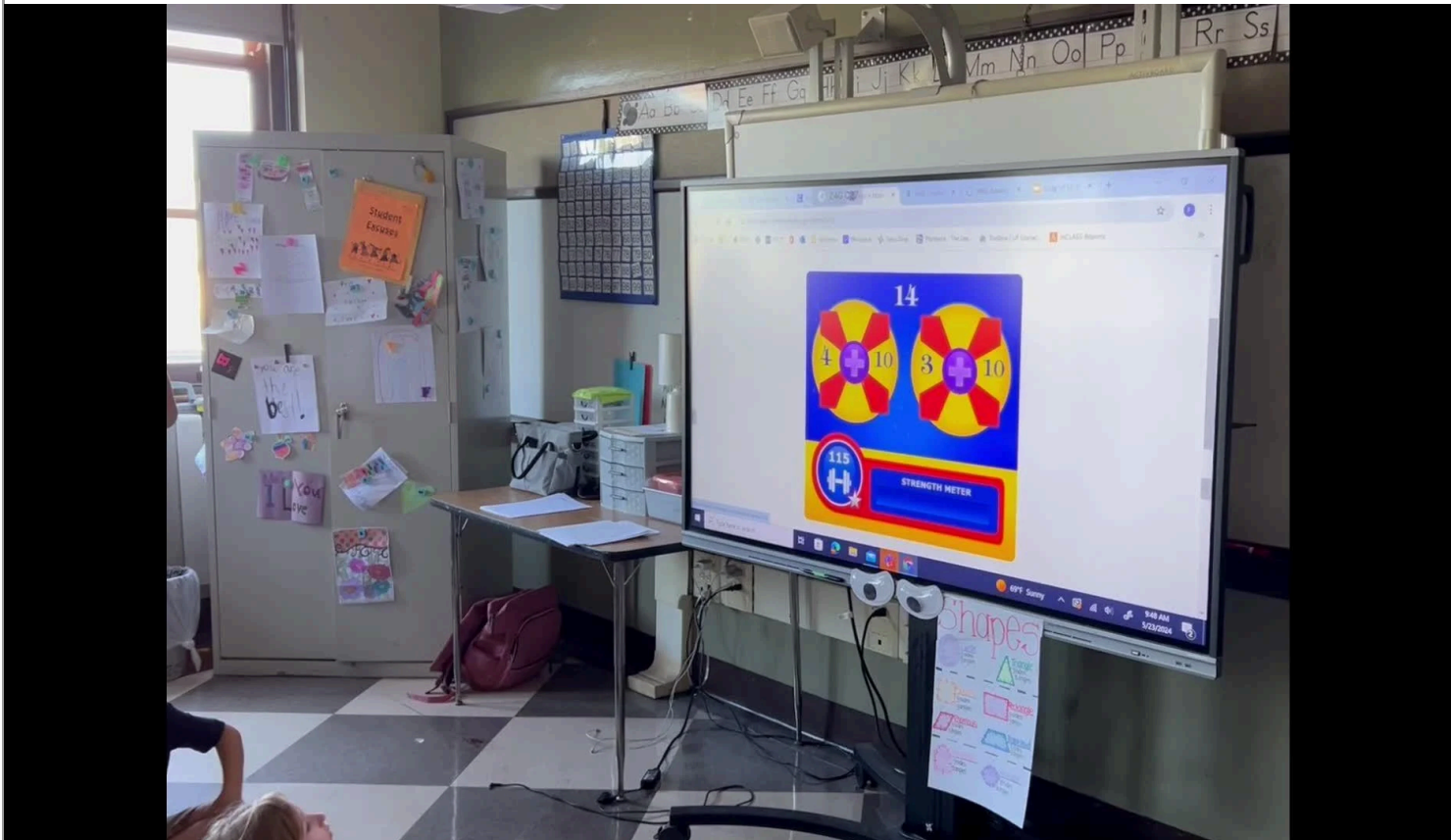




TOP STORY EDITOR'S PICK

Buffalo Schools students exceed superintendent's goals for math, reading

Ben Tsujimoto 2 hrs ago 1



Buffalo Public Schools students in Felicia Glogoza's first-grade class at Lorraine Elementary show their excitement during a timed math challenge. This First in Math tool is part of Buffalo Schools' efforts to make districtwide improvements in math, especially at the elementary level.

A key group of Buffalo Public Schools students and their teachers can celebrate their growth last school year in reading and math, hard work that is also meaningful to top administrators.



