

# ISD board learns about state top to bottom ranking system

Posted by Ken Grabowski on September 16th, 2014



*Manistee ISD General Education Director Kay Salyer gives a report to the board on the Top to Bottom school ranking.*

MANISTEE — What do educators face in terms of state rankings?

That was the question that Manistee Intermediate School District General Education Director Kay Salyer posed to her board of education on Monday. Salyer detailed for the board what her department is doing with county schools to meet the stiff mandates that are being established by the state.

“One of the projects we are always doing in General Education is looking at the data that the state gives us and helping local districts on what strategies to implement to improve their state achievement scores,” she said.

Salyer gave the board a Top to Bottom school ranking list for them to look at for area schools. She said that ranking is something they are focusing on this year to improve all the standings of all schools.

“The components are achievement, the improvement of achievement over time, the gap between the top and bottom 30 percent and the graduation rate if the school has a 12th grade in it,” she said.

The top-to-bottom ranking assigns schools a ranking with 100 being the top ranked schools and it goes downward from that point.

Salyer presented the board with statistics on how the area schools met that criteria over the past three years. Only schools that have 30 or more full academic students in at tested class get ranked (Bear Lake and CASMAN do not) and they must be tested in two areas.

"Those schools who have less than 30 students will have a ranking soon, but we are not there yet in the process," she said.

Salyer said the Brethren Middle School which has fallen from 41 to 6 in the ranking is a reason for real concern.

"Priority Schools are from a score of 5 down, and we have to change the scores at Brethren next year, so they don't fall into that category," she said. "I can't really speak to all the changes, but one thing is there are different students. This is also a small school, so a few students can throw off the numbers. What we found is if we really implement a strategy we can improve it."

ISD Board President Mary Becker-Witt questioned the statistics.

"This is based on how they do on that particular day when they are given the test, and not the whole year," she said. "If you were building a factory part and judged job performance on only one day you wouldn't pay attention to that data."

ISD Superintendent Jeff Jennette said that is why Salyer is doing several assessments in the schools throughout the year with the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) testing.

"The hope is that they improve kids along the way with the interim assessments, so when they hit this one snapshot, they will test better," she said.

Salyer said she didn't disagree with Becker-Witt's assessment.

"However, this is the game we play, and we have to do it," Salyer said.

Salyer said the key is targeting where the problem is located and then attacking it with some vigorous teacher professional development.

"If we can really put our heads together and make a nice plan to see where the data flows it can make a difference," she said.

Salyer said that one way they address it is if reading is considered the problem that is where the focus goes to for that school. She used Brethren High School's problem with reading as an example.

"Their leadership team came over here to meet with me and (ISD consultant) Dency Lippert and the plan was to implement four reading strategies," she Salyer. "This included the math, science, social studies and English teachers and they all went to work on reading strategy."

She said they used an article of the week strategy for each subject and the scores went back up the next year. The Brethren High School went from a ranking of 16 to 47 the next year.

"That is how you implement strategy, and you can move up on this list," she said. "I have to get the teachers focused on implementing some strategies to fix that problem. You have to get all the teachers to buy in and the teachers have to get the students to buy in."

Salyer said the Brethren teachers would meet every Friday at lunch to make sure progress was still being made. It is a very targeted implementation, but the end result is worth the work.

The idea that they were teaching for the test is something that Salyer disputed.

"We are teaching the Common Core Standards and that is what the test is based on," she said. "It used to be such a terrible thing to teach to the test, but we don't have a choice. If you say to the superintendent you are teaching to the test he is going to say, 'good,' because if you teach to the test the kids are going to perform well on it."