



Northwest suburban high schools fail, but officials are skeptical of data

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Prospect High School has a 94.5 graduation rate, a 24.6 average ACT, not a single teacher who isn't considered highly qualified and a student body that gets into the best colleges.

By most standards, the Mount Prospect school is exemplary. But under the standards of No Child Left Behind, Prospect has failed to make the adequate yearly progress NCLB requires in order to be considered successful.

Prospect is not alone. Aside from Barrington High School, every public high school in the Northwest suburbs failed the NCLB standards this year, according to statistics released Thursday. That includes every school in Districts 214, 211 and 207, along with Bartlett, Streamwood and even Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire.

Northwest suburban elementary or unit school districts fared slightly better, although two-thirds of the districts came up as "failing." Those who passed are Prospect Heights 23, Arlington Heights 25, River Trails 26, Mount Prospect 57 and Rosemont 78.

Those that stumbled - either because of low scores districtwide or because some subgroups of students within the district did not perform well - are Palatine Township 15, Keeneyville 20, Wheeling Township 21, Elgin Area U-46, Schaumburg Township 54, Elk Grove Township 59, Des Plaines 62, East Maine 63, Carol Stream 93, Lake Zurich Unit 95 and Barrington Unit 220.

But the local high school administrators, at least, don't seem panicked - or even concerned.

In 2008, 62.5 percent of students had to meet or exceed state standards to "pass." This year, the target jumped to 70 percent. Most schools as a whole have no problem meeting those standards such as Prospect, where 79.2 percent of students passed.

But meeting AYP relies not just on the student body as a whole, but the school's subgroups. At Prospect, special education students with Individualized Education Programs make up a subgroup, and only 29

Top reading, math scores

In the Northwest Suburbs

3RD GRADE READING	% MEETS/EXCEEDS	3RD GRADE MATH	% MEETS/EXCEEDS
Rosemont D78	92.6	Arlington Heights D25	96.6
Arlington Heights D25	91.0	Lake Zurich D95	96.1
Mount Prospect D57	90.6	Mount Prospect D57	94.9
Lake Zurich D95	88.6	Barrington D220	94.8
Barrington D220	85.0	Prospect Heights D23	93.7
8TH GRADE READING	% MEETS/EXCEEDS	8TH GRADE MATH	% MEETS/EXCEEDS
Arlington Heights D25	97.2	Prospect Heights D23	97.2
Lake Zurich D95	92.7	Lake Zurich D95	94.5
Mount Prospect D57	92.2	Arlington Heights D25	94.0
Barrington D220	93.1	Mount Prospect D57	93.9
Prospect Heights D23	96.6	Barrington D220	92.9

Source: Illinois State Board of Education

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percent of Prospect students with IEPs passed in reading, 20.5 percent in math and 27.3 percent in science.

Educators don't put much stock into assessment systems that label otherwise high-performing schools as failing.

"Nobody can argue with the basic theory behind No Child Left Behind because everybody wants every kid to be successful," Barrington Area Unit District 220 Superintendent Tom Leonard said. "But there's a problem with the mathematics connected to it."

Subgroups tell a similar story in District 220, which is considered failing overall though only Sunny Hill Elementary didn't meet AYP.

The Carpentersville school, which met AYP in math but not reading, has significantly different demographics than the rest of the district, including a high number of students learning English. About 85 percent of Sunny Hill students are minorities, 81 percent are low income, and 55 percent are English Language Learners.

Sunny Hill failed in the Hispanic, low income, ELL and special education subgroups.

Assistant Superintendent Louise Robb said it made AYP until two years ago, when the state required all students take standardized tests in English. She said students there perform exponentially better as they further their English language education.

"We think we do pretty darn well in terms of seeing growth in individual kids," Leonard said. "We're not going to drive ourselves crazy getting concerned about AYP. It's a losing battle."

Leonard isn't the only administrator who believes few - if any - schools will meet AYP by 2014, when 100 percent of students are supposed to meet or exceed expectations.

Steve Cordogan, director of research and evaluation for District 214, said high schools are especially prone to failing because they use the Prairie State Achievement Exam - an assessment he said has a harder standard than admission into a public university. Elementary districts use the ISAT, which Cordogan said has a 78 percent pass rate, compared to 51 percent for the Prairie State test.

The higher pass rate contributed to several success stories at the elementary level. The most impressive took place in Palatine Township Elementary District 15, where six of eight schools that failed AYP in 2008 passed this time around.

"It took a herculean effort on the part of our teaching staff," Assistant Superintendent Mary Zarr said.

District 15 started extended day centers at 10 of its schools to offer after-school instruction for targeted students. As a result, 180 out of the district's 192 subgroups met AYP, officials said. Zarr also said 90 percent and 93 percent of students met or exceeded standards in reading and math, respectively.

It becomes increasingly difficult to meet AYP at bigger schools because they tend to have more subgroups. That was true at Schaumburg Township Elementary District 54, which has about 14,000 students and more than 25 schools. Five District 54 schools that met AYP in 2008 failed this year, a drop Superintendent Ed Rafferty attributes in part to large enrollment and diversity at the schools.

"The larger the school, the quicker it is to fail generally," Rafferty said. "(No Child Left Behind) is up for reauthorization, and while I certainly hope the focus on accountability stays, there's got to be relief in the sanctions."