

October 18, 2006

To: Members of the Board

From: Tom Bishop

Subject: Article of Interest

Attached is the following article of interest:

11.1 *“Del Mar schools are continuing to earn impressive test scores” – Del Mar Times, October 6, 2006*

RECOMMENDED: For Information Only.

11.1

News

Del Mar schools are continuing to earn impressive test scores

By Jim Kerr

Although opinions vary on the importance of standardized school test scores as a tool to measure a well-rounded student, it is undeniable score results have become very important to school districts under state and federal guidelines for evaluating performance and academic achievement.

Plus, some bragging rights are involved when you are the best in the county.

As presented to Del Mar Union School District trustees at its Sept. 25 regular meeting, the 2006 Academic Performance Index report, which provides data on student performance on standardized tests, indicated district students have been doing their homework.

According to Janet Bernard, the district's assistant superintendent and head of curriculum, Del Mar district schools earned the highest index score in San Diego County and one of the highest scores in the state. The district's Sage Canyon, Ashley Falls and Del Mar Heights schools showed some of the most significant academic growth in the state.

"This is the culmination of all the work that we do," said Bernard.

The performance index is measured on a numerical scale from 200 to 1,000 and is based on test performance as well as school demographics. A score of 800 is considered a target goal for all California schools and the state expects annual progress in reaching that goal. Schools falling below the target without making yearly progress are subject to sanctions under the federal No Child Left Behind Act established in 2001.

Del Mar district schools gained ground in the index for the third consecutive year, reaching a cumulative score of 941 out of a possible 1,000. The district's Sage Canyon School scored a 966 on the index, the highest in San Diego County.

All Del Mar district schools scored above the 900 mark, except for Del Mar Hills Academy, which scored slightly below at 895. But Del Mar Hills and the other six district schools have all shown steady and impressive progress since 2003 when tests were first aligned to reflect state standards.

All seven of the district schools scored in the plus column for growth. The schools collectively, in fact, have the highest growth score in San Diego County over that three-year period.

“We far exceeded all federal requirements,” said Bernard. “Something is really working right in our district.”

Individually, students continued to make strong gains on a percentage basis, especially in performance at advanced levels on English, math and science — the basis of the standardized tests commonly referred to as the STAR test. Fifty-nine percent of district students performed at an advanced level, something Bernard called “very impressive.”

Bernard also said dramatic gains were achieved in math scores with 65 percent scoring at an advance level. She singled out fifth grade students at Torrey Hills School for their achievement on the science portion of the tests. Overall, science scores improved among fifth graders district-wide, she added.

Board president Barbara Myers praised the district’s achievement, and the hard work of students, parents and teachers, but reminded those at the meeting, as she said she does every year when announcing the scores, there is more to a student than test scores.

“It does take a village to make this work,” said Myers, “but remember we don’t test art, music and technology.”

Trustee Annette Easton, who like Myers is a candidate for school board re-election in November, asked Bernard about remedies for a percentage of students falling below the achievement line.

“These are certainly good improvements over time,” said Easton, “but we still have a chunk of students scoring basic or below. That 10 to 15 percent equates to several hundred students.

“We are always looking at intervention material for our schools,” Bernard continued. “We make sure every site is using appropriate materials. We continue to examine resource strategies with teachers and continue to look at all data.”

Overall in California, the percentage of students who scored at proficient, or advanced levels, climbed slightly over last year with a 2 percent gain. But a 58 percent majority of students in the state scored below the proficiency level.

Bernard indicated English language learners might be contributing to some of the lower score results in her district. She said the district has 80 students for whom English is not their native language. She said normally by third grade, 90 percent of those English language learners are reclassified.

“We are constantly helping our teachers,” said Bernard. “Despite our success, we still have a lot of work to do.”