



NEWS RELEASE

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Student Achievement in Reading and Mathematics Has Increased Overall Since Passage of the No Child Left Behind Act

Report Finds More Evidence of Achievement Gaps Narrowing Than Widening Since 2002

WASHINGTON – June 5, 2007 – Student achievement in reading and math has increased since the No Child Left Behind Act was enacted in 2002, according to the most comprehensive and thorough study to date of the results of state tests administered as part of the landmark federal education law.

In addition, the number of states in which achievement gaps among groups of students have narrowed far exceeds the number of states in which gaps widened since 2002, according to *Answering the Question that Matters Most: Has Student Achievement Increased Since No Child Left Behind?*, a report from the Washington, D.C.-based Center on Education Policy (CEP).

The study is unique as it includes verified data from all 50 states – much of which is available for the first time in the report – and investigates achievement trends both before and after the passage of NCLB. The report also limits its analysis to testing data that is comparable from year-to-year, eliminating data in grades and subjects where states have made significant changes to their assessment systems.

The report also uses two methods for evaluating achievement, including the percentage of students considered proficient – the primary measure of adequate yearly progress under NCLB – and effect sizes, a measure based on average test scores that addresses some of the limitations of the percentage proficient measure. Using either method, the report finds that the number of states showing achievement gains since 2002 is far greater than the number showing a decline. In addition, yearly gains are generally greater after 2002 in states where comparable data prior to 2002 was available.

However, the report notes that the gains cannot be attributed directly to No Child Left Behind, as considerable federal, state and local reform efforts have all been underway prior to and since 2002.

“American educators and students were asked to raise academic achievement, and they have done so,” said Jack Jennings, president & CEO of the independent, private nonprofit Center on Education Policy. “The weight of evidence indicates that state test scores in reading and mathematics have increased overall since No Child Left Behind was enacted. However, there should be no rush to judgment as there may be many factors contributing to the increased achievement.”

The study identified several possible reasons for the results, including increased learning, teaching to the test, more lenient tests, scoring or data analyses, and changes in the populations tested. “Any or all of these factors in combination could be contributing to these trends,” the report indicates.

Biggest Gains at the Elementary Level

Using the percentage of students reaching proficiency and effect sizes, the report finds that the biggest improvements since 2002 were seen in elementary level math, where 22 of 25 states with comparable data demonstrated moderate-to-large gains on both measures, and no state showed a moderate-to-large decline. When looking at only at the percentage of students scoring proficient, 37 of 41 states with trend data in elementary math showed moderate-to-large gains.

Reading performance has also increased since 2002, especially at the elementary level. Of the 25 states with sufficient trend data for elementary reading, 14 states made gains based on both performance measures. When looking only at the percentage proficient, 29 states experienced moderate-to-large gains, while only two states experienced declines. Additional findings from the report include the following:

- § **Average yearly gains in test scores were greater after 2002 than before in nine of 13 states with sufficient data to determine achievement trends before and after NCLB.** Four other states experienced slower rates of increase since 2002. However, the report warns that because such a limited number of states had both pre-and post-NCLB data, it is difficult to say whether this trend is truly representative of the national picture.
- § **There is more evidence of achievement gaps narrowing than widening since 2002, though gaps remain substantial.** In 14 states the gaps between White and African American students have narrowed in reading at all three grade spans, while no state had reading gaps that widened at all grade spans. White-Hispanic gaps narrowed at all three grade levels in reading in 13 of the 40 states with sufficient data.
- § **Data required to perform rigorous analyses of achievement trends are not available in many states.** While NCLB requires states to report a massive amount of test data used to gauge school effectiveness, mandatory data was sometimes incomplete. CEP found that complete data on the percentage of students proficient were available on the Web in just 25 states. Further, data on the numbers of students tested were available for students in general in 44 states and for subgroups of students in 43 states. CEP analyzed up to 16,000 data points in each state for the report.

“The ever-changing nature of test results that are continuously modified due to revisions, appeals, corrections, rescoring, and other administrative issues makes an accurate and complete picture of NCLB a moving target,” said Jennings. “There is a clear need for more transparency in test data.”

The report is the first of a three-phase study of student achievement and represents a continuation of a broader national study of federal, state, and local implementation of NCLB that CEP has been conducting since 2002. Throughout 2007, CEP will release additional new research on the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act.

The report, *Answering the Question that Matters Most: Has Student Achievement Increased Since No Child Left Behind?*, is available online at <http://www.cep-dc.org>.

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Based in Washington, D.C. and founded in January 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 any special interests. Instead the Center helps citizens make sense of the conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create conditions that will lead to better public schools. For more information, please visit <http://www.cep-dc.org>.