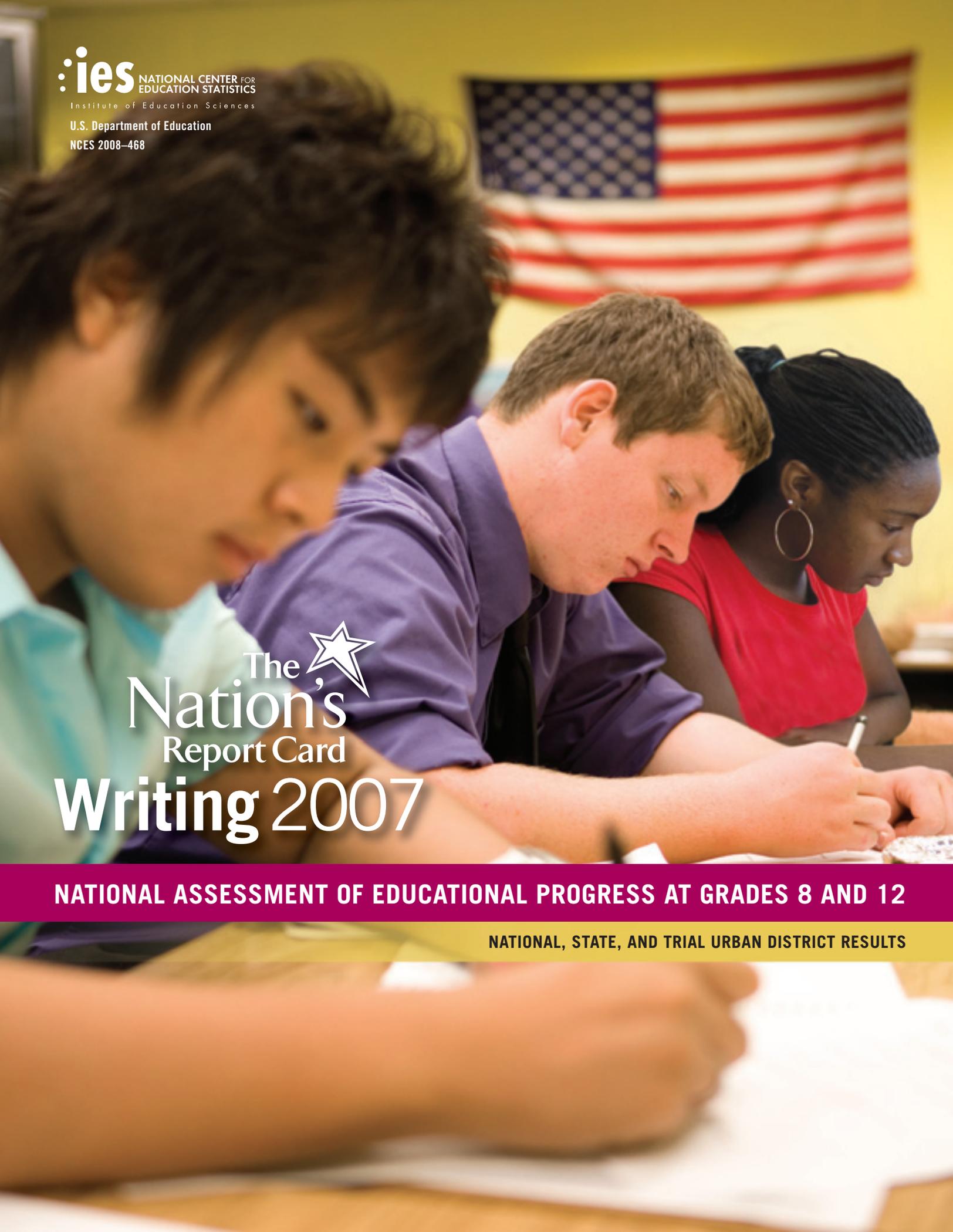


**ies** NATIONAL CENTER FOR  
EDUCATION STATISTICS  
Institute of Education Sciences

U.S. Department of Education  
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The   
Nation's  
Report Card  
**Writing 2007**

**NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS AT GRADES 8 AND 12**

**NATIONAL, STATE, AND TRIAL URBAN DISTRICT RESULTS**

# Executive Summary

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## What is The Nation's Report Card™?

