

Social Environment

ACTION Goal: All persons have the opportunity to engage in the civic, recreational, and cultural aspects of their communities.

INDICATOR B1

VOTER PARTICIPATION

This indicator measures the percentage of the voting-age population that actually votes.

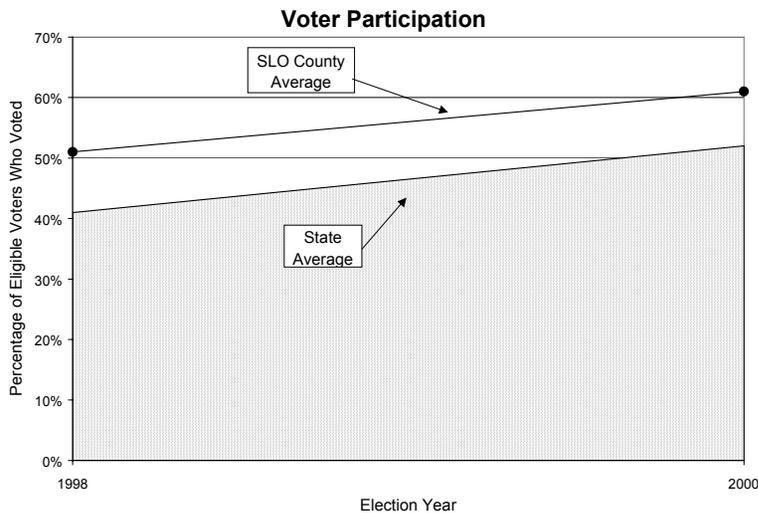
Why Is It Important?

Involvement in the political process is one of the factors contributing to a healthy community. A community's needs and priorities should be determined by the voices of its residents. Opportunities for civic participation, like voting, are necessary to build and maintain a responsive government. Voting is one measure of whether people feel they have a stake in the future.

How Are We Doing?

The accompanying graph shows the proportion of eligible voters that has voted in the past two general elections. Typically, turnout is higher in years with presidential elections.

Residents of San Luis Obispo County are much more likely to vote than people in other parts of California. The 10-percent gap seen in the graph below has been consistent since the early 1990s. Prior years are not shown in the graph below because the Secretary of State's calculation of the number of eligible voters differs from the Census Bureau adult population estimates used in the *Compact 2000* report.



SOURCE: California Secretary of State, 2001 (http://www.ss.ca.gov/elections/sov/2000_general/reg.pdf)

INDICATOR B2

Public Access and Information

This indicator measures how well local government agencies provide opportunities for residents to learn about, and be involved in, the local decision making process.

Why Is It Important?

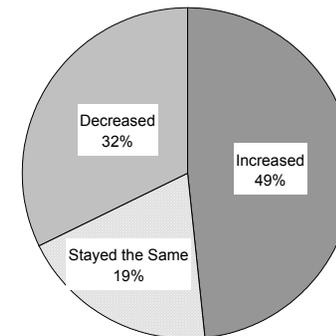
Public participation is a vital component of any healthy democracy. Some feel they do not have enough voice in government decisions. This indicator illustrates whether local agencies are taking more or fewer steps to encourage high levels of civic participation.

How Are We Doing?

In late 1999, 31 local government agencies were surveyed to determine which of 30 different public access methods each was then using. These methods included: hold meetings in evenings, broadcast meetings on television or radio, mail agendas free of charge, host a website, and make information available in Spanish or Braille. However, simply because a government agency makes a type of access available does not mean that residents know about, or use, the method. This indicator does not measure how many residents know about the existence of each method.

In March of 2001, the same 31 agencies (County, cities, planning departments, school districts, and special districts) were surveyed again. Since the 1999 survey, 15 of the 31 agencies are now making more effort to involve local residents in their decisions, six have not changed the number of methods used, and 10 are using fewer methods.

