup>13</sup>

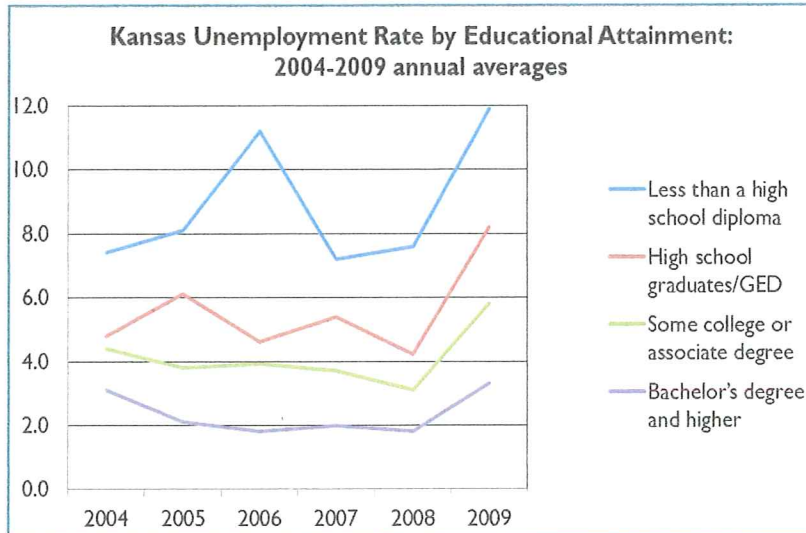
The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation established a Commission to Build a Healthier America to look at the factors that affect the health of all Americans. Using 2005-2007 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey data they were able to compare educational attainment level to self-reported health status. They found that in Kansas, when compared with college graduates, adults who have not graduated from high school are 2.5 times as likely—and those who have graduated from high-school are 1.8 times as likely—to be in less than very good health.<sup>14</sup> The graph below illustrates this observation.



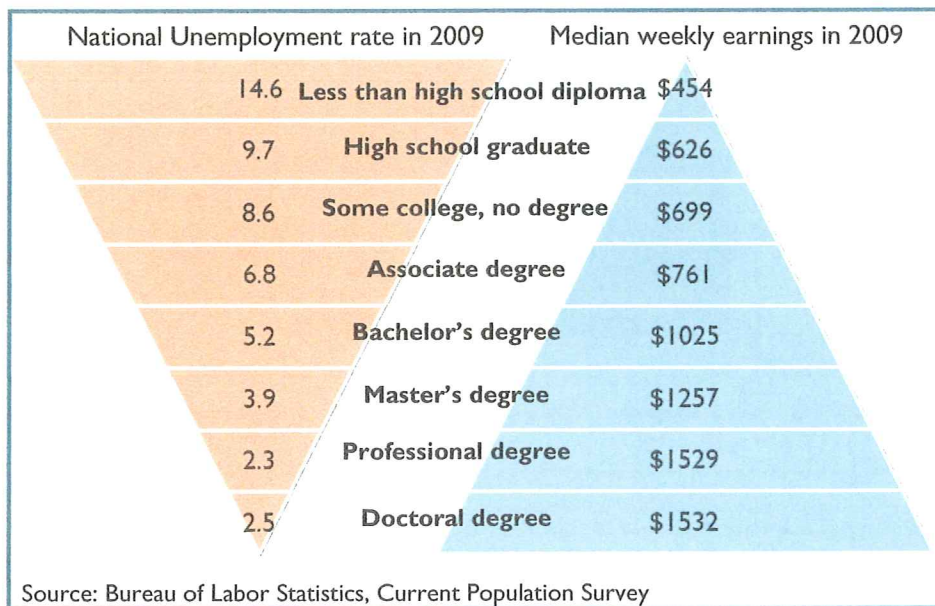
Kansas unemployment rates follow a similar trend with less educated individuals experiencing higher unemployment rates than those who have higher levels of education. Over the past five years, the unemployment rates of Kansans with less than a high school diploma are on average

- 12 *Per Capita Operating Costs: KDOC Facilities*. 2010. Kansas Department of Corrections.
- 13 Cohen, M. and Piquero, A.R. 2008. New Evidence About the Monetary Value of Saving a High Risk Youth. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 14 (1): 5-33.
- 14 *Adult Health Status: A Snapshot of Kansas*. 2009. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission to Build a Healthier America.

six percent higher than Kansans who possess a Bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>15</sup> Nationally, unemployment rates reached 14.6 percent in 2009 among non-high school graduates.<sup>16</sup> When compared with median weekly earnings, it is easy to see how increasing educational attainment can positively effect the economy.



Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey

Of additional concern are the dropout and graduation gaps that exist among different groups of students. Kansas dropout rates are disproportionately high among African American, Hispanic and American Indian students, special education students and students from low-income families.

15 American Community Survey, 2004-2009. US Census Bureau,

16 Current Population Survey, 2009. US Census Bureau,

According to data from the Kansas State Department of Education, during the 2008-2009 school year African American, Hispanic and American Indian students left school at much higher rates than their Caucasian peers ( 2.3 percent, 2.1 percent, and 2.5 percent versus 1.2 percent, respectively).<sup>17</sup> Similar differences in dropout rates exist between special education students (1.7 percent) and general education students (1.3 percent).<sup>17</sup> Disparities also persist among different income levels with low-income (free lunch) students exhibiting a dropout rate over twice that of non-low income (paid lunch) students (2.4 percent versus 1.0 percent).<sup>17</sup>

Annual Dropout Rates by Subgroup<sup>17</sup>

	All Students	African American Students	Hispanic Students	Native American Students	Special Education Students	Free Lunch Students
<b>2008-2009</b>	1.4%	2.3%	2.1%	2.5%	1.7%	2.4%
<b>2007-2008</b>	1.6%	2.6%	2.7%	3.3%	2.3%	2.6%
<b>2006-2007</b>	1.8%	3.0%	3.0%	3.6%	2.1%	3.2%

These same student sub-groups experience graduation rates five to ten percent lower than the state average. The 2009 graduation rate for all students was 89.1 percent, however African American, Hispanic and American Indian students, special education students and students from low-income families had much lower rates (83.2 percent, 80.7 percent, 80.8 percent, 84.4 percent and 80.2 percent, respectively).<sup>17</sup> English language learner students had the lowest graduation rate in the state at 77.1 percent.<sup>17</sup>

Achievement gaps are also present in the percentage of students scoring proficient and above in math and reading. In 2010, to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) the goal was 81.3 percent in reading and 76.4 percent in math. In the All Students category Kansas exceeds the goal by five percent in reading and seven percent in math.<sup>17</sup> However, the state missed the goal among African American, Hispanic, special education, English language learners and free and reduced lunch students by an average of 11.1 percent in math and 12.0 percent in reading.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, Kansas does well on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), with fourth and eighth grade math and reading scores above the national average. The scores for African American,

<sup>17</sup> Data obtained from the Kansas State Department of Education. For more information about AYP, dropout and graduation data for the state, individual districts, and student subgroups, visit the Data, Media and Reports tab on the KSDE website : <http://www.ksde.org>

Hispanic, special education and English language learner students are much lower though, ranging from 12 to 33 points behind the state average.<sup>18</sup>

It is important to note that the decision to drop out is rarely the result of a single life event. It usually stems from a long process of disengagement. A national survey of students who left school without graduating revealed that students experienced one or more of the following factors:<sup>19</sup>

- Thought classes were not interesting
- Said they were not motivated to work hard
- Had to get a job and make money
- Became a parent
- Had to care for a family member
- Were failing classes
- Missed too many days of school and could not catch up
- Felt that they entered high school poorly prepared by earlier schooling
- Didn't have school support that might have made a difference, such as tutoring or after school help
- Repeated at least one grade
- Had too much freedom in high school environment
- Had parents who were not aware or only somewhat aware of their child's grades or that they were about to drop out of school

A similar study was conducted in Kansas. In 2009, 533 Kansans participated in a survey to find out if they had ever dropped out and if so, what were the reasons for doing so. Of the 533 respondents, 172 indicated that they had dropped out of school. The average age of this subgroup was 23 years. Respondents were asked to indicate whether any of the listed factors were major reasons, somewhat reasons, or not at all reasons why they dropped out. The top five major reasons why Kansans left school include:<sup>20</sup>

