The state of the achievement gap

Focus

Examines overall achievement for different subgroups of students and whether achievement gaps between subgroups have decreased, remained the same, or increased. Presents specific data and findings for each of the seven states included in the study.

Methodology

Analyzed data from state reading and mathematics tests in seven states (CA, IL, MS, NY, NC, OR, and TX) from 2002 through 2005. Grades 3, 5, 8, and high school were examined (except in NY, where grades 4, 7, and 10 were examined). Also looked at achievement gaps on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Major Findings

- **Evidence of gaps.** Achievements gaps existed in both state test and NAEP results in all seven states studied. These gaps could be quite large, ranging from 11 percentage points to more than 40. Gaps were found between white and black students, white and Hispanic students, and students with disabilities and non-disabled students, and for other ethnicities including Asians and American Indians.

- **State differences.** While achievement on state tests and standards was relatively high in the early grades in some states, such as Texas, North Carolina, and Mississippi, achievement decreased as students matriculated through the system. North Carolina and Mississippi both showed measurable gains in closing gaps in the earlier years, while gap closure in Texas stagnated and sometimes reversed in high school. Other states showed little progress in either raising achievement or closing gaps.

- **Mixed trends by grades and subjects.** In all of the states, progress in overall achievement and gap closure was mixed, varying from grade to grade and subject to subject.

- **Gaps on NAEP.** Even though overall achievement on NAEP was below achievement on state assessments, the achievement gaps on NAEP data were generally comparable to state assessments with a few exceptions.

Where to Obtain

http://www.aspeninstitute.org/atf/cf/%7BDEB6F227-659B-4EC8-8F84-8DF23CA704F5%7D/AchievementGap1.19.07.pdf
Has student achievement increased since 2002? State test score trends through 2006-07*

Focus

Describes trends in scores on the state tests used for NCLB accountability. Examines trends in overall achievement and achievement gaps from 2002 (the year NCLB was enacted) through 2007. Compares state test score trends with trends in state-by-state results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Includes profiles for each state with test score trends and information about the state’s testing system.

Methodology

Collected, verified, and analyzed extensive test data in reading and mathematics, through 2006-07 where available, from all 50 states. Looked at percentages of students scoring proficient, as well as effect sizes, an indicator based on average test scores. Analyzed trends in state NAEP results for all states. Limited analysis to test results that were comparable from year to year and took other steps to address common problems with comparisons of achievement data.

Major Findings

- **State gains.** Since 2002, the percentages of students scoring proficient on state reading and math tests have gone up in most states with at least three years of comparable test data. Gains tended to be larger in elementary and middle school grades than in high school. Achievement has also risen in most states according to effect sizes.

- **NAEP and state tests.** Trends in reading and math achievement on NAEP have generally moved in the same positive direction as trends on state tests, although gains on NAEP tended to be smaller. The exception was in grade 8 reading, where fewer states showed gains on NAEP than on state tests, especially using effect sizes.

- **State gap trends.** In states with sufficient data to determine gap trends, gaps on state tests have narrowed more often than they have widened since 2002, particularly for African American and low-income students. Trends were also largely positive for Latino students, but this finding is less conclusive because in many states the Latino subgroup has changed significantly in size. On the whole, percentages proficient and effect sizes revealed similar trends of gaps narrowing or widening, although percentages proficient gave a more positive picture than effect sizes.

- **NAEP gap trends.** Gaps on NAEP have also narrowed more often than they have widened in states with sufficient data to determine trends. The exception was in grade 8 math, where gaps widened more often than they narrowed for most subgroups. NAEP results showed less narrowing of gaps than state tests did.

- **Caution about causation.** It is impossible to determine the extent to which recent achievement trends have occurred because of NCLB. Since 2002, many different but interconnected actions have been taken at the federal, state, and local levels to raise achievement. Furthermore, NCLB has affected all public school students, so there is no suitable comparison group to show what would have happened without NCLB.

*For additional information, see the summary for CEP’s 2007 achievement study, Answering the Question That Matters Most.
Where to Obtain

http://www.cep-dc.org
Center on Education Policy, 2007

Answering the question that matters most: Has student achievement increased since No Child Left Behind?*

Focus

Examines test data from all 50 states to determine whether student achievement on state tests has increased and whether achievement gaps between subgroups of students have closed since NCLB was implemented in 2002. Includes profiles for each state with test score trends and information about the state’s testing system.