Change in Number of Access Methods (1999-2001)



Source: ACTION for Healthy Communities agency survey, 2001

INDICATOR B3

Youth Activities

This indicator measures the degree to which parents feel their middle-school-aged children have sufficient recreation opportunities. Specifically, phone survey respondents were asked the question: “Does your child or children have enough activities after school and on weekends (including recreational)?”

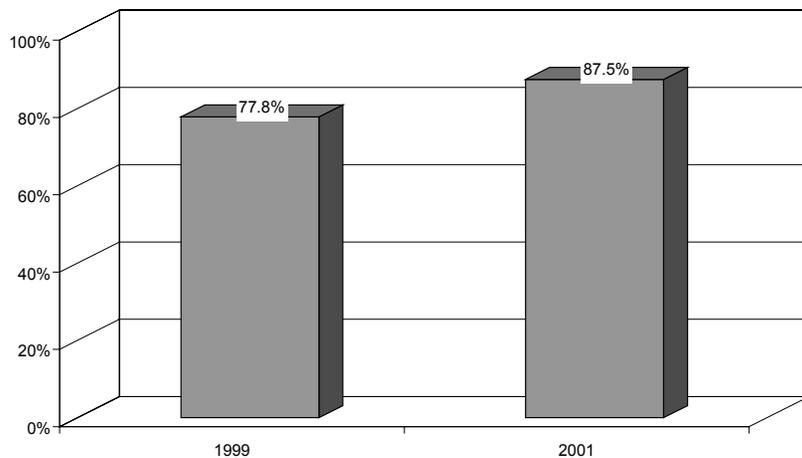
Why Is It Important?

According to the Educational Resources Information Center, “The number of children and adolescents without family supervision after school is increasing. ... These children risk injury, victimization, bad nutrition, and the negative impact of excessive television viewing. ... Those who ‘hang out’ with similarly aimless friends may join gangs or engage in premature sexual activity, drug and alcohol use, and other anti-social behavior.” Participation in constructive non-school activities not only lessens these risks but also encourages learning, teamwork, discipline and mastery of skills.

How Are We Doing?

More than five out of six San Luis Obispo County parents feel their children have sufficient non-school activities. In 1999, parents’ perception of activities for middle-schoolers lagged slightly behind their elementary and high-school counterparts. That gap disappeared in the 2001 survey. While the trend is positive, note that differences between 1999 and 2001 are not statistically significant and could be the result of chance.

Middle-School Children Have Sufficient Activities



Source: ACTION for Healthy Communities telephone surveys, 1999 & 2001

INDICATOR B4

Volunteer Participation

This indicator measures the proportion of adults in the county who regularly volunteer time to community or non-profit organizations.

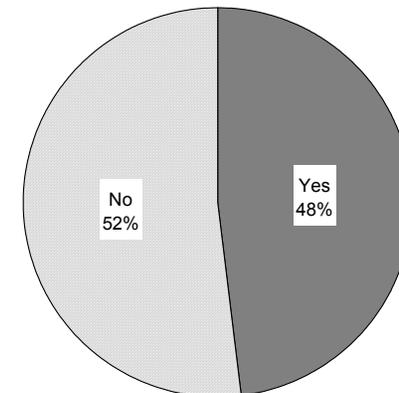
Why Is It Important?

Volunteering reflects an awareness of others and their needs, and an affirmation that everyone benefits through a connected community. A well-documented aspect of volunteering is that it extends a person’s social network. Socially connected people are more likely than isolated people to have good health, live longer and have a better overall sense of well-being.

How Are We Doing?

