

Are Delaware's National and State Education Awards legitimate?

After reading the Delaware Department of Education headline "[Delaware Schools Receive National, State Honors](#)" I thought that we might be able to look at what these schools are doing successfully and copy that in other districts.

However, I am sad to report that, after looking up the assessment scores on the DE DOE Report Card for each of the 17 schools that received these awards, I found that **in all cases but one - North Smyrna Elementary School - these awards were not actually based on good performance in their specific category.**

Neither of the two schools that received the National Elementary and Secondary Education Act (NESEA) awards showed improvement in the categories for which they were chosen - "Closing the Achievement Gap" and "English Learner Proficiency".

Only one of the three schools chosen by Secretary Holodick as showing "Exceptional Student Performance and Academic Growth" showed improvement on the percentage of students proficient in either ELA or math. This was North Smyrna Elementary in Smyrna School District.

The two schools that were awarded for "Closing the Achievement Gap" between races did not have enough data on minority students to be reported on the Report Card.

Seven schools received awards for "Serving Special Populations" meaning that English Language students improved in ELA over time. However, data on the *change in scores* for EL's is not found on the Report Card. Plus there are very few EL students in these schools and thus their numbers are "locked" and thus not included on the Report Card.

And finally, none of the three schools that were awarded for "Continued Excellence" had *any* data for percentages of students proficient in math or ELA.

Many of the schools which received the above awards *did* show overall performance higher than the average for the state. However, all but North Smyrna did not show improvement in the particular area indicated by the name of the award it received. It would have made much more sense and been more honest to simply acknowledge those schools that have above average scores.

As for the national awards, I would hope there must be some schools in the state that actually "Closed the Achievement Gap" and others that showed improvement for EL students. They should be acknowledged for doing so.

Delaware's DOE should recognize schools in the *actual* areas in which they are improving. This would be a far better way to honor teachers, administrators and schools which are helping to improve the lives of their students rather than assigning awards to those who do not deserve them."

To see the specific data for each of the schools receiving awards click [here](#).

Data for “Are Delaware’s National and State Education Awards legitimate?”

National Awards

Rehoboth Elementary School in Cape Henlopen School District and Lake Forest South Elementary School in Lake Forest District were [honored](#) as National ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act) Distinguished Schools.

Rehoboth Elementary received the award for "**Closing the Achievement Gap**" which I assume means between the races. The school's overall ELA and Math proficiencies were better than the average for DE with 66% prof in ELA and 58% prof in math (in contrast with the statewide 41% prof in ELA and 31% prof in math).

Yet, the Department of Education’s (DOE) Report Card doesn’t even allow for a comparison of the number of students of each race who achieve proficiency from one year to the next. One can only look at the most recent year.

In Rehoboth Elementary there are only 8 African American (AA) students, 17 Hispanic students, 5 multi-racial students and too few of every other race than white to be reported. Of the 8 AA students only 3 are proficient in ELA and none are proficient in math. Of the 17 Hispanic students, eight are proficient in ELA and 6 are proficient in math. Of the 5 multi-racial students none are proficient in ELA and 2 are proficient in math.

Note: All of the numbers in this article are based on the author’s calculations using the percent proficient in each category and the total number of students in each category to determine the number of students in each category who are proficient.

Lake Forest South received the reward for **EL proficiency** and again their overall scores were better than the average for the state with 53% prof in ELA and 53% prof in math. But when you look at EL students there are only 8 of them and only one is proficient in ELA and none are proficient in math.

I then looked up how these awards were determined and each of the 50 states gives the names of 2 schools to the NESEA and it looks like the NESEA doesn't even look at the data.

I do not know on what basis the Delaware Secretary of Education picks these schools but it is not based on their actual performance in “Closing the Gap” or in EL proficiency. However both schools are better overall than the average Delaware school.

State Awards

I then looked up the 15 schools that the Delaware Secretary of Education chose to honor with state awards. He broke them down into 3 categories.

Exceptional student performance and academic growth

The first is "**Exceptional Student Performance and Academic Growth**". This included 3 schools.

Frederick Douglass Elementary School (ES) in Seaford School District (SD) has overall scores higher than the state average with 53% proficiency in ELA and 46% in math. But the school’s change in ELA scores from 2023 to 2024 actually **decreased** by 1% from (54% to 53%) and the math scores increased by only 2% points from 42% to 44%.

N. Smyrna ES in Smyrna SD also scores higher than the average school with 53% proficiency in ELA and 56% in math. The improvement from 2023-24 in ELA is 43% to 53% and in math is 45% to 56% which are both significant. ***This is excellent and should be awarded.***

Seaford Central ES in Seaford SD has 50% prof in ELA and 47% prof in math. There was no change in ELA scores between 2023-24. The math scores declined from 45% to 37%.

“Closed the Achievement Gap”

The next category was "**Closed the Achievement Gap**" which I assume means between white students and other races. These 2 schools are:

Hartly ES in Capital SD has a 46% prof for ELA and 41% for math. The number of each minority group is so small that the number of students achieving proficiency in either ELA or math for each group was locked.

Hodgson VoTech (not a part of a SD) has bad overall scores of 32% prof in ELA and 7% prof in math! There are so few students in each racial category that the scores are “locked”.

“Serving Special Populations”

The 3rd category is "**Serving Special Populations**" which means EL students achieved “exceptional growth toward meeting proficiency on the state’s English proficiency test”. Seven schools received this award. However, the *change* in scores for different populations (i.e. ELs) is not available on the Report Card. You can either see the change in ELA for *all* students from

2023 to 2024 or the scores for ELs for *one year*. This data could potentially be found on the massive DOE data file but the fact that the numbers of ELs are generally small and thus are “locked” on the report card indicate that this information would also not be available in the full data set. Nor would the findings be statistically significant.

“Continued Excellences”

The last category was "**Continued Excellences**". These 3 schools (Blades ES in Seaford SD, West Seaford ES in Seaford SD, and Woodbridge Early Childhood Education Center in Woodbridge SD) all contained no data on the Report card for ELA or math proficiency.