



NEWS RELEASE

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ARKANSAS' LEARNING STANDARDS RANK HIGH IN NATIONAL STUDY

Arkansas' public school students benefit from some of the highest learning standards in the nation, according to a study released today by the U.S. Department of Education. The study, "Mapping 2005 State Proficiency Standards Onto the NAEP Scales," shows a high correlation between what is considered proficient on Arkansas' benchmark examinations and equivalent scores on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), which is also known as The Nation's Report Card.

"With this report, the federal government validates all the work that has been put in over the years to produce high standards of learning for our students," said Dr. Ken James, Commissioner of Education. "I am thrilled with this news because it means that when students reach the state's expectations for proficiency, which are manifested in our curriculum frameworks and assessed through our benchmark exams, they are in a prime position to compete with students from anywhere in the United States for college placement and well-paying jobs."

All Arkansas students in the third through eighth grade take the Arkansas Benchmark Exam in both mathematics and literacy. NAEP is administered to a sample of students in the fourth and eighth grades, also in mathematics and reading. In 2005, more than 10,900 students at 300 Arkansas schools took the exam. For the report, the National Center for Education Statistics compared the level of performance on the benchmark exams of fourth and eighth graders at those schools where NAEP was administered, mapping the level of proficiency on the state exam to the equivalent scale score for NAEP. In all four comparisons – fourth and eighth grade reading and mathematics – Arkansas performance standards correlated highly with those of NAEP. A perfect correlation is designated by a

1.0 score, and USDOE officials said in releasing the report that a correlation of .6 pointed to standards closely aligned with those of NAEP.

Arkansas' correlation scores ranged from .68 to .79. In fourth grade reading, with a correlation of .73, Arkansas ranked fourth highest in the nation for having standards highly correlated with NAEP. In eighth grade reading, with a .68 correlation, Arkansas ranked 10th in the nation. The correlations and national ranks for 4th grade mathematics were .72 and seventh respectively and for 8th grade mathematics, .79 and sixth respectively.

"When our curriculum and assessment unit works with educators from across the state to develop our curriculum frameworks, NAEP standards are one of the guiding pieces we use to develop the specific skills and knowledge that we want our students to master at each grade," Dr. James said. "We've done so because NAEP standards set a high goal for the nation's students."

Arkansas scored at or near the national average when NAEP was administered in 2005. Scores on the state's benchmark exams as well as on standardized tests such as the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, the SAT and ACT have had positive trend lines in recent years.

"The focus that has been put on education in this state is paying off. Forward-thinking legislation and strong leadership from the executive branch have set and maintained a course that is proving instrumental to educational gains in this state," Dr. James said. "In addition to the terrific work at the policy level, the tremendous efforts put forth by educators and students in this state will push Arkansas to the forefront on both educational and, eventually, economic fronts."

The full federal report is available at

<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/researchcenter/statemapping.asp>.

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The Arkansas Department of Education strives to ensure that all children in the state have access to a quality education by providing educators, administrators and staff with leadership, resources and training.