



For Immediate Release March 24, 2010

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Virginia Students Again Rank Among Strongest Readers on National Reading Tests

Results from national reading tests taken last year show that Virginia elementary and middle school students continue to outperform their peers nationwide and are among the nation's strongest readers.

The average reading scores of Virginia students on the 2009 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) — also known as “The Nation’s Report Card” — were significantly higher than the average scores of their national and regional peers:

- Virginia’s average grade-four score in reading of 227 was seven points higher than the average score of 220 for the South and the nation.
- Students in only one state – Massachusetts – performed at what the national testing program described as a statistically higher level on the fourth-grade reading test.
- Virginia’s average grade-eight score in reading of 266 was five points higher than the average for the South and three points higher than the average for the nation.
- Fourth-grade African-American students in Virginia again outperformed their national and regional peers, and in no state did black students perform at a statistically higher level in either grade. Achievement gaps between black and white students at both tested grade levels were statistically unchanged from 2007, when the national reading tests were previously administered.

NAEP reading tests are taken by samples of students selected to be representative of each state and the country as a whole. Tests in reading have been administered every two years since 2003.

“NAEP sets rigorous goals for reading proficiency and provides an objective means of comparing student achievement from state to state,” said Superintendent of Public Instruction Patricia I. Wright. “And by analyzing data from administration to administration, educators and policymakers can identify trends and make informed decisions about instruction and accountability.”

While Virginia students again ranked among the nation’s highest achievers, the 2009 NAEP results for the commonwealth show that overall achievement among Virginia fourth graders is similar to achievement in 2002, while the overall average reading score for eighth graders has declined.

“Our challenge is to build on the progress Virginia students have already made under the Standards of Learning program — especially in middle school and among minority students,” Board of Education President Eleanor B. Saslaw said.

The Board of Education has taken several actions in the last year to enhance the rigor of the commonwealth’s reading standards and accountability program. Revised English Standards of Learning (SOL) approved by the board in January 2010 include more rigorous objectives for reading, especially in the middle school grades. For example, the new standards place additional emphasis on building vocabulary through informational reading and the use of roots, affixes, cognates, synonyms and antonyms to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words.

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Full implementation of the new English SOL is anticipated in 2012-2013. Reviews by the College Board and ACHIEVE found strong alignment between Virginia’s revised English standards and the knowledge and skills students must possess to be college and career ready.

“The development and introduction of SOL tests aligned with the revised English standards will include an opportunity for the Board of Education to review the current definition of what constitutes a minimum level of acceptable proficiency,” said Wright.

The board’s accreditation regulations call for an increase in the reading pass rates required for middle and high schools to earn state accreditation to 75 percent. The 2010 General Assembly approved legislation to delay implementation of the higher benchmarks until the calculation of accreditation ratings for the 2012-2013 school year in response to requests from school divisions.

NAEP reading assessments were administered in Virginia during January and February 2009. Approximately 3,000 fourth-grade students from 130 elementary schools and 2,800 eighth graders from 108 middle schools were included in the Virginia sample.

The inclusion of larger percentages of students with disabilities — 11 percent in both grades in 2009 compared with eight percent in 2007 — did not impact overall achievement as average scores and proficiency levels for the commonwealth’s fourth and eighth graders were similar to 2007.

The average reading score of non-disabled fourth-grade students in Virginia increased one point to 230, a statistically significant four-point increase since 2005. The average score of 269 for non-disabled students in grade eight differs little from the average score of 270 for 2007 and 2005.

All Students’ Reading Results

Grade 4							Grade 8							
Group	1994	1998	2002	2003	2005	2007	2009	Group	1998	2002	2003	2005	2007	2009
Virginia	213	217	225	223	226	227	227	Virginia	266	269	268	268	267	266
South	*	*	*	215	217	219	220	South	*	*	259	258	260	261
Nation	212	213	217	216	217	220	220	Nation	261	263	261	260	261	262

** Regional data not provided. NAEP achievement comparisons are performed prior to rounding. As a result, comparisons referenced in the text may differ from the results of comparisons of data in tables.*

Virginia fourth-grade students achieved an average score of 227 on the reading test, which was unchanged from 2007. The commonwealth’s average fourth-grade score was significantly higher than the average scores for students in the nation and the South.

