

District in top 9 percent on state assessment

By Tom Marshall Senior Advocate writer

The Montgomery County School District learned last week that it had placed in the top 9 percent of districts in Kentucky based on a statewide assessment.

A four-year review of the district's scores shows that it has improved from the 24th percentile in 2011 to 73rd in 2012, 87th in 2013 and 91st for 2014.

The scores are good enough to place it among distinguished districts on the Unbridled Learning: College/Career Readiness for All School Report.

The district showed gains from 2013 at four of the six schools: Mapleton Elementary, Mt. Sterling Elementary, Montgomery County Intermediate and McNabb Middle.

Drops were reported at Camargo Elementary, which was the district's highest achiever last year, and Montgomery County High School.

There are seven designations that a school can receive.

Needs improvement designation is for those schools that fall below the 70th percentile, proficient is for those at or above the 70th percentile, distinguished are for those above the 90th percentile, progressing is for those that meet the annual measurable objective, high performing is for the top 90 percent of schools, school of distinction is for the top 95 percent of schools and high progress is for top 10 percent of improvement.

The following are scores and designations for individual schools:

* Camargo Elementary-Score of 86th percentile, proficient/progressing, down from 93rd percentile in 2013.

Achievement: 81.8, down from 85.3 the previous year.

Gap: 58.9, down from 63.4 in 2013.

Growth: 58.9, down from 68.0.

Reading: 70.7, down from 74.8 in 2013.

Math: 73.1, down from 80.8 in 2013.

Science: 100, same as 2013.

Language mechanics: 89.2, up from 84.7 in 2013.

* Mapleton Elementary-96th percentile, distinguished/school of distinction/high performing school, up from 77th percentile in 2013.

Achievement: 88.2, up from 78.9 in 2013.

Gap: 57.7, up from 49.1.

Growth: 70.6, up from 64.9.

Reading: 83.8, up from 66.

Math: 78.1, up from 70.9.

Language mechanics: 100, up from 76.4.

* Mt. Sterling Elementary-Score in the 85th percentile, proficient/progressing, up from 81st percentile in 2013.

Achievement: 83.0, up from 75.2.

Gap: 57.5, up from 47.4.

Growth: 57.4, down from 72.2.

Reading: 79.4, up from 64.6.

Math: 71.8, up from 62.

Science: 100, up from 97.2.

Language mechanics: 71.7, down from 83.8.

* Montgomery County Intermediate-98th percentile, distinguished/progressing/school of distinction/high progress, up from 78th percentile in 2013.

Achievement: 87.0, up from 78.8.

Gap: 58.9, up from 51.4.

Growth: 72.3, up from 64.0.

Reading: 84.6, up from 69.1.

Math: 85.9, up from 75.3.

Social studies: 99.1, up from 93.8.

Writing: 80.8, up from 77.5.

Language mechanics: 66.6, down from 74.4.

* McNabb Middle-94th percentile, distinguished/progressing/high performing/ high progress, up from 56th percentile.

Achievement: 86.6, up from 72.2

Gap: 53.4, up from 44.2.

Growth: 67.4, up from 57.1

College and career readiness (from Explore): 45.9, up from 43.5.

Reading: 82, up from 64.7.

Math: 78, up from 58.5.

Science: 95.5, up from 89.4.

Social studies: 98.5, up from 82.6.

Writing: 76.5, up from 64.3.

* Montgomery County High School-54th percentile, needs improvement, down from 69th percentile in 2013.

Graduation rate: 99.2, up from 97.

College and career readiness: 74.8, up from 68.0.

Achievement: 62.1, down from 63.0.

Gap: 30.1, down from 37.0.

Growth: 52.5, down from 53.0.

Reading: 66.8, up from 66.

Math: 55.8, down from 60.

Science: 57.8, down from 64.

Social studies: 63.9, up from 58.

Writing: 65.7, down from 69.

Language mechanics: 64.9, down from 67.

