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## Urban School Progress Continues on State Tests

### *Report Includes City-by-City Profiles of Large-City School District Trends on Math and Reading State Assessments*

WASHINGTON—April 11, 2007—The nation’s big-city school districts continue to improve in reading and mathematics on state-mandated tests, with evidence of racial achievement gaps narrowing and low-performing students making gains, according to a new study.

Students in 67 major city school systems in 37 states posted substantially higher test scores in 2006 than in 2002 in fourth- and eighth-grade mathematics and reading on state assessments, according to *Beating the Odds: A City-by-City Analysis of Student Performance and Achievement Gaps on State Assessments* by the Council of the Great City Schools.

In the report’s seventh annual analysis, Council Executive Director Michael Casserly notes, “The data not only show consistent gains over the past several years,

<b>Increases in Percentages of 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Urban Students Scoring at or above Proficiency in Reading and Math*</b>						
	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>Change</b>
4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Reading	43%	48%	50%	54%	55%	+12 points
4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Math	44%	51%	55%	59%	59%	+15 points
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Reading	34%	37%	37%	38%	42%	+8 points
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Math	35%	39%	43%	46%	46%	+11 points

\*Percentages reflect student performances on differing state assessments in cities that administered the same test in each of five consecutive years

but a more complete picture of progress in urban schools is emerging.”

The *Beating the Odds* findings for the 2005-2006 school year show that 59 percent of urban school students scored at or above proficiency in fourth-grade math on their respective state assessments, a whopping 15 percentage point increase from 44 percent in 2002. For eighth graders, the percentage climbed to 46 percent, compared with 35 percent in 2002, an 11-percentage point rise.

In reading, urban schoolchildren also have posted gains over the last five years. From 2002 to 2006, the percentage of fourth graders scoring at or above proficiency in reading on state tests

rose to 55 percent from 43 percent in 2002 – a 12-percentage point gain. For eighth graders, the percentage increased to 42 percent from 34 percent in 2002, an 8 percentage point hike.

Last year’s report revealed evidence of a parallel upward trend of big-city school districts that volunteered to take the often more-rigorous federal test – the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) – compared with their state tests, two distinctly different assessment tracks now showing similar trends.

### ***Math Achievement***

Although urban school achievement is advancing, it still lags behind state averages. However, 20 percent of big-city school systems scored at or above their respective states in fourth-grade math, while 16 percent did at the eighth-grade level.

Seven major urban school districts – Anchorage, Broward County (Fort Lauderdale), Palm Beach, Portland (Oregon), Sacramento, San Diego and San Francisco -- had both fourth- and eighth-grade math scores that were equal to or greater than their respective states.

Other urban school systems that had average math scores in the fourth grade equal to or greater than their states were Charleston, Christina (Delaware), Long Beach and Seattle. In eighth grade, the urban systems were Hillsborough County (Tampa), Omaha, and Orange County (Orlando).

In examining the proficiency gap in math achievement between city school systems and their respective states, the study found the city-state gap declined by 4 percentage points among fourth graders from 2002 to 2006. The city-state gap among eighth graders proficient in math fell by 2 percentage points.

*Beating the Odds VII* also examined for the first time academic trends among the most “struggling urban students” – those who scored “below basic” levels of proficiency.

From 2002 to 2006, the percentage of urban fourth graders who scored “below basic” achievement levels in math on their respective state tests decreased from 29 percent in 2002 to 19 percent in 2006 – an improvement of 10 percentage points.

In eighth-grade math, urban students who scored “below basic” achievement levels on their respective state tests decreased from 30 percent in 2002 to 26 percent in 2006 – an improvement of 4 percentage points.

“Urban schools are clearly increasing the numbers of students scoring above proficiency levels and decreasing the numbers at the lowest, contributing to overall progress where America wants it most,” said Casserly.

### ***Reading Achievement***

Similar to math, reading scores in urban schools were generally below state averages. But some 18 percent of urban districts had reading scores in grade four that were equal to or greater than their respective states, and 20 percent scored at that level in eighth-grade reading.

Five urban districts – Anchorage, Broward County (Fort Lauderdale), Portland (Oregon), San Diego and San Francisco – showed reading scores that were equal to or greater than their respective states.

Other urban districts – Long Beach, Norfolk, Christina (Delaware) and Seattle -- had fourth-grade reading scores matching or exceeding their states. In eighth-grade reading, Charleston, Orange County (Orlando), Palm Beach and Tucson had scores equal to or greater than their states.

In analyzing the proficiency gap in reading achievement between city school districts and their respective states, *Beating the Odds* found the city-state gap declined by 3 percentage points among fourth graders from 2002 to 2006. The gap of eighth graders proficient in reading fell by 2 percentage points.

Among the most low-performing students, the study found that the percentage of urban fourth graders who scored “below basic” achievement levels in reading on their respective state tests decreased from 27 percent in 2002 to 21 percent in 2006 – an improvement of 6 percentage points.

In eighth-grade reading, urban students who scored “below basic” achievement levels of their respective state tests decreased from 29 percent in 2002 to 25 percent in 2006 – an improvement of 4 percentage points.

### ***Racial Achievement Gaps***

*Beating the Odds VII* indicates that racial gaps in math achievement in urban schools appear to be narrowing. Between 2002 and 2006, 67 percent of urban school districts in the study narrowed the gap between their fourth-grade African-American students and their white peers statewide in math proficiency. In eighth grade, it’s 60 percent.

Among Hispanic students, 62 percent of urban school districts narrowed the gap between their fourth graders and white peers statewide, while 53 percent did in the eighth grade.

The study also found evidence of racial achievement gaps narrowing in fourth- and eighth-grade reading. Between 2002 and 2006, 77 percent of urban school districts in the study reduced the gap between their fourth-grade African-American students and their white peers statewide in reading proficiency. In eighth grade, it’s 67 percent.

Sixty-seven percent of urban school districts narrowed the reading gap between their fourth-grade Hispanic students and their white peers statewide. Some 60 percent reduced the reading gap in eighth grade. Data are also presented on changes in the gaps between students eligible for a free or reduced price lunch and those who are not.

City-by-city profiles of the seventh edition of *Beating the Odds* can be found on the Council’s Web site at [www.cgcs.org](http://www.cgcs.org).

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*The Council of the Great City Schools is the only national organization exclusively representing the needs of urban public schools. It is a coalition composed of 66 large-city public school districts.*