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For Immediate Release

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# SCUSD middle schools make impressive gains on state tests

*Fern Bacon leads the way with a second straight year of big jumps in math, language arts*

**August 31, 2012 (Sacramento):** SCUSD middle school kids –often regarded as the hardest to teach – outpaced their elementary and high school peers in gains on state standardized tests in English language arts and math, according to data released today.

SCUSD's eight middle schools had the highest increase in the percentage of students scoring at or above grade level in math and language arts on the 2012 California Standards Tests (CSTs). The biggest increases were in English Language Arts scores, a rise credited to the district's push to implement the more rigorous Common Core Standards in that subject. More than half – 55.3 percent – of SCUSD middle school students tested in the "proficient" and "advanced" ranges, an increase of 5.6 percent over 2011.

Overall, SCUSD students' English language arts proficiency increased 2.4 percent despite serious reductions due to state cutbacks.

"With Common Core Standards, we are pushing our students to be ready for college and 21<sup>st</sup> century careers," said Superintendent Jonathan Raymond. "We are holding them to higher levels of work and working hard to give our teachers to tools, strategies and content knowledge to help our children learn at these higher levels."

Math scores remained relatively flat. Common Core math standards will begin to be implemented this coming school year (2012-13).

Among the middle schools, Fern Bacon, one of seven district Priority Schools, had the biggest increase -- 15.7 percent -- in the number of students scoring in the "proficient" and "advanced" ranges in language arts. Fern Bacon was also tops in the increase in math performance (11.9 percent).

In 2011, about a third (34.2 percent) of Fern Bacon's students scored at grade-level in English. This past spring, half (49.9 percent) achieved proficiency.

Fern Bacon Principal Nancy Purcell says her formula for improving student learning can be summed up in one word: "People," she says. "Our greatest resource is human capital. Our teachers and staff go beyond the call of duty every single day to just get the job done."

Purcell added that the test scores reveal only one aspect of Fern Bacon's turnaround in recent years. She said the culture and climate of the school has significantly improved, which contributes to student academic success.

"Test scores are just one component of what represents quality in a school," she says. "At Fern Bacon, we have a culture built on high expectations and compassion and kindness. Kids feel safe and happy to be here and that's just as important."

Fern Bacon's standardized test scores have rocketed an estimated 100 points on the state's accountability index since 2009-10, when the school was named one of seven "Superintendent's Priority Schools."

The Priority Schools initiative was launched by Superintendent Jonathan Raymond in the spring of 2010 to accelerate the rate of student learning in struggling schools and close achievement gaps. Participating schools are Oak Ridge, Father Keith B. Kenny and Jedediah Smith elementary schools, Fern Bacon, Will C. Wood and Rosa Parks middle schools and Hiram Johnson High School.

As they did in 2011, students at Priority Schools made across-the-board gains on the CSTs.

Other CST highlights include:

- Theodore Judah Elementary School students gained 12.8 percent in language arts proficiency and 8.4 percent in math, the biggest gains among the SCUSD elementary schools.
- Health Professions High School saw dramatic gains in language arts, world history, social science, math and science scores. Student proficiency in science rose 20.1 percent, the biggest gain by any SCUSD school in any subject.

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