Methodology

Collected and analyzed extensive test data in reading and mathematics, through 2005-06 where available, from all 50 states for state tests used for NCLB accountability. Had states verify the accuracy of their data. Looked at percentages of students scoring proficient, as well as effect sizes, an indicator based on average test scores. Limited analysis to test results that were comparable from year to year and took other steps to address common problems with achievement data. Included pre-NCLB (1999-2002) and post-NCLB test results where comparable data were available.

Major Findings

- **State test score gains.** In most states with three or more years of comparable test data, student achievement in reading and math has gone up since 2002, the year NCLB was enacted.

- **Gap trends.** There is more evidence of achievement gaps between groups of students narrowing since 2002 than of gaps widening. Still, the magnitude of the gaps is often substantial.

- **Pre- and post-NCLB trends.** In 9 of the 13 states with sufficient data to determine pre- and post-NCLB trends, average yearly gains in test scores were greater after NCLB took effect than before.

- **Caution about causation.** It is very difficult, if not impossible, to determine the extent to which these trends in test results have occurred because of NCLB. Since 2002, states, school districts, and schools have simultaneously implemented many different but interconnected policies to raise achievement.

- **Test data availability.** Although NCLB emphasizes public reporting of state test data, the data necessary to reach definitive conclusions about achievement were sometimes hard to find or unavailable, or had holes or discrepancies. More attention should be given to issues of the quality and transparency of state test data.

Where to Obtain

http://www.cep-dc.org

*For additional and updated information, see the summary for CEP’s 2008 achievement study, Has Student Achievement Increased Since 2002?
†For additional information from state officials about the achievement trends discussed in this report and the impact of NCLB, see the 2007 report from the Human Resources Research Organization and Center on Education Policy, Behind the numbers: Interviews in 22 states about achievement data and No Child Left Behind policies.
Center on Education Policy and Human Resources Research Organization, 2007

Behind the numbers: Interviews in 22 states about achievement data and NCLB

Focus

Reports evidence from state experts about the test score trends identified in CEP’s 2007 report, Answering the Question That Matters Most: Has Student Achievement Increased Since No Child Left Behind? Reports the views of state officials about the impact of NCLB provisions on achievement and other outcomes and their suggestions for changing the law.

Methodology

Interviewed state education officials in the 22 states with the longest periods of comparable test data before and after NCLB.

Major Findings

- **Confirmation of trends.** State officials interviewed generally confirmed the accuracy of the achievement data and trends reported in CEP’s 2007 achievement study. Several provided additional information, explanations, or clarifications.

- **Limited research-based evidence.** Most states had not done their own evidence-based studies of achievement trends or factors that might explain these trends. State officials said this was largely due to a lack of staff and rising demands on staff.

- **Changes in testing systems.** Many states had changed their testing systems since 2002, often in ways that made it invalid to compare test data over time. The most common changes were done to comply with NCLB, such as testing more grades, disaggregating data for subgroups, or assessing English language proficiency. Many states made other types of changes, such as revising the content standards on which tests are based, adding new tests or modifying existing tests, changing the cut scores defining proficient performance, and changing test contractors.

- **Future changes.** Many states were pursuing additional changes in their testing systems that would affect the future comparability of test data, such as revising content standards, changing high school exams, or adopting new or additional assessments. Some states planned to make more test data available to the public.

- **Need for technical assistance.** Many states emphasized the need for federal technical assistance (and often funding) to improve the capacity of states and school districts to collect and analyze data required by NCLB. Some states desired better information, guidance, or research from the federal government about best practices for improving achievement or closing achievement gaps.

- **Anecdotal evidence.** State officials usually cited anecdotal evidence rather than research studies to support conclusions about the impact of NCLB on achievement. Several states felt that disaggregating data for subgroups had improved achievement. But most interviewees did not see NCLB accountability requirements as a very effective way to identify low-performing schools or raise student achievement.

Where to Obtain

www.cep-dc.org
Focus

Comprehensive study that describes the federal, state, and local implementation and impact of various provisions of NCLB during school years 2004-05 and 2005-06. Summarized below are the study’s findings about achievement.

Methodology

Collected data through a survey of all 50 states, a nationally representative survey of 299 school districts, case studies of 38 geographically diverse districts and 42 schools, three national forums, and six special analyses of critical issues in implementing NCLB.

