

PRESS & GUIDE

DPS to take steps to improve on MEAP performance

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DEARBORN - Students in grades K-9 in the Dearborn Public School District (DPS) who took the MEAP test last fall as a whole outperformed Wayne County in each category they were tested on, according to DPS Assistant Director of Assessment Shereen Tabrizi.

Tabrizi discussed district results with the DPS Board of Education during its April 13 meeting, where she also said DPS third- and fifth-graders outdid the state in writing, while DPS third-graders bested state results in math.

DPS students struggled with the writing test, though, Tabrizi said, but students improved their writing scores some over last year. DPS students also improved on several of the math scores, sometimes by several percentage points, she said.

"We are happy with what is going on," Tabrizi said.

Learning to be intensified

While Tabrizi is pleased with DPS students' progress, she unveiled a number of steps the district will take to build on that improvement.

Those steps include:

- o Intensifying student acquisition of literacy and numeracy to ensure most students read at grade level and acquire the necessary math skills by third grade;
- o Providing intervention to 'atrisk' students across all grade levels;
- o Focusing on teaching problem solving, critical thinking and comprehension skills;
- o Ensuring learning is applied to real-life situations;
- o and strengthening the district's partnership with parents in educating students.

"We can't work alone," Tabrizi said. "We need to make sure what we're doing in the classroom is being supported at home and that the goals of parents are being aided by teachers."

Does DPS help new students?

DPS Board President Joe Guido questioned if district officials over a two- to four-year period could track the performances of students new to the district. He also asked if those new DPS pupils had an affect on test scores.

Tabrizi said new students do affect scores, adding she had just continued a longitudinal study of scores. She also said data only goes back so far.

"I've done several of those studies and each time, we find students who stay with us perform much better than when they don't," Tabrizi said. "The higher the mobility, the lower the achievement of the student."

Board members disagree on test's intent

Board Vice President Aimee Blackburn said she finds it absurd that school districts determine success by comparing groups of students each year. She said she doesn't believe that tells a district much educationally, adding a student's progress should be measured individually and year-by-year.

Board Trustee Pam Adams said she believes students should be judged against one another, as it would help determine how teachers educate different students.

Michigan plans to change the state writing test in two years, limiting the test to fourth and seventh grade, among other changes. It is currently given annually in third through eighth grade.

Mixed bag of results

Other Dearborn test results were mixed across the 21 elementary schools and seven buildings with middle schools, Tabrizi said.

At the fourth-grade level, Howard, Lindbergh, Geer Park, Duvall, Snow, Howe, Haigh and River Oaks elementary schools continued to be top scorers in the district, placing above the state average in both English Language Arts and math.

Maples, Oakman, William Ford and McCollough elementary schools, however, were far below the state average in both categories at fourth grade.

Teachers and administrators at each school access the test scores and see exactly where students are struggling and succeeding. For example, the tests could show pupils do not understand fractions but have mastered multiplication, Tabrizi said. The school can then work to strengthen weak areas.

Overall, DPS was below the state average in fourth grade English Language Arts and math.

"The district exceeded the county at each content area and each grade level," Tabrizi said. Wayne County is a better benchmark for DPS because the county's demographics better align with the district's, she said.

Dearborn plans to continue focusing on improving reading as the key to improving all scores, she said.

Freelancer Katie Hetrick contributed to this report.