



**EMBARGOED RELEASE:**  
Wednesday, Oct. 5, 2011, 12:01 a.m. EDT

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## **High School Test Score Gains Lag Behind Earlier Grades According to New Study by the Center on Education Policy**

### *Achievement at Advanced Level Declines in Many States*

WASHINGTON, D.C.—(Oct. 5, 2011)—While high school scores on state English language arts and math tests have risen since 2002 in most states, new data show smaller proportions of states making gains in high school compared with 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. The data, published in the Center on Education Policy's new report, also show a striking lack of progress and widening gaps at the advanced level in many states.

CEP's report, *State Test Score Trends Through 2008-09, Part 5: Progress Lags in High School, Especially for Advanced Achievers*, is based on state test results from 40 states and the District of Columbia. States were included if they had at least three consecutive years of test data through school year 2008-09 for the high school grade assessed for the No Child Left Behind Act, generally grade 10 or 11.

High school students in more than three-fourths of the states analyzed made gains in average test scores and percentages of students scoring proficient, the study found. But compared with grades 4 and 8, a smaller share of states made gains and a larger share showed declines. In addition, high school gains tended to be smaller than gains in grades 4 and 8.

"These trends show that progress in raising achievement is lagging in high school, so these students may not be adequately prepared for life after graduation," said Jennifer McMurrer, CEP research associate and co-author of the study. "The data can't tell us why, but we can speculate about contributing factors, such as institutions and instruction that aren't meeting the needs of high school students, low student motivation, and fewer resources for remediation at high school compared with the earlier grades."

The study also reveals a lack of progress among high school students at the advanced achievement level. Although the percentage of high school students reaching the advanced level has increased since 2002 in a majority of the states analyzed, one-third or more of these states showed declines at the advanced level for high school students. Declines at this level were more prevalent at high school than at grades 4 and 8.

Progress has also lagged at the advanced level for major groups of high school students, including racial/ethnic minority students, low-income students, and boys and girls. In a large majority of the states analyzed, all of these groups made gains in both average test scores and percentages scoring proficient. But fewer states posted gains

for subgroups at the advanced performance level. In English language arts, the percentage of students reaching the advanced level declined in one-third to one-half of the states analyzed for all groups except Asian Americans.

“We’re not sure what’s behind these troubling declines at the advanced level,” said Nancy Kober, CEP consultant and co-author of the study. “Clearly, some students aren’t taking challenging courses like algebra and geometry early enough. High achievers may also be getting less attention amid the intense focus on bringing students to proficiency. It’s also possible that they are more motivated to score well on the SAT or AP tests, which have more impact on their future, than on state tests.”

Moreover, achievement gaps have often widened at the advanced level in high school, in contrast to a broad trend of narrowing gaps for high school students at the proficient level and in average test scores. Gaps in the percentage of high school students reaching the advanced level widened more often than they narrowed, especially in math. The African American-white gap in advanced high school achievement widened in two-thirds of the states analyzed, and the Latino-white gap widened in three-fifths of these states.

“These trends show a need to rethink high school education,” said Jack Jennings, CEP’s president and CEO. “The adoption by 44 states of common academic standards for high schools affords us the opportunity to do that.”

The report, along with achievement trends for individual states, can be accessed free of charge 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.*