Major Findings

- **Gains reported on surveys.** According to the study’s national surveys, 78% of districts reported that student achievement had improved from 2003-04 to 2004-05 on state tests used for NCLB. During this period, 35 states said achievement had improved in reading, and 36 states said it had improved in math. But NAEP showed no gains in reading and small gains in math from 2002 to 2005. Case studies of school districts revealed a more mixed and complex view of achievement, with fluctuations in achievement from year to year or in different grades.

- **State and district views of factors contributing to gains.** States and districts cited school district policies and programs as important contributors to achievement gains more often than they cited NCLB requirements. About three-fourths of the states responding to CEP’s survey rated district policies as “important” or “very important” causes of increased student achievement, and most also rated state policies as important or very important. About 79% of the districts surveyed rated their own policies as important or very important causes, far more than those crediting federal policies for gains. However, about half of the district officials surveyed cited NCLB’s adequate yearly progress requirements as an important factor in rising achievement—a view echoed by two-thirds of the states with rising achievement.

- **Effect of regulatory changes.** While evidence from the study suggested that increased learning accounted for some of the gains in state test results, many states have also taken advantage of additional flexibility from ED to make policy changes that may have resulted in more students being counted as proficient. It is not clear to what extent state policy changes have contributed to rising percentages of students reaching proficiency.

- **Achievement gaps.** More than two-thirds of the states reported that achievement gaps between student subgroups were narrowing or staying the same in math, and about four-fifths of states said gaps were narrowing or staying the same in reading. Similarly, more school districts said that gaps were narrowing or staying the same than said that gaps were widening.

Where to Obtain

http://www.cep-dc.org
From the capital to the classroom: Year 3 of the No Child Left Behind Act

Focus

Comprehensive study that describes the federal, state, and local implementation and impact of various provisions of NCLB during school years 2003-04 and 2004-05. Summarized below are the study’s findings about achievement.

Methodology

Collected data through a survey of 49 states, a nationally representative survey of 314 school districts, case studies of 36 geographically diverse districts and 37 schools, three national forums, and four special analyses of critical issues in implementing NCLB.

Major Findings

- **Gains reported on survey.** Student achievement was improving on the state tests used for NCLB according to 73% of the states and 72% of the school districts surveyed by the study. States and districts were also more likely to report that achievement gaps between white and African American students, white and Hispanic students, and English language learners and non-ELL students were narrowing rather than widening or staying the same. Testing experts caution, however, that these achievement gains should be considered preliminary rather than definitive because high-stakes testing and accountability programs can cause early spikes in state test scores that do not persist over time or do not show up to the same extent on other tests.

Where to Obtain

http://www.cep-dc.org
The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, 2006

Tracking achievement gaps and assessing the impact of NCLB on gaps

Focus

Analyzes trends in scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress tests in reading and mathematics for public school 4th and 8th graders of different racial and socioeconomic groups. Looks the pre-NCLB (1990-2001) and post-NCLB (2002-2005) periods.

Methodology

Used NAEP’s national-level and state-level aggregate measures of performance in scale scores. Also used the percentages of students scoring at or above the NAEP proficient level. Drew from the 1990-2005 NAEP public school sample for the NAEP reading and math assessments at grades 4 and 8.

Major Findings

- **Overall impact of NCLB.** NCLB did not have a significant impact on improving reading and math achievement across the nation and states. The national average scores on NAEP remained flat in reading and grew at the same pace in math after NCLB as they did before. In grade 4 math, there was a temporary improvement right after NCLB, but it was followed by a return to the pre-reform growth rate.

- **Proficiency on NAEP.** If the trend through 2005 were to continue, only 24% to 34% of students would meet the NAEP definition of proficiency in reading by 2014, and 29% to 64% would meet it in math.

- **Gap trends.** NCLB has not helped the nation and states significantly narrow the achievement gap. The racial and socioeconomic gaps in NAEP reading and math achievement have persisted after NCLB. There was some reduction in gaps in math right after NCLB, but the progress was not sustained. If the trend through 2005 were to continue, the proficiency gap between advantaged white and disadvantaged minority students would not close by 2014, and the percentage of poor and black students meeting the NAEP proficiency definition would be 25% in reading and less than 50% in math.

- **Lack of scale-up.** NCLB’s attempt to scale up the alleged success of states that adopted test-driven accountability policies before NCLB did not work. It did not enhance academic improvement in the first generation of states with test-driven accountability (such as Florida, North Carolina, and Texas), nor did it transfer the effects to a second generation of states. Both first and second generation states failed to narrow NAEP reading and math gaps after NCLB.

