

Livingston Parish Schools Rank No. 1 for Growth in Students Passing National AP Tests

Live Oak High School Sets Pace for District

LIVINGSTON, La. – Livingston Parish leads the state’s effort to increase student participation and passing rates on national Advanced Placement (AP) exams that allow students to earn college credit and deepen their knowledge and understanding of a wide variety of college-level subject material.

The Louisiana Department of Education announced this week that 471 students in Livingston Parish scored a 3, 4 or 5 on AP exams in 2016 – up 474 percent from 2013, when just 82 students parish wide earned a passing score on AP exams. That improvement ranks Livingston Parish No. 1 for the percentage increase of students scoring proficient on AP exams for all of Louisiana.

At the same time, those 471 passing test scores also rank Livingston Parish as the state’s sixth highest for sheer number of passing AP exam scores in a single year among all parishes, including those that have magnet, parochial and private participants.

“We are very excited to see that our students are responding well to the increased expectations and level of rigor that is being asked of them,” Instructional Supervisor and Accountability Contact Tracy McRae said.

Jody Purvis, High School Supervisor of Instruction, said the huge increases in student scores are a direct correlation to parish-wide efforts to create greater access to AP courses on high school campuses.

“By offering more course opportunities and by beginning those classes earlier in their academic careers, we are creating greater access and a culture of expectation,” Purvis said.

Purvis noted that Livingston Parish high schools grew their AP course enrollment last year, while Live Oak High School led the district with the percentage of students scoring proficient on the exams.

Live Oak High School posted the district's strongest results – the school administered 419 AP exams in 2016, receiving 227 passing scores for a 54.2 percent overall passage rate. At the same time, the school received notification that 44 students earned the prestigious AP Scholar Award. The award includes several levels of distinction that is given to students who successfully pass a minimum number of AP Exams.

Last year, the school had two students who received the highest award—the National AP Scholar Award—which goes to students who average a passing score of 4 on at least eight AP exams. In addition, last year LOHS had 18 AP Scholars, five AP Scholars with Honor, and four Scholars with Distinction. This year the school has 29 AP Scholars, 11 AP Scholars with Honor and four AP Scholars with Distinction.

Live Oak High School Principal Beth Jones credits the school's "culture of expectation" and her teachers' desire to improve instruction for the steady growth in AP performance. She noted that the school operates a "modified block" schedule that allows AP students to return to their AP teachers for extra instruction or lab work during the day's eighth hour. Students who are not in AP classes receive remediation from their teachers or additional instruction in financial responsibility during that time.

"This structure has made a significant difference in our students' ability to gain greater understanding and reinforce their learning. And our parents believe in what we're doing, and they support us," Jones said. "The biggest testimony to our success comes from our students—each year they encourage one another to take AP courses, and they challenge each other to compete. What we have found is that once our students take the challenge and they are successful, then they are asking for more AP opportunities and encouraging others to do the same."

Jones noted that Live Oak High School offers a total of 18 AP courses, with some courses offered every other year to ensure adequate enrollment. This year, the school has 15 AP courses being taught, including two new classes that started this year – micro-economics and environmental science.

The Walker system is also reaping improved AP results from its investments, according to the latest report. Walker Freshman High students took 21 AP exams in 2016, and 12 earned a score of 3, 4 or 5, for a passage rate of 57.1 percent. At the same time, Walker High School saw nearly half its students earn passing scores, as 67 students scored proficient on 135 exams given – a 49.6 percent passage rate.

Walker High School Principal Jason St. Pierre said his school currently offers seven AP courses, as well as four pre-AP courses in science, English, literature and math.

“We’re changing the learning culture on this campus. More of our students believe they can achieve at the highest level, and they’re wanting to take more rigorous, more rewarding courses. Our teachers are working hard to support them to be successful, and we’re finding new ways to expand their opportunities each year,” St. Pierre said.

St. Pierre said his school manages a traditional block schedule for its students, but offers a “double block” schedule for AP classes, allowing those courses to be taught the full school year to give students more opportunities to review and “double down” on the material. Walker High also sponsors a two-day AP Camp that is held three weeks prior to the start of school to better acclimate students to their instructors, classmates and coursework, he said.

Denham Springs Freshman High saw half its students, 22 out of 44, earn passing scores on AP exams. French Settlement High School had fewer than 10 students sit for AP exams, but 45.5 percent passed, which is more than double that school’s passage rate over the past three years.

Superintendent Rick Wentzel praised the district’s improvements, and noted that the students’ participation and success in AP courses can have a far-reaching impact on their success at the post-secondary level.

“Not only can students earn class credits that are recognized across the nation at most colleges and universities, but with the rising cost of education these days, this program offers students and families a way to save on their expenses,” Wentzel said.

He noted that some AP courses can earn from 3.0 to 12.0 college hours, depending upon the test score and university policy.

“And even our students who fall short of earning college credit have a greater understanding of the class material and are better prepared to take these courses when they do go to college,” Wentzel said.

McRae said the district’s improved AP scores are in sync with the district’s other academic indicators.

“As we are increasing the rigor of our courses, enhancing our staff development and instituting a higher level of expectation at all our campuses, we are seeing improvement in all academic indicators,” she said.