

Testimony before the  
Special Committee on Education

## Examining Skills for Student Success Post-Graduation A Discussion of the Findings of the Kansans Can Success Tour 2021

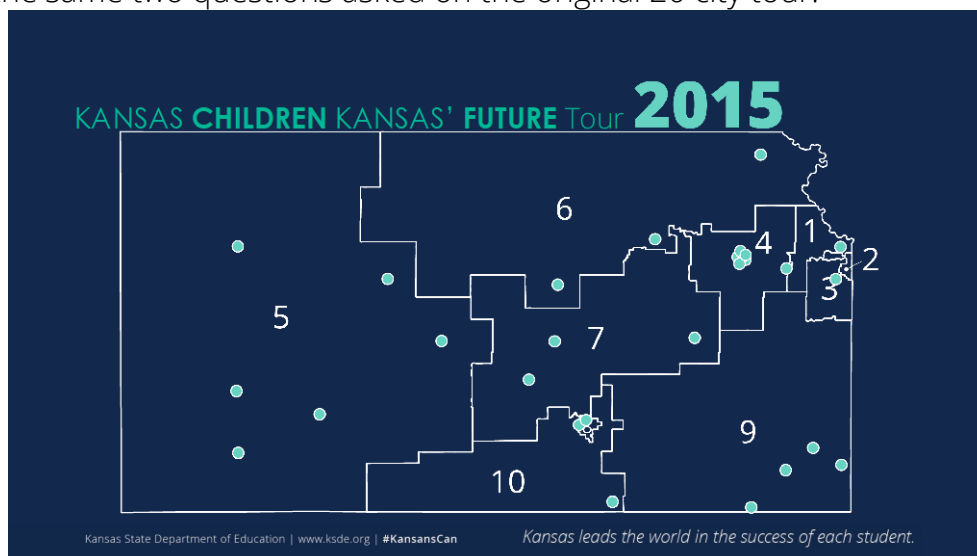
Dr. Randy Watson, Kansas Commissioner of Education  
November 30, 2021

