



INDIANA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

TO: Ronda Swartz, Principal at Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic School; Tammy Misinski, Assistant Principal
FROM: Brian Murphy, Hearing Officer
RE: Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic School, 2015–16 Letter Grade
DATE: February 6, 2017

Finding: Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic School’s (“IHM”) request for a grade of “A” for 2015–16 should be denied, and its grade should remain a “B”.

I. Facts

IHM appeals its 2015-16 “B” grade designation and requests that it be changed to an “A”. IHM is a K-8 parochial school that received 89.1 overall points for 2015-16. In support of its appeal, IHM cites four circumstances that it believes each alone, or cumulatively, adversely affected its grade.

First, IHM requested an IDOE audit based on a student missing from its growth domain in error. The mistake was fixed but it did not change the grade designation (it resulted in an increase in IHM’s overall score by one tenth of a percentage point). IHM believes the discovery of this error is evidence of other undiscovered errors.

Second, IHM staff members stated that they identified discrepancies in the grading of short answer responses and writing prompts. IHM formed this conclusion by having its staff members compare student writing prompts; for example, the tests of two twins in sixth grade. IHM stated that the answers were similar but graded differently.

IHM stated that a student with an IEP who has a problem with spacing of words completed a test that was unfairly graded. According to IHM, the grader likely had trouble being able to read the student’s writing, resulting in a lower score, even though the written response should have been legible to the grader. IHM further stated that this student’s response displayed a vocabulary much higher than an average student in the same grade.

Third, IHM experienced online testing issues; namely, online interruptions and a student whose test was not scored because the part 2 could not be located by Pearson.

Fourth, IHM removed six teachers after the 2015-16 school year. IHM stated that students in these classes performed significantly lower on the ISTEP+ than students in the same grades taught by teachers who were retained.

II. Argument and Analysis

a. Audit Correction

IHM first argues that the mistake found during the audit caused concern about other potential unknown problems with its grade calculation. This argument is based on speculation. Further, when IDOE conducts an audit, it looks at all of the relevant data and reruns the calculations so that it can find errors not specifically raised by the school.

b. Grading Issues

IHM's second argument is based on the grading discrepancies it asserted it found in the writing portions of the ISTEP+, as well as the student with an IEP whose writing response IHM believes was graded unfairly. Rescores were requested for these items, and no scores were changed by Pearson. There is insufficient evidence to show a higher grade is warranted by this issue.

c. Testing Issues

IHM states that the testing interruptions, and the student's missing ISTEP+ part 2, could have caused it to have a lower grade. It would amount to speculation for me to find that had the interruptions not occurred, and had the one missing ISTEP+ part 2 not been lost, the school would have received an "A" grade. Consequently, there is insufficient evidence for me to conclude that the testing issues here affected IHM's grade.

d. Staffing Issues

IHM argues that students within the classrooms of teachers released by IHM performed worse than students in other classrooms. While many students did in fact perform better in other classrooms, I would be speculating to conclude that staffing decisions affected IHM's grade.

e. Cumulative Effect

Lastly, IHM argues that all of these issues, considered together, should result in an "A" grade. In support of this argument, IHM asserts that the NWEA predicted many students who failed the spring 2016 ISTEP+ would pass it. Those students predicted by the NWEA to pass should, according to IHM, be counted as passing the ISTEP+.

The ISTEP+ assessment is the assessment used in our accountability system, by law. See IC 20-31-8-1 and 511 IAC 6.2-10-1(15). Unlike the ISTEP+, the NWEA is not fully aligned to Indiana's College and Career Ready Standards. Also, unlike the ISTEP+, the NWEA does not contain applied skills items. Therefore, it would be improper for me to form a conclusion based on NWEA test results.

Further, given the speculative nature of each of the issues raised, there is insufficient evidence that their cumulative effect would result in an "A" grade.

III. Conclusion

For the foregoing reasons, IHM's appeal should be denied, and its "B" grade designation should not be changed.