

Teachers: Test results are urgent chance to change

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WINDHAM — Acknowledging a steep decline in Connecticut Academic Performance Test scores over the past two years, the local teachers union claims a need for more collaboration among school officials, parents and school staff.

“We’re concerned about much more than test scores, but these latest numbers provide an urgent opportunity to ask some tough questions,” Windham Federation of Teachers President Randall Prose, a social studies teacher and coach at Windham High School, said in statement released this morning.

“We’re about to start the third school year of major reform. The time is now to come together and demand answers,” said Prose.

The CAPT is administered each year to 10th-grade students in mathematics, science, reading and writing.

Scores were released by the state Department of Education Tuesday afternoon and represent a decline in the number of Windham students meeting goal in all four content areas.

Windham High School fell significantly short of meeting the state average in all areas, which has alarmed school administrators (**Teachers, Page 4**)

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and staff.

For example, Windham High School writing scores fell from 32.9 percent of students meeting goal in 2012 to 16.5 percent in 2013.

The number of students meeting goal in math fell by 7.1 percentage points, from 20.8 percent to 13.7 percent, while those meeting goal in science fell by 6.9 percentage points, from 22.5 percent to 15.6 percent.

In reading, the number of students meeting goal fell by 5.8 percentage points, from 18.2 to 12.4.

Windham Superintendent Ana Ortiz could not be reached for comment this morning, but the school system did release a statement about the CAPT and Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) scores. The CMT scores were also released Tuesday afternoon.

That statement, however, does not specifically address the one released by the Windham Federation of Teachers.

"With the work that has been completed over the last year, Windham Schools are now poised to make meaningful strides in raising the achievement levels of our students," Ortiz said in the statement. "The foundation has been laid and we are ready to continue to do what needs to be done to ensure that all of Windham's students are meeting and exceeding our academic expectations of them."

In the teachers union statement, Prose referred to the state's appointment in 2011 of Special Master Steven Adamowski, who was brought in to help turn around a district with increasing poverty and declining student achievement.

Prose said he felt there should be some level of accountability from Adamowski and school administrators.

"Our students are counting on all of us from the special master on down to be constructive and to be accountable," said Prose.

Windham Board of Education Chairman Murphy Sewall said he has not yet seen the statement from the teachers union, but noted collaboration among all parties is an ongoing effort.

Currently, school governance councils, comprised of teachers, parents and school officials, work together on various different school issues, including, for example, the budget.

"That's probably, at this point, our principal means of having collaboration" between parents, school staff and school officials, said Sewall.

Kathleen Koljian, an advanced placement English teacher at Windham High School and a member of the union, emphasized the importance of collaboration.

"We've always said that for any reform to work there must be opportunity for true collaboration," she said. "That collaboration must include committed educators, engaged parents and community members in making decisions that impact opportunities for our students to learn."

Sewall noted changes that have taken place in the district over the past few years would not be effective overnight.

"It's going to take a while for the change to have an effect," said Sewall.

Soon, the CAPT will be replaced by a newer test, called the Smarter Balanced assessment.

That test is being piloted this year, with districts having a choice between the new test and the CAPT.

Areas of focus will be determined once the district decides which test it will give to its students.

The test will likely be mandated in 2015 and will be taken by 11th graders.

When the test is mandated, districts will still take the CAPT science test.

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