### Background

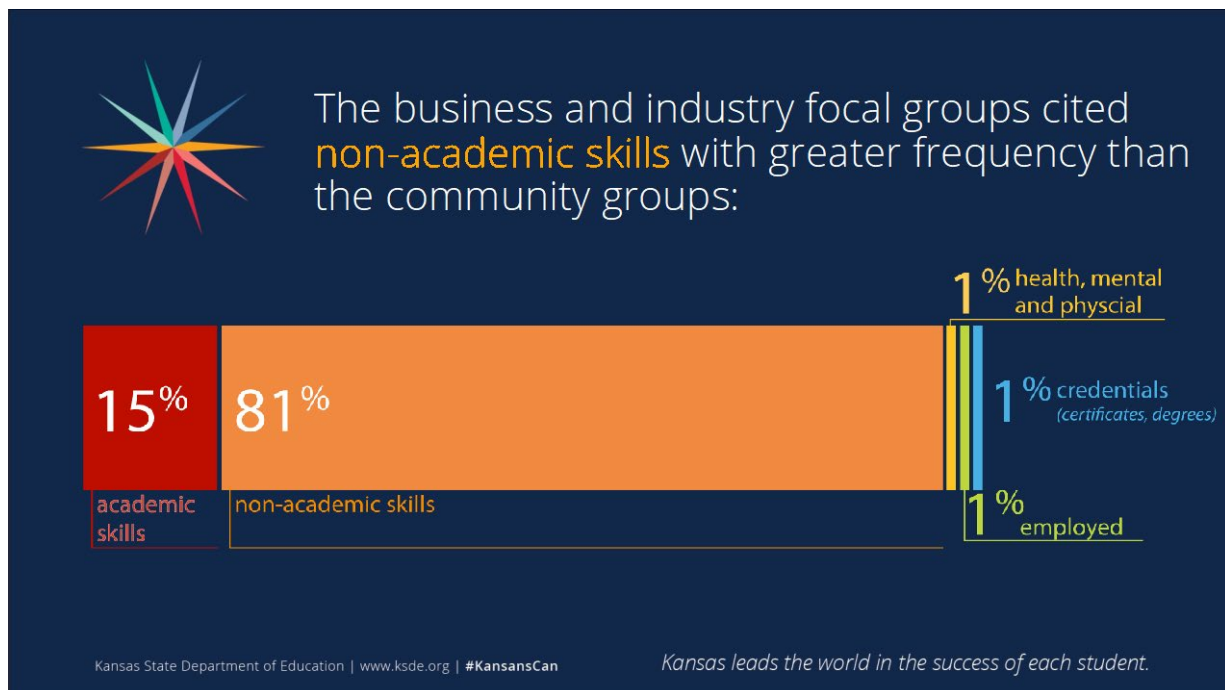
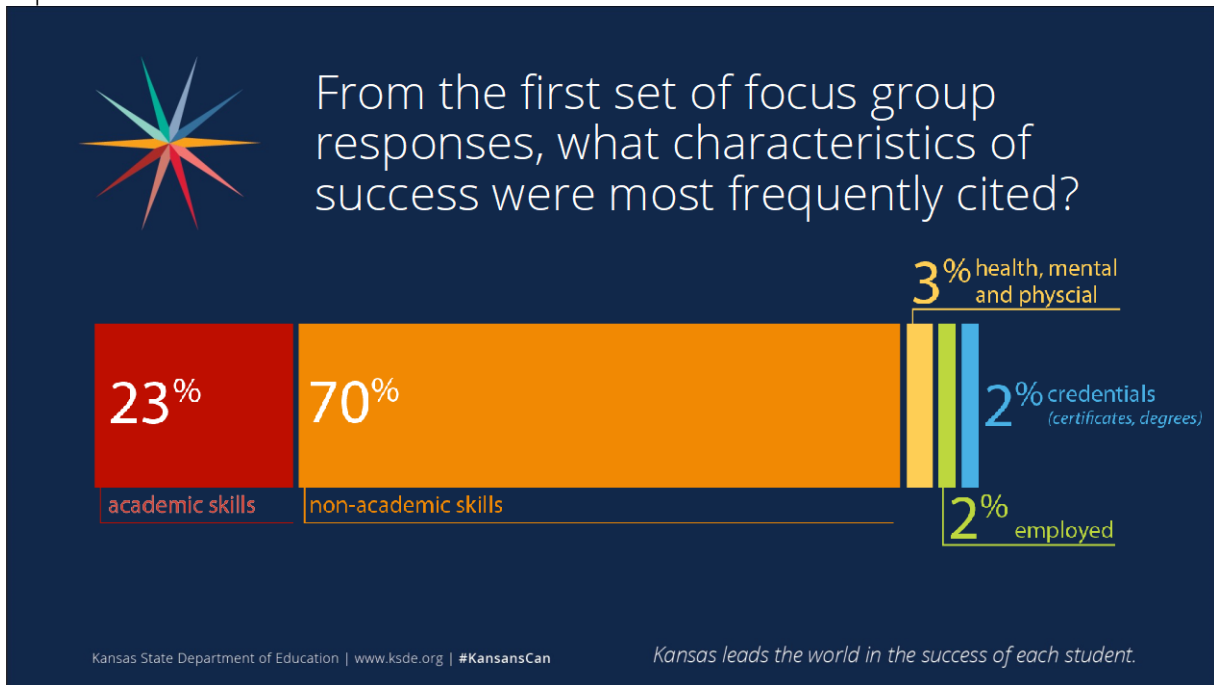
In 2015, the Deputy Commissioner, Brad Neuenswander and I toured the state to find out what Kansans wanted in their educational system. We initially went out to 20 different locations in Kansas to conduct sessions where participants could give open ended answers to two main questions:

1. What are the skills, attributes and characteristics of a successful 24-year old Kansan living in our state today?
2. What should schools do, if anything, to prepare students to be successful as just described in question #1?

Upon returning and looking at who attended the sessions, we noticed that there was not as much business participation as we wanted in the sessions, so I went to see Mike O'Neal, who at that time was President of the Kansas Chamber. He and I developed a plan that would include voices from the business community from across our state in seven different locations. We went back out to those locations and asked the business leaders the same two questions asked on the original 20 city tour.



In response to question #1, both the community and business sectors indicated that the majority of skills needed for success were skills not measurable on state assessments. This did not diminish the need for academic skills, but rather emphasized that more than academic skills were needed for success as an adult.



In response to the second question, what should schools do, if anything, to prepare students to be successful as just described in question #1, the responses received from both the general community and the business sectors generated around these themes:

- Re-designing the curriculum—around individualized goals, planning, instruction, and experience, around incorporating real-life problems and projects into the curriculum, and experiential learning—is heavily suggested.
- New roles are suggested for school counselors—in deeper individual career planning, and perhaps in coordinating internships and work experiences with business and community organizations.
- The large proportion of instrumental skill training that included some *experiential* training, e.g. internships; concrete, realistic practice, job shadowing, etc.—suggests much more integrated coordination with businesses and community organizations.
- Project and task performance, individual planning, curriculum designed for realistic experiences, internships and work experiences—are more important measures than traditional assessments.
- Post high-school measures—credentials, employment, well-being—are also important measures of K-12 success.

