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More O.C. students passing exams in English, math, science

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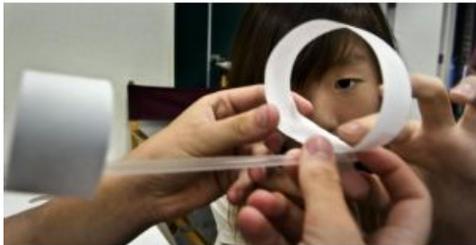
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By FERMIN LEAL / THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Orange County's public school students made modest gains for the ninth straight year on a slew of standardized tests aimed at measuring how well they are learning math, English, science and social studies, according to figures released Friday.

Results of the California Standards Tests show that about 66 percent of students countywide in grades 2 through 11 tested proficient or advanced in English, and 71 percent of students in grades 2 through 7 passed in math. Last year, 63 percent passed in English and 70 percent passed in math.



Beechwood eighth grader Lina Jang works to construct a paper hoop airplane that she collaborated on with fellow student Beth Lillie during their Stem class (science, technology, engineering, and math).

BRUCE CHAMBERS, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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More local students are also succeeding in algebra, physics, chemistry and other higher-level courses, as schools continue to place a stronger emphasis on preparing students for college and careers in science, technology, engineering and math, known as STEM, educators said.

"I am pleased to see that students continue to make steady progress with academic achievement. This shows that our teachers, support staff, administrators and board members are committed to serving students with the highest degree of integrity and that they remain passionate about their work," county Superintendent Al Mijares said. "It is clear that Orange County is on the right track, and our educators are dedicated to ensuring the success and well-being of all students."

STEADY GROWTH CONTINUES

More than 361,000 students in Orange County were administered the CST in the spring. The tests are one of main tools used by the state to measure student achievement. They are a key ingredient of the state's Academic Performance Index and help determine whether schools meet testing targets required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act. API and No Child Left Behind scores are scheduled for release in October.

The number of tests each student took depended on his or her grade level. For example, second-graders took two tests, in second-grade English and math. Meanwhile, high school students may have taken four or five tests, depending on their enrolled courses, in subjects like algebra, U.S. history, biology or chemistry.

Statewide, more than 4.7 million students in California took the CST, with 57 percent testing proficient or advanced in English and 63 percent passing in math. Last year, 54 percent of students statewide passed in English and 62 percent passed in math.

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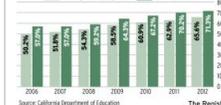
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Passing grades

The percentage of Orange County students who passed the STAR English-language arts and mathematics tests, 2006-2012:



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Passing grades 2006-2012

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O.C. highlights from the 2012 California Standards Tests

Students tested: 361,171 from grades 2 through 11

English: 66 percent of all students tested passed

Math: 71 percent of students in grades 2 through 7 passed

Algebra I: 60 percent of eighth-graders enrolled in algebra passed; 95 percent of seventh-graders passed

Science: For the sixth year in a row, the passing rate rose in grades 5, 8 and 10. There was a 2 percentage-point gain in fifth grade, a 3 percentage-point gain in eighth grade, and a 4 percentage-point increase for 10th-grade life science.

History: The percentage of students who scored proficient or advanced increased in grades 8-11, for history, U.S. history and world history tests.

percent increase, meaning an additional 1,314 students have passed.

"The continuous improvement of our student's performance on assessments is showing that we have a clear focus on learning and that we are on the right track to ensuring all of our students are college and career ready," said Santa Ana Superintendent Thelma Meléndez de Santa Ana.

STEM-READY STUDENTS

Over the past few years, many educators, business people and experts have called for public schools to increase efforts to boost the number of STEM-ready students so the U.S. will remain competitive in the global economy. Friday's results show Orange County's upward trend in science and math is continuing.

For example, more local students are taking algebra at an earlier age. Nearly 21,000 eighth-graders, or about 55 percent of all eighth-graders countywide, were tested in Algebra I, nearly double the number from 2003. About 62 percent of these students passed. An additional 4,100 seventh-graders were tested in Algebra I, with 95 percent passing. In 2003, there were no seventh-graders enrolled in Algebra I.

Educators recommend students complete Algebra I by the eighth grade so they can begin taking higher-level math and science in high school.

Utt Middle School in Tustin had the county's third-highest rate of algebra proficiency among eighth-graders. About 81 percent of the all eighth-graders at Utt passed the Algebra I exam.

