

STUDENT SCORES UP IN MATH, SCIENCE; READING, WRITING SKILLS STABLE

From US Dept. of Education

■(WASHINGTON) The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics reported that American students generally improved performance in math and science, but remained stable in reading and writing achievement.

In commenting on the Report in Brief: National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 1994 Trends in Academic Progress, U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley urged schools and families to work harder to improve reading and writing skills, while expanding on the gains made in math and science.

Department research shows that reading and writing are greatly influenced by what goes on in the home and in after school activities. "Parents can do their part by making sure that children have a vast assortment of reading material and practice writing, and get a library card and use it," Riley added.

Known as the "The Nation's Report Card," NAEP has monitored trends in academic achievement since the 1970s and is the only continuing assessment of a nationally representative sample of U.S. students' academic performance. In science, math, and reading, students were tested at ages nine,

13, and 17. In writing, students in grades 4, 8, and 11 were tested.

The trend report found that the average math and science score for nine year olds was higher than 20 years ago. Thirteen year olds had higher average math scores than in 1973, while their science scores were not significantly different over the time period from 1970 to 1994.

The average science score for 17 year olds in 1992 and 1994 was higher than anytime since 1977, but lower than the 1969 average, while their average math scores in 1992 and 1994 were higher than anytime since 1978, and a little higher than in 1973.

Student performance is reported on a 500-point scale, divided into five levels of achievement (150, 200, 250, 300 and 350).

Among the report's findings:

✓ Compared to 1977 for science and 1978 for math, higher percentages of 9 year olds in 1994 showed an understanding of fundamentals in both subjects (levels 150, 200, and 250). But no significant changes occurred in the percentages of students at age 9 or grade 4 reaching any level of performance on the reading or writing scales.

✓ Almost all 13 year olds reached level 150 in science and math, and gains were

made in the percentages of students at or above levels 200 and 250. Few changes were observed in levels of reading and writing performance.

✓ At age 17, the only change observed in science performance levels was an increase in the percentage of students reaching at least level 300. In math, 17 year olds made gains at levels 250 and 300. No significant change at any performance level was observed in reading. And the percentage of 11th graders at or above level 250 in writing declined between 1984 and 1994.

✓ Thirteen and 17 year old boys continue to outscore girls in science and math, while girls outperform boys in reading and writing.

✓ Despite a narrowing of the gap between the average performance of white and black students in three of the four subjects tested, in 1994, white students had average scores that were higher than those of black students in all four subjects. And the average scores of white students were higher than the average scores of Hispanic students in all subjects.

✓ Students' reports indicated an increased use of technology in the classroom. Between 1984 and 1994, there was a sharp increase in the percentage of students at grades 8 and 11 who used computers to write stories or papers.

✓ There was an increase in the percentage of 9 year olds who reported reading for fun daily, and 9 and 13 year olds were less likely in 1994 than 1982 to watch six or more hours of television each day. Between 1978 and 1994, there was a small increase in the percentage of 17 year olds who reported watching six or more hours of television daily.

The report is available from the National Library of Education by calling 1-800-424-1616, and via the Internet at <http://www.ed.gov/NCES/NAEP>.

OSHA'S STRONG ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM CONTINUES IN FY 96

From US Dept. of Labor

■(WASHINGTON) While working hard to build partnerships with business owners who care about their workers' safety and health, the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) has simultaneously worked to stringently enforce safety standards for those who don't.

In the past fiscal year, the number of OSHA citations for very serious safety violations was up 30 percent. The total of significant and egregious enforcement cases in the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, 1996, (FY '96) was up sharply over the previous year: 165 compared with 125. Significant cases are those with proposed penalties totaling more than \$100,000 and egregious cases are those where multiple willful violations warrant instance-by-instance penalties.

There were six egregious cases in FY '96 compared with 17 in FY '95. The FY '96 egregious cases involved:

✓ DeCoster Egg Farms, of Turner, Maine, \$3.6 million in proposed penalties, for numerous willful violations, including

unguarded machinery and violations of housing requirements for migrant workers;

✓ Lisbon Contractors, Inc., of Danboro, Pa., \$210,900 in proposed penalties, mainly for violations of the trenching standard;

✓ Richter's Bakery of San Antonio, Inc., of San Antonio, Texas, \$1,040,000 in proposed penalties, mainly for willful violations of standards for confined space entry, lockout/tagout of equipment and hazard communication;

✓ J.M. Cashman, Inc., of Quincy, Mass., \$770,000 in proposed penalties, for failing to provide fall protection for employees at a Boston, Mass., construction worksite, and failing to ensure that a subcontractor, Saugus Construction Co., of Georgetown, Mass., provided fall protection for its employees (a worker was killed in a fall at the site);

✓ Saugus Construction Co., of Georgetown, Mass., \$448,000 in proposed penalties, for failing to provide fall protection for its employees at the Boston site; and

✓ AK Steel Corp., of Middletown, Ohio, \$1,015,000, for violations of the lockout/tagout standard.

"The more I observed Washington, the more frequently I visited it, and the more people I interviewed there, the more I understood how prophetic L'Enfant was when he laid it out as a city that goes around in circles."

*John Mason Brown
'Through These Men'
1956*