
PERSPECTIVES FROM THE PRESIDENT

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Abstract

KATE President Nathan Whitman provides a hopeful and encouraging reflection on the 2023-2024 school year.

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Last year, I presented a reflection via a football analogy. It was a somber reflection and one whose tone I hoped would not carry over into this year's perspective. Luckily, I was partially right. Unlike the past two years of 1,700 and 1,800 teacher vacancies as we entered summer (Educate Kansas, 2022-2023), this year, only 1,600 educational vacancies exist (Educate Kansas, 2024). However, this number still speaks to the educational crisis that Kansas—and to be fair, the United States—finds itself a part of. Is this the start to a downward trend? We can hope.

Speaking of hope: Governor Laura Kelly successfully led an effort to fully fund special education in Kansas after much political turmoil (*Governor Kelly Fully Funds Kansas Schools*, 2024). Investment into the science of reading continues to grow (Carpenter, 2024). Moreover, there was a significant overhaul by the KSBOE for graduation requirements, starting with this incoming freshman class, that finally tackle Individual Plans of Study and financial literacy (Deines, 2024). Furthermore, a new coalition of colleges is now working together towards making an education degree more affordable in an initiative known as Educate the State (Wray, 2024). One can only hope that these and other endeavors add some sense and stability to the educational landscape which has been fraught with chaos and challenges.

Nevertheless, while we did gain some ground, there are still issues to be faced, like the unprecedented open enrollment of districts for the upcoming school year (Perez, 2024) and bills that target LGBT+ individuals and students under the logical fallacy of protecting children from obscenity (Barackman, 2024). On top of all that, ESSER funds from the COVID-19 pandemic are going away, leading to the elimination of needed services and roles (Loging and Heilman, 2024), and combating generative AI is still an ongoing issue in classrooms, especially those in English Language Arts; however, some institutions and teachers have even embraced the technology (Mark, 2024).

We still must fight for public education and the future of our students. But we have hope.

Some things are changing for the better. NCTE continues to support affiliates through professional development opportunities, like this summer's Affiliate Leadership Meeting (NCTE, 2024). Collaborations at the state level provide leadership opportunities for educators of all walks, like the new KS LEADS conference (Bush, 2023). Change is hard. Change is difficult. Change, though, is necessary for hope. Be part of the change you want to see by joining organizations, attending conferences, speaking up at board of education meetings, and serving on committees. Now, for the shameless plug: regarding leadership opportunities, did you know that you can [nominate yourself for the Kansas Association of Teachers of English board](#) on our website?

I *hope* to see you at our upcoming [fall 2024 conference: *Voices From Our Backyard*](#). Effect change by presenting and attending. The Kansas Association of Teachers of English, and educators like you, have been—and continue to be—one of my sources of hope and inspiration.

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