The Nation's Report Card™ informs the public about the academic achievement of elementary and secondary students in the United States. Report cards communicate the findings of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a continuing and nationally representative measure of achievement in various subjects over time.

For over three decades, NAEP assessments have been conducted periodically in reading, mathematics, science, writing, U.S. history, civics, geography, and other subjects. By collecting and reporting information on student performance at the national, state, and local levels, NAEP is an integral part of our nation's evaluation of the condition and progress of education. Only information related to academic achievement and relevant variables is collected. The privacy of individual students and their families is protected, and the identities of participating schools are not released.

NAEP is a congressionally authorized project of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) within the Institute of Education Sciences of the U.S. Department of Education. The Commissioner of Education Statistics is responsible for carrying out the NAEP project. The National Assessment Governing Board oversees and sets policy for NAEP.

The writing skills of eighth- and twelfth-graders improved in 2007 compared to earlier assessment years, with gains across many student groups.

Nationally representative samples of more than 165,000 eighth- and twelfth-graders participated in the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) writing assessment (the assessment was not administered at grade 4 in 2007). Each student responded to 2 out of 20 possible writing tasks intended to measure one of three purposes for writing: narrative, informative, or persuasive.

Results are presented nationally for both eighth- and twelfth-graders, and in participating states and urban districts only for eighth-graders. Comparing the results of the 2007 writing assessment to results from previous years shows the progress eighth- and twelfth-graders are making in improving writing skills.

### Scores increase in 2007 for both eighth- and twelfth-graders nationally

Average writing scores were higher in 2007 than in previous assessments in 2002 and 1998. Increases were also seen since 2002 in percentages of students performing at or above the *Basic* achievement level but not at or above *Proficient*.

#### At grade 8 in 2007

- The average writing score was 3 points higher than in 2002 and 6 points higher than in 1998.
- The percentage of students performing at or above the *Basic* level increased from 85 percent in 2002 to 88 percent and was also higher than in 1998.
- The percentage of students performing at or above the *Proficient* level was higher than in 1998 but showed no significant change since 2002.

#### At grade 12 in 2007

- The average writing score was 5 points higher than in 2002 and 3 points higher than in 1998.
- The percentage of students performing at or above the *Basic* level increased from 74 percent in 2002 to 82 percent and was also higher than in 1998.
- The percentage of students performing at or above the *Proficient* level was higher than in 1998 but showed no significant change since 2002.

## Most racial/ethnic groups gain

As shown in the chart below, average writing scores increased since 2002 for White, Black, and Asian/Pacific Islander students at both grades. The average score for Hispanic eighth-graders was higher in 2007 than in both previous assessments, while there was no significant change for Hispanic students at grade 12.

## Some racial/ethnic and gender gaps are closing

Gains for minority students and male students have contributed to the narrowing of some gaps. At grade 8, the 6-point increase in the average score for Black students from 2002 to 2007 contributed to a smaller gap between White and Black students than in both previous assessments.

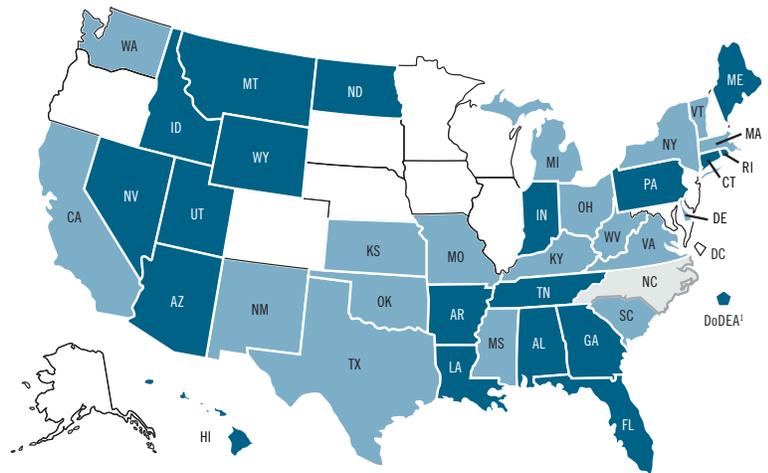
At grade 12, an 8-point increase for male students since 2002 contributed to a narrowing of the male – female gap in comparison to 2002, but there was no significant change in comparison to the gap in 1998.

