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**Urban School Students Score at Highest Levels Ever On State and Federal Tests**

***Report Includes City-by-City Profiles of Big-City School District Trends On Math and Reading Assessments***

Christina School District

**<http://www.cgcs.org/BTO8/Christina.pdf>**

Students in the nation's major city public school districts continue to advance in reading and math on state tests and on the more rigorous federal test– the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

A new report analyzing academic progress in 66 urban school systems in 37 states and the District of Columbia shows substantially higher test scores in 2007 than in 2003 in fourth and eighth-grade mathematics and reading on state assessments. It indicates that the state and national test scores are at their highest levels since academic proficiency data have been collected for urban schools.

*Beating the Odds: An Analysis of Student Performance and Achievement Gaps on State Assessments* by the Council of the Great City Schools compares this past school year's state test scores with those reported a year after the federal *No Child Left Behind* law was implemented in 2002, requiring school districts to report performance levels based on state tests and show the percentage of students who score at the "proficient" level.

The *Beating the Odds* findings for the 2006- 2007 school year show that 63 percent of urban school students scored at or above the proficient level in fourth-grade math on their respective state assessments, a whopping 14 percentage point gain from 49 percent in 2003. For eighth-graders, the percentage climbed to 55 percent, compared with 42 percent in 2003, a 13 percentage point rise.

In reading, urban schoolchildren also posted gains over the past four years. From 2003 to 2007, the percentage of fourth-graders scoring at or above the proficient level in reading on state tests rose to 60 percent from 51 percent – a 9 percentage point hike. For eighth-graders, the percentage increased to 51 percent from 43 percent in 2003, an 8 percentage point gain.

### **National Test Assessments**

The report also reveals that the state-test trends coincide with NAEP gains by urban students, but with lower percentages of students scoring at or above the proficient level on what is generally considered a more rigorous exam than most state tests.

Students in big-city public schools have made faster math and reading gains than the nation on the NAEP over the past few years, according to *The Nation's Report Card* for 2007 released by the U.S. Department of Education. The report last November marked the first time that the nation could see four- or five-year trends on NAEP for the country's major urban public school systems since the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) was launched in reading in 2002 and math in 2003.

Some 28 percent of urban fourth-graders scored at or above the proficient level in math in 2007 on NAEP, an 8 percentage point hike from 20 percent in 2003. In reading, 22 percent of urban schoolchildren in fourth grade reached or went beyond the proficient level in 2007, a 5 percentage point increase from 17 percent in 2002.

*Beating the Odds* also includes how student test scores in 11 big-city school districts that volunteered for the trial urban NAEP compare with scores on their respective state tests. Among the 11 cities are New York, Los Angeles and Chicago, the nation's three largest school systems.

Although urban schools show gains in math and reading performance, the districts still generally lag behind state and national averages in fourth and eighth grades, and acknowledge that they still have a long way to go to reach proficiency levels. But there are exceptions.

### **State Math Achievement**

In the report's eighth annual analysis, data show that 22 percent of urban school districts now score as high as or higher than their respective states in fourth-grade math, and 16 percent score as high or higher at the eighth-grade level in 2007.

The school districts with both fourth- and eighth-grade math scores equal to or greater than their respective states are Anchorage, Broward County (Fort Lauderdale, Fla.), Charleston, New Orleans, Palm Beach and Portland, Ore.

### **State Reading Progress**

In 2007, 16 percent of urban school districts scored at or above their respective states in fourth-grade reading, and 14 percent at the eighth-grade level. The school districts with both fourth- and eighth-grade reading scores equal to or greater than their respective states are Anchorage, Broward County (Fort Lauderdale, Fla.), Charleston, New Orleans, Portland, Ore., San Diego and San Francisco.

### **Achievement Gaps**

*Beating the Odds VIII* also indicates that racial achievement gaps in urban schools narrowed in math between 2003 and 2007, although they remain wide. Some 66 percent of bigcity school districts narrowed the gap between their fourth-grade African-American students and white counterparts statewide in math proficiency – 63 percent in eighth-grade math.

Among Hispanic students, 63 percent of the urban school districts narrowed the gap with white fourth-graders statewide – 58 percent in eighth-grade.

In reading, between 2003 and 2007, 64 percent of major city school systems narrowed the achievement gap between fourth-grade African-American students and white counterparts statewide in reading proficiency – 67 percent at the eighth-grade level. Among Hispanic students, 57 percent of urban school districts narrowed the gap with white fourth-graders statewide – 63 percent in eighth grade.

