

## **Wildcat Pride – Success in the Classroom**

The faculty, administration, and board of education of the Wilmington School district continue to be extremely proud of the accomplishments of its students. One measure of student achievement can be witnessed through the annual state tests which are given to students in grades 3 – 8, as well as to all juniors throughout the state. Although the district, along with all other school districts throughout the country, is still currently working within the unrealistic constraints of the federal NCLB legislation, it was with great pride that numerous points of success were observed on the 2014 assessments. These results represent merely the performance of our students on one high stakes exam – amidst a full year of both formative and summative assessments of the actual learning which is taking place within the district’s classrooms. However, the District still pays very close attention these annual results. On an annual basis, classroom teachers, building and district administrators, and school board members take a very close look at these outcomes – celebrating academic success while also targeting specific areas for continued growth. At the beginning of the October 8<sup>th</sup> school board meeting, individual students who excelled on the 2014 state exams will be formally recognized and honored for their success.

The era of the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) and Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE) is officially over, as both assessments will be replaced with the new PARRC exam beginning with the spring of 2015. Over the past several years, educators and students in Illinois have been transitioning to new learning targets and readying themselves for a new and improved standardized assessment system. About a year and a half ago, Superintendent Jay Plese shared information regarding the decision of the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to arbitrarily implement much more stringent cut scores on the high-stakes exam taken by all elementary students, beginning with the spring of 2013. This alteration was designed to begin preparing teachers, students, and the public at large for the new Common Core- based state tests which will be implemented later this school year. Undoubtedly, these new, web-based assessments will be at a much higher level of difficulty; and as a result, the state board has been anticipating a significant decrease in test scores, primarily in the elementary grades. This anticipation of a significantly increased rigor was the driving factor behind ISBE’s decision to strengthen the grading scale beginning with the 2013 ISAT. As expected, the end result was that the percentage of elementary and middle school students “meeting” or “exceeding” standards dropped substantially during both of the past two years . Even though the actual scores of individual students may have increased, the new cut scores had a negative impact on the overall results. A good analogy is a pole vaulter who clears the bar at 12 feet, improves his vault to 13 feet, but cannot clear the bar because it has been raised to 15 feet. His performance improved, but the bar was raised even higher.

While attempting to navigate the new waters of the common core and upcoming PARRC assessment, the faculty and staff have continued to keep one eye of annual ISAT tests at the same time. We are proud of the Wilmington kids who have continued to perform well on these required annual exams. School officials were undoubtedly proud of the following points of success in 2014, as well as many others:

- 4th grade science scores continued to soar off the charts, with an overall success rate of 83%, with low income and special education subgroups also scoring high at 77% and 67% respectively.
- As a whole class, 66% of last year's 4<sup>th</sup> graders met or exceeded the increased expectations in Reading, and once again, earned an impressive overall success rate of 71% in the area of Mathematics (both at nearly 10% points higher than state averages).
- With the revised cut scores in place, nearly 70% of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade class from Stevens met or exceeded expectations in Math (5 percentage points higher than state average), with just under 60% of 5<sup>th</sup> graders successfully reaching the bar in Reading – 59% within the low income subgroup.

The majority of the scores across all grade levels at Stevens Intermediate School continued to exceed state averages in math, reading, and science.

- Within the revised cut score ranges, 55% of last spring's 6<sup>th</sup> graders met or exceeded in Reading & 57% in mathematics.
- 80% of WMS 7<sup>th</sup> graders succeed with the new Science cut scores.
- 8<sup>th</sup> grade students achieved an overall average success rate of 60% in Reading (4% higher than state average).

Similar to virtually all other schools throughout Illinois, neither Stevens Intermediate nor Wilmington Middle School were officially recognized as meeting the ever increasing expectations related to the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) component of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation.

