California public school students continued to outperform their peers in most states on Advanced Placement tests last year, and the state's huge population of Latino students was a particular bright spot, according to reports issued by the College Board on Wednesday. But the state's overall performance slipped slightly from the previous year, and African American students performed dismally compared with their counterparts of other races.

A report on national AP results "reveals a true and startling lack of equity," conceded Trevor Packer, a vice president of the College Board, which runs the Advanced Placement program as well as the SAT test. "What we can see is that African American students in particular are not receiving encouragement and support to enroll in AP classes." Those who do are far less likely to succeed than students of other races.

The Advanced Placement program is intended to offer college-level material to high school students. Taking the classes can boost students' grade-point averages, because the AP grades are given more weight than regular high school grades. And some colleges and universities give college credit to students who pass AP exams with scores of three or better on a five-point scale.

The program has become controversial in recent years, however, for two very different reasons. Some critics have complained that AP classes are inequitably distributed, with far more offerings in affluent, suburban schools than in the inner city. At the same time, some elite private schools have dropped AP classes out of concern that they rely too heavily on rote learning. Still, they remain popular in many schools, and are regarded as a virtual requirement for most students planning to apply to four-year universities.

Nearly one in five California public school students scored three or better on at least one AP exam last year, ranking the state eighth in the nation. New York ranked No. 1, with close to a quarter of its students achieving that benchmark.

Latino students, who lag in many academic assessments, showed surprising strength in AP classes. In large part, that was because many Spanish-speaking students excel in AP Spanish courses. In California, where Latino students account for 37% of all public school pupils, they made up 30.7% of the students who scored three or better in an Advanced Placement exam. However, if Spanish-language classes are removed from the list, that figure drops to 16.1%, according to Sue Landers, director of program development for the College Board.

That still represents a measure of success by a large number of students. "I think it is something to be applauded," Landers said.

Asian students made up a much larger chunk of successful AP students than they did of the overall population,
and white students lagged slightly. The group that provoked the most concern among College Board officials was African Americans, who are far less likely than any other sizable group to take AP classes, and even less likely to score a three or above on the tests. Although more black students than ever took AP classes in California last year, they accounted for less than 2% of all successful AP students, despite making up more than 7% of the state's public school population.

College Board officials said that suggests that black students are not being sufficiently prepared or encouraged to take AP classes. "You can't just drop a student into college-level courses in high school without laying the groundwork," College Board President Gaston Caperton said in announcing the results.

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Gains and Gaps on AP Scores

The College Board released data Wednesday showing improved performance by students on Advanced Placement examinations and highlighted examples of new programs to prepare more black and Latino students for AP courses. But the data released also showed huge gaps in the participation rates and success rates of black and Latino students, as compared with white and Asian students.

The figure highlighted by the board was that 15 percent of the high school class of 2007 earned at least one score of 3 on an AP exam. That is the score that the College Board says signifies college-level performance and is typically the minimum level at which colleges will award credit. Only 12 percent of students earned at least one 3 in the class of 2002.

There is much debate among academics about whether AP courses are truly college-level, with studies regularly coming out that either question the program or praise it. But even AP skeptics acknowledge that the program is popular with students and parents, that admissions offices value it as an indicator of rigor in instruction, and that AP courses are frequently among the most challenging in high schools. As such, who takes AP matters — and educators have increasingly focused on data from the AP program to see whether the program’s emphasis in admissions is likely to hurt minority applicants and what the participation rates say about the preparation of a diverse pool of students for admission to top colleges.

Here the data will probably give cause for concern. Black and Latino students are less likely to take AP exams and to score at least a 3 on at least one test.

AP Participation by Racial and Ethnic Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>% of School Population</th>
<th>% of AP Enrollment</th>
<th>% Earning 3 on One AP Exam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>64.0%</td>
<td>61.7%</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Those numbers would appear to suggest that the most significant problems with what the College Board calls an “equity and excellence gap” — a gap between enrollment levels and AP participation and success levels — is with black and Native American students.

