

# Results show math, science aren't out of reach

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The conflicting data coming out about schools can make your head swirl. Too few kids ready for college. Too few students mastering their subjects. Too many teens trailing their global peers in math and science.

Then great data arrives, and you want to hug a teacher.

The latest positive news comes from the National [Math](#) and Science Initiative. Set up two years ago by Exxon Mobil and led by Tom Luce, a Dallas attorney and former assistant secretary of [education](#), NMSI has been pushing for more students to take and pass Advanced Placement classes in six states.

The organization has been training and mentoring AP teachers in Arkansas, Virginia, Alabama, Massachusetts, Kentucky and Connecticut. It also offers students in those states a financial incentive to take the college-prep courses.

Results of that work are coming in, and coming in strong.

Today, NMSI is announcing in Alabama that the AP exam scores for the 67 schools in its program show an average increase of 51 percent in the number of math, science and English exams passed. As Luce says the scores often are more than nine times the average national increase.

Passing rates by minority students are especially striking -- and contradict the argument that AP courses are only for students in tony

suburban schools.

In Arkansas, the passing rate increase among minorities rose 76 percent, twice the state average. In Virginia, minority scores jumped 107 percent, about 30 percent better than the overall average. And in Massachusetts, they went up about 95 percent, close to twice the state average increase. In all, scores for blacks and Latinos rose by an average of 71 percent.

These data are so encouraging because challenging AP courses often open the door to college, and because the progress is coming in math and science, two critical areas where U.S. students trail their peers

New U.S. Department of Education information -- remember, we warned you about these head-swirling reports -- shows that our students now rank below their peers in 31 countries in math.

Like others, we worry that the demand for math and science work can overwhelm other subjects, including the arts. But let's be realistic: Our nation's economic base depends on college graduates who can think conceptually about math and science. They are tomorrow's inventors. They are tomorrow's researchers. They are tomorrow engineers.

In fact, if you are troubled by the current economic scene, think how much worse it could be if we turned out fewer students who grasp math and science fundamentals.

Fortunately, the NMSI results show an opposite trend. [Students](#) can do better in math and [science](#). We're thrilled to add that good news to the swirl.

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