



Colorado Department of Education – Communications Office
201 East Colfax Ave.
Room 501
Denver, CO 80203
Phone: 303-866-3898
Fax: 303-866-6938

April 3, 2008

News Release

“Nation’s Report Card” Shows Colorado Students Ahead on Writing in Eighth Grade

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results released today for the eighth grade 2007 writing assessment shows Colorado students perform higher than the national average.

The percentage of Colorado students who performed at or above the NAEP Basic level was 91 percent or higher for grade eight writing in 2007. Nationally, 87 percent of students performed at that same level.

Basic is defined by the National Assessment Governing Board as demonstrating “prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work” at each grade assessed.

“Writing instruction is prioritized in Colorado schools alongside reading, math and science, and that emphasis pays dividends with national comparisons,” said Colorado Commissioner of Education Dwight D. Jones. “These results reflect the importance of writing as a core skill, as seen in state content standards and the fact that writing is tested in grades three through 10. Those involved in the original adoption of state content standards can be thanked for ensuring that writing skills have stayed at the forefront in Colorado schools.

“In addition,” added Commissioner Jones, “classroom teachers and their efforts should be commended. They are clearly providing quality instruction and making a difference.”

NAEP, established in 1969, is the only federally mandated and nationally representative assessment of what young students know and can do in key subject areas. Commonly referred to as the “Nation’s Report Card,” it is used to provide a point of reference for comparisons between states and to provide an accurate and representative picture of student performance over time.

NAEP provides national and state results in eight subject areas, including mathematics, reading, writing and science. Results have been produced for the nation and participating states for almost 20 years.

Representative samples of students in grades eight and twelve from 45 states, the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) and the Department of Defense Schools participated in the 2007 NAEP writing assessments. Alaska, the District of Columbia, Maryland, Nebraska, Oregon and South Dakota did not participate in the 2007 NAEP state writing assessment, but they were included in the nationally representative sample. Grade twelve results are only reported at the national level.

Nationally, about 135,100 students in 6,310 schools in grade eight nationwide took the tests. In Colorado, approximately 2,600 students in 116 public schools participated. Students across the nation participated in the same assessment for each grade and subject.

Each student received two 25-minute writing tasks, in addition to general background questions and writing-specific background questions. The test requires no more than about one hour per student to administer—about 50 minutes on the writing questions, and a few more minutes on background questions.

The results are reported in average scale scores in which the range is zero to 300. The results are also reported in achievement levels defined by the National Assessment Governing Board which oversees NAEP, <http://www.nagb.org/>.

There were three states and one jurisdiction that outperformed Colorado in average scale score (MA, NJ, CT and Department of Defense), 10 states that were not significantly different than Colorado and 31 states significantly lower than Colorado.

Colorado grade eight male students outscored their counterparts in 35 states and the national public. The grade eight Colorado male average score was 152.

In addition, Colorado eighth grade students with disabilities made a 20 percent gain for performance at and above the NAEP Basic Level in the writing assessments from 1998 to 2007, rising from a score of 36 percent to 56 percent. That rate of growth led the nation.

In 2007, only two states (New Jersey and Connecticut) surpassed Colorado's average score for students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, a common yardstick for measuring economically disadvantaged students. New Jersey had an average score of 168 for these students, Connecticut scored 163 and Colorado scored 152.

The President and Congress use NAEP results in setting education policy. States are neither rewarded nor sanctioned based on their results. The Nation's Report Card, produced by the U.S. Department of Education, has generated more than 600 reports in its history.

For more information about the 2007 NAEP writing results go to the Initial Release Site: <http://nationsreportcard.gov/> or the CDE web site, http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeassess/documents/NAEP/index_naep.html

For more information, contact Pam A. Sandoval in the CDE Unit of Student Assessment, 303-866-6643; or Mark Stevens, 303-866-3898, or Megan McDermott, 303-866-2334, in the CDE Office of Communications. To sign up for the CDE e-mail news service, please visit <http://www.cde.state.co.us/Communications/index.html>.

#