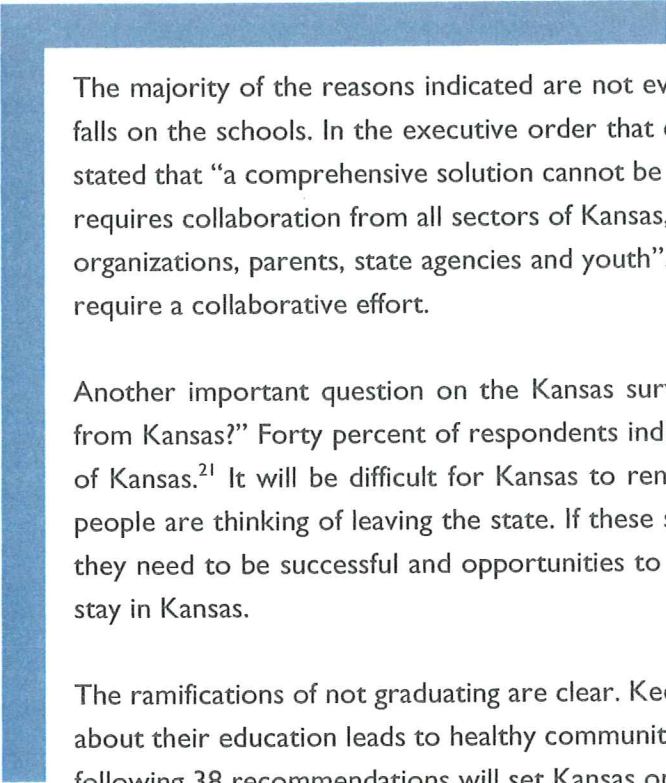
- Personal or family problems (36.4%)
- Got in trouble at school (24.5%)
- Had to get a full-time Job (22.7%)
- The school environment (21.5%)
- Money problems (20.9%)

18 *National Assessment of Educational Progress*. 2009. US Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics.

19 Bridgeland, J.M., Dilulio, Jr., J.J. and Morison, K.M. 2006. *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*. Civic Enterprises.

20 *Kansas DropIns Youth Survey*. 2009. Kansas DropIns.







The majority of the reasons indicated are not even school issues and yet this burden consistently falls on the schools. In the executive order that established the Commission, Governor Parkinson stated that “a comprehensive solution cannot be accomplished by any one entity, but rather requires collaboration from all sectors of Kansas, including: business, schools, community organizations, parents, state agencies and youth”. Successful solutions to the dropout problem will require a collaborative effort.

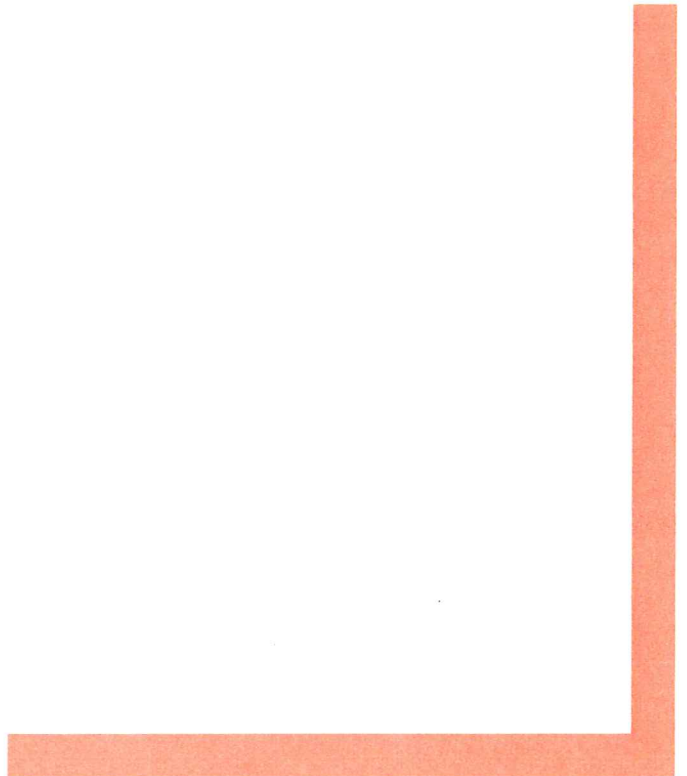
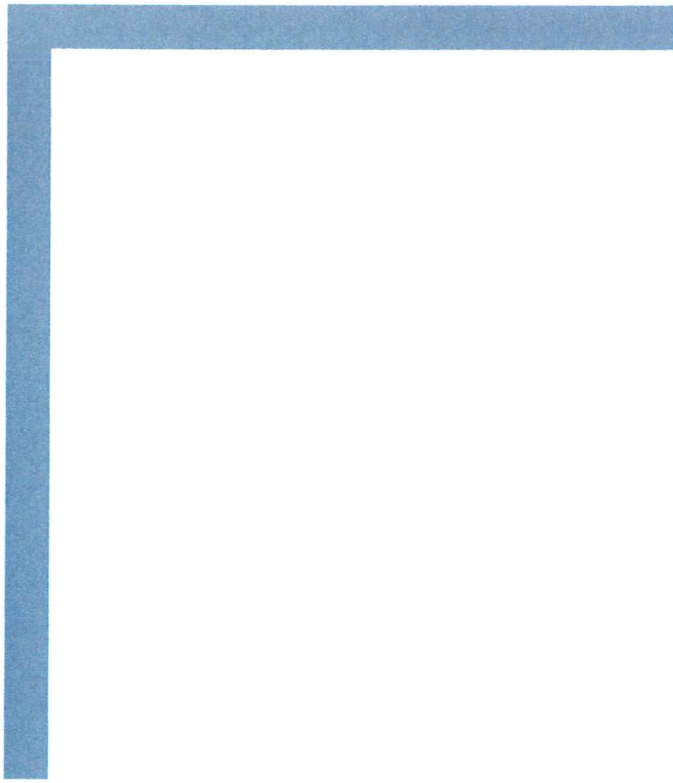
Another important question on the Kansas survey was “would you ever consider moving away from Kansas?” Forty percent of respondents indicated that they would likely consider moving out of Kansas.<sup>21</sup> It will be difficult for Kansas to remain competitive if such a large number of young people are thinking of leaving the state. If these students graduate from high school with the skills they need to be successful and opportunities to apply their skills, they are more likely to want to stay in Kansas.

