

City schools close test gap

Reading, math scores outperform averages for state

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Memphis City Schools has improved student test scores in reading and math at a rate faster than the rest of the state, according to a national study released Wednesday. Many of the nation's urban school districts have made significant progress meeting state standards in reading and math in the five years since No Child Left Behind was enacted, according to the Council of the Great City Schools. The council is a coalition of the nation's 67 largest city school districts.

Thirty-seven states and the District of Columbia were represented in the report, which looks at fourth- and eighth-grade reading and math test scores in the nation's urban school districts.

Those districts have narrowed the achievement gaps among their mostly poor, minority students and their white, more affluent peers.

In the 2005-06 school year, 59 percent of urban school students scored at or above proficiency in fourth-grade math tests, up 15 percentage points from 2002.

Eighth-graders went from 35 to 46 percent scoring in the proficient or advanced levels.

Gains were also seen in reading. Fourth-graders moved from 43 to 55 percent, and eighth-graders moved from 34 to 42 percent in the same period.

The report, however, noted that urban school districts still often fall below state averages.

That remains true in Memphis, where the city's percentage of fourth-graders scoring at or above proficient was 11 points below the state number for 2006.

"We still have a lot more to do. It's not one strategy that will get us the results," said Memphis Supt. Carol Johnson.

She and Denver school Supt. Michael Bennet were featured during a nationwide conference call Wednesday as an example of the progress being made.

"We think that Carol Johnson in Memphis is doing a tremendous job in leading the reforms of the school district," said Mike Casserly, executive director of the Council of Great City Schools.

Johnson was particularly proud of the scores of the district's middle school students.

When she came to Memphis in 2003, most of the schools on the state's corrective action list were middle schools.

Since then, middle schools have boosted the number of black, Hispanic and special education students meeting the proficient or above level, Johnson said.

The district's eighth-graders went from scoring 64 percent proficient or advanced to 82 percent in four years.

"I would say that No Child Left Behind clarified for us that the focus must be not just on some of the children, but all of the children," she said.

She attributed the success to the district's focus on middle school literacy, helped by a \$16 million federal grant, and increased professional development for principals and teachers.

"We are relying more on data to make decisions on who needs more professional development and where intervention strategies need to be put in place," Johnson said.

MOVING ON UP		
Memphis City Schools was highlighted in a new report by the Council of Great City Schools for increasing the test performance of its students at a faster rate than the state average. To see more of the report, go online to cgcs.org		
	Memphis	State
4th Grade		
Reading	up 5.5%	up 3.5%
Math	up 6%	up 4%
8th Grade		
Reading	up 6%	up 4.5%
Math	up 4.7%	up 1%
<i>Source: Council of Great City Schools</i>		