**Urban Environment** America's big-city school systems enroll about one-quarter, or 26 percent, of all students of color in the nation, and a

disproportionately high number of English language learners and poor students.

The report attributes the standards movement as the catalyst that triggered change in urban schools. It gave urban school administrators direction on what they were being held responsible for delivering.

*Beating the Odds* analyzed two assessments – state and national – because the nation does not have a single system to measure progress relative to the same standard across school districts in all states.

### **General Assembly Acts Boldly to Limit Education Cuts to \$30 Million**

Unexpected and welcomed action by the General Assembly and Gov. Ruth Ann Minner late Thursday evening April 24, 2008 will limit FY09 cuts to public education to \$30 million.

House Joint Resolution 14, sponsored by Sen. Nancy Cook (D-Kenton) and Rep. Bill Oberle (R-Beecher's Lot), passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 39-0 (two not voting: Rep. Greg Lavelle/R and Rep. Bob Valihura/R) and the State Senate by a vote of 18-0 (two not voting: Sen. Bob Marshall/D and Sen. Karen Peterson/D).

"Legislators clearly were reacting to the tremendous outpouring of emails and calls they received from DSEA members and parents up and down the state," said Barbara Grogg, DSEA President. "And we are grateful for this action sufficiently in advance of the May 15th layoff notice deadline, and hope that school superintendents will act in the spirit of the resolution, 'to minimize employee reduction in force notifications and minimize employee layoffs.'"

The following passage from the resolution states that the 2009 budget: "... must incorporate comprehensive strategies including but not limited to base budget cuts, revenue enhancements and government re-engineering."

Moving forward, two points are worth the attention of DSEA members: \_(1) the implementation of the agreed-upon \$30 million budget reduction amount; and \_(2) the remaining task of coming to an agreement on a new revenue package. The latter point is especially true for a number of other state services that affect children and working families.

"We will very closely monitor discussions and proposals for the remaining \$30 million in cuts to ensure that they are educationally sound," said DSEA Executive Director Howard Weinberg.

The budget deficit for FY09 remains at \$225 million. With \$30 million coming from public education, that still leaves a \$195 million gap to be made up from a combination of further budget cuts and revenue increases. And....that presumes no worsening of state revenues between now and the June official state revenue forecast from DEFAC (Delaware Economic and Financial Advisory Committee).

The official press release issued from Legislative Hall Thursday night noted that, "School officials from around the state sat in meetings with the legislative-administration finance team and said they were pleased with the accord. 'We are still going to have to make cuts,' said Colonial School Superintendent George H. Meney. 'But we're looking at operational cuts that we hope won't be too noticeable in the classroom.'

"Woodbridge School Superintendent Kevin Carson said districts were going to look at making uniform cuts to avoid a patchwork of cuts around the state. Both superintendents praised the group for its effort on behalf of teachers and students.

"These leaders stepped up and worked hard on behalf of our schools,' Carson said. 'They really came through and helped a lot of kids by doing this.'"

### **State Board Turns Down Two Charter School Applications and Revokes Marion T. Academy's Eight Year-Old Charter**

The State Board of Education, following a recommendation from the Accountability Review Committee and Sec. of Education Valerie Woodruff, turned down applications to open charter schools this fall from the **Delaware Community Charter School and Middletown Preparatory Charter School.**

DSEA leaders as well as Claudia Bock, president of the Christina Education Association, were on hand to testify against the Delaware Community School

application, if necessary. Bock had enlisted the support of the Christina community, school board and legislators to send in letters of protest to the State Board. This school, which offered little that would be unique, was to open close to where the new Porter Road School is to open, a school that voters had just approved. The school was also supported by two bond bill votes in the General Assembly. In that Bear/Newark area of Christina are several elementary schools, all of which are rated Superior. With the support of the community for a new school in the area, why stretch scarce state resources to open a similar school?

Criteria such as these are not in the current charter school law and were not used by the Dept. of Education to deny the application. It was denied on more technical grounds.

And sadly, after some struggles, the State Board also voted to revoke the charter of the Marion T. Academy. Marion T. has operated in the City of Wilmington since 2000, serving K-8 students. It will close this summer, causing hardship to their families, staff and students.