The ramifications of not graduating are clear. Keeping all of our students engaged and excited about their education leads to healthy communities and productive citizens. Implementation of the following 38 recommendations will set Kansas on a path to academic and economic success.



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21 *Kansas DropINs Youth Survey, 2009.* Kansas DropINs.



## Commission Findings and Recommendations

The following sections outline the key findings and recommendations that address the eight topic areas identified in the executive order that formed the Commission. The Commission's recommendations are divided into four main sections: new statewide expectations, areas for improvement, research opportunities and moving forward. The recommendations were placed in the section that seemed most appropriate, but there are several situations where the recommendation could have fit in more than one section. The numbers assigned to each recommendation are arbitrary and do not reflect a particular level of importance. Each of these sections is critical to reducing the number and percentage of dropouts in Kansas.



**New Statewide Expectations:** new goals and activities that should be undertaken by the Kansas State Department of Education

**Areas for Improvement:** changes that should be made to positively influence 21st century skills, attendance, career and technical education, discipline and graduation requirements

**Research Opportunities:** areas where additional understanding is needed

**Moving Forward:** steps that need to be taken to ensure the implementation of the recommendations

It is important to note that the Commission's recommendations do not represent a complete list of the action steps that may need to be taken to reduce the state dropout rate. Rather, the recommendations in this report primarily focus on the topic areas specified in the executive order. The Commission encourages all key stakeholders to continue the conversation and expand on the recommendations included in this report.

## Commission Findings and Recommendations

### New Statewide Expectations

**Recommendation 1:** By 2020, the graduation goal should be 95 percent as measured by the four-year adjusted cohort rate.

**Rationale:** Setting a high graduation goal demonstrates the state's belief that all students can and should graduate from high school.

**Recommendation 2:** By 2015, the dropout rate should be cut in half (reduced from current 1.4 percent to 0.7 percent).

**Rationale:** The 2008-2009 annual dropout rate was 1.4 percent. By 2015, it should be 0.7 percent. This will result in an additional 1,500 students remaining in school. Setting a goal for reducing the state dropout rate will support our goals of increasing the state graduation rate and preparing students with the skills to be successful in life, work and/or post-secondary education.

#### What is the Difference Between the Graduation Rate and the Dropout Rate?

The graduation rate is calculated using a four-year adjusted cohort rate, which is defined as the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who entered high school four years earlier (adjusting for transfers in and out).<sup>22</sup> The dropout rate is calculated annually and reflects the number of seventh–twelfth grade students who drop out in any one school year. The dropout rate cannot be the inverse of the graduation rate for two specific reasons:

1. The dropout rate is calculated using one year of data while the graduation rate is calculated using four years of data
2. The dropout rate is calculated on seventh–twelfth grade students while the graduation rate is calculated on ninth–twelfth grade students

**Recommendation 3:** The Kansas State Department of Education should standardize, collect and track data from the parental consent form which allows children age 16 or 17 to be exempt from compulsory attendance requirements.

**Rationale:** According to K.S.A. 72-1111, if a child is 16 or 17 years of age, the child may be exempt from compulsory attendance requirements if the child and the parent or person acting as parent attend a final counseling session and sign a disclaimer. An additional question should be added to the disclaimer that asks the student why they are dropping out of school. It would be advantageous for the Kansas State Department of Education to collect and track this information so that they could know the reasons why students are dropping out.

<sup>22</sup> A Uniform, Comparable Graduation Rate. 2008. U.S. Department of Education.

## Commission Findings and Recommendations

### New Statewide Expectations

**Recommendation 4:** A State of Kansas diploma should be awarded to students who are under the custody of the Secretary of SRS or the Commissioner of JJA on or after their 17<sup>th</sup> birthday and who have achieved the minimum state credit requirements.