In summary, Kansans, from community groups to businesses, asked the State Board to consider the following in designing an educational system.

## What Kansans want from their schools



Learning from over 2,000 participants, in what researchers from Kansas State called, “the largest qualitative study completed on Kansas education,” the State Board developed a new system of accountability to encompass what Kansans and research stated was needed for future success of students. This started with a vision statement:



Our Vision for Kansas ...

Kansas leads the **world** in the success of each student

Kansas State Department of Education | [www.ksde.org](http://www.ksde.org) | #KansansCan *Kansas leads the world in the success of each student.*

The State Board wanted to include three distinct parts to their vision of education for Kansas. First that Kansas would set the highest measures and standards for success and measure school districts against those measures and standards in the accreditation process. Second, that the vision would focus on success and in doing so, the State Board, in collaboration with the Kansas School Superintendent Association, produced the state definition of success.



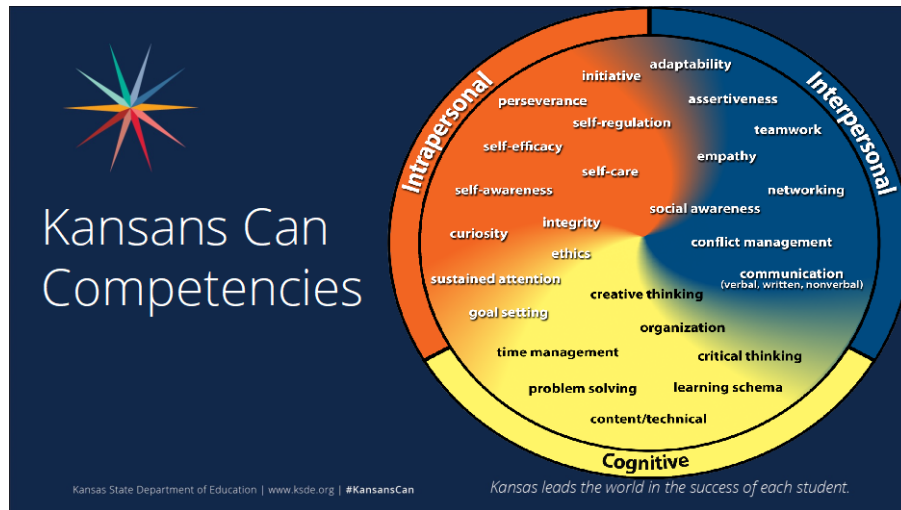
A Successful Kansas High School Graduate has the

- Academic preparation,
- Cognitive preparation,
- Technical skills,
- Employability skills and
- Civic engagement

to be successful in postsecondary education, in the attainment of an industry recognized certification or in the workforce, without the need for remediation.

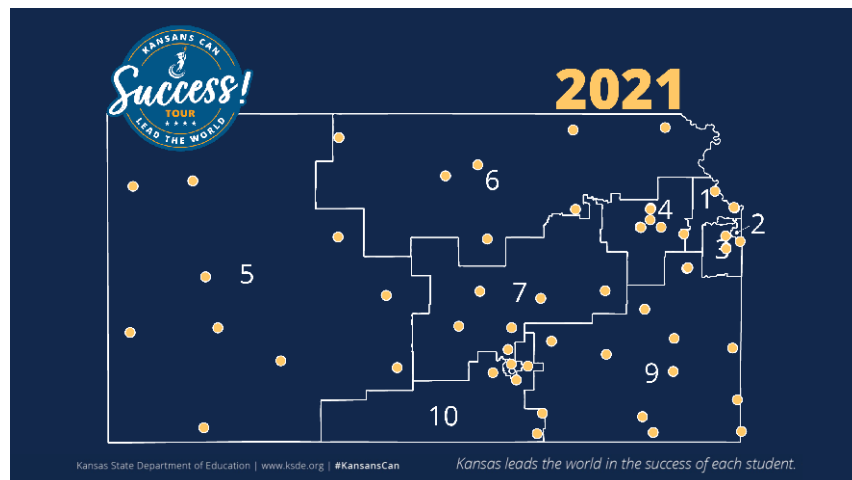
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The third part of the vision was that “each student” would obtain this success. This work was done and completed in 2016 and the State Board set a goal of achieving this vision by 2026-2030, with all schools involved in the work no later than 2026. The skills that Kansans stated were essential were captured by this graphic. It is important to note that Kansans clearly stated it was the combination of these skills that made up success.



