SCUSD increases graduation rates, decreases drop outs

*Data released by the state today shows big gains for SCUSD high schools; achievement gaps narrow for students*

**June 27, 2012 (Sacramento):** More Sacramento City Unified School District students are graduating from high school and fewer are dropping out, according to California Department of Education data released Wednesday.

The state’s “cohort” data, which tracked students who were freshmen in 2007, shows that SCUSD increased its graduation rate from 2010 to 2011 by 6.4 percent – a rate of gain four times faster than the state as a whole. About three-quarters of SCUSD students (73.8 percent) who started high school in 2007 graduated with their class in 2011.

Similarly, fewer SCUSD students from the class of 2011 dropped out during their four years in high school. SCUSD’s 2011 drop-out rate of 17.5 percent represents a decrease of 5.5 percent over 2010.

SCUSD Superintendent Jonathan Raymond attributed the higher graduation and lower drop-out rates to increased efforts to place children in positions where they can be successful. Specifically, he cited SCUSD’s Linked Learning career pathways, increased focus on alternative programs, online credit recovery program, attendance efforts and support for students and families.

“We are working harder than ever to make school relevant, interesting and empowering for kids,” Raymond said. “Through our expanded career-themed academies, specialized small high schools and highly engaging classes, we’re focused on preparing our young people for success in both college and careers. We’re also providing better access to programs that help kids who have fallen behind make up required courses on a schedule that works for them.”

SCUSD highlights of the graduation and drop-out rate data include:
Luther Burbank High School increased its graduation rate 5.3 percent to 78.8 percent – a rate higher than the state average despite the fact that 90 percent of Burbank’s students live at or below the federal poverty line. Statewide, 60 percent of California kids live in families that meet the federal poverty threshold.

Sacramento New Technology High School saw the highest increase in the percentage of graduates, jumping 21.5 percent from 60.9 percent in 2010 to 82.4 percent in 2011.

Hiram Johnson High School increased its graduation rate 9.1 percent from 57.2 percent to 66.3 percent. Johnson was selected for the Superintendent’s Priority School program in 2010 and has begun to put programs in place to prevent drop-outs and increase graduation rates.

Arthur A. Benjamin Health Professions had the second highest gain in graduation rate, moving 18 percent from 67.5 percent to 85.5 percent.

Graduation rates for African-American and Latino students rose 14.7 percent and 8.8 percent, respectively, narrowing the “achievement gap” between demographic groups of students. In 2010, there was a 20 percentage point difference between the graduation rate of African American students and white students. In 2011, that difference shrunk to 13 percent. In 2010, white students graduated at a rate 7 percent higher than Latino students. In 2011, that gap narrowed to 5.1 percent.

Sacramento New Technology Principal Paula Hanzel says the school works all four years, beginning with a freshmen overnight orientation, to push kids to succeed. “The bottom line for our school is ‘every student graduates.’ That’s the non-negotiable.” Hanzel said the school also believes in grade transparency – students, teachers and the administration are keenly aware of academic progress.

“While it’s hard to attribute any one thing as the factor that makes the difference, programs like the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project, Parent University, a strong curriculum and good teaching in every class make a difference in keeping kids engaged and successful,” Appel said.

Burbank Principal Ted Appel attributed his school’s improving graduation rate to great teachers, counselors and efforts to engage families in student learning.

“Burbank has six Small Community Learning Communities (SLCs) in such career-themed pathways as Construction and Engineering, International Environmental Studies, Law and Social Justice and Performing Arts. Each SLC has a core group of teachers and a counselor, providing kids with caring adults they can count on for help. “We have worked very hard to develop strong relationships with kids so we have fewer of them falling between the cracks,” Appel said.

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“When a student gets off-track, we know it immediately and we immediately work to correct the situation,” she said. “Basically, we dog them about it until they improve.”

Although there is still work to be done – SCUSD lags slightly behind the state as a whole – Superintendent Raymond said he is proud of the district’s ongoing efforts. “When kids are excited about school and see the connection between class and a career, they’ll stick with it. That’s our goal – to see every child earn a diploma and be prepared for the rigors of college and careers.”