



NEWS RELEASE

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COMMISSIONER KEN JAMES' STATEMENT REGARDING 12TH GRADERS' SCORES ON "THE NATIONS REPORT CARD"

Results released today by the U.S. Department of Education show little progress in reading and mathematics among high school seniors on the National Assessment of Education Progress, also known as The Nation's Report Card. A representative sample of more than 21,000 high school 12th graders in more than 900 schools across the country participated in the assessments between January and March of 2005. Because of the sample size, results are released for the nation and in regional breakdowns, but state-by-state breakdowns are not possible.

At the national level, reading scores showed no significant difference since 2002, when the test was last administered, but are six points lower than they were in 1992. In 2005, 73 percent of the students scored at or above the basic level and 35 percent scored at or above the proficient level. The 2005 mathematics assessment was based on a new framework and graded on a different scale, so a direct comparison cannot be made to previous years' scores. In 2005, 61 percent scored at or above basic and 23 percent at or above proficient.

"The decline in reading scores over the past decade or so is disturbing, and it reinforces the message that we must make reading an integral part of our middle school and high school curricula," said Dr. Ken James, Arkansas Commissioner of Education. "The trend for the 12th graders reflects the decline that occurred in eighth grade NAEP reading scores across the nation last year. While Arkansas was one of only three states that did not see a decline in our eighth grade scores, we saw no improvement

either. Likewise, our state 11th Grade Literacy Exam scores remained constant for the last three years, with 45 percent scoring proficient or above all three years.”

Dr. James said the Arkansas Department of Education had several strategies in place to focus learning strategies on reading for upper-grade students, including Smart Step Strategies for the Content Area, Mid-Level Fluency Instruction, Mid-level Word Study Instruction, Mid-level Vocabulary Instruction, Literacy Lab Classroom Project, and Literacy Circles for mid-level and high school.

“While we are unable to glean information about Arkansas students’ only, we do anticipate improved scores among our students as more and more complete the Smart Core curriculum,” he said. The NAEP study looks at scores by students taking three levels of curriculum: standard, midlevel, and rigorous, which would be the equivalent of Smart Core in Arkansas. “Not surprisingly, scores were higher when students were enrolled in the higher level courses. And, most exciting, the achievement gap between black and white 12th graders closed completely when looking at those students taking a curriculum at midlevel or above. That is what we anticipate can happen in Arkansas once every child is enrolled in Smart Core.”

Copies of *The Nation’s Report Card: 12th-Grade Reading and Mathematics 2005* and *The Nation’s Report Card: America’s High School Graduates*, and additional data from the 2005 12th-grade assessments are available online 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.