



Faqs: Mapping State Proficiency Standards

What is NAEP?

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation's Report Card™, is the largest continuing and nationally representative assessment of what our nation's students know and can do in various subjects such as mathematics, reading, science, and writing. Standard administration practices are implemented to provide a common measure of student achievement. Teachers, principals, parents, policymakers, and researchers all use NAEP results to assess academic progress and develop ways to improve education in the United States. NAEP is a congressionally mandated project of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), within the U.S. Department of Education and the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). The National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) sets policy for the NAEP program.

What is the Progress Report on State Proficiency Standards?

NCES developed this study to measure the relative rigor of states' standards for student proficiency. Formally titled, Mapping State Proficiency Standards onto the NAEP Scales: Results From the 2015 NAEP Reading and Mathematics Assessments, this report is the sixth in the series. The report compares states' reading and mathematics proficiency standards using NAEP as the common metric. Because all states participate in NAEP for these grades and subjects, it is possible to compare states' proficiency standards with each other as well as with NAEP standards. For the first time, this report includes standards for the three testing programs: ACT Aspire (ACT), Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC). To prepare this report, NCES analyzed data from state public school results for the 2014–15 school year, and the 2015 NAEP assessment results in reading and mathematics for grades 4 and 8. Some states were not included in the study because they did not have data available. Several states were excluded from the grade 8 analysis because they did not have a general end-of-course test.

The findings in this report indicate that while states continue to have different definitions of student proficiency, those definitions have become increasingly more rigorous over the past decade. Most state proficiency standards were within the NAEP Basic achievement level, though the proficiency standards for PARCC mathematics assessments were within the NAEP Proficient achievement level. Several states, including New York, Kansas, and Alaska, set expectations for proficient performance on their assessments in the NAEP Proficient achievement level.

What does it mean to be *Proficient*?

Achievement levels differ across NAEP subjects and by grades. In general, a student at the Proficient level

demonstrates solid academic performance. Students reaching this level have demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, including subject-matter knowledge, application of such knowledge to real-world situations, and analytical skills appropriate to the subject matter. You can visit the NCES website to see a full breakdown by subject and by grade level, as well as view sample questions that students can correctly answer at each level.

Where do the NAEP achievement levels come from?

NAEP achievement levels, developed by The National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), are intended to measure how well students' actual achievement level matches the achievement desired of them across different subjects. A broadly representative panel of teachers, specialists, and members of the general public help refine and review NAEP achievement levels.

Why is NAEP used as the basis for comparison of state proficiency standards?

States develop or choose their own assessments and set their own standards for determining student proficiency, which prohibits direct comparisons. Since all states participate in NAEP reading and mathematics assessments, at grades 4 and 8, NAEP provides a common yardstick with which the relative rigor of states' bars for proficiency can be compared. The comparison of standards presented here is not intended to suggest that any differences reflect deficiencies in the design of either state assessments or NAEP, or the standards placed on them. Rather, NAEP is used as the point of comparison because it provides a common metric, which allows for comparisons of student proficiency standards across states and over time.

Are the NAEP standards too high?

NAEP's achievement levels indicate what students should know and be able to do according to The National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB). The National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) defines Proficient as demonstrating "competency over challenging subject matter, application of such knowledge to real-world situations, and analytic skills appropriate to the subject matter." The board sets the aspirational policy goal that all students should be proficient.

Standards can serve different purposes. States may construct their standards for the same purpose as NAEP, or they may use them for defining minimum competency, determining promotion to the next grade, or addressing other purposes. Under NAEP's legislation, NAEP's achievement levels remain in a 'trial' status, to be used and interpreted with caution, until the Commissioner of Education Statistics determines that NAEP's achievement levels are reasonable, valid, and informative to the public.

Can achievement be compared across states?

This study is a measure of standards, not of student performance. NAEP scores of the state's student populations would be a better measure of achievement across states than where states set their bar for proficiency.

Why does my state not appear in this report?

Four states—Massachusetts, Montana, Nevada, and North Dakota—were not included in the 2015 study due to

data issues. In Massachusetts, approximately one half of the students took the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System tests and the other half of the students took the PARCC assessments, therefore making the estimated NAEP equivalent score not an accurate expression of the state standard for proficient performance. Montana, Nevada, and North Dakota requested their exclusion from the study as they experienced problems with the administration of state assessments in 2015. Furthermore, in 2015 some states did not have an end-of-grade assessment in grade 8 English Language Arts or mathematics that all students are required to take, as some students take end-of-course tests such as English I, Algebra I, or Geometry. Because of the effects on the estimates, for those states, mapping of grade 8 standards was not shown. They are:

Subject	States
Reading/ELA	Iowa, Texas
Mathematics	Colorado, District of Columbia, Florida, Iowa, Missouri, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Wisconsin

Why does this report not include data from previous reports?

Due to the methodology and the fact that the same states were not analyzed in each report, we cannot compare state-by-state performance equivalently across years. We can compare the proportion of states at certain achievement levels for each grade and subject across years up to 2005. We encourage people to explore previous reports, which can be found online at <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/studies/statemapping/>

