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ARKANSAS STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE HOLDS STEADY ON THE NATION'S REPORT CARD

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) mathematics and reading results for fourth- and eighth-grade students released Tuesday showed that Arkansas students scored at the same levels in 2007 that they did in 2005, the last time the test was administered. NAEP, referred to as the nation's report card, is given periodically to a sample of students nationwide.

Average 2007 scale scores, which range from 0 to 500, for Arkansas students were:

- 217 for fourth-grade reading, compared with 217 in 2005
- 258 for eighth-grade reading, compared with 258 in 2005
- 238 for fourth-grade mathematics, compared with 236 in 2005
- 274 for eighth-grade mathematics, compared with 272 in 2005

While the mathematics scores appear slightly higher in 2007, the difference is not considered statistically significant from 2005. The performance trend mirrored many other southern states, though not the national trend.

"Arkansas students and teachers should be proud that the performance of our students at these grade levels has not declined, yet we must all be honest with ourselves that we are not yet where we want to be," said Dr. Ken James, Commissioner of Education. "In 2005, our scores fell at or very near the national average, but because the rest of the nation showed improved performance, we have slipped a bit in terms of state rankings in all areas, save mathematics at the fourth grade. That alone is proof

that we cannot be satisfied with the status quo for our students. If we are, we are not properly preparing the children of our state to compete for well-paying jobs and college opportunities.”

Average scale scores for the nation were 220 for fourth-grade reading, 261 for eighth-grade reading, 239 for fourth-grade mathematics, and 280 for eighth-grade mathematics.

Recent educational reforms have produced higher test scores across the board for Arkansas students in recent years, and Arkansas performance standards have been judged by national organizations to be some of the most rigorous and closely aligned with NAEP of any state in the nation. Earlier this year, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings praised Arkansas and Massachusetts as the two states leading the way in standards setting in their educational systems.

“We know we have the right pieces in place to put together a successful learning experience for all of our students,” Dr. James said, “and I fully expect that the positive results we have witnessed in recent years will continue because all of us in public education know the importance of educating each and every one of our students so that no student graduates without the skills and knowledge he or she needs to succeed as a contributing, productive citizen.”

Across the nation, 190,000 fourth graders and 161,000 eighth graders took the NAEP examination. In Arkansas, those numbers were about 6,100 fourth graders and 4,900 eighth graders at approximately 260 schools. The sample of students represents all Arkansas students; NAEP does not release the names of the students or schools involved in the examinations.

Full results for the 2007 NAEP exam are available at <http://nationsreportcard.gov>.

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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.