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More context for school scores

By: Allen Hemphill - Commentary

There is a tendency to think that some of the Southern states are populated by redneck know-nothings -- and I mention those states only because California cannot measure up to them in science, math, reading and writing!

California schools rank so low in national tests that in science, only Mississippi ranks lower! Since not all states test in the science category, it would not be fair to say how bad that is without at least mentioning the states that do test that rank higher than California: Alabama, Hawaii, Louisiana, Florida, Texas, Georgia, Arkansas, West Virginia. California ranks 44 of the 45 entities tested.

Yes. I know those are all "hick states" in some people's minds, and indeed I am the educational product of one of those "hick states."

So, who among the "hick states" ranks higher than California in national tests of math conducted by the federal government? West Virginia, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Florida, Georgia, Arkansas, Kentucky, just to mention a few. California stands 46 of 52 states and districts.

California student writing skills also reflect California's dismal performance. In writing, a section in which not all states and districts participated, California students again fail. A list of "hick, redneck states" whose student performance exceeds those of California students: West Virginia, Georgia, Tennessee, South

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* no more than 500 words;

* are explicitly local to North San Diego County. Discussions of national or international issues are welcome ONLY if you make a significant, explicit connection to North San Diego County in the text of your essay.

* e-mailed to opinion@nctimes.com as text pasted in the body of an e-mail. Other acceptable but less desirable means of submission include: mail to Community Forum, Opinion desk, North County Times, 207 E. Pennsylvania Ave., Escondido, CA

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Carolina, Kentucky, and of the 43 states and entities tested, California ranks No. 33.

If you are looking for some change in the so-far-uniform poor performance, you certainly are an optimist. In reading, California is beaten by all states and districts except Hawaii and the District of Columbia. Yes, we are number 50 of the 52 states and districts tested. You may have read the news report recently that one of every three residents of the District of Columbia is functionally illiterate, so it is scant relief that California students are better readers than the city that supplies the workers for our federal government.

I'm sorry, but there is no way to put lipstick on this pig and pass it off as anything but a pig with lipstick.

I taught computer science, undergraduate and graduate level, at a local university for 14 years and found that, uniformly, the lowest-performing students in my class were from the university School of Education. When I then decided to get a second master's degree in education ---- it was free, so what the heck ---- I quit after four courses because the lack of academic rigor was so pronounced that any incoming freshman student at an academic university could have easily received an A. In fact, almost 100 percent of the students in the Graduate School of Education did receive an A. That alone tells you one of the reasons our students and their parents are so happy about their wards' "education."

We are all being fed "happy pills" about the situation, and the unvarnished truth is too hurtful to our self-esteem for us to recognize.

-- Allen Hemphill lives in Hidden Meadows, an unincorporated community north of Escondido.

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