Student groups	Grade 8		Grade 12	
	Since 1998	Since 2002	Since 1998	Since 2002
<b>Overall</b>	↑	↑	↑	↑
White	↑	↑	↑	↑
Black	↑	↑	↔	↑
Hispanic	↑	↑	↔	↔
Asian/Pacific Islander	↔	↑	↔	↑
American Indian/ Alaska Native	↔	↔	↔	‡
Male	↑	↑	↑	↑
Female	↑	↑	↑	↔
<b>Gaps</b>				
White – Black	↓	↓	↔	↔
White – Hispanic	↔	↔	↔	↔
Female – Male	↔	↔	↔	↓

↑ Indicates the score was higher or the gap increased in 2007.  
 ↓ Indicates the score was lower or the gap decreased in 2007.  
 ↔ Indicates there was no significant change in the score or the gap in 2007.  
 ‡ Reporting standards not met. Sample size is insufficient to permit a reliable estimate.

These and other results can be found at <http://nationsreportcard.gov>.

## Some states gain at grade 8



<sup>1</sup> Department of Defense Education Activity (overseas and domestic schools).

### Of the 39 states and jurisdictions that participated in both 2002 and 2007, average writing scores for eighth-graders in

- 19 states and Department of Defense schools increased,
- 1 state decreased, and
- 18 states showed no significant change.
- Twelve states and the District of Columbia did not participate or did not meet the minimum participation guidelines for reporting.

## Urban districts gain

As shown in the chart to the right, eighth-graders in three of the four districts that participated in both the 2002 and 2007 NAEP writing Trial Urban District Assessments (TUDA) improved. When compared to their home states, Atlanta and Los Angeles made greater gains since 2002.

District	Since 2002
Atlanta	↑
Chicago	↑
Houston	↔
Los Angeles	↑

While scores in 9 of the 10 participating urban districts were lower than the average score for eighth-graders in the nation, when comparing results for only lower-income students, scores in six districts were not significantly different from the nation. Lower-income students in Boston and New York City scored higher on average than their peers in large central cities (i.e., cities with populations of 250,000 or more).

Among the 10 districts that participated in 2007, the average writing score for eighth-graders in Charlotte was higher than the score for public school students in large central cities. Also in comparison to large central cities, scores for students in Cleveland and Los Angeles were lower, and scores in the remaining seven districts were not significantly different.

# Overview of the Writing Assessment

The NAEP writing assessment measures writing skill by asking students to write essays and stories for a variety of audiences. In this way, the assessment collects important information on students' writing ability and offers a broad picture of how well our nation's students can explain, persuade, and describe using written words.

## The Writing Framework

The NAEP writing framework serves as the blueprint for the writing assessment. Developed under the guidance of the National Assessment Governing Board, the framework represents ideas from a wide range of organizations that are part of writing education, including writing experts, school administrators, policymakers, teachers, parents, and others.

Informed by writing research and theory, the NAEP writing framework emphasizes that good writers can communicate effectively in a variety of styles. In addition, effective writing requires a thoughtful approach that includes composing and revising.

The framework specifies that students' writing skills be measured by asking students to write for different purposes and audiences. Tasks on the assessment require students to inform, to persuade, and to tell

stories—real or imagined—and to do so for a range of audiences, among them teachers, newspaper editors, potential employers, and peers.

The current NAEP writing framework was first used to guide the development of the 1998 assessment at grades 4, 8, and 12 and has continued to be used through 2007. (A new framework will be used for the 2011 NAEP writing assessment.) Updates to the framework have provided more detail about the kinds of writing tasks to include in the assessment but have not changed the content, allowing students' performance in 2007 to be compared with previous years. While grade 4 was not assessed in 2007, fourth-graders were assessed in previous years and may be assessed again in the future.

