

# ACT math scores defy downward national trend

By Ritika Sanikummu & Josie Bennett  
EDITOR & STAFF REPORTER

The United States is seeing a decline in math ACT scores for the first time in 25 years.

But North is bucking this trend.

Student math composite scores have increased an unprecedented amount.

Principal Kate Murray attributes the positive trend to an intentional move to help North students increase their scores.

Teachers began integrating test preparation into the curriculum, both directly and indirectly, through methods such as test-prep Tuesday in math courses and vocabulary acquisition in English classes.

Murray began implementing new strategies with staff in 2013 to refresh approaches to standardized tests so teachers could utilize different test-taking strategies.

“At different staff meetings, we would do a different portion, so I would hand out a passage from the

reading section and gave the same allotted amount of time a student would have. We did it in silence in the meeting and everybody took it so that we became the learner again,” Murray said. “We remembered what skills were required in order to do well.”

Teachers were able to remember what it felt like to take the exam as students and became accustomed to the perspective required to do well. Skills such as resilience, focus, confidence and controlling anxiety all contribute to testing performance.

Math teacher Eric Vanston finds that staff practice is beneficial to not only the teachers, but to students as well. Teachers are able to relate their experiences to students in order to reduce stress and better understand how to effectively help students.

In addition to the usual multiple choice questions in ACT prep practices, Vanston also makes sure to integrate story problems into his curriculum.

“I believe that any time you’re work-

ing through complex problems and try to solve them, (although) it’s not (directly related) to the test, it can count towards students being more successful,” Vanston said.

Sophomore Zach Page finds that at times the math portion of exams can be challenging. However, the methods that his math teachers use have been beneficial.

“There (have) been more multiple choice quizzes, and they have thrown me off a couple of times, but I think it will help me with future tests like the SAT,” Page said. “My last two math teachers, Mr. Vanston and Ms. (Lauren) Nixon, really emphasized particular problems that they know will be on those types of tests. I feel more prepared for the upcoming standardized tests.”

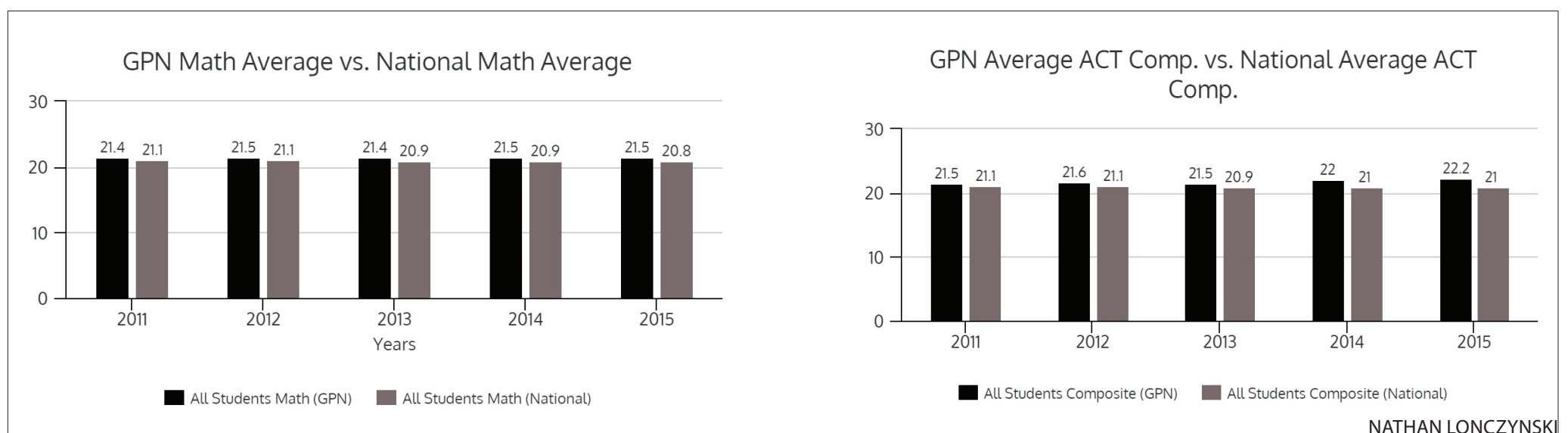
Senior Nuha Mosa also believes that her math teachers have helped her to better understand the strategies of standardized testing and how to apply them during the test.

“Practicing for the math portion is different than practicing for an English section because it’s not really conceptual thinking. It’s just a math problem. It’s just knowing what to do. So it’s not really thinking about it. It’s just remembering what you need to know,” Mosa said. “The teachers just need to teach you things or make sure you understand a problem when you come across it. The teachers helped me with knowing what to expect.”

Since the staff rolled out the new test-taking strategies in 2013, North has seen a gradual increase in math scores and has set an example for how to mix new methods into the curriculum.

“We meet as principals often and share our strategies, and I would say that we are definitely on the frontier of creating programs that support struggling learners,” Murray said. “There are schools that come to visit us to learn more about what we do to support struggling learners.”

## North's average math composite compared to the national average math composite scores.



## AP Biology students visit genetics conference

AP Biology students were invited to attend the Genetic Update Conference held at Birmingham Seaholm High School on Monday, Nov. 2. By attending this extra-credit opportunity, students had a chance to learn more about genetic biology.

“It was really interesting. I learned about cloning and that in the future, they’re going to be able to make human organs instead of waiting for a donor,” junior Mackenzie Simon said.

