

# Advanced Placement

By Dan Stevens

With all of the school report cards, and test score analysis being done, one benefit is that it offers a method to compare local schools on how well they are doing. (Well, maybe not schools, but you can compare classes.)

It is important to clarify that the rankings are all based on the same test results and scores from kids who were tested as juniors last year. And every educator, coach and administrator can testify that some classes are stronger than others. (Basically, we're comparing senior classes – not schools.) But the simple truth of the matter is that the students who will be graduating this year from Pearl City, Stockton and Scales Mound have an awful lot to brag about.

"We are very proud of our test scores," said Pearl City Principal Mike Schiffman. "But our curriculum isn't just molded on state scores. Our staff creates lessons that connect students to everyday life, and to the future. Whether students are headed for college, trade schools or the work force we try to teach them skills they can use in life."

Pearl City leads the pack among area schools in getting statewide and even national recognition. Pearl City was the top District in the rankings of the Rockford Register Star, also made it into the Chicago Sun Times Top 100 list, and for the second year in a row the Wolves received a Bronze medal from the national magazine, US News & World Report.

"We also receive a lot of support from the community. We have a high level of parent involvement, as well as strong support from local businesses," Schiffman added.

Coming in right behind Pearl City is Stockton's senior class. The Blackhawks have taken a dramatic turn from being recognized primarily for sports, and are now in conversations about academics.

"You know, when Dr. Gilliland first showed up he was talking about making us the best school in the state," one parent said. "At first, you just nod your head and smile. But I'll be damned if we're not headed in that direction."

Nobody can argue that exceptional students can be found within each and every district in our region. How-

ever, when taken as a group, the senior class at Pearl City is sitting at the top this year.

## Register Star School Rankings

Each year the Rockford Register Star ranks the area schools based on last year's state test scores. The Pearl City High School ranked first in the area based on the PSAE test. These rankings include all of the schools in the Rock River Valley (Winnebago and Stephenson Counties).

Rankings of schools within the survey area (Jo Daviess & Carroll counties not included) who exceeded the state average scores were:

1. Pearl City
2. Durand
3. Polo
4. Winnebago
5. Hononegah
6. Dakota
7. Forreston
8. Stillman Valley
9. Orangeville
10. Lena-Winslow
11. Byron
12. Belvidere North
13. Pecatonica
14. North Boone

Other schools within the Register Star's area that failed to meet state standards included in order: Oregon, Harlem,

Freeport, Rochelle, Belvidere, Auburn, South Beloit, Guilford, Rockford East and Jefferson.

Again - no schools in Jo Daviess or Carroll Counties were included in the Register Star's data.

## Chicago Sun Times Rankings

Similar to the Register Star, the Sun Times ranks schools state-wide based also on Reading and Math scores from the 2009 Illinois Standards Achievement Tests and the Prairie State Achievement Exams. High school rankings are strictly based on eleventh grade results. (This year's senior class)

The rankings use a statistical method called standardizing to analyze the "scale score" of every reading and math test statewide. The method compares each test score with the state average and creates a school average that is then compared with other school averages. Standardizing levels the playing field in years when one test might be harder to pass than others.

But the system is also flawed in that smaller schools can have their average drastically dropped by one or two

poorly performing students.

In either case, the rankings provided by the Sun Times listed Pearl City as the highest ranking school in our area. The Wolves finished 55th in the state. The only other schools to make the top 100 list were Stockton High School which finished in 85th place, and Polo which finished 96th.

## US News & World Report

For the second year in a row Pearl City has received the Bronze medal award. There were 71 schools in Illinois to receive an award. Two schools received gold, 37 received silver, 32 received bronze. Pearl City was the only school in Stephenson, Ogle, Winnebago, or Carroll County to receive a medal.

Scales Mound received a bronze medal in Jo Daviess County. To receive the award you go through a three step process.

1) School must perform better than average students in the state. The data that is used is Reading and Math scores from the PSAE.

2) The school must perform better than the state

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average for least-advantaged students (low-income)

3) Schools must have a College Readiness program with AP and international courses. The students then need to test higher than the average student in the state.

When considering all of the various rankings, one message rings out loud and clear – although you will find exceptional students at each and every school in the region, the Wolves, Blackhawks and Hornets are rising to the surface as being the strongest.

If we compared schools to an assembly line, the test

scores stand as testimony that, right now, Pearl City, Stockton and Scales Mound seem to be putting out the best product.