

# **What Does a Successful 24 Year Old Look Like?: Reflections from the State Board of Education**

*Jim Porter*

“What does a successful 24 year old look like?” This is a critical question that must be successfully addressed if Kansas is to “Lead the World in the Success of EACH Student.”

For many decades we have attempted to fit the student in to the system, and many students have been successful. However, many have not. What would happen if the system were built around the individual student? What would happen if individual student’s interests, passions and talents were the most important factors when determining the best educational plan for each student?

Those of us who have spent our entire careers in public education have seen so many otherwise capable students disengage when they did not see the relevance of their classes to their life interests or career plans. All students need to be able to read, write and communicate effectively. All students need to understand and apply math. Currently all students, regardless of their interest or future plans follow the same Language Arts and Mathematics Curriculum. That is fitting the student in to the system. These are only two examples, the same could be said of other curriculum areas. What would school look like if the curriculum were fitted to the students?

The Kansas State Board of Education is responsible for EACH Kansas public school student. Right now about 14 of every 100 incoming high school freshmen do not graduate. In addition there are students who do graduate who are not prepared for the next step in their lives. This is not acceptable, and we cannot expect different results by following the same path.

By developing Individual Plans of Study based on student interests, abilities and passions and by developing plans based on what is important to each student we expect to not only improve the graduation statistics but also, and more importantly, engage all students so that they have a much better chance of leading a fulfilling lives. We want them to successful 24 year olds and continue that success throughout their lives.

*Jim Porter (jporter@ksde.org) is former chair of the Kansas State Board of Education.*