State Schools Chief Tom Torlakson Announces California
Ranks 5th Nationally in Advanced Placement Exam Scores

SACRAMENTO—State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson announced today that California was fifth in the nation in the percentage of 2015 graduates who earned a score of three or higher on an end-of-course Advanced Placement (AP) exam taken during their high school careers.

Among California graduates, 30.2 percent of seniors earned a score of three or more on an AP exam, which can allow them to earn college credit, compared with 18.6 percent in 2005. This represents a substantial increase of 11.6 percentage points over the past decade. For 2015, California students’ AP exam performance is 7.8 percentage points above the national average of 22.4 percent. Last year, California was sixth in the nation in this category.

“I’m so pleased that California continues to be among the national leaders in the percentage of students scoring competitively on rigorous Advanced Placement tests,” Torlakson said. "It shows we are making great progress in our efforts to encourage students to take courses that will challenge them, give them a greater understanding of a wide variety of subject matters, and help prepare them for college and 21st century careers.”

State education officials attribute California’s continued success to a sustained statewide focus on expanded college-going opportunities for students, particularly for students from underserved communities. California’s steady annual increases in AP course enrollment and test performance numbers are a direct result of past state investments in Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and AP expansion.

Torlakson also praised Arroyo Valley High School in the San Bernardino City Unified School District (SBCUSD) for winning the 2015 Gaston Caperton Opportunity Award, which is given by the College Board for especially dramatic improvements in AP exam participation and
performance rates among traditionally underrepresented student populations. Arroyo Valley High School, one of four schools nationwide to receive the award in 2015, has received a $25,000 award to apply toward programs that encourage more students to attend college. The AP exam participation rate at Arroyo Valley High School is 35 percent, a marked increase from just 13 percent in 2011.

“I applaud SBCUSD’s sustained dedication in encouraging more students to enroll in AP courses and to providing these students with the effective academic support services needed to perform well on the tests,” Torlakson said.

California is also outpacing the national average in advancing opportunities for students who come from low-income families. Of the 56.3 percent of the state’s K–12 students eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program in the Class of 2015, 44.2 percent took at least one AP exam. Nationally, 51.3 percent of U.S. public school students were low income, and 29.8 percent of them took at least one AP exam.

California receives federal funding to pay a portion of the AP exams for income-eligible public school students. For the May 2015 testing cycle, the California Department of Education (CDE) reimbursed $10,078,333 to 393 local educational agencies for 245,813 AP exams for income-eligible students. End-of-course AP exams are usually given in May.

Success in AP courses is one measure of pupil achievement, which is one of eight state priorities addressed under the new Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP).

For more information on the operation of the College Board’s AP program in California, please visit the CDE AP Web page.

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The California Department of Education is a state agency led by State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson. For more information, please visit the California Department of Education’s Web site or by mobile device. You may also follow Superintendent Torlakson on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.