For more information on the framework, visit <http://www.nagb.org>.

## PURPOSE FOR WRITING

**Narrative**—Narrative writing encourages writers to incorporate their imagination and creativity in the production of stories and personal essays. At its best, narrative writing fosters imagination, creativity, and speculation by allowing writers to express their thoughts and to analyze and understand actions and emotions.

**Informative**—In informative writing, the writer provides the reader with information. This type of writing is used to share knowledge and to convey messages, instructions, and ideas. When used as a means of exploration, informative writing helps both the writer and the reader to learn new ideas and to reexamine old conclusions.

**Persuasive**—Persuasive writing seeks to persuade the reader to take action or bring about change. This type of writing involves a clear awareness of what arguments might most affect the audience being addressed. Writing persuasively also requires the use of such skills as analysis, inference, synthesis, and evaluation.

## Assessment Design

The 2007 writing assessment consisted of 20 writing tasks at each grade. To minimize the burden on any one student, each student took only a portion of the assessment, consisting of two 25-minute sections. Each section featured one writing task intended to measure one of the three purposes for writing. The writing tasks incorporated a variety of stimuli to elicit students' writing, including photographs, cartoons, newspaper articles, letters, poems, or literary excerpts. Examples of students' responses are included in this report.

Students had the opportunity to write in a variety of forms, such as essays, letters, and stories. Space was provided in each test booklet section to enable students who chose to do so to engage in prewriting activities. Students were also given a writing brochure that presented them with ideas about how to plan their writing and review what they wrote. They were encouraged to use this in the process of responding to each writing task. While the same general ideas were presented in the brochures for both grades 8 and 12, the wording varied slightly for each grade. Copies of the brochures given to eighth- and twelfth-graders are provided in each grade section of this report.

The emphasis on each purpose for writing varied from grade to grade to match the differing levels of student development and instructional focus. As shown in

table 1, the targeted percentage of assessment time gave comparable weight to all three purposes at grade 8 and stressed informative and persuasive writing at grade 12.

## Scoring Students' Writing

Students' written responses were evaluated according to scoring guide criteria describing six performance ratings: Excellent, Skillful, Sufficient, Uneven, Insufficient, and Unsatisfactory. Specific scoring guides were developed for narrative, informative, and persuasive writing at each grade. Recognizing that a national standardized writing assessment such as NAEP constrains students' opportunities to plan and revise, responses to assessment tasks were viewed as first drafts and not as polished pieces of writing. Only the students' completed responses were considered in the rating process; scorers did not see students' planning pages.

Table 1. Target percentage of assessment time in NAEP writing, by grade and purpose for writing: 2007

Purpose for writing	Grade 8	Grade 12
Narrative	33%	25%
Informative	33%	35%
Persuasive	33%	40%

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.  
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Assessment Governing Board, Writing Framework and Specifications for the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2006.



# Reporting NAEP Results

The students selected to take the NAEP writing assessment represent all eighth- and twelfth-grade students across the U.S. Students who participate in NAEP play an important role by providing information on academic achievement in our nation's schools. NAEP data can only be obtained with the cooperation of schools, teachers, and students nationwide.

Representative samples of schools and students at grades 8 and 12 participated in the 2007 NAEP writing assessment (table 2). The national results reflect the performance of all eighth- and twelfth-graders in public, private, Bureau of Indian Education, and Department of Defense schools. The numbers of schools and students participating at grade 8 were larger than at grade 12 in order to report results for individual states and 10 urban districts. The state and urban district results reflect the performance of eighth-graders in public schools only.

Table 2. Number of participating schools and students in NAEP writing assessment, by grade: 2007

Grade	Schools	Students
Grade 8	6,810	139,900
Grade 12	660	27,900

NOTE: The numbers of schools are rounded to the nearest ten, and the numbers of students are rounded to the nearest hundred.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2007 Writing Assessment.

