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Inspire students buck the trend, greatly outpace state counterparts in test scores

They scored nearly 36% better than state average in language arts



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CHICO — With fewer than half of California high school students meeting or exceeding state standards in math and English during the 2022-23 academic year, one charter school in Chico has provided a remarkable contrast.

Inspire School of Arts and Sciences, a charter school affiliated with the Chico Unified School District, notched some results on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress — CAASPP — tests that would certainly be the envy of most schools in the state.





Brown

Final tallies issued last week showed 83.5% of Inspire students met or exceeded state standards in English language arts, compared to 46.7% statewide. It's an improvement of 4.7% over the pre-COVID levels for the school, which like all other institutions statewide needed to close during the virus pandemic.

In math, 50.5% of Inspire students met or exceeded state standards — a sharp difference over the statewide score of 34.6%. It's the highest math scores Inspire students have recorded since the implementation of the CAASPP in 2015.

If these statistics don't provide enough good news, Inspire students demonstrated



Inspire principal Becky Brown was not at all surprised by the high achievement rate, citing the school's handling of the distance-learning requirements as COVID raged.

"I feel really good about it. There are myriad reasons this is happening," she said, referring to the sensational test scores.

"Being a small school and being able to pivot really quickly, based on what students need, is important to our small school," she explained. "That was the way we responded during the COVID lockdown. There are very few districts that would be able to have all of their teachers on board" with immersive online classes.

Brown described what the school called the "1-by-8 block schedule, for a little more than four weeks at a time," in which students attended all of their classes on a regular schedule.

"Parents and teachers reported they were grateful for this. It helped in reducing the stress," Brown said. "It allowed teachers to check in with their students."

In addition, Inspire has what Brown called an "advisory program" — one class that students take over four years with one teachers and the same cohort, thus maintaining familiarity and trust.

"We kept that going during lockdown. It kept a feeling of connectedness and made sure kids were able to connect with their peers," she said.

By way of the school's curricular emphasis on arts and sciences, students generally have greater creative and analytical skills — also boosting test scores.

"I think that's another factor," Brown said. "At our school, we value creativity and imagination. There is a lot of open discussion and dialogue in classes. Students build skills in thinking critically."

One area that caused disappointment was the 31% chronic absenteeism rate — with "chronic absenteeism" defined as when a student misses 10% or more of school days for any reason. The statewide rate dropped from 30% in 2021-22 to 25% last year.

Brown said that the school "has more work to do to communicate to students that attendance matters, and to partner with families to understand and address the barriers to attendance."

To that end, the school assigned an attendance liaison "to contact parents and guardians, identify challenges and support students in showing up and staying

