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NEWS RELEASE

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Tests Show Rhode Island Students Improve in Mathematics, Hold Steady in Reading

The results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2005 tests, released today (October 19th, 2005) show that Rhode Island public-school students have improved in mathematics and held steady in reading.

The reading scores are almost exactly at the national average. The mathematics scores fall slightly below the national average.

The results from the 2005 test – sometimes called “The Nation’s Report Card” – show that 62 percent of the state’s 4th graders and 71 percent of the state’s 8th graders have reached the “basic achievement level” in reading. This represents no change from the last time the test was given, in 2003.

The test results show that 76 percent of the state’s 4th graders have achieved the basic achievement level in mathematics, up 4 percentage points since 2003 (and up 22 points since the first test, in 1992); 63 percent of the 8th graders have reached the basic achievement level, unchanged from 2003 (up 14 points since the first test, in 1990).

“Since my election, I have made improving Rhode Island’s education test scores a priority for my administration,” said Governor Donald L. Carcieri. “We have hired math and literacy specialists to help our most challenged schools. We are developing a new statewide curriculum in reading, writing, and math. And we have extended the school day to provide more opportunity for students to learn.

“Throughout the last three years, I have been particularly focused on improving our students’ performance in mathematics,” Carcieri continued. “My Blue Ribbon Panel on Math and Science Education recently unveiled a comprehensive action plan for further improving math instruction and student results. These test scores show that we are making steady progress.

“At the same time, these results demonstrate the need to redouble our efforts to improve reading instruction,” the Governor concluded. “While reading scores have remained steady, we can and must do better.”

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“I congratulate the Rhode Island schools on the continued progress in mathematics,” said James A. DiPrete, Chairman of the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education. “In the coming weeks, the Board of Regents will look carefully at these test results to consider ways in which the state can ensure continued progress for all of our students in both mathematics and reading.”

“Though I am pleased with the progress our students are making in mathematics, I hope in time to see us reach and surpass the national average on both the mathematics and reading tests,” said Peter McWalters, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. “It is important to note that some of our students are performing very well. But our students in the areas with the greatest concentration of poverty continue to lag behind their peers. We must continue to make significant investments in our urban districts, our areas of greatest need, so as to continue our progress.”

The U.S. Department of Education National Center on Education Statistics (NCES), which administers the NAEP tests, does not release results by district. Rather, the state results are broken into three categories: Central City, Urban Fringe, Rural.

In Rhode Island, the results for Urban Fringe and Rural districts surpass the national average for comparable districts. The scores from Central Cities in Rhode Island fall below the national average for Central Cities, however.

In addition, Rhode Island has more students in Central Cities than the nation as a whole and far more than the other Northeast states. (NCES considers Pawtucket, Providence, Warwick, and Woonsocket to be “Central Cities.”)

The NCES does not rank state results, but places each state into one of three “tiers.”

On all four tests, Rhode Island is placed in the middle tier, as in previous years. The other New England states are generally in the top tier.

(Please note that in previous years NCES used the percent of students who achieved the level of “proficiency” to set up the three tiers; this year, NCES organized the tiers by percent who achieved the “basic” level. NCES defines basic as the “partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade.”)

The results in Rhode Island, and elsewhere, closely track poverty levels. For example, the “2005 Kids Count Data Book” on child well-being shows that Rhode Island has by far the worst level of childhood poverty among the New England states. New Hampshire has the lowest childhood-poverty level in the nation; Connecticut ranks # 4, Massachusetts and Vermont tie for # 5, and Maine is # 13. Rhode Island ranks # 29.

More details about the 2005 Rhode Island NAEP results, including breakdowns by student groups, are posted on the R.I. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website, www.ride.ri.gov, see under “Assessment and Accountability News.”

The NCES has posted information about the NAEP results on its site: <http://nationsreportcard.gov>

Note: Commissioner McWalters will be available for interviews today (Wednesday) from 2 p.m. – 3 p.m.