

Schools across the district and Commonwealth are seeing stars this week as results of the Kentucky Department of Education's new accountability system have been released.

Schools are rated on a scale of up to five stars based on the results from the spring assessment. We are pleased with our schools, but especially proud of our four stars, showing great effort by students, teachers and support staff.

"We are very proud of our five four-star schools," said Superintendent Brent Roark. "We are very pleased with our nine three-star schools. Our administrative teams, teachers and students are already working hard to prepare for the next round of assessment in the spring."

Harlan County's elementary schools are divided into two divisions in the assessment, elementary and middle. Scores are assigned to each.

During a press conference Monday afternoon, Commissioner Dr. Wayne Lewis explained the star rankings, with one being the lowest and five the highest.

Lewis told reporters that if a school earns three stars, "That is a pretty good school." He said his daughter attends a school that would receive three stars.

In Harlan County, the district overall earned three stars at the elementary and middle school levels and two stars for the high school.

At the elementary level, Cawood Elementary and James A. Cawood Elementary earned four stars, while Cumberland, Evarts, Green Hills and Rosspoint elementary schools scored three stars. Black Mountain received two stars.

Middle schools in the district receiving four stars were Evarts, Green Hills and Rosspoint, while Black Mountain, Cawood, James A. Cawood and Wallins gained three stars. Cumberland Elementary was tagged with two stars.

Harlan County High School also received a two star on the first round of assessment, leaving substantial room for growth in the next assessment later this school year.

Lewis explained during his remarks that the college and career transition rates are 35 percent of a high school's scores.

With the local unemployment rating being the highest in the state at 13 percent, that figure likely impacted a lower transition score for our high school as those not pursuing postsecondary found it difficult to gain employment.

Other factors included in the ratings are math and reading performance levels, performance in social studies, science and writing, students' academic growth/progress and graduation rate.

Forty-five percent of the high school accountability score comes solely from the math and reading portion of the junior ACT. With such a heavy percentage weight given to one test at one grade level, many of the other programs and other positive initiatives going on within the school are given little, if any, weight in the new five star accountability system.

Roark noted that no schools fell in the CSI or state intervention categories. "We are very pleased with this," he said, adding five of our elementary and middle schools are four stars and nine are three three stars.

He also noted the district has some of the highest free and reduced lunch and Special Education rates in the state.

"We celebrate our successes. We are proud of all of our schools. This is the first year of the star assessments. We are all learning, as are our colleagues across the state, how all of the assessment components come together for the overall ranking. Our principals are working hard with their teams to move all of our schools to the four and five star ratings."

All of our schools will continue to strive to be the best possible through hard work and determination. Congratulations to all of our students and staff in our four star schools.