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## COLUMNISTS

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## EDUCATION

## Area school officials sort out API scores

The test scores are in, but what do they mean?

By **Elizabeth Gabriel**

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When the federal government decided it wanted to improve the quality of education in the United States, it came up with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. And to see if the program was working, it had to have a way to quantify the progress of the nation's schools. That's the reason for days of testing from second to 11th grade for the students and weeks of data analysis by educators.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell released California's 2007 Accountability Progress Report (APR) Aug. 31 with its accompanying load of acronyms: Academic Performance Index (API); Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and the federal Program Improvement (PI).

Yosemite High School Principal Steve Raupp and Bass Lake Joint Unified Elementary School District Superintendent Glenn Reid had this to say about their schools' fall reports:

"We feel pretty good about where we are," Raupp said.

"We did OK. Districtwide, we dipped," Reid said.

The target API score is 800 out of 1,000. YHS scored 781 with a change of plus one from last year; the school did meet its AYP. The Bass Lake district recorded 773, a minus 10 from last year and did not meet its AYP. Those figures represent page after page and column after column of scores and figures broken down by every possible category. They have to be studied, digested and interpreted by school administrators and faculty committees.

"We had three big boxes of stuff," Raupp said. "The challenge is to break that down into something we can make use of."

Both administrators said that challenge is being addressed.

While Bass Lake Elementary and Mountain Home in his district were way over their targets (855 and 823, respectively), Oak Creek Intermediate dropped 45 points from last year, Reid said.

"We're already working on this," Reid said. "They need to reassess what they're doing. "

Reid said there is a new principal at OCI.

"We're creating pacing guides for the teachers so they know what they need to know. We are building our schedules to make sure we cover the subjects we know will be on the tests. The guides give teachers maps to follow."

The team developing those maps meets for the first time on Monday, in fast response to the challenge.

Likewise at the high school, teams are going through the results to see what needs to change, what needs to be strengthened and what needs to be maintained.

Reid and Raupp agreed that the advent of the tests has put a new stress on schools.

"It's given us a new sense of purpose," Raupp said. "We've spent a lot of time aligning with state standards and we want to be sure we're hitting the right targets."

"It's made us more scientific," Reid said. "We have much more focus on accountability and achievement. We need to know where the kids are at all times and move them forward as far as they can go. We are more data driven."

He said that in the past, a teacher may have had a unit that the children enjoyed, and the teacher loved teaching, but it was one of doubtful academic usefulness.

"We have to get away from the 'well, it's fun' idea," Reid said.

That is not to say that the fun units or the units that don't speak directly to the standardized testing are being eliminated by either administrator.

"Local history is not on the standardized tests," Raupp said. But after the tests are completed in the spring, Raupp said, high school students get a unit on that and a trip up to Yosemite. Ellen Peterson teaches a unit on the Vietnam War and brings in local people who were there.

"There are many rich and meaningful things that go on in classrooms, things that teachers are passionate about. That will continue," Raupp said. "We have to be careful to achieve a balance."

Reid agrees with enrichment as part of the curriculum, but stresses a broad view of the educator's mission.

"There is a lot being asked of kids today," he said. "The kids we are teaching now are competing against the whole world," he said. "They must be more thinking oriented, know how to solve problems in groups. We can't just teach facts, we have to teach them how to apply those facts to something bigger, to the big picture."

Raupp said, "(The test scores) are important, but they're not the only thing. We want the students to be ready for college, to be ready for life."

Despite the seemingly scientific nature of the tests, however, both administrators have caution.

Raupp said that some students may mistakenly take the tests lightly. That can skew the scores.

"Remember," Reid said, "that this is a snapshot of a 10-year-old kid for three days in a school year."

For full results go to [www.cde.ca.gov](http://www.cde.ca.gov).

Enter "API scores" in the search field or click on "Accountability Progress Report for 2007."