- **Inflated gains.** The state assessment results that are the basis of NCLB accountability are misleading because they tend to significantly inflate proficiency levels and proficiency gains and to deflate achievement gaps. The higher the stakes of the state assessments, the greater the discrepancies between state and NAEP results.

Where to Obtain

http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/esea/nclb_naep_lee.pdf
Council of the Great City Schools, 2008

Beating the odds: An analysis of student performance and achievement gaps on state assessments. Results from the 2006-2007 school year

Focus

Examines progress in student achievement among inner-city schools through spring 2007. Also measures achievement gaps between cities and states, minority and white students, and economically advantaged and disadvantaged students. Includes demographic and staffing data for the urban school districts studied. Part of a series of annual reports.

Methodology

Analyzed district-level achievement data for 66 urban school districts from 37 states and D.C. Data showed results of state math and reading tests used for NLCB and were collected from state Web sites, databases, and other sources. Trends covered the years with comparable data in each district between 2000-01 and 2006-07.

Major Findings

- **Math gains.** Mathematics achievement improved in urban schools. The percentage of 4th graders in the Great City Schools scoring at or above the proficient level in math increased by 16 percentage points, from 47% in 2003 to 63% in 2007. The percentage proficient among urban 8th graders similarly increased by 13 percentage points, from 42% to 55%.

- **Math achievement gaps.** Gaps in math achievement in urban schools appeared to be narrowing. In 4th and 8th grade math, some progress was made in reducing racial-ethnic achievement gaps over the six years analyzed.

- **Reading gains.** Reading achievement improved in urban schools. The percentage of 4th graders in the Great City Schools scoring at or above the proficient level in reading rose by 9 percentage points, from 51% in 2003 to 60% in 2007. The percentage proficient among urban 8th graders similarly increased by 8 percentage points, from 43% to 51%.

- **Reading achievement gaps.** Gaps in reading achievement in urban schools appeared to be narrowing. In 4th and 8th grade reading, some progress was made in reducing racial-ethnic achievement gaps over the period analyzed. Urban school achievement is below state averages in reading.

- **Urban compared with state.** Despite significant gains in performance, urban school achievement still stood below state averages in math and reading.

- **Urban context.** The urban districts that belong to the Council of Great City Schools enrolled 15% of the nation’s public school students, but a greater share of the nation’s minority students. Students in urban schools are more likely to be African American, Hispanic, or Asian American; to come from low-income families; and to come from non-English speaking homes.

Where to Obtain

http://www.cgcs.org/publications/BTO8_Revised.pdf
Economic Policy Institute, 2006

“Proficiency for all”—An oxymoron

Focus

Examines whether NCLB’s goal of 100% proficiency by 2014 is obtainable and if not, what a more reasonable goal would be.

Methodology

Investigated the varying meanings of proficiency according to NCLB and the National Assessment of Educational Progress and the distribution of student performance on NAEP and international exams.

Major Findings

• Unattainable goal. There is no date by which all (or even nearly all) students in any subgroup can achieve proficiency. By ignoring the inevitable and natural variation among individuals, NCLB is deeply flawed; no goal can simultaneously be challenging to and achievable by all students across the entire achievement distribution. Impossible gains would be required for all students to reach NAEP’s challenging academic standard of proficiency. Even the world’s top-performing countries are far from being able to meet a standard of “proficiency for all,” as NAEP defines it. Remedial programs may contribute to higher achievement for cohorts already moving through the system but probably cannot succeed in realizing the goals of NCLB.

• Gap-closing goal. Closing the achievement gap, which implies the elimination of variation between socioeconomic groups, is very difficult but worth striving for.

• Shift in NAEP “proficient” definitions. Over time, NAEP has moved away from its original scale and norm-referenced reporting of results to criterion-referenced reporting, a move that has politicized standardized testing. The language and structure of NCLB law assumes “challenging” proficiency standards, signaling the intention that all students should be proficient according to NAEP’s definition. However, NAEP’s current definitions of proficiency are fraught with subjectivity. Making judgments of what students ought to be capable of, rather than basing judgments on observations of what actual students can achieve, yields results that the federal government itself acknowledges should be “interpreted with caution.”

• Lower standards not the answer. The problem with the 100% proficient goal can’t be fixed by lowering NCLB’s expectations, which would effectively return NCLB to the “minimum competency” accountability standard of the 1970s that the law was intended to reject. Even if the goal were lowered to meeting the equivalent of NAEP’s “basic” performance level, many students would still fall short.

