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Oldham County Schools | Test results show overall drop

Fewer schools meet goals; Harmony Elementary among bright spots

By Sara Cunningham • scunningham@courier-journal.com • September 29, 2010

• DATABASE: Oldham County No Child Left Behind and Kentucky Core Content Test scores

With four years to go, Harmony Elementary is rapidly closing in on goals set for all schools by the federal No Child Left Behind law.

Under the law, all students at every school in the nation are expected to reach "proficiency" on state math and reading tests by 2014.

At Harmony, more than 85 percent of the students are proficient or distinguished in reading, up from about 80 percent last year, according to state test score data released last Thursday.

More than 88 percent of Harmony's students are proficient or distinguished in math, up from about 79 percent last year, and the school saw even larger growth in social studies and on-demand writing.

The school's success stands out in a year when Oldham County saw more of its schools fall short of federal math and reading goals and saw overall drops in the percentages of students testing proficient or distinguished in almost every subject

area and at all grade levels, with the exception of on-demand writing at the high school and middle school levels.

Eight Oldham County schools met all their goals, compared with 13 schools last year. Most of the nine schools that missed meeting their goals had never fallen short before under **No Child Left Behind**.

As a district, Oldham met 14 of 19 goals this year, falling short in five areas: reading and math among black students, reading and math among students with disabilities and reading among low-income students.

"We're concerned about it but not alarmed," said Superintendent Paul Upchurch. "These results don't mean we should panic; we just need to spend some time figuring out what happened and what we can do to better meet students' needs."

In Kentucky, math and reading scores from the Kentucky Core Content Test that students take each spring are used to determine progress toward meeting No



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Child Left Behind goals. Students also take the tests in science, **social studies** and on-demand writing.

Schools are measured on their overall progress toward performance goals each year and on the performance of students who are separated into certain categories like minorities, low-income, disabled and limited-English students. Each year, schools are required to make "adequate yearly progress" toward their goals, and the standards rise each year.

Upchurch said No Child Left Behind's rising standards made it likely that some schools eventually would come up short. Schools that are making progress could fail to meet goals because they just aren't making progress fast enough, he said.

While Upchurch said the district doesn't want to put too much emphasis on No Child Left Behind, he said he was surprised by the drops in percentages of students testing at proficient and distinguished on the state tests.

"We expect improvement in every area, every year," Upchurch said. "I believe our instructional practices are second to none and our principals, teachers and students are working really hard."

Upchurch and Deputy Superintendent Charlene McAuliffe said teachers and principals already are looking at the data from the state tests and trying to figure out what might have happened and where they need to go next.

McAuliffe said changes in the test this year, such as the state shortening the testing window from 10 days to six and including fewer open-response questions, also will be looked at as teachers and principals pore over the results.

"We know our schools are not putting less effort into it," McAuliffe said. "We're all in the situation of figuring out what happened. Was it a fluke? Was it something about the test? Is there something we need to do differently? We're not panicking. We're going to be very deliberate about what we do."

Other schools besides Harmony did see some success, and part of the next step is looking at what those schools have done, McAuliffe said.

La Grange Elementary and South Oldham Middle School didn't meet federal goals last year, but they met them this year.

If South Oldham Middle meets its goals

The advertisement features the USA TODAY logo at the top left. Below it, the word "AutoPilot" is written in a large, bold, black font, with a blue airplane icon to its right. To the right of the title, it says "The new travel app for iPhone® and iPod touch®". Below this, it says "Presented by: Hampton" with the Hampton logo. At the bottom right, it says "SEE HOW IT WORKS >>". On the left side, there is a smartphone displaying the app's interface, which shows a flight schedule for "USA TODAY Meeting" on "Sep 21, 2009". The schedule includes a flight from BNA to MDL, a flight to Washington (MD), and a flight to Washington. The app also shows weather information for Washington (MD) as "Partly Cloudy" and a link to "View a Flickr gallery of Washington".

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next year as well, the school won't have to let students transfer to other schools. It takes two consecutive years of meeting goals to have those sanctions lifted.

Likewise, a school that fails to meet its goals for two years in a row is sanctioned.

South Oldham is the only Oldham school to have ever faced sanctions through No Child Left Behind, but it's the only middle school in the district this year to make all of its goals. Test scores show more than 83 percent of the school's students are proficient or distinguished in reading, up from last year's 79 percent, and more than 84 percent of the school's students are proficient or distinguished in math, up from last year's 82 percent.

"I'm very happy for my staff and students," said South Oldham principal Rob Clayton. "There's a lot of pride in performing well."

Clayton said the school will continue to monitor student progress this year and give extra help to struggling students.

McAuliffe said South Oldham Middle and La Grange Elementary really "zeroed in" on students who were struggling and other schools are doing the same.

Centerfield Elementary's principal, Diane Morgan, said her school missed its federal goals in reading among students with disabilities and low-income students. The school also saw slight drops in the percentage of students scoring proficient across the board.

"We're rolling up our sleeves and digging in to find out what we can do better," Morgan said.

None of the district's high schools met federal reading and math goals, and all of them saw drops in the percentage of students who tested proficient in all subjects tested except on-demand writing.

North Oldham High School principal Lisa Jarrett said her staff is looking at individual students' needs to see what the school can do better.

"I don't want to have the reputation of only being in the game if we're winning," Jarrett said. "We're poring over that data, and we're going to just keep working hard. We're still a high-performing school in a high-performing district. It's just that we can do better."

Reporter Sara Cunningham can be reached at (502) 582-4335.

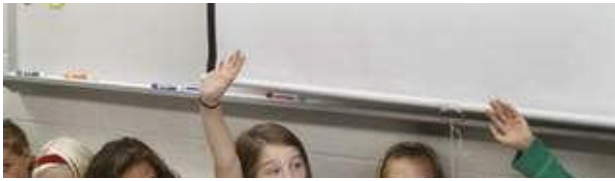
COVER PHOTO: Harmony Elementary fifth-

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grade teacher Sharon Stump works with students Katelynn Meyer, left, Mason Beard and Zach Whitlow.



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