

Seniors' grades on rise, not test scores

Report: Grade inflation, other factors could account for students earning higher marks

By NANCY ZUCKERBROD
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It doesn't add up. Two federal reports out Thursday offer conflicting messages about how well high-schoolers are doing academically.

One showed that seniors did poorly on national math and reading tests.

The other, a review of high school transcripts from 2005 graduates, showed students earning more credits, taking more challenging courses and getting better grades.

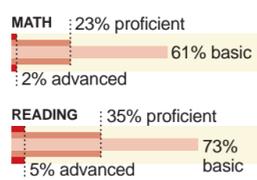
"The reality is that the results don't square," said Darvin Winick, chair of the independent National Assessment Governing Board, which oversees the tests.

Nearly 40 percent of high school seniors scored below the basic level on the math test. More than a quarter of seniors failed to reach the basic level on the reading test. Most educators

Test scores don't reflect grades

Nearly 40 percent of high school seniors scored below the basic level on the government's national math test.

Percentage of 12th graders in 2005 who were at or above a level of ...



SOURCE: The Nation's Report Card AP

think students ought to be able to work at the basic level.

"I think that we are sleeping through a crisis," said Massachusetts Commissioner of Education David Driscoll, a govern-

ing board member. He said the low test scores should push lawmakers and educators to enact school reforms.

The new reading scores show no change since 2002, the last time the test was given.

"We should be getting better. There's nothing good about a flat score," Winick said.

The government said it could not compare the math results with the previous scores because the latest test was significantly different.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress, often called the nation's report card, is viewed as the best way to compare students across the country because it's the only uniform national yardstick for how well students are learning. The tests were given in 2005.

The transcript study showed that 2005 high school graduates had an overall grade-point average just shy of 3.0, or about a B. That has gone up from a grade-

point average of about 2.7 in 1990.

It is unclear whether student performance has improved or whether grade inflation or something else might be responsible for the higher grades, the report said.

More students are completing high school with a standard curriculum, meaning they take at least four credits of English and three credits each of social studies, math and science. More students also are taking the next level of courses, which generally includes college preparatory classes.

"I'm guessing that those levels don't connote the level of rigor that we think they do. Otherwise kids would be scoring higher on the NAEP test," said David Gordon, a governing board member and the superintendent of schools in Sacramento, Calif.

Mark Schneider, commissioner of the federal National Center for Education Statistics, said the government would conduct a

study examining the rigor of high school courses.

The transcript study released Thursday showed no increase in the number of high-schoolers who completed the most advanced curriculum, which could include college-level or honors classes.

On the math test, about 60 percent of high school seniors performed at or above the basic level. At that level, a student should be able to convert a decimal to a fraction, for example.

Just one-fourth of 12th-graders were proficient or better in math, meaning they demonstrated solid academic performance.

To qualify as "proficient," students might have to determine what type of graph should be used to display particular types of data.

On the reading test, about three-fourths of seniors performed at or above the basic level, while 40 percent hit the proficient mark. Seniors working at a basic read-

ing level can identify elements of an author's style. At the proficient level, they can make inferences from reading material, draw conclusions from it and make connections to their own experiences.

As in the past, the math and reading scores showed large achievement gaps between white students and minorities.

Forty-three percent of white students scored at or above proficient levels on the reading test, compared with 20 percent of Hispanic students and 16 percent of black students.

On the math test, 29 percent of white students reached the proficient level, compared with 8 percent of Hispanics and 6 percent of blacks.

The gap in reading scores between whites and minorities was relatively unchanged since 2002.

One of the stated goals of the federal No Child Left Behind law is to reduce the gaps in achievement between whites and minorities.

• Gunfight

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE)

stomach and buttocks went well. He was regaining color Thursday afternoon and was in stable condition. Doctors said he could be sent home by the middle of next week, Greenwood Police Chief Joe Pitcher said.

"The surgery went well. I guess he's going to be OK," Greenwood Mayor Charles Henderson said.

McElhaney was shot as many as four times by Collins in a fast-food restaurant parking lot just north of the Marion County line. One bullet struck McElhaney in the stomach, just below his bulletproof vest, Pitcher said.

