



For Immediate Release
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Virginia Eighth Graders Score Higher than Nation in Writing

Virginia students outperformed students nationwide on the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) writing test. The commonwealth’s eighth graders achieved an average score of 157, three points higher than the national average of 154. Virginia students scored significantly higher than students in 20 other states. Test takers in only seven states achieved significantly higher average scores.

While Virginia students outperformed their peers nationwide in writing for a third consecutive time, their average score was unchanged from 2002, and there was little change in proficiency levels. Ninety percent of Virginia students demonstrated at least basic writing skills on the 2007 test, and 31 percent met or exceeded the rigorous NAEP standard for full proficiency.

“Young people who communicate clearly and effectively stand out – especially in this era of text messaging and electronic chatter,” said Superintendent of Public Instruction Billy K. Cannaday Jr. “While Virginia’s public schools produce some of the nation’s strongest writers, we must do more to equip students with the communications skills they need to compete in the global economy of the 21st century.”

Grade-8 NAEP Writing 1998-2007: Average Scores

	1998	2002	2007
Virginia	153	157	157
Nation	148	152	154

Grade-8 NAEP Writing: 2007 Proficiency Levels

	Below Basic	At or above Basic	At or above Proficient	Advanced
Virginia	10%	90%	31%	1%
Nation	13%	87%	31%	2%

The NAEP is the only nationally representative assessment of what American students know and can do in various subject areas. The writing assessment measures students’ narrative, informative and persuasive writing skills. Each student performs two of the 17 writing tasks included in the assessment and has 25 minutes to complete each task. Writing skills are categorized as “Below Basic,” “Basic,” “Proficient” or “Advanced.”

The 2007 writing assessment included samples of eighth graders representative of the nation and each of the 45 participating states. The eighth-grade sample for Virginia included 2,631 students in 108 schools.

(more)

In addition, a nationwide sample of twelfth graders was tested as part of the 2007 NAEP writing assessment. The average score of the nation's seniors rose five points to 153, compared with 2002's average of 148. State-level results are not reported for grade 12.

African-American eighth graders in Virginia achieved an average score of 142, compared with the national average of 140. Eighty-four percent of black students in the commonwealth demonstrated at least basic proficiency in writing, and 14 percent performed at the proficient level or better.

**Grade-8 NAEP Writing 1998-2007: Average Scores
African-American Students**

	1998	2002	2007
Virginia	140	140	142
Nation	130	134	140

**Grade-8 NAEP Writing: 2007 Proficiency Levels
African-American Students**

	Below Basic	At or above Basic	At or above Proficient	Advanced
Virginia	16%	84%	14%	<1%
Nation	20%	80%	15%	<1%

Hispanic students achieved an average score of 145 compared with the national average of 141. Eighty-two percent of Hispanic students tested at the basic level or better, and 18 percent performed at the proficient level or above. While the average score of Hispanic students in Virginia has declined since 1998, the changes are not considered significant because of the small numbers of students assessed.

**Grade-8 NAEP Writing 1998-2007: Average Scores
Hispanic Students**

	1998	2002	2007
Virginia	151	146	145
Nation	130	135	141

**Grade-8 NAEP Writing: 2007 Proficiency Levels
Hispanic Students**

	Below Basic	At or above Basic	At or above Proficient	Advanced
Virginia	18%	82%	18%	<1%
Nation	21%	79%	17%	<1%

Writing assessments in grades 5, 8 and 11 have been part of Virginia's accountability program since Standards of Learning (SOL) testing began in 1998. Since then, the average score of Virginia eighth graders on the NAEP writing test has risen by a statistically significant four points. The NAEP standard for proficiency denotes competency over challenging subject matter. In contrast, passing scores on Virginia Standards of Learning tests and similar tests in other states are set to represent a minimum level of acceptable achievement for accountability purposes.