• Alternative approach. The authors suggest a statistical procedure, inspired by business “benchmarking” and based on norm-referenced measures of academic achievement, that could be used to establish strenuous but realistic achievement goals. The report describes a 19-year program that might bring a cohort of children from birth to maturity with high achievement.

Where to Obtain

Primary progress, secondary challenge: A state-by-state look at student achievement patterns

Focus

Examines patterns of student achievement from 2003 through 2005.

Methodology:

Analyzed state reading and math achievement data for 2003 through 2005 from the elementary, middle, and high school assessments used for NCLB accountability. Examined overall achievement patterns and progress in closing achievement gaps between groups of students. The study was limited to states with comparable data for the years analyzed, a total of 23 to 32 states, depending on grade level and subject.

Major Findings

- **General trends.** While student achievement in reading and math had risen in many states, much work lay ahead to ensure that all students met state standards. Progress in raising achievement and closing gaps was strongest in the elementary grades, and stronger in math than in reading.

- **Elementary level.** Overall achievement gains were most consistent in the elementary grades, where math achievement increased in 29 of 32 states and reading achievement increased in 27 of 31 states. Elementary achievement declined in 1 state in math and in 3 states in reading.

- **Middle and high school levels.** Middle and high school achievement improved somewhat, especially in math. In middle school math, 29 states improved overall achievement while 1 lost ground and 1 saw no change. Middle school trends were more mixed in reading, where overall achievement increased in 20 of the 31 states, declined in 6 states, and did not change in 5 states. The trend of more success in math than reading was seen in high school, as well. High school math results increased in 20 of 23 states and decreased in 2. High school reading results increased in 17 of 24 states and decreased in 5.

- **Gap trends.** In the elementary grades, 26 of 30 states narrowed the African American-white math gap. Twenty-four of 29 states narrowed the Latino-white reading gap. The majority of these states narrowed the gap by raising achievement for white students and simultaneously accelerating improvements for minority students. There was much less progress in narrowing gaps in the middle and high school grades, especially Latino-white gaps. Fewer states reported data to analyze gaps by income, but in states that did, high school trends were discouraging. In high school math, the gap between poor and non-poor students widened or stayed the same in 8 of the 12 states analyzed. In high school reading, this gap widened or stayed the same in 6 of 13 states.

Where to Obtain

**Focus**

Examines student achievement on state assessments to determine whether the NCLB accountability provisions have helped to spur improvements.

**Methodology**

Examined achievement of students on state assessments from 2002 through 2004 in 29 states at the elementary level, 28 states at the middle school level, and 23 states at the high school level. States with at least three years’ worth of comparable, publicly available data were included in the analyses.

**Major Findings**

- **Secondary progress lagging.** After two full school years of implementing NCLB, states made progress in reading and math at the elementary grades, but results lagged in the middle grades and high schools, particularly when it came to narrowing achievement gaps.

- **Elementary trends.** At the elementary level, 28 of the 29 states analyzed increased achievement from 2002 through 2005 in math, and 20 of 28 states raised achievement in reading. The majority of states reduced gaps between student groups in both math and reading at the elementary level.

- **Middle school trends.** At the middle school level, 24 states improved overall performance in math, but only 16 of the 27 states examined raised scores in reading. Middle school reading achievement declined in eight states and did not change in three more.

- **High school trends.** Fewer states raised overall performance in high schools. On math tests, 14 states made overall gains; 6 dropped in overall achievement, and 1 saw no change. In reading, 11 states improved overall scores, while results declined in 6 states and remained flat in 3.

- **Gap trends.** Many states are not achieving the goal of narrowing gaps between subgroups at the secondary level. In middle school reading, more states saw gaps narrow than widen, but in some cases gaps narrowed because achievement of white students went down. In middle school math, the Latino-white gap widened or stayed the same in more states than it narrowed in. The gap between poor and non-poor students narrowed in just nine states. States made the least progress in closing gaps at the high school level.

- **Consistency.** In many states, progress was not consistent across grades. A handful of states lost ground for several groups across all three grades levels.

**Where to get the study online:**

Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO), 2008

Are advanced students advancing? Examining achievement trends beyond proficiency

Focus

Examines changes in the percentage of students scoring at the “advanced” or top achievement level on the state tests used for NCLB. Also looks at the magnitude of achievement gaps for subgroups of students at the highest achievement levels.

