

Why this matters

Being good at math can open up opportunities for an individual, including high-paying careers.

More than 25 school districts across San Diego County reported even fewer girls outperforming boys in math scores last year — undoing progress on a longstanding gender gap before the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted campuses and inflicted lasting consequences on learning.

But not at Del Mar Union.

Not only was it the sole school district in the county where girls outperformed boys in math last year, it's just one of three across California that actually saw a flip post-pandemic in

And just like before the pandemic, Del Mar Union students scored overall higher in math than those at any other school district in the county last year.

Girls at the district tested about 7% better compared to 2019, scoring less than half a point higher than boys. Despite the flip, boys also improved — raising their average score by $5\,\%$ in the five-year period, according to the Stanford Education Data Archive. The project adjusted standardized test scores for third through eighth graders to compare across $5,\!000$ school districts in 33 states over the last 15 years.

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Alison Fieberg, the district's assistant superintendent of instructional services, credited the success to multiple factors, including a changed teaching approach and response during and after the onset of the pandemic.

"We're really proud," she said. "I think that our test scores point to high achievement for both our boys and our girls."

 $\label{eq:continuous} A \ decade \ ago, \ Del \ Mar \ Union \ chose \ to \ approach \ math \ through \ what's \ known \ as \ cognitively$ guided instruction: helping students develop conceptual understanding by engaging in daily problem solving that leads to conversation.

Then when schools went remote, the district was among those who returned to in-person instruction early — by September 2020. The district also offered a fully virtual program, so students didn't have much interruption to their learning, Fieberg said.

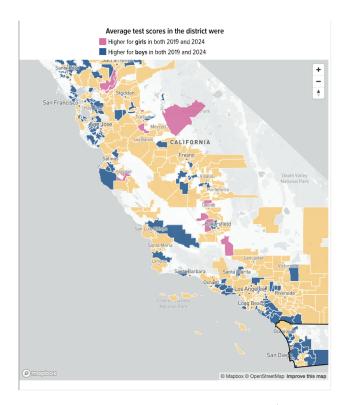
The return to in-person allowed teachers to quickly work together to analyze student problem solving and various assessments and determine which interventions were needed, she added.



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In 2018-19, girls scored higher than boys in math across 60% of California's school districts, according to data from the Stanford Education Data Archive that the Associated Press analyzed.

Last year, that number was 4%. And nationwide, boys on average outscored girls in math at roughly nine out of every 10 districts.

The statistics are from state data, which does not track test scores among non-binary students.

Experts have yet to confirm what factors could be contributing to the widening gap, EdSource $\underline{\text{reported}}$.

Some research found a gap forming in boys' favor after just four months of schooling. Other research links the gap to girls who have reported more anxiety and lower confidence in their math abilities.

Fieberg said it's important to help students with their perception of math, especially if they're already struggling with it, on top of providing access to quality education and intervention support, she said.

"I think that math identity plays a role," said Fieberg.

Del Mar Union serves about 3,500 students living in Del Mar, Carmel Valley and parts of Pacific Highlands Ranch. Last year, roughly 10% of the district's students were considered socioeconomically disadvantaged, state data shows.

 $\underline{\textit{EdSource}}\ contributed\ to\ this\ report.$

Type of Content

News: Based on facts, either observed and verified directly by the reporter, or reported and verified from knowledgeable sources.

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