

**Sam Drury**  
**210 East Sterne Boulevard**  
**Centennial, Colorado 80122-1026**

December 27, 2007

Scott Murphy, Superintendent  
Littleton Public Schools  
5776 South Crocker Street  
Littleton, Colorado 80120

Dear Scott:

I am concerned about some recent responses to the Heritage High School loss of the School Accountability Report "Excellent" rating announced by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) on December 5. I have attached a copy of the "Principal's Message" from the January 2008 HeritageHighlights online newsletter. I also have attached a copy of Pam Cirbo's presentation at the December 13 LPS Board of Education meeting.

An article in the December 13 *Littleton Independent* included this verbatim excerpt:

... and Heritage High went from excellent to high this year.

Mollie McDonald, director of curriculum, instruction and assessment noted that a school's rating can change with an insignificant fluctuation in scores.

"Heritage High School's rating went from excellent to high because of a difference of .03 of a point," McDonald said.

"A small change can appear to be a big deal but it's not," she said....

The two attached documents and the above newspaper article excerpt during the past two weeks have prompted some questions and comments about apparent implied causes and corrective actions for the 2007 change in the CDE SAR rating from "Excellent" to "High" for Heritage High School (HHS).

My questions include the following:

1. Did the HHS rating change with an insignificant fluctuation in scores?
2. Was that HHS change because of a difference of .03 of a point?
3. Did that HHS change appear to be a big deal but it's not?
4. Were the HHS AP students to blame for the decline in overall 2007 CSAP scores?
5. Will HHS AP students be required to score "Advanced" on prior CSAP tests?
6. What are the answers to Pam Cirbo's December 13 initial list of questions?
7. What activities are being planned to implement through HHS Advisory?
8. Could the approximately 20 students who had incomplete or invalid test scores ... have made all the difference in last year's performance rating for HHS?
9. Do you really believe that HHS is responding appropriately?

My comments associated with each of the above questions are on the next two pages.

In your consideration of the above nine questions, please refer to the December 13 *Littleton Independent* verbatim excerpt for the first three questions, to Pam Cirbo's December 13 presentation for the next three questions, and to the January 2008 "Principal's Message" for the last three questions.

**1. Did the HHS rating change with an insignificant fluctuation in scores?**

No, the HHS "fluctuation" was not insignificant! The HHS School Accountability Report (SAR) rating changed with an Overall Academic Performance Index (OAPI) score of +1.28 (Excellent) in 2006 to +1.09 (High) in 2007. The HHS OAPI score slipped from 21st highest for Colorado high schools in 2006 to 39th highest in 2007. The OAPI changes from 2006 to 2007 were from 14th to 17th (+1.44 to +1.40) for Arapahoe HS, and from 104th to 108th (+0.68 to +0.65) for Littleton HS. HHS had the second-largest decline in overall CSAP proficiency for all LPS schools from 2006 to 2007; Whitman ES had the largest decline. The word "fluctuation" (which suggests constant irregular changes) modified by the word "insignificant" is obfuscation for public consumption to draw attention away from a serious problem at HHS.

**2. Was that HHS change because of a difference of .03 of a point?**

No, the HHS change was not caused by a difference of .03 of a point. Although HHS failed to meet the OAPI minimum score of +1.13 by 0.05 (not 0.03), the real issue is the large decline (-0.19 OAPI) for which HHS is accountable rather than the relatively small amount (-0.05 OAPI) that HHS fell below the cut score for "Excellent" (+1.13).

**3. Did that HHS change appear to be a big deal but it's not?**

That HHS change appeared to be a big deal because it is a big deal! In 2006 there were 34 high schools in Colorado that were rated "Excellent" (OAPI scores from the +1.13 cut score up to the +2.45 highest score achieved in 2006). Twenty of those schools had lower OAPI scores for 2007, but only four (12% of 34) schools had larger declines than did HHS (-0.19 OAPI).

