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Area schools show improved PARCC scores

By BILL KNIGHT
For The Weekly Post

Most students in Illinois' public schools didn't pass the 2017 Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) exams, according to results released Tuesday by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). But all Weekly Post area districts showed students performing better than statewide results, and four of the five area districts showed significant improvements.

Brimfield, Elmwood, Princeville and Williamsfield all showed gains in their district "composite" number – the ap-

proximate average of percentages in English Language Arts and math, as determined by the ISBE, led by Princeville topping the halfway mark. (See chart.)

"We have built a solid foundation from which to attain equity and excellence for all students," said State Superintendent of Education Tony Smith. "Illinois educators have achieved a significant accomplishment in embracing the new Illinois learning standards, implementing the related instructional shifts, and adapting to the PARCC assessment over the past three years. I am pleased with the work we are committed to doing together to

serve Illinois children."

Dean Cantu, Chair of Bradley University's Department of Teacher Education and an Elmwood school board member, commented, "Among the myriad assessments on the K-12 educational landscape are state and national assessments, which provide students, parents, teachers and administrators with data relative to the performance and progress of learners (both individual and groups, i.e. class [or] grade level).

"Such assessments provide teachers with data that help them to identify individual student needs, differentiate instruction,

and monitor student growth," he added, "– both throughout the year and longitudinally, i.e., across school years."

Elmwood Elementary Principal Tony Frost said, "All classes performed at or above the state averages. ELA scores show well and we continue to support both Math and Reading with interventions targeted to support all children. We continue to recognize students scoring in the approaching area to encourage and support these students to meet/exceed on future assessments."

Elmwood Junior/Senior High
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PARCC information

Percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations.

School District	2015	2016	2017
Brimfield			
Composite*	47	44	45
ELA**	54	44	44
Math	40	44	47
Elmwood			
Composite	48	42	44
ELA	55	49	48
Math	39	36	39
Farmington			
Composite	22	30	30
ELA	26	32	32
Math	19	29	28
Princeville			
Composite	52	48	52
ELA	51	48	50
Math	51	50	53
Williamsfield			
Composite	35	30	37
ELA	38	33	39
Math	28	30	34
State of Illinois			
Composite	33	34	34
ELA	38	36	37
Math	28	31	31

*Composite is approximate average of ELA and math percentages, as determined by the ISBE. Figures rounded to nearest whole number. **English Language Arts
SOURCE: Illinois State Board of Education

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PARCC: Local schools see improvement

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School Principal Tony McCoy added, "Seventh and 8th grade Math/ELA scores continue to be solid, but we're still looking at moving more students from the 'approaching' category to the 'meets.' We will be using year-2 SAT data to evaluate our progress of preparing Juniors for college readiness."

Princeville Superintendent Shamon Duling said, "We continue to see positive gains. We saw some impressive gains based on grade-level results for multiple grade levels. We also demonstrated improvement in our ACT results, going from a composite score of 20.5 in 2015-16 to 23.7 in 2016-17.

"Our teachers will continue to look at individual PARCC scores, along with multiple other assessment data, as they work to meet the needs of each individual student," he added.

Farmington's new Superintendent Zac Chatterton said, "Our math and English Language Arts have improved over the last two years. Math is up 9 percent throughout the district and ELA is up 6 percent. All three of our schools have academic goals associated with improvement in these areas. We hope to see continued

improvement in the coming years as we continue to enhance our curriculum and assessment of learning."

Williamsfield Superintendent Tim Farquer said, "We are very proud of the gains our students continue to make. Our teachers and para-professionals have done some amazing work. We've moved from the middle of the pack to the top 10 in the 30-district area on test scores alone.

"Our innovative approach allows students to earn an Associate's Degree while in high school," Farquer continued. "Our career pathways help kids position themselves for success in the world of work. We couldn't be more proud of our students and staff."

The new federal education law Smith cited – the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) – gives districts greater flexibility to blend funds to address specific local needs.

"Illinois' educators and students worked incredibly hard under extreme financial uncertainty," Smith said. "We are making real progress. Our educators and educational leaders are diving into the data to uncover what's working and to identify new strategies and partnerships to support

the whole child.

"With the [federal government's] approval of the Illinois ESSA Plan, assessment results are one of many indicators that will inform a system of balanced accountability for all students moving forward," he continued. "Test scores should never be used as a sole indicator informing school interventions or personnel decisions. A single test will never fully capture the impact of a great teacher or the extraordinary benefits of a great school on a child's development. Data from multiple sources drives our efforts to build the capacity of every school to serve each child fully."

At Bradley, Cantu echoed Smith.

"We can never lose sight of the purpose or role of assessment in education," Cantu said, "as education researchers James McLean and Robert Lockwood remind us: 'If assessment is to be a positive force in education, it must be implemented properly. It cannot be used to merely sort students or to criticize education. Its goals must be to improve education.'"

In Princeville, Duling said, "We, like all schools throughout Illinois, are interested in all aspects of a student's education. We

aren't willing to put too much emphasis on only one test that is given only one time per year. There is much more to educating the entire child and our teachers will continue to gather as much information as possible in working with their kids to improve their individual student's successes."

The Weekly Post next week will feature a "deep dive" into PARCC details by grade level.

(NOTE: Brimfield Superintendent Robert Richardson was out of town past The Weekly Post's deadline.)

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