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LAUSD students better on exit exams

But district still lags behind state average

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More Los Angeles Unified students passed the California High School Exit Exam on their first try this year, but the district's performance still lags behind the state average, according to test results released Tuesday.

"I think improving on last year is always evidence of good things, but we are not where we need to be," said LAUSD board president Monica Garcia. "We are now challenged by the budget cuts ... but students are not excused from their requirements because we are in an economic recession ... we need to stay focused and with or without cuts our students need to pass."

All high school students must pass the test before they can graduate.

In Los Angeles Unified, 70 percent of students taking the exam passed the math portion in the 10th grade - when the test is first administered - up from 66 percent last year. On the English portion, 71 percent of the district's 10th-graders passed, compared to 70 percent last year.

Statewide, 80 percent of students passed the English portion on the first try and 79 percent passed the math section.

"I am pleased that in spite of the chaos of the last seven months, teachers and administrators and counselors made it clear to students that it was important for them to pass this," said LAUSD Superintendent Ramon Cortines.

Districtwide, Latino and black students continued to pass the test at a lower rate than their white and Asian peers, and the performance of English learners stayed



far below the district average. But the achievement gap between the two groups narrowed in almost every subject area, with African-American students making the biggest gains. The first-time passage rate of the CAHSEE by English learners rose to 20 percent, up from 19 percent last year.

On the math portion of the exam, 59 percent of all African-American students in the district passed in the 10th grade, up from 54 percent last year, while 68 percent passed the English portion, compared with 64 percent last year.

Latino students increased their pass rate in the English portion of the exam by 4 percentage points, to 68 percent. In math, Latino students increased their pass rate by 1 percent from last year, with 68 percent passing in the first try.

While Cortines said state budget cuts would reduce the amount of funding CAHSEE

intervention programs will receive next year, David Kietzman, executive director of Youth Speaks Collective, an East Valley advocacy group, said one way to prevent a dip in scores is through better preparation in the eighth or ninth grade.

"Money should be put into prevention programs, not just when students are seniors and you are hoping they'll understand something they haven't understood through four years of high school," Kietzman said.

State schools chief Jack O'Connell said he was also pleased with the steady progress but was worried about future scores. He said school districts across the state will work with \$18 billion less than what they had expected.

"No one can deny the progress we've made, but our collective ability to continue this upward trend will indeed be tested as schools are asked and forced to do more with less," O'Connell said.

One group of students who will not be required to take the exam this year will be those with special needs, under a budget agreement made between Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and the Legislature last July.

Special education students make up about 11 percent of students statewide, and of those, about 60 percent graduate with a high school diploma. Statewide, almost 57 percent of all students with special needs passed the CAHSEE by the end of senior year.

"This really threatens the quality of education for students with disabilities," O'Connell said.

"This devalued their diploma, and again it becomes a certificate of seat time and not real accomplishment."