

Carson high schools focus on making ACT score gains

By Jessica Garcia
jgarcia@nevadaappeal.com

Carson High School has been able to maintain its ACT test scores for the past five years while Pioneer High School made gains in English and math from 2019 to 2020, according to data provided by the principals of both schools at a recent Carson City School Board presentation.

CHS Principal Bob Chambers shared the school's composite scores of 18 from 2017 and 2018 moderately improved to 18.6 to 2019 and remained the same in 2020. From 2017 to 2020, English scores gradually improved from 16.7 to 17.4, math went up from 18.2 to 18.6, reading dipped and climbed again from 18.1 to 18.8 with a peak of 19.2 in 2019 and science scores rose from 18.5 to 19.1. The total number of students testing at CHS in 2017 was 486, and that, too, increased to 521 by 2020.

These numbers, however, are not experiencing any growth to stay on track with national results for census testing schools, Chambers said. The ACT provides College Readiness Benchmark Scores,

or the minimum score necessary in subject areas, including English, math, reading or science, that indicate whether at least a 50% chance of earning a B grade or 75% chance of earning a C grade in corresponding college-credit courses is likely for the student.

For example, with an English composite score of 17.4 in 2020, CHS is not on pace with the national benchmark score of 38. For math, with its score of 18.6, it is behind the national score of 22. It also lingers behind the national reading score of 22 at 18.8 and science score of 23 at 19.1.

Chambers said CHS will require systemic changes to achieve greater results. The school currently provides ACT boot camps, practice testing and other support tactics starting in the sophomore year. CHS provides a smaller environment with 15 students and two proctors, he added.

"It's super important to give students the absolute best opportunity while they sit in that room," he said. "It's a really well-oiled machine."

Measuring success,

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WEATHER

Partly sunny today with a high near 40 degrees and a low near 20.

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however, doesn't only come by ACT scores. Carson High's graduation rate was on an upward trajectory as of 2017, from 88.06% in 2017, 93.2% in 2018, 94.57% in 2019 and then slightly dipping to 93.5%

in 2020. The class of 2020 produced 34 non-graduates, including students the school could not track, those enrolled first semester or moved out of state and did not communicate with the school, severe and profound students who did not graduate with a regular diploma or students who

withdrew. It also included 108 transfer students who did not graduate with the 2020 cohort.

Trustee Mike Walker said given the pandemic and the past year's unique conditions, Carson High's ability to stay on par for now with its scores is sufficient.

"We certainly want to see growth," Walker said. "But, in these circumstances, to see a flat line as opposed to seeing a dipping line, I think that's good news. ... That normal is going to drop for all of us at all grade levels for years because the impact of what's

happening in education for years to come, we can't even calculate it. I think it's a victory that you're maintaining."

At Pioneer, Principal Jason Zona celebrated some of the successes his campus experienced with its ACT testing by moving to online testing, restructuring its testing day, helping to relax student attitudes and dismissing previous preparation practices, and it worked.

"We tried some things out of the box this year," he reported.

The school saw gains from 3% to 10% proficiency

in its average math scores, 14% to 34% proficiency in English, 15% to 22% proficiency in reading and 2% to 27% proficiency in writing with only a minor dip from 8% to 7% in science from 2019 to 2020.

Total composite scores for PHS' 2019-20 cohort in English were 15.55, 16.2 for math, 16.86 for reading and 17.28 in science.

Focusing on the standards and skills rather than the test itself allowed for greater success and learning, Zona said.

Graduation, too, generally is on the rise from 2016, going from 72% and gradually increasing to 80.8% in 2017, 80.3% in 2018, 82.35% in 2019 and taking a slight dip to 78.2% in 2020, with 54 graduates this past year,

15 non-graduates and 37 transfer students.

Pioneer's 78% transiency rate makes it difficult to track and retain students from their freshman to senior years, Zona said, so any academic interventions have to be tailored. Smaller class sizes, however, make it easier to work with youth who struggle.

"We don't have the luxury of having four years with a student, so we have to maximize our time," he said. "Our attendance is traditionally lower than the city and state."

The trustees praised Zona and his team for the work they've done with their student population and the challenges they've faced to increase the ACT scores overall.



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