

August 29, 2014

Dear Parents;

Today the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) released the Annual Performance Report (APR) for all the school districts in Missouri. The report measures five standards:

1. Student Achievement on state assessments
2. Subgroup Achievement on state assessments (students that are in identified groups including free/reduced lunch, racial/ethnic background, English language learners, and students with disabilities)
3. College and Career Readiness (CCR)
4. Attendance
5. Graduation Rate

For each of these five standards, the district earns points based on the past three years of results. An overall APR score is generated based on the percentage of these points earned. This year the Dunklin R-V School District's APR is 80%, which is a decrease from last year when the district earned an 84.6%.

This is only the second year DESE has used this method to determine an APR score for districts. Previously, DESE had 14 standards that a district either met or did not meet based on five years of data. For the last six years of that method the district had met either 13 or 14 standards and earned Distinction in Performance. While the staff of Dunklin R-V School District and I are disappointed with the results, I do not believe that our district has gone from being a district that earns Distinction in Performance to a low performing district in two years. The teachers and administrators are studying the data and trying to determine the causes to make changes to raise our score. But I believe there are some flaws in the system that hopefully DESE will address in the coming years.

Earlier I mentioned that the new system is based on three years of data instead of five years. I mention this because when five years of data is used, a one year of drop in a score does not have the same impact as it does when only three years of data are used. Our test scores were down last spring, and this was a trend that was seen in a majority of Missouri districts. Since our scores are down and were the lowest in the three years, this prevented our district from earning progress points, which measures improvement. The drop in student achievement is the cause of the decrease on the APR. The district earned the same amount in points on CCR, Attendance, and Graduation Rate.

Although, the district earned the same amount of points in attendance as last year, this was only 7.5 points out of 10. To earn all 10 points the district needs to have 90% of the students with 90% or higher attendance. Last year the district had 88.9% of our students with 90% attendance. This was an improvement from 87.8% the year before. To earn improvement points DESE looks at two-year averages during the three-year span. The first two years the district had an average attendance rate of 87.6% above 90% attendance. The last two years of the three-year period the district had an average of

88.4%. Unfortunately, though we improved by .8%, the district needed to improve by 1% to earn improvement points. Parents- thank you for helping us improve this percentage but we still need to get better. That .2% difference amounts to a small handful of students and would have improved our APR score to 81.4%. Improving student attendance has to be a partnership with our families, and student attendance is also directly related to student achievement. The more school your child misses, the more likely that they will struggle with achieving at high levels.

In closing, I want to emphasize that the APR score is only one method of evaluating our district. I don't believe that a system in which half of the points earned are based on state assessment scores should be the only way we gauge our district's success. I get to visit classes regularly and see the good things taking place. State assessments are one-time events and not the daily things going on in the classrooms. Our district has also made some decisions that support educating the whole child and not just focusing on state assessments. For example, the district provides everyday PE for all students in kindergarten to eighth grade. With the current rates of childhood obesity the Board of Education and I believes this is important. Our district still offers a well-rounded program of education that includes art and music at all grade levels. This year the elementary moved from a half-time technology teacher to a full-time technology teacher with more grade levels have computer/technology special classes. At the high school our district is in the second year of a 1-to-1 initiative. These are all ways that we are working to meet our mission of "Educating today for a better tomorrow." None of these programs or activities are evaluated or taken into consideration in the current system that DESE is using for the APR.

I believe that education is about more than the five standards that the state has decided to evaluate and while I will continue working with the staff to improve our APR score, it is not the only item I will use to evaluate our district. We have improvements that we must make, but I will not neglect to educate the whole child just to score high on one system developed by DESE. We as a community need to continue to decide what is best for the students of Dunklin R-V School District.

Sincerely,
Stan Stratton
Superintendent