Within the PSAE assessment system, 11<sup>th</sup> graders are the only students at the high school level which are required to participate in the mandated annual state tests. The high school assessment or Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE) is comprised of both the full, regular ACT exam and the state-developed Work Keys component. Illinois happens to be in the small minority of states across the entire nation which actually require each and every student to complete the extremely rigorous ACT exam. As an entire state, Illinois' overall average ACT score has traditionally outpaced each of the other states which require all students to complete the exam.

In Wilmington, last year's junior class scored higher than the previous class in overall Science results while having virtually the same percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations in Math and seeing a very slight decrease in Reading.

- The entire junior class earned a composite ACT score of 20, which was right on par with the state-wide average of all high school juniors;
- Identified College bound WHS juniors (taking the ACT on a national test date for college admission purposes) earned an outstanding overall composite score of 23.7 compared with a National Overall ACT Composite of 21.0 (representative of primarily only college bound students due to the fact that Illinois is one of a small number of states requiring all students to compete the exam);
- 3 current WHS seniors earned an overall score of 30 or better on the ACT exam; with 7 students earning a composite score of 27 or above. 28 of the current WHS seniors earned an impressive composite score of 24 or above.
- The top three ACT scores were earned by:
  - Brittany Medlin – 31
  - Ashley Soper – 35 \*\*\* Top Score in School History
  - Tom Ullsmith – 30.

The school board and administration fully recognizes that the process of education is an ongoing one which continually builds upon the foundation which is first formed in pre-school and kindergarten. The successes of students across all grade levels should be celebrated by the Board and Administration, parents, and the community in general. The impressive scores earned by the current senior class at WHS are clearly a result of 12 years of devotion and hard work from the entire faculty of District 209U and a testament to the commitment of the parents of these Wilmington students to the importance of education. This community as a whole should share in the pride of the students and staff of the Wilmington School District in response to the 2014 state test scores once again. Even though the state tests represent only one form of student achievement; the leaders of the district are very pleased with the 2014 results and are greatly looking forward to the upcoming celebration with the students, along with their parents and teachers, who exceeded expectations on at least two of the individual assessments within the ISAT (grades 3-8) and PSAT (11th grade). This is scheduled to take place at the beginning of the regularly scheduled October school board meeting on October 8<sup>th</sup> – beginning at 7:30 pm in the main gym of Wilmington High School. Letters of invitation will be mailed to the homes of those students who will be recognized at the annual Student Recognition Ceremony.

In addition to the annual state test scores, another example of academic excellence in Wilmington can be seen in the annual numbers of Illinois State Scholars being recognized

annually from WHS – once again a culminating example of the dedicated efforts of the district’s students and staff across all grades - k-12. These students are honored for excellence in the classroom, in addition to their impressive performance on the ACT exam. WHS was blessed to have 13 of last year’s senior class recognized as Illinois State Scholars.

2000	9
2001	6
2002	9
2003	8
2004	13
2005	9
2006	10
2007	14
2008	13
2009	16 ** Most in school history
2010	13
2011	12
2012	14
2013	10
2014	13

From 2000 through 2006, WHS averaged 9 state scholars per school year. Since 2007, the annual average has increased to over 13 Illinois State Scholars per year representing the Wilmington School District.

The academic accomplishments of the students in Wilmington across all grade levels and in all different areas of the curriculum never cease to amaze. We are very proud of these accomplishments. Test scores, classroom grades, and local & state awards or honors are important and truly worth monitoring. However, we must always remember that the Wilmington School District’s core mission is grounded in the comprehensive education of its children. A tremendous amount of hard work and intense effort takes place on a daily basis by the talented students and dedicated teachers of the Wilmington School District with this focus in mind. The Wilmington School District, along with virtually every other district throughout the

state, has undoubtedly been experiencing the financial pressures of the current economy, and is now continuing to successfully deal with the pressures of new standards, assessments, etc. along with the required, annual high-stakes state tests. Regardless, the ongoing commitment to the core mission of *School and Community United for Excellence* – a sincere devotion to providing the best possible educational experiences for each and every child of Wilmington – continues to produce student success inside the classrooms of the Wilmington School District.