**Rationale:** Kansas school districts' graduation requirements range from 21 to 30 credits. Youth in the Secretary or Commissioner's custody cannot control whether or not they move to a new school district when they are removed from their home. These moves may find youth on track to graduation in one district, but off track in another district due to increased graduation requirements. Offering a State of Kansas diploma to this population would remove a significant barrier they are currently facing.

**Recommendation 5:** The Kansas Department of Education should develop an early warning system with key P-12 grade level indicators targeted at accurately predicting students likely to drop-out. This system should focus on dropout prevention, utilizing school- and community-based intervention components.

**Rationale:** Early warning systems help predict which students are most likely to drop out of school. Intervening with these students as soon as they begin to display key indicators will help increase the likelihood that they will graduate from high school. The use of school- and community-based interventions will address the many reasons that students are dropping out.

**Recommendation 6:** Develop a recognition program to highlight schools that show exemplary progress toward graduating all students.

**Rationale:** When schools don't meet a target or a goal, they are quickly recognized for their underachievement. Seldom, however, are schools recognized for the improvements they have made in a particular area. Recognizing the efforts of these schools would send a positive message that Kansas values the progress they are making toward graduating all students.

**Recommendation 7:** Support statewide implementation of Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) model (See Appendix E).

**Rationale:** MTSS is a continuum of increasingly intense research-based interventions provided to students that respond to their academic and/or behavioral needs. The main goal of MTSS is for schools to use their resources in ways that enables every child to be successful. This is accomplished by being prevention oriented; implementing evidence-based interventions for all students and tailoring interventions based on student's needs; and using progress monitoring data to know when to make a change in instruction.

## Commission Findings and Recommendations

### Areas for Improvement: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

“In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, students must be fully engaged. This requires the use of technology tools and resources, involvement with interesting and relevant projects, and learning environments—including online environments—that are supportive and safe. ...In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, educators must be given and be prepared to use technology tools; they must be collaborators in learning—constantly seeking knowledge and acquiring new skills along with their students.”

-Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education March 3, 2010

**Recommendation 8:** Support statewide implementation of the Kansas State Department of Education 21<sup>st</sup> century skills model (see Appendix F).

**Rationale:** Education is the key to America’s economic growth and prosperity and to our ability to compete in the global economy. As we prepare students to succeed in college and careers, they must be able to learn, apply and adapt in all subjects. Preparing all students with content knowledge and essential higher-order skills will engage and empower them to contribute in our increasingly competitive, interconnected world.

**Recommendation 9:** Support and foster youth-led projects and initiatives in the classroom and beyond.

**Rationale:** Key among the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that are likely to contribute to personal, academic, and career success for our students is their ability to demonstrate leadership skills while working to address real-world problems. School projects and community-based organizations that connect students with both leadership development and service to the community through problem solving and team building should be fostered. Such project work should also be aligned with and connected to the curriculum in meaningful ways, whenever possible.

**Recommendation 10:** Redesign school accreditation to include a focus on the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills model.

**Rationale:** To flourish in a dynamic, global economy, every student deserves an education that culminates in 21<sup>st</sup> century readiness for college, careers and civic participation. Incorporating these priorities within the process of school accreditation will help promote a common vision that supports schools in preparing all students to succeed.

## Commission Findings and Recommendations

### Areas for Improvement: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

**Recommendation 11:** Redesign state assessments to emphasize performance based, curriculum embedded, higher-order skills.

**Rationale:** Most high stake state assessments currently used in schools measure knowledge of discrete facts, not necessarily the students' ability to apply knowledge in complex situations, nor do they generate evidence of the skill sets that the business and education communities believe will ensure success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Implementing innovative performance-based measures will provide meaningful, relevant and on-going data related to what students know, and are able to do while informing the instructional process.

**Recommendation 12:** Expand and enhance positive relationships among stakeholders to support implementation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills model.

**Rationale:** A key component of the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills model is fostering and improving stakeholder relationships. This kind of collaboration will help create the broad support needed to fully implement the model.

**Recommendation 13:** Ensure availability of technology and focused professional development necessary to implement the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills model.

**Rationale:** Technology is at the core of virtually every aspect of our daily lives and work, yet in our educational system, it is considered an optional component and in many learning environments, it is simply non-existent. Supporting learning powered by technology must be leveraged to provide individualized, engaging and powerful learning experiences and content, as well as resources and assessments that measure student achievement in more complete, authentic, and meaningful ways. Additionally, it will be difficult for students to master competencies gained by the fusing of core subject knowledge and higher-order thinking skills unless educators are well trained and supported in student-centered, authentic, engaging, and personalized instruction.