A question about volunteering was asked in the 1999 telephone survey but was not repeated in the 2001 survey. In 1999 just under half of San Luis Obispo County respondents reported giving regularly of their time to charitable organizations. A national study conducted in May 1999 for The Independent Sector by the Gallup Organization found that 56 percent of people nationwide indicated volunteering in the previous 12 months. However, nine percent of those volunteers characterized their volunteer work as limited to special times of the year (rather than regularly). While the question wording from the two surveys was slightly different, San Luis Obispo County residents appear to volunteer at least as often as the national average. It is recommended that this question be re-instituted in future surveys, with question wording revised to closely parallel that of The Independent Sector’s *Giving and Volunteering in the United States* survey. That wording can be found at <http://www.independentsector.org/programs/research/surveys/english.pdf>

Regularly Do Volunteer Work, 1999



Source: ACTION for Healthy Communities telephone survey, 1999

INDICATOR B5

Discrimination

This indicator reports on the percentage of residents that has experienced some type of discrimination in the past twelve months.

Why Is It Important?

Everyone is entitled to live in a community free of discrimination. Regularly surveying the community on this topic provides us with basic information on the scale of the problem, as well as, the type of discrimination taking place.

How Are We Doing?

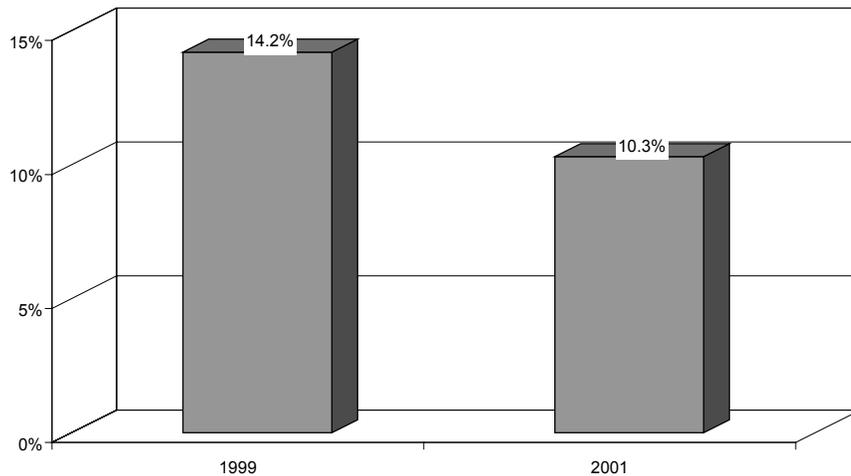
The 1999 and 2001 ACTION telephone surveys posed the following question to randomly selected adults in the county:

"Have you felt discriminated against in San Luis Obispo County in the last 12 months?"

Results showed that 10 percent of those surveyed indicated they had experienced some type of discrimination in the past year. This figure is down from the 1999 survey results of 14 percent, a statistically significant decrease.

Age (32%), ethnicity (17%), and income (8%) were the three areas of discrimination most often noted by respondents in the 2001 survey.

Experienced Discrimination in Last 12 Months



Source: ACTION for Healthy Communities telephone surveys, 1999 & 2001

Education

ACTION Goal: All students enter school ready to learn, and graduate from high school prepared for the workforce or higher education, and have an interest in life-long learning.

INDICATOR CI

Student Educational Performance

This indicator shows whether or not San Luis Obispo County students are improving their math and language skills.

Why Is It Important?

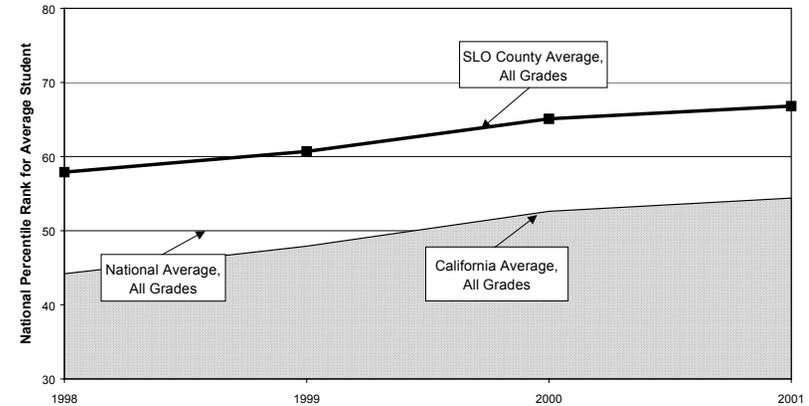
Young people need basic academic skills to participate fully in all aspects of life. Mastering these skills prepares students for further education, gainful employment, and self-sufficiency.

