

Less than half of students in Maryland pass PARCC

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First PARCC test results for elementary poor

Less than half of Maryland elementary and middle school students can pass the tough new standardized tests, a result school officials attribute to an overhaul of teaching and testing standards in the past several years. Maryland raised the standards for what public school students are expected to learn two years ago and the results show that teachers and students have not yet adjusted to the higher expectations of the new Partnership for Assessments of Career and College Readiness or PARCC.

On the reading test, nearly 40 percent of Maryland students in grades three through eight failed to meet the standard set by educators from Maryland and about 10 other states. Only 30 percent met the standard in math. That standard could be adjusted by the Maryland State school board if they believe it is too high.

"We have set the bar high, and this data reflects that," said Interim State Schools Superintendent Jack Smith, in a statement. "These results should be viewed in combination with other measures when assessing student progress."

The results were not as good as those in Massachusetts and New Jersey, but slightly better than those in Illinois, Louisiana and Rhode Island. Not all of the states that give the test have released all of their data yet.

The new Common Core standards require students to do more analytical thinking, to write more and to read more difficult material. The tests are scored on a five point scale, with four being meets expectations, and five being exceeds expectations. A three or less is failing, unless the Maryland State Board of Education votes to lower the standard.

2015 Maryland PARCC scores: Grades 3 through 8

Even in counties, such as Howard County, where students have generally done well, less than half of students could pass math. Of counties in the Baltimore region, Harford County results appeared to be the best, and it was the only county that had all its students take the test on paper and pencil. Carroll County students had significantly higher pass rates on math than the other suburban Baltimore counties.

Baltimore County schools had higher scores than the city, but lower than the other suburban counties, particularly in math. For instance, less than 14 percent of sixth grade students and less than 28 percent of fourth grade students passed math. In reading, less than 50 percent of students passed. In Baltimore City, less than 20 percent of students could meet the expectations in all grades. In math, that dropped in some grades to 10 percent

Baltimore County Superintendent Dallas Dance said the results are just the baseline, and he expects scores to increase by the 2016-2017 school year, as teachers grow more comfortable with the new curriculum.

"If you talk with teachers...They are feeling more confident with it now," Dance said.

Dance blamed the low pass rates, in part, on the fact that when he arrived three and a half years ago, the school system had not yet started rewriting its curriculum to be aligned to the Common Core, a step most school systems had

taken. Dance then hired and fired a company to do the rewrite, setting the county even farther behind. Dance acknowledged the need to make adjustments to the math curriculum. He said he will analyze the math data and believes he may need to make changes beginning in grade three.

Dance also attributed the low scores to leadership changes across the state in the past several years. There have been three state superintendents – two interims - in the past five years, and nearly every school district around the city has a new superintendent.

Despite the overall poor results, schools in the state that have been predictably high performers continued to show those results, indicating that the wealth of students in a school predicts test score results. The new test – with its five achievement levels – provides a more fine grain view of individual school achievement. A smattering of schools in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, and Howard counties had grades where more than 75 or 80 percent scored a 4 or higher. For instance, Severna Park Elementary had 85 percent of its third graders and 92 of its fifth graders passing the reading test. At Shipley's Choice in Anne Arundel, 94 percent of third graders passed. In Baltimore County, Summit Park, Franklin Elementary, and Timonium had high pass rates. Riderwood Elementary, also in northern Baltimore County, had nearly 40 percent of its fourth graders scoring a 5 in reading, one of the highest percentage of students in a single grade in the Baltimore area who met that standard. In Baltimore City, schools such as Hampstead Hill, Hamden, Mt. Royal, Mt. Washington, Tunbridge, Thomas Johnson, and Mt. Washington continued to be high performers.

Schools that did poorly – and there were many – had less than 10 percent of their students passing. In addition, they sometimes had large numbers of students failing with a 1, the lowest score.

In the city, 52 percent of students got a 1 in eighth grade math. Such low scores indicate that the majority of students will have to make large gains in achievement before they are able to pass the test.