

Media Fact Sheet

Star Test Results in Perspective: Less than It Appears

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After a two week delay because Los Angeles Unified, the state's largest district, did not turn its tests in on time, the California Department of Education will release the 2002 STAR test results on August 29. Although these results are highly touted each year and form the entire basis for financial rewards to schools and teachers, STAR is badly flawed. In fact, CDE will replace the major component, the nationally normed SAT-9, entirely in 2003. When reporting on both the state's results and those of local districts, please consider the following:

- This identical SAT-9 test has been administered since 1998. No questions have changed even though more than a million copies of the test have been distributed. It is a badly compromised test with a strong upward bias. Last year California's independent Legislative Analyst's Office concluded, *"providing \$677 million in rewards based solely upon this test creates incentives for schools to misuse their knowledge of Stanford 9 test questions."*
- Only 50% of the questions on the California Content exams are new. Others appeared last year.
- Test scores spiked upwards once on the SAT-9 after students and teachers had seen the test and teachers were better able to coach students on how to take the exam. Since that time, scores have been generally flat and high school performance has actually decreased slightly.
- High school performance, the bottom line for the K-12 system, is particularly disturbing because the weakest students are dropping out before they even take the test in their junior year. This ought to provide a tremendous boost to the percent that are performing at grade level. For example, for the Class of 2001 between the sophomore and junior years 12% fewer took the exam statewide. Yet the numbers at grade level rose only 3% in reading, remained flat in math, and declined 4% in science.

- Other test scores reflect continuing weak and poor performance in California public schools.
 - Our fourth and eighth graders score dead last in the country's National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in science along with Mississippi, reflecting both the highest percentage "below basic" and the lowest percentage "proficient."
 - Our fourth graders on the NAEP outscore only Mississippi in mathematics and our eighth graders are fourth from the bottom.
 - In 2001, 45% of entering California State University students required remedial mathematics.
 - None of the high school grades averaged 50% correct answers on California's Standard Test for history, a multiple choice test.
- About one-third of entering freshmen do not graduate from high school four years later.
- Only 25 percent of entering 9th graders graduate four years later meeting the UC/CSU entrance requirements with a grade of C or better. Only 12 percent of Hispanic/Latino students achieve at this level.
- Nearly half of those fail the CSU entrance exams in English and mathematics, indicating that even students supposedly prepared for college actually lack significant skills and knowledge. About 60 percent of Hispanic/Latino students fail the exams, meaning only 5% of Hispanic/Latino 9th graders can actually demonstrate that they are fully prepared for college four years later. As they now constitute 43% of all high school students in California, this is a potential catastrophe for California's future economy and society.

California Parents for Educational Choice believes accurate reporting on educational data is critical for our citizenry. Despite billions of dollars and years of effort, progress is minimal at best and dismal at K-12's bottom line, the high school. After the results are available, we will provide you with an op-ed containing our analysis. Please contact Alan Bonsteel, President, (415) 982-6403 or Peter Hanley, Executive Director, 650-522-8436 with any questions.