

Fourth-grade MEAP results show difference in schools

By Katie Hetrick, Press & Guide Newspapers

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DEARBORN/DEARBORN HEIGHTS - A private Muslim academy and several Dearborn Public School District (DPS) schools posted the area's highest fourth-grade scores on state tests last fall.

The Press & Guide examined fourth-grade MEAP results from October to compare elementary schools in Dearborn and Dearborn Heights.

Some DPS elementary schools, including Duvall, Lindbergh, Howard, Howe and Long scored above the state average in both English Language Arts and math.

Fourth-graders at Crestwood's Kinloch Elementary School and District 7's Madison Elementary School also bested the state average in both categories.

The Muslim American Youth Academy was the only local school to have every fourth-grade student score proficient or better on a state test. Every fourth-grader in the school succeeded on the math test and 87 percent were proficient or better in English Language Arts.

Academy Principal Albert Harp said 21 of the 30 students taking the fall test scored at the highest level in math and the other nine scored at level two, which is still proficient.

"How do we pull it off? With hard work," Harp said. The private school also has good teachers and dedicated parents, he said.

"The kids are intelligent and smart," Harp said.

The academy — at 19500 Ford Road in Dearborn — offers smaller classes sizes. The fourth grade has two classes with 15 students each, while the largest class at the school has 22 students. The 10-year-old private school offers classes from preschool through fifth grade. It charges \$4,800 plus fees this year for tuition for one elementary student.

The tuition means the academy attracts from only a limited group of families, the principal said.

"There's a correlation between socioeconomic status and performance," Harp said. Students from better-educated, more affluent homes generally do better on any standardized tests, research shows.

"We have very high expectations of our kids, and our parents are supportive," Harp said.

Private schools are not required to take the MEAP, but all public schools, including charter schools, must give the tests. The Muslim American Youth Academy was the only private school in Dearborn or Dearborn Heights with scores posted for the elementary grades. MEAP tests cover third through eighth grade.

Within DPS, scores varied widely across the district.

For English Language Arts, Duvall and Lindbergh were the most successful, with 92 percent and 88 percent, respectively, of students proficient or better on the exam. At the other end of the scale, Salina Intermediate and McCollough Elementary had less than half of their fourth-grade students proficient in English Language Arts.

Similarly, Duvall and Howard schools, with 98 percent proficiency, and Lindbergh and Lowrey, with 94 percent, were the district's best scoring schools on the fourth-grade math test. On the other end of the scale, Salina saw 67 percent of its students test proficient, and Miller had 73 percent.

Administrators note that influences outside the school's control can make a big impact on test scores.

"Each school has its own population with different demographics and interventions," Shereen Tabrizi said in an e-mail. Tabrizi examines MEAP data for Dearborn Public Schools.

Salina has a lot of turnover in students, she said. Also, a number of students may leave for months to visit other countries and then return to school where they are already two or three years behind their peers academically.

McCollough/Unis, a joint elementary and middle school, has a lot of rental property in its area and thus a lot of turnover, Tabrizi said.

"Despite all of these factors, Salina and Unis have established a pyramid of interventions that would ensure closing the achievement gap for students despite their lack of academic preparation, economic factors and language barriers," she wrote.

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