



# NEWS

CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

DR. DIANNA R. WENTZELL, COMMISSIONER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## CONNECTICUT STUDENTS AMONG TOP PERFORMERS IN READING NATIONALLY

(HARTFORD, CT)—The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), known as the “Nation’s Report Card,” released results from the 2015 assessments today, which showed that Connecticut remains among the top performers in the nation in reading in both grades 4 and 8. In math, Connecticut students performed similarly to their national peers in grade 4 and slightly above the national average in grade 8.

While the national NAEP scores declined in three of four areas in 2015, Connecticut NAEP scores remained steady in grade 4 and 8 reading and grade 8 math. The only area where Connecticut declined since the NAEP assessment was last administered in 2013 is 4<sup>th</sup> grade math.

“In Connecticut, we raised the bar for all children with more rigorous learning standards and curriculum, and these scores show we are holding our own as a state and students are rising to this new challenge. We also know we have more work to do to raise student achievement and ensure that every child from every corner of the state has the skills and knowledge to succeed in college and career,” said state Commissioner of Education Dianna R. Wentzell.

Over the past 10 years, Connecticut exhibited significant gains in grade 8 reading performance. In 2005, 34 percent of grade 8 students were performing at or above proficient in reading. In 2015, 43 percent of students are performing at or above proficient – a nine percentage point gain. In 2015, no state had a higher percentage of students at or above proficient in grade 8 reading and only one state – Massachusetts – was higher than Connecticut in grade 4 reading.

“As they did on the baseline year of the Smarter Balanced assessment, Connecticut students have delivered strong results in reading compared to other states in the nation,” said Commissioner Wentzell. “We are pleased to see Connecticut’s reading performance in the highest tier. However, we have much work to do to raise reading and math performance to the high level we know our students can achieve.”

In math, Connecticut students in grades 4 and 8 are in the middle of the pack in terms of performance. Connecticut 8<sup>th</sup> grade students outperform students in 21 states. The NAEP results reflect similar challenges revealed in this year’s Smarter Balanced assessment, which is aligned to the more rigorous college and career-ready standards of Common Core.

“The NAEP assessment is one measure among many that helps us understand student performance in our state and make decisions about where to invest time and resources to improve student learning where we see gaps.

Both the NAEP and Smarter Balanced assessments show us that one area where we need to make significant improvement is math,” said Commissioner Wentzell.

In August, Commissioner Wentzell announced that she will convene educators, industry and business leaders, and experts in math and STEM instruction on a Commissioner’s Council on Mathematics. This group will be charged with identifying best practices, both in Connecticut and across the nation, and to explore promising innovations in the areas of math and science instruction. The state Department of Education also plans to intensify supports to math teachers. In the coming year, the SDE will continue to offer quality professional development opportunities for educators who teach math. In addition, the SDE will explore other, innovative professional learning opportunities to strengthen supports for Connecticut’s math educators.

Connecticut NAEP scores continue to show an achievement disparity among subgroups and it continues to be a priority of the department to close these gaps through support to districts and increased focus on accountability.

It is important to note that as school districts in Connecticut have transitioned to the more rigorous college- and career-ready standards of Common Core, there are some topics on the NAEP assessment that test student knowledge about topics the students have not yet learned. The NAEP results – as well as the baseline year of Smarter Balanced data – should not be construed to show that students are learning less, rather that we have raised the bar with more challenging standards and more purposeful instruction that will better prepare our young people to compete with students across the world in the global marketplace.

“One of our biggest and most important challenges as a state, is to find pathways to excellence and equity in education for our students. Our Alliance District initiative and Commissioner Network are two examples of strategies we have in Connecticut to turn around our lowest performing schools and districts and get all students from all backgrounds and incomes on the path to success in the future. We can only achieve this goal through working together at the state and local levels with educational leaders, teachers, parents, students and community members. We have raised the bar for achievement in Connecticut; now we must deliver on our promise to kids,” Commissioner Wentzell said.

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