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## **Virginia Students Score Nation's Biggest Five-Year Gain in Achievement on Advanced Placement Tests**

The College Board today recognized Virginia for achieving the nation's largest five-year increase in student achievement on Advanced Placement (AP) examinations.

According to the College Board's sixth annual *Advanced Placement Report to the Nation*, the percentage of public high school seniors in Virginia earning a grade of three or higher — generally qualifying for college credit — on at least one AP test has increased by 5.8 points since 2004. In 2009, 18,568 seniors in the commonwealth earned a qualifying score on at least one AP test, compared with 12,349 in 2004.

"Virginia has developed and implemented innovative strategies to expand access to AP courses and provides incentives for schools to identify students with the potential for success," Superintendent of Public Instruction Patricia I. Wright said. "And more of our young people are ready for the challenge of AP courses because of the Standards of Learning (SOL) program, which has raised the instructional floor for all students."

Following Virginia in raising AP achievement were Maryland, Georgia and Maine, which each saw five-year gains of 5.4 points.

During 2009, 22.9 percent of the commonwealth's public high school seniors earned a grade of 3 or better on at least one AP examination, compared with 17.1 percent in 2004. Achievement on AP tests in Virginia increased by 1.6 points compared with 2008, when 21.3 percent of Virginia seniors qualified for college credit on at least one test. Only two states, New York and Maryland, had higher percentages of seniors earning grades of 3 or better on AP tests during 2009. Nationally, 15.9 percent of 2009's public school seniors earned a qualifying score on at least one examination.

Participation in AP courses in Virginia schools exceeds the national average by nearly ten points; 36.4 percent of Virginia's 2009 seniors took at least one AP test during their high school careers, compared with 26.5 percent nationwide.

Virginia is one of 16 states that have eliminated the "equity and excellence" gap for Hispanic students, according to the College Board report. Hispanic students made up 6.3 percent of the class of 2009 and accounted for 6.5 percent of seniors earning a score of three or higher on at least one AP test.

The number of African-American seniors achieving a qualifying score on at least one AP examination has nearly doubled in the last five years. African-American students accounted for 24.4 percent of the 2009 graduating class and 6.5 percent of seniors earning a grade of three or higher on at least one AP examination.

(more)

Virginia students may substitute AP examinations for end-of-course SOL tests in the same subject areas. Enrollment in AP courses is among the criteria for recognition under the Virginia Index of Performance awards program created by the Board of Education to encourage advanced learning and achievement. Virginia promotes AP participation through the Early College Scholars initiative and the Virtual Virginia online learning program, and uses federal grant money to subsidize test fees for low income students.

Dr. Wright praised the contribution of the commonwealth's affiliate of the National Math and Science Initiative (NMSI) in increasing AP achievement during 2009. The Virginia NMSI affiliate provided training and support for teachers and incentives for students in 14 high schools with traditionally low participation rates. Last year, 963 seniors in these schools earned a grade of three or better on at least one AP test, compared with only 546 during 2007-2008.

The 14 schools are as follows:

- Amelia County — Amelia County High
- Bedford County — Jefferson Forest High, Liberty High and Staunton River High
- Franklin County — Franklin County High
- Halifax County — Halifax County High
- Henrico County — Deep Run High and Varina High
- Martinsville — Martinsville High
- Nottoway County — Nottoway High
- Prince Edward County — Prince Edward County High
- Richmond — Richmond Community High and Thomas Jefferson High
- Smyth County — Marion Senior High

“Teachers, administrators and students in these schools were eager to accept the challenge of expanding participation in AP programs – especially in mathematics and science, “ said Dr. Wright. “We hope to build on this success as the initiative works with 11 additional schools this year and 20 more schools during 2010-2011.”

U.S. Government & Politics was the most popular AP course among Virginia's 2009 seniors, followed by U.S. History, English Literature, English Language, Psychology, Calculus AB, World History, Biology, Statistics and Environmental Science.

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