

District 323 Dunlap schools among best in state, again

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Dunlap, Ill. — When the Chicago Sun-Times released its 2009-2010 list of the top schools in Illinois last week, Dunlap School District 323 repeated its success from last year.

Five of its seven schools, elementary through high school, made the list for this year, all of which made the list last year as well.

"An effective organization and school district that is getting results has to attribute those results to the professionals doing the work," said Superintendent Dr. Jay Marino. "In Dunlap we feel we have gone out and pursued to secure the very best staff and administrators to help us move our vision forward."

The two elementary schools that appeared in the Top 100 were Wilder-Waite at 34 and Banner Elementary at 70. Banner improved upon last year's ranking by 26 spots.

The rankings were based on the 2010 Illinois Standards Achievement Tests and Prairie State Achievement Exams taken last March and April.

They use a statistical method called standardizing to analyze the "scale score" of every reading and math test.

The method compares each test score to the state average and creates a school average that is compared to other schools.

They average the actual scores instead of just taking the averages of schools that meet or exceed a passing bar. The reasoning is because some schools may have 100 percent passing therefore making it difficult to compare to other schools.

Only grades with at least 10 students tested were analyzed.

"(It's) a great honor for us, and we are extremely proud of the efforts our students and teachers put forth," said Banner Elementary Principal Greg Fairchild. "It also shows how our parents and families value education, but this is true of all of the Dunlap schools."

Todd Jefferson, principal of Wilder-Waite, said these rankings are a mere "snapshot of student achievement for the entire school year."

Jefferson said they closely monitor students throughout the year, which helps the teachers identify problem areas and improve the students' skills.

"I believe the ranking reflects an educational system in which everyone is pulling in the same direction," Jefferson said. "Success is truly a team effort. We are both honored and humbled with the recognition."

Both Dunlap middle schools were ranked in the Top 60 with Dunlap Middle at 47 and Dunlap Valley at 52.

Both rankings of elementary and middle schools were based on schools testing at least two grades.

Dunlap High School was ranked the highest of any of the Dunlap schools at 21. The high-school rankings were based on the 11th grade test results.

Tom Welsh, principal of DHS, echoed the thoughts of the other principals about how it speaks to the leadership of teachers and administrators, but also to what it means to the community, and what it means to those who will graduate from Dunlap schools.

"The recognition our school has earned offers a tremendous sense of pride for our community," Welsh said. "In addition, the reputation for academic excellence at DHS is recognized by many of the universities where our graduates apply for admission."

As big of a recognition as having its schools make the list — some in multiple years — the school district is still looking toward its future.

"We have a rich tradition, but a continuous improvement organization doesn't just rest on tradition, but looks to improve further," Marino said. "We're proud of the recognition, but looking at opportunities for improvement."

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