

Santa Barbara Junior High A Closer Look

Bob Noël

Effective this coming Fall, Santa Barbara and Montecito families have a right to send their seventh and eighth graders to La Colina Junior High. This is a consequence of Santa Barbara Junior High's failure to meet performance targets set by the No Child Left Behind Act. The school district is required to facilitate such transfers and to provide transportation.

However, before requesting a transfer, parents might want to consider some academic performance data broken down by student subgroup (California Department of Education data).

In 2004, the white subgroup at Santa Barbara Junior High had an Academic Performance Index rating of 894. This placed that subgroup among the top three percent at California middle schools, on par with schools in such communities as Del Mar, Rancho Santa Fe, Palos Verdes, San Marino, Los Altos, Palo Alto, Hillsborough and Piedmont.

La Colina's API rating for the "white subgroup" was thirty-two points lower at 863—barely into the top ten percent of California middle schools.

It is well known, that Santa Barbara Junior High also serves a large number of socio-economically disadvantaged students. This subgroup's API rating was only 636. About half of California middle schools had higher ratings.

Disadvantaged students also failed to clear the bar for two consecutive years in mathematics. That is what put Santa Barbara Junior High on the NCLB list of "Program Improvement" (PI) schools, where it joins schools in some very poor urban and rural communities.

Two other student subgroups at Santa Barbara Junior High fared even more poorly: students with disabilities and English learners. Luckily, under NCLB rules for 2004, they were exempt.

Here are a few of the things NCLB requires of PI schools.

PI year-1 Parental right to transfer; outside technical assistance; teacher training.

PI year-2. (the above plus) \$900 of free tutoring for each disadvantaged student.

PI year-3. (the above plus) "corrective actions" such as: longer school day or year, replacement of some staff, or implementation of a new curriculum.

PI Year-4 Begin a process of major restructuring with such possibilities as replacing the faculty, closing the school or state take-over.

PI status also has financial consequences, which primarily affect federal funds for disadvantaged students. Those funds will have to be redistributed, some other schools experiencing decreases as the PI costs kick in.

For Santa Barbara Junior High to exit PI status, all NCLB targets must be met for two consecutive years. This will be difficult. NCLB targets have been raised from last year, when SBJ failed to meet them, and students with disabilities and English learners are no longer

exempt. At the same time, no substantial year-1 remedies were implemented at the school. If this year's test results (to be released this summer) fail to meet targets, 2007-08 will be the first possible exit year.

In considering their transfer option, parents can be assured that Santa Barbara Junior High will continue to provide the very best in pre-collegiate educational opportunities. While La Colina's high-end program is also quite good, enrollments at that campus could exceed 1100 students this Fall-- even more in Fall, 2006. The main effect of NCLB intervention is to confront SBJ with its real challenge. That is to prepare under-represented subgroups for access to those opportunities.

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Jim:

If you're interesting in seeing the CA middle school dataset I prepared for this article, let me know. It is an Excel file.