

ALLIANCE FOR
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Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress

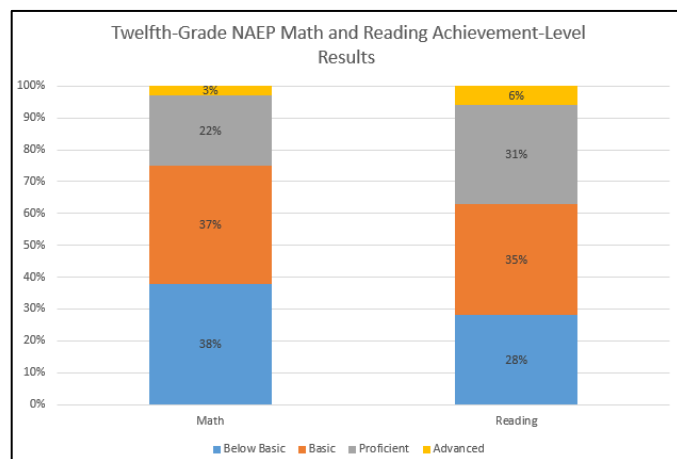


SUBSTANDARD: U.S. High School Seniors Post Poor Marks on Nation's Report Card

Large percentages of American high school seniors struggle with basic reading and math skills, according to the latest results from a national test widely considered to be the “gold standard” for measuring student achievement.

Released on April 27, results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation's Report Card, show that 38 percent of U.S. twelfth graders scored below the basic level in math while 28 percent did so in reading.

In both subjects, the percentage of students scoring below basic was higher in 2015 compared to 2013, indicating that increased percentages of high school seniors lack even partial mastery of the prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work.



Only one in four American twelfth graders scored at or above the math “proficient” level—defined as demonstrating mastery over challenging subject matter while 37 percent met that benchmark in reading.

When broken down by subgroups of students, all types of students fared poorly, but there are disturbingly large achievement gaps between white students and students of color. In math, only 12 percent of Hispanic high school seniors and 7 percent of African American high school seniors—compared to 32 percent of white high school seniors—scored at or above proficient. In reading, 46 percent of white high school seniors reached the proficient level, compared to only 25 percent and 17 percent, respectively, of Hispanic and African American twelfth graders.

“Today’s NAEP results show that education is still not a balanced equation for all students,” said **Alliance for Excellent Education President Bob Wise**. “And for traditionally underserved students, the numbers are only getting worse.”

Overall, the national average math score for twelfth graders (152 on a 300-point scale) was 1 point lower in 2015 than 2013. In reading, the average score (287 out of 500) was not significantly different from 2013, but it was lower than the average score when the test was first given in 1992 (292).

In a statement, **U.S. Secretary of Education John King** preached patience and pointed to reforms, including higher standards, that are already underway but need time to take effect.

“Over the past seven years, schools have undergone some of the most significant changes in decades—work that is being led by educators who are retooling their classroom practices to adapt to new and higher standards,” King said. “We know the results of those changes will not be seen overnight, so we need to be patient—but not passive—in continuing to pursue the goal of preparing all students for success after high school.”

King also noted opportunities where states can take action based on the test results. “Twelfth graders who took math classes their senior year did significantly better on NAEP than those who did not, which indicates how important it is that schools continue to expand opportunities—particularly for historically underserved students—to take advanced course work,” he said.

The poor performance by U.S. high school seniors on NAEP follows news that the national high school graduation rate for the class of 2014 [rose to an all-time high of 82.3 percent](#). Additionally, [results released last summer from ACT and College Board](#) indicated that many high school graduates are unprepared for college. On the ACT, only 28 percent of 2015 ACT-tested high school graduates met college-readiness benchmarks in each of the four subjects (English, reading, math, and science). Results from the College Board were not much better, with 41.9 percent of SAT takers in the Class of 2015 meeting the SAT college- and career-readiness benchmark.

“If there is any good news, it is that the national high school graduation rate has improved, but more diplomas without adequate math and reading preparation is not a formula for success for students or the nation,” said Wise.

Complete NAEP results are available at http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_g12_2015/.



IT PAYS TO IMPROVE SCHOOL QUALITY: New Economic Analysis Pegs Economic Growth to Level of Student Achievement

Were every state to lift its student performance so that all of its students reached at least the basic level of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the economic impact on the United States would be at least \$32 trillion,¹ according to a new economic analysis appearing in the Summer 2016 issue of *Education Next*. Should every state reach the level of Minnesota, the top-performing state in the analysis, the economic impact would be \$76 billion, or more than four times the current gross domestic product (GDP) of the United States.