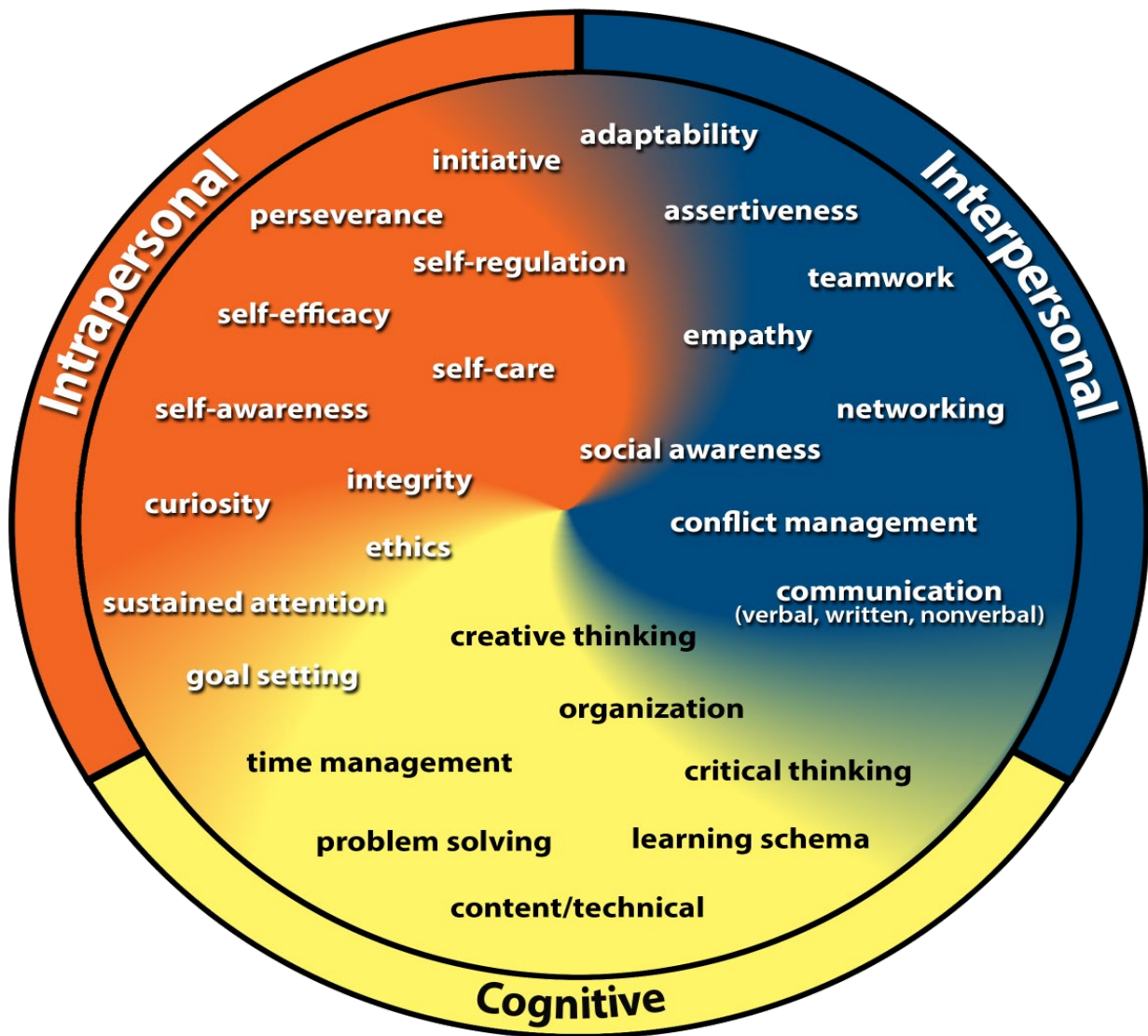
### Kansans Can Success Tour 2021

In the late summer of 2021, Dr. Neuenswander and I again went back out throughout Kansas to explain the work done in 2015-16 and to gage to what extent, Kansans – Community, Parents and Business, agreed or had changed their mind, about the direction that the State Board was taking in preparing students for future success. This time we went out to 50 different Kansas communities and engaged the Kansas Chamber of Commerce and local chambers of commerce before we embarked on the tour.



We asked almost 4,000 participants the following two questions:

1. In 2015 Kansans told us that a combination of academic, employability, social-emotional, and cognitive skills lead to success. On a scale of 1-5 do you still agree that these are the skills that students need to be successful in transition to adulthood?



