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State says 16 schools need improvements

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Mar 15, 2023

Lancaster County School District testing coordinator Alex Dabney presented the district's 2021-22 school improvement designations at the Feb. 21 school board meeting. Sixteen of the county's 24 schools received some kind of designation.

School improvement designations include four categories: comprehensive support and improvement (CSI), priority schools, additional targeted support and improvement (ATSI) and targeted support and improvement consistently underperforming subgroups (TSI) designations.

The last two designations refer specifically to subgroups within each school. All of the designations are part of the annual state school report cards.

CSI

Two Lancaster County schools were labeled as CSI schools — Brooklyn Springs Elementary and Lancaster High. CSI schools are Title I schools in the bottom 5% of their grade span (elementary, middle or high) or any high school with a graduation rate lower than 70%. CSI is a three-year designation, which will be assessed again in 2025.

Priority schools

Three county schools were labeled as priority schools — Clinton Elementary, A.R. Rucker Middle and South Middle. Priority schools are in the bottom 10% of all schools in their grade span. It is also a three-year designation.

“There’s a correlation between what we’re seeing from the elementary to middle school to high school,” said board member Melvin Stroble. “This is not new. Clinton has historically been an underperforming school.

“How do we break this cycle? We know it’s there and we know what schools they are. I’m just concerned that we need to be doing something different, or we need to understand what changes need to be made.

“This is really a concern, because through the years we put money into Clinton from outside sources and we’re still seeing Clinton where it is,” Stroble said.

ATSI

Four county schools were listed as needing additional targeted support and improvement for their disabled populations, which were in the bottom 5% of their grade span — Erwin, Health Springs, McDonald Green and Kershaw elementaries.

The ATSI designation means that more resources and support will be provided to foster student success in this subgroup. This includes teacher and assistant training — hands-on, behavioral and more — with the goal of improving classroom instruction.

TSI

Nine county schools were listed in TSI designation, which is given to subgroups in the bottom 10% of the grade span.

These included the disabled populations at Indian Land Elementary, Indian Land Intermediate, and Andrew Jackson, Buford and Indian Land middle schools, and Buford and Indian Land High School.

Erwin Elementary’s Black student population and Buford Middle’s Black and poor populations also received TSI designation.

“Those subgroups (ATSI and TSI), that’s really part of the achievement gap piece of this, as there’s some identified subgroups that we need to work stronger with, greater than we do now,” Superintendent Dr. Jonathan Phipps said.

What schools do with the results

Schools establish goals throughout the year to improve student success on test scores, graduation rates and more to improve their results.

School officials work with multiple organizations, grants and programs to foster student achievement and success, in hopes of improving report card designations and subgroup designations.

District officials have been looking at incorporating a multi-tiered system of support, which will involve working with schools directly. In those meetings, they can analyze the data analysis classification of achievement gap areas, identify urgent concerns and start to problem solve.

The district testing office will also look at intervention strategies, and how to support social emotional learning at the earliest grade level. The district testing office said its goal is to be more proactive than reactive.

“Seventy-five% of the schools in South Carolina are on some kind of list,” Dabney said. “Nobody’s immune to it. I think there’s one district in South Carolina that has no classification. I’m not sure where that is, utopia somewhere.”

For more information or for data on specific schools in the district, visit www.screportcards.com.

Haley