

## Perfection leads to 'benchmark'

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**MENDHAM** – Mendham High School juniors racked up a perfect score on the state test last year and teachers weren't the only ones who noticed.

The Business Coalition for Educational Excellence (BCEE) designated the school as a New Jersey Benchmark School last month, a recognition given for outstanding state assessment scores.

The state test taken by students is the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA). Two categories, math and language arts are given on the test, and although Mendham High's performance has always been very high in both sections, it was the first time the school was at the very top of the ladder, said Marianna Marchese, director of Student Personnel Services at the high school.

Students scored a 95.4 percent in math and a perfect 100 percent in the language arts last year, Marchese said.

"We've always been in the 90s, but never 100 percent," Marchese said. "It's hard to replicate 100 percent on a test but I'm sure we'll be very close. We certainly always strive to achieve the best."

Mendham High School, with about 1,300 students, has found that most of its graduates go on to four-year colleges, and alumni say they are well-prepared for col-

lege work, Marchese said.

BCEE gave schools the recognition based on their percentile rank. Out of 391 schools, 73 received the Benchmark title. Only schools with similar student populations were compared to one another, to ensure the competition was fair, said George Koodray, a BCEE spokesman.

"You bubble up the categories and compare them. These are the schools that rise to the top of those groupings," Koodray said. "We hold up these schools as a model for other schools to aspire to. They have exhibited role model behaviors and have demonstrated the ability to perform at the highest level."

Essentially, he said, the awarded schools have shown what is possible for students to achieve.

The high-scoring schools, after being identified, were sorted into three different categories, Koodray said, one category for schools exhibiting outstanding performance over three years, another for schools who have significantly improved their scores and, lastly, a category for schools that score very high, that are "advanced proficient."

Mendham High School, with its one perfect and one near-perfect score, falls under the last category.

For the last couple of years, Koodray said, BCEE has been able to give schools commemorative breakfasts and a banner to hang on school walls as a token of having gained the Benchmark

honor. But this year, he said, the BCEE doesn't have the finances to do that, although they hope it will be possible in the future.

This year, they can publicize the names of the schools, getting the word out through press releases and their Web site, just4kids.org.

"In a small way, we do what we can do to tip our hats to them," Koodray said.

The Benchmark Schools title has been around for five years as an annual recognition, Koodray said, and BCEE, a coalition of businesses, created it in order to promote the skills students will need in the workplace when they emerge from school.

"We're trying to promote the basic skills that are necessary," he said.

In addition to the schools who earned the Benchmark Schools recognition, Koodray said schools can check their state test scores on the BCEE's just4kids.org.

"It's really a running poll, an ongoing survey, as to how you're doing," he said.

Koodray said schools can use the information listed on the web site to make informed decisions about how they can improve their students' education. Also, BCEE set up the site so that it proves beneficial for businesses hiring employees. The businesses can inform their potential employees about the state of the school district in their communities.

