

A new way to check on CMS

With Data Dashboard, information on test scores and more is just clicks away.

By ANN DOSS HELMS

ahelms@charlotteobserver.com

Are there more late buses in northern or southern Mecklenburg County?

How satisfied are parents with the responsiveness at their child's school?

How do gifted and disabled students at your child's school perform on state tests, compared with the same types of students elsewhere in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools?

Parents, newcomers, taxpayers and anyone interested in public schools now have a tool to explore such questions as CMS rolls out its "Data Dashboard."

Two years and \$600,000 in the making, the online database consolidates information that has been scattered around the district's Web site, adds material and makes it all easier to search and analyze.

For instance, a user can compare academic performance and other measures broken down by school, city, geographic district or poverty levels. A parent who already knows pass rates at a child's school can break those numbers down - seeing, say, how gifted black students at that school performed vs. the same group districtwide.

"This is a technological leap for us," Superintendent Peter Gorman said Wednesday.

Potential users range from parents trying to choose a school to people interested in public policy. For example, test-score gaps based on race and income are one of the biggest challenges facing CMS and districts across the country. The new database shows that in CMS, white students from low-income homes outperform black and Hispanic students from middle-class homes on state high-school exams, a breakdown that CMS hasn't provided in previous reports.

The site still has quirks - finding current data often requires an extra click - and gaps the district hopes to fill. Parents who previewed the system told officials they'd like to be able to compare all schools at a glance, seeing who's best and worst on any given measure. Accountability Chief Jonathan Raymond said ranking lists are among planned improvements.

"This is Version 1.0. There will be many more," Gorman

said.

CMS's accountability office worked with Mariner, a Charlotte-based data consulting firm, to create the data dashboard. The district will be tracking use, and hopes to cut down on staff time required to process data requests as people gain the capability to do their own research.

More than 80 percent of CMS families have Internet access, Chief Communication Officer Nora Carr said.

Use the dashboard

- Start at <http://pmd.cms.k12.nc.us/Default.aspx>
- Instructions are in the upper left corner; sample searches are at lower right.
- Choose a category from the list of "Strategic Goals" along the left side. For instance, test scores, dropout rates and graduation rates are under "High Academic Achievement," while on-time bus data is under "World Class Service."
- Get more details by clicking on a specific measure (such as "end of grade math passing scores") or on options listed along the top, such as "compare" or "look inside the data."
- The system defaults to the 2006-07 school year, but 2007-08 data is often available; change the "Academic Year" window to get the most recent information.
- If you're stumped, use the "Feedback" link (bottom left) to e-mail questions.