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Virginia Students Outperform Peers on National Math Tests

Virginia fourth-grade and eighth-grade students outperformed their peers nationwide and in the South in mathematics on the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Students in only five states performed at what the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) considers a statistically higher level on the grade-4 test, and students in only eight states achieved at a higher level on the eighth-grade assessment.

The NAEP, also known as “The Nation’s Report Card,” is a national measure of student achievement that is taken by samples of students representative of each state and the country as a whole. Tests in mathematics are administered every two years and provide a means of comparing states’ progress in raising student achievement.

The average scores of Virginia students — 243 for grade 4 and 286 for grade 8 — were significantly higher than the average scores of their national and regional peers.

- Virginia’s 2009 average grade-four score in mathematics was five points higher than the average score of 238 for the South and four points higher than the average of 239 for the nation.
- Virginia’s 2009 average grade-eight score in mathematics was six points higher than the average score of 281 for the South and four points higher than the average of 282 for the nation.

According to NCES, the 2009 Virginia results represented the same level of achievement as 2007, when students last took the national mathematics tests. NCES considers the increase in mathematics achievement of Virginia students in both grades since 2003 as statistically significant.

“Virginia students are holding onto the gains in mathematics achieved during early and middle years of the decade,” Superintendent of Public Instruction Patricia I. Wright said. “Building on this progress requires a continued focus on strengthening the mathematics skills of elementary and middle school students.”

The inclusion of larger percentages of students with disabilities and limited English proficient students in the 2009 Virginia testing samples did not significantly impact achievement as average scores, and proficiency levels for the commonwealth’s fourth and eighth graders were similar to 2007.

“The Virginia Department of Education has worked in partnership with local school divisions to increase participation in NAEP among these subgroups,” Dr. Wright said. “I am impressed that the success of these efforts has not had a significant impact on average achievement.”

The 2009 NAEP sample of Virginia students for mathematics included approximately 2,901 fourth-grade students from 130 elementary schools and 2,804 eighth graders from 108 middle schools.

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Mathematics 1996-2009: Grade 4 Mean Scores

Group	1996	2000	2003	2005	2007	2009
Virginia	223	230	239	240	244	243
South	NA	NA	233	237	239	238
Nation	222	224	234	237	239	239

Mathematics 1996-2009: Grade 8 Mean Scores

Group	1996	2000	2003	2005	2007	2009
Virginia	270	275	282	284	288	286
South	NA	NA	274	276	279	281
Nation	271	272	276	278	280	282

Of the students identified for participation in the 2009 state-level sample, 19.6 percent of the fourth graders and 16.5 percent of the eighth graders were students with disabilities or English-language learners. Of these students, 10.7 percent of the fourth graders were excluded from testing, compared with 21.7 percent in 2007, and 21.4 percent of the eighth graders were excluded, compared with 38.3 percent two years ago. A common reason for excluding a student is when a testing accommodation specified in a student's individualized education plan — such as use of a calculator — is not permitted for students taking NAEP.

Forty-three percent of Virginia fourth graders met or exceeded the rigorous NAEP standard for proficiency, statistically higher than both the 38 percent nationwide and 36 percent in the South. NCES regards the increase in the percentage of Virginia fourth-grade students meeting the NAEP proficiency standard since 2003 as statistically significant.

Of the Virginia eighth graders tested, 36 percent performed at or above the NAEP proficiency standard, statistically higher than both the 33 percent nationwide and 30 percent for the South. The percentage of Virginia eighth graders meeting the national proficiency standard for mathematics also is significantly larger than in 2003.

Black students in Virginia achieved an average score of 225 in fourth-grade mathematics, compared with 222 nationwide and 223 in the South. Black eighth graders in the commonwealth also outperformed their peers, achieving an average score of 268, compared with 260 nationwide and 262 for the region.

Mathematics 1996-2009: Grade 4-Blacks

Group	1996	2000	2003	2005	2007	2009
Virginia	203	211	223	224	228	225
South	NA	NA	217	221	222	223
Nation	199	203	216	220	222	222

Mathematics 1996-2009: Grade 8-Blacks

Group	1996	2000	2003	2005	2007	2009
Virginia	244	253	262	263	268	268
South	NA	NA	252	255	261	262
Nation	241	243	252	254	259	260

Black fourth graders in only two states — Massachusetts and Texas — achieved statistically higher average scores than those in Virginia. No states were statistically higher in grade 8.

Sixteen percent of black fourth graders achieved at or above the proficient level, compared with 15 percent nationwide and in the South. The percentage of black students in grade 4 meeting or exceeding the NAEP standard is significantly larger today than in 2000.

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Fourteen percent of black eighth graders achieved at or above the proficient level, compared with 12 percent nationwide and in the South. The percentage of black students in grade 8 meeting or exceeding the NAEP standard also is significantly larger today than in 2000.

Hispanic fourth graders achieved an average mathematics score of 234 on the 2009 NAEP, which was 7 points higher than the average score of their peers nationwide and the same as for Hispanics in the South. The average score of Hispanic grade-8 students was 274, which was 8 points higher than the national average of 266 and statistically the same as the average scale score of 275 for Hispanics in the South.

Only Hispanic fourth graders in Montana achieved a statistically higher average score than those in Virginia while no states were statistically higher in grade 8.

Twenty-eight percent of Hispanic fourth graders in the commonwealth achieved at or above the proficient level, compared with 21 percent nationwide.

The percentage of Hispanic Virginia fourth graders meeting or exceeding the NAEP standard is significantly larger today than in 2000, when only 16 percent met or exceeded the standard.

Twenty-three percent of Hispanic eighth graders in the commonwealth achieved at or above the proficient level, statistically higher than the 17 percent nationwide and the same as Hispanics in the South. Proficiency levels of Hispanic eighth graders in Virginia have not changed significantly since 2000.

Given the small number of Virginia's Hispanic test takers, NCES does not regard recent year-to-year changes in the average scores and proficiency levels of these students as statistically significant.

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