



NEWS RELEASE

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New CEP Report Provides In-Depth Look at State Progress In Raising Achievement for Students with Disabilities; Cites Problems with Data

WASHINGTON, D.C.—November 17, 2009—Since 2006, more states have shown gains than declines in the performance of students with disabilities on reading and mathematics tests, according to a new report by the Center on Education Policy (CEP). The report cautions, however, that imprecise data make it difficult to obtain a clear picture of achievement for this group of students.

The report, *State Test Score Trends Through 2007-08: Part 4. Has Progress Been Made in Raising Achievement for Student with Disabilities?*, analyzes trends in the reading and math performance of students with disabilities from 2006 to 2008 at three achievement levels on the state tests used for No Child Left Behind accountability. The report also highlights reasons why test data are “fuzzy” for these students.

At the elementary, middle, and high school levels, more states showed gains in the percentage of students with disabilities scoring at the proficient level than showed declines, according to CEP’s analysis. In addition, students with disabilities have made progress in grade 4 at three achievement levels—basic-and-above, proficient-and-above, and advanced. Even with this progress, however, large differences—as much as 30 or 40 percentage points—exist between the performance of students with disabilities and non-disabled students.

The report highlights several data issues that make it difficult to draw precise conclusions about the performance of students with disabilities. First, states administer two or three types of assessments to students with disabilities—the regular state test and one or two types of alternate assessments, each with its own definition of proficient performance; the percentage of students with disabilities assessed with alternate assessments may vary widely from state to state and year and year. Second, many states have yet to demonstrate that results from their alternative assessments are valid, or that testing “accommodations,” such as individually administered tests or more time to complete tests, do not affect the validity of results. Third, in some states, the number of test-takers with disabilities has changed rapidly over the years studied by CEP in ways that could affect achievement trends.

“The differences among states in approaches for testing students with disabilities and reporting results make it hard to obtain a clear picture of achievement for students with disabilities,” said Jack Jennings, CEP’s president and CEO. “Federal and state policymakers should take steps to clarify how results for students with disabilities on state tests are reported so that trends will be more valid and meaningful in the future.”

This report is part 4 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 through 3 of the series are available online at 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.