

Tomahawk students show significant growth in Measures of Academic Progress assessments. State reporting still uncertain.

There have been a lot of changes in the world of education this school year. Much of it has been around assessment. State testing is still very uncertain. The Department of Instruction is currently looking for a new state assessment, school report cards will not be issued this year, and results of these assessments have yet to make their way to schools. No one is certain how test scores will be reported or even if they will be reported to the public. How do we measure the performance of our schools without state assessment? Modern schools have adopted assessments they can use to monitor student growth and focus teaching to target the needs of our students. The Tomahawk School District uses Measures of Academic Progress testing in grades 2-8 to accomplish this, and we can share the results of these assessments with our public.

In the fall of 2013 our students scored below grade level average on language arts, math, and reading in grades 2-5. They scored below average grade level in math and language arts at the middle school level, and at grade level average for reading. WKCE scores from Fall 2006-Fall 2013 when compared to other schools in CESA 9 scored in the bottom quarter of CESA 9 in reading and math at the elementary level, and math at the middle school level. Our three year averages showed our scores at the elementary level going down and our scores at the middle school level going up from Fall 2011-Fall 2013. The WKCE scores seem to match up with the MAP scores of the fall of 2013.

Very few staff members in the Tomahawk School District had been shown these scores prior to this past year. When staff was shown our students' scores, they felt that we, as a district, needed to do better for our students.

By the end of last school year we saw good increases in our student achievement scores with MAP assessment. MAP assessments are given three times a year, which gives us the ability to react and help our students while the school year is still in full swing, as opposed to state assessments which give us one snap shot that we cannot do anything with until after the summer, which is often far too late to really address student needs. Kids change over the summer. While we saw growth, the school district still was not satisfied with where we ended the year last year, hovering at the low end of grade level average, and slightly below in language and math at the elementary level (40-60% is normal for grade level).

Our spring of 2015 MAP test data is a sign that we are doing good things and that the district is on the right path. One year of growth could be a fluke, two years is the beginning of a trend. Elementary level scores all fell at or above grade level average (50-60% range). Middle school scores all surpassed the grade level average. Significantly higher in reading, with an average score of 69%, which means that the middle school scored in the top 31% of the nation in reading.

So are we satisfied? The next thing we need to focus on is achievement gaps. Gaps are the difference between special education students, low socioeconomic students, or minority students and the rest of the school when it comes to assessment scores. In Tomahawk our most significant gaps involve special education and low socioeconomic students. With the size of our school district, it is nearly impossible to measure this for the public in a fair way. Instead, what we will focus on is the gap between our low achieving students and our high achieving students. Closing this gap by raising students up to grade level or above grade level average will help us to close our gaps for those groups of students. This is where we will need to do our most work in Tomahawk in coming years to continue to show progress in our overall scores. There are areas we need to target: like elementary reading where 43% of our students are below grade level average and the rate of improvement in middle school math and language arts. So we still have work to do, but in all, we are excited and happy about the hard work our teachers have put in to accomplish this rise in student achievement.

At the HS level we have no current data we can share for the 2014-15 school year yet. Data is generally still a year behind at the high school level because it is harder to find an assessment we can use at the HS level and state assessments are always a year behind. The two things we can look at for last school year are ACT scores and our graduation rate. As a district our graduation rate has been above the state level since at least prior to 2010. This past school year our rate was a full 5.2% above the state rate. This was up 1.6% from the previous year.

Our ACT scores through spring 2014 only represent students who took this optional college bound assessment. Those scores have traditionally represented about 50% of our Juniors and have hovered around the state average, with this past school year being .5 points lower than the state average, and approximately .4 points lower than the previous year.