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2008 Test Scores Show General Improvement with Room to Grow

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2008 TEST SCORES SHOW GENERAL IMPROVEMENT WITH ROOM TO GROW

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Results of the 2008 Arkansas student assessments were released earlier this summer and revealed that Arkansas students continue to improve with respect to the state standards. On nationally-normed exams, Arkansas students perform at roughly the average level.

Students in public elementary and secondary schools in Arkansas take three major standardized exams each year: the Benchmark examinations, the End-Of-Course assessments (EOC), and the Stanford Achievement Tests (SAT-10). The Benchmark tests, which are criterion-referenced and based explicitly on the Arkansas state curricular frameworks, are administered to students in grades 3-8 in math and literacy. The EOC assessments measure proficiency in algebra, geometry, and literacy for high school students.

The norm-referenced SAT-10 exams are used to gauge the achievement of Arkansas students against that of students nationwide. The statewide results on

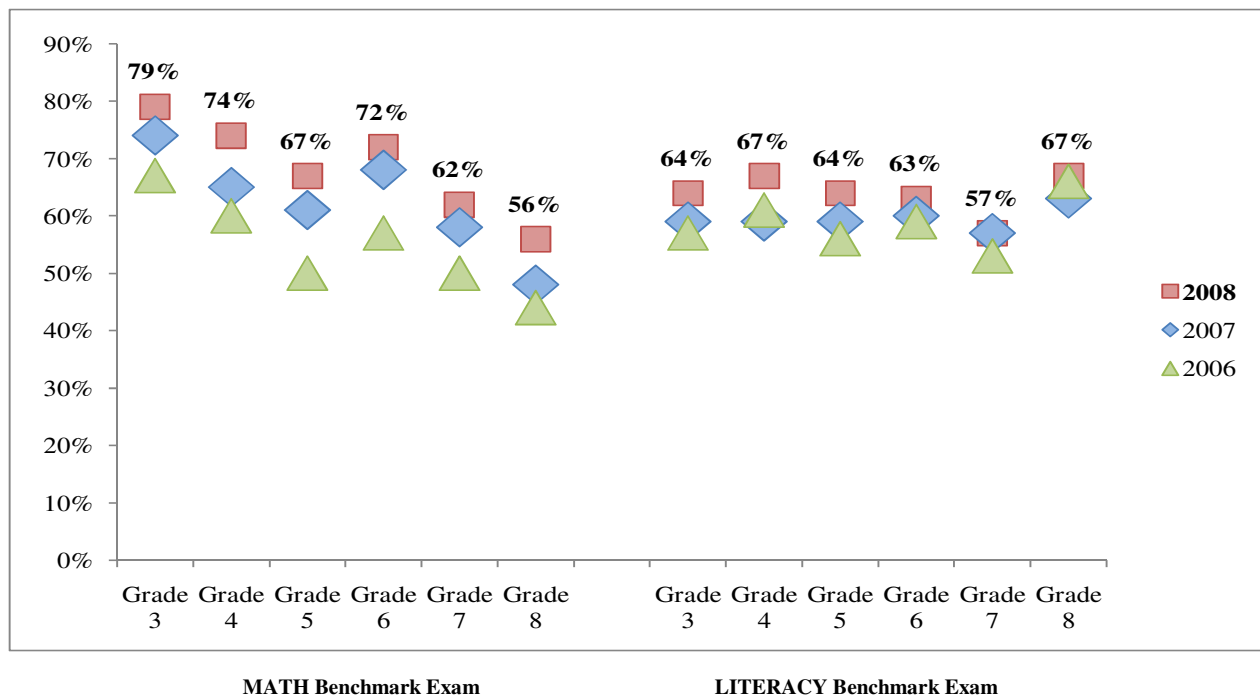
the SAT-10 are presented as percentile rankings, which essentially compare the achievement of Arkansas students to that of all other students in the nation. SAT-10 rankings were reported for grades 1-9 for math and reading, and for grades 5, 7, and 9 on the science tests. Results of the comprehensive language exam were reported for students in grades 3-8.

BENCHMARK EXAMINATIONS

The Benchmark test results revealed continued overall improvement in math and literacy for grades 3-8 (See Figure 1 below).

In both subjects across all grades, the majority of students are performing at proficient or advanced levels. However, achievement in math, as measured by the percentage of students testing at proficient or advanced levels, generally declines from the 3rd grade to the 8th grade, while achievement in literacy is stable across all grades.

