



NJDOE News

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New Jersey Eighth-Graders Tops in the Nation in Writing

New Jersey eighth-graders are the best writers in the nation for their grade level, according to results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests given last winter, Education Commissioner Lucille E. Davy announced today.

In their first year taking the writing test, eighth-graders at 111 schools throughout New Jersey scored statistically better than all but one of the 45 states that participated in the writing test, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics.

"It is gratifying to see such a strong performance by our eighth-grade students," said Governor Jon S. Corzine. "Effective writing skills are an essential element of competing and being successful in the 21st century economy and I am indeed pleased that the efforts of all of our educators are yielding such positive results."

While New Jersey's score was better than Connecticut's, the difference was not statistically significant. New Jersey's average scale score was 175, which is higher than the national average of 154.

According to 2007 NAEP results, New Jersey eighth-graders performed better than their peers nationwide in the major subgroups tested: male, female, white, black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, eligible for the National Lunch Program and not eligible for the National Lunch Program.

"Dating back to 1985, we have assessed our students' ability to write as part of the Language Arts Literacy standardized tests," Education Commissioner Lucille E. Davy said. "Every one of our standardized tests contains a written section. None of this happens overnight - these results stem from a continued focus on educational reforms and best practices. Our students understand what is expected of them and in this case, they achieved phenomenal results."

"The NAEP test is the only real national comparison to see how states stack up against one another," Commissioner Davy continued. "To see these results - to be the best in the nation - is an incredible accomplishment. Our eighth-grade students have demonstrated they have a good foundation upon which they can build continued success."

New Jersey students typically fare well on the NAEP tests. While NAEP didn't test fourth-grade in writing in 2007, Gov. Corzine did laud fourth-graders for their success on both the reading and math tests when the results were announced in September:

- In reading, New Jersey students trailed only Massachusetts and tied with three other states - Vermont, Connecticut and New Hampshire.
- New Jersey fourth-grade math students fared better than students in every state in the nation except Vermont, New Hampshire, Minnesota and Kansas. As in the reading results, only Massachusetts scored higher.

"The findings of this study exemplify our commitment to improving educational attainment in our elementary schools," Gov. Corzine said in September. "We equate our increases to sound preschool and early childhood education programs in New Jersey. They are providing our youngest students with a solid foundation of basic fundamentals, and the efforts are achieving positive results."

This is the first year New Jersey has participated in the NAEP writing test, which was given in January and February of last year. The score scale for the writing test is from 0 to 300 and is broken into four categories: below basic, basic, proficient and advanced proficient.

Among the key findings announced today:

- The percentage of total students in New Jersey that performed at or above the proficient level (56 percent) is higher than the national average (31 percent);
- New Jersey eighth-graders scored better than all states except Connecticut in the following categories: overall score, whites and males;

- 98 percent of the white students who took the test scored at grade level;
- Hispanic students scored slightly higher (162) than all other states except Wyoming (153) – according to the NCES, scores of 162 and 153 are not statistically different from one another for the NAEP test; and
- New Jersey’s students with disabilities average scale score (139) was better than the national average (118), on par with Massachusetts and Connecticut and better than all other states that participated.

African-American students in New Jersey scored comparable to the national average on the test (152 versus 154) and better than the national average for the demographic.

While the majority of the findings are good news for New Jersey, Commissioner Davy said the gap between white and African-American student scores (32 points, which is greater than the national average of 22 points) needs to be addressed.

“While our African-American students scored on par with the national average, there is still work to be done,” the Commissioner said. “DOE has already implemented a Middle Schools to Watch program that will share best practices statewide. Also, through our new state monitoring system, we continue to pinpoint what is working and what isn’t. We are confident we will see improvement.”

The writing NAEP assessment is administered every four years at randomly selected schools. The writing test is voluntary. This year, Alaska, Maryland, Nebraska, Oregon, South Dakota and the District of Columbia chose not to participate.

NAEP does not provide scores for individual students or schools, but offers results regarding instructional experiences, school environment for populations of students (for example, fourth-graders and eighth-graders) and subgroups of those populations (for example, male students, students with disabilities).

For more information, please contact the Department of Education Public Information Office at (609) 292-1126.