

# THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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ONLINE ARTICLE

## New math approach leads to higher API scores for some O.C. schools

**Schools using MIND Research Institute program show dramatic increases.**

By **FERMIN LEAL**

The Orange County Register

At Romero-Cruz Elementary, math is not just a class, it's an adventure.

Students learn fractions, long division and Algebra by helping a computerized penguin named Jiji waddle along roads and blast off into space.

"Math is so much fun," said fifth-grader Ariansi Avelar. "It's my favorite subject."

Students at Romero-Cruz Elementary learn math with the computer-based program by using games that teach the basic building blocks of math, without relying on language.

The program, developed by the MIND Research Institute, is credited with helping Romero-Cruz Elementary improve its Academic Performance Index by 86 points, the largest increase in the county, according to figures released Tuesday.

In fact, five of the 10 schools in the county with the highest improvement on API scores use the MIND Institute's math program as part of their regular curriculum.

"We owe a lot of our school's success this year to the math program," said Edna Velado, the principal at Romero Cruz Elementary, which began using the program last school year. "Kids here have never been more excited to learn about math."

Students in the program spend two 45-minute periods a week on computers. They must master one game before they can move on to the next. So they have to learn the math to win the game. But they move at their own pace, unlike a tradition-



MICHAEL GOULDING, FOR THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Ashley Garcia pays close attention during her math lessons at Romero Cruz Elementary in Santa Ana, Tuesday.

al math class where the teacher moves on regardless of whose head is still spinning.

The program is geared to students with high populations of English learners, who often struggle because of language barriers, said Ted Smith, the institute's executive director.

Last year, 71 schools across the county used the program. Math scores improved an average of 12.8 percentage points at schools using the program, Smith said.

### Federal, state scores remain steady

The state on Tuesday released both API and federal No Child Left Behind scores

for all public schools.

About 64 percent of all of Orange County's public schools met all testing targets required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act, while 86 percent reached targets under the state's API.

The gap between the percentage of local schools meeting federal and state testing goals continued to grow because of tougher levels for student achievement required the federal government.

Last year, 65 percent of local schools met federal targets, while 83 percent reached targets under the state's API.

Statewide, 51 percent of schools met all

No Child Left Behind goals; 64 percent met API growth targets.

Although both the state and federal systems use many of the same tests and other measurements, they use different formulas for gauging success.

The state accountability system measures improvement in student achievement from one year to the next. Under the API system, schools are given credit for improving the overall performance of their students. School growth targets are set based upon the starting point of the school and are re-set each year depending on the level of growth each school site shows.

The federal system rewards schools for the percent of students the school has passing state assessments. No matter where a school began, all schools are expected to meet the same target at the same time.

The API “confirms that most California schools are continuing to make solid gains in academic achievement,” said state Superintendent Jack O’Connell. “For the seventh year in a row schools at every level have made real progress.”

### **Federal targets**

In California, No Child Left Behind looks primarily at standardized tests that students took in the spring to determine

whether schools are making “adequate yearly progress.”

Locally, 379 campuses made adequate yearly progress, while 209 did not.

This year, between 43 percent and 46 percent of students in each school needed to be proficient in English, and 42 percent and 47 percent needed to pass in math.

Next year, targets will increase another 10 percentage points and so on until 2014 when every student group is expected to be proficient in core subjects.

The federal government expects schools to reach testing goals each year for all groups, which include English learners, low-income students and different ethnic/racial groups.

Each year, many schools fail because not enough English learners can pass English tests or too few special education students pass other tests. This year, 112 schools in the county failed to reach English test targets for English learners.

One-hundred schools in the county now face sanctions for missing testing goals on the federal No Child Left Behind’s accountability system. Sanctions included required tutoring, allowing parents to transfer students to better performing schools, a change of principals, and state takeover. Last year 101 schools faced sanctions.

Only schools that receive federal funding for low-income students, about 320 in the county, are subject to sanctions.

### **State targets**

The API ranges from 200 to 1,000, and is calculated from state test scores and graduation rates for high schools.

All schools are required to grow their scores by 2 to 5 points each year until they reach a score of 800. Schools with a score of 800 no longer have to show improvement.

About 500 schools in the county reached their growth target on their API score, while 79 did not.

In Orange County, 61 percent of schools already have an API score of 800 or higher, compared to 41 percent of schools statewide.

The median API score in the county was 824, while the state median was 771.

Oxford Academy in Cypress had the county’s highest API score at 983, followed by Weaver Elementary in Los Alamitos and Turtlerock Elementary in Irvine, both with a score of 980.

“Scores in Orange County continue to remain strong,” said county Superintendent William Habermehl. “It’s a credit to all the hard work from our teachers, parents and students.”