How Are We Doing?

Since 1998 the California Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program has required annual measurement of student achievement for public school students in grades 2 through 11. The program uses the nationally normed multiple-choice Stanford Achievement Test, 9th edition (SAT 9).

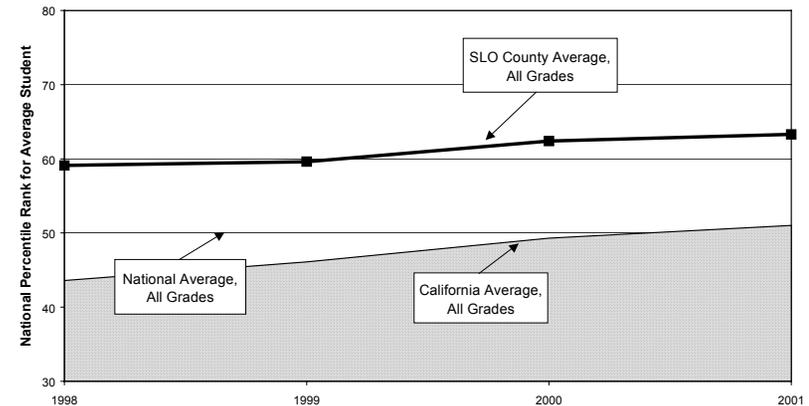
In both math and language, the national percentile rank for the “average” student in San Luis Obispo County (averaged across all grades) has outpaced state and national averages by at least 12 percentile points, and has risen consistently over time. Math scores have risen somewhat more rapidly than Language scores. Statewide scores have shown similar improvement since 1998.

STAR MATH TEST SCORES



SOURCE: California Department of Education, STAR Reports (Stanford, or SAT-9, Test), 1998-2001
 Note: Average of NPR scores across all grades tested (2-11)

STAR LANGUAGE TEST SCORES



SOURCE: California Department of Education, STAR Reports (Stanford, or SAT-9, Test), 1998-2001
 Note: Average of NPR scores across all grades tested (2-11)

INDICATOR C2

High School Dropout Rates

This indicator measures the percentage of students who drop out before completing four years of high school.

