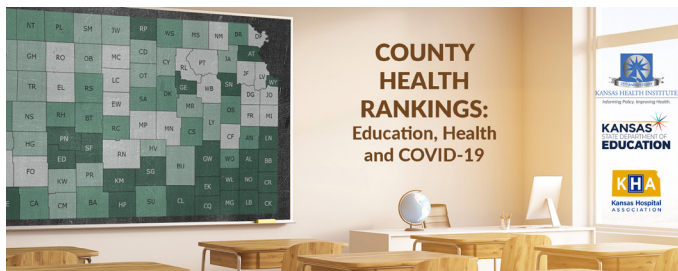


# EDUCATION, HEALTH AND COVID-19



As COVID-19 continues to cast a spotlight on schools as hubs for a range of services beyond education, it is more vital than ever to identify partners to support these needs. On September 22, 2020, the Kansas Health Institute (KHI), Kansas Hospital Association (KHA) and Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) co-hosted a [2020 County Health Rankings virtual event](#) to explore the interplay between education and health; innovative partnerships between schools, hospitals and other sectors; and strategies to leverage County Health Rankings data.

Around 200 people from across Kansas participated in the event, which was opened by Robert St. Peter, M.D., President and CEO of KHI, and Jean Clifford, member of the KHI Board of Directors and the Kansas State Board of Education (District 5). St. Peter emphasized the critical role of the County Health Rankings as a catalyst to recognizing a two-way connection between education and health across the state. Clifford echoed these remarks and noted that “in education we see health as essential to our students’ success in school and life.”

## Opening Remarks

Opening remarks were delivered by Gov. Laura Kelly, who emphasized that improving educational opportunities and health outcomes are key priorities of her administration. To advance these priorities, the administration has been



Gov. Laura Kelly

focusing on expanding high-speed broadband, improving health care access and implementing economic development initiatives.

## Panel Discussion: Setting the Stage

The first panel in the event focused on education and health and the “whole child” approach to education.

Lt. Governor Lynn Rogers opened the panel by describing how listening sessions in rural



Lt. Gov. Lynn Rogers

communities across the state in 2019 helped shape the priorities of the administration. He said schools and hospitals are the heartbeat of communities in rural areas because they are key service providers and often the largest employers.

KSDE Commissioner Randy Watson, Ed.D., M.S., shared the experience of the Kansas school system in adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic.

He highlighted the role of stakeholder input in developing the school reopening plan, [Navigating Change](#).



Randy Watson, Ed.D., M.S.

Watson issued a call to action that emphasized creative thinking about repurposing community spaces for school learning as districts determine how to bring students back to school.

Tiffany Anderson, Ed.D., Superintendent of Topeka Unified School District 501, drew attention to how a



Tiffany Anderson, Ed.D.

student’s ability to learn is impacted by coming to school hungry, and also by not knowing where the next meal or shelter will come from. Anderson emphasized

that focusing on the “whole child” is important to helping students become successful learners, and that the role of a school as the center of the community provides an opportunity to address different needs. In Topeka, for example, some current efforts have focused on implementing micro-classrooms, providing internet hot spots, adding mental health screening

questions to school enrollment forms and installing laundry machines at 18 schools.

## 2020 Kansas Health Rankings: What's New?

Charles Hunt, M.P.H., Senior Analyst at KHI, provided an overview of the 2020 County Health



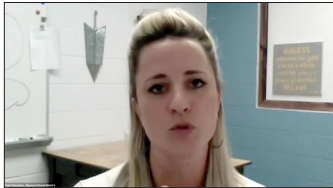
Charles Hunt, M.P.H.

Rankings. Hunt noted that counties that rank lower in terms of their health factors tend to also rank lower in terms of their health outcomes. To learn more about

their counties, Hunt encouraged event attendees to review their [individual county profiles](#), developed by KHI. The profiles describe more than 30 measures, including two education-related measures. Other resources highlighted by Hunt included a database of more than 400 [strategies](#), [congressional district maps](#), an [interactive diagram](#) that shows the magnitude of disparities by different factors and [guidance for using the data](#).

## Perspective from a Peer Community

Event attendees also had the opportunity to hear from Teal VanLanen, Director of Improvement and



Teal VanLanen

Community Engagement for the Algoma School District in Wisconsin. The district won the 2017 Culture of Health Award from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The school district began using County Health Rankings data along with education-related data to identify vital conditions across the community, then convened conversations across sectors about ways to address them. As a result, the school district became a central hub for mobilizing community efforts.

## What is Happening in Kansas?

The importance of collaboration remained a central theme throughout the second panel. Melissa Rooker, Executive Director of the Kansas Children's Cabinet,

emphasized that cross-agency collaboration and hearing from voices across Kansas was critical in informing the development of the 2020-2024 [All In For Kansas Kids: Early Childhood Strategic Plan](#).



Melissa Rooker

Austin Gillard, F.A.C.H.E., CEO of Clay County Medical Center, described a collaboration in which



Austin Gillard, F.A.C.H.E.

partners, including the school system, medical center, local health department, police department and emergency medical services, came together

to develop initiatives that focus on improving the health of the region.

Todd Carter, Ed.D., District Administrator of USD 480 in Liberal, said the district was among the first seven school districts in the state to participate in the [Kansas Can School Redesign Project](#). The district implemented a



Todd Carter, Ed.D.

“soft start approach” to transitioning students from home to school so they are ready to learn. According to Carter, the value of this approach is that it meets all students where they are every day.

## Closing Remarks

Lee Norman, M.D., Secretary of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, said



Lee Norman, M.D.

COVID-19 was a stress test for the state of Kansas. The pandemic helped to reveal gaps and opportunities for improvement. To address these gaps, Norman

recommended novel thinking and interconnectedness, focusing efforts on as local a level as possible, and making sure that the work cuts across sectors, engages champions and empowers activation teams.

### KANSAS HEALTH INSTITUTE

The Kansas Health Institute supports effective policymaking through nonpartisan research, education and engagement. KHI believes evidence-based information, objective analysis and civil dialogue enable policy leaders to be champions for a healthier Kansas. Established in 1995 with a multiyear grant from the Kansas Health Foundation, KHI is a nonprofit, nonpartisan educational organization based in Topeka.

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