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Our mission is to ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence throughout the Nation.

School District of Philadelphia

HIGHLIGHTS OF SPRING 1997 SAT-9 RESULTS

MAJOR IMPROVEMENT IN STUDENT PARTICIPATION

There was a strong increase in student participation in the testing program from school-year 1996 to 1997, as a much greater proportion of the students who were eligible to take the test took the test – for example:

- across the three grades and the three subjects of the test, the proportion of students taking each section of the test increased from an average of 64.9 percent in 1996 to 80.0 percent in 1997
- compared to 1996, when an average of 49 percent of the 11th graders missed each section of the test, in 1997 more than three-quarters took the reading section while more than two-thirds took the mathematics and science sections
- in 1997, an average of 84.4 percent of the 8th graders took each of the sections of the test – in 1996, the average percent of 8th graders taking each section of the test was 72.4
- in 1997, more than 90 percent of the 4th graders took each of the sections of the test (reading, mathematics, and science)

There was a strong increase in the number of special education and ESOL students who took the test in 1997 compared to 1996 – for example:

- the number of special education students tested more than doubled in mathematics and science (103 and 112 percent increases, respectively), and almost doubled in reading (97 percent increase)
- the number of ESOL students tested increased by more than 30 percent in each subject

SUBSTANTIAL ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT GAINS REALIZED

Substantial academic gains were recorded in each subject and at each grade level - for example:

- there was an increase of at least five (5) percentage points in the proportion of students performing at the basic level or higher in all grades and subjects,

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except for 8th and 11th grade mathematics (3.1 and 2.7 percentage point increases respectively) and 11th grade science (3.5 percentage point increase)

Reading achievement improved at each grade – for example:

- there was an increase of more than five (5) percentage points in the proportion of students achieving at the basic, proficient, or advanced level in each of the three grades.

Gains were made in science at each grade level – for example:

- there was an increase of 8.9 percentage points in the proportion of 4th grade students achieving at the basic, proficient, or advance levels in science

Fourth grade academic achievement was strong – for example:

- in 1997, more than one-half (50.9 percent) of the fourth graders demonstrated basic, proficient, or advanced reading skills, while almost one-half of the fourth graders demonstrated basic, proficient, or advanced performance in mathematics and science (44.3 and 48.8 percent respectively)

INSTRUCTIONAL IMPLICATIONS – AREAS ON WHICH WE NEED TO FOCUS

While there is a lot to celebrate, the 1997 SAT 9 results also help us to focus on areas of particular need. For example, while Philadelphia students showed gains in each subject and at each grade level:

- 8th and 11th grade performance lags behind that of 4th grade students
- 8th and 11th grade student performance in mathematics lags behind that of reading – both the 1997 achievement and the improvement over 1996 results are low
- while the 1997 achievement in science improved at each grade since 1996, science performance (particularly in 11th grade) is not as strong as in other subjects

Statement of
Richard W. Riley
U.S. Secretary of Education
September 2, 1997

Release of New Philadelphia Test Scores

It is a great pleasure to be in Philadelphia on this "good news" day for public education. The results that were just announced by David Hornbeck tell us that tough, rigorous standards make a difference in the education of our young people. These results are a solid, first step; a clear indication that doing the hard work of putting standards in place leads to progress.

The results also tell me that when a community comes together to support education, you get results and give young people hope. So I want to congratulate the parents, teachers and administrators who worked so hard to make this possible. The greater Philadelphia business community has been and continues to be your strong right arm in supporting the reform process and they are to be congratulated as well.

As an urban community, Philadelphia is not alone in doing the hard work that has to be done to achieve excellence in public education. All across America, urban school systems are being rebuilt around the concept of rigorous standards. The old idea that drift and failure was acceptable for some of our children and some of our schools is no longer being tolerated. The old idea that we can let some of our young people fail -- what I call the tyranny of low expectations -- is no longer acceptable.

As a result, we are starting to see the first tangible results here in Philadelphia and elsewhere that high standards make a difference. In New York City, Rudy Crew, the Chancellor of that school system, has set the goal of making sure every child is able to read well and independently by the end of the third grade.

In Chicago, Paul Vallas is reconstituting schools and ending the practice of social promotion. In San Francisco, SAT scores are up for the fifth year in a row and above the national average. There are many more cities -- Boston, Seattle and Houston just to name a few -- that have joined Philadelphia in this new urban, education movement.

But we have to do much more to prepare our young people for the 21st century. Our most recent long term trend report, which we released last week, tells us our nation's schools are doing a better job of teaching math and science, and this is particularly true when it comes to minority students -- both African-American and Hispanic.

But we have not closed the gap by any means, and we can not be satisfied with children who are slow readers and as a result are falling behind in their schooling. This is why President Clinton has called for voluntary national tests for 4th grade reading and 8th grade math. As a nation, we can't be satisfied with minimum standards or what passes for mediocrity.

Last Saturday, the President in his weekly radio address called on the Congress to support these voluntary national tests in these core basics and today I repeat that call. As the President said, Congress should not “ prevent your school district or your state from choosing to take this test.” The President went to on say, “ to those in Congress who oppose high national standards, let me be clear: I am determined that America will have the high standards that are essential to providing our children with the best education in the world.”

The American people believe in national standards of excellence, and these voluntary tests in the core basics of reading and math are the best way I know to reach this level of excellence. This is why Philadelphia has joined 14 other urban school systems and eight states to take these voluntary, national tests. I hope other schools districts in Pennsylvania will also consider taking these tests.

Now, there are some critics who say that these tests will be too difficult for children in our urban schools. I reject this assumption and so does the President. Yes, suburban young people have many advantages, but effort and a commitment to excellence matter more. The fastest way to turn eager young students into 16 year old drop-outs is to dumb-down their education by giving them a watered-down curriculum. They get the message loud and clear that they are being left behind.

For many of our young people the only way to achieve success and to climb out of poverty is to climb the ladder of educational excellence one step at a time. The Drexel Futures Poll told us just a few days ago that young people know this as well -- they recognize that taking the tough core courses like math, English, biology and chemistry -- is the only way to prepare for the future.

In conclusion, let me once again congratulate the people of Philadelphia and David Hornbeck on the success that has come from your hard work. These improved test scores tell us that you are headed in the right direction.

Keep up the good work.

Thank you.