



STATE of MINNESOTA
Office of Governor Mark Dayton

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 7, 2013

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Minnesota Makes Significant Gains in Narrowing Achievement Gap

Minnesota students post highest scores on “Nation’s Report Card” in state history

ST. PAUL, MN – For the first time since the state began reporting achievement gap data more than a decade ago, national test results released today show that Minnesota is making significant progress in narrowing the achievement gap between white students and students of color. According to the 2013 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) – otherwise known as the “Nation’s Report Card” – math scores among Minnesota fourth grade students were the best in the country this year, and reading scores showed significant achievement gap closures. Additionally, fourth and eighth grade students this year recorded the best scores in math and reading since NAEP scores started being collected in Minnesota.

“These results are very encouraging, especially among our state’s youngest children,” said Governor Mark Dayton. “I congratulate Minnesota students, educators, and parents for their hard work. Today’s report shows important progress toward narrowing achievement gaps between students of color and white students. The additional investments in early learning scholarships and all-day kindergarten, which were approved by the Legislature this year, will help build on this progress.”

Minnesota Department of Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius pointed to several initiatives that have contributed to this success, including: significant investments in early education by Governor Dayton and the Legislature, the new “Read Well by Third Grade” law that includes a requirement for every district to create a literacy plan, Minnesota’s waiver from the federal “No Child Left Behind” law, and more rigorous reading and math standards.

“Today’s results are first and foremost a testament to the incredible work of teachers who know that every child matters,” said Commissioner Cassellius. “It also shows that if we focus our efforts on the things that work – setting high standards, holding schools accountable, supporting great teachers and investing in early learning – we will get results.”

How Minnesota Students Performed on the 2013 Nation’s Report Card

NAEP test scores for Minnesota students improved significantly this year, marking important progress in reading and math proficiency – particularly among students in the fourth grade.

Best Fourth Grade Math Scores in the Nation – Minnesota fourth graders posted the best math scores in the nation, with more students performing at advanced levels than any other state.

This year, African American students in Minnesota posted big gains in math, performing fourth-highest among all African American students in the country, compared to 22nd in 2011.

Fourth Graders Post Tenth-Best Reading Scores in the Country – This year’s test results also showed significant progress in reading among Minnesota fourth grade students. Minnesota fourth graders performed tenth-best in the nation in 2013, moving up from 22nd just two years ago. Additionally, gaps between white students, and African American and Hispanic students closed by 10 test points – a roughly 25 percent improvement since 2009.

Eighth Graders Fifth-Best in Math, Eleventh-Best in Reading – Despite posting the best scores since Minnesota began recording eighth-grade NAEP scores in math and reading, students in eighth grade did not show as much improvement from 2011. The gap between white and African American students in reading is the seventh largest in the nation, while the gap between white and African American students is fourth largest in math. Still, Minnesota eight-graders performed among the best in the nation, ranking fifth-best in math and eleventh-best in reading.

“Today’s results paint a picture of two very different approaches to educating children,” said Commissioner Cassellius. “For three years, this administration has focused on investing in our youngest learners, providing earlier interventions to make sure kids are on track, and holding ourselves accountable for every child’s progress: we are seeing the results of those efforts with our fourth grade students. Our eighth grade students by contrast, faced years of disinvestment and did not get the same kind of focused attention on early literacy as students in recent years have gotten. We clearly have much more work to do to increase achievement for those students who have not had the same support since preschool.”

Minnesota’s NAEP results in full are available on the [National Assessment of Education Progress website](#).

About the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

The Nation's Report Card is the largest nationally representative, continuing evaluation of the condition of education in the United States. Through the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), The Nation's Report Card informs the public about what America's students know and can do in various subject areas and compares achievement data among states and various student demographic groups.

Since NAEP assessments use the same sets of test booklets for students across the country, NAEP test results serve as a common metric to compare academic progress and performance between states. The assessment stays essentially the same from year to year, which also makes NAEP scores a useful tool to assess student academic progress over time.

Additional Information:

Where We Are: Narrowing the Achievement Gap

For the first time since the state began to report achievement gap data more than a decade ago, the “Nation’s Report Card” released this week shows that Minnesota is making significant progress in narrowing the achievement gap between white students and students of color.

- Minnesota Students Achieve Best Scores on Record – This year, fourth and eighth grade students recorded the best scores in math and reading since the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) scores began being collected in Minnesota more than a decade ago.
- Best Fourth Grade Math Scores in the Nation – Minnesota fourth graders posted the best math scores in the nation in 2013, with more students performing at advanced levels than any other state. African American students in Minnesota posted big gains in math, performing fourth-highest among all African American students in the country, compared to 22nd in 2011.
- Fourth Graders Posted Tenth-Best Reading Scores in the Country – This year’s test results also showed significant progress in reading among Minnesota fourth grade students. Minnesota fourth graders performed tenth-best in the nation in 2013, moving up from 22nd just two years ago. Additionally, gaps between white students, and African American and Hispanic students closed by 10 test points – a roughly 25 percent improvement since 2009.
- Eighth Graders Ranked Fifth-Best in Math, Eleventh-Best in Reading – Despite posting the best scores since Minnesota began recording eighth-grade NAEP scores in math and reading, students in eighth grade did not show as much improvement from 2011. The gap between white and African American students in reading is the seventh largest in the nation, while the gap between white and African American students is fourth largest in math. Still, Minnesota eighth-graders performed among the best in the nation on this year’s test, ranking fifth-best in math and eleventh-best in reading.

How We Got Here: Investing in Minnesota Students

For years, Minnesota has had one of the worst achievement gaps in the nation. But renewed efforts and investments in education are beginning to pay off. Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius pointed to several initiatives that have contributed to this year’s success, including:

- Significant investments in early education made by Governor Dayton and the Legislature;
- The new “Read Well by Third Grade” law that includes a requirement for every district to create a literacy plan;
- Minnesota’s waiver from the federal “No Child Left Behind” law; and
- More rigorous reading and math standards.

Where We Are Going: More Work to Do

This year’s NAEP results paint two pictures: one of investment and one of disinvestment. The Dayton Administration has focused on investing early and supporting students from birth, and Minnesota is seeing the results with our fourth grade students.

Eighth grade students have unfortunately faced a decade of disinvestment. Minnesota has much work ahead of us to improve achievement for those students who have not had the same support since preschool. By sharing best practices and continuing to invest in our students,

Minnesota will continue knocking down barriers to opportunity until every child is ready for career and college.

Key investments that will build on this important progress include:

- **More Funding For Every School in Minnesota.** The budget invests an additional \$234 million in the school funding formula, providing schools with an increase in funding in each of the next two years.
- **All Day Kindergarten for Every Child.** For the first time in its history, Minnesota will offer All-Day Kindergarten to every child in Minnesota. Currently, only 54% of Minnesota's Kindergarten students have access to free all-day Kindergarten, with thousands of families having to pay out of pocket.
- **Reforming the Special Education Formula.** The budget invests \$40 million in special education reform, providing needed funding reform and greater funding equity for schools.
- **Early Learning Scholarships for 8,000 Kids.** The budget invests \$40 million in scholarships that will help thousands more children attend high quality child care and preschool to ensure that children are prepared for Kindergarten and beyond. Families will be eligible for up to \$5,000 in scholarships.
- **Repaying our Schools.** The budget accelerates repayment of the money that the state borrowed from our schools in previous bienniums.
- **Testing Reform to Improve How We Measure Student Achievement.** The bill will help move away from punitive testing standards, to help districts implement college and career readiness exams.