

NAEP Results Show Children Still Left Behind Under NCLB

Recently released National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test scores demonstrate that the pace of educational improvement across the country has slowed since the controversial "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) law went into effect. The data support a growing consensus that the current version of NCLB is not fulfilling its goals and Congress must pass a new education law, one that will actually help schools improve.

In general:

- NAEP gains have slowed or stalled since NCLB was passed.
- Score gaps between racial groups for the most part have narrowed only slightly and less quickly after NCLB was passed.

According to the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), the federal committee charged with oversight of NAEP:

"The average 8th-grade reading score . . . remains below the level of achievement shown in 2002."

"[Mathematics] gains made since 2003 are . . . not as large as those realized during some earlier periods."

The slowing rate of improvement in reading and math comes despite powerful evidence that curriculum is being narrowed to emphasize reading and math and deemphasize other subjects. The probable explanation is the NCLB's pressure to raise scores in two subjects has produced massive teaching to the test, as evidence shows is happening. But the state tests measure very limited, mostly low-level kinds of learning and thinking. The consequences are to both narrow and dumb down curriculum and instruction, leading to a slowdown in the growth on independent measures, such as NAEP.

On the next page, find a set of tables comparing scores by groups over time for reading and math in grades 4 and 8. NCLB went into effect in 2003, so in each category, the comparisons are between the 2000-2003 pre-NCLB period (except grade 8 reading, which is from 1998) and the 2003-2007 period after the law took hold.

This material is on the web at www.fairtest.org.

NAEP Results for Reading & Math, Grades 4 & 8, by Group

Grade 4 Reading

The rate of improvement slowed for all groups (five points in 3 years from 00-03, versus 3 points in 4 years from 03 – 07). For Hispanics, the rate of closing the gap slowed. The actual rate of improvement is about 1 point per year in the latter period for Blacks and Hispanics, down from 2 points per year in the pre-NCLB period. At the current one-point per year improvement rate, the average Black will score proficient in about 35 years; about half of Blacks will not be proficient. Hispanics will show similar results. Since 2002, the gap between students from high- and low-income families narrowed by only one point.

| | 2000 | 2002 | 2003 | 2005 | 2007 [change rate] (Basic = 208, Proficient = 238) |
|------------|------|------|------|------|--|
| Overall | 213 | 219 | 218 | 219 | 221 [00-03 = 5; 03-07 = 3] |
| Black | 190 | 199 | 198 | 200 | 203 [00-03 = 8 points; 03-07, 5 points] |
| Hispanic | 190 | 201 | 200 | 203 | 205 [00-03 = 10 points; 03-07, 5 points] |
| White | 224 | 229 | 228 | 229 | 231 [00-03 = 4 points; 03-07, 3 points] |
| Low Income | 193 | 203 | 201 | 203 | 205 [00-03 = 8 points; 03-07, 4 points] |

Gaps: B/W closed 4 points from 00-03, then 2 points 03 - 07.

H/W closed 6 points from 00-03, then 2 points 03 - 07.

Grade 8 Reading

There has been no improvement, and some decline, in Black, Hispanic and White reading scores since 2002. The longer trends are flat: gains are 0 to 2 points for individual groups from 1998-2007; overall, average scores declined 1 point in 9 years. At the current rate of improvement of about ¼ point per year, the average Black will score proficient in about 140 years. While Hispanic improvement was better in the latter period, the 9-year improvement is 2 points, the same as for Blacks. Since 2002, the gap between students from high and low income families reduced two points. Lower scoring students are not improving: the 10th and 25th percentiles were lower in 2007 than in 2002. Compared with 2003, there was no change -- 217 for the 10th percentile, 242 for the 25th. (There was no 2000 grade 9 reading test.)

| | 1998 | 2002 | 2003 | 2005 | 2007 [change rate] (Basic = 243, Proficient = 281) |
|------------|------|------|------|------|--|
| Overall | 264 | 264 | 263 | 262 | 263 [98-03 = -1 point; 03-07 = 0 points] |
| Black | 243 | 245 | 244 | 243 | 245 [98-03 = 1 point; 03-07 = 1 point] |
| Hispanic | 245 | 247 | 245 | 246 | 247 [98-03 = 0 points; 03-07, 2 points] |
| White | 271 | 272 | 271 | 271 | 272 [00-03 = 0 point; 03-07 = 1 point] |
| Low Income | 245 | 248 | 247 | 247 | 247 [98-03 = 2 points; 03-07, 0 point] |

Gaps: B/W narrowed 1 point from 98-03, then remained the same 03-07.
H/W closed 0 points from 98-03, then closed 1 point 03-07.

Grade 4 Math

The rate of improvement and the rate of closing gaps dramatically slowed, from the pre-NCLB 2000-03 period to the NCLB (03-07) period. For Blacks, the rate of improvement slowed from 4 points per year to 1.5 points per year. At the latter rate, it will take more than 15 years for the average Black to score "proficient" (about half will not be proficient).

| | 2000 | 2003 | 2005 | 2007 [change rate] (Basic = 214, Proficient = 249) |
|------------|------|------|------|--|
| Overall | 226 | 235 | 238 | 240 [00-03 = 9; 03-07 = 5] |
| Black | 203 | 216 | 220 | 222 [00-03 = 13 points; 03-07, 6 points] |
| Hispanic | 208 | 222 | 226 | 227 [00-03 = 14 points; 03-07, 5 points] |
| White | 234 | 243 | 246 | 248 [00-03 = 9 points; 03-07, 5 points] |
| Low Income | 209 | 222 | 225 | 227 [00-03 = 13 points; 03-07, 5 points] |

Gaps: B/W closed 4 points from 00-03, then 1 more point 03-07.
H/W closed 5 points from 00-03, then 1 more point 03-07.

Grade 8 Math

Improvement rates for Blacks and Hispanics remained constant for the 03-07 period compared with the 00-03 period. Gains by Blacks and Hispanics are in the 1.5- to 2-point per year range in the latter period. Blacks closed the gap with Whites at a slower pace after NCLB. With a 2-point per year increase, the average Black will not quite reach proficient in 20 years. With a slower improvement rate, Hispanics will take longer.

| | 2000 | 2003 | 2005 | 2007 [change rate] (Basic = 262, Proficient = 299) |
|------------|------|------|------|--|
| Overall | 273 | 278 | 279 | 281 [00-03 = 5 points; 03-07 = 3 points] |
| Black | 244 | 252 | 255 | 260 [00-03 = 8 points; 03-07, 8 points] |
| Hispanic | 253 | 259 | 262 | 265 [00-03 = 6 points; 03-07, 6 points] |
| White | 284 | 288 | 289 | 291 [00-03 = 4 points; 03-07, 3 points] |
| Low Income | 253 | 259 | 262 | 265 [00-03 = 6 points; 03-07, 6 points] |

Gaps: B/W closed 4 points from 00-03, then 5 more points 03-07.
H/W did not close from 00-03, then closed 3 points 03-07.

Note: almost all changes, even of 1 point, attain statistical significance on NAEP, meaning they have a low likelihood of occurring by chance.

- All data taken from charts available from NCES at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>.