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LOUISIANA'S ACT SCORES REACH NEW HIGH *Minority ACT Test Scores Rise Above National Average*

BATON ROUGE, La. – Louisiana's Class of 2008 is more college ready than any of the state's previous graduating classes based on an analysis of ACT scores. The students also improved in every subject area and while the national composite score actually declined, Louisiana's composite score showed improvement.

Students receive their individual test scores within weeks of sitting for the test; the report released today by ACT provides the state with an average composite score.

Louisiana's average composite score, which includes public and nonpublic students, increased to 20.3 in 2008 from 20.1 in 2007. Nationwide, the average composite score dropped to 21.1 in 2008 from 21.2 in 2007. A composite score is a compilation of the scores students receive on the English, math, reading and science portions of the exam.

“Overall, student assessments indicate we're continuously improving, and the news that our ACT composite score showed a gain is encouraging for educators, parents and students,” State Superintendent of Education Paul Pastorek said. “As we focus on adequately preparing our students to succeed in their college and career choices, this reinforces our direction and demonstrates that what we're teaching in our classrooms is producing tangible results for our students.”

While the number of test takers in 2008 failed to match the 36,661 students who participated in the test in 2004, the year preceding hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the report by ACT shows a steady increase in the number of students taking the exam compared to recent years. The total number of 2008 Louisiana graduates taking the exam is 34,211, which represents a 1 percent increase from 2007 when 34,042 took the exam.

“The fact that the number of students taking the exam has increased and our composite scores and subject area scores still continue to improve is further evidence that our students are resilient and motivated,” Pastorek noted. “They possess the power and knowledge to meet the expectations of life after high school, and we are doing a better job of positioning them to thrive regardless of what direction they pursue.”

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Louisiana's African-American and Asian-American students demonstrated the greatest subgroup gains in the state. The composite for African-American students went from 17.0 in 2007 to 17.4 in 2008. This tops the composite score of African-American students nationwide, which fell from 17.0 in 2007 to 16.9 in 2008.

The composite for Asian-American students went from 21.7 in 2007 to 22.1 in 2008. Although Asian-American students in Louisiana didn't perform as well as their peers nationwide – the 2008 national composite for Asian-Americans is 22.9 – they did achieve higher growth. Louisiana's Asian-American students improved their composite score by four-tenths of a point while Asian-American students nationwide improved their score by three-tenths of a point.

"It is especially encouraging to note that our state's minority students are outpacing the nation in growth on their ACT scores," said Commissioner of Higher Education Sally Clausen. "That means that more students will have better access to colleges and universities as well as the workforce."

The ACT assessment tool is utilized by most in-state colleges and universities to determine eligibility for admissions and scholarships as well as placement in college courses. ACT data illustrates Louisiana's 2008 high school graduates are more college ready in the subjects of English and math than prior years' graduates. In 2008, 69 percent of students reached the Louisiana college-ready benchmark of an 18 in English and 59 percent reached the college-ready benchmark of an 18 in math. This compares to the 67 percent in English and 57 percent in math achieved by 2007 graduates.

The gains in English and math in large part provide a strong measure of success for the Board of Regent's targeted initiative to ensure students are prepared for college in their English and math skills. Since 2002, the Board of Regents has funded the statewide Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS). And in that six year time frame, Louisiana students have increased their ACT college-readiness levels in English by 5 percentage points and in math by 8 percentage points. These increased college-readiness levels represent a savings to Louisiana of over \$8 million in developmental and remediation costs for 2008-09, according to ACT.

"We are making great progress in Louisiana when it comes to improving our ACT scores and I believe EPAS can be credited with some of that success," Clausen said. "By tracking student scores as early as the eighth grade with EXPLORE and then again in tenth grade with PLAN we can determine where we can partner with K-12 policy makers to enhance teaching and learning so that our young people are truly prepared to do well in college and the workforce."

Other findings include:

- English scores for Louisiana students improved to 20.5 in 2008 from 20.3 in 2007.
- Math scores improved to 19.7 in 2008 from 19.5 in 2007.

- Reading scores improved to 20.3 in 2008 from 20.2 in 2007.
- Science scores improved to 20.0 in 2008 from 19.9 in 2007.
- 88 percent of Louisiana students took the ACT in 2008. Only five states have a higher rate of participation.
- Hispanic students achieved the second highest subgroup gains in 2008 going from 20.2 in 2007 to 20.5 this year. This tops the national composite of 18.7 for Hispanic students.
- Louisiana's Caucasian students scored a 21.5 composite in 2008 compared to a 21.4 in 2007. This is still below the national composite of 22.1 for Caucasian students.
- Louisiana students who reported taking a core of four years of English and at least three years of math, social studies and natural sciences had an average composite score of 20.9 compared to an average composite score of 18.1 for students who reported taking less than those core classes.

Board of Elementary and Secondary Education President Linda Johnson said she was most intrigued by the findings related to course rigor and intensity.

“In reviewing the data provided by ACT, every year we see a continuing trend. Students who take advanced coursework score better on the exam, sometimes by as much as seven points in a subject area,” Johnson said. “We must continue our efforts to strengthen core classes and encourage students to proceed into more challenging levels of coursework. These results prove it is vital to the future success of our students.”

The ACT test may be taken by students in their sophomore, junior or senior years. The information reported by ACT reflects the performance of Louisiana students who at the time of testing, reported they were scheduled to graduate in 2008. ACT scores by school district are expected to be released by the Department later this week.

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