We have engaged three different research groups to analyze the data received from the Kansans Can Success Tour. While the groups have not yet provided the State Board with the results of this tour, we do know that Kansans agreed that the combination of skills listed above were still necessary to assist students to transition to successful young adults.

We followed up with a second question.

2. In 2015, Kansans told us that schools should focus on four core areas to assist students in becoming successful. These areas included teaching the student success skills - a combination of academic, employability, social-emotional, and cognitive skills that lead to success. Second, that schools should work to personalize a plan for each student. Third, schools should engage families, parents, business and the entire community on a stronger basis and fourth, that students should do real world work or project based simulated work as much as possible. On a scale of 1-5 do you still agree that schools should emphasize these four areas that students need to be successful in their transition to young adulthood?

## Kansas School Redesign Principles

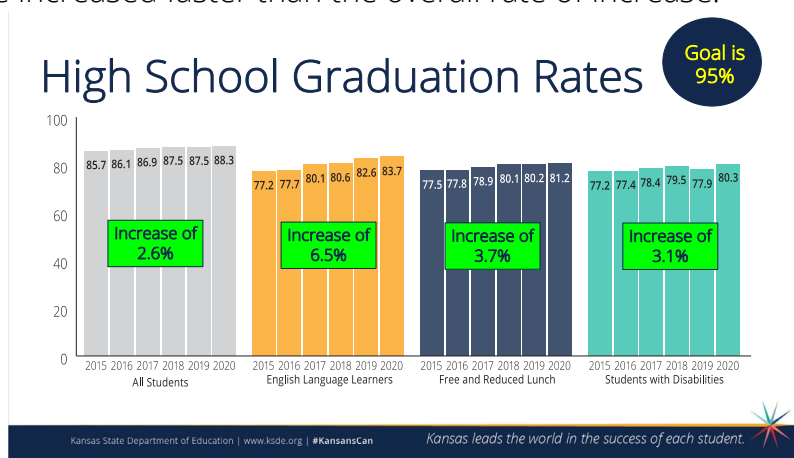
<b>Student Success Skills</b>	<b>Family, Business, and Community Partnerships</b>
There is an integrated approach to develop student social-emotional learning.	Partnerships are based on mutually beneficial relationships and collaboration.
<b>Personalized Learning</b>	<b>Real World Application</b>
Teachers support students to have choice over their time, place, pace and path.	Project-based learning, internships, and civic engagement makes learning relevant.



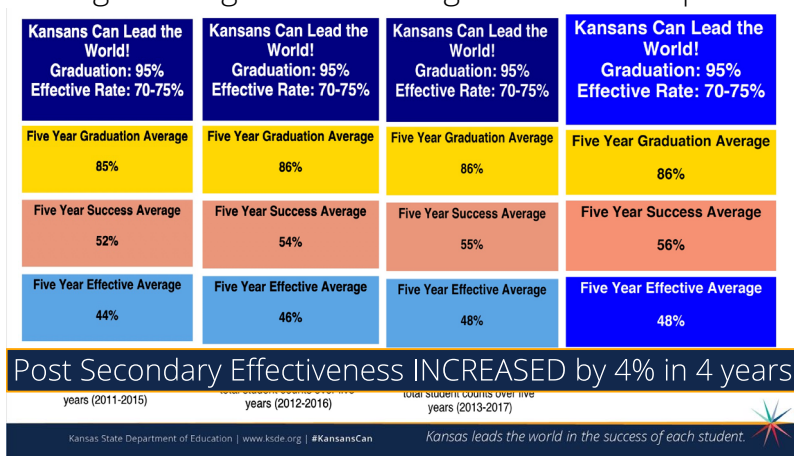
Once again, researchers are still doing a complete analysis of the data, but we can say with confidence that Kansans believe this work is what is needed to from schools to help students become successful.

Finally, we asked everyone on the tour to give as many comments as they liked to the question, "What support do schools need to accomplish the system change desired by Kansans?" These were open ended answers that the research groups are still analyzing at this time.

Finally, during the tour, we celebrated with Kansans that since 2015, graduation rates have increased 2.6%, while every sub-group – poverty, ELL students and students with disabilities have increased faster than the overall rate of increase.



In addition, since 2015, the post-secondary effectiveness numbers – those students who graduate high school and go on two years after high school to complete or pursue some type of post-secondary schooling, increased 4%. This is greater than the percent of students graduating from high school during the same time period.



Finally, since 2010, students taking remedial college courses (age 17-19) attending community college fell 5.8% and for state universities fell 6.3%.