## Scale Scores

NAEP writing results are reported on a 0–300 scale. Because NAEP scales are developed independently for each subject, average scores cannot be compared across subjects even when the scale has the same range. Although the writing scale score ranges are identical for both grades 8 and 12, they were derived independently, and therefore, scores cannot be compared across grades. For example, the average score of 156 at grade 8 does not denote higher performance than the score of 153 at grade 12.

In addition to reporting an overall writing score for each grade, scores are reported at five percentiles to show trends in results for students performing at lower (10th

and 25th percentiles), middle (50th percentile), and higher (75th and 90th percentiles) levels.

## Achievement Levels

Based on recommendations from educators and members of the general public, the Governing Board sets specific achievement levels for each subject area and grade. Achievement levels are performance standards showing what students should know and be able to do. They provide another perspective with which to interpret student performance. NAEP results are reported as percentages of students performing at or above the *Basic* and *Proficient* levels and at the *Advanced* level.

States may define their assessment standards differently than NAEP. For example, a state's proficient achievement level may be the standard for promotion to the next grade, while NAEP defines the *Proficient* level as competency over challenging subject matter.

As provided by law, NCES, upon review of congressionally mandated evaluations of NAEP, has determined that achievement levels are to be used on

### NAEP ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS

**BASIC** denotes partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at a given grade.

**PROFICIENT** represents solid academic performance. Students reaching this level have demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter.

**ADVANCED** represents superior performance.



a trial basis and should be interpreted with caution. The NAEP achievement levels have been widely used by national and state officials.

## Item Maps

Item maps provide another way to interpret the scale scores and achievement-level results for each grade. The item maps displayed in each grade section of this report show student performance on NAEP writing tasks at different points on the scale.

## Accommodations and Exclusions in NAEP

Many of the same testing accommodations allowed on state and district assessments (e.g., extra testing time or individual rather than group administration) are provided for students with disabilities or English language learners participating in NAEP. Even with the availability of accommodations, some students are excluded from the NAEP assessments by their schools. Jurisdictions vary in their proportions of special-needs students (especially English language learners). These variations, as well as differences in policies and practices regarding the identification and inclusion of special-needs students, lead to differences in exclusion and accommodation rates. These differences should be considered when comparing student performance over time and across jurisdictions.

While the effect of exclusion is not precisely known, the validity of comparisons of performance results could be affected if exclusion rates are comparatively high or vary widely over time. In the 2007 writing assessment, overall exclusion rates (for both students with disabilities and English language learners) in the nation were 3 percent at both grades 8 and 12, state exclusion rates at grade 8 varied from 1 to 7 percent, and the 10 urban school districts excluded from 2 to 11 percent. See appendix tables A-1 through A-5 and A-13 for the percentages of students accommodated and excluded at the national, state, and urban district levels. More information about

NAEP's policy on inclusion of special-needs students is available at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/inclusion.asp>.

## Interpreting Results

Results from the 2007 writing assessment are compared to results from previous assessment years. Changes in performance results over time may reflect not only changes in students' knowledge and skills but also other factors, such as changes in student demographics, education programs and policies (including policies on accommodations and exclusions), and teacher qualifications.

NAEP results adopt widely accepted statistical standards; findings are reported based on a statistical significance level set at .05 with appropriate adjustments for multiple comparisons. In the tables and figures of this report that present results over time, the symbol (\*) is used to indicate that a score or percentage in a previous assessment year is significantly different from the comparable measure in 2007. The symbol is also used to highlight differences between scores or percentages of students in urban districts and those in the nation or large central cities. As a result of larger eighth-grade sample sizes beginning in 2002, smaller differences (e.g., 1 or 2 points) can be found to be statistically significant than would have been detected with the smaller sample sizes used in 1998 or in the twelfth-grade samples.

Score differences or gaps are calculated based on differences between unrounded numbers. Therefore, the reader may find that score differences cited in the text may not be identical to the difference obtained from subtracting the rounded values shown in the accompanying tables or figures.

Not all of the data for results discussed in this report are presented in corresponding tables or figures. These and other results can be found at <http://nationsreportcard.gov>. For additional information, use the NAEP Data Explorer at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nde>.