**4. Were the HHS AP students to blame for the decline in overall 2007 CSAP scores?**

There were 337 HHS students (21% of 1,607 total school enrollment) who took any Advanced Placement (AP) courses during school year 2006-07. Only a few of them took any CSAP exams (for 9th and 10th grade) that year, and less than half of the AP students also took the mandatory ACT exam (for 11th grade) that year. The ACT Composite score, which is about one-third of the OAPI calculation for high schools, was 21.9 for 2006 and 21.8 for 2007 (a small change). Therefore, nearly all of the OAPI decline is associated with the CSAP scores and not the ACT scores. As reported by Pam Cirbo, HHS staff apparently claimed that "... the Advanced Placement students were to blame for the decline in the school's overall 2007 CSAP scores because those students did not try hard enough on their individual tests...." I agree with Pam's rebuttal: "I do not believe that premise at all." What data, such as cohort students' scatterplots of CSAP results of 10th grade students compared to 11th grade AP students and to all 11th grade students, are available for review?

**5. Will HHS AP students be required to score "Advanced" on prior CSAP tests?**

Please refer to Pam Cirbo's December 13 presentation for opposition to that idea.

**6. What are the answers to Pam Cirbo's December 13 initial list of questions?**

When I asked Pam this morning, she replied that she has not yet received any answers.

**7. What activities are being planned to implement through HHS Advisory?**

The January 2008 "Principal's Message" includes this ambiguous statement: "We are planning to implement a number of different activities through Advisory to reconnect students with their results from previous years and to motivate them to perform their very best." What information is available to support that statement?

**8. Could the approximately 20 students who had incomplete or invalid test scores ... have made all the difference in last year's performance rating for HHS?**

The HHS "No Score" average for the seven CSAP tests in high school was only 1.4% (LPS total was 1.6%, and Colorado total was 2.5%) in 2007, but HHS was 2.7% (LPS total was 2.0%, and Colorado total was 2.4%) in 2006. If HHS had not reduced its "No Score" average by 1.3% last year, its OAPI score would have been even further below the "Excellent" rating cutoff. Of course, the "Unsatisfactory" average for the seven CSAP tests has more impact (than does the "No Score" average) upon the OAPI score; HHS "Unsatisfactory" was 10% (LPS total was 9%, and Colorado total was 17%) in 2007. Obviously, performance by all 780 HHS students for the 2007 CSAP is much more important than the tiny fraction with incomplete or invalid test scores.

**9. Do you really believe that HHS is responding appropriately?**

As I stated at the beginning of this letter, the two attached documents and the above newspaper article excerpt during the past two weeks have prompted some questions and comments about apparent implied causes and corrective actions. What is your disagreement (if any) with the newspaper article excerpt? What are your responses to Pam Cirbo's December 13 presentation? What other information besides the January 2008 "Principal's Message" do you have to provide transparency for more meaningful identification of probable causes and effective corrective actions?

What questions and/or comments do you have about this letter?

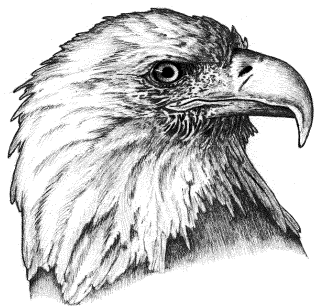
Sincerely,



Sam Drury  
Phone: 303-795-1535  
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Attachments

cc: Board of Education



# Heritage Highlights

<http://heritage.littletonpublicschools.net>

January 2008

## PRINCIPAL'S MESSAGE

### RE: Heritage High School Still Excellent

Dear Heritage Students and Parents:

Our community takes enormous pride in our students, our staff, and our school. We are very proud of our reputation as one of the top high schools in the state of Colorado. As you can imagine, we were disappointed with the news that our school rating as identified by the Colorado Department of Education's School Accountability Report (SAR) has moved from "Excellent" to "High."

The annual SAR rating is based on student performance as measured by the 9th and 10th grade CSAP test and the 11th grade state ACT test. The student performance results from all content areas on all tests for all three grade levels are combined into one score known as the Overall Academic Performance Index (OAPI). The 9th and 10th grade results on CSAP represent roughly two-thirds of the score with the 11th grade state ACT test representing roughly the other third of the OAPI. Clearly, the state puts great value in all of these tests.

