



NEWS RELEASE

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Writing Skills Improve for Eighth- & 12th-Graders, According to The Nation's Report Card™

WASHINGTON (April 3, 2008)—Achievement in writing for the nation's eighth- and 12th-graders is up among many student groups, according to The Nation's Report Card™, which presents results at the national level, for most states, and for 10 large urban school districts.

Average scores on the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress in writing have increased significantly for both eighth- and 12th-grade students since previous assessments in 2002 and 1998. Since 2002, the percentage of students performing at or above the *Basic* level of achievement has risen in both grades, increasing from 85 to 88 percent at eighth grade and from 74 to 82 percent at 12th grade. However, there has been no change in the percentage of students reaching the higher *Proficient* level at either grade since 2002.

Most student groups have improved their writing scores since 2002, including White and Black students in both grades and Hispanic students in eighth grade. In addition, many of the largest gains in 2007 were made by lower- and middle-performing students in both grades who scored at the 10th, 25th, and 50th percentiles.

Meanwhile, gains for Black students and male students helped to slightly narrow the achievement gaps between White and Black students at eighth grade and male and female students at 12th grade since 2002. However, gaps remain unchanged elsewhere, with White students continuing to outperform Black and Hispanic students by large margins at both grade levels, and female students similarly outperforming male students in both grades.

"These overall results are encouraging, not just because writing skills are improving, but also because that improvement was most pronounced at the lower-achievement range," said Darvin M. Winick, chair of the National Assessment Governing Board, which

oversees the assessment. “As in earlier results, differences in scores between urban districts and the nation tend to disappear when student demographics are considered.”

GAINS FOR STATES, URBAN DISTRICTS

In addition to the national results, *The Nation’s Report Card: Writing 2007* also includes results for 46 states and jurisdictions and for 10 large urban school districts that voluntarily participated in the assessment at the eighth-grade level.

Of the 39 states and jurisdictions that participated in the writing assessment in both 2007 and 2002, average writing scores increased for 19 states and the Department of Defense schools, while scores decreased for only one state, North Carolina. Eighteen states showed no significant changes in writing scores.

At the same time, three of the four urban districts that participated in both 2007 and 2002—Atlanta, Chicago, and Los Angeles—improved their overall scores significantly. And all four, including Houston, significantly reduced the percentage of students performing below *Basic*. In addition, Atlanta and Chicago increased the percentages of students reaching the *Proficient* level, with Atlanta more than doubling that number from 9 percent to 19 percent. Average scores for the participating urban districts—which also include Austin, Texas; Boston; Charlotte, N.C.; Cleveland; New York City; and San Diego—were below the national average with the exception of Charlotte.

“Most of the nation’s eighth- and 12th-graders are doing a solid job of writing to inform, persuade, and tell stories,” said Amanda Avallone, assistant principal and eighth-grade teacher at Summit Middle Charter School in Boulder, Colo., and vice chair of the Governing Board. “But we need to work harder to strengthen achievement for Black, Hispanic, and male students and to ensure all students have these important skills.”

More than 165,000 eighth- and 12th-graders participated in the representative-sample writing assessment, administered by the National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education. The assessment is designed to measure whether students can communicate effectively by asking them to write essays, letters, and stories. Students were asked to complete two 25-minute sections, each featuring one writing task intended to measure how well they can write for different audiences while being able to show their ability to narrate, persuade, or inform. *The Nation’s Report Card: Writing 2007* and additional information from the 2007 writing assessment are available online at <http://nationsreportcard.gov>.

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The Nation’s Report Card is the only nationally representative, continuing evaluation of the condition of education in the United States and has served as a national yardstick of student achievement since 1969. Through the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), The Nation’s Report Card informs the public about what America’s students know and can do in various subject areas, and compares achievement data between states and various student demographic groups.

The National Assessment Governing Board is an independent, bipartisan board whose members include governors, state legislators, local and state school officials, educators, business representatives, and members of the general public. Congress created the 26-member Governing Board in 1988.