"We start preparing students for algebra beginning in the sixth grade. We set high expectations and do all we can to help our students achieve them," said Utt Principal Tom Giebe.

Each year, Utt works to enroll all eighth-graders in algebra courses. Students who struggling with the course are required to spend 88 minutes per day learning algebra – twice as long as any other course. The principal has also created before- and after-school intervention programs for students who need extra help.

"Algebra helps students develop critical thinking and analytical skills they can use across other courses. It's also a good predictor of how well students will do in high school and college," Giebe said.

Willard Intermediate and Sierra Intermediate, both in Santa Ana, had the lowest passing rates in eighth-grade algebra, 17 percent and 18 percent respectively. In science, other schools that struggled included Santa Ana High, where 21 percent of 10th-graders passed, and Wakeham Elementary in Garden Grove, where 14 percent of fifth-graders passed.

Beechwood School in Fullerton had among the highest math and science scores in the county. The k-8 school is one of a handful to offer geometry in the eighth grade. About 22 percent of all eighth-graders took the geometry test, with 92 percent passing. The school also had between 90 percent and 100 percent of students passing in other science and math classes.

Principal Julie Graham credits her students' success in science to a concept recently introduced called "flipping classes." In science, teacher Holly Steele has students review lectures at home through online video clips. The

Orange County scores in English have increased by a combined 24 percentage points since 2003, the first years of the tests, and by 22 percentage points in math. Statewide, students have made similar improvements.

Many educators credit the steady improvement on the tests each year on California's standardized curriculum, called content standards, developed 10 years ago so teachers can prepare students for testing by following daily lesson plans.

"In less than a decade, California has gone from having only one student in three score proficient to better than one student in two. That's nearly 900,000 more students reaching proficiency now than in 2003 – a remarkable achievement that represents real, sustained improvements in learning," state Superintendent Tom Torlakson said in a statement.

School in Irvine Unified and Los Alamitos Unified on average had the highest passing rates in English and math, with many schools in these districts having passing rates between 85 percent and 100 percent across all grade levels.

In contrast, some schools in Santa Ana Unified and Anaheim City school districts had among the lowest scores. At Patrick Henry Elementary in Anaheim, 16 percent of third-graders passed in English, while at Santa Ana's Carver Elementary 18 percent of third-graders passed in English. These schools also had among the highest rates of English learners and low-income students countywide, the two students groups that often struggle the most on standardized tests.

But officials in these districts point to steady gains across all their schools to show that even struggling schools are moving in the right direction. Since 2010, all schools in Santa Ana have had a combined 5.6 percent increase in English passing rates, meaning an additional 1,222 students have scored proficient and advanced. In math, schools have recorded a 5.5

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students can review the clips as many times as they need, then arrive at school with the foundation for hands-on experiments.

"This allows classes to be more fun and interactive," the principal said. Graham also credits the school's lauded Science Olympiad team, which placed sixth in last year's state competition, and new STEM Lab for encouraging more students to become excited about science, engineering and math.

Orange County also had more high school students in 2012 than ever before tested and passing in chemistry, physics, Algebra II. In Algebra II, 26,364 students were tested in Algebra II, with about 50 percent of students testing proficient. In chemistry, 24,829 students were tested and 62 percent passed. And in physics, 7,465 were tested and 70 percent passed. These figures were all also about double compared with 2003.

High schools leading this effort include Oxford Academy in Cypress, where 97 percent of students tested passed in physics; Irvine High, where 96 percent of students passed in chemistry; and Cypress High, where 98 percent of students passed in Algebra II.

Contact the writer: 714-704-3773 or fleal@ocregister.com

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Andrea Carpenter

Congrats to the 9th graders at Los Alamitos High taking Algebra II with a 95% proficiency rate!

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Juan Contreras · [★](#) Top Commenter · Mission Viejo, California

How about a BIG Congrats to the Teachers and Parents of these kids, Who make a difference. Congratulations!! 95%!!! That's awesome!

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Andrea Carpenter

Yep, 54%advanced, 41%proficient, a lot of hard work.

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Marcia Vandenberg

Good job everyone!!!

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Dean Schulte

Where are the Charter Schools in Capo? Why are they not listed? Oxford South OC just posted scores from 94%- 100% in all grades.

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Tina Andres · [★](#) Top Commenter · Biola University, UCI, National University

My son attends a charter and it is listed separately, not in the district's scores. Although I can no longer find the place to find the scores here.

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Heather Marie Hammer · Fountain Valley, California

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