Oconee, Pickens above state SAT scores



JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

Daniel High School ranks second in the state among top performing school districts when it comes to Scholastic Aptitude Test scores released Monday by the South Carolina Department of Education. The School District of Oconee County ranked 19th among the 85 school districts.

BY GREG OLIVER
THE JOURNAL

COLUMBIA — The School District of Pickens County, ranks second, and the School District of Oconee County, 19th, among the Top 20 performing school districts when it comes to Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) performance in South Carolina.

Pickens County's composite score of 1,541 and Oconee County's, 1,446, exceeds the state SAT average of 1,431. Pickens County also topped the national average of 1,498.

Pickens Superintendent Kelly Pew said the district's achievement is due to the students, teachers and administrators.

"We provide a rigorous instructional program that prepares our students for the SAT and other assessments, as well as college and careers," Pew said.

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SAT: Daniel High School led the district at 1,620

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The 1,431 statewide average composite score for the Class of 2012 on the SAT's math, critical reading and writing portions is five points below last year and a 23-point drop since 2008. By subject area, South Carolina students averaged 488 in math, a two-point drop from a year ago; 481 in critical reading, a one-point decrease; and 462 in writing, a two-point drop.

Nationally, the 1,498 marked a two-point drop from a year ago. While State Superintendent of Education Mick Zais said those statistics point to a troubling trend, especially in the area of reading, Pickens students scored above the state average in each subject area.

All but one Pickens County high school scored above the state and national average on its composite score. Daniel High led the district at 1,620, followed by Easley High, 1,537, and Pickens High, 1,522. Liberty High, 1,363, was the lone exception.

In Oconee County, Walhalla High, 1,475, and Seneca High, 1,441, exceeded the state average while West-Oak High, 1,423 fell short by eight points. None of the individual high schools in the school district exceeded the national average.

However, District Superintendent Mike Lucas said high schools in Oconee County recorded significant SAT achievements in various subject areas. The results were shown as part of the SAT mean scores at the schools over a two-year trend.

"Seneca High exceeded mean state performance in critical reading, math and the composite score while West-Oak High exceeded state performance in math and the composite score and Walhalla High exceeded state performance in all areas and the U.S. mean in the area of critical reading," Lucas said.

Never was that more evident than the fact that, among the 84 school districts in South Carolina, Oconee and Pickens ranked among the 20 top performers. The 1,541 composite score by Pickens County is just behind York 4-Fort Mill's 1,568 that tops the state and among only four to score above 1,500. Oconee County's 1,446 is just below Spartanburg District 5, 1,449, Spartanburg 1, 1,453 and only four spots below Greenville County, 1,455.

Lucas added that the Seneca High Class of 2012, when compared with the previous year, bucked a districtwide trend by scoring above seniors from the previous year — 1,441 compared to 1,407.

Although pleased with her district's scores on the SAT, Pew said Pickens County educators aren't resting on their laurels.

"We will be looking at individual school scores and identifying areas on which we can improve," Pew said, adding that the district's instruction department, principals and teachers will work together to improve scores.

While SAT scores declined statewide, state education officials said South Carolina students improved their performance on college level Advance Placement Exams. The percentage of public school-only students receiving a score of 3, 4, or 5 (necessary to earn college credit) increased 12.99 percent during the 2011-12 school year while the percentage of all students in South Carolina receiving at least a 3 increased by 12.56 percent.

AP exam results from school districts, as well as individual high schools throughout the state, won't be released until sometime in October.

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