## Commission Findings and Recommendations

### Areas for Improvement: Attendance

“The reality is an absence is an absence, excused or not, and that child is not in that classroom benefiting from the instruction on that day. We have to work in our community, with our schools and our families to build a culture of attendance.”

-Ralph Smith, Executive Vice President, Annie E. Casey Foundation

**Recommendation 14:** The Kansas State Department of Education should provide guidance on what constitutes an excused absence.

**Rationale:** Having a consistent definition of what is an excused absence would help schools more accurately track excused and unexcused absences. Families with high mobility within the state would also benefit from having consistent absence guidelines at each school they attend.

**Recommendation 15:** Schools and stakeholders should work together to establish an attendance council that will create a school wide action plan for addressing absenteeism and develop individual action plans for students with chronic absences.

**Rationale:** K.S.A. 72-1113 currently requires schools to report children who are inexcusably absent from school three consecutive school days, five school days in any semester or seven school days in any school year as truant. These parameters are very broad and in some school districts result in a backlog of truancy cases. Furthermore, truancy status is based solely on unexcused absences. This creates the potential for students with high numbers of excused absences to go unnoticed. Chronic absenteeism (excused and unexcused absences) is often a steppingstone to dropping out of school. It is important that schools and stakeholders work together to address absenteeism before a student heads off track academically, and bad attendance habits become rooted.



## Commission Findings and Recommendations

### Areas for Improvement: Attendance

**Recommendation 16:** Educate students, parents/guardians and the community on the importance of regular attendance (this could be accomplished by the school attendance council).

**Rationale:** Coming to school every day, being on time, and completing daily school assignments are important predictors of school success. Students who don't attend school regularly may have a difficult time learning the material and completing their assignments which could ultimately lead to course failure. The National Center for Children in Poverty found that chronic absence in kindergarten is associated with lower academic performance in first grade for all children regardless of gender, ethnicity or socioeconomic status.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, researchers Ruth Neild and Robert Balfanz found that eighth-graders in Philadelphia who missed five weeks of school or failed math or English had at least a 75 percent chance of dropping out.<sup>24</sup>

**Recommendation 17:** Provide schools with the resources to continue and to develop extra- and co-curricular activities and encourage all students to participate.

**Rationale:** One way to foster school engagement is to encourage students to participate in extra- and co-curricular activities. These activities should be seen as a vital part of the education process and should receive the adequate resources needed to operate.

23 Chang, H.N. and Romero, M. 2008. *Present, Engaged, and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades*. The National Center for Children in Poverty.

24 Neild, R.C. and Balfanz, R. 2006. *Unfulfilled Promise: The Dimensions and Characteristic's of Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis, 2000-2005*. Baltimore: Center for Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University.

## Commission Findings and Recommendations

### Areas for Improvement: Career and Technical Education

**Recommendation 18:** Implement the Career and Technical Education policy initiatives approved by the Kansas State Board of Education (See Appendix G).

**Rationale:** Research shows that students who participate in high-quality career and technical education programs are less likely to drop out of high school, more likely to improve their test scores, have increased earning power in the workforce, and are more likely to pursue post-secondary education.<sup>25</sup> The Kansas State Board of Education adopted a comprehensive set of career and technical education policy initiatives in 2010 that should be implemented by local school districts.

**Recommendation 19:** Encourage all school districts to include school-to-registered apprentice programs, internships, and work- and experience-based learning programs in structured learning time.

**Rationale:** Students who participate in professional learning experiences, such as those listed above, are better prepared to: make connections between real world experiences and the classroom; look at education with a greater sense of purpose; interact with adult role models to develop positive relationships and career connections; develop new skills and experiences beneficial to their career futures; enhance self-esteem as they demonstrate skills and earn recognition; and expand understanding of career and work options available and the need for post-secondary training.<sup>26</sup>

**Recommendation 20:** Provide the opportunity for every student in Kansas to take the Kansas Career Pipeline Assessment and be counseled about available career opportunities.

**Rationale:** In September 2009, Kansas DropINs conducted eight regional summits across the state to find out why students were dropping out of school. Six of the eight regions listed a key reason as “students are unable to find applicability of school to the real world”.<sup>27</sup> The Kansas Career Pipeline helps students see how their coursework prepares them for their future career goals, thus demonstrating its applicability and making it relevant. It is important that students have access to representatives from community organizations, businesses, industries and agencies during the counseling process so they can fully understand the career opportunities available and build new relationships.

25 *Career and Technical Education's Role in Dropout Prevention and Recovery*. 2007. Association for Career and Technical Education.

26 Randel, Gayla. 2010. *Professional Learning Experiences 2010-2011 Fact Sheet*. Kansas State Department of Education

27 *Kansas Dropout Prevention Pre-Summit Report*. 2009. Kansas DropINs.

