

Strong results at Sumner

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When Sumner Elementary School Principal Sheila Berger talks about the school's modified 45/15 calendar, it's become a little predictable as to how people respond, having to do with the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments.

"The No. 1 question I get is: 'You had good results, so is it all because of the calendar?'" Berger said. "And unfortunately, you can't really put a finger on exactly one thing that you do that causes a great affect on kids."

Sumner is nearly halfway through its second year on the modified calendar, which includes 45 days of school, followed by 15 days off, with shortened summer breaks. Berger, in her ninth year at Sumner, presented the Austin School Board with an update at a special meeting Monday.

Sumner had one of the most notable and positive jumps in the district for the MCAs in 2012. Its 5.6 percent gain in reading for the number of students proficient was a strong mark for the district and above the state average growth of 1.6 percent. That wasn't the only piece of good news for the Sumner MCAs.

"Math though, we kind of blew the top off," Berger said.

It was a 24.7 percent proficiency gain in math for Sumner, leading the district in the number of students proficient. Sumner also was recognized as "celebration eligible," which means it did not reach the top 15 percent of schools but the 25 percent below that. Sumner has submitted an application to be a celebration school.

"We feel very strongly that the calendar did have a great affect on the great success we had," Berger said.

Some other highlights Berger pointed out having to do with Sumner and its 45/15 calendar were that families enjoy the opportunity for their students to recharge during the intercession breaks, parents also find the remediation during the school year more beneficial rather than waiting for summer school, staff also was well-rested with the breaks and the calendar "really seemed to help in the winter months," Berger said.

Also in the first year under 45/15, there were 50 percent less suspensions than the previous year, a factor that is typical in 45/15 schedule research.

Changes were made on how they serve breakfast this year, resulting in a jump from an average of 60 of its students eating the morning meal last year to 220 this year. (The school has about 250 students total.) This year, breakfast is eaten in the classroom, and it's gone well.

"We feel like that has been very much a positive way to start our day," Berger said.

Sumner is on a three-year waiver for the 45/15 schedule, so after next school year, it would need to apply again to continue with the schedule.