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## **Center on Education Policy Analysis of 8<sup>th</sup>-Grade Achievement Finds Improvement in Most States; Widening Gaps at Advanced Level**

*Report reveals Asian American 8<sup>th</sup> graders outpacing peers in reading and math*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – April 5, 2011– Contrary to the perception that 8<sup>th</sup>-grade achievement is stagnating, a new analysis by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) finds upward trends in reading and math test scores in most states.

Progress is strongest in math, where every state with sufficient data made gains in the percentage of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students reaching the advanced level and all but one of these states showed gains at the proficient level. In most of these states, however, gaps have widened between lower- and higher-achieving subgroups of 8<sup>th</sup> graders at the advanced level in math.

The report, *State Test Score Trends Through 2008-09, Part 3: Student Achievement at 8<sup>th</sup> Grade*, is the third in a series of CEP reports on test score trends between the 2002 and 2009 school years. This report examines 8<sup>th</sup> grade trends at three achievement levels: basic and above, proficient and above, and advanced, and tracks changes in achievement gaps by race, ethnicity, gender and income.

The analysis draws on data from all 50 states and the District of Columbia but focuses on the 43 states with three or more years of comparable test data. Individual state profiles are available for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. CEP chose the 8<sup>th</sup> grade for its middle school analysis because it has longer trend lines than grades 6 and 7, and because it is the grade tested for other national and international assessments. For the first time, CEP also looks at gaps between student subgroups performing at the advanced level at grade 8.

“It’s widely perceived that students in the middle grades are doing poorly. If that were true, we would expect to see flat scores and little progress when compared with elementary or high schools,” said Jack Jennings, CEP’s president and CEO. “To the contrary, more states showed gains at grade 8 than showed gains at grade 4 and high school.”

All states with sufficient data on advanced achievement (42 states) showed gains in the percentage of 8<sup>th</sup> graders reaching the advanced level in math, while 35 of them posted similar gains in reading with five showing declines and two showing no change.

Some states were noteworthy for their annual gains at the advanced level. For example, Virginia 8<sup>th</sup> graders gained an average of 5 percentage points a year in both reading and math.

The report also analyzes 2009 reading and math scores by student subgroups, including African American, Asian American, Latino, Native American, white, and low-income students. Overall, Asian American 8<sup>th</sup> graders outperformed all subgroups in reading and math at the proficient and advanced levels. A median of 41 percent of Asian Americans reached the advanced level in math across all states with sufficient data – far higher than any other subgroup. In 10 of 28 states with sufficient data, the percentage of Asian Americans scoring at advanced in math was more than 20 points higher than the percentage for white students.

“Our analysis found an unexpectedly large achievement gap between Asian American and white students in math at the advanced level,” Jennings said. “This gap has largely escaped the attention of researchers, policymakers and the public.”

CEP also looked at the trends in gaps at the advanced level for 8<sup>th</sup> grade from as far back as 2002 through 2009. Among the key findings, achievement gaps at the advanced level widened for African American, Latino and Native American 8<sup>th</sup> graders in the majority of states with sufficient data. The gap in math achievement between students who are low-income and those who are not also widened in all but one of these states. Overall, Asian American students tended to have the largest annual gains in both reading and math at the advanced level.

In many states, average annual gains for African American, Latino, Native American and low-income students were smaller at the advanced level than gains for white, Asian or students who were not low-income. As a result, gaps have widened between lower-achieving and higher-achieving groups, despite progress by all groups.

“We still have a lot of work to do to move more African American, Latino, Native American and low-income students up to the advanced level,” Jennings said. “These students have shown gains, but their achievement must accelerate.”

The report is available for free at [www.cep-dc.org](http://www.cep-dc.org).

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*Based in Washington, D.C., and founded in 1995 by Jack Jennings, the Center on Education Policy is a national independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. The Center does not represent special interests. Instead, it helps citizens make sense of conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create conditions that will lead to better public schools.*