But while the numbers above are those published by the College Board, officials upon request released additional data in which the Latino rates for participation in AP and the percentage of those earning at least one 3 are recalculated excluding the Spanish language courses and test. Latino students make up more than 55 percent of those who take that exam, and if those students and scores are excluded, the percentage of Latino students in AP program falls to 7.5 percent, and the percentage of students earning at least a 3 on one exam falls the same percentage, creating a significant gap that is otherwise not visible. (College Board officials said that there were valid reasons to look at the data with or without the AP Spanish impact.)

Trevor Packer, who leads the AP program for the College Board, said that the figures showed a “true and startling lack of equity.” Packer stressed that a variety of factors can hinder minority enrollments in AP: lack of preparation, lack of encouragement or lack of courses to take.

Packer said that the gaps, for whatever reason, show “how concerned we should be as a country for the lack of equity for minority students.”

The large gap for black students, he said, may point to the need for programs similar to those started in Texas, where educators have had a positive impact on Latino AP enrollments by reaching out to Latino parents to explain benefits of the program. Packer said that there were not programs of similar scope reaching out to black families.

The College Board report also releases gender and racial/ethnic breakdowns for those taking particular AP exams. These data reflect a continuation of several trends in recent years. Female students continue to dominate in the humanities (67 percent of those taking art history for example), but are also achieving equity or close to it in many science fields. Females made up 58 percent of those taking the biology exam and 47 percent for chemistry. Computer science remains dominated by male students, who made up 83 percent of test takers. The gender gap is also still notable in physics.

On race/ethnicity, Asian students are disproportionately represented among AP test takers in every field except two: Italian language and culture, and Spanish literature.

Here is a sampling of data on those taking the tests in particular AP programs (figures for racial and ethnic groups will not add to 100 because “other” and “not stated” are left out).

**AP Examinees by Race and Gender in Selected Fields**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Native American</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calculus AB</td>
<td>64.4%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer science</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English literature and composition</td>
<td>64.9%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European history</td>
<td>68.1%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French literature</td>
<td>66.3%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government and politics: U.S.</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human geography</td>
<td>59.7%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macroeconomics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics: electricity and magnetism</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>64.7%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

— Scott Jaschik

The original story and user comments can be viewed online at http://insidehighered.com/news/2008/02/14/ap.

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Number of AP Test Takers and Scores Are Up, but Racial Gap Persists

By BECKIE SUPIANO

The number of high-school students taking Advanced Placement examinations continues to rise, as does the number of students who perform well on them, according to a report released on Wednesday by the College Board. Yet College Board officials expressed concern about the participation rates and performance of minority students, particularly African-Americans.

The College Board, a nonprofit association, administers 37 different Advanced Placement, or AP, exams that let high-school students earn credit or test out of introductory courses at many colleges. The tests are graded on a scale of 1 to 5, with a score of 3 or higher demonstrating college-level competence. The report notes a study suggesting that even students who score a 1 or 2 on a test may be better prepared in that subject than those in comparable non-AP courses, but it adds that more research is needed on that question.

According to the report, "The 4th Annual AP Report to the Nation," 24.9 percent of the 2.8 million students who graduated from American public high schools in 2007 took at least one AP test, and 15.2 percent of them earned a score of 3 or higher on at least one test. Those numbers are up slightly from the previous year (The Chronicle, February 7, 2007).

Underrepresentation of African-Americans

However, only 3.3 percent of the students who scored 3 or higher on a test were African-American, despite the fact that black students represented 14 percent of all high-school seniors last year. Hawai’i was the only state in which the percentage of African-American students scoring a 3 or higher matched their overall representation in the student body.

African-American students also are less likely than their peers to take AP classes, said Trevor Packer, who directs the College Board's Advanced Placement program. The board sees a "true and startling lack of equity," Mr. Packer said. "African-American students in particular are not receiving encouragement and support."

Black students accounted for only 7.4 percent of AP test takers last year, according to the report. White students, by contrast, accounted for 61.7 percent of test takers and 64 percent of graduating seniors.

In many states, American Indian and Hispanic students’ participation matched their representation in the student body. Nationally, Hispanic students made up 14.6 percent of the high-school-senior population, and 13.6 percent of them scored at least a 3 on an AP test.

