

NewburyportNews.com, Newburyport, MA

November 6, 2013

How our schools are doing

Viewpoint

Amesbury School Committee

---- — The Amesbury School Committee welcomes the opportunity to provide an accurate analysis of the 2013 MCAS / Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System results released recently in October across the Commonwealth. Consistently, Amesbury's students demonstrated continued excellence in virtually all subject areas across the district in each of its schools and in each tested grade level. We celebrate the fact that when Amesbury's 2013 MCAS results are compared with those of districts having similar demographic profiles, Amesbury's students consistently ranked in the upper third. This detailed analysis was compiled by Amesbury's director of Assessment and Accountability, Lyn Griffin, and presented at the Oct. 15 meeting of the School Committee.

Amesbury's data evidenced continued growth and achievement. Students currently take the MCAS tests in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics at each grade level from 3-8, as well as in grade 10. Students also take science MCAS tests in grades 5 and 8 and in biology in grade 9. In nearly every grade and subject area (with the exception of sixth-grade math), Amesbury's performance exceeded the statewide levels. In addition, there were specific areas of impressive growth:

Both of Amesbury's elementary schools are Level 1 schools again this year. Amesbury is the only one in the surrounding communities to have all Level 1 elementary schools.

Cashman Elementary has a school percentile of 75 percent — Cashman Elementary School is doing better than 75 percent of all elementary schools in the state.

Amesbury Elementary School's fourth-grade ELA scores increased from 48 percent Advanced/Proficient in 2012 to 71 percent Advance/Proficient in 2013 — an increase of 23 percent.

Last year, there was great concern over the 50 percent Advance/Proficient score in fifth-grade math. While there is work still ahead, there was an increase of 12 percent on the 2013 MCAS math scores to 62 percent.

In spite of the designation of a Level 2 Accountability rating for the first time, (AHS missed its target of narrowing proficiency gaps for its "high needs" population by 2 points) the high school's scores were exactly the same as last year (when they were a Level 1) — an impressive 94 percent of students were Advanced/Proficient in ELA and 88 percent were Advanced/Proficient in math.

Amesbury students continue to be competitive with the surrounding communities despite having one of the highest needs populations in the area (“high needs” students are defined by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as an unduplicated count of students with disabilities, students who are low-income, and students who are English Language Learners (ELL) or formerly ELL). Thirty-six (36 percent) of Amesbury’s student population falls into the “high needs” category.

We are delighted with the high percentage of Amesbury High School students performing at the Proficient and/or Advanced level. Clearly, this attests to the effectiveness of our two elementary schools and our middle school in equipping students with the skills and knowledge necessary for success, not only in the high school setting but beyond their public school years. As a School Committee, we extend our gratitude to our elementary, middle and high school teachers, along with the teachers at the Amesbury Academy. Every district has its unique challenges in addition to meeting state mandates — Amesbury’s approach will continue to be focused, long-term and solution-oriented.

We encourage all to visit the link on Amesbury Public Schools website for the charts of comparison and information presented to the School Committee:
<http://www.amesburyma.gov/news.cfm?story=72814&school=0>.

The Amesbury School Committee would like to recognize the excellent work of Amesbury Public Schools students and staff as they continue to strive for excellence in education. Despite challenges, we continue to be unconditionally committed to every child in our schools. The unparalleled intelligence, dedication and selfless service of our teachers in tirelessly preparing our greatest resource, our children, for a successful future is Amesbury’s hallmark!

Amesbury School Committee: Debra LaValley, vice chair, Mayor Thatcher W. Kezer III, chair; Stan Schwartz; Gale Hanshaw

<http://www.newburyportnews.com/opinion/x1442601471/How-our-schools-are-doing/print>