



TO: The District 95 Community and Board of Education

FROM: Kaine Osburn, Superintendent

DATE: February 5, 2018

SUBJECT: GreatSchools school rating site

District 95 has received inquiries about the GreatSchools.org ratings for our schools. Most troubling is that the new scoring system used by GreatSchools unfairly rates our schools with greater diversity (socio-economics, race/ethnicity). Equity is a core value in District 95 established through our community engagement process. The GreatSchools' website ratings are not about equity.

The site relies almost exclusively on standardized test scores but **test score performance in District 95 schools has not changed** significantly in recent years; **performance has remained consistently strong**. Furthermore, less than 2% separates our highest from lowest performing elementary school on the 2017 PARCC tests. Despite this fact, three of our five elementary schools received a substantially lower rating by GreatSchools due to the percentage of diverse subgroups in the school. When they add their "equity" score, it arbitrarily represents 28% of the overall rating at those schools, even if subgroups make up only 5% of that school's population. For a more detailed examination, please **keep reading** and always contact your school's principal if you have any questions about academic performance at your child's school.

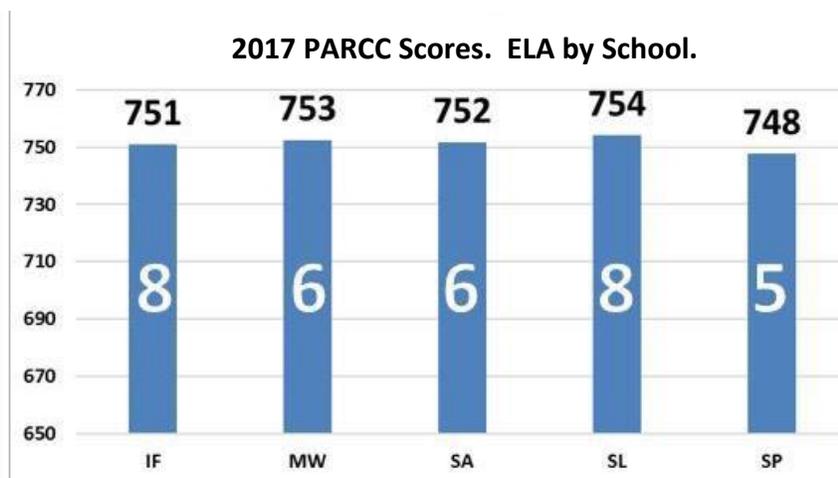
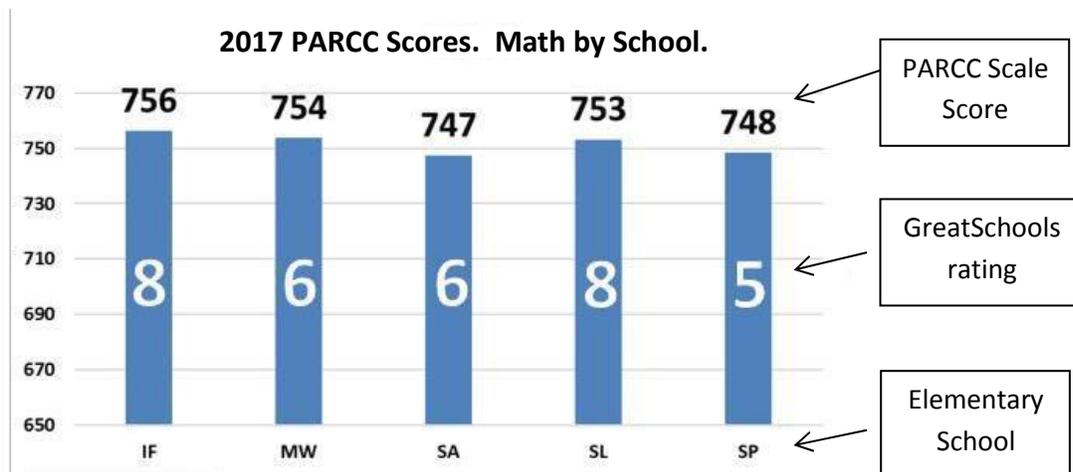
THE DETAILS BEHIND SCORES

GreatSchools offers parents a rating of an individual school and posts reviews of the school as a way to compare schools. This past October, GreatSchools changed the formula used to rate schools. Each of our K- 8 schools receives 3 scores: Test Scores, Academic Progress, and Equity. All three of these scores are based on a school's performance on the 2017 PARCC assessment. While the site does use recognizable statistical methods, the application of these methods is not based on a recognizable rationale. One example is its weighting of its "Equity" score compared to its weighting of other scores.