Arnold received minor injuries after a bullet broke his radio. The bullet ricocheted off the radio and hit his leg. He also was wearing a bulletproof vest.

The Greenwood police investigation will focus on what happened and will search for a motive, Pitcher said.

He didn't know where Collins got the gun, which Pitcher didn't believe he had a permit to carry.

Pitcher didn't know if Collins and the driver of the vehicle were given breath tests, where the two had been or where they were going, in what order shots were fired, how many bullets struck Collins, who was shot first or how many witnesses saw the shooting.

The shooting was the first time Greenwood officers were wounded by gunfire in the line of duty and the first time an officer killed a suspect, said Henderson, a former police chief.

The department chaplain has been on hand to counsel officers, Pitcher said.

"The officers are in shock, but they're handling it well," he said.

Investigators spent part of the day in Marion County at Collins' autopsy, which had not been completed by Thursday afternoon.

Police will wait on lab results, which will show if Collins had any alcohol or drugs in his system, as part of the shooting investigation.



STAFF PHOTO BY JOSHUA MARSHALL

Two Greenwood police officers and an Indianapolis man were shot Wednesday during a gunfight at the McDonald's restaurant parking lot at

Investigators searched Collins' apartment at 8243 Zona Drive on the southside early Thursday, looking for any evidence that would show why Collins fired at the officers, Pitcher said. The apartment is located in Berkley Commons, off Madison Avenue, about a mile from where the shooting happened.

Henderson said investigators are trying to learn why the shooting happened, what caused the officer to fire, who shot first, if more shots were fired than necessary and if civilians were put into danger.

After the shooting, police questioned the driver of the vehicle, Michael James Hatchett, 25, Greenwood, and two acquaintances of Collins' who bumped into him in the lot Wednesday night by chance. No one else appears to have been involved in the shooting.

Police have a better idea of what happened just before 10:45 p.m. Wednesday, when McElhaney and Arnold stopped the car Collins was riding in. The vehicle was speeding on County Line Road in an unknown direction, and McElhaney stopped the driver. The driver pulled into the McDonald's parking lot at the northwest corner of County Line Road and Madison Avenue. Officers suspected the two had

been drinking and handcuffed Hatchett but could not get Collins out of the car. Hatchett was not arrested.

McElhaney and Arnold, who responded to the stop as back-up, approached the vehicle, and Collins got out of the passenger side. A verbal argument started, and officers tried to calm Collins, Pitcher said.

Collins backed away from officers and then pulled a gun. The officers struggled with the man and fell to the ground. Collins broke free and shot at the officers at least six times, Pitcher said.

A witness told police the officers' guns were still in their holsters when they wrestled the man to the ground, Pitcher said.

Officers returned fire with their .40-caliber Glock pistols, shooting at Collins as many as 17 times, he said. Pitcher did not know how many of the shots hit Collins but said he had multiple gunshot wounds.

Collins died at the scene, Pitcher said.

McElhaney, who has been with the department nine years and is also a firearms instructor at the Indiana Law Enforcement Academy, was taken to Wishard Memorial Hospital in Indianapolis. Arnold, a Greenwood officer for

County Line Road and Madison Avenue on the southside. Business went on at the fast-food restaurant Thursday.

three years, was treated and released.

Investigators and officers spent the evening collecting bullets and casings from the parking lot and searched the car Collins was riding in.

They found no drugs or weapons inside, Pitcher said.

Police are trying to find out more about Collins, a teen who spent part of his youth in a group home, friends said.

Collins came to the Atterbury Job Corps in October 2005 and earned his general educational development certificate two months later, said Jim Hemmelgarn, community and business liaison for the training center near Edinburg.

A year ago, he was kicked out of the job corps because officials found a .45-caliber bullet in his possession during a routine search.

When his locker was inspected, officials found a homemade tattoo gun, a single razor blade and a bag of marijuana, Hemmelgarn said.

In August, he enrolled at Ivy Tech Community College and was pursuing an associate degree. He also worked as a part-time grill cook at R.J. Wingers restaurant near his apartment.

Hatchett, the driver of the vehicle, was questioned by police but did not seem to have any involvement in the shooting. He was released.