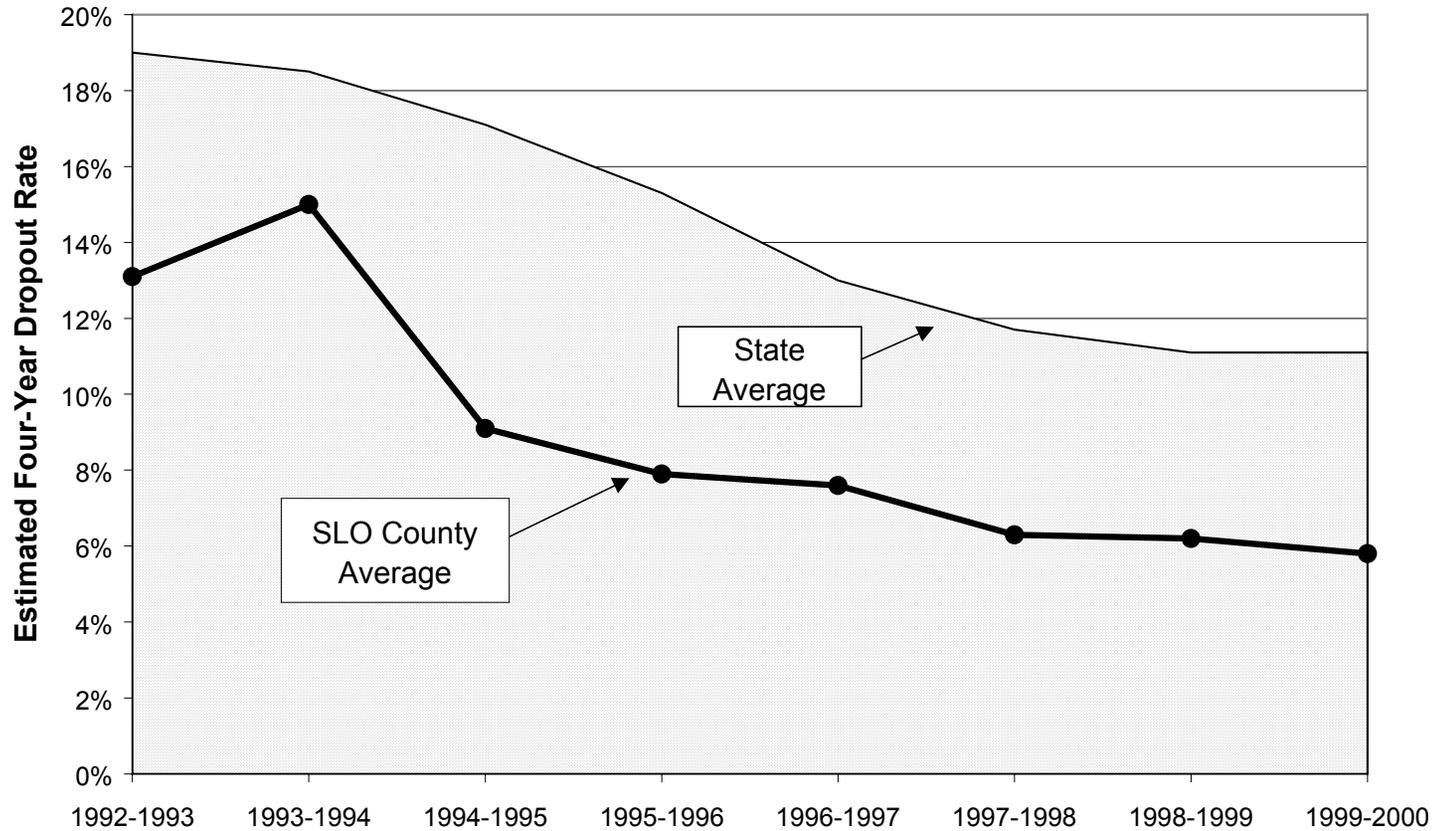
Why Is It Important?

Lacking a solid education, students who drop out of high school often lose out on important opportunities in their lives, particularly employment.

How Are We Doing?

Countywide dropout rates steadily declined from 1993 to 1998, but appear to be leveling out. In 2000, the countywide high school dropout rate was about half the state average. Since 1994, all local school districts have had dropout rates lower than the state average.

High School Dropout Rates



SOURCE: California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Unit, 2001

INDICATOR C3

Preparation for Employment

This indicator measures how well prepared local high school graduates are for employment, as rated by the employers who hire them.

Why Is It Important?

Maximizing their potential for the future requires that students develop a strong work ethic, relevant job skills, and self-confidence. Prospective employers are the best judges of how well schools, families, and the community have prepared high school graduates for the workplace.

