

Seventh-graders take test for first time; scores generally low

by [Jolayne Houtz](#)

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The scores of area seventh-graders in their first attempt at the state's new test mirror the results of fourth-graders when they took it for the first time last year.

Seventh-grade students scored poorly in math, a little better in reading and writing and quite well in listening on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning, the new performance-based test.

Fourth-graders, now in their second year on the test, improved in everything except writing, where scores dropped.

Seventh-graders at 105 public schools in King County, South Snohomish County and on Bainbridge Island took the test. Of those students, 43 percent met the standard in reading, 24 percent in math, 35 in writing and 82 in listening. Those scores are slightly above the state averages.

Eastside scores high

Schools with the highest percentage of students meeting the standards in all four subjects tested were almost exclusively on the Eastside: Islander Middle School on Mercer Island, Pine Lake and Beaver Lake middle schools in Issaquah, the International School in Bellevue and the International Community School in the Lake Washington district.

Also, Maplewood **K-8 Parent Cooperative in Edmonds had top scores**. The school requires parents to work in the school a half-day per week.

In Seattle, only one middle school, Washington, made the top 10 in any subject area.

Washington, the site of the Seattle School District's gifted program, outperformed all but Islander Middle School and Bellevue's International School in math.

Schools that draw students from wealthier families tend to have higher test scores, and with the exception of Washington, all the high-performing schools have very low levels of student poverty, as measured by the number of students eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches through government subsidies.

Eastside schools on this list all have 4 percent or fewer of their students qualifying for lunch subsidies. Maplewood has 10 percent; Washington 35 percent.

But these schools say they also benefit from talented teaching staffs, committed parents and students who strive to meet rigorous academic standards.

New school making a name

Lake Washington's International Community School is just in its second year but is already making a name for itself in academics.

Students study foreign languages each year of the program, and academic topics are studied across several subject areas, with students expected to practice until they get it right, then build on their knowledge, said Principal Cindy Duenas.

Those students have chosen to be at the school, and "that's a point in our favor," Duenas said.

Another school that stands out is the tiny Tenth Street School in the Marysville School District. Though it didn't have top scores in every category, its students stood out in reading and listening.

Focus on performance

The school has just 155 students in grades six through eight with a schoolwide focus on performance: Students have to demonstrate newly acquired knowledge in various ways - through oral reports or writing, for example - and in front of various audiences, said Principal Pete Lundberg.

In addition, the school is organized around an arts theme.

Each student takes band, art and drama in addition to regular academic courses.

At the other end of the spectrum, these schools had the lowest percentage of students meeting the standards in all four subject areas: Dimmitt in Renton, Showalter in Tukwila, Cedar Valley Community School in Lynnwood and South Shore and the African American Academy in Seattle.

They also have high poverty rates, ranging from 42 percent to 83 percent.

Collin Williams, principal at Seattle's African American Academy, called the scores "not surprising, but also not acceptable."

More than three-quarters of his students come from low-income homes. The school also has many who transfer in and don't benefit from the whole K-8 program, he said.

Have 'to move forward'

"I'm not going to hang my head in shame. We just have to move forward and get these scores up," Williams said.

The school will have more tutors this year working with students, as well as the benefit of grants that will support teacher training and a schoolwide emphasis on reading. For the first hour of each day, all students will focus on reading.

Cedar Valley principal Gayle Everly noted the [scores of fourth-graders at her K-8 school jumped significantly in their second year of taking the test, with the greatest increase in reading - up 16 percentage points.](#)

She hopes to see her seventh-graders' scores jump next year, too, by building on strategies that seemed to work with the younger students: focusing on parent involvement, reading and basic skills.

Dimmitt, in the Renton district, is a new school entering its second year. It takes time for a principal and staff to come together around a schoolwide academic plan, said district spokesman Peter Daniels.

The fact the seventh-grade test was new this year, and tougher than the multiple-choice tests most students are used to, also helped drive down scores, he said.

Dimmitt also will benefit from some grants this year aimed at improving the school's academic performance, including a \$700,000 grant spread over three years to provide new after-school academic programs.