Methodology

Analyzed test data provided and verified by all 50 states on students performing at the top achievement level at the elementary and middle school grades from 2002 to 2006. Analyses of trends were limited to states with comparable years of data. Data were originally collected for the achievement studies of the Center on Education Policy.

Major Findings

- **State differences in top group.** There were wide disparities across states in the percentages of students classified in the top achievement level, ranging from a minimum of 2% to a maximum of 51% to 62%, depending on the subject and grade assessed. Average percentages of students classified in the top achievement level ranged from 17% (middle school math) to 23% (middle school reading). Interpreting these differences is complicated, however, because state definitions of top-level (advanced) performance vary widely.

- **Gains for top group.** In the majority of states, the average annual percentage of students classified in the top achievement level increased across all grade and subject combinations. Still, several states saw declines in the percentages of top-performing students in each subject/grade combination analyzed. Elementary grades tended to have slightly greater increases than middle grades, and more states showed gains in math than in reading. About one-fourth of the states experienced declines in the percentages of top-performing students in both elementary and middle school reading.

- **Widening gaps.** Across grade levels, subjects, and subgroups, achievement gaps at the top level generally did not narrow. This was particularly true in math, where about three-quarters of the states with comparable data saw gaps widen. And in reading, more than half the states with comparable data saw gaps widen. The average changes in gaps at the top performance level varied across states.

Where to Obtain

Focus

Investigates the impact of NCLB on student achievement and growth by comparing achievement trends before (school year 2001-02) and after (school year 2003-04) the implementation of NCLB. Also examines the impact of NCLB on the performance and growth of students in various subgroups.

Methodology

Used data from the Growth Research Database of the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA), which allows student achievement and growth to be compared on a common, stable scale. Examined performance on the NWEA tests in reading for more than 320,000 students in grades 3 through 8 in 200-plus school districts in 23 states, and in mathematics for more than 334,000 students in grades 3 through 8 in 200-plus school districts in 22 states.

Major Findings

- **Overall gains in reading and math.** Reading and mathematics scores improved in the first two years after NCLB was implemented (between 2001-02 and 2003-04).

- **Less growth for all racial-ethnic groups.** The rate of student growth declined in the first two years after NCLB was implemented. Slight decreases in growth were found for every major racial-ethnic group.

- **Greater changes in math.** The overall gains in test scores—as well as the declines in the rate of growth—were greater in math than in reading.

- **Higher achievement in grades with state tests.** Students in grades tested in state assessment programs had higher achievement and growth on the NWEA tests (an independent measure) than students in grades not included in state assessments. The presence of a state test that measures, monitors, and reports student achievement appeared to provide some impetus to improved learning.

- **Shrinking achievement gaps.** Gains for African American, Native American, and Hispanic students were large enough to cause a modest narrowing of the achievement gaps between these subgroups and white and Asian students.

- **Less growth for Hispanic students.** In every grade and subject analyzed, growth of Hispanic students tended to be lower than that of Anglo students with exactly the same initial score.

Where to Obtain

http://www.nwea.org/research/nclbstudy.asp
Focus

Seeks to judge the effects of NCLB on achievement by examining long-term national trends on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the share of students deemed proficient under state versus NAEP definitions, and comparisons of trends on state tests and NAEP.

Methodology

Analyzed data from NAEP and state assessments in 12 diverse states for the period from 1992 to 2006, with particular focus on the performance of 4th graders.

Major Findings

- **Importance of NAEP trends.** To answer the question of whether NCLB is working, one should not rely on state testing programs and the jagged trend lines that stem from their results. Instead, it is important to focus on historical patterns informed by NAEP. State tests exaggerate the percentage of 4th graders deemed proficient and above compared with NAEP results.

- **Pre- and post-NCLB trends.** In the 12 states analyzed, earlier test score growth largely faded after enactment of NCLB in 2002. Gains in math achievement persisted in the post-NCLB period, albeit at a slower rate of growth.

- **Different proficiency definitions.** Performance in many states appeared to continue climbing after NCLB. But the bar defining proficiency has been set much lower in most states than the NAEP definition of proficiency, and the disparity between state and NAEP results has grown since 2001.

- **Progress in narrowing gaps.** Progress seen in the 1990s in narrowing achievement gaps has largely disappeared in the post-NCLB era.

Where to Obtain

http://www.aera.net/uploadedFiles/Publications/Journals/Educational_Researcher/3605/07EDR07_268-278.pdf
Is the No Child Left Behind Act working? The reliability of how states track achievement

Focus

Examines whether state testing systems provide an accurate and consistent indicator of students’ proficiency and whether the federal rules and resources are prompting achievement gains.

