

The Greenville News

August 19, 2009

Pickens schools top ACT in state

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High school students in Pickens who took the ACT college entrance exam scored better, on average, than their peers nationally and statewide, according to numbers released today by the state.

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The average composite score in Pickens was 22.6 for the 2009 academic year according to the state Department of Education.

Pickens students' scores were ranked first in the state among 2009 graduating high school students in that district who took the test.

"We have initiatives in place to increase the rigor and relevance in our curriculum," said Pickens Superintendent Henry Hunt.

"When teachers provide quality instruction, the results will be gains in student achievement."

Statewide, the 2009 average composite for all high school seniors who had taken the ACT was 19.8, according to state figures.

That's down a tenth of a percentage point from last year's 19.9, the state's highest average ever.

The national average was 21.1, unchanged from last year.

Public high school graduates had a composite score of 19.7 for 2009, unchanged from last year.

ACT officials said eight South Carolina students – all in public schools – reported perfect scores of 36 for 2009.

State Superintendent of Education Jim Rex said South Carolina's public school students have shown steady progress while the number of students being tested has dramatically increased.

"The national average has gained two-tenths of a point since 2005, but our gain is twice that," Rex said.

"That's especially significant considering we've had a 42 percent growth in the amount of test-takers during that time. But we can't be satisfied with where we are. We need to keep moving these numbers higher."

ACT officials said a dramatic growth in student participation is usually accompanied by a downturn in scores, which hasn't happened in South Carolina.

Rex said nearly 2,300 more public school students' scores are in this year's report, a 16.5 percent increase from 2008. Nationwide ACT results are based on nearly 1.5 million participants, up 4 percent compared to last year.

The newly released ACT scores are from students who graduated in 2009, regardless of when they took the test during their high school careers.

The ACT includes four tests: English, mathematics, reading and science reasoning.