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Stark school leaders grade state report cards 'F' for flawed data

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The annual progress report for your school likely has some failing grades, say local superintendents, who met Tuesday with reporters to share concerns.

School leaders say the report card grades do not depict the reality of what is going on in the classroom, and they don't event want the state to release the data.

"We agree the data in this report card is flawed and does not accurately reflect the achievements of the students in the 22 districts we represent," Stark County Educational Service Center Superintendent Joe Chaddock said, referring to the county's 17 public school districts and a handful of districts outside of Stark, including Dalton.

Chaddock and fellow educators have urged local legislators to stop the ODE from releasing the data to the public.

Superintendents got their first look at the grades Monday.

The latest installment will include grades for value-added — academic progress made by students during a year — and the performance index — a composite of test scores across multiple grades and subjects.

"We are more than a report card can measure," said Teresa Purses, president of the Stark Education Partnership.

Community service, athletics, civic duties, participation in the arts and more can't be measured on the report card, she said.

Stark County students continue to see improvement in a number of areas including the number of students graduating. More students also are taking Advanced Placement and College Credit Plus courses, she said.

Students are college and career ready when they graduate from high school and, Purses said, more students are attending college and remaining in school.

DATA FLAWED

Officials say changes from the Ohio Achievement Assessment test to the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers testing last year, more rigorous standards and a switch from paper and pencil testing to online testing have muddled the grading.

Lake Local Superintendent Jeff Wendorf called the state report card inaccurate and obsolete.

"It's convoluted and complicated," he said adding his district won't use the system.

Educators listed progress made by students as an example of a report card component that doesn't measure up. According to information provided by the ESC, 12 districts received an F in growth, three a D, one district a C. Four districts garnered an A from the state. The prior year, 13 districts received an A while four had Fs, three had Cs, and one a B.

Officials said the flip-flop is in part due to a switch to the PARCC exam making scores from the previous year unable to be compared.

The state has recognized the problems and has offered safe harbor for districts, teachers and students.

"Districts performing at an A/B level for years now, why are they getting D/F; what changed?" Fairless Superintendent Broc Bidlack asked. "The staff didn't change, the instruction didn't change, the delivery style didn't change. Why did the grade change?"

Bidlack said more rigorous standards and a change in state tests have districts facing a new ballgame.

He said districts across the county are catering to students beyond their academic needs — from physical, emotional and non-academic barriers to student learning.

"We are looking at the entire child not just the testing," Bidlack said.

MORE THAN GRADES

Officials hopes parents and community members will look past the scores when they are released on Thursday.

"I would just ask our parents to think for themselves, to evaluate your schools, your teachers and your administrators on what you think and on what your student's education is like," ESC Assistant Superintendent and former Perry Local Schools Superintendent Marty Bowe said.

Purses suggests trusting assessments districts are consistently using to evaluate their students, their needs and achievements.

"Before their was a state report card we trusted the information we received from the school," she said. "I hope we never lost that trust."

The message is clear, said Purses: You won't find anyone that is going to work harder for kids than local educators.

But educators must be held accountable and parents should look to ACT scores, graduation rates and other indicators, she acknowledged.

"We believe when you look at the whole group of students and look at each student group you are going to find folks in this room are closing achievement gaps; sometimes that story doesn't get told," Purses said. "That report card is not going to be an indicator of the success that happens for our children in the classroom."

Last month, the state released data, including graduation rates, how well schools help struggling readers in kindergarten to third grade, and how prepared graduates are for college.

Districts received grades for K-3 literacy and graduation rates. The third component — Prepared for Success — will be a new grade starting with report cards issued next fall.

Last month's report cards show data for the success category, such as students that earned industry credentials before graduating, those who took and scored well on college entrance exams and how many students were taking college-credit classes in high school.

Many districts, such as Tuslaw, Northwest and Massillon, have disputed information provided by the state, including the number of students taking college credit courses.

"The theme is hold us accountable but treat us fairly," Chaddock said. "We think this report card does not accurately reflect the great things going on in our schools. This is a positive message. We're about getting better. And we think that as we kind of gauge all of our school districts we look at college readiness, we look at career readiness and we look at being ready to enter the military. Those are the three goals we have for each of our graduates.

"Because the fourth option is poverty," he said, "and that's an option that is not acceptable to any of us. We are working very diligently to continue to get better."

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