



The Alliance for Regional Collaboration to Heighten Educational Success (ARCHES) is a voluntary confederation of collaboratives focused on improving student outcomes and closing the achievement gap through collective action among schools, community colleges, baccalaureate-granting colleges and universities, business, and community and family-centered organizations.

MERCED COUNTY P-16 EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL

History

Begun in 2003, the Merced County P-16 Education and Community Council, under the auspices of the Merced County Office of Education, has focused singularly on education as the driver of regional economic development. The Council has involved an inclusive representation of all societal sectors that comprise this community in order to leverage resources and political will to accomplish its goal: to improve student achievement and expand access to a rigorous program of study so that more students are prepared for higher education and the workplace.

In order to achieve this goal, the Council is emphasizing systemic change and identification of structural barriers in order to both improve student achievement and ensure that all students -- pre-school to baccalaureate recipients -- have access to a rigorous program of study by minimizing antithetical policies and practices. In this regard, the Council has developed specific objectives for pre-school; kindergarten through high school; and, higher education.

Membership

The Council consists of representatives from 20 school districts, the Merced County Office of Education, Merced College, California State University, Stanislaus, University of California, Merced, economic development agencies, community organizations, the private sector, and local government. To further augment involvement in the Council's efforts, a Business Education Alliance for Merced (BEAM) was established in 2008 consisting of representatives from the private sector, education, and government agencies.

Demographics

In this county, children under 14 constitute 29 percent of the population -- the largest proportion in the state. On every socio-economic measure, the county ranks below the state average. Latino children are the predominant group in the schools that enroll 56,164 students.

Impact

In 2006, this Council received an ARCHES-ENLACE grant to enhance college-going rates of students by linking Career-Technical and college preparatory courses that combines relevance of the former with the rigor of the latter. The Council embarked on a two-pronged approach:

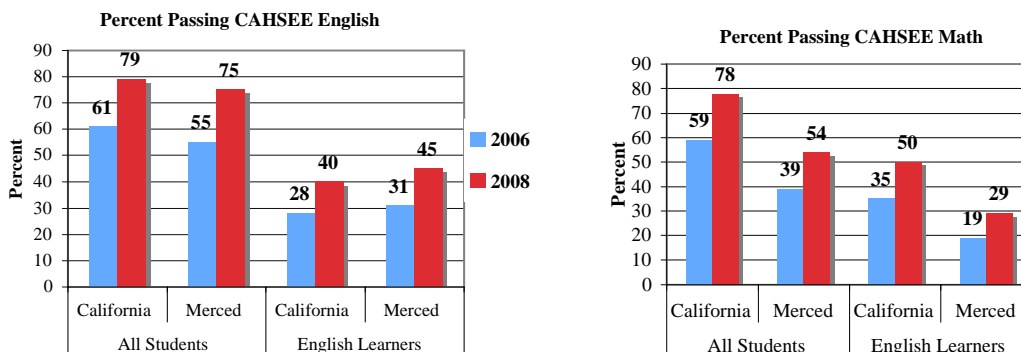
- Enhanced rigor in Career-Technical courses in Regional Occupational Programs (ROP) so that they would be certified as college preparatory courses by the public universities; and,
- Offered professional development in order that teachers of Career Education and college preparatory courses would engage in team-teaching of these classes.

The Council's efforts under the ARCHES grant has resulted in the following outcomes:

- Eleven ROP courses were certified as meeting the admissions requirements for the state's public universities; in the past, no ROP courses were certified in this regard.
- Because of these course approvals, 10 percent more students in Merced County have met the course requirements for admissions to the state's public universities.
- 432 Regional Occupational Program (ROP) students enrolled in university-accepted courses.
- Four new courses linked academic and Career-Technical curricular approaches that were team-taught by faculty from these strands.

Other activities of this P-16 Council have resulted in improved student achievement on several performance indications. Display 1 presents the percentage of tenth graders statewide and in Merced County who passed the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE).

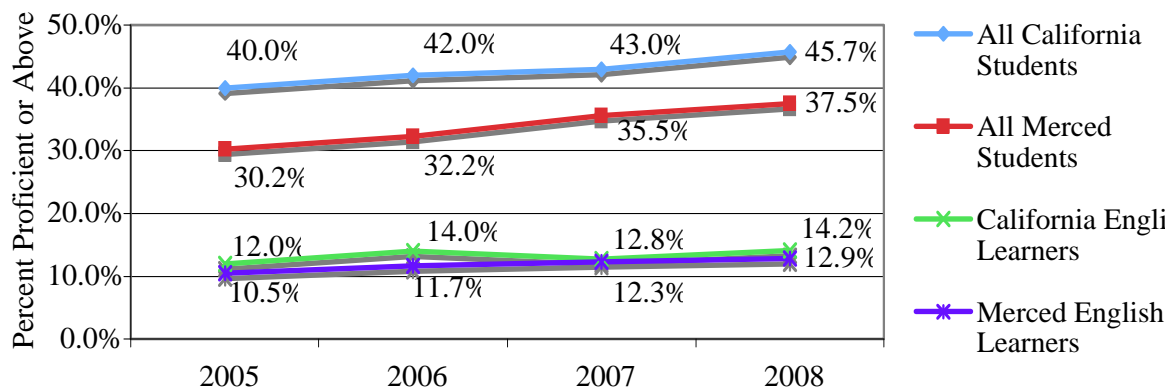
Display 1
Proportion of Students Passing the CAHSEE in Tenth Grade from 2006 to 2008



- Over 15 percent more tenth graders passed each CAHSEE section between 2006 and 2008.
- At least ten percent more tenth grade English Language Learners passed each CAHSEE section in 2008 than did in 2006.

Display 2 pictures the proportion of students in grades 2-11 scoring proficient or above on California Standards Tests (CST) in their respective grade levels in English Language Arts.

Display 2
Percentage of Students Proficient and Above on English Language Arts CSTs in Grades 2-11



- Across these grade levels, 7.3 percent more Merced County students scored proficient and above on the English Language Arts portion of the CST in 2008 than did so in 2005.
- During this time period, the performance of all Merced County students and English Language Learners become more similar to that of the statewide population of students.

Future Initiatives

For each of the Council’s sub-committees, specific initiatives are in progress:

- *Early Care and Education:* Identify and implement a county research-based assessment to measure the school readiness of children entering kindergarten in 2010.
- *K-12:* Increase by 10 percent the number of eighth graders who complete Algebra with at least a “C” and enroll in the next college preparatory course in which they earn at least a “C”.
- *Higher Education:* Strengthen curriculum alignment between educational levels.