Methodology

Compared trends from 1992 through 2005 in state test results and results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress for 12 diverse states. Also analyzed achievement changes for the three years after NCLB was enacted in 2002.

Major Findings

- **Reading.** Across 12 states there was a small improvement in the percentage of children achieving proficiency in reading, based on NAEP results between 1992 and 2005. But state tests estimated much higher shares of students reaching proficiency than the NAEP results show.

- **Math.** Children made greater progress in math proficiency than in reading over the 13-year period analyzed, but state test results exaggerated the annual rate of improvement compared with NAEP results.

- **Disparities between state and NAEP results.** Disparities between state and NAEP estimates of proficiency are not new. States have long claimed that a much higher share of students are proficient relative to NAEP results, even before NCLB created the incentive for states to set a low bar.

- **Post-NCLB trends.** During the three school years after NCLB was enacted in 2002, some states maintained their apparent momentum in raising the percentage of 4th graders scoring proficient in math, as gauged by state and NAEP exams, while reading performance leveled off or slipped in several states. Two states with weak accountability systems prior to NCLB (Arkansas and Nebraska) experienced gains in math proficiency after enactment of NCLB but not in reading.

Where to Obtain

http://pace.berkeley.edu/2006/06/01/is-the-no-child-left-behind-act-working-the-reliability-of-how-states-track-achievement/
Focus

Investigates the extent to which adolescents (students in grades 4 through 12) are meeting state and national literacy goals as measured by state assessments and the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and whether results from these two types of assessments are consistent with one another.

Methodology

Collected assessment data in English language arts from all states, mostly from testing year 2003. Examined NAEP results for grades 4 and 8 from 2003 in reading and 2002 in writing.

Major Findings

- **General findings.** In several states, fewer than half of the students met the state proficiency standards for literacy set for NCLB, and in no state did even half the students meet the NAEP national literacy standard of proficiency. Moreover, the pass rates on state assessments varied significantly from state to state.

- **State reading results.** The pass rates on the elementary school (4th or 5th-grade) state assessments differed widely across states, ranging from 28% to 87%. In seven states, less than half of the students passed at the elementary level. The pass rates on the middle school state assessments ranged from 21% to 88% percent. Three states had pass rates of less than 30%. In 12 states, less than half of the students passed the reading assessment.

- **NAEP reading results.** Grade 4 NAEP proficiency rates on the 2003 state-by-state NAEP reading assessment ranged from 10% to 43%, with an average of 30%. In only three states (Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut) did the proportion of students scoring at the proficient level reach 40% or above. Overall, between 10% and 43% of 8th graders scored at the proficient level on the 2003 NAEP reading assessment. The average proficiency rate of 8th graders was 32%.

- **Writing tests.** Pass rates on the state and the NAEP writing assessments tended to be somewhat lower than on the reading assessments.

- **Achievement gaps.** The NAEP and state assessments showed large and surprisingly similar achievement gaps between subgroups of students disaggregated by race/ethnicity and poverty status. Students with limited English proficiency and students with disabilities trailed well behind their peers.

Where to Obtain

High-achieving students in the era of NCLB

Focus

Examines the NAEP performance of high-achieving students during the 1990s and since 2000. Analyzes teacher views of how schools are serving high-achieving students.

Methodology

Analyzed national and state NAEP performance data and demographic data from restricted-use NAEP student files. Conducted a random, nationally representative survey in winter-spring 2008 of the attitudes of 900 teachers in grades 3-12 toward the education of academically talented students.

Major Findings

- **Languid performance for high achievers.** Since 2000, children at the 10th percentile of achievement (the bottom 10% of students) have made rapid gains on NAEP 4th-grade reading and math tests and on 8th-grade math tests, but those at the 90th percentile (the top 10%) have made minimal gains.

- **Not just an NCLB phenomenon.** The pattern of big gains for low achievers and lesser ones for high achievers is associated with the introduction of high-stakes accountability in general, not just NCLB. NAEP data from the 1990s show that states that adopted testing and accountability regimes before NCLB saw similar patterns before NCLB.

- **Struggling, not advanced, students a top priority.** Asked about the needs of struggling students, 60% of teachers said they were a “top priority” at their school. Asked about the needs of “academically advanced” students, only 23% of teachers said they were a top priority. (They could give multiple answers to this question.)