A subset of third graders in the Buffalo Public Schools, heavily affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, met two academic goals set for the district superintendent.

Buffalo News file photo

The district's economically disadvantaged third graders exceeded their targets – which doubled as evaluation markers for Superintendent Tonja M. Williams – in the two core subject areas, according to **data presented last month by Chief Academic Officer Anne Botticelli.**

"We met and we exceeded, and it is a happy day," Williams said.

Among her three goals for the 2023-24 school year, the Buffalo School Board, a consultant for the Council of the Great City Schools and Williams last August agreed the superintendent would focus on the academic growth of this small population of about 1,730 students. The mission was less about how the district stacked up against its peers and more to determine whether its students were learning.

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The district would ensure these students – whose first school years were disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic – were equipped with strong curricula, implementing research-backed reading strategies such as Orton-Gillingham and popular game-inspired math activities including First in Math.

Their growth would be tracked in both subjects over the course of the year with specific digital tools – **DIBELS** for literacy development and **i-Ready** for math – which would display the percentage of the group that met or exceeded the district's grade-level expectations.

Third graders at the end of the 2022-23 school year read at or above grade level at a rate of 33%, so district leaders collaboratively set the end-of-year goal for third graders in 2023-24 at 39%. According to the district's latest data, 40% of economically disadvantaged third graders were reading at or above grade level at the end of June.



Buffalo schools implementing 'science of reading' training for teachers, mentors

Buffalo schools have invested close to \$1 million in **Orton-Gillingham** training programs to not only curb learning loss but serve as a building block for the future.



'Shift the mentality': Gamelike tools spark Buffalo Schools' rebound in math

Buffalo Public Schools is using math games such as First in Math to build proficiency. They're beginning to find success. Can they make the subject more fun for kids?

The degree of math growth expected of the population was smaller, but research has shown that the subject was stunted more by the pandemic than reading. Of 2022-23 economically disadvantaged third graders, 13.3% were at or above grade level in math at the end of the year, and this year's third graders were tasked with reaching 15.9%.

Data released at the beginning of the year, however, revealed how much ground this year's third graders would have to make up. Just 4% of economically disadvantaged third graders were doing math at or above

grade level in i-Ready tests administered in September. In June, however, the percentage of third graders meeting or surmounting grade-level expectations rose to 21%.

Williams was ecstatic with the results in both categories, but especially in math.

"This is great work," she said. "We should all feel proud of it. The board should feel proud for setting these goals. We should be running and telling everyone from the rafters what the children in the Buffalo Public Schools can do and have demonstrated."

"We had two years that we were struggling really in a big way, but we turned this around," said Sharon Belton-Cottman, the School Board president.

For several reasons, Buffalo Schools over the last year pivoted away from just relying on New York State standardized testing, in part due to state delays in releasing scores, as their most important barometer.



'This data has faces': Buffalo Schools leaders urge sensitivity in evaluating student achievement

Buffalo Schools Superintendent Tonja M. Williams said she's encouraged by recent academic progress in reading and math, emphasizing the need to recognize students' disrupted learning during Covid-19 closures and vast mental health challenges the pandemic caused.



With state scores delayed again, Buffalo Schools picks a balanced route forward

While awaiting state testing data and the dawn of the new standards, Buffalo Schools has placed greater emphasis on internal assessments for math and reading, as well as identifying whether students are showing growth, not meeting a perceived standard.

The district Office of Shared Accountability advocated using DIBELS, a diagnostic assessment for reading used for decades, and i-Ready, a more recent math tool that gauges a student's level by asking more difficult or easier questions, depending on the accuracy of a student response.

While there are significant differences between the two programs, both generally track skill development through substantial data collected over time, rather than the snapshot provided by an annual standardized test. Among the perks praised by Buffalo Schools is the assessments at the beginning, middle and end of the year, as well as rapidly available results to then inform what

interventions might help a student reach the next level. There are benchmark and growth elements to both programs.

The third marker for Williams' evaluation is the district's June graduation rate, which should be released later this month. After initial confusion about the appropriate number, the solidified goal was to at least match the June 2023 graduation rate of 75.7%.

In the meantime, district leaders beamed with pride after the steps forward.

"If I could do a cartwheel," Williams said, "I would."

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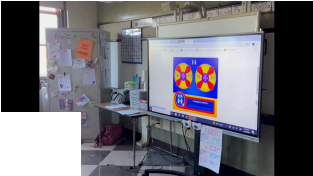
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