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San Diego Schools Closing Gap In Math

By Patricia Hawke

As the San Diego schools graduating class of 2007 begin their senior year, school district

superintendents across San Diego County are celebrating. The San Diego County Schools announced in September that, as of the class of 2006, the gap in passing the crucial math portion of the state exit exam is nearly closed between black/Latino and white/Asian students.

The county school report represented three years worth of student testing. The results break a long-standing pattern of lagging scores for black and Latino students.

Across the nation, as well as in the San Diego schools, gaps have long been evident between races in many academic measures, such as SAT scores, dropout rates, and college prep course enrollment.

There are many theories as to why the gap exists. Some believe high-achieving minority students are condemned by their peers as "acting white", while others believe that racism is built into the institution to discourage minorities from enrolling in rigorous courses. It is even believed that predominantly low-income, minority schools generally employ inexperienced or uncredentialed teachers.

Whatever the problem, it seems the San Diego schools and other districts in the county are resolving it. About three years ago, 42 school district superintendents, including the San Diego schools, pledged to help black and Latino students bring their math skills up to par. The Superintendents' Achievement Gap Task Force closed the gap by using teacher training, prep courses, increased teaching time for struggling students, and a symposia for county educators to share techniques and results. A variety of methods were employed to ensure students had every opportunity to succeed.

By class of 2006 graduation day, 92.3 percent of blacks and Latinos had passed the test, and 98.5 percent of whites and Asians had passed. When the class of 2006 first took the exam two years ago, 65 percent of blacks and Latinos passed the math portion, with 90 percent of whites and Asians passing it.

The math portion of the California High School Exit Exam covers middle school math and some algebra. A score of at least 55 percent must be achieved to pass the exam. Students first take the

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exam in their sophomore year and have numerous chances in their junior and senior years to retake the exam. The test was first administered in 2001, but the requirement to pass or not receive a high school diploma was implemented with the class of 2006.

Passing the math portion is of particular concern to the San Diego schools, where 43 percent of its students fall into this lagging behind category. Latino children represent its largest racial or ethnic group.

San Diego schools Superintendent Carl Cohn pointed out the importance of this test. He said it means the difference between a lifetime of unemployment and/or incarceration and a successful lifestyle for San Diego schools students. "It makes all the difference in the world," stated Cohn. "The test is genuinely high stakes."

The National Center for Education Statistics underscores the San Diego schools superintendent's

remarks. It reports that, if a student enrolls in algebra in the eighth grade, the chances that student will apply to a four-year college almost doubles.

With all the good results for the county's class of 2006, 1,207 students were denied diplomas, because they did not pass the math portion of the exit exam. Thus, for the San Diego schools, a gap is still a gap. San Diego schools officials acknowledge that more work needs to be done to bring blacks and Latinos' pass rates up within the San Diego schools.

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for Schools K–12, providing free, in–depth reports on all U.S. public and private K–12 schools. For more information on San Diego schools visit

<http://www.schoolsk-12.com/california/san-diego/index.html>

Welcome to Paradise in America's Finest City, San Diego

By Barry Berndes

Welcome to Paradise in America's Finest City, San Diego by Barry Berndes

San Diego is a fabulous place to live, work and play. Yes, San Diego has the best of everything. It has over 50 miles of beautiful beaches and bays, which are an invitation to explore.

San Diego is also home to a casual California lifestyle, which is a result of its wonderful, warm, year-round weather. In fact, the National Weather Service describes San Diego's climate as being the most ideal in America.

Yes, San Diego has a big population. In fact, it's the seventh largest city in the nation and the second largest in the state, but it has a small town mentality. Most of its residents are happy-go-lucky people, who are delighted to live in beautiful San Diego. This happy feeling is reflected in the friendliness of its

residents. It's all here in San Diego and a whole lot more.

....to be continued...

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