

Local districts outperform county, state on California assessment tests



Del Mar Union School District students collaborate and share perspectives during the school day. (Courtesy DMUSD)



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The percentage of San Diego County public school students who at least met expectations of statewide standardized tests rose slightly last year, but they're still lower than they were before the COVID-19 pandemic, new data released last month show.

Nearly 54% of San Diego County students met or exceeded the standard for English language arts in the 2024-25 test results, and nearly 42% met or exceeded the standard for math. Passage rates in both subjects were up by roughly a percentage point since last year.

Those outcomes are better than the statewide average, but they also showed less improvement than the statewide scores did. Statewide, almost 49% met or exceeded the English standard, and around 37% met or exceeded the math standard — both up by around two percentage points.

Local North County school districts in Solana Beach, Del Mar and Rancho Santa Fe and the San Dieguito Union School District, well outperformed both the county and the state, placing among the top performing districts in the county.

The top performing elementary school among the local schools was Ocean Air with 89% of students scoring proficient or advanced in English language arts (ELA) and 92% in math. At the middle school level, 86% of Pacific Trails students met or exceeded the standard in ELA and 91% in math. Canyon Crest Academy recorded some of the best high school results in the county with 93% of students meeting or exceeded the standards in ELA and 86% in math.

Every spring, California public school students in third through eighth grade, as well as 11th-graders, take comprehensive, end-of-year standardized tests in ELA and math as part of the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress, or CAASPP. The state science tests are taken by fifth, seventh and 11th graders. Private school students do not take the tests.

CAASPP scores offer a consistent indicator of student academic performance that can be compared across the state and over time. But some educators have warned of limits to how useful they are in judging or improving academic performance.

That's partly because they're a backward look: The test scores come out several months after students take the tests, when those students have generally moved on to the next grade.

In the Solana Beach School District, 84% met or exceeded the standard in ELA and 82% in math.

“Solana Beach School District students’ success reflects their curiosity, effort, and love of learning, as well as the collective dedication to educational excellence across our schools,” said Solana Beach Superintendent Jennifer Burks. “We are proud of our students and grateful for the commitment of the entire SBSD community that works together to support every learner’s growth and success. These results highlight our students’ perseverance, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, qualities that will continue to support their success in middle school, high school, and beyond.”

Del Mar Union School District students showed growth from last year’s results, placing among the top of the county with 83% of students meeting or exceeding the standard in math and 82 percent in ELA.

Science scores also rose by more than two percentage points, with 75% of students meeting or exceeding the standard, compared to the county average of 38 percent.

According to the district, the scores reflect a “commitment to excellence” that includes professional development for teachers, which strengthens their knowledge of research-based instructional practices that promote student engagement and meaningful learning.

“Our teachers are also committed to their own learning,” said Alison Fieberg, assistant superintendent of instructional services in a news release. “The district’s investment in professional learning ensures that every student in all subjects benefits from high-quality instruction designed to inspire thinking and deepen understanding.”

In Rancho Santa Fe, 85% of elementary school students showed proficiency in both ELA and math, with strong performances by the third and fourth grade cohorts.

At the middle school level, 85% met or exceeded the standards in ELA and 83% did in math, representing a 5% change from 2024. Middle School Principal and Director of Curricular Instruction Lindsey Conley said it is promising to see that upward trend for their eighth graders.

At the school board's October meeting, Conley and Elementary School Principal Joe Erpelding spoke about how they use the test scores to understand each students' individual performance, providing targeted intervention and supports. Beyond just the test scores, they are working to create a positive school culture where students can feel valued and included, to help them succeed academically and reduce the district's challenges with chronic absenteeism through leadership opportunities, school-wide activities and student and community engagement.

The San Dieguito Union High School District Director of Assessment and Accountability Kelly Gilbert was very excited by the district's performance this year: "Positive academic gains are so important." At the board's October meeting she said it was a huge accomplishment that San Dieguito students earned a 79% proficiency in ELA, representing a marked improvement over the county and a return to pre-pandemic levels. They are also outperforming the county and state in math, with 69% meeting and exceeding the standards.

San Dieguito also has one of the largest participation rates in the county for the Advanced Placement (AP) exams, with 10,324 exams taken with a 91% pass rate.

According to Niche's 2026 Best Schools and Districts, San Dieguito was recently ranked number one in San Diego County, in the top three in the state and among the top 20 districts in the nation with an overall grade of A+ rating

"That is amazing," Gilbert said. "This recognition, along with the test results, I think really is worthy of congratulations." Gilbert said those results don't just happen automatically, congratulating the students, teachers, support staff and the district's "amazing supportive and involved parents."

Countywide as well as statewide, CAASPP scores reflect some stubborn achievement gaps among student groups — particularly in connection with students' family income levels.

Within San Diego County, only about 21% of socioeconomically disadvantaged students met the English language arts standard — compared with 70% of students who weren't disadvantaged. Math reflected a similar gap: Just 16% of socioeconomically disadvantaged students met expectations there, versus 60% of students who weren't disadvantaged.

The county's top performers underscore the impacts of student family income.

In all of the 10 districts with the highest rates of students passing both math and English, fewer than a quarter of students are socioeconomically disadvantaged. And in most of the 10 districts with the lowest passing rates, a majority of students were socioeconomically disadvantaged.

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