

EDUCATION and YOUTH

DOING THE MATH

Scores show ups and downs in local schools

■ National scores holding steady over past decade

By Dee Ann Campbell
Sun-Advocate Publisher

BUTLER -- Much focus has been placed on declining reading scores and literacy rates in the United States, and according to recent assessments, students are also struggling in other subject areas as well. But when it comes to mathematics, scores seem to be holding steady.

But in local public schools, math scores on state assessments have shown both improvements and declines over the past two years.

According to information from the 2019 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), national math scores improved substantially from 1996 until recent years, increasing among 4th and 8th grade students tested on the NAEP. But there has been no significant change in average scores since 2015.

Math scores increased rapidly in the early years of No Child Left Behind, which began in 2002, but not showing much improvement since then. According to NAEP scores, average math scores in 2017 were nearly identical to those posted in 2009, including a drop during the period between 2013 and 2015.

Education officials said that the increase in scores following the implementation of NCLB could have been due to the abrupt and profound accountability changes



Proficiency scores from local schools

put in place by the law, with an increase focus on math and reading. Once schools settled into the new requirements, the scores began to plateau.

According to NAEP scores, 4th graders in the U.S. showed average scores of 235 out of 500 in 2003, rising to 242 by 2013,

but then remaining at 240 from 2015 through 2017.

But overall, only two states showed higher scores in 2017 than in 2015, while 10 states scored lower and 41 showed no change.

The average score among 4th graders

in Alabama was 232 in 2017. The state was among 13 states and Puerto Rico to log the lowest scores in the nation.

Trends in Alabama showed that math scores averaged 208 in 1990 (212 for the nation), rising to 223 by 2003 (nationally 234) and to 233 by 2013 (nationally 241). Since then, scores among the state's 4th graders have hovered near 232.

Locally, math scores in state assessments have shown mixed results over the past two years, with some schools showing improvement and others posting declines.

Overall proficiency data for the local system was released along with the annual Report Cards last month, showing student proficiency on state-required assessments in math, reading, and science. According to the 2019 report card, 22.61% of students in the Choctaw County School System were proficient in math. Another 37.63% were close to reaching proficiency, with 39.76% listed as 'needing support'.

At Choctaw County High School, students did, in fact, show growth in math. Assessments released on the annual report card showed that math proficiency among CCHS students rose six percentage points from the 10.43% reported for the school last year.

This year's proficiency percentages at Southern Choctaw High School showed an 8.96% proficiency rate in math, down from the 13.66% reported last year.

At the elementary school level, Choctaw County Elementary showed 34.27% proficiency in math, compared to 41.12% the previous year. Math scores at Southern Choctaw Elementary showed improvement from 24.19% in 2018 to 26.63% in 2019.



Letters to Santa mailbox now located at Butler City Hall

BUTLER -- Children in the Butler area can now mail those important Letters to Santa in a new box located at Butler City Hall. Letters placed in the box will be forwarded to the Choctaw Sun-Advocate and then on to the North Pole. Deadline for getting those letters in the annual Letters to Santa section will be December 6.



Five reasons kids should play outside

(StatePoint) Whether it's dance lessons, computer projects, art class or yoga, kids these days are busy bees. And while such activities are enriching and fun, experts say that many kids aren't spending enough time doing something much simpler and every bit as important as structured programming: playing outdoors.

"Finding time for the kids to play outside can be such a challenge for parents," says Keri Wilmot, a pediatric occupational therapist and an expert contributor to TheGeniusofPlay.org. "As a parent I worry about 'stranger danger' or whether my kids will be able to navigate social issues on their own. Without spontaneity, playtime has lost some of its fun."

Outdoor play is necessary for healthy child development, according to The Genius of Play. The initiative, whose mission is to raise awareness about the importance of play and help parents make play a critical part of raising their kids, is sharing five benefits of unstructured outdoor playtime:

• Physical Development: Research has shown that physically

active kids tend to be leaner and healthier, while an inactive childhood can lead to a sedentary (and likely unhealthy) lifestyle in adulthood. Furthermore, physical play builds gross and fine motor skills necessary for success in school and beyond. Hanging from the monkey bars, for instance, helps kids develop the hand muscles needed to grip a pencil.

• Risk-Taking: Through outdoor play, children are given the opportunity to step outside their comfort zones and try new things. While taking risks won't always lead to success on the first try, moments like a first bike ride without training wheels, or the first trip down the big slide in the playground, are critical for building the confidence and resilience needed to pursue a future career, start a business, or handle life's many challenges.

• Social Skills: Childhood games played outdoors can help build social skills and teach kids to follow directions. From games as simple as tag, to those with more complicated rules, like "Kick the Can," "Capture the Flag," and sports like soccer and

basketball, communication, teamwork and other important social skills are developed during outdoor play.

• Problem Solving: Children's imaginations are often stimulated by the world around them. Being outside widens their horizons and can encourage kids to tap into their creativity in order to come up with solutions to challenges, such as learning how to build a sandcastle or figuring out how to climb up a jungle gym.

• Reducing Stress: So much outdoor play involves physical activity, thrilling moments and a sense of freedom, all of which can boost endorphins, helping to lower stress levels and reduce anxiety and depression. Interestingly, simply touching dirt when creating mud pies or digging for worms can be beneficial. According to a Bristol University study, certain types of "friendly" bacteria in soil have been found to activate the group of neurons that produce serotonin, which contributes to a feeling of well-being and happiness. So, don't be afraid to let your kids get a bit dirty out there!

For play ideas, expert advice

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North Choctaw Water Authority

North Choctaw Water Authority will be accepting sealed bids to retain a contractor to enclose the existing North Choctaw Water Authority Building. North Choctaw Water Authority has the right to accept or refuse any bids. A copy of the specifications will be at the North Choctaw Water Authority office in Lisman, AL. All bids are to be submitted November 26th – December 10th, 2019 @ 12:00P.M. Bids will be open at the board meeting on December 11, 2019.