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Town hits SAT high

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Greenwich High School's Class of 2005 scored another 15-year high on the Scholastic Achievement Test, while the Class of 2007 also made significant gains over the previous year's scores on the Connecticut Academic Performance Test, the superintendent announced yesterday.

The SAT results improved in both math and verbal scores as well as participation rates. The students scored an average of 1,149 out of 1,600, according to the district's report.

On the math portion, students scored an average of 586 out of 800, an increase from 576 last year. On the verbal portion, they scored 563 out of 800, up from 555 last year.

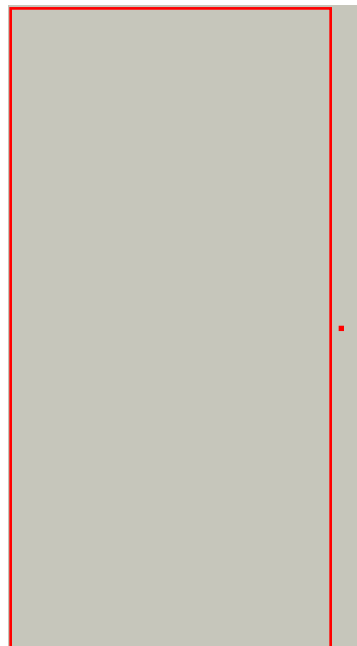
"This is the highest score in 15 years, continuing a seven-year trend," Leverett told the audience assembled at Central Middle School for the school year's first Board of Education meeting.

The district performed better than state and national averages on both the math and verbal sections. For math, the national average was 508 and the state average was 517. For verbal, the national average was 520 and the state average was 517.

In preparing the report, John Curtin, assistant superintendent of curriculum, research and evaluation, compared test scores from 1990 through the present. The scores were taken from each member of the Class of 2005's most recent taking of the test, administered in the spring and fall of 2004.

The rate of participation of seniors taking the test also increased from 88 percent in 2004 to 91 percent in 2005. This figure particularly pleased Curtin, who was concerned when the participation rate hit a 15-year low last year. He is hoping the 3 percentage point increase will help close the gap between the percentage of white and Asian compared with black and Hispanic students who take the test, but has not yet been able to break down the SAT data. Because the test is voluntary, the rate is used as a measure of students' college ambitions, he said.

In the previous year, while 92 percent of white and 95 percent of Asian students took the exam, only 50



percent of black and 58 percent of Hispanic students did, according to the report.

The CAPT results also reflect significant improvements over last year. The state-mandated test, administered to sophomores every May, is broken down into four subtests -- mathematics, reading, writing and science. The results determine how well high schools are performing under the No Child Left Behind federal education reform law. Students who don't achieve proficiency at GHS are asked to either take the test again or follow an alternate course of demonstrating proficiency to graduate, Curtin said.

The percentage of last year's GHS sophomores who achieved mastery, or the grade level goal set by the state and required for GHS graduation, increased in all four subjects.

The most notable improvement was in the science section, where the number of students scoring at the advanced level jumped to 42 percent from 28 percent last year. In addition, the number scoring at the proficient level increased to 90 percent from 89 percent last year, and the number scoring at the mastery level increased to 64 percent from 57 percent last year.

Headmaster Alan Capasso credited his assistant principal, Rick Pietrowski, who formerly ran the school's science department, and Vincent Galasso, the program administrator, for science improvements.

"One of the challenges is the CAPT science test does not match up sequentially very well with the science curriculum," Capasso said. Changes have been made in recent years to address that, he said.

"Part of what you are seeing is a reflection of those changes," Capasso said.

Results on the mathematics portion of the exam also improved, with 43 percent scoring at or above the advanced level, compared to 39 percent past year, and 69 percent scoring at or above the mastery level, compared to 67 percent last year. The percentage of students scoring at the proficiency level remained the same at 88 percent.

Reading and writing scores generally held steady, with the exception of a drop in the percentage of students achieving advanced level on the writing exam from 40 percent last year to 31 percent this year.

Although Curtin was pleased by the improvements on both tests, he warned that the achievement gap that appears when the CAPT scores are broken down by race and socioeconomic status persist.

"The troubling part of the story is when you disaggregate it by subgroup," he said. "We are not making progress in terms of closing gaps."

For example, while 44 percent of white and 47 percent of Asian students scored at or above the advanced level on the CAPT's four subtests averaged together, only 6 percent of black students and 14 percent of Hispanic students did. And, while 40 percent of all students scored at or above the advanced level on the test, only 10 percent of those who were eligible for free and reduced lunch -- the school's only measure of socioeconomic status -- did.

To address this issue, the district formed a Committee to Close the Achievement Gap in June, which met

five times throughout the summer. Committee members Curtin and Deputy Superintendent Mary Capwell presented a preliminary report of the committee's findings at the meeting.

Their suggested solutions ranged from making sure that everyone in the community truly believes that all children can achieve at their highest potential, to implementing Individual Improvement Plans this year for students whose performance falls below goal.

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