Presenter Sam Rhines’ conducted his four-hour conference like a college lecture for biology teachers and students it was designed to teach the latest in genetic advances, research areas and possible career options.

“He talked about how there’s this thing called CRISPR (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats) that goes into your genes and takes some out,” Simon said. “Say you had a gene for a disease. It would go into your body and take out that gene and put in a gene that doesn’t give you a disease. It takes out the bad genes and puts in the good ones in place of them. He also talked about that in 10 years, they would have the cure to diabetes. It was really cool.”

Attendees had the opportunity to learn about the powerful tools used in the field of genetics to combat diseases.

“He was talking about all this stuff that when we’re going to be doctors in the future, this is the stuff we’re going to be working on, curing all these diseases,” senior Maria Ciaravino said.

AP Biology teacher Susan Speirs asked students who attended the conference to tweet about their experience using #GPNAPBIO for the people that didn’t

go could follow what was discussed during the lectures.

“I learned quite a bit and noticed that students were engaged and interested,” biology teacher Andrew Pola said. “The end goal of the trip was to inform and inspire students.”

The purpose of the conference was to translate intricate research into understandable concepts and show how advancements in genetics will have implications on the future.

“It made an impact. It was really interesting because ... a lot of people there want to go into medicine,” Ciaravino said. “That’s the stuff that, if I become a scientist, I would be working on. That was really interesting to see what we’re going to be doing in the later years.”

By Yena Berhane

## Students honored at Board meeting

North and South AP students were honored at the Board meeting on Oct. 26 for earning either a four or five on an AP exam along with several semifinalists and commended scholars in the 2016 National Merit Scholarship Competition.

Juniors who excelled on the PSAT last year were named semifinalists and received an application, which gave them the chance to become a National Merit Scholar. According to nationalmerit.org, 50,000 students are picked to receive the award. In early September, 16,000 were selected to become semifinalists. Five months later, 15,000 students are going to be chosen to become finalists.

Assistant Principal Tom Beach believes students that secure the award should be recognized to set an example for others.

“A National Merit final is a high price. It sends a message to the colleges that you’re going (to apply to) that you are one of the best in the entire country,” Beach said. “If you’re picking four colleges, the odds are that all four are gonna want you because they know that you are one of the top of the top in the entire country, so it’s a pretty big deal.”

Superintendent Dr. Gary Niehaus hopes this experience will allow him to honor students and give them a chance to strengthen their resumes. At the board meeting, the honored students will be given a certificate signed by the Superintendent and Board President.

Semifinalist senior Mason Liagre has already been impacted by the overwhelming influence of the award.

“My Gmail inbox is full of colleges (whose) opening lines of the email are about the National Merit Scholarship,” Liagre said. “My outlook on college has probably gone from pretty nervous about it to a little bit more confident. I think that’s the main change. I feel a little bit more better about myself as well because it’s a pretty big honor.”

By Michal Ruprecht

### Reach out to Family, Friends, Parents, Siblings and Teachers

- 24-Hour Crisis Line (800) 241-4949
- GPN Counselors (313) 432-3224
- Trevor Lifeline - LGBTQ (866) 4-U-TREVOR
- Eating Disorder Crisis Line (800) 273-8255
- Marijuana Anonymous (800) 766-6779
- Gambling Helpline (800) 270-7117
- Depression Hotline (800) 231-1127
- GPS Counselors (313) 432-3519
- American Pregnancy Helpline (866) 942-6466
- Alcoholics Anonymous (800) 337-0611

## Information cards aim to prevent suicide awareness

Suicide awareness cards have popped up around campus at both North and South over the past few weeks. These cards have tips about targeting the warning signs of depression and several hotline numbers including the North counseling office and the National Suicide and Bullying Prevention Lifeline.

Grosse Pointe Public Schools has a relationship with the Beaumont Community Health Coalition and SERVE, the district’s service organization. Together, they provided the cards for both campuses.

The district wants to make sure both students physical and mental health are a priority.

“Our goal always is to take good care of our students. We recognize that students struggle with all different types of issues, and we want to use the re-

### YOU ARE IMPORTANT. WE ARE HERE TO HELP

#### Warning Signs:

- Talking about suicide
- Feeling hopeless, helpless or worthless (depression)
- Out of control behavior (alcohol or drug use)
- A loss of interest in the things one cares about
- Self-destructive behavior
- Out of character behavior
- Taking unnecessary risks
- Giving away prized possessions

- Narcotics (Heroin) Anonymous (877) 338-1188
- Domestic Violence Helpline (800) 799-7233
- National Suicide/Bullying/Prevention Lifeline 1 (800) 273-TALK

sources we have in the community to support the health of our students,” Principal Kate Murray said. “The health of our students includes their academic well-being, their mental health, their social and emotional well-being as well.”

The idea behind the cards is to offer students resources to find help for personal problems when they are outside of school.

“We think sometimes kids feel very sad, very hopeless and disheartened and (are) not sure where to turn ... so if kids need help with something, and it is maybe after school, they’ve got a card that they can call, so the kids always have support available to them,” counselor Barbara Skelly said.

Skelly said she doesn’t know if these cards will make any impact but is hoping students use them to their advantage.

“We’re hoping kids pick them up,” Skelly said. “We won’t know if they use them, but we hope that if they feel the need to talk to someone, they know that they can reach someone 24/7.”

By Sarah Wietecha