GreatSchools gives each school a summary score between 1 and 10 based on the school's performance on the PARCC assessment. Since GreatSchools pulls its data from the Illinois School Report Cards, they only have access to score bands, which are more volatile and less accurate descriptors of student performance than scale scores, which are a more reliable way to express scores (https://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/RD_Connections16.pdf). Score Bands are cut offs determined by the State of Illinois and not a measure of actual performance on the test. All graphs in this communication use scale scores to compare performance across our schools.

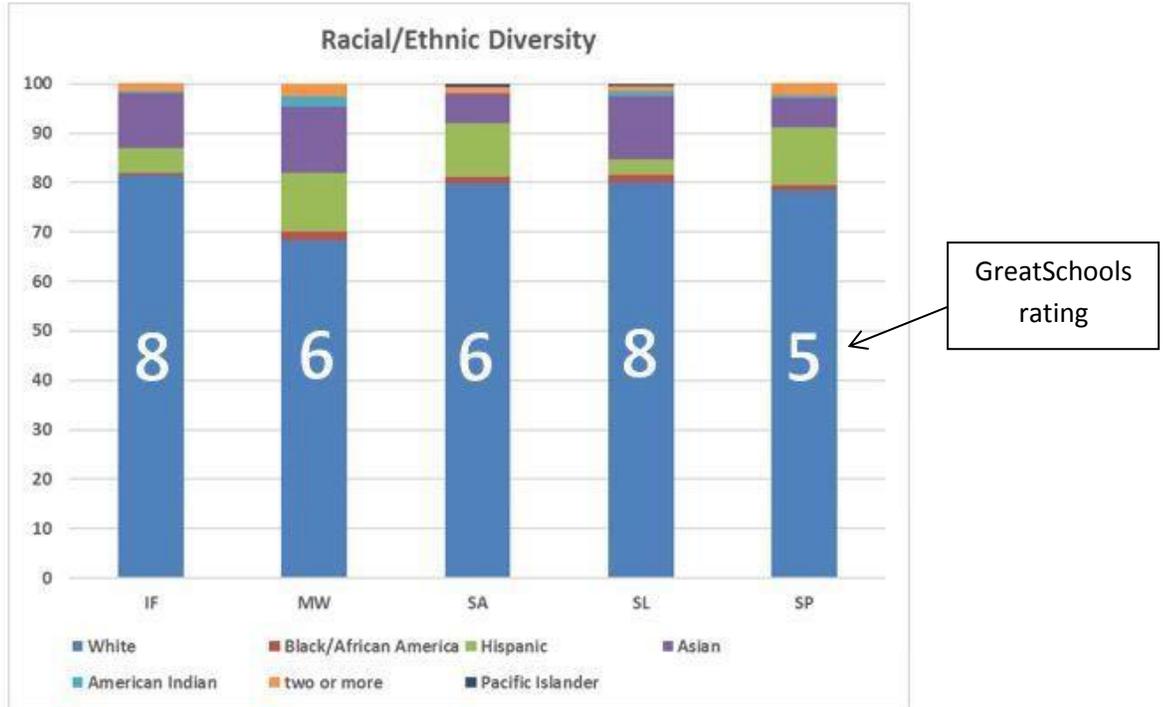
Graph 1 and 2 below illustrate how similarly all five of our elementary schools performed on the 2017 PARCC assessment in both English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics. Each of these graphs displays the average scale score for all students at a given school. The numbers in the middle of each bar display the GreatSchools overall score for the school. On the PARCC assessment, Scale Scores can range from 650 to 850. At our elementary schools, the scores range from 747 (Sarah Adams) to 756

(Isaac Fox) in Mathematics, which represents a 1% difference in performance in achievement from building to building. The 6-point range in ELA from May Whitney (753) to Seth Paine (748) is even smaller. Using these PARCC scale scores, our elementary schools perform in a very similar fashion. Based on this data, we would expect our elementary schools to receive a similar score from GreatSchools. Since that was not the case, the District had to look closer at the Equity score to get a better understanding of why the overall scores from GreatSchools varies so much from one elementary school to the other.



The Equity score, new for 2017, was added to identify schools where an achievement gap exists between various at-risk subgroups and the general student population. The Equity score is only reported when the subgroups exceed 5% of the general population, even though this number might not equal a large enough number of students to be statistically significant. And this new score makes up 28% of the school's overall ranking! For 2017, neither Spencer Loomis nor Isaac Fox received an Equity score. These are also the only District 95 elementary schools to receive a score of 8 (out of 10) on the Great Schools website.

