

NCLB scores continue to climb

A record number of Fayette County schools met federal No Child Left Behind targets in 2008, and across the district, higher percentages of students of all races, socioeconomic groups and special needs are knocking the tops off of state reading and math tests.

“I’m proud of the progress we’re making,” Superintendent Stu Silberman said. “Our efforts to focus on the individual needs of every student and raise expectations across the district are clearly moving us forward.”

In all, 72 percent of our schools met the federal standards set by No Child Left Behind. That’s a record for Fayette County, which four years ago had 56 percent of schools making the grade.

The news was also good for the district as a whole. Out of 25 target categories, Fayette County met the federal standards in 22. It’s important to note that this achievement comes in a year where federal requirements rose by an average of nine points across the board, making it tougher than ever to meet the standards.

This year, 32 of 33 elementary schools bested the federal standards and can be said to have made Adequate Yearly Progress or AYP. In addition, four of the district’s 12 middle schools met all of their federal benchmarks, including Winburn Middle School, which made AYP for the first time since NCLB took effect.

No Child Left Behind is a 2001 federal law that established a new way of looking at schools that receive federal money. The law uses test scores to determine whether all groups of students are reaching required levels of performance in reading and math. Schools that meet 100 percent of their targets are said to have made Adequate Yearly Progress. But if any single group of students misses the test score targets, a school does not make Adequate Yearly Progress and can face increasingly harsh sanctions.

Of the 14 Fayette County schools that did not make Adequate Yearly Progress last spring, eight met 80 percent or more of their goals. Four of the 14 schools missed only one target.

Although all schools are required to meet federal standards, only those that receive federal funding for having high percentages of students living in poverty can be sanctioned. This year, seven schools will face federal consequences, down from 15 last year. (Two of those seven met federal targets this year, but must post improvements two years in a row to avoid further penalties.)

District leaders will dig down into the data to determine needs and provide additional resources at the middle and high school level to shore up achievement.

In the districtwide results, the percentages of students scoring proficient or distinguished increased for every classification of student (race, poverty, special needs and limited English skills) in both reading and math, except Asian reading. (Even with the slight decrease, the Asian reading subgroup had the highest percentage of students scoring proficient or distinguished.)

After making dramatic gains in reading in 2007, math achievement took center stage in 2008. Of the 50 schools where comparisons to 2007 could be made, 44 schools had higher percentages of all kids scoring proficient or distinguished in math in 2008 compared with the year before. Sixteen schools posted double-digit gains, with a maximum gain of 22.43 percent by Breckinridge Elementary.

Twelve schools posted double-digit gains for every subgroup in math – Ashland, Breckinridge, Bryan Station Middle, Clays Mill, James Lane Allen, Johnson, Lansdowne, Northern, Russell Cave, Southern Elementary, Tates Creek Elementary, and Yates. Russell Cave has made double-digit gains in every subgroup for the past two years. Johnson Elementary posted double-digit gains for every subgroup in math and reading in 2008.

Of the 50 schools where comparisons to 2007 could be made, 26 schools had higher percentages of all kids scoring proficient or distinguished in reading in 2008 compared with the year before. Given that in 2007, 44 schools made gains in reading and half of those schools posted double-digit gains as high as 33 percent, slight decreases are statistically likely.

As student achievement increases and higher percentages of students are meeting or exceeding state standards in reading and math, it will become increasingly harder for schools to post double-digit increases. Even so, roughly a third of all increases in the percentages of students performing proficient or better in reading and math this year were double-digit gains.

“In order to meet federal standards and become the school district our kids deserve, we are going to have to keep on working with intensity,” Silberman said. “Our theme this year, with a nod to the Olympics in Beijing, is to ‘Go for the gold.’ Doing what’s best for all kids will take the passion, perseverance and determination of Olympic champions. But I have no doubt that we will do what it takes for our kids.”