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☞ School scores worse than they appear

By: Allen Hemphill - For the North County Times

The annual [Academic Performance Index](#), or API, is released each year and trumpeted loudly, but other than parents glancing at the rating of each school in which they have a child enrolled, nothing much happens.

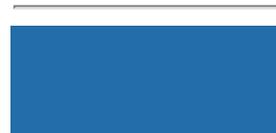
The administration of each school district places the best possible spin on the results, the media dutifully report the numbers and the spin, and the subject rapidly fades away.

The results do not go away, of course. People who are seeking a better school for their children look at the results all year long, and many make home-buying decisions based on the numbers.

That is why the Poway Unified School District is both high in scores, and relatively immune to the current housing market decline. It would be a huge exaggeration to say that the Poway Unified School District is a great school district, or even the best in San Diego County. But it is the best school district in which people of moderate means can afford to buy a home.

PUSD is a good California school district, academically, athletically, and in other ways ---- it has great bands. Considering the cost of housing in better school districts, PUSD is a school district worth considering.

Here is what the media are not telling you.



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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**

The caveat to all of this puffing is that the API scores for a given school are relative to other California schools, so all of the measurement is against a degraded standard. Being in the top California schools is like being the Best Dressed Man in Big Foot, Texas ---- there just ain't much competition.

California ranks so low nationally that our "best" is none too good, and, in fact, pathetic. I checked the federally produced National Report Card, the only national test of students. Using the latest available data (2005), here is where California stands:

1. In reading, of the 52 states and entities tested, including the District of Columbia, California ranks No. 50 out of 52!
2. In writing, of the 43 states and entities tested, including the District of Columbia, California ranks No. 33 out of 43!
3. In math, of the 52 states and entities tested, including the District of Columbia, California ranks No. 46 out of 52.
4. In science, of the 45 states and entities tested, including the District of Columbia, California ranks No. 44 out of 45!

The chant "We're Number 50!" just does not have a great rhetorical ring to it. But these numbers are not researched and reported nearly so widely as the API, because California students look pretty good when compared only against other poorly educated students.

It is not an onerous problem for anyone to find this information. Are you wondering why everyone doesn't know the facts about school ratings? Obviously, it is not in the best interest of the schools, or the teachers, or even the embarrassed state of California, to feature this data. Most parents have no idea that California schools are so bad, so it is first necessary to give them some facts.

These are the facts.

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

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All entries must be accompanied by a phone number which we will call before publishing the submission. Also, send a brief biographical sketch of the author, including any information about you that relates to the subject discussed in your submission. The biographical information won't count against the 500-word limit.

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