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Waterbury students lag on test

Waterbury schools falling behind rest of state in math, English

BY MICHAEL GAGNE REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

September 6, 2018

Results from last spring's Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium tests showed Connecticut's public school students in grades 3 to 8 are making some gains overall in math and English language arts.

But the rates of students meeting achievement standards in the state's large urban school districts, like Waterbury, continue to lag behind statewide averages.

Statewide, more than 55 percent of students achieved a score on ELA portion of the SBAC test that indicated they had met or exceeded the proficiency standard. Meanwhile, on the math test, the total percentage of students who had met the benchmark statewide was just under 47 percent.

In Waterbury, 19.2 percent of students who had taken the math test scored as having met or exceeded expectations, an improvement of 1.6 percentage points over last year's results, and 3 percentage points higher than 2015-16 test results.

Meanwhile, on the math portion of the test, more than 55 percent of Waterbury students attained a score on in the Level 1 range, which meant their scores did not meet expectations. In the ELA test, 48 percent of students scored in that range.

Among districts around Greater Waterbury, Naugatuck Public Schools showed some of the strongest gains in math and ELA. More than 52 percent of borough student achieved the proficiency standard in ELA, while nearly 49 percent of students achieved benchmarks in math.

The nearly 49 percent of borough students achieving proficiency in math is an improvement over the prior year's rate of 41.2 percent, and the 32.1 percent of students who had met or exceeded expectations on tests administered during the 2015-16 school year.

For Superintendent Sharon Locke, the results for third grade students on math were some of the most promising, as 54.3 percent scored as having met or exceeded expectations. That percentage bested the percentage of third-graders – 53.8 percent – statewide to achieve that level, by a half-percentage point. At some schools, more than 65 percent of third-graders achieved proficiency.

"It just speaks to the work of our teachers at the K-to-2 level," Locke said, attributing the achievement to what she called "targeted instruction and professional learning."

"The district also invested in math coaches," Locke said. "All of our K-to-8 schools have math coaches."

Students at Brass City Charter School outperformed their statewide peers, with nearly 66 percent of students meeting or exceeding standards in ELA and nearly 67 percent of students attaining those levels in math. The test was administered to third, fourth and fifth grade students at the school.

“We believe that our high expectations for students, rigorous curriculum, strong social-emotional program, and mission aligned teachers who receive weekly coaching all contribute to our success,” said Barbara Ruggiero, the school’s executive director, in an email to the Republican-American.

Waterbury Public Schools Chief Academic Officer Darren Schwartz said the city’s school district is “improving in most areas, but more still needs to be done for all students in Waterbury.”

As one of the districts efforts to reform instruction, new English language arts and science curricula “are being implemented districtwide this school year in all elementary and middle schools.”

Overall, the district has shown improvements on both the math and ELA tests, with the strongest improvements seen in math, with the percentage of students achieving proficiency increasing by 6.1 points since the test was first administered during the 2014-15 school year.

Schwartz said district students are showing growth, with one subgroup of students – English language learners – achieving proficiency at a rate exceeding statewide averages. The percentage of those students who had achieved their growth targets increased by 8 percentage points, which Schwartz noted had exceeded the statewide average improvement for that group, which was 5.5 percentage points.

Ajit Gopalakrishnan, chief performance officer for the State Department of Education, said in a conference call with reporters this week the results are promising.

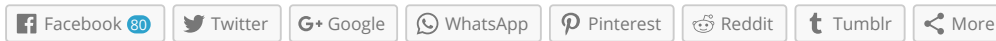
Gopalakrishnan said test scores are only one component of school performance. The accountability results, referred to as the Next Generation Accountability System, will be released later in the year.

Gopalakrishnan said statewide, math performance results are at “their highest levels, because they have been increasing each of the years.”

The state is also seeing improvement among what Gopalakrishnan referred to as “our most vulnerable student groups,” which include African-American and Hispanic students, as well as high needs students, a group that includes low-income students, students with disabilities and English language learners.

Gopalakrishnan said the state is also seeking increases in its Alliance District and Commissioner’s Network schools.

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