

## News Release

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For immediate release

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### Schools receive Base API scores, rankings

California public schools today received the 2008 Base Academic Performance Index (API) report, which provides baseline data for the 2008-09 accountability period and calculates rankings that allow comparisons of schools across the state. This report, which uses composite achievement data from spring 2008 standards-based testing, provides every school in the state with a Base API score, Statewide Rank, and Similar Schools Rank.

**Base API Scores:** Sonoma County's Base API scores are above the state average, as they have been throughout the history of this program. The county's median scores—796 for elementary schools, 773 for middle schools, and 758 for high schools—compare favorably to the statewide scores of 774, 739, and 702 respectively. Forty-two percent of Sonoma County schools are at or above the statewide performance target of 800, including 46 percent of elementary schools, 38 percent of middle schools, and 24 percent of high schools. <sup>(1)</sup>

The release of the Base API represents the start of the state's annual accountability reporting cycle, which is designed to indicate each school's academic growth over a one-year period. In August or September, the Base numbers that were released today will be compared to Growth API scores to reveal the extent to which each school's performance is improving. The Growth API will use results from spring 2009 testing, thus providing a clear picture of how achievement has progressed throughout the course of one school year.

“The Base API scores are a necessary part of the accountability system, but they do not provide new information about student achievement,” explains Sonoma County Office of Education assistant superintendent Don Russell. “It is a recalibration of last year's data, which is done to allow for the gradual phase-in of new performance indicators and for other changes to this complex and evolving system.”

This year, the API is being changed to eliminate previously used norm-referenced testing and to accommodate a new standards-based modified assessment for students with disabilities.

“The real story about school improvement will come in late August when we can see how each school’s API has changed as a result of efforts this school year,” says Russell.

**Statewide Ranks:** The Base API report includes two types of ranking systems designed to give parents and the community information about how their schools are doing in comparison to others across the state. The first, known as Statewide Ranks, places all schools in California in ten groups of equal size, called deciles, using Base API scores. This system compares schools of the same type (elementary, middle, or high), then assigns each school a rank of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest.

Because API scores have been rising across the state since this program was first developed, the scores associated with each rank have steadily increased over time. For example, an elementary school with an API of 680 had a statewide rank of 7 in 1999, but that same score now results in a rank of 1. This means that schools must realize annual achievement gains or they will slip in the statewide rankings.

Today, nearly 60 percent of Sonoma County schools are in the upper half of the statewide ranking scale for their school type. Sixty-six percent of local schools improved or maintained their state rank from the previous year, despite the upward drift of the ranking scale.

“The county’s Statewide Ranks, which continue to yield positive results for a majority of local schools, also reveal a trend that is puzzling,” explains Don Russell. “Over time, the percentage of our schools in the upper half of ranks has gradually declined, indicating that Sonoma County is not keeping pace with statewide growth. Unfortunately, the accountability system doesn’t give us a way to pinpoint exactly why this is happening, but it’s something we are continuing to monitor as a county.”

**Similar Schools Ranks:** The second ranking system in the Base API report is the Similar Schools Ranks, which compares each school’s API to that of 100 other schools of the same type (elementary, middle, or high) that have similar opportunities and challenges. In this system, a majority of Sonoma County schools (61 percent) improved or maintained their standing, but only 35 percent of schools are in the upper half of the similar schools ranks.

“At the county level, we are urging schools and districts to examine their similar schools ranking and to concentrate on why they are falling at the lower end of this scale,” says Russell.

“Why are our API scores above average, but our similar school rankings below average? That’s a challenge for us to figure out and change.

“The good news is that there are many local schools that are in the upper levels of this system, including schools that have large populations of English-language learners and disadvantaged students.”

Nine Sonoma County schools received a similar schools ranking of 10, including Luther Burbank, Hillcrest Middle, Liberty, Orchard View, Piner-Olivet Charter, Robert L. Stevens, Two Rock Union, Douglas Whited, and J.X. Wilson. Also noteworthy are five schools that made large gains on this ranking system: Wilson School in Petaluma (moved from a rank of 1 to 8), Doyle Park (3 to 8), Hillcrest Middle (6 to 10), James Monroe (5 to 9), and Piner Elementary (3 to 7).

More information about the Base API—including rankings for every school in Sonoma County—is posted on the California Department of Education website, [www.cde.ca.gov/api](http://www.cde.ca.gov/api).

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<sup>(1)</sup> Following the California Department of Education’s model, calculations for median Base API scores and percentage above 800 do not include small or alternative schools.