

2008 CATS overview

To understand the importance of the scores released Sept. 10, 2008, by the Kentucky Department of Education, it is helpful to understand a bit of background on the Commonwealth Accountability and Testing System, more commonly known as CATS.

Every year, students in grades three through eight, and 10 through 12, take state tests (called the Kentucky Core Content Test or KCCT) that measure how much they have learned. Tests are a combination of multiple choice and short written response questions in reading, math, science, social studies, writing, arts and humanities, and practical living and vocational studies. Students are rated as novice, apprentice, proficient, or distinguished, with novice being the lowest and distinguished being the best. At some grade levels, students also take national tests.

Individual student scores are combined with factors like attendance, retention and dropout rates, as well as a measure of how many students have moved to higher performance levels, to give a school a score of between 0 and 140. The goal in Kentucky is for every school to reach 100 by the year 2014. To make sure the school is on track toward 100, each school has individually calculated goals to reach every two years. Progress toward the goal of 100 is evaluated by averaging performance over two years and comparing school and district scores to their individual goals.

Major changes to the state testing system have created a situation where the numbers are more complicated than usual. This year, schools and districts will receive two sets of scores. One score will show how the school did under the new ratings system. That score looks to the future and gives a snapshot of how much work a school has to do in order to reach the state goal of 100 by the year 2014. The second, so-called "adjusted" score is a way to bridge the new system with past performance so that schools and families can see how the results compare with the predetermined biennial goals. Accountability ratings of "meets goal," "progressing," or "assistance" are based on the adjusted scores.

Another important special exception this year is that we have several schools that are being judged against the districtwide goals because they had attendance area changes. Although the scores shown are the schools', the accountability ratings may not be a true measure. Schools affected by this situation are: Booker T. Washington Academy, Johnson Elementary, Meadowthorpe Elementary, Russell Cave Elementary, Crawford Middle, Edythe J. Hayes Middle and Tates Creek Middle. The scores shown for Athens-Chilesburg Elementary are actually district scores, but on the chart, the school's real scores are also shown at the bottom.