

NBISD not content with its B

District tackling challenges at lower-graded campuses to help improve outcomes

By Sara Samora The Herald-Zeitung Aug 17, 2019

Schools and school districts might get the same kind of letter grades that they assign their students, but officials with New Braunfels Independent School District say the mechanics behind those simple letters are a lot more complicated.

When the Texas Education Agency released its annual accountability ratings earlier in the week, the district got an 89, which is a B.

But the district actually earned a 91, which would be an A.

Because one of the school campuses received an individual letter grade of D, the district can't get the A it earned.

That's because of a "statutory cap" the state instituted.

"The statutory cap then prevents the district from getting an A — the official rating even though we earned the points for it — and therefore artificially lowers the overall score to an 89," Victoria Pursch, the district's assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, said.

The cap was one of the legislative changes of the accountability system and this year marks the first time campuses got letter grades. Districts began receiving letter grades last year.

“You know, everything’s kind of confusing the first year you do it,” Pursch said.

Pursch will present the accountability report as part of Monday’s board meeting.

The D report

The school that received a D was Memorial Elementary, with an overall score of 61.

The letter grade D indicates the school needs improvement when it serves too few students well, and not enough of those students are making academic progress to prepare for success in college, a career, or the military.

Memorial Elementary earned a C in Student Achievement (72 out of 100), an F in school progress (59 out of 100) and an F in Closing the Gaps (35 out of 100).

The state is also trying to follow and be in sync with the federal government’s accountability requirement, where the whole district takes a hit.

Memorial's F in the Closing the Gaps area dropped the district's overall score.

Closing the Gaps tracks how well different student populations in a district, such as economically disadvantaged, students receiving special education, English learners and ethnic groups, are performing.

That was the federal part of the system that penalized NBISD.

"You know, it's the political construct and those are the rules of the game," Pursch said.

She said with smaller campuses, particularly those with high numbers of students who are economically disadvantaged, the way the system is set up can be tricky.

"You can get caught in the formula without even knowing you're about to get caught there, so it kind of sneaks up on you," she said.

Tackling the problem

Pursch said that the district has to ensure that it's doing as well at those campuses as they are at others.

"Frankly, we have economically disadvantaged people at all campuses in which those kids are just as smart, just as capable as not economically disadvantaged," Pursch said. "It's just sometimes you've got to do a better job with the effectiveness of your instruction and your background pieces and all of the things you do to make sure kids are succeeding."

The school district has already put several things in place this year to bring in changes at Memorial and Klein Road Elementary, which earned a C.

Pursch is optimistic.

The school district has set up intensive training and they have an instructional specialist knowledgeable in reading and math inside and out at the elementary level. There are also district specialists for grading and mathematics.

“We’ll be spending more time at these campuses than they do at the other elementary campuses just so that they can offer a higher level of support from the district level,” Pursch said. “We have also added additional staff, so basically the state now enables us to really make some changes in terms of finding the very best teaching staff and making sure that campuses have teachers with a track record of strong performance.”

At Klein, NBISD is adding another intervention teacher that helps kids close those gaps.

Come October, the school district will do an assessment and see if they need to tweak or find another solution, then they will do assessments quarterly.

Progress

Pursch said she is proud of the teachers and schools at NBSID.

“I know in my estimation they are rock stars. I see how hard they work every single day. They show up and they all take this to heart.”

She also said they care about the kids.

“The main thing we do is inspire kids to want to learn,” Pursch said. “I want all parents to know we’re going to do everything we can to do the right thing.”

To view the ratings the rest of the NBISD schools, visit txschools.gov.

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