## Commission Findings and Recommendations

### Areas for Improvement: Career and Technical Education

**Recommendation 21:** Give every high school student the opportunity to be tested on a national exam prior to his/her junior year to ensure that the student and his/her parents/guardians understand the student's abilities and readiness for postsecondary education, training, and/or employment to develop an action plan for skill enhancement.

**Rationale:** Typically students are tested on a national exam as they prepare to apply for post-secondary education. Students who are going directly to employment after high school usually do not participate in such exams. By offering all students the option of being tested prior to their junior year, additional instruction and opportunities can be provided in areas that need improvement. This will increase the likelihood of future success for the student.

## Commission Findings and Recommendations

### Areas for Improvement: Discipline

**Recommendation 22:** Stakeholders should participate with school districts in developing discipline policies and programs that keep students in attendance at school.

**Rationale:** When students are removed from school, they often fall behind academically, resulting in an increase in misbehavior when they return to class. Effective policies use developmentally appropriate disciplinary techniques that keep students in the school environment and learning, limiting the amount of time spent outside of class. Often times poor attendance is treated as a disciplinary issue. If a student is not attending school it is likely because they are disengaged or do not feel connected to the school. Suspending students who already are experiencing difficulties is simply going to further distance them. In-school suspensions should be the standard practice except when students pose a danger to persons or property or when they are a serious disruption to the educational process.

**Recommendation 23:** Districts should offer professional development to help staff use developmentally and culturally appropriate strategies when working with students.

**Rationale:** All behavioral strategies and interventions utilized in the school should be child-centered and appropriate for the age, gender, cognitive, emotional, and cultural backgrounds of the students. Providing professional development on this topic would help staff recognize and use appropriate strategies.

**Recommendation 24:** Foster relationships between families, schools and communities to support children from birth through graduation in order to prevent disciplinary issues.

**Rationale:** Students are influenced by the family, school, and community contexts in which they develop. Student learning and development are enhanced when there is purposeful overlap of communication and collaborative activities among school personnel, families, and community members. One possible outcome of this kind of collaboration is better student behavior within and outside of school.<sup>28</sup>

28 Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76, 701-712.

## Commission Findings and Recommendations

### Areas for Improvement: Graduation Requirements

**Recommendation 25:** Support local district policies to award a diploma to students who have achieved the minimum state credit requirements (KAR 91-31-35).

**Rationale:** Local school districts graduation requirements currently range from 21 to 30 credits. Presently, local school districts have the discretion of waiving district graduation requirements that exceed the minimum state credit requirements. The Commission supports superintendents in their decision to exercise this discretion. Situations that would be appropriate to receive this discretion include, but are not limited to, students who experience high mobility, teen pregnancy, long-term illness, academic difficulties or youth who have been under custody of the Secretary of SRS or the Commissioner of JJA.

**Recommendation 26:** The Kansas State Board of Education should review the differences between state and local district graduation requirements and determine the need for a change in state requirements.

**Rationale:** As previously mentioned, local school districts graduation requirements currently range from 21 to 30 credits, while the minimum state credit requirement is 21 credits. Of the 293 Kansas districts, 70 percent report requiring 24-26 credits to graduate. The Kansas State Board of Education should review the differences among the local school districts to see if any changes should be made to the current state requirement.

**Recommendation 27:** In addition to the minimum state graduation requirements, develop diploma endorsements around the Kansas Career Clusters Model.

**Rationale:** The Alabama State Department of Education requires all of their students to achieve the minimum state credit requirements in order to graduate. Students who want to go above the minimum can earn the following diploma endorsements: Advanced Academic, Advanced Career and Technical, and Career and Technical. It is important to note that these endorsements are an add-on to the required coursework and do not create separate pathways for career- and college-bound students. Kansas would benefit from developing similar diploma endorsements.

## Commission Findings and Recommendations

### Research Opportunities

**Recommendation 28:** Identify and inventory all educational programs in Kansas that serve adults 16 and over who lack a high school diploma or GED and research what, if any, improvements can be made to the service delivery models.

**Rationale:** Within Kansas there are a multitude of diploma completion, GED testing and skill enhancement programs that serve adults who lack a high school diploma. However, no central repository of this information exists as a tool for interested participants. Nor do these programs fully collaborate to ensure that a) there is not a duplication of efforts and b) that all areas of the state are being served.

**Recommendation 29:** Examine successful public/private sector collaboration models, particularly involving rural areas, in order to develop and engage such partnerships in support of individual student success for graduation.