Mr. Packer said there were several possible reasons for why the organization had been more successful in encouraging Hispanic students’ participation. For one, the Spanish-language AP exam can provide a natural entry point into the AP system. And several states with large Hispanic populations have made a special effort to reach out to the families of Hispanic students, which may have increased their awareness of the AP program.

The College Board itself has several programs that aim to increase the access of minority and low-income students to the courses and tests. Some of those programs reach out to middle-school students. The College Board's goal is for the demographic makeup of test takers who score 3 or higher on an exam to match that of the overall high-school student
Effort on Quality

College Board officials also discussed on Wednesday the organization's national audit of AP courses. That effort, which began in 2007, is designed to ensure the quality of AP courses taught at high schools across the country.

The audit involved more than 800 college faculty members who reviewed the syllabi for 130,000 AP courses taught in 14,000 high schools. Two-thirds of those courses had passed muster by November, and the rest were allowed to be re-evaluated after the syllabi were adjusted (The Chronicle, November 16, 2007). Most of those courses have since been approved, and 93 percent of the submitted courses are now allowed to bear the AP name.

As part of its effort to ensure the quality of AP classes, the College Board also is training both new and returning AP teachers. The board expects more than 30 percent of AP teachers to retire in the next five years.

Even when there are enough AP teachers, their continuing education is crucial, said Jean C. Robinson, a political-science professor at Indiana University at Bloomington. This is particularly true when exams change, which recently happened with the AP exam in comparative government and politics, for which Ms. Robinson is the chief reader. The exam was revised, in part to add Iran to the countries that are covered. That change demanded resources to educate teachers about Iran.

The most popular AP subject in 2007 was U.S. history, followed by the two English exams. That same year, two new subjects, Chinese language and culture, and Japanese language and culture, were introduced.
February 14, 2008

Larger Share of Students Succeed on A.P. Tests

By TAMAR LEWIN

A higher percentage of students in public high schools are taking and passing Advanced Placement exams, according to a report issued Wednesday by the College Board. The gap between the performance of black and white students, however, remains large.

Advanced Placement courses, which offer college-level study in 37 subjects, are prepared by the College Board and have been widely seized on as a good route to increasing the rigor of a high school education. The exams are scored on a five-point scale, and some colleges offer course credit to students who pass, earning a score of 3 or above.

The proportion of students taking the courses has grown slowly but steadily over the last five years, as has the percentage of students with a score of 3 or higher.

Last year, more than 15 percent of the 2.8 million students who graduated from public high schools scored a 3 or above on at least one A.P. exam. In 2002, 11.7 percent of the graduates got a 3 or better on at least one exam, as did 14.7 percent of the 2006 graduates.

Black students are far less likely than whites to take or pass an Advanced Placement exam. Over all, black students made up 14 percent of last year’s graduates, but only 7.4 of those taking an A.P. exam, and only 3.3 percent of those passing one.

By one measure, Hispanic students seemed to have closed the gap with whites. The College Board reported that last year they made up 14.6 percent of the graduates, 14 percent of those taking an A.P. exam and 13.6 percent of those passing one. But many of them received that passing grade on the Spanish language exam, and if those results were eliminated, only 7.5 percent would have a passing score.

As in past years, New York had the highest proportion of students, 23.4 percent, scoring 3 or better on at least one A.P. exam. In Connecticut, 20.1 percent had a passing score, and in New Jersey, 17.1 percent did.

On average, high schools that offer Advanced Placement courses offer 9 of the 37 courses in the College Board program.

Although the mean score on A.P. exams — 2.83 last year — has dipped slightly for the last few years, the College Board said the change has not been statistically significant.

“In every subject, the mean score goes up and down, and we’ve never had a subject that’s gone down for two years in a row, except geography,” said Trevor Packer, director of the Advanced Placement program.

Mr. Packer said that as the Advanced Placement program has become mainstream, instead of one for
relatively few elite students, the number of poorly prepared students scoring a 1 on an exam has grown, while fewer students get a 2, and the number scoring higher has stayed relatively flat.