

State reports cards show differences without much explanation

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out of the report cards makes it somewhat easier to understand what is being evaluated in a particular area. The front of the report card shows both the school's overall rating and "School at a Glance." This section includes the components that are evaluated for "school characteristics:" testing participation, school size, English language learners, class size, personnel and number of expulsions due to weapons.

The inside of the card contains the Academic Achievement section, where benchmark testing in reading, writing, math multiple choice and math problem solving results in the Student Performance rating. The overall data are reported for each subject area and compared to the 2000-2001 school year and to data from similar schools and the state average. The "student behavior" rating is compiled only from statistical data for attendance (and in high schools the drop-out rate). Each school also receives a rating for improvement in test results (assessments), attendance and dropout rate.

Vernonia Schools

Both Vernonia High School and Washington Grade School received the lowest possible satisfactory rating overall. Neither Mist nor Lincoln schools receive an overall rating. The state tests students at four benchmark levels usually in grades 3, 5, 8 and 10. Lincoln School is not rated because it has only kindergarten, first and second grade students, and state testing does not begin until third grade; Mist does not receive a rating because the student population is too small. However, both schools show attendance below the state average, though Mist is the only school in the district to receive a satisfactory attendance rating. All other Vernonia schools received a low rating for student behavior (meaning attendance).

Funderburg presented data showing that Vernonia schools have significant problems in the areas of attendance and mathematics, particularly problem solving. The percentage of students meeting state standards in this area is below both the state average and the average for comparable schools. There is also a marked reduction in the percentage of students

meeting the standard after the fifth grade benchmark, at the eighth and tenth grade benchmark levels. The percentage of students passing reading and math knowledge and skills (multiple choice) tests is at, or slightly higher than, the state average in grades 3 and 5, but the percentage drops significantly in grades 8 and 10. The percentage of students meeting the standard for math problem solving is significantly below the state average at all grade levels.

Some bright spots

There are a few bright spots in the Vernonia reports. Funderburg told the board that district teachers are to be commended for the high percentage of students meeting the state standards in writing at all grade levels. The district's schools also received exceptional ratings for school characteristics based on the high percentage of students taking the state assessments and small class size, compared to the state average. (The small class size also contributes to the higher per-student expenditure.)

Attendance problems

Funderburg told the board repeatedly that the district must get serious about addressing problems in attendance and academics. According to Funderburg, ratings in these areas may be worse next year even if improvements are made this year. Funderburg said he would be taking action immediately to improve attendance at all schools and the board will be presented with a new policy soon. WGS teacher Ilene Grady also told the board that the public needs to be educated about the importance of attendance.

Administrative decisions will be made and implemented quickly to improve attendance, Funderburg said, but academic improvements will be a longer process. Data over the last few

years of testing indicate problems across all grade levels, so improvement in instruction will require collaboration with staff and evaluation of curriculum in order to improve K-12 mathematics education.

Banks School District

A glance at the bar graph of each school's overall rating might initially lead to a conclusion that Banks schools were dramatically "better" than Vernonia schools, but further analysis of the data does not support that view. Comparisons between the two districts are particularly difficult at the elementary and junior high level because Vernonia's junior high is an integral part of the elementary school and is included in that evaluation. Banks Elementary (BES) Banks Junior High (BJHS) and Washington Elementary (WGS) in Vernonia, all received overall ratings of satisfactory, though BES and BJHS were solidly in the middle of the satisfactory category while WGS hovers as close to the bottom of the category as possible.

Different results

While BES improved attendance by 0.4 percent, just exceeding the statewide average and earning a satisfactory rating for student behavior, WGS improved attendance by 1.6 percent but received a low rating because it was still below the state average.

All schools were rated satisfactory for academic achievement, but Banks students continue to pass state assessments (tests) at levels higher than or equal to the state average through the tenth grade benchmark, without the break in testing success experienced by Vernonia students. This may be due, in part, to expanded tutoring offered in the Banks School district by Americorp member volunteers at both BES and Banks High School (BHS).

High Schools

Comparisons between the two high schools are both easier to make and more dramatic. While VHS barely retains an overall rating of "satisfactory," BHS retains its "strong" rating. The percentage of BHS students meeting the state standard at the tenth grade benchmark is above statewide averages in every category (math knowledge and skills, problem solving and writing) except writing, where the percentages are slightly less than the state average. Writing is the one area where VHS students exceed the statewide average.

The state issues rating for improvement in assessments, attendance and dropout rate. This is a new area of the report card and graphically presents changes in reading and math test scores over a four year period, comparing the average for 1998-2000 with the average for 2000-2002. Attendance/drop out rates in the two schools are moving in the opposite directions. Vernonia attendance has increased from 84.8 percent to 87.6 and the drop out rate has increased slightly, while attendance at BHS has dropped from 95.4 percent to 93.7 and the drop out rate has decreased. It should be noted that changes in the dropout rate in a small school can be the result of changes in the size of the graduating class or a single student dropping out. Reading scores remained the same

at BHS, and VHS improved reading scores by 10 percent. Most dramatically, Banks math scores improved by a whopping 20 percent compared to VHS six percent improvement. BHS received an "improved" rating in this category and VHS' rating was "stayed about the same."

SAT scores and attendance

SAT scores for Vernonia students taking the national college prep exam are below both the state and national averages with an average combined score of 977, and less than a third of students participating. BHS achieved an average combined score of 1016, with more than 50 percent of the students participating.

BHS had a slight drop in attendance, but received a strong rating for student behavior and was still nearly 2 percent higher than the state average. Despite improving attendance by 4.5 percent, Vernonia received a low rating because the attendance rate remains below the state average.

Additional info

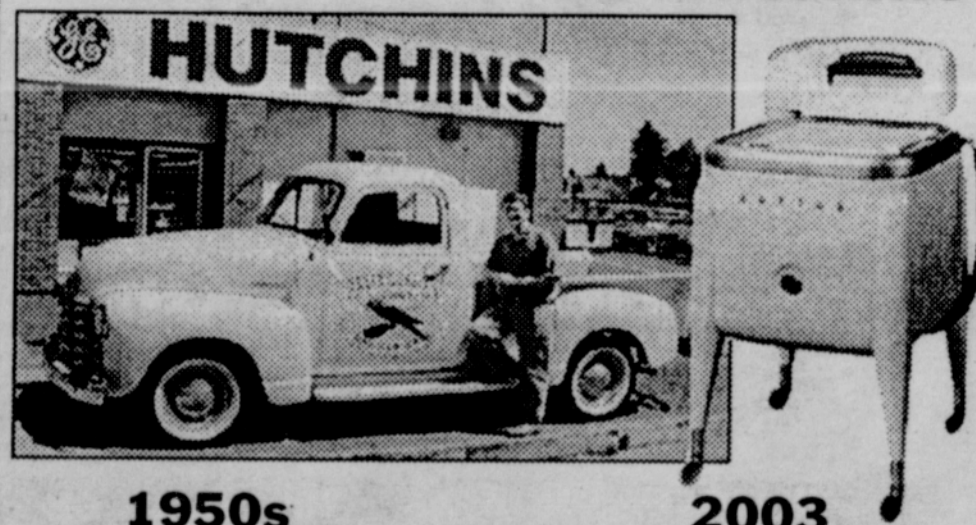
Additional information about schools is available at the following sites:

Report Card Website: reportcard.ode.state.or.us

Department of Education Website: www.ode.state.or.us

Database Initiative Website: dbi.ode.state.or.us/reports.htm

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