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Strong results at area schools

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The long-awaited results of the 2008-09 local report cards were released Tuesday morning by the Ohio Department of Education, and overall, academic improvement throughout the state is evident.

Included in the top performing schools in northwest Ohio were Ayersville Local, Central Local, Northeastern Local, Archbold Area, Wauseon Exempted Village, Fort Jennings Local, Miller City-New Cleveland Local, Ottawa-Glandorf Local, Pandora-Gilboa Local, Edon-Northwest Local and Evergreen Local. Those districts earned excellent with distinction honors, the highest designation assigned by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE).

Other ratings for districts were excellent, effective, continuous improvement, academic watch and academic emergency -- all based on their performance in multiple areas.

Districts earning an excellent rating on their 2008-09 report cards were Hicksville Exempted Village, Gorham-Fayette Local, Pettisville Local, Pike-Delta-York Local, Antwerp Local, Columbus Grove Local, Kalida Local, Leipsic Local, Ottoville Local and North Central Local.

Meanwhile, districts earning effective ratings were Defiance City, Holgate Local, Liberty Center Local, Napoleon Area, Patrick Henry Local, Paulding Exempted Village, Wayne Trace Local, Continental Local, Bryan City, Edgerton Local, Stryker Local, Millcreek-West Unity Local and Montpelier Exempted Village.

Northeastern Local Schools received an excellent with distinction rating this year, earning 29 standards -- up from 26 the previous year -- as well as a 102.2 performance index. The only standard missed by the district was the eighth-grade social studies category.

Superintendent Jim Roach has scheduled a celebration for staff members on Friday with cake and a luncheon.

Roach said he is very pleased with the performance of his students and teachers. "This speaks highly of the instruction and quality of our education," he said, "but it's also a team project. Parents are working with their kids and reinforcing the importance of education."

The superintendent is planning an in-service program for staff and also credits curriculum mapping in subject areas for student success. A 21st Century Grant for before- and after-school tutoring is expected to enhance the students' academic skills. In addition, new Success Maker computer program software has been ordered.

Also seeing success is Defiance City Schools, which met an additional standard this year for 25 out of 30. Once again, the district has been ranked an effective school district, though the superintendent is striving for higher goals.

"I'm never going to be satisfied until we get in the excellent category," said Defiance superintendent Mike Struble. "I've seen similar districts achieve it. I don't want to diminish what we're doing. I think we're going a good job overall."

Meeting adequate yearly progress is difficult for the district because of its high special education population. The state also requires 75 percent of those students to be at or above the proficient level. Assistant superintendent Ian MacGregor noted that 17.7 percent of the district makes up the special education population.

Wayne Trace Local Schools also has a high special needs population -- at 22 percent.

"Anything over 14 percent is considered high by the state," explained Brian Gerber, Wayne Trace superintendent.

"We have a blueprint for success we're implementing," he noted. He called it a team effort -- an effort that seems to be working. The previous year, the district only met 20 out of 30 indicators. This year, 27 out of 30 were met, with the district earning an effective rating and meeting adequate yearly progress.

"It was a total team effort," he stressed. "These wonderful scores reflect high student achievement in all three buildings. We are certainly thrilled with this outcome and effort and ability of our highly qualified and effective staff members. We are on track. We will sustain this effort and achievement because we know how to sustain it."

He stressed that the hard work, drive and determination to achieve the report card success has been rewarded.

Holgate Local Schools is a district that also improved its standings on the local report card. Ranked effective, the district met 27 standards, up from 21 the previous year.

"Congratulations to the students who took the tests," said superintendent Tony Meinerding. "We know they gave it their best. I am proud of the teachers. They didn't work any harder last school, because they worked hard the previous years, but they might have worked a little smarter last year."

He explained that during the 2008-09 school year, Howard Warncke and Louise Dalton, curriculum coordinators from the Northwest Ohio Educational Service Center, worked with the

teachers to make sure the curriculum was aligned. Numerous teachers also went off-site for professional development.

"I think what I am most proud of is the fact that the teachers -- throughout the elementary school especially -- were excited about the state tests," he added. "They expressed confidence throughout the year that their students would perform well on the tests and I believe the enthusiasm generated by the teachers excited the students.

"Regardless of the state report card, and we all know it is an important piece of the educational puzzle, but just one piece, is the fact that students at Holgate receive quality instruction from dedicated teachers and have been receiving quality instruction before last year's report card success."

Districts' goals on the report card are to be proficient in 30 indicators. These indicators included standardized tests in grades 3-8 and Ohio graduation tests in grades 10-11, in addition to meeting state attendance and graduation rates.

Also factored in were the performance index, which measures the achievement level of all students; whether the schools met adequate yearly progress, which measures whether schools and districts have gaps in achievement among up to 10 groups of students; and value-added data, which measures progress made by students over the previous year.

ODE reported that a "+" indicates that a district or school achieved more than one year of expected growth (value-added) for their students over the past year for grades 4-8 in reading and math. A "3" indicates that a district or school has achieved one year of expected growth for students over the past year and a "--" indicates that a district or school has achieved less than one year of expected growth in that grade area. None of the schools in Defiance, Fulton, Henry, Paulding, Putnam or Williams counties were given the "--" value-added rating.

"Educators continue to help students achieve at higher levels and, in many cases, surpass the rigorous academic standards that have been laid before them," Deborah Delisle, state superintendent of public instruction, said in the ODE's press release. "More districts have earned a rating of effective or higher on their 2008-09 report cards than in previous years."

ODE officials reported that more than 85 percent of school districts and nearly 72 percent of school buildings received ratings of effective or higher this year. Earning excellent with distinction honors were 116 districts.

"This is a moment to celebrate the achievement of our students as well as a time for us to reflect on how best to intensify our efforts to prepare all students to graduate from high school being well prepared for college and a career," added Delisle.

For more information on individual district or building results, visit ODE's website at www.ode.state.oh.us.