

# Marin schools shine in state



IJ photo/Jeff Vendsel

**PASSING GRADE:** Chelsea Weighall teaches California history to fourth grade students at Coleman School in San Rafael on Tuesday afternoon. Coleman is among Marin's public schools that continue to perform far above the state average on the Academic Performance Index.

## Test scores in county exceed state averages

By Rob Rogers

*IJ reporter*

By any standard, San Rafael's Coleman Elementary School is a success. The school's Academic Performance Index score has risen by 50 points in the past year and more than 100 points in the past three years, according to state Department of Education figures released Tuesday.

In addition, scores for Hispanic or Latino students — 44 percent of Coleman's population — have risen by 117 points in the past three years, and scores for the 52 percent of its students who are economically disadvantaged have climbed by 134 points in the same period.

### School by school results/A11

Yet Principal Ruth Reynolds said the school hadn't boosted its academic standing by focusing its efforts on a particular group of students, or by concentrating on testing at all.

"We can't focus on any one particular subgroup," said Reynolds, whose school's overall score of 825 was well above the state median score of 758 for elementary schools. "We have to look at all of our kids.

"We have a diverse school," Reynolds said. "We look like California."

Coleman was one of many of Marin's

public schools that continue to perform far above the state average on the API tests. Of the county's 61 traditional schools, 69 percent — up from 67 percent last year — received scores greater than 800, the state's standard for academic achievement.

The county's schools exceeded state averages at every level. Seventy-three percent of Marin's elementary schools received API scores of 800 or higher, as opposed to 34.6 percent of elementary schools statewide. About 80 percent of the county's middle schools and 44 percent of its high schools scored higher than 800,

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# SCORES: Marin public schools' test

## Academic Performance Index and your school

Here's how Marin schools fared in the California Department of Education's report. A 10 ranking is the highest possible.

### How to read this chart

**API rating:** Index of test scores from 200 to 1,000

**Statewide rank:** Rankings are categorized into a 1 to 10 scale that translates into percentiles. For example, a statewide rank of "9" ranks the school in the 90th percentile.

**Similar schools rank:** This ranking compares schools of the same socio-economic level. Schools were split into groups of 100 based on a set of criteria including family income level, number of students receiving free lunches, student ethnicity and average class size. Schools were then ranked within the group in the same 1 to 10 scale used for the statewide rank.

	2006 API rating	2006 state-wide rank	2005 state-wide rank	2006 similar schools rank	2005 similar schools rank		2006 API rating	2006 state-wide rank	2005 state-wide rank	2006 similar schools rank	2005 similar schools rank
<b>Bolinas-Stinson School District</b>	<b>818</b>					<b>Reed Union School District</b>	<b>938</b>				
Bolinas Elementary*	818	8	8	NA	NA	Bel Aire Elementary	953	10	10	8	7
<b>Dixie School District</b>	<b>882</b>					Del Mar Intermediate	924	10	10	9	9
Dixie Elementary	930	10	10	8	6	Reed Elementary	940	10	10	9	7
Mary E. Silveira Elementary	868	9	9	1	1	<b>Ross School District</b>	<b>943</b>				
Vallecito Elementary	901	10	10	4	7	Ross Elementary	945	10	10	10	10
Miller Creek Middle School	886	10	10	5	4	<b>Ross Valley School District</b>	<b>897</b>				
<b>Kentfield School District</b>	<b>925</b>					Brookside Elementary	938	10	10	10	10
Bacich Elementary	947	10	10	9	10	Manor Elementary	865	9	9	4	10
Kent Middle School	914	10	10	8	10	Wade Thomas Elementary	938	10	10	10	10
<b>Lagunitas School District</b>	<b>762</b>					White Hill Middle School	873	10	10	6	10
Lagunitas Elementary	768	6	6	1	3	<b>San Rafael Elementary School District</b>	<b>774</b>				
San Geronimo Valley*	704	3	NA	NA	NA	Bahia Vista Elementary	705	3	3	9	10
<b>Larkspur School District</b>	<b>907</b>					Coleman Elementary	825	8	7	10	6
Neil Cummins Elementary	920	10	10	6	5	Gallinas Elementary	752	5	6	6	5
Hall Middle School	896	10	10	7	8	Glenwood Elementary	919	10	10	5	7
<b>Mill Valley School District</b>	<b>911</b>					Laurel Dell Elementary*	720	4	4	NA	NA
Edna Maguire Elementary	945	10	10	9	10	San Pedro Elementary	696	3	2	9	8
Old Mill Elementary	942	10	10	7	8	Sun Valley Elementary	908	10	10	9	9
Park Elementary	902	10	10	2	7	Davidson Middle School	746	6	6	8	2
Tamalpais Valley Elem.	929	10	10	6	10	<b>San Rafael High School District</b>	<b>733</b>				
Strawberry Point Elem.	915	10	10	7	10	San Rafael High School	700	6	5	2	1
Mill Valley Middle School	896	10	10	6	8	Terra Linda High School	779	9	9	4	1
<b>Novato Unified School District</b>	<b>821</b>					<b>Sausalito Elementary School District</b>	<b>734</b>				
Hamilton Meadow Park	820	8	6	5	3	Bayside*	780	6	4	NA	NA
Loma Verde Elementary	817	8	8	9	9	M.L. King Jr. Academy*	640	2	2	NA	NA
Lu Sutton Elementary	790	7	7	2	5	Willow Creek Academy*	738	5	4	NA	NA
Lynwood Elementary	804	7	8	5	4	<b>Shoreline Unified School District</b>	<b>757</b>				
Novato Charter Elem.	861	9	9	1	4	Bodega Bay Elementary*	758	6	7	NA	NA
Olive Elementary	830	8	7	8	5	Tomales Elementary	772	6	7	8	10
Pleasant Valley Elem.	914	10	10	9	9	West Marin Elementary	810	7	7	7	6
Rancho Elementary	955	10	10	10	10	Inverness Elementary	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
San Ramon Elementary	834	8	9	3	4	Tomales High School	711	6	6	4	8
Hill Middle School	812	8	9	7	10	<b>Tamalpais Union High School District</b>	<b>811</b>				
San Jose Middle School	789	8	9	3	4	Redwood High School	842	10	10	6	9
Sinaloa Middle School	890	10	10	7	8	Sir Francis Drake High	809	9	10	2	10
Marin School of Arts & Tech.	768	8	9	7	10	Tamalpais High School	806	9	10	2	10
Novato High School	773	9	8	7	8						
San Marin High School	803	9	9	5	9						

