



**For Immediate Release**

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## **Kentucky's common-core testing program hits major snag** *Lawmakers surprised to discover that education officials will not score constructed-response questions in high school exams*

(LEXINGTON, Ky.) – Only one year after Kentucky became the first state in the nation to introduce an education assessment and accountability system aligned with the national Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the program has already hit a major snag.

In a decision with national overtones for the other 44 states that have signed on to the CCSS, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) has discontinued scoring for all constructed-response questions in each of the four CCSS-aligned high school end-of-course exams.

This decision means only multiple-choice questions remain as scored portions in these tests, which are a major element in the state's accountability program for high schools.

The US Department of Education has put states under considerable pressure to adopt common-core standards with the goal of developing school programs that prepare students for college and careers.

Lawmakers expressed surprise when told of the dramatic action, which KDE officials quietly communicated to school districts earlier this year.

“This sudden, unannounced change raises questions as to whether the remaining high school testing program complies with a bill I co-sponsored in 2009 that required the Kentucky Department of Education to develop new, high-quality education standards and coordinated tests that are aligned with what our students need to be ready for college and careers, and that are consistent across Kentucky,” said Senate President Pro Tem Katie Stine, R-Southgate, a member of the state Senate's Education Committee. “Because the Kentucky Legislature is ultimately responsible for education in the state, legislators need to hear from the KDE and others regarding this very disturbing development.”

Kentucky House Education Committee member Rep. Addia Wuchner echoed Senator Stine's concerns.

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“Senate Bill 1 from 2009 was targeted at getting our kids ready for college and careers,” said Wuchner, R-Florence. “To insure we remain on target, I am requesting a hearing about the drop of the constructed-response questions and a review of the CCSS adopted by KDE at the next convening of the Interim Joint Education Committee.”

Internal KDE documents reveal concerns among the state’s education leaders about constructed-response questions, including inadequate scoring turn-around times and a lack of diagnostic feedback explaining how scores for each answer are determined.

The slow score turn-around means constructed-response results could not be included in students’ final course grades and led to major delays in the “Unbridled Learning” results release for the 2011-12 school year – delays that could occur again had these questions not been deleted.

Reaction to the testing failure from other Kentucky organizations with Common Core interests has also been swift.

“Reacting as a parent, I can’t help wondering why Kentucky’s children have been exposed to these ongoing testing problems for more than two decades,” said Gina Glenn with Kentuckians Against Common Core Standards. “It seems like our children are locked in a continuously repeating experiment in the increasingly vain hope that the results will somehow turn out different the next time.”

Although Kentucky law requires scores be returned to schools well before the start of the following school term, the first CCSS-aligned test results were not issued until November of 2012. Department officials also said the state was not getting value for the \$1.5 million annual cost of the constructed-response questions. Open-response question costs have been an issue in Kentucky since the early 1990s.

“Kentucky’s two-decades-long experience with constructed-response testing provides a rich history of the problems of locating test vendors who can reliably score constructed-response question results in a timely manner,” said Richard Innes, the Bluegrass Institute’s staff education analyst. “Very simply, it does not look like constructed-response questions in large-scale statewide testing programs can be properly scored within the necessary time constraints at a cost that states can afford.”

The KDE also announced that local high schools may continue to score the constructed-response questions at their option.

“This actually will de-standardize what is supposed to be a standardized test given the same way throughout the state,” Innes noted. “A quick check reveals some districts will locally score, but another won’t even administer these questions.”

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