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Statewide Science Assessment Results Released

MONTPELIER – Statewide science assessment results for Spring 2011 were released by the Vermont Department of Education today. The results are from the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) Science assessments, given to Vermont public school students in grades 4, 8 and 11 in May 2011. This is the fourth year of administration of the NECAP Science Assessment, which combines scores from multiple choice and short answer questions with results from an inquiry task that requires students to analyze and interpret findings from an actual science experiment.

Fifty-three percent of Vermont fourth graders assessed were proficient or higher in science, down one percentage point from last year. In grade eight, 29 percent were proficient or higher, the same as 2010. In grade 11, 31 percent were proficient or higher, up three percentage points from 2010.

“Unfortunately, more than ten percent of the fourth graders scored just a point or two below the proficient mark.” Director of Assessment Michael Hock explained. “The good news for those students is that a proficient score is clearly within their reach.”

As seen in previous years statewide and nationally, an achievement gap persists between students from low-income families and their peers. In grade four, 38 percent of those students were proficient or higher, compared to 65 percent of their peers. In grade eight, 14 percent of those students were proficient or higher, compared to 36 percent of their peers. In grade 11, 15 percent of those students were proficient or higher, compared to 36 percent of their peers. The achievement gaps at grades four and eight have not changed from 2010. However, at grade 11 both student groups improved their scores over last year, though the achievement gap remained the same.

“Although we obviously would like to have higher scores statewide,” said Gail Taylor, Director of the Department’s Research, Standards and Assessments Division, “we are encouraged by the results at grade 11, and by the many individual schools that have high percentages of students scoring proficient or above, some as high as 100%. Our job is to find out what the successful schools are doing and share what we learn with the less successful schools.”

The NECAP assessments were created in collaboration with Rhode Island and New Hampshire. They are designed to specifically assess how well Vermont students have learned the skills and content contained in the Vermont Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities and Grade Expectations.

In addition to releasing the NECAP results, the Vermont Department of Education also announced that Vermont will be among 20 states working with Achieve, Inc., a nonprofit organization that helps states raise academic standards and graduation requirements, to

develop the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). These new standards will clarify and improve understanding of the science content and practices students will need to learn from kindergarten through high school. As one of the lead states, Vermont will gather and deliver feedback from state-level committees, address common issues and challenges, and guide the process of writing the new standards.

“In Vermont, we fully recognize the importance of science achievement for all students as they prepare for college and for challenging careers.” said Pat Fitzsimmons, who was the department’s Elementary Science Consultant prior to becoming Assistant Director of the Research, Standards and Assessment Division. “We are also encouraged by research that shows that good science instruction can help students improve skills in reading, writing and math. We are very excited to be working with Achieve and our partner states in developing new science standards that will guide our teaching and learning for years to come.”

For school reports, visit

http://www.education.vermont.gov/new/html/pgm_assessment/data.html.