\*Because fewer than 99 students were tested, test scores are less reliable than scores for larger schools.

# results exceed statewide average

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compared with 23.9 percent of California middle schools and 13.6 percent of the state's high schools.

"Our change has been slow and gradual, with no real spikes and no significant declines," said Mary Buttler, assistant superintendent of the Marin County Office of Education.

API scores, which range from 200 to 1,000, measure student performance on several statewide tests in grades two through 11, including the California Standards Tests, California Alternate Performance Assessment and the California High School Exit Examination.

The county's scores have continued to increase, Buttler said, in part because Marin's educators have used previous results to target those students most in need of academic assistance.

"We're able to identify English language learners and special education students, and that's helped to increase API scores, in addition to a lot of hard work maintaining a solid educational program," Buttler said.

At Coleman Elementary, situated in the Dominican neighborhood at 140 Rafael Drive, teachers and administrators have worked to tailor the school's educational program to the needs of each of its 172 students.

"We assess the data we have, and come up with a matrix for every student in every class," Reynolds said. "If we have a child who's struggling with reading comprehension, we put together a program that specializes in reading. If she needs additional instruction, or extra time, we tailor the program to the needs of the student. If there are children who are working at above grade level and need additional challenges, we work with the staff to provide them with incentives."

Buttler noted that the county had 19 schools with API scores of 900 or greater. Novato's Rancho Elementary School had the county's highest score at 955, after tying for first place last year.

Other top-scoring schools included Brookside Elementary and Ross Elementary, the only Marin schools, other than Rancho, to receive the highest possi-

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ble rankings both statewide and among similar schools.

Sausalito's Martin Luther King Jr. Academy had Marin's lowest score, at 640, despite increasing its score by 11 points over the last year. About 96 percent of the school's test-takers in 2006 were listed as "economically disadvantaged," as opposed to 2.7 percent of Rancho students.

That achievement gap between students at different socioeconomic levels persists across the state, said Jack O'Connell, California's superintendent of public instruction.

"While our schools are showing steady overall progress, I am deeply concerned that significant gaps exist between the API results for different subgroups of students," O'Connell said. "I have begun an intensive effort to find ways to close the gap that exists between successful students who are often white or Asian and financially well off, and struggling students who are too often poor, Hispanic, African American, English learners or with a disability.

"As a state, we have a moral, ethical and economic obligation to address the need of every group of students," O'Connell said.

While the county as a whole reported modest growth, a few districts reported significant gains.

"We're particularly proud of Hamilton Meadow Park Elementary and Olive Elementary,"

said Novato Superintendent Jan LaTorre-Derby, who noted that Hamilton rose from an API score of 772 to 820, while Olive's climbed from 798 to 830. "Those two schools made gains in all subjects."

The API ranks each of the state's schools on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 representing the best. It also provides a comparison with 100 other schools that share similar qualities, such as class size, ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

State officials say that "similar schools" rank is important, because it allows individual schools to determine how quickly their school is improving in comparison with other schools. In Marin, however, educators have questioned the state's system for determining "similar" schools.

"We've looked at some of the schools our schools are compared to, and they're not a match," LaTorre-Derby said. "Our San Jose Middle School was compared to Kent Middle School, and there's really no basis for comparison."

Officials say the API standard, in effect since 1999, has encouraged steady improvement in California's schools, pointing out that a score of 665 — considered above-average in 1999 — would now place a school in the lowest 10 percent statewide.

"During the last seven years, elementary schools have grown at an average of 18 points per year," said Pat McCabe, director of policy and evaluation for the California Department of Education.

Yet the API has come under criticism by those who claim a student's education should be measured by more than his or her performance on a test.

"As soon as our student information system gets going, we'll be able to include graduation rates in the API," McCabe said. "We've had recommendations to include college-going rates, workforce readiness, college preparedness and other indicators. But it's harder to bring those in because we're not actually in control of the data. However, we expect there will be legislation that will add other indicators over the next year."

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