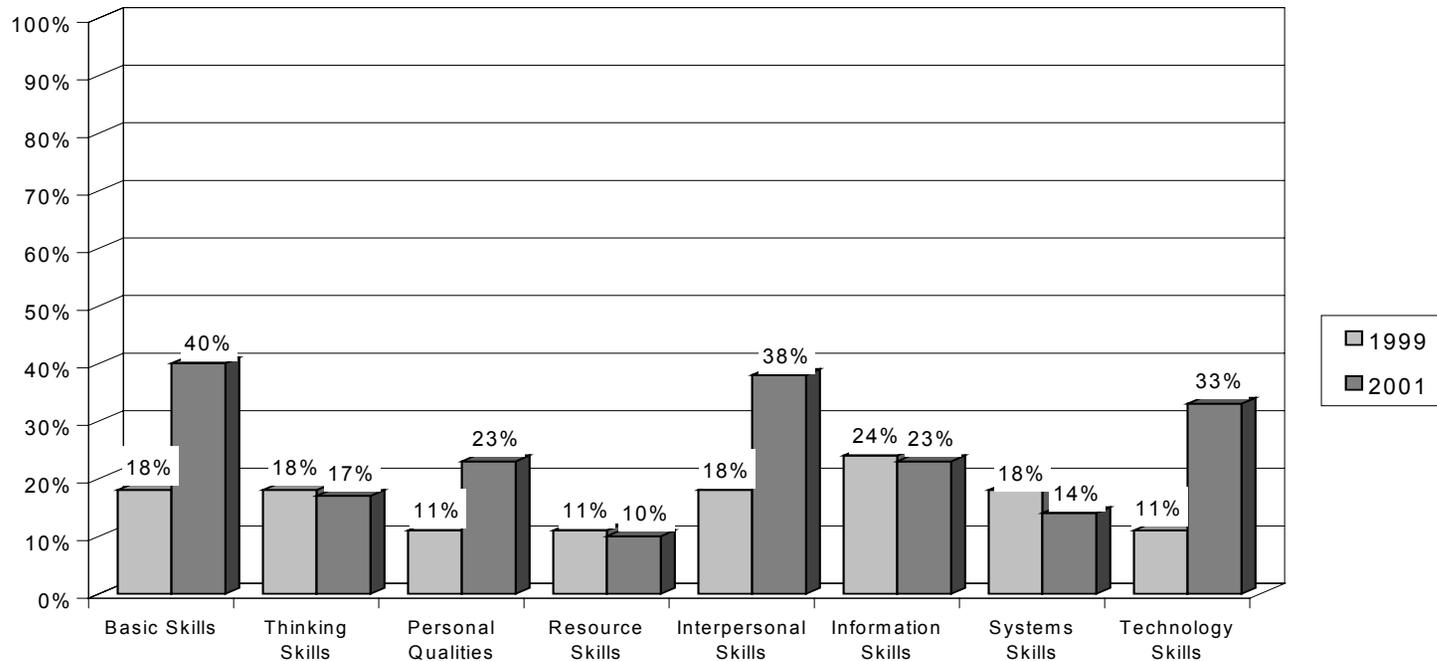
How Are We Doing?

A survey of larger employers in the county who are likely to hire recent high school graduates was first conducted in 1999 and again in 2001. The 49 employers surveyed in 2001 estimate they had interviewed over 1,500 new high school grads in the past year.

Forty-one of those employers had hired a total of 306 of those new graduates. Survey measurements are based on criteria developed by the U.S. Department of Labor, Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) for eight skills: basic skills, thinking skills, personal qualities, resource skills, interpersonal skills, information skills, systems skills and technology skills.

In general, employers rate new high school grads' skills as fairly low. Less than half of employers rate any of the skills at the "excellent" or "very good" level. On the other hand, ratings for four of the skills improved dramatically from the 1999 survey, while the other four declined slightly.

Work Preparedness
(% of new employees rated "excellent" or "very good")



Source: ACTION for Healthy Communities employer surveys, 1999 & 2001

INDICATOR C4

College Preparation and Placement

This indicator measures the percentage of county high school graduates enrolling at Cuesta College with college-level language and math skills. More local high school graduates continue their education at Cuesta College than any other institution.

Why Is It Important?