**Rationale:** Several of the Commission recommendations involve multi-sector collaboration. It is beneficial to research collaboration models to ensure that those recommendations can be successfully implemented. Engaging the public/private sector in the education system will help ensure students have the resources that they need to be successful and graduate.

**Recommendation 30:** Identify and reduce the barriers to graduation that currently exist within the state (i.e. policy, reporting, funding and mobility).

**Rationale:** Schools have reported that there are barriers within the current system that are either a disincentive or a hindrance to graduating all students. Every effort should be made to eliminate these barriers so that all students can succeed.

## Commission Findings and Recommendations

### Moving Forward

**Recommendation 31:** Support a marketing and communication campaign that showcases the critical role of career and technical education in transforming the way education is delivered to all students and underscores the positive economic impact it provides for citizens and our state.

**Rationale:** Career and technical education is a proven strategy that prepares students to succeed in postsecondary education and the workforce. For many high school students, career and technical education provides the relevant learning experiences and relationships they need to be successful in high school and beyond.<sup>29</sup> It is important that these benefits are communicated across the state to encourage greater participation in career and technical education programs.

**Recommendation 32:** Continue the Commission's collaborative work under the format of a P-20 Council with the Council's membership broadened to include representatives from communities and other organizations.

**Rationale:** The Kansas P-20 Council has fulfilled the purpose for which it was created by former Governor Kathleen Sebelius. It is the hope of the Commission that the P-20 Council would be reestablished by the new administration in order to continue to work on issues related to graduation, dropout prevention and recovery.

**Recommendation 33:** Encourage and support the secure sharing and appropriate use of data across agencies.

**Rationale:** In order for stakeholders to have the information they need to improve student and system performance, Kansas must continue to build linkages to exchange and use information across early childhood, K-12 education, postsecondary and the workforce and with other critical agencies, such as health, social services and criminal justice systems.<sup>30</sup>

**Recommendation 34:** Identify key champions in the state to facilitate meaningful collaboration among stakeholders to ensure that all students graduate.

**Rationale:** There are a number of individuals and organizations working in the state to improve graduation and dropout rates. Initiating statewide collaboration among these groups would capitalize on these efforts and increase the likelihood that all Kansans graduate.

29 *Career and Technical Education's Role in Dropout Prevention and Recovery*. 2007. Association for Career and Technical Education.

30 Carson, R., Laird, E., Gaines, E. and Ferber, T. 2010. *Linking Data across Agencies: States That Are Making It Work*. Data Quality Campaign and The Forum for Youth Investment.

## Conclusion

As demonstrated throughout this report, the consequences of not graduating from high school are severe and extend beyond the student to also affect their family, school, community and state. Every organization and citizen in Kansas suffers when thousands of students are allowed to drop out each year. Not graduating these students is literally costing the state nearly a billion dollars a year.

To reiterate, each high school dropout costs Kansas approximately \$260,000 in lost earnings, productivity and wages and \$12,939 in Medicaid and uninsured healthcare expenditures over the course of their lifetime.<sup>33</sup> For the 3,003 students who did not graduate in 2009 this results in an economic loss of \$818 million. The Kansas Department of Labor made unemployment benefit payments to nearly 179,400 individuals in 2009, of which individuals without a high school diploma had the highest unemployment rates.<sup>34</sup> The Kansas Department of Corrections spent \$213 million last fiscal year to incarcerate inmates, most of who do not possess a high school diploma.<sup>35</sup>

Over the next 10 years, Kansas will experience an increase of 99,000 jobs requiring postsecondary education, yet the current rate of credential production does not satisfy the future workforce demand.<sup>36</sup> The state's ability to attract and retain employers is intrinsically tied to how effectively we graduate students today. No one is expendable. When we allow students to leave high school without a diploma we are endangering our state's economic competitiveness and quality of life.

In these hard economic times, Kansas cannot afford to be complacent. We cannot afford to let thousands of young people leave school every year without a diploma. We cannot afford to let our low-income and minority students fall behind their peers in achievement and attainment. We cannot afford to let these 38 recommendations go by the wayside. It is crucial to our state's economic viability and the health of our local communities that every young Kansan graduate high school with the skills they need to be successful in post-secondary education or a career.

33 Amos, Jason. 2008. *Dropouts, Diplomas and Dollars: U.S. High Schools and the Nation's Economy*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

34 *2010 Kansas Economic Report*. 2010. Kansas Department of Labor

35 *Per Capita Operating Costs: KDOC Facilities*. 2010. Kansas Department of Corrections.

36 *Beyond a High School Diploma, Keeping Kansas Competitive*. 2010. Governor's Forum Workgroup: Kansas Board of Regents, Kansas Department of Commerce and Kansas Governor's Office.