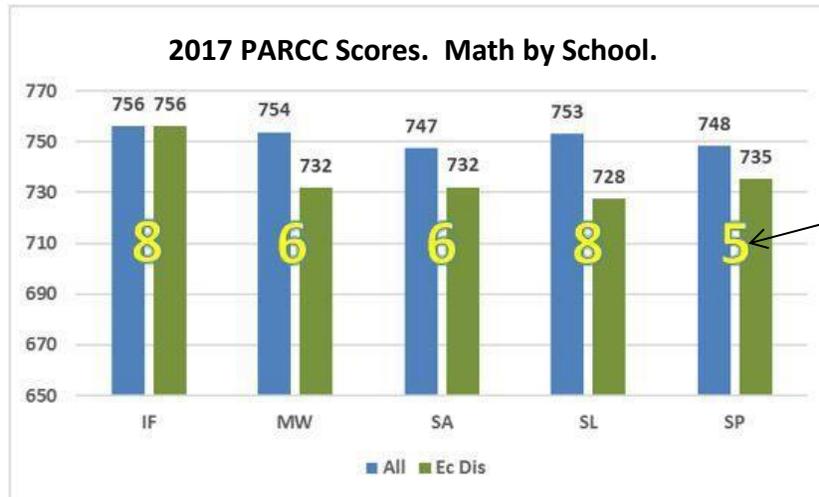
Graph 3, shown below, is a stacked bar graph illustrating the Racial/Ethnic Diversity at each of the elementary buildings. The numbers in the middle of the bars once again illustrate the overall score from the GreatSchools website.



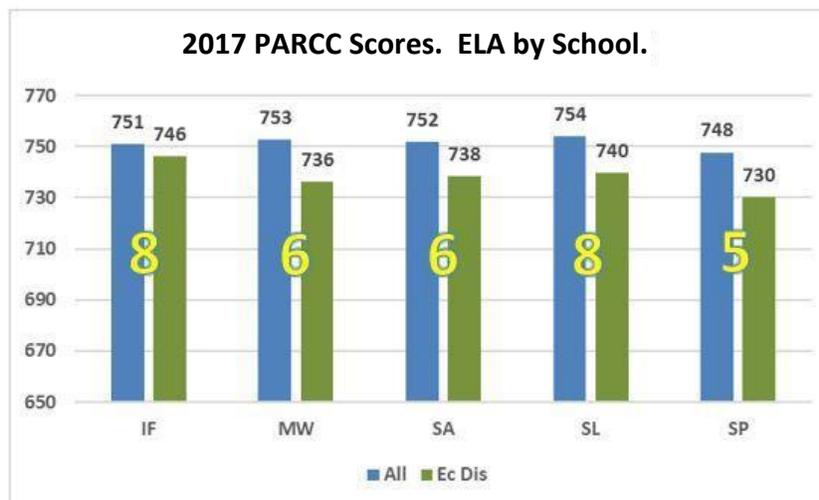
In the Lake Zurich Report for Comparable Districts, presented to the school board in December of 2017, at-risk racioethnicity was defined as the collection of Hispanic, Black and Native American Students. These groups were identified because research indicates a greater risk for underperforming peers nationally on high-stakes tests. The three schools receiving the lowest score from GreatSchools had the largest percent of students falling into this category.

Following this research, we would also expect May Whitney, Sarah Adams, and Seth Paine to have the lowest PARCC scores. These three elementary buildings performed almost identically to Isaac Fox and Spencer Loomis while also housing a more diverse population. While it should be celebrated that May Whitney students earned almost identical scores on the most recent PARCC assessment (as can be seen in graphs 1 and 2), GreatSchools gave them a lower overall score because of their “Equity” score. Once more, this disputes the validity of the GreatSchools school scores.

Similar conclusions can be made by comparing the performance of our Economically Disadvantaged Students to the overall performance on the 2017 PARCC assessment at each of our elementary schools as shown in graphs 4 and 5 below.



