



NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Chloe Louvouezo at 202-955-9450 ext. 314 or clouvouezo@communicationworks.com

New Study Finds Asian American Students Generally Outperform Other Racial/Ethnic Subgroups in State Reading and Math Tests

*High Performance for the Asian American Subgroup
Tends to Mask Academic Needs of Lower-Performing Asian American Students*

WASHINGTON—June 30, 2010—A new study from the Center on Education Policy (CEP) shows that in 2008, Asian American students were often the highest performing racial/ethnic subgroup in math in grades 4, 8, and high school, and in reading in grades 4 and 8. Asian American students also made greater gains between 2002 and 2008 than the white subgroup, ending up further ahead of white students than when they started. Some Asian students are struggling academically, however—a reality that is sometimes overlooked because of the high achievement of the group as a whole.

The study, *Policy Implications of Trends for Asian American Students*, summarizes key results for Asian American students on the state tests used for accountability under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. CEP analyzed 2008 state test results, as well as trends since 2002 in the percentages of Asian American students reaching various achievement levels. Findings for the study were drawn from test data gathered by CEP from all 50 states.

Overall, the study finds that the percentage of Asian American students scoring at the proficient level increased on state tests of both reading and math. In 2008, Asian American 4th graders also outperformed other racial/ethnic subgroups in reading and math to an even greater degree at the advanced level than at the proficient level.

According to the report, Asian American students tend to perform better in math than in reading. The study finds that in 2008, Asian American students led other subgroups in math at grades 4, 8, and the high school grade tested for NCLB. In addition, the median percentage proficient in math was higher for Asian American students than for other racial/ethnic subgroups at all three levels. In reading, Asian American students led other racial/ethnic groups at grades 4 and 8, but in high school reading, white students outperformed Asian American students.

“The high test scores of Asian American students as a whole tends to mask the academic needs of Asian American students who are struggling academically,” said Jack Jennings, CEP’s president and CEO.

Despite national rising achievement of Asian American students, the subgroup had notably lower achievement on state tests than the white subgroup in four states—Alaska, Hawaii,

Minnesota, and Wisconsin. In some cases, the white subgroup outperformed the Asian American group in reading by as much as 15 to 20 percentage points in these four states. In these and other states, the Asian American subgroup includes student populations with greater poverty, lower average achievement, and unique educational challenges, such as Hmong refugee children and Native Hawaiians.

Consistent with the data reported by states for NCLB accountability, the patterns highlighted by CEP deal with the performance of Asian American students in the aggregate. The Asian American subgroup is extremely diverse, however, and includes many students who perform across the full spectrum of achievement, as well as students with widely varying nationality, cultural, language, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The variation among states in the performance of Asian American students could be attributed to this diversity, as well as to the fact that nearly one in four Asian American students in the country is an English language learner (ELL). In addition, many Asian American students are immigrants or refugees, and some come from families with lower-incomes and educational rates.

“Students learning English need extra help, regardless of ethnic or racial background,” said Jennings.

The report considers policy implications of Asian American achievement trends, such as looking at the Asian American experience to consider the impact of such factors as student motivation and parental expectations. CEP also offers several policy recommendations to strengthen achievement for Asian American students, including refining language proficiency assessment and other testing policies for ELLs; developing or refining programs that expand learning opportunities for ELLs; and providing professional development to improve the cultural awareness and effectiveness of teachers and school leaders in working with Asian American students.

In review, below are key highlights to consider from the report:

- As a group, Asian American students often outperformed other racial/ethnic subgroups in reading and math at grades 4, 8, and the high school grade tested. In high school reading, however, white students did better than Asian American students in most states with sufficient data and sufficiently large Asian subgroups.
- The Asian subgroup is extremely diverse and includes a wide variety of nationality, language, and socioeconomic groups. The high performance for the Asian American subgroup as a whole tends to mask the academic needs of Asian American students who are struggling, are immigrants or refugees, have limited English proficiency, or come from Asian nationality or ethnic groups with higher poverty and lower educational rates.
- Local, state, and national attention is needed for Asian American students who are not high achievers and those who are English language learners. On the positive side, policymakers could look at the Asian American experience to consider the impact of such factors as student motivation, effort, and parental expectations.

To coincide with the release of this report, **CEP is also releasing two other reports that look at the performance of African American and Latino students on state reading and math tests.** To request copies of these reports, please contact Chloe Louvouezo. Other related research is available on CEP's Web site, 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.