To simplify a complex formula, Heritage needed an OAPI score of 1.13 to maintain our excellent rating, and our 2007 OAPI score was 1.08. Heritage students were only .05 away from the "Excellent" rating. According to our calculation, roughly 25 students at the 9th grade level and 30 students at the 10th grade level scored lower compared to Heritage students from previous years. So what does this mean?

It means we have a "High" rating, but we are still an excellent school with extremely bright and passionate teenagers, an exceptional and committed staff, and the best and most supportive parents in Colorado. We don't want to over-emphasize the importance of CSAP, but we don't want to under-react either. As a school, the CSAP test is an important measure of what our students "know and are able to do," and we do take the test seriously. The rating is important to us.

The Heritage staff takes a great deal of pride in our students, and we are committed to making improvements to recapture the "Excellent" rating. We are planning to implement a number of different activities through Advisory to reconnect students with their results from previous years and to motivate them to perform their very best.

Parents we need your help; we need you to encourage your students to take the test seriously and to come ready to do their best. In 2007, approximately 20 students had incomplete or invalid test scores which counted against their peers as a negative number in the OAPI calculation. These students could have made all the difference in last year's performance rating.

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**Attendance Office**  
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Heritage High School will provide each individual an environment where students and staff share mutual respect and commitment to purposeful learning and teaching.

At Heritage we want to make sure that we respond appropriately, without panic, and without excuses. Whether we like it or not the CSAP and the state ACT make up our school rating and it is by this rating that our school is judged by the public. In our community we all know that the rating is not the sole indicator of our school quality, and it is essential that we all carry the message loud and clear about the excellent students and staff at Heritage High School.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kenneth J. Moritz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "K" and "M".

Kenneth J. Moritz  
Principal

Good Evening,

Earlier this week, my Heritage High School junior student informed me that the Advanced Placement students were to blame for the decline in the school's overall 2007 CSAP scores because those students did not try hard enough on their individual tests. In addition, he was also under the impression that one potential remedy would be to change the school's Advanced Placement policy to include the requirement of scoring in the advanced category on CSAP in order to be eligible for Advanced Placement coursework the following year.

I am very concerned about the possibility of a small group of students being blamed for a whole grade level's CSAP performance. I do not believe that premise at all. How many 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade AP students were there in those respective grades for 2007? I believe that the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade AP students are a very small percentage of their overall class. I submit to you that there were, by far, more upper classmen AP students who do not even take CSAP tests.

To deny a student admission to AP coursework the following year solely on the basis of scoring in the advanced category on CSAP tests is punitive and vindictive. Why would anyone even consider that to be a viable strategy in the face of declining academic achievement and declining enrollment? The fallacy of the foregoing strategy is that fewer AP students require fewer AP teachers, which could lead to the district downsizing the AP course offerings further reducing academic rigor. How does denying a student admission into AP coursework fill in gaps and holes for those students who are functioning below grade level? A simple solution to a complex problem usually is the **wrong** solution.

Blaming students for declining academic performance does not seem to me to be a very productive way to solve the problem of declining academic achievement. It doesn't foster a positive and caring learning environment. Nor does it get at the root causes of the decline in student learning. I equate the blame game to the saying, "The beatings will continue until morale improves." Playing the blame game also engages in intellectual dishonesty. It indicates an unwillingness to take on the problem in an objective, straightforward manner. How can an effective corrective action plan be developed if only tunnel vision is employed to solve the problem?

Why not have a willingness to determine:

- How many below grade level students comprised the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade classes?
- How many below grade level students were moved (or not) from functioning below grade level to functioning at grade level in the past year?
- Is it even reasonable to expect the high school to fill holes and gaps for students who have had 9 years to acquire those learning gaps? Should those students even be in high school without a highly structured coursework delineated so that learning gaps and holes can be filled?
- Do the courses offered at the various ability levels contain the necessary essential learnings so that the students can score in the proficient or advanced on CSAP tests?

The list of questions to be posed should be more comprehensive than those I have listed tonight. I hope the Board and Superintendent will direct HHS to take a broader and more in depth approach to this complex problem. Thank you.