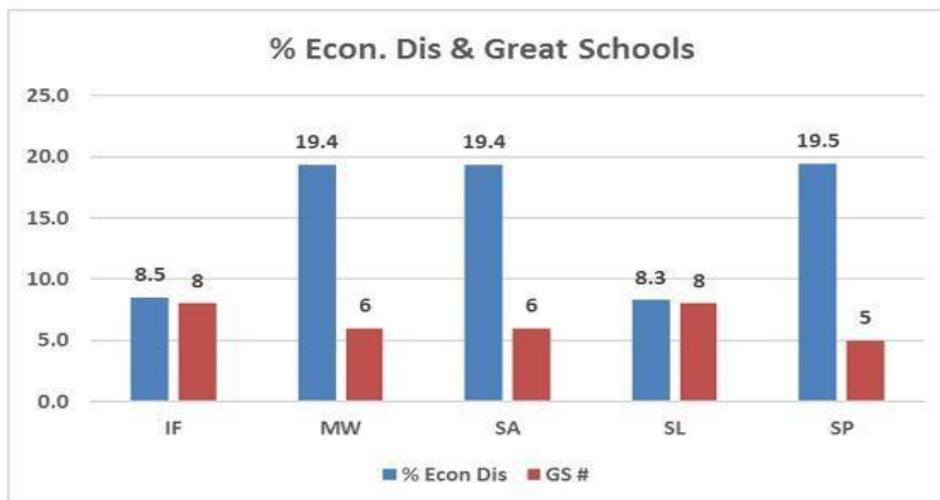
GreatSchools
rating



Years of research confirms that economically disadvantaged students are at risk for underperforming peers nationally on standardized tests. *That achievement gap does exist at schools in District 95.* However, despite that that gap is almost eliminated at Isaac Fox, the number of students falling into this category is too small to be reported. On the other end of the spectrum, the school with the largest performance gap in either test is Spencer Loomis, with 25 points separating the average Math PARCC scores and the average of the Economically Disadvantaged students on the same test. This too does not show up on the GreatSchools score, as the percent of students falling into this category didn't reach the threshold necessary to report, once more illustrating a flaw in the system. Outside of these two extreme cases, the gaps in performance on the 2017 PARCC assessment in this subgroup are fairly consistent from school to school, and from ELA to math, but are not consistent with the variance in scores our elementary schools received from the GreatSchools website.



Graph 6, which compares each school's percent of Economically Disadvantaged students to the overall score received from GreatSchools once more illustrates that using its metrics favor schools with less diversity and higher socio-economic groups.



OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

To truly understand an individual school or district, it is best to use multiple sources of data. It would be beneficial for those seeking information about a particular school to review information from other resources. For example, the Illinois Interactive Report Card provides an overview of a district and individual schools. It also allows an individual to compare schools. For your convenience, the link to the site is provided. <https://illinoisreportcard.com/Default.aspx>

Each year, the Director of Assessment provides the Board of Education with a Learning Report. In this report, we provide a comparison of LZ95 to comparable high performing unit districts. These districts are: Barrington 220, Batavia 101, Elmhurst 205, Geneva 304, Indian Prairie 204, Naperville 203, St. Charles 303, and Wheaton 200. You may review this report using the following link: [https://www.boarddocs.com/il/lz95/Board.nsf/files/ATTVFS74F682/\\$file/Lake%20Zurich%20Report%20for%20Comparable%20Districts%20-%202017.pdf](https://www.boarddocs.com/il/lz95/Board.nsf/files/ATTVFS74F682/$file/Lake%20Zurich%20Report%20for%20Comparable%20Districts%20-%202017.pdf)

Among many successes noted in the report, Lake Zurich High School was recognized on the 8th Annual AP Honor Roll. The AP District Honor Roll recognizes school districts committed to increasing access to AP for underrepresented students while simultaneously maintaining or increasing the percentage of students earning AP Exam scores of 3 or higher. AP District Honor Roll recipients are committed to expanding the availability of AP courses among prepared and motivated students of all backgrounds.

During the 2016 Community Engagement presentations, the District provided multiple data points for parents to assess the district's performance. The Defining Success presentation can be viewed at http://www.lz95.org/initiatives/community_engagement_strategic_planning.aspx

In the Community Engagement presentation, the district acknowledged that there is an achievement gap for students with an individual education plan (IEP), English Language Learners



(EL), and Low Socio-Economic students. We also outlined the supports that are in place to support learners who are not functioning at grade level.

- Reading support
- Math Intervention
- EL/Bilingual Services
- Continuum of services for special needs students
- Access to technology

CONCLUSIONS

Certainly, community members appreciate having a resource that helps them understand school quality. GreatSchools asserts that its ratings of schools provide parents with information about the quality of schools. Research has been done indicating rating systems like GreatSchools inform the public about the school's demographic characteristics but in a way that contributes to choices which increase school segregation (Ben-Porath (2012); Chakrabarti & Roy (2010)).

"Equity" is a core value that was established in the 2016 community engagement and strategic planning process. That means District 95 strives to provide for every student the education necessary to empower personal excellence, including academic excellence. Furthermore, our vision includes a "collaborative and diverse learning community." Our strategic plan and school improvement plans establish how we will uphold our values, achieve our vision, and fulfill our mission. That mission, vision, values, and plan was established as the result of listening to the community. We continue to be a high performing district, and we are confident that the path we are on with you as a community member will sustain that performance in the future.