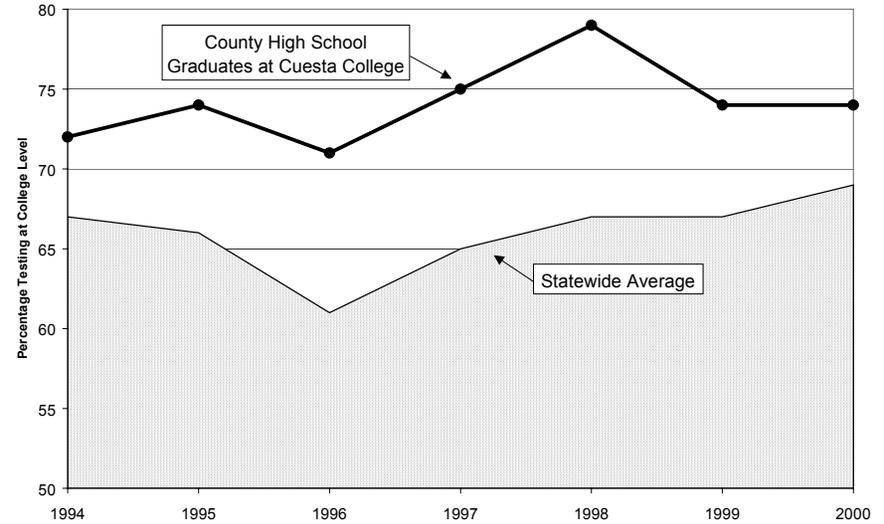
Fundamental math and language skills are essential for all students to advance academically on schedule and to participate fully in all aspects of the college experience. This measure indicates how well local high school graduates are prepared for college level work.

How Are We Doing?

Community colleges across the state give incoming students standardized tests to determine if they need remedial classes in math and language. Those who meet the standard (do not need remedial classes) are deemed to be performing at the college level. The accompanying graphs show test results for those incoming Cuesta College students residing in San Luis Obispo County, the majority of whom are graduates of county high schools.

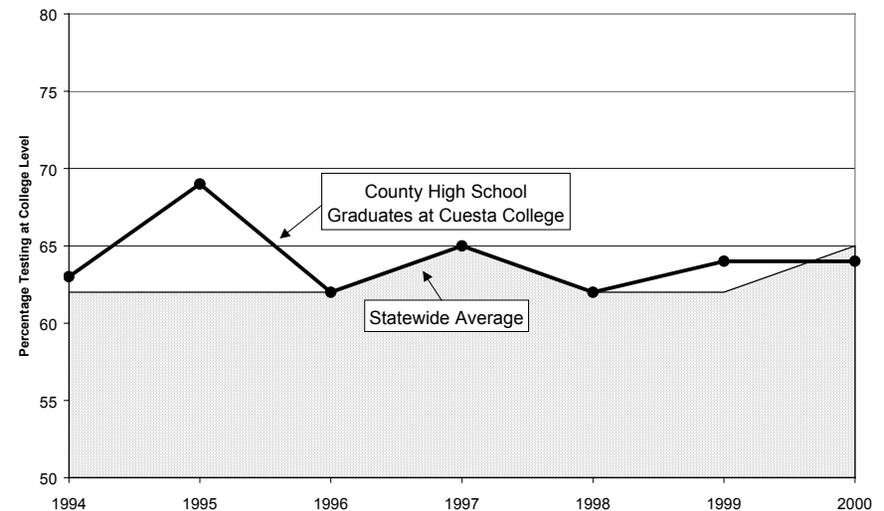
Since 1996 the language skills of local students entering Cuesta College appear to be unchanged, but still comparable to statewide averages. On the other hand, math scores of local students entering Cuesta may have increased slightly, and are noticeably above the state average.

Incoming Students Performing College-level Math Skills



SOURCE: Cuesta College, Matriculation Services, Advanced Placement Test, 2001

Incoming Students Performing College-level Language Skills



SOURCE: Cuesta College, Matriculation Services, Advanced Placement Test, 2001