



CSAP results improve in 14 of 25 tests

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DENVER — State officials on Wednesday said the 10th round of testing under the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) showed widespread improvement over the previous year, proving the value of the tests in improving public education.

Scores improved in 14 of 25 statewide tests, and improvement also was seen in schools previously rated as underachieving.

Officials said gaps narrowed in performance among gender, ethnic, economic and other groups and credited the CSAP tests with giving teachers, parents and schools the information they need to focus on weaknesses.

“We have seen more positive gain across wider, broader categories of students and tests than we’ve ever seen before,” Education Commissioner William Moloney said.

Among the schools singled out by education officials as showing particularly strong improvement was Rocky Mountain Elementary in the St. Vrain Valley RE-J1 district, where teacher Michelle Faye said officials use the tests to pinpoint problems and shape plans for improvement.

“The greatest success, no matter what language, culture or economic status of the child, comes from focusing on the students and what they need to learn,” she said.

In the 2005-06 school year, students were tested in reading, writing and math in grades 3-10 and science in grades 5, 8 and 10. Spanish-language reading and writing tests were administered in grades 3 and 4.

Numbers of students who scored proficient and advanced in statewide reading tests increased in six of eight grades over the past year, except for 3rd and 4th graders.

Math results increased in seven of eight grades in the same period, with 7th graders falling back 1 percentage point. Students from poor families improved on 17 of 25 tests.

Writing scores, however, were flat or declining, except for an improvement for 5th graders.

Black and Hispanic students improved on 17 of 25 tests.

The results showed declines in performance in Spanish-language reading and writing tests, with the numbers of students scoring proficient and advanced in reading dropping by 1 percentage point in grades 3 and 4, and the numbers of students scoring proficient and advanced in writing dropping by 4 points in 3rd grade and 11 points in 4th grade.

Gov. Bill Owens called the overall successes encouraging, but noted a significant number of children are still performing below average.

“We have a long way to go,” said Owens, who must step down after this year because of term limits. “We are focusing, though, on reading, writing, math and science and making some improvement.”

Owens acknowledged criticism that the testing program has led to some declines in class offerings in art, physical education, music, geography and other areas not covered by the tests, whose scores are used to measure schools’ performance and sanction schools that consistently perform poorly.

But he said the tests measure progress in the “basic building blocks of education,” which he said must be addressed before more resources can be used on other parts of the curriculum.

“We do want to look at what is happening and improve it,” he said. “We need to measure to improve.”

State Board of Education member Jared Polis said residents concerned about offering instruction in history, geography, foreign languages and other topics not covered in the CSAP tests should turn to their local school boards.

“CSAP figures are important and show part of the picture, but they were never meant to show the whole picture,” he said.

About 1.5 million tests were administered last spring.