

# NWP Responds to NAEP Writing Assessment

When the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) writing assessment results were released last month, NWP Executive Director Richard Sterling was invited by Secretary of Education Richard Riley to take part in a national press conference in Washington, DC. Sterling was asked to speak to reporters from several major news organizations about the assessment results.

“There is emerging consensus in the field that we do know which practices promote student writing achievement,” Sterling told reporters. “It’s important to see that confirmed in the latest writing assessment results.”

He emphasized that while the NAEP study cannot demonstrate a causal relationship between various home and school practices, the results can serve as a resource for educators to learn more about approaches that support improved writing achievement for all students.

Sterling said he found the results both encouraging and challenging. “While we are discovering what works and we’re pleased to see so many students performing at or above the *Basic* level, we’re

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working hard to move our nation's children up to a higher standard in writing," Sterling said. "The goal of the National Writing Project is to see all students performing at or above the *Proficient* level."

The assessment showed that 84 percent of 4th-graders, 84 percent of 8th-graders and 78 percent of 12-graders performed at or above the *Basic* level of writing proficiency. About one-quarter of students in all three grades performed at or above the *Proficient* level. *Basic* denotes partial mastery of the knowledge and skills fundamental for proficient grade-level work, according to the assessment. *Proficient*

represents solid academic performance and demonstrates competency over challenging subject matter.

Sterling pointed out that the results of the NAEP assessment also demonstrate that the kinds of teaching and writing practices commonly used by NWP teachers lead to higher student writing achievement.

Fourth, 8th and 12th grade students who said they always or sometimes discuss their writing with teachers scored higher than students who said they never did so. Students who reported that their writing was saved in a portfolio throughout the school year also had higher scores than those who did not use portfolios. In addition, the assessment showed that students who plan ahead when writing and write more than one draft also scored higher than their peers.

"This is encouraging news," Sterling said of the findings, "because these broad strategies are advocated by a wide array of researchers, scholars and writing teachers."

In the week after the press conference, the NWP was mentioned in several major news stories about the assessment results, including articles in the Los Angeles Times, Education Week, the San Francisco Chronicle and the Christian Science Monitor.

NAEP conducts annual academic assessments for the National Center for Education Statistics, a division of the U.S. Department of Education. To view the results of the assessment online, including individual state results, go to: <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/writing/writing.asp>.