



NEWS RELEASE

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NAEP Report on Student Achievement in Largest States Sheds Light on Direction of U.S. Education

Reading, mathematics, and science scores from five states show regional trends, mirror national challenges

WASHINGTON—A National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report card for the first time summarizes results in several subjects from multiple states—and holds clues to challenges and achievements from which other states may learn.

“*Mega-States: An Analysis of Student Performance in the Five Most Heavily Populated States in the Nation*” reveals demographic shifts and achievement trends in the most heavily populated states, whose students together represent nearly 40 percent of the nation’s public school students. Decades of data and long-term trends collected in reading, mathematics, and science from the regionally representative “mega-states”—California, Florida, Illinois, New York, and Texas—provide a comprehensive portrait of student achievement in the midst of America’s shifting demographics.

“By reflecting results from every region of our country, this report sheds light on the overall direction of educational progress, as other states are also experiencing the demographic and economic challenges similar to those the largest states face,” said David P. Driscoll, chair of the Governing Board. “This first-of-its-kind report has lessons for all, and is a tool that policymakers, parents, and educators should use to take stock of how the nation is doing, and to take steps to increase student achievement and close achievement gaps for children in all states.”

The report presents academic performance for students in grades 4 and 8 in reading, mathematics, and science. The findings include average scores among the five states, as well as national averages and results among various demographic groups. Results are also reported at or above the *Proficient* achievement levels. While *Basic* denotes partial mastery of the prerequisite skills and knowledge fundamental for proficient work, *Proficient* represents solid academic performance.

Between 1990 and 2011, data show that, proportionately, the education system came to include more Hispanic students and fewer white students: In 1990, 7 percent of eighth-grade students nationally were Hispanic, compared with 23 percent in 2011. This shift happened in all five states to varying degrees. California saw an increase of 22 percentage points in its population of Hispanic students (from 30 to 52 percent), and New York’s Hispanic population grew 9 percentage points in that time. Concurrently, the percentage of white students decreased in all states, most dramatically in California, Illinois, Texas and Florida.

In terms of performance, the report showed large gains for Hispanic students. Between 1992 and 2011, Hispanic fourth graders in New York made larger reading gains than their national peers, while the percentage of Hispanic fourth graders in Florida reading at or above *Proficient* in 2011 was higher than for the nation and the other mega-states. Hispanic eighth graders in Texas made academic gains in mathematics, bringing average scores up by 38 points since 1990. In 2011, Texas boasted the highest percentage of Hispanic eighth graders at or above *Proficient* compared with Hispanic peers in the nation and other mega-states. That same year, the percentages of Hispanic students performing at or above the *Proficient* level in mathematics and science in fourth grade were higher in Florida and Texas than in the nation.

There are 2.9 million English language learners (ELL) in the five states. Among all the states in the nation, California enrolled the largest number of public school ELL students—a number that exceeds the total enrollment of all students (ELL and non-ELL combined) in 41 states and the District of Columbia. The percentages of ELL students performing at or above *Proficient* in fourth-grade reading in the mega-states were not significantly different from their peers nationally.

The percentage of black students in the nation and in the mega-states has not changed significantly, but there have been notable achievement gains for black students in California, Florida, and Texas. From 1992 to 2011, average reading scores for fourth-grade black students in California and Florida increased by 28 and 25 points respectively. In Florida, among eighth graders, black students were the only racial/ethnic group that made larger reading gains than their peers across the nation from 1998 to 2011. In California, the achievement gap in mathematics between black and white fourth graders narrowed by 12 points since 1992, and in Texas, the average scores of eighth-grade black students rose 42 points—the largest gain among the mega-states. On the science assessment, a higher percentage of black students in Texas performed at or above *Proficient* at both grade levels when compared with students across the nation.

Overall, progress toward *Proficient* over time is promising in mathematics but mixed in reading. Since 1990, average scores for fourth- and eighth-grade students in mathematics increased despite demographic shifts in all five mega-states. Florida fourth graders made larger mathematics gains than their peers across the nation, while Texas made the largest score gains in mathematics at grade 8.

In reading, four states demonstrated progress toward *Proficient* in fourth grade, but only Florida showed statistically significant reading gains for eighth graders. In Illinois, reading scores in fourth grade were stagnant and average eighth-grade scores are down one point from 2003 to 2011.

With few exceptions, California has trailed the nation and the other four mega-states at both grade levels in assessments administered over the past 10 years in reading, mathematics, and science. Of the five states, California has the greatest number of schools, spends less than the national average per pupil, has the highest student-to-teacher ratio, and has consistently performed lower than the national average in all subjects.

“This landmark report clearly shows us how these states have progressed over the past two decades,” said Driscoll. “We’re seeing gains in the levels of proficiency, and bright spots in closing achievement gaps among our children—but there’s still room for improvement.”

Highlights by subject:

Reading

- Fourth-grade Florida students with disabilities and those from low-income backgrounds made greater gains than their peers in the nation from 2003 to 2011.
- The percentage of low-income New York eighth graders performing at or above *Proficient* was higher than for the nation.

Mathematics

- The percentage of fourth-grade Hispanic students at or above *Proficient* in 2011 was higher in Florida and Texas than in the nation.
- In 2011, the percentages of eighth-grade students at or above *Proficient* were higher in Texas than for the other mega-states and the nation. This was true for white, black, and Hispanic students as well as for students attending city schools and those from low-income families.

Science

- Compared with the nation, the percentage of low-income fourth-grade students performing at or above *Proficient* in Florida was higher, while Illinois, New York, and Texas were not significantly different.
- In 2011, eighth-grade students in Texas scored higher than the nation and other mega-states.

A Web version of the report with interactive ways to explore is available at www.nationsreportcard.gov/megastates. Visit www.nagb.org/mega-states for more information and materials on recent results.

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The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is a congressionally authorized project sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. The National Center for Education Statistics, within the Institute of Education Sciences, administers NAEP. The Commissioner of Education Statistics is responsible by law for carrying out the NAEP project.

The National Assessment Governing Board is an independent, bipartisan board whose members include governors, state legislators, local and state school officials, educators, business representatives, and members of the general public. Congress created the 26-member Governing Board in 1988 to set policy for NAEP.