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Aug. 13, 2008

Texas sets new record with all-time high average on ACT

AUSTIN – For the third straight year in a row, Texas public and private school graduates increased their ACT composite score, setting a new state record with an all-time high average of 20.7, even while the national average score dropped.

Texas also set a new state record for the number of test takers, with 79,050 students in the graduating Class of 2008 taking the college admission exam, a 3 percent increase from last year. That represents 29 percent of the state’s senior class and is about a 2,500-student increase over the Class of 2007. Nationwide, a total of 1.42 million 2008 graduates took this college admissions test.

“With our ACT composite scores increasing every year for three years in a row, it seems to indicate that recent educational reforms are making a difference. These scores demonstrate the importance of taking rigorous, advanced coursework and I’m proud of the Texas students who take on that challenge,” said Commissioner of Education Robert Scott.

Results released today show that Texas scores rose this year on each of the four subject-area tests for reading, English, math and science. The ACT is scored on a scale of one to 36, with 36 being the highest possible score.

Texas’ white, African American, Asian American, and American Indian students earned a composite score that was higher than their ethnic group nationally.

White students in Texas posted an average composite score of 22.4, compared to 22.1 nationally. African-American students in Texas earned higher scores this year with an average composite of 17.2, a 0.3 percent increase over their national counterparts who earned a composite score of 16.9. Average score increases of 0.3 and 0.4 are unusually large gains for one year on the ACT. Typically, scores move up 0.1 and occasionally 0.2 per year.

Asian-American Texans received a score of 23.8, significantly above the 22.9 earned by Asian students nationally, while American Indian students earned an average score of 21.5, substantially above the national average for their ethnic group of 19.0.

Texas’ Hispanic students received a score of 18.4, compared to a score of 18.7 for Hispanics nationally. While lagging behind the national performance, Texas Hispanic students have increased their score for three straight years and make up 18 percent of the Hispanic test-takers nationally.

Although the state composite score rose from 20.5 to 20.7, it continued to trail the national average of 21.1, which was lower than the 2007 composite score.

“We saw exciting and substantial gains posted by Texas students. This impressive one-year growth shows that our students are increasingly prepared to succeed in college. We still have a great deal of work to do to get all students ready for college and the work force, but these results show that we are on the right track,” Scott said.

An ACT, Inc. analysis shows that Texas students who took the recommended graduation plan—four years of English, three years each of math, science and social studies—are substantially more likely than those who took less than the core to be ready for college-level coursework.

Of the Texas seniors who took the recommended core math coursework, 44 percent surpassed ACT's college readiness benchmark in math, compared to 31 percent who took less than the core. In addition, 26 percent of students who took at least three years of science met or exceeded the benchmark, with only 13 percent of those who took less than the core achieving that standard.

ACT has established college readiness benchmarks for the four individual tests given in reading, English, math and science. A benchmark score is a minimum score needed on an ACT subject-area test to indicate a 50 percent chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75 percent chance of earning a C or higher in a corresponding college course.

The percent of Texas graduates who met or exceeded the ACT college readiness benchmarks, and are considered ready for college-level coursework, increased in all four subject areas this year.

According to the test results, 63 percent of the Texas students who took the ACT are likely to be successful in a college English composition class, while 49 percent are expected to succeed in social sciences. Of the Texas ACT test takers, 44 percent are ready for a college Algebra course and 25 percent are expected to succeed in college biology. In addition, the percentage of graduates who met all four benchmarks improved for the third straight year, with 20 percent meeting the college readiness benchmark in 2008, compared to 19 percent in 2007.

"The increase in college readiness in a single year is very significant. This gain shows what Texas educators and students are capable of. We in higher education look forward to working closely with our K-12 colleagues to continue to improve educational outcomes for the students of Texas," said Raymund Paredes, Texas commissioner of higher education.

Among Texas students, the top five universities being sent scores by ACT test takers are the University of Texas, Texas A&M University, Texas Tech University, Texas State University and Baylor University.

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