



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **States Narrow Achievement Gaps in Reading and Math, Though Some Gaps Remain Large**

#### ***50-State Study Shows Scores Increase Across Subgroups and Subjects***

WASHINGTON, D.C. – October 1, 2009 – Student achievement gaps for minority and low-income students have narrowed across all grade levels and subjects in 74 percent of all trend lines between 2002 and 2008, according to a report released today by the Center on Education Policy (CEP). Despite this progress, achievement gaps continue to be a challenge, widening in 23 percent of trend lines studied in the report.

The report, *State Test Score Trends Through 2007-08, Part 3: Are Achievement Gaps Closing and Is Achievement Rising for All?*, reflects findings from the third year of a multi-year study of student achievement. The report describes overall achievement trends and gap trends among African American, Latino, and Native American students and their white and Asian counterparts, and between low-income students and those who are not low-income.

CEP's study analyzes state test data in three different ways. Elementary school math and reading scores from all 50 states are examined to see if gains were made across all three achievement levels—basic, proficient, and advanced—and whether progress is lagging at any level for specific subgroups. The report also looks at gaps between subgroups in the percentage scoring "proficient" to see whether these gaps at the elementary, middle, and high school grades have narrowed, widened, or stayed the same since 2002. In addition, the study looks at achievement gaps in average test scores for different groups.

The report finds that in general, achievement for minority and low-income students has gone up and achievement gaps have narrowed in most states, although gaps are still large. Gains made by various racial/ethnic subgroups have outpaced gains by white or non-low-income students in most states. Across subgroups and states, there was more progress in closing gaps at the elementary and middle school levels than at the high school level.

Most often gaps narrowed because the achievement of lower-performing subgroups went up rather than because the achievement of higher-performing subgroups went down. However, with gaps still widening in 23 percent of cases, test scores for lower-

scoring subgroups must increase at a faster rate in order to close gaps—a main goal of the No Child Left Behind Act.

In addition, progress in narrowing gaps was less rosy when gaps were analyzed using average test scores rather than the percentage of students scoring proficient. Still, gaps in average test scores narrowed more often than they widened.

“The good news from this study is that, overall, states have made progress in closing achievement gaps,” said Jack Jennings, president and CEO of CEP. “However, now is not the time to let up. There is still much work to be done.”

According to the report, all subgroups made more gains than declines in grade 4 at all three achievement levels. Overall, state test results broken out by subgroup were more positive in math than in reading at all achievement levels. Between one-fourth and one-third of the states with data saw declines in the percentage of student in various subgroups reaching the advanced level in reading.

Progress in closing gaps in both reading and math was particularly noteworthy for Latino and African American students. Gaps in the percentage of students scoring proficient narrowed in 79 percent of the trend lines studied for Latino students and 77 percent of the trend lines for African American students—a higher share than for other subgroups. Despite this progress, African American students still had the largest average gaps in percentages of students scoring proficient than any other subgroup. Meanwhile, the Asian subgroup generally outperformed all other subgroups, including white students, in all subject and grade level combinations except high school reading.

This report is part 3 of CEP’s 2009 series, *State Test Score Trends Through 2007-08*, which looks at student achievement trends since NCLB was enacted in 2002. Parts 1 and 2 of the series, *Is the Emphasis on Proficiency Shortchanging Higher- and Lower-Achieving Students?* and *Is There a Plateau Effect in Test Scores?*, are available online at [www.cep-dc.org](http://www.cep-dc.org),

Also, available at the same web site are individual profiles showing subgroup trends for each of the 50 states.

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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.*