- **More teacher attention to low-achieving students.** Asked “who is most likely to get one-on-one attention from teachers?” 81% of teacher named struggling students while only 5% named advanced students.

- **Belief that all students deserve equal attention.** Teachers were asked the following: “For the public schools to help the U.S. live up to its ideals of justice and equality, do you think it’s more important that they (a) focus on raising the achievement of disadvantaged students who are struggling academically, or (b) focus equally on all students, regardless of their backgrounds or achievement levels?” Only 11% chose the former, while 86% chose the latter.

- **Teachers experience.** Low-income, black, and Hispanic high achievers (on the 2005 8th-grade math NAEP) were more likely than low achievers to be taught by experienced teachers. These groups of high achievers were also as likely as other high-achieving students to have teachers who had majored or minored in math.

Where to Obtain

http://www.edexcellence.net/doc/20080618_high_achievers.pdf
Focus

Considers whether NAEP results and state assessment results are comparable.

Methodology

Analyzed 2003 data from NAEP and state tests for 48 states and D.C.

Major Findings

- **State vs. NAEP standards.** The median standard for proficiency on states' primary math assessment fell between the NAEP basic and proficient levels in grades 4 and 8.

- **Variation.** Standards varied greatly in difficulty across states, as reflected in their NAEP equivalents. There was more variation among states in the placement of state standards on the NAEP scale than there was in average NAEP performance.

- **Link between standards and performance.** States with high standards tended to see few students meet their standards, while states with low standards tended to see more students meet standards. There is no evidence that setting a higher standard correlated with higher NAEP performance.

- **State vs. NAEP trends.** There were significant differences in trends between the two assessments in 14 of 24 states for grade 4 and in 11 of 22 states for grade 8.

- **Correlations across schools.** Correlations across schools between NAEP and state assessment results in math were greater than 0.7 in 41 of 46 states for grade 8 and in 30 of 49 states for grade 4. (A correlation of at least 0.7 is important for confidence in the linkages.) But several factors depressed the correlations.

- **Some gains larger on NAEP.** Across states, NAEP achievement gains from 2000 to 2003 were significantly larger than state assessment gains in grade 4 but not grade 8. Across states, there was a positive correlation in gains between the two tests.

- **Gap comparisons.** In 34 of 70 gap comparisons at grade 4, and in 17 of 62 gap comparisons at grade 8, NAEP showed significantly larger achievement gaps than the state assessment did. In only two gap comparisons (both at grade 8), the state assessment found a significantly larger gap. The tendency for NAEP to show larger gaps in math than state tests did was equally strong for the black-white and Hispanic-white gaps, but was slightly weaker for poverty gap comparisons.

Where to Obtain

Focus

Comprehensive study that describes the progress of states, districts, and schools through school year 2004–05 in implementing key provisions of Title I. Summarized below are the study’s findings about achievement.

Methodology

Drew on data from a set of implementation studies by the U.S. Department of Education. Data for these studies came from surveys conducted in a nationally representative sample of school districts, other state and local surveys, state performance reports, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Major Findings

- **Overall achievement.** For both state assessment and NAEP results, recent achievement trends through 2004 or 2005 are positive overall and for key subgroups, particularly in mathematics and at the elementary level. In states that had three-year trend data available from 2002-03 to 2004-05, the percentage of students achieving at or above the state’s proficient level rose for most student subgroups in a majority of the states.

- **Pace toward 100%**. Based on trend data for 36 states, most states would not meet the goal of 100% proficient by 2013-14 unless achievement increased at a faster rate.

- **NAEP trends.** Recent NAEP trends showed gains for 4th grade students in reading, mathematics, and science, overall and for minority students and students in high-poverty schools. Trends for middle and high school students were mixed; neither 8th nor 12th grade students made gains in reading or science achievement.

- **Achievement gaps.** State assessments and NAEP both provided some indications that achievement gaps between disadvantaged students and other students may be narrowing. For example, state assessments showed a reduction in the gap between low-income students and all students in most states. On the long-term trend NAEP, achievement gains for black and Hispanic students substantially outpaced gains by white students, resulting in significant declines in the black-white and Hispanic-white achievement gaps, but recent changes in gaps often were not statistically significant.

- **Graduation rates.** The averaged freshman graduation rate was fairly steady from 1996 to 2004. The mean graduation rate in 2004 (75%) was slightly higher than in 1996 (73%). However, these longitudinal data may not be strictly comparable because of changes in reporting over time.

Where to Obtain