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Stark school officials: State report cards are too flawed

Representatives from the Stark County Educational Service Center, four Stark County school districts and the nonprofit Stark Education Partnership held a joint press conference Tuesday to express their concerns about what they say are inaccurate scores in the report card results. The state is expected to publicly release the report card results Thursday.

Stark County educators and school superintendents say the local report card results are so flawed that they don't want the state to publicly release them Thursday.

"There's an entity that deserves an F, but it's not our schools," said Marty Bowe, former Perry Local superintendent who now works for the Stark County Educational Service Center.

Representatives from the Stark County ESC, four Stark County school districts and the nonprofit Stark Education Partnership held a joint press conference Tuesday to express concerns about what they see as inaccurate data in the report card results ahead of Thursday's public release.

Stark County Superintendent Joe Chaddock said the group was empowered to speak for all 22 school districts in Stark, Summit and Wayne counties that are members of the Stark County ESC.

The group said the state's decision to change from the Ohio Achievement Assessment that students had been taking since 2004 to the more rigorous and time consuming Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers last year has produced results that do not align with historical results or internal benchmarking data.

While schools, teachers and students cannot be penalized for poor scores, local school officials say they fear that publicly releasing the report card results will cast an unjustified negative perception on local school districts that could have long-term consequences.

"When our parents and our community members vote for a levy, they don't stand there at the ballot box and do an analysis of our five-year forecast," Bowe said. "It's how they feel. ... If they feel poorly about it and they think something needs changed there, they vote no on the levy. Completely flawed data to make us look bad does not help us when it comes to public opinion of our schools."

Chaddock said districts have contacted state legislators to communicate concerns about the report card results and the need for more local control. He hopes that districts in Ohio's other 87 counties are doing the same.

As of Tuesday afternoon, the state had not indicated that the results would be delayed. Ohio Department of Education officials have scheduled a conference call for Wednesday afternoon to brief the media on the report card release.

RESULTS

Thursday's report card results will include scores for how well students performed on math, English, science and social studies tests in various grade levels, how well gifted students performed as well as how much districts spent. In January, the state released the first half of the report card results, which reflected how well districts prepared students for college or a career and how well they helped young struggling readers get on track. Some Stark County districts also had disputed their January scores as incomplete.

School officials on Tuesday provided a breakdown of the letter grades that Stark County ESC-member districts scored on the latest report card for overall academic performance and overall progress. The breakdown did not include results for individual districts and did not identify districts by name.

For academic performance, the breakdown shows that none of the 22 districts had enough students who scored well enough on last year's state tests to be given an A.

Eleven districts got a B, eight districts received a C and two districts received a D on performance. One district was not included in the breakdown. The grade distribution is similar to the year before, according to the provided summary.

It's under the progress scores where grades plummet.

According to the provided breakdown, 12 school districts received an F, while three received a D, one received a C and four received an A. The distribution is a near flip from the prior year when 13 districts received an A in overall progress and four had received an F.

School officials said the overall progress score is where the switch to the PARCC test is the most glaring. The score is supposed to reflect student progress over a school year.

But since the state switched to the PARCC test last school year, school officials said the scores are not comparable.

"It's like if you're going through driver's training and you practice in a car, and then you show up and you have to take (the test) on a tractor," Chaddock said.

Bowe likened the comparison between the two tests to a high school sophomore who had earned high grades throughout his school career until a teacher gives him a new evaluation and he receives an F grade.



PHOTO/ CANTONREP.COM/MICHAEL S. BALASH

Mike Bayer, Curriculum Director at the Stark County Educational Service Center talks about the upcoming release of the state report card.

“Do you think your child all of a sudden is ineffective and incompetent? Or is it the new evaluation system that’s flawed?” Bowe said. “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.”

BEYOND REPORT CARDS

Teresa Purses, president of the Stark Education Partnership, which has tracked student performance for more than a decade, said other measures that have remained constant over the years, such as graduation rates and college entrance exam scores, show the true progress that districts have made.

In 2004, 10 Stark County schools had more than 90 percent of their seniors graduate. Last year, the number jumped to 14.

Purses also noted that the number of Stark County graduates who needed remedial math or English courses when they went to an Ohio public college has dropped significantly, while the number of students taking advanced placement and dual credit courses in high school continues to rise.

“We are so much more than a report card measure,” Purses said.

Lake Local Superintendent Jeff Wendorf said the district considers the report card results “obsolete” and “terribly convoluted.”

“We’re not going to pay attention to it,” Wendorf said. “It’s like trying to determine a good car based on its tire pressure. It doesn’t matter. It’s obsolete.”

Wendorf, along with superintendents from Jackson, Fairless and Alliance, said they use their own internal testing data to measure how well students are progressing, rather than relying on the changing state standards.

This school year, students will once again be given a different state test as state legislators decided to drop the PARCC tests after hearing numerous complaints from students, parents and educators.

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