

**REVIEWING THE USE OF
STATE ASSESSMENT TESTS IN KANSAS**

PERFORMANCE AUDIT REPORT
Executive Summary
with Conclusions and Recommendations

From a Report to the Legislative Post Audit Committee
By the Legislative Division of Post Audit
State of Kansas
June 1996

Legislative Post Audit Committee

Legislative Division of Post Audit

THE LEGISLATIVE POST Audit Committee and its audit agency, the Legislative Division of Post Audit, are the audit arm of Kansas government. The programs and activities of State government now cost about \$7 billion a year. As legislators and administrators try increasingly to allocate tax dollars effectively and make government work more efficiently, they need information to evaluate the work of governmental agencies. The audit work performed by Legislative Post Audit helps provide that information.

We conduct our audit work in accordance with applicable government auditing standards set forth by the U.S. General Accounting Office. These standards pertain to the auditor's professional qualifications, the quality of the audit work, and the characteristics of professional and meaningful reports. The standards also have been endorsed by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and adopted by the Legislative Post Audit Committee.

The Legislative Post Audit Committee is a bipartisan committee comprising five senators and five representatives. Of the Senate members, three are appointed by the President of the Senate and two are appointed by the Senate Minority Leader. Of the Representatives, three are appointed by the Speaker of the House and two are appointed by the Minority Leader.

Audits are performed at the direction of the Legislative Post Audit Committee. Legislators or

committees should make their requests for performance audits through the Chairman or any other member of the Committee. Copies of all completed performance audits are available from the Division's office.

LEGISLATIVE POST AUDIT COMMITTEE

Senator Lana Oleen, Chair
Senator Anthony Hensley
Senator Phil Martin
Senator Alicia L. Salisbury
Senator Don Steffes

Representative James E. Lowther, Vice-Chair
Representative Tom Bradley
Representative Duane Goossen
Representative Sheila Hochhauser
Representative Ed McKechnie

LEGISLATIVE DIVISION OF POST AUDIT

800 SW Jackson
Suite 1200
Topeka, Kansas 66612-2212
Telephone (913) 296-3792
FAX (913) 296-4482

The Legislative Division of Post Audit supports full access to the services of State government for all citizens. Upon request, Legislative Post Audit can provide its audit reports in large print, audio, or other appropriate alternative format to accommodate persons with visual impairments. Persons with hearing or speech disabilities may reach us through the Kansas Relay Center at 1-800-766-3777. Our office hours are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.



LEGISLATURE OF KANSAS
LEGISLATIVE DIVISION OF POST AUDIT

MERCANTILE BANK TOWER
800 SOUTHWEST JACKSON STREET, SUITE 1200
TOPEKA, KANSAS 66612-2212
TELEPHONE (913) 296-3792
FAX (913) 296-4482


June 6, 1996

To: Members of the Kansas Legislature

This executive summary contains the findings, conclusions, and recommendations from our completed performance audit, *Reviewing the Use of State Assessment Tests in Kansas*.

The report also contains appendices showing the results of surveys of school superintendents, principals, and teachers concerning their use of the State assessment tests, and a description of the steps taken to ensure that the assessment tests were reliable and valid.

This report includes several recommendations for ensuring that the assessment results are used in appropriate ways, and for ensuring that steps are taken to continue to monitor the reliability and validity of the assessment tests. If you would like a copy of the full audit report, please call our office and we will send you one right away. We would be happy to discuss these recommendations or any other items in the report with any legislative committees, individual legislators, or other State officials.


Barbara J. Hinton
Legislative Post Auditor

**Reviewing the Use of State Assessment
Tests in Kansas
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

LEGISLATIVE DIVISION OF POST AUDIT

**Question 1: Are There Limitations as to
How the Information Obtained From the
State Assessment Tests Should Be Used,
and How Is It Being Used?**

In a broad sense, the type of assessment tests selected and the way they were developed imposes some overall limits on the use of assessment test results. *Because the assessment tests specifically measure students' progress toward meeting the Kansas curriculum standards, no national comparisons can be made. Also, because each assessment test goes through a pilot development stage, results from early versions of the test can't be compared with results from later versions.* page 12

The assessment tests were designed so that, by themselves, the test scores would be reliable and valid when used to measure students' average performance at individual schools. *Concerns had been raised about the reliability and validity of the assessment tests. The University of Kansas' Center for Educational Testing and Evaluation, the contractor that developed the tests, followed the steps required by professional standards to ensure the assessment tests were valid and reliable for measuring students' average performance at individual schools. But, officials from the Department of Education and the Center said the assessment test results shouldn't be used as the sole factor in comparing individual student performance or in making comparisons between schools or districts, because of the many other factors that can affect such comparisons.* page 15

In general, school administrators indicated they are using State assessment test scores as designed. *They are using the results to see whether their students are being taught what they're expected to know, to identify changes that may be needed in what or how they teach, and to try to improve those test results over time.* page 18

Because of confusion about how test results should be used, assessment test results sometimes are being used for purposes they weren't designed for. *A significant number of school administrators and teachers said they're using the assessment test results to compare individual students' achievement. Some superintendents and principals said they were using the assessment test results to make comparisons between schools and districts. A small number said they had or were considering tying students' graduation requirements to their assessment test scores, or were using the results to evaluate teacher performance. Recent actions by the Legislature—including mandating a school building report card and student performance expectations—will either require or encourage assessment test results to be used for purposes they weren't designed for.* page 18