Thirty-eight percent of Virginia fourth graders met or exceeded NAEP’s standard for reading proficiency – the same percentage as in 2007.

Virginia eighth-grade students achieved an average reading score of 266, which was three points higher than the national average and five points higher than the average for students in the South. Virginia’s 2009 average grade-eight reading score was one point lower than the average score for 2007, a difference not considered statistically significant.

Thirty-two percent of Virginia students in grade eight met or surpassed the proficiency standard, which was not a statistically significant change from 2007, when 34 percent achieved at or above the proficient level.

Black Students’ Reading Results

Grade 4							Grade 8						
Group	1998	2002	2003	2005	2007	2009	Group	1998	2002	2003	2005	2007	2009
Virginia	199	205	206	207	213	210	Virginia	250	252	250	251	252	250
South	*	*	197	199	203	205	South	*	*	243	242	244	246
Nation	192	198	197	199	203	204	Nation	242	244	244	242	244	245

** Regional data not provided. NAEP achievement comparisons are performed prior to rounding. As a result, comparisons referenced in the text may differ from the results of comparisons of data in tables.*

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African-American fourth graders in Virginia public schools achieved an average reading score of 210, compared with 213 in 2007. This did not represent a significant change. Black fourth graders outscored their national and regional peers by significant margins.

Eighteen percent of African-American fourth graders in Virginia performed at or above the proficient level, which was little changed from 2007 when 19 percent met or surpassed the NAEP standard.

Black eighth graders in Virginia achieved an average score of 250, which represented little change from 2007's average of 252.

Fourteen percent of black eighth graders in Virginia performed at or above the proficient level, which was not a significant change from 16 percent in 2007.

Hispanic Students' Reading Results

Grade 4							Grade 8						
Group	1998	2002	2003	2005	2007	2009	Group	1998	2002	2003	2005	2007	2009
Virginia	207	224	210	218	216	214	Virginia	265	261	266	259	258	256
South	*	*	207	211	212	212	South	*	*	248	249	252	253
Nation	192	199	199	201	204	204	Nation	241	245	244	245	246	248

* Regional data not provided. NAEP achievement comparisons are performed prior to rounding. As a result, comparisons referenced in the text may differ from the results of comparisons of data in tables.

Hispanic students in Virginia also outperformed their peers nationwide in reading. The average grade-4 reading score for Hispanic students in Virginia in 2009 was 214, which was 10 points higher than the national average. Twenty-six percent of Hispanic fourth graders in the commonwealth demonstrated proficiency or better, a significantly higher percentage than the 16 percent nationwide.

The average score of Hispanic eighth graders in Virginia was 256, which is statistically higher than the national average, but did not represent a significant change from 2007. Twenty-two percent of Hispanic eighth graders in the commonwealth demonstrated proficiency or better, compared with 16 percent nationwide.

White Students' Reading Results

Grade 4							Grade 8						
Group	1998	2002	2003	2005	2007	2009	Group	1998	2002	2003	2005	2007	2009
Virginia	225	233	231	233	233	234	Virginia	273	275	275	275	273	272
South	*	*	226	227	228	229	South	*	*	269	267	269	269
Nation	223	227	227	228	230	229	Nation	268	271	270	269	270	271

* Regional data not provided. NAEP achievement comparisons are performed prior to rounding. As a result, comparisons referenced in the text may differ from the results of comparisons of data in tables.

The average grade-four reading score for white students in Virginia in 2009 was five points higher than the national average. Forty-seven percent of white fourth graders in the commonwealth demonstrated proficiency or better, compared with 41 percent nationwide.

White eighth graders in Virginia achieved an average score of 272, which did not represent a statistically significant change from 2007. Forty percent of white eighth graders in the commonwealth demonstrated proficiency or better, compared with 39 percent nationwide.

NAEP is administered by the National Center for Education Statistics, a research arm of the U.S. Department of Education.