



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Shepard Building
255 Westminster Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-3400

NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Elliot Krieger, Communications – (401) 749-0252 (cell)

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Rhode Island Students Score Near the National Average on Science Assessment

Rhode Island 8th graders scored slightly above the national average on the national assessment in science administered last year by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education. The test results were released today (May 24th, 2006).

On the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), known as “The Nation’s Report Card,” 58 percent of Rhode Island 8th graders reached the achievement level of “Basic” or better; nationwide, 57 percent did so. Basic is defined as “partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work.”

Among Rhode Island 4th graders, 63 percent reached Basic or better; nationwide, 66 percent did so.

Based on these results, the NCES places Rhode Island in the middle tier of states for both grades, with 26 states performing better, 8 performing about the same, and 8 performing worse at the 4th-grade level; 24 states were performing better, 6 performing about the same, and 14 performing worse than Rhode Island at the 8th-grade level.

Since the last time the test was administered (2000), the percentage of students in Rhode Island performing at or above Basic is down two percentage points for grade 4 and unchanged for grade 8.

“These results clearly demonstrate that Rhode Island has much work to do in order to make our students more competitive in the critical subjects of science,” Governor Donald L. Carcieri said. He urged the General Assembly, business leaders, and parents to get behind his education initiatives to reform how the subjects of science and mathematics are taught in our schools, especially in the early grades.

In January, Governor Carcieri unveiled his comprehensive education-reform agenda to address science- and mathematics-curriculum issues, professional development for teachers and administrators, and improving efficiencies among school districts. “Today’s results demonstrate why we must move quickly to implement the education-reform initiatives that came out of my Blue Ribbon Panel on Mathematics and Science Education,” the Governor said. “We can’t afford to delay these important initiatives any longer. Every year we wait, our students pay the price.”

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The Governor noted that his legislation to establish a statewide science curriculum unanimously passed the Senate, but it remains in the House Health, Education & Welfare Committee. He has also directed the Board of Regents to create a process that allows mathematics and science professionals to teach a limited number of mathematics and science courses as adjunct faculty and to establish a pilot project that creates alternative certification for teachers.

In his FY 2007 budget, the Governor proposed a \$41-million increase in direct aid to cities and towns and \$17.5 million in targeted investments to upgrade science and mathematics instruction, to support teacher preparation, and to improve student performance.

“Though the science test results released today show that Rhode Island students score at the national average, we know that our students can improve once they get the right resources,” said James A. DiPrete, Chairman of the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education. “We must continue to invest in mathematics and science instruction.”

NAEP scores are not released by school or district, only by type of district. The results show that Rhode Island students in “Urban Fringe” and “Rural” districts performed significantly better than similar students nationwide at the 8th-grade level; students in Rhode Island “Central City” districts performed significantly worse than similar students nationwide in both the 4th grade and 8th grade.

“Not surprisingly, these results once again show that there are three Rhode Islands,” said Peter McWalters, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. “Some of our districts are performing at nationally competitive levels. But until we improve results in our cities, our overall state results will be average at best.”

Among most groups of students by racial/ethnic background, poverty status, and program type (English-language learners, students with disabilities), there were no significant changes in test scores in Rhode Island since 2000. The test scores of Rhode Island Hispanic students in the 4th grade, however, rose significantly.

In March, the R.I. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) published new state standards (known as Grade-Span Expectations) in science, specifying what students should know and be able to do in earth and space sciences, life sciences, and physical sciences at each school level. These standards are posted on the RIDE website, at <http://www.ride.ri.gov/standards/gle/default.htm>

The state will begin its first statewide testing in science on a pilot basis next year. Testing at each school level will begin in 2008.

Further information about the NAEP science results is available on the NCES website: <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>