School officials and others we talked with or surveyed during the audit had both positive and negative opinions about the value of the assessment tests. *Those who liked the assessment tests were most positive about how the results could improve education in Kansas. Those who didn't like the tests generally voiced concerns about the usefulness of the information they provided, the consistency of scores, and the amount of time it took to administer them.*

..... page 21

Members of the public also expressed praise concern about the State assessment tests. *Although some people we spoke with said they thought the assessment tests were beneficial and valuable, others expressed concerns that the assessment tests included inappropriate attitude-type questions and had reading selections that contained inappropriate subject matter. We found that the attitude questions no longer are asked. Also, the Department tries to minimize controversy over the reading passages through its selection process.*

..... page 23

Question One Conclusion: *Kansas assessment tests were designed to be used for comparisons over time of an individual school, individual district, or the State as a whole, to see if students were mastering the things they are supposed to learn under the State's curriculum standards. Average scores were not intended to be used to make comparisons between students and between school districts. Making these types of comparisons requires significantly more information than can be gleaned from the test scores alone.*

..... page 25

Responses to our surveys show that most educators are using the State assessment tests for appropriate purposes. A few indicated they were using them for things they weren't designed for. Generally, superintendents seemed to have a better understanding of acceptable uses than did principals and teachers. This may indicate that the districts need to improve communication to make sure information reaches all levels. A legislative requirement to produce building report cards could increase the risk that test scores will be used inappropriately. The Department will need to take appropriate precautions when it issues building report cards to help ensure that test scores are not misinterpreted or misused. Another legislative requirement to set expectations for student performance could require that the tests be redesigned to make them better measures of individual student performance.

The performance components of the assessment tests (those parts that require students to write open-ended responses or complete group or individual projects) generated a lot of positive and negative comments. Much concern was expressed about the cost of administering and grading these parts of the tests. Clearly, these types of questions represent a new way of testing whether students are mastering the higher-order critical thinking skills required by the curriculum standards. After they have been in use an appropriate amount of time, the Department may want to consider whether their use is the most cost-effective way to obtain the desired information.

Concerns also were raised about whether local scoring of the tests would allow districts to inflate their scores to show improvement. The Department has built in some safeguards to detect inflated scores, and will need to continue monitoring this so that interested parties can have assurance that the test scores are reliable.

Question One Recommendations: *A brief summary of the report's recommendations, together with a summary of applicable comments from the agencies, is presented below.*

..... page 26

We recommended that the Department of Education continue to work with school district superintendents to ensure that the information about the appropriate and inappropriate uses of the State assessment tests is communicated to all educators. We also made recommendations to the Department to lessen the likelihood that test score information contained in building report card will be misinterpreted.

We recommended that the Department assess what changes would need to be made to the assessment tests to make the scores more reliable and valid for comparing individual student scores to the "Student Performance Expectations" the Legislature has required the Department to establish. We also recommended that the Department present these changes, and their associated costs, to the education committees at the start of the 1997 legislative session so the Legislature can make an informed decision about whether it wants to retain the student performance expectations.

We recommended that the Department continue to monitor the consistency of local scoring, and evaluate whether changes in scores reflect changes in what is being taught. Finally, we recommended the Department continue to monitor the performance components of the tests to ensure the information they provide is worth the cost.

The Department generally concurred with these recommendations, and noted it already is doing many of the things we recommended. The Department noted that it thought performance assessments were an important element for testing students' higherorder thinking skills, and that such assessments yielded information that couldn't be obtained from other tests. The Department concurred, however, that it should continue to monitor both the performance and multiple-choice/multiple-mark portions of the State assessment.

Question 2: How Do Kansas' State Assessment Tests—and Its Methods of Measuring Student Performance—Compare With Other States?

Kansas is further along than more than half the states we contacted in the development of its assessment tests. *Five of the 13 states we reviewed—Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, and Oklahoma—are using assessment tests, which generally are similar to those being used in Kansas. The main differences we noted were that the other states tended to have centralized scoring of their tests, and also required other standardized tests to be administered. Two other states, Arizona and California, used assessment tests in the past, but dropped them because the results were being used for purposes they weren't designed for. Both states are developing new assessment tests.*

..... page 27

APPENDIX A: Comparing the State Assessment Tests With the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the National Assessment of Educational Progress page 33
APPENDIX B: Evaluating Reliability and Validity page 37
APPENDIX C: Summary of Interviews with School District Superintendents page 41
APPENDIX D: Summary of Survey Responses from Principals page 45
APPENDIX E: Summary of Survey Responses form Teachers page 51
APPENDIX F: Agency Response page 57

This audit was conducted by Ellyn Sipp, Scott Brunner, and Trish Pfannenstiel. If you need any additional information about the audit's findings, please contact Ms. Sipp at the Division's offices. Our address is: Legislative Division of Post Audit, 800 SW Jackson Street, Suite 1200, Topeka, Kansas 66612. You also may call (913) 296-3792, or contact us via the Internet at: LPA@PostAudit#1.ksleg.state.ks.us.