Percentage of students scoring novice:

Reading, 28.2 percent; math, 25.2 percent; science, 23.9 percent; social studies, 26.7 percent; writing, 13.1 percent; language mechanics, 17.4 percent.

In individual subjects, MCHS students scored 66.8 in English II, above the state average of 61; 55.8 in algebra, below the state at 56.8; 57.8 in biology, below the state at 59.4; 63.9 in U.S. history, below the state at 66.7; 57.4 on 10th grade on-demand writing, below the state at 58.4; 77.9 on 11th grade on-demand writing, above the state at 72.1.

All the district's schools scored 100 percent on program reviews, a new scored accountability measure this year, except for the high school, which scored a 79.2.

The program reviews are a self assessment completed by a team of educators in each school that scores against a state rubric.

The reviews are subject to state audit.

Marty Dixon, a district curriculum specialist, led the district wide program review effort.

However, the Kentucky Dept. of Education asks the public to remember that because this year the components of the system have changed with the addition of program reviews, you cannot compare overall accountability scores from previous years.

The KDE also cautions when making any comparisons using data outside of the 2013-2014 School Report Card since some of the data has changed slightly from last year due to data cleanup.

Calculating the scores

Achievement: Student performance on tests in reading, math, science, social studies and writing.

Gap: Performance (percentage of proficient and distinguished) of students who are members of traditionally underperforming groups (ethnic minorities, special education, poverty and limited English proficiency) compared to the goal of 100 percent proficiency in all five subject areas.

Growth: Individual student's score compared to the student's academic peers to determine if typical or higher levels of growth have occurred in reading and math.

College/Career Readiness: High school graduates who successfully meet an indicator of readiness for college and/or careers.

Graduation rate: The percentage of on-time graduates as measured by four-year adjusted Cohort Formula.

Inside the numbers

Superintendent Josh Powell primarily credits teachers with the continued improvement in scores.

Powell said personnel changes have improved the quality of teaching students in the district are receiving.

"The teachers are empowered and leading the way," he said. "When I arrived in 2011 it was more of a top down process. A change in administration and principals have also been instrumental in this endeavor."

Making these personnel changes in low performing districts like Montgomery County was previously is difficult and can anger segments of the community who don't want things to change, Powell said.

"Our personnel changes are what have led to these dramatic improvements contrary to what's reported at board meetings and in the media," he said.

Now that all teachers are held to the same standard there is a level playing field and teachers are working together to reach student achievement, school administrators said.

Alison Hubbard, the district's assessment coordinator, said there is a sense of excitement among teachers about the future.

Nowhere is that more evident, she said, than McNabb Middle School, which saw one of the biggest jumps in the state from the 56th to 94th percentile.

That's also evident at Camargo Elementary, where scores have risen from among the poorest in the state a few years ago to the top 7 percent last year.

Powell said staff at the school were disappointed with this year's scores, which dropped 7 points, but still remain among the top 14 percent in the state.

That goes to show how much pride staff at the school, and throughout the district, take in student performance, he said.

A change of culture exists at all the elementary schools from the days when parents could request certain teachers and some could pull strings to ensure they got who they wanted, Hubbard said.

Now all the teachers are good and there is no need to ask for those judged the best, she said.

"It didn't used to be that way," Hubbard noted.

Administrators, however, were disappointed with the drop in scores at the high school, but said that it wasn't unexpected.

The school underwent a leadership change last year when principal Jim Dusso left the school.

"It wasn't a teacher issue, but a leadership issue last year," Powell said. "As I've said before, leadership is the critical variable in producing these dramatic increases. We anticipated the high school would be exactly where they're at."

Powell said he expects scores to improve at the high school next year now that it's under new leadership.

Former principal Shannon White has returned to head the school and joins a revamped leadership team.

Powell said he also expects those scores to be boosted by increased attention to the Sterling School now led by Rocky Franz.

Sterling School results are included with the high school.

Efforts there have already increased district wide graduation rates to among some of the highest in the state, Powell said.