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Virginia Students Fifth in Nation on Advanced Placement Tests *Commonwealth Recognized for Narrowing "Equity Gaps"*

The percentage of Virginia high school seniors taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses and qualifying for college credit on AP examinations continues to increase, according to a report issued today by the College Board, which oversees the AP program.

The College Board, in its 2013 AP Report to the Nation, said that 27.2 percent of 2012 Virginia graduates earned a score of three or higher on at least one AP examination, compared with 25.6 percent of 2011 graduates.

Despite the increase in participation and performance, Virginia students now rank fifth in the nation in achievement on AP tests after five consecutive years at number three. Massachusetts is now third with 27.9 percent of its 2012 graduates earning qualifying scores and Florida is fourth with 27.3 percent. Both states use state funds to promote AP participation by covering fees for students and providing incentives for teachers and schools.

"I would be more concerned about the change in Virginia's national ranking if it were an indication of lower student achievement — but it is not," Superintendent of Public Instruction Patricia I. Wright said. "The percentage of Virginia high school students accepting the challenge of AP courses and examinations continues to increase, as does the achievement of our students on the tests. But AP participation must increase at a greater rate for Virginia to remain competitive with states that are investing resources for this purpose."

Maryland leads the nation in AP achievement with 29.6 percent of its 2012 graduates earning qualifying scores, followed by New York at 28 percent. Nationwide, 19.5 percent of 2012 graduates earned a qualifying score on at least one AP test.

In releasing its annual report, the College Board noted Virginia's success over the last 10 years in expanding access to AP courses and examinations, including the following:

- The number of Virginia graduates taking at least one AP examination during high school has increased by 89 percent since 2002.
- 42.4 percent of Virginia 2012 graduates took at least one AP examination during high school, compared with 26.8 percent of 2002 graduates.
- 27.2 percent of 2012 Virginia graduates scored a three or higher on at least one AP examination, compared with 16.8 percent of 2002 graduates.
- More Virginia 2012 graduates scored a three or higher on at least one examination than took AP tests in 2002.

The 2013 AP Report to the Nation also cited Virginia's progress in narrowing "equity gaps" for African-American students. Equity gaps describe the difference between the percentage of overall enrollment and the representation of a student subgroup in AP courses and achievement on AP tests.

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The number of African-American seniors graduating from high school having taken an AP examination has nearly tripled in ten years. In 2012, 4,442 black students participated in AP testing, compared with 1,623 in 2002. During the same period, the percentage of black graduates earning at least one qualifying score rose 2.3 points to 7.4 percent in 2012, compared with 5.1 percent in 2002.

The number of Hispanic Virginia graduates who took at least one AP examination has more than tripled in ten years. In 2012, 2,573 of Virginia's Hispanic graduates took at least one AP test, compared with 745 of 2002 Hispanic graduates. During the same period, the percentage of Hispanic graduates earning at least one score of three or higher rose 2.5 points to 7.1 percent in 2012, compared with 4.6 percent in 2002. However, the increases in Hispanic participation and achievement in AP testing did not keep up with growth in enrollment.

Twelve Virginia school divisions were among the 539 districts recognized by the College Board for simultaneously increasing access to AP courses and raising achievement on the examinations. The Virginia divisions making the College Board's AP honor roll are as follows:

- Bristol
- Chesterfield County
- Fauquier County
- Gloucester County
- Hampton
- Northampton County
- Portsmouth
- Powhatan County
- Prince William County
- Roanoke County
- Rockingham County
- Virginia Beach

Virginia students may substitute AP examinations for end-of-course Standards of Learning 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 also 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.

According to the College Board, students who score a three or higher on AP exams typically have greater academic success in college and are more likely to graduate on time with a degree than comparable non-AP peers.

The most popular AP course among Virginia's 2012 graduating seniors was US Government and Politics, followed by US History, English Language and Composition, English Literature and Composition, Psychology, Calculus AB, World History, Statistics, Biology and Environmental Science.

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