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Schools have action plan to improve CATS scores

By Sara Cunningham
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Principal Rob Clayton said he wasn't surprised that his South Oldham Middle School didn't make enough progress on state reading tests to meet one of its No Child Left Behind goals.

But that didn't make it an easy thing to hear.

The school failed for the second straight year to reach its reading goals for students with disabilities. As a Title 1 school — meaning 35 percent or more of its students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch — it now faces sanctions that include allowing some students to transfer to a higher-performing school in the district.

"We were not totally surprised by the results, but we're certainly disappointed," Clayton said. "We're already putting a few things in place to help us address what's going on."

This is the first time since the No Child Left Behind Act was enacted in 2002 that an Oldham County public school will face state sanctions for failing to meet all of its reading and math goals.

The federal law requires students to reach proficiency, meaning they must score at predetermined levels on state math and reading tests, by 2014. Schools are measured on their overall performance and on the performance of students who are minorities, low-income, disabled and speak limited English.

Each year, schools are required to make "adequate yearly progress" to meet their goals.

The state released the test score data Sept. 23. The scores are from the Kentucky Core Content Test that students take each spring in reading, math, science, social studies and on-demand writing. The results in reading and math are used to determine whether schools met their goals under No Child Left Behind.

The Kentucky General Assembly passed Senate Bill 1 earlier this year, requiring the state to create a new assessment test beginning in spring 2012, but students will continue taking parts of the old test until then.

South Oldham wasn't the only school in the district to miss goals this year. Oldham County and South Oldham high schools and La Grange Elementary also missed goals, all of them in math and reading scores of disabled students. Neither of the high schools missed goals last year and are not Title 1 schools, so they don't qualify for sanctions.

Many of Oldham's schools made big leaps in various areas, but the four that missed goals didn't make enough progress in particular areas, according to No Child Left Behind.

La Grange missed a goal last year and is a Title 1 school, but it won't face sanctions. The state classifies it as "reconfigured" because its school population changed last year during redistricting for Locust Grove Elementary School. Sanctions could apply next year, however, if the school fails again.

The district as a whole missed one of its 19 goals. It met all its goals last year so it doesn't qualify for sanctions.

Deputy Superintendent Charleen McAuliffe said the district is not pleased with the results but isn't panicking.

"We're never happy when children aren't as successful as we know they could be," McAuliffe said.

The key to addressing shortcomings is identifying which students are struggling and matching their needs with good teaching strategies, she said.

South Oldham Middle already has a literacy program that provides one-on-one and small-group interventions for students, but the school is getting a new program that will help teachers track progress on a weekly basis, Clayton said.

"We're going to have a more systematic approach to monitoring all our students, including the ones that are struggling in areas," he said. "We know we have a challenge before us" and the school is willing to accept it.

Oldham County High principal Brent Deaves said he wasn't completely surprised by the test results, either. In anticipation, the school moved away from a block schedule, which allows students to take math, reading or other core subjects a semester at a time, rather than for the whole year.

"We wanted to change so that students have yearlong, consistent schedules," Deaves said.

The school also has a team of intervention teachers who work with students struggling in English, science and math, he said.

Oldham County Middle made similar changes last year after the school missed one of its goals, principal Chris Kraft said. The school met all of its goals this year.

"We identified those kids we saw struggling and changed their schedules to better help them," Kraft said. "We weren't shy about giving a kid two hours of help with reading if that's what they needed.

"In the end, it's about success for the kids and we all need to do what we have to in order to make that happen. To say we're pleased with our scores this year would be an understatement."

McAuliffe said the district has worked to create training opportunities for teachers and give schools more time to share ideas that help students progress. For example, the district started releasing students two hours early one day each month this year to allow teachers to meet for training, she said.

"Our schools are focused on what they need to do with our kiddos," McAuliffe said. "We're not panicking over this because we have a plan in place for what we're all going to do to push ahead. We all want what's best for our students."

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