

# **Edwardsville School Board Discusses Student Test Scores, Chronic Absenteeism Noted in Recent Report**

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November 14 2023 10:25 AM



**EDWARDSVILLE** - The Edwardsville Community Unit School District #7 (ECUSD7) Board of Education discussed chronic absenteeism and dropping test scores during a special Board of Education meeting on Monday, Nov. 13, 2023.

Superintendent Dr. Patrick Shelton and Curriculum/Instruction Director Tara Fox presented data from Illinois Report Card — a program that breaks down how each school in a district is performing on an academic and social level — to the Board. ECUSD7 had 12 schools designated as “commendable” and one, Woodland Elementary School, as “targeted.”

“There weren’t any internal surprises, because we know our achievement has kind of been stagnant, not moving in the right direction, for quite some time,” Shelton said.

The school report cards can show how students and teachers are performing compared to other districts in Illinois. Shelton pointed out that chronic absenteeism has been a major issue in the district since the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected every school’s score. Additionally, test scores have dropped across the country since the pandemic.

In ECUSD7, Shelton and Fox also noted that the pandemic impacted younger students’ growth in Math and English Language Arts. This growth was measured through the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR), a test that all Illinois 3–8 public school students take to ensure they are meeting the Illinois Learning Standards.

Fox explained that the IAR is a new test, implemented in 2019 to replace previous state assessments like the ISAT and PARCC tests. She said students’ test scores usually suffer during years that they transition from one test to the next. For example, the district’s ISAT scores were in the 80s and 90s. But when the ISAT was replaced with the PARCC test in 2016, scores “plummeted.”

“It dropped down into the high 60s, low 70s,” Fox explained. “And then again, IAR dropped back down to the 50s. And then following COVID, it dropped again. In between those big drops, though, we were seeing some kind of small progression upward in many of our scores.”

She also pointed out that last school year was the first year that all ECUSD7 students took the IAR on a computer, which likely affected scores as younger students often struggle with basic computer skills.

Changes to the Illinois Learning Standards also played a factor in district test scores. These standards are evaluated on the IAR to ensure that teachers are focusing on these standards in their lessons.

Shelton pointed out that many of the school curriculums have not been replaced for several years and some of the resources are not as relevant as they used to be, meaning teachers still meet the standards but might not focus on them as heavily as the IAR does. Teachers then “pull other things into your classrooms” to supplement the curriculum, Shelton said.

“You’re doing what good teachers do, but it may or may not be aligned with changes in the standards or the science of reading or whatever it is,” he added.

The board will be voting whether or not to approve a new middle school English Language Arts curriculum at the regular Board of Education meeting on Nov. 27, 2023. Additionally, all ECUSD7 teachers received a “proficient or excellent” score on the report card.

Edwardsville High School scored 85.45 on the Illinois Report Card, a “commendable” ranking. They have a graduation rate of 52.47% out of 53.57%, which boosted their score. The school struggled with chronic absenteeism and the measure of ninth-grade students who are “on track.”

Board member Jennifer Brumback explained what this means for freshmen students and how Edwardsville has “a couple of things working against us.” She also noted that people should consider how ninth-grade readiness is impacted by chronic absenteeism.

“The other day in our work session, we went through a list of all of the school districts around us that have seven or eight classes. So students that are freshmen that have eight classes, they still only have to pass five of them to be considered ‘on track,’” Brumback said. “We offer six classes to our freshmen. They still have to pass five in order to be on track. So at a lot of schools in other districts, students have a lot more opportunities to take electives if they have more class periods. And so it doesn’t matter which classes they are passing...It puts us at a disadvantage when compared to other districts that offer seven or eight classes to their freshmen.”

While there were some areas where ECUSD7 schools scored higher or lower than the state average, the district was generally close to the state average on almost every criteria. Fox noted that she wanted to focus on these areas, too, so ECUSD7 can rank higher than the state average on future assessments.