



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Students in a math 111 class take a quiz on Monday morning at Dallas High School.

Test participation will matter more

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — Dallas School District and the charter schools it sponsors missed the mark on participation rates for Smarter Balanced testing in a few grades during the 2015-16 school year. For now, those statistics are simply informational, but soon they will start to count as the state will begin holding schools accountable for testing participation rates lower than the federal standard of 95 percent.

After hearing concerns from parents and educators about the new assessments, the state passed a law allowing families to opt out their children from testing, which further complicates matters for schools, said Steve Martinelli, DSD's director of instructional services.

"Opt outs did affect us in a couple of places," he said. Percentages lower than 95 are seen at Whitworth Elementary School in fifth grade language arts (94) and math (93.5).

"That is concerning and we need to look at that and determine what is causing that, why there is more opt outs in our fifth-grade students than the other grades," he said.

Last year's sixth-grade

class came in at 94 percent in math and 94.4 in language, also due to opt outs, Martinelli said.

Even lower rates are seen at Dallas Community School, a charter school geared for home-school students. Martinelli said he's working with the school director to see if those rates can be improved.

"It's not a super easy sell in our home-school population because that is part of the reason often they chose home school," Martinelli said. "There are not interested in standardized tests."

The issue with low participation rates is that they could soon play into the ratings schools are assessed on annual school report cards issued by the state. Schools can be rated from a high of five to a low of one.

Last year and this year, those ratings aren't issued because of the new assessment, but perhaps as soon as next year, those rates will count.

"This is the second year we haven't had an overall rating, but on the front page of the report card, you will see the number of consecutive years you haven't met participation rates," Martinelli said. "Each year you don't meet participation rates, your overall rating will drop one level."

Students combine college, high school

Willamette Promise helps students earn credits toward future education

By Jolene Guzman
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Willamette Promise credits 2015-15

Math 111: 44
Chemistry 104: 88
Writing 121: 124
Biology: 145
Spanish: 192

DALLAS — During the 2015-16 school year, Dallas High School potentially saved students more than \$125,800 through its Willamette Promise program.

More than 90 students, mostly juniors and seniors, used the dual credit program to take college-level courses. They combined to earn 593 credits on the year, said DHS Principal Steve Spencer.

Willamette Promise, a program of the Willamette Education Service District, works with local colleges and universities to "overlay" college-level work onto high school classes. Students have the option of earning the college credit — if they pass Willamette Promise assessments — and complete a high school graduation requirement at the same time.

Because it's a retroactive enrollment, meaning students apply for the credit after they have completed the course, there is no danger of having a bad mark on a transcript.

"This is about creating a college-going culture in the high school and (giving) students that have been oftentimes been classified as underserved or under-represented that opportunity to show success in high school with no risk," Spencer said. "When they see that they can do that college-level work here at the high school, we can create that college-going culture."

Last year was the second for the program and Spencer said school officials were pleasantly surprised by the participation rate.

"We wanted to encourage this, but because it is new, we didn't really have a baseline," Spencer said. "We more than doubled the students that we had earn the credits."

Ryan Bibler, a junior, was one of those students. He took Chemistry 104 and

earned four credits toward what he hopes will be a teaching degree.

"I thought that is a great opportunity because college credit is a lot cheaper when I'm in high school," he said.

He had to work a little harder. Unlike for the high school course, there was only one test retake allowed when shooting for college credit.

Bibler said it was worth it. "It's wonderful. I appreciated it so much," he said. "It's money I save, time I save, stress I save."

Math teacher Suzanne Cassim is teaching math 111 for Willamette Promise for the second year. She has added more classes to accommodate the 93 students taking the class, many of which intend to seek Willamette Promise credits.

She said at \$30 per course, it's bargain for high school

students to apply for the credit and a chance get a taste of college work.

"We go at a slower pace and they have more resources here. I can take my time to really prep them for it," Cassim said. "I do think that these college and AP classes and Willamette Promise classes prepare them because of the rigor involved."

Similar to Bibler's chemistry class, testing requirements are stricter with Willamette Promise. Students have no retake opportunities in her class.

"They know they need to be ready that first time," she said.

Spencer said he won't know how many credits are earned this year until later, but hopes more students will take advantage of the opportunity.

"It's been exciting to see kids feeling confident about the work they do," Spencer said. "I have no doubt the kids that we put up, who are earning these credits, are doing an equal amount or more challenging work than what's expected at the next level."

SCHOOL NOTE

Enroll now for YMCA winter program

POLK COUNTY — Enrollment is open for the YMCA Winter C.L.U.B. program. The program is open to kids in grades K-5 over the winter break, Dec. 19-23 and 27-30.

The program run two weeks, but parents can enroll kids for as much or as little as they like.

Each day will feature a different theme, which includes a STEM activity, 30 minutes for reading and activities. Each day also includes a morning and afternoon snack and lunch. Cost is \$40 per day, \$180 per week or \$300 for both weeks. Scholarships are available to those who qualify. Registration deadline is Dec. 9.

For more information or to register: 503-399-2753.



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