

Scholar Test Scores County high schools happy about statewide test results

From staff and wire reports

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Students in two Santa Cruz County school districts have earned better scores on a new state writing test than students statewide, although one district lagged behind the state average.

The scores were announced Tuesday by State Superintendent of Public Instruction Bill Honig.

Statewide, high school seniors achieved an average score of 250 on the test. That test, the California Assessment Program's 12th grade writing test, had a maximum of 400 points, and a minimum of 100.

San Lorenzo Valley High School posted an average of 280 points, 30 above the state average.

Santa Cruz City high schools — including Santa Cruz, Soquel and Harbor — earned an average of 266.

Pajaro Valley Unified District high schools, including Aptos and Watsonville highs, scored an average of 209.

State officials reported that English-language proficiency played a "significant role" in scoring differences.

Evelyn Bachelor, assistant superintendent of secondary education for Pajaro Valley schools, agreed, pointing out that Pajaro Valley has a high percentage of students whose native language is not English.

State officials said that students whose primary language is English averaged a statewide score of 257, while students with another native language but who have become fluent in English scored an average of 238.

Statewide, students with limited English ability averaged a score of 158.

"I'd say we did pretty well,"

Even though Pajaro Valley schools scored below the state average, the results were praised by officials there who cited a large number of students whose native tongue is not English.

Bachelor said. In addition to a high percentage of limited English speakers, "we have a large number of migrant students as well. Last year we had about 600 migrant students in secondary schools, out of about 3,500 students.

"We have the second largest migrant population in California, right after Los Angeles," Bachelor said. "When kids first come to us, many can't speak any English at all."

The scores were published for comparison among school districts, State Superintendent Honig said.

Individual students' tests were scored from 1 to 6 points, 6 being the best.

Honig praised the achievements of students statewide, saying the results of the new writing test show that education reform efforts are paying off.

The results show that 21 percent of the seniors scored a 5 or 6 on their essays, which is considered a commendable or exemplary achievement, he said.

Another 58 percent scored a 3 or 4, which is defined as adequate or evidence of achievement. Some 19 percent received lower scores of 1 or 2, which means limited or minimal achievement.

Schools that have emphasized

writing in classrooms scored significantly higher than those that did not, Honig said.

"The results of this test show that we're moving in the right direction and the efforts of California's education reform movement are paying off," said the state superintendent of public instruction.

In general, the higher scoring students were those who watch less television, read more and do homework, he said.

Females had an average score significantly above males, apparently reflecting a somewhat greater devotion to studies, officials said.

The tests will serve as a basis for comparison with future years and as an aid in setting state and local goals, said Honig.

In the tests, students were asked to write essays in response to specific prompts that focused on four types of writing, covering a range of skills.

For example, writing an autobiographical incident required description of a personal story, while evaluation and interpretation called on abilities to make judgments, infer meanings and to detail arguments.