To All Elmwood Park CUSD #401 Stakeholders,

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) has released the district and school report cards for public viewing. As communicated last year, the report card has shifted to taking a multiple measures approach to determine a summative designation for each school due to the federal government’s passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Multiple measures means the state is looking at many factors when determining the rating, as opposed to strictly going with academic achievement on a standardized test as was the case with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era.

The state’s new report card system is now providing a more comprehensive look at the multiple variables that are impacting student achievement. For example, you will now be able to see student and teacher attendance rates, the district’s adequacy target related to funding, more detailed teacher and administrator demographic information, and so on. Also, the report card is now looking at multiple ways to define success, such as determining College and Career Readiness and indicators for next grade level readiness in the elementary and middle schools. These report cards provide important information that is digestible for the reader and can be part of what is utilized for the district to continue developing a vision to improve upon the learning environment for students and staff.

The state moved last year towards a system where a school can be awarded any four (4) summative designations: Exemplary School, Commendable School, Underperforming School, and Lowest Performing School. For the second year in a row, Elmwood Park CUSD #401 has its four (4) eligible schools receiving a summative designation of Commendable.

Also, I do wish to take some time to communicate the significant marks of achievement in this year’s report card. It has been frequently communicated by parents and other stakeholders that the district was not performing to their expectations in relation to standardized assessments, affecting school ratings in other forms of measurement, and often with any gains coming at the expense primarily afforded to test recalibration and not able to close performance gaps with the state. The latest results from the report show a departure from that trajectory where Elmwood Park CUSD #401 now has districtwide gains for the first time in nearly a decade and not due to recalibration of the state assessment.

In short, Elmwood Park CUSD #401 has shown statistically significant and legitimate growth in many performance indicators concerning academic performance and student participation and success in college and career opportunities and being on track for graduation.

The new assessment for Grades 3-8 is the Illinois Assessment for Readiness (IAR), which replaced the PARCC. However, the only difference is the name of the test with the structure and grade level complexity intact and where the state can still draw direct comparisons to student growth and achievement from last year to this year. In English Language Arts, the district made a gain of 9%, going from 3% below the state average to 5% above. In Math, the district made a gain of 3%, closing the gap with the state by the same percentage.
For high school, the state is still using the SAT. In English Language Arts, the high school made a gain of 5%, closing the gaps with the state by the same percentage. In Math, the high school made a gain of 8%, going from 9% below the state average to 2%.

There are many other indicators for success to direct your attention to, which include college and career coursework participation and credit achievement, Ninth Grade on Track, graduation rates, and the achievement gaps. A more detailed assessment of the district’s report cards will be given out to all stakeholders in an upcoming issue of the Superintendent Spotlight and at the Board of Education meeting on Wednesday, November 20 at 7:00 PM.

While viewing the report cards can lead to noticing real and perceived strengths and areas for growth for each building and Elmwood Park CUSD #401 as a whole, please know that this information is included in the district’s vision to further enhance the learning environment for students and staff by providing the necessary resources to articulate programming and expectations, in addition to student support services.

It must also be stressed to all that these achievements, in the midst of so much change, are not typical. What is typical with so many changes occurring within a school or district to programming, support, and teacher development is having the expectation for the scores to be stagnant, at best. This is statistically the case for most schools and districts. However, this district has shown meaningful growth that students, parents, staff, and the community can be proud of. It has frequently been communicated to this office that many of the changes we have embarked on should have happened previously, but what matters most now, and it cannot be stressed enough, is that the district has these changes in place, will continue to support them, and that staff and administration have performed competently and admirably as they have navigated the seas of change.

For context, in the last four (4) years, the district has implemented a technology initiative moving the middle and high schools to 1:1 and saturating the elementary levels, established common learning experiences and expectations across the district with new program articulation in the four (4) core content areas, expanded upon college and career options and will be implementing an articulated system next school year for Grades 6-12, pursued a co-teaching model for students with an IEP and EL designation, increased time with Specials and expanded acceleration and enrichment opportunities at the elementary level, incorporated a social-emotional learning curriculum districtwide, added interscholastic and tutoring opportunities for students, embarked on a construction project at the middle school to house Grades 6-8 and modernize facilities, approved a full-day Kindergarten program to go into effect next school year, and increased professional development opportunities for staff.

Years ago, I recall at an event a group of parents commenting to a group of administrators on how the district’s “scores do not match [the] narrative.” This is a statement that has often been repeated or paraphrased, but it can be said confidently that our scores do match our narrative. Between the changes the district has made and the talented educators and leaders we have within our buildings, we will continue to extend an invitation to opportunity for all of our students. We look forward to continuing our journey as stakeholders in various capacities to further the success of Elmwood Park CUSD #401 and work to improve upon the areas for growth.

If you have any questions and/or concerns, you can reach me at 708-583-5831 and/or waden@epcusd401.org.

Sincerely,

Dr. Nicolas D. Wade
Superintendent of Schools