

Contacts:

Tracy Dell'Angela
(202) 219-1412

Andrew Kolstad
(202) 502-7374

NAEP STUDY SHOWS WIDE RANGE IN WHERE STATES SET BAR FOR STUDENT PROFICIENCY

(WASHINGTON, DC) – States vary widely in where they set their student proficiency standards in 4th and 8th grade reading and mathematics, according to a new report released today by the National Center for Education Statistics. The report compares proficiency standards of states using the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) as the common metric.

“The study gives policymakers, educators and parents a way to view state proficiency standards using a common yardstick,” said John Q. Easton, Director of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). “It shows that a student seen as proficient in one state might be seen as not proficient in another.”

The report, *Mapping State Proficiency Standards onto NAEP Scales: 2005-2007*, uses NAEP to provide context for understanding the relative stringency of state standards given that each state has its own assessment system and standards for proficiency. The study compared the range of state standards in both 2005 and 2007 and measured changes in the rigor of state proficiency standards when new state standards were set after key aspects of the state assessment system changed.

According to NCES Acting Commissioner Stuart Kerachsky, “NAEP’s unique role in providing comparable state-by-state results makes it valuable in helping us understand the relative stringency of state standards.” This study compared state standards for proficiency to scores on the NAEP scale by translating the point at which a state’s students were deemed proficient on the state assessment to a point on the NAEP scale. That point, or the *NAEP equivalent score*, puts all states on a common scale, and helps identify a state’s proficiency standard in relation to other states.

Results for at least 47 states are included in the study. The range of state standards was wide in the four comparisons made in the study: 4th and 8th grade reading and mathematics. This research report shows that states have widely different criteria for what is proficient performance.

Using NAEP achievement levels as a reference point for understanding the stringency of state standards, most were within the NAEP *Basic* achievement level range, except in 4th grade Reading, where most were below NAEP’s *Basic* level. Overall, only two states set standards within the NAEP *Proficient* achievement level.

However the results in the report need to be understood from a state context, said Lou Fabrizio, Director of Accountability, Policy & Communications in North Carolina and a member of the National Assessment Governing Board.

“NAEP and states approach proficiency differently,” Fabrizio said. “For most states, proficiency means students are performing at grade level. For NAEP, proficiency means competency over challenging subject matter.”

In the report, the NAEP achievement levels were used only to provide context for understanding the rigor of state standards. NCES makes no claim that NAEP achievement levels should be preferred over those of the states.

There were between 12 and 18 states, depending on the grade and subject, which reported changes between 2005 and 2007 in their state testing system. In many cases, the changes did not result in significant changes to the state standard for proficiency. However, of those states that made significant changes in their standards, there were more instances of lower, or less challenging standards, than higher ones.

Of the grade/subject changes in state standards:

- 12 states increased standards;
- 20 made no significant change; and,
- 26 decreased.

Comparisons were made between the changes in state assessment results and changes in NAEP scores. In most cases, the changes in state assessment achievement were confirmed by NAEP.

The study examined state standards in 4th and 8th grade reading and mathematics using data from the 2006-2007 state assessments and from the 2007 NAEP assessments. This research study does not reflect changes states may have made to their performance standards after 2007.

NAEP, often called the Nation’s Report Card, is the only nationally representative assessment of student progress. All states are required under No Child Left Behind to participate in NAEP’s 4th and 8th grade Reading and Mathematics assessments. Students in every state take the same assessment and are measured by the same standard, providing a way to measure and compare state results in any given year and over time.

This report is part of an NCES research series that presents results or discussions that may involve developmental techniques and may not reach definitive conclusions.

The full text of the report is available at:

<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/studies/statemapping.asp>.

NCES is the statistical center of the Institute of Education Sciences in the U.S. Department of Education. IES’ mission is to provide rigorous evidence on which to ground education practice and policy.

###