Figure 1: Percentage of AR Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced on Benchmark Exams, 2006-08



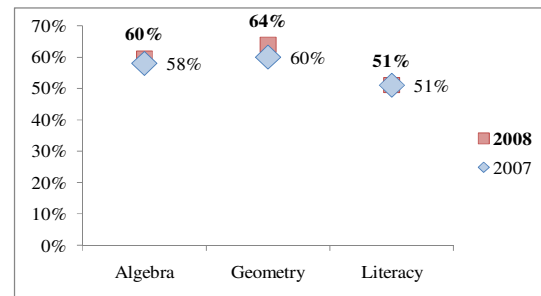
Source: Arkansas Department of Education; see http://arkansased.org/testing/excel/state_summary_2008.xls

END-OF-COURSE ASSESSMENTS

The EOC test results indicate that on the literacy exam, the percentage of students scoring at proficient or advanced has remained constant from the previous school year. All students take the literacy EOC during the spring of their junior year in high school.

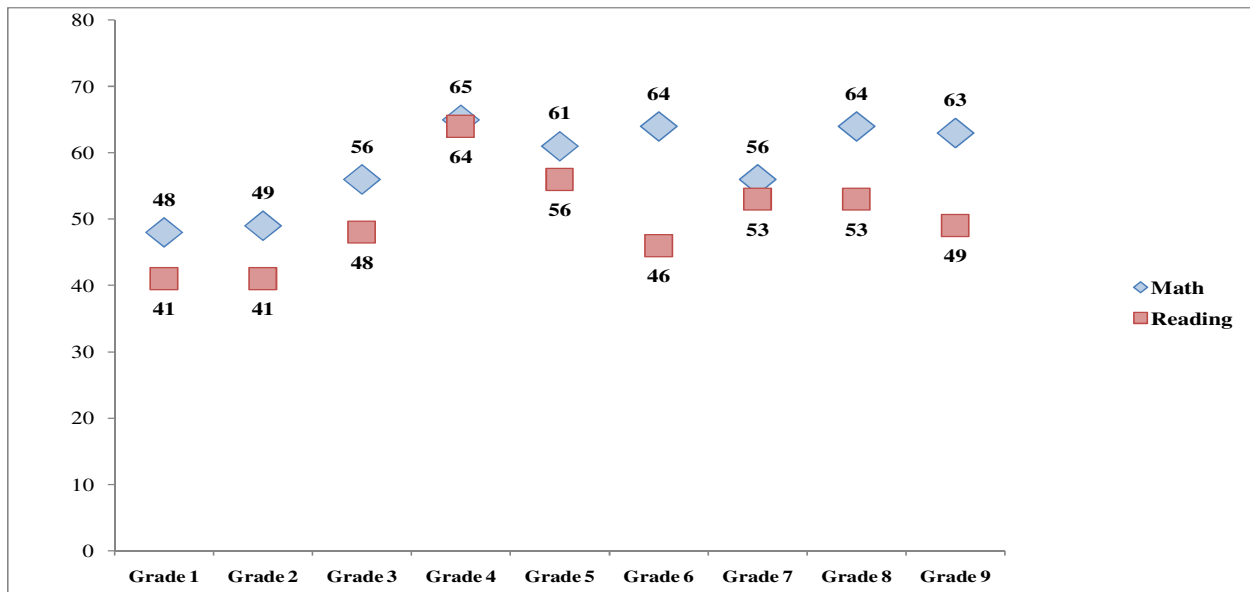
On the algebra and geometry EOC, the majority of students score in the proficient or advanced range, with the results on both tests indicating improvement from 2007 to 2008. Students take the math EOC tests at the end of their algebra I and geometry classes, usually in grades 9 and 10, respectively.

Figure 2: Percentage of Students Scoring Proficient or Better on EOC Exams, 2007-08



Source: Arkansas Department of Education; see http://arkansased.org/excel/state_summary_2008.xls

Figure 3: Percentile Rank of Arkansas Students on the 2008 SAT-10 Math and Reading Tests



Source: Arkansas Department of Education; see http://arkansased.org/excel/state_summary_2008.xls

SAT-10 TESTS

Highlighted in Figure 3 are the percentile ranks of Arkansas students on the SAT-10 math and reading tests, with scores above the 50th percentile reflecting performance above the national average. On the math assessment, Arkansas students in grades 1 and 2 performed at a level slightly below the national average in math. Students in grades 3-9 performed above the national average. In reading, Arkansas students remained near the national average at all grades, performing above the national average in grades 4, 5, 7, and 8 and below the average in the remaining grades.

SUMMARY

The continued improvement of Arkansas students on state assessments is good news. However, we should view this good news cautiously, as disturbing achievement gaps remain between the state's advantaged and disadvantaged students. Further, it is important to “check” the results of state exams with the results of national exams, such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Keep an eye on the OEP web site in the coming weeks to examine these issues, as we publish policy briefs and reports on achievement gaps in Arkansas, the performance of Arkansas students on the NAEP, and the varying levels of standards in place for state exams around the nation.