Only 5 percent of Saginaw High, Arthur Hill graduates are college ready
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SAGINAW, MI - There are 280 Saginaw High and Arthur Hill students who walk across a stage tonight to graduate and receive their diplomas. And, statistically, only 14 of them are prepared for college.

According to SAT scores given to juniors in March of 2017, most students at two of the city's high schools aren't considered college ready. Specifically, at Saginaw High and Arthur Hill, five percent or less of the students tested were college-ready in all subjects, which includes math, reading and writing. Saginaw Public School District is the largest district in the county.

The district's other high school, Saginaw Arts & Sciences Academy, falls on the opposite end of the spectrum. The college prep school ranked No. 4 in Michigan for college-readiness, with 85 percent of its students testing at college-ready benchmarks on the SAT. This year, 39 students graduated from the school.

There are 113 students graduating tonight, June 7, from Saginaw High School, and 167 from Arthur Hill. Felesia Harrel, director of the College Bound Academic Learning Center, 3521 State in Saginaw, pointed out three reasons she believes some students are more prepared than others.

"I think students start too late," Harrel said. "A lot of parents start when they get in high school. They should start in middle school with critical reading, language and essay writing parts."

She also believes students lack foundational skills when it comes to math. Harrel said the students who do well in her college-prep program are the ones who have parents who seek help outside of school.

"Parents have to do their part, too," she said. "Parents have to be more proactive. Some parents will spend money on expensive cell phones and sporting events but won't invest enough into the academic part of their child."

'Get the numbers up'

Tamelka Richardson-Doster, a parent of a graduating senior at Saginaw High, says many social factors contribute to problems for students, parents and the school district.

"Some students are responsible for going home and looking after their siblings because their parents had to work," she said. "And sometimes not one job, but two."

Extra responsibilities take away from some being able to properly study, she said. Richardson-Doster praised the tutoring efforts of the school, but pointed to some issues within the district, like long-term substitute teachers and a lack of teachers in some core classes.

However, Richardson-Doster, who serves as a parent-liaison for the district, said she will continue to work with school officials over the summer to fix problems.

"We will try to eliminate barriers to get the numbers up," she said. "We will also try implementing some things to get those numbers up next year."

Tests don't always tell the tale

Public schools across Saginaw County show a range of success when it comes to college readiness. Frankenmuth High School ranked 31 in the state, with 66 percent of students testing at the college-readiness benchmark. At Heritage High School in Saginaw Township, 36 percent of students hit the benchmarks.

The administrator who will likely lead the Saginaw Public Schools district into the next school year argues the numbers don't completely determine a student's collegiate success. Newly appointed Interim Superintendent Ramont Roberts said those data points could help the district make the necessary adjustments to improve student success.

"Those tests, though, put in place to measure college readiness, they are not the only way of measure that tells us whether our kids will be successful at post-secondary education," Roberts said.

Roberts said plenty of students, who have not scored the college benchmarks, have gone on and succeeded in college.