Two women also were questioned. They arrived in the parking lot and appeared to know Collins.

The parking lot could be some sort of neighborhood hangout, which was why the girls were there, Pitcher said.

They also did not appear to be involved and were released, he said.

"They didn't do anything wrong other than having poor taste in friends," Pitcher said.

At least one bullet struck a business across the street from the restaurant. Police recovered a bullet fragment from the wall of a tire store on the southwest corner of the intersection.

Investigators could perform ballistics tests to see whose gun the bullet came from, Pitcher said, but he doesn't know if the tests will be done.

Pitcher didn't know how many bullets and shell casings officers collected at the scene.

Indianapolis police will not investigate the shooting, even though it happened just north of the Johnson County line, said Lt.

Doug Scheffel, spokesman for the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department.

The decision on who investigates a crime is based on where the incident started, he said.

In this case, officers attempted to stop the car in Johnson County, but the stop was actually made in the McDonald's parking lot in Marion County.

Since the case began in Johnson County, Greenwood police will investigate, he said.

Johnson County Prosecutor Lance Hamner said his office will review the findings of the police department investigation to determine whether the law was followed.

Hamner and the Marion County Prosecutor's Office decided that it made the most sense for Hamner's office to review the findings.

"Whenever there is an officer involved shooting, even if it doesn't result in a death, it is reviewed as thoroughly as a homicide investigation," Hamner said.

Greenwood police have a policy to investigate any police-action shootings with their own detectives because the department has the resources to do so, Henderson said.

The policy is the same in Indianapolis, where the homicide division investigates police shootings, Scheffel said.

Officers follow a department procedure when using force, such as firing a weapon. If someone shoots at an officer, it is justifiable for them to shoot back, Pitcher said.

"You're not supposed to fire until you or someone else is in imminent danger," Henderson said.

When officer Michelle Richardson and Lt. David Mertz arrived at the scene, McElhaney was on the ground and Arnold was standing over the suspect with his gun. Pitcher didn't believe Mertz or Richardson had their weapons drawn.

Both officers were wearing bulletproof vests, which are similar to the shape of a halter top and end near the officer's navel. Officers are not required to wear the vests but are encouraged to, Pitcher said.

• Decisions

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE)

No officer wants to shoot someone and will try to avoid the situation, such as by talking to the person, Anderson said. But in some cases, there's little time to talk.

In the shooting Wednesday night, police believe the suspect began shooting before Green-

wood officers Eric McElhaney and Jay Arnold pulled their guns.

Anderson knows both officers through work at the academy.

McElhaney is a firearms instructor at the academy, a position that requires three to five years of experience, 40 hours of training in how to teach a course and a score of at least 95 percent on proficiency shooting tests, Anderson said.

"No police officer wants to shoot someone. That's the last thing they want to do," he said.

But officers must be prepared to react to a dangerous situation. Drawing a gun for an officer should be like a motorist checking his or her rearview mirror; it's a reflex, he said.

"The act of getting the gun out of the holster should not be a conscious thought process," he said.

Anderson remembers times as a road officer when he drew his gun without knowing he did, then noticing his gun was out.

Each shooting incident is dif-

ferent, from where the suspect was shot to how many shots an officer fires.

Officers are trained to shoot to stop the situation, not to kill, he said.

"You shoot to stop the aggressive behavior. Once the threat is down, you quit," Anderson said.

The number of shots an officer should fire is not defined either.

An officer may shoot a suspect fatally in his first shot but shoot three or four more times before

realizing the suspect is falling, Anderson said.

Police believe the Greenwood officers fired at least 17 shots Wednesday.

No one knows how they will react until they are in the situation, Anderson said.

"If you don't feel the situation, the fear, if you don't feel all that, then you can't say," he said.

That's why officers get 48 hours of firearms training at the academy and most agencies

require additional training for officers, he said.

"Everything is done that is possible to prepare these officers," Anderson said.

Part of what he teaches officers is to be prepared for a time when they will have to fire their gun before the situation ever arises and to be sure they are able to shoot.

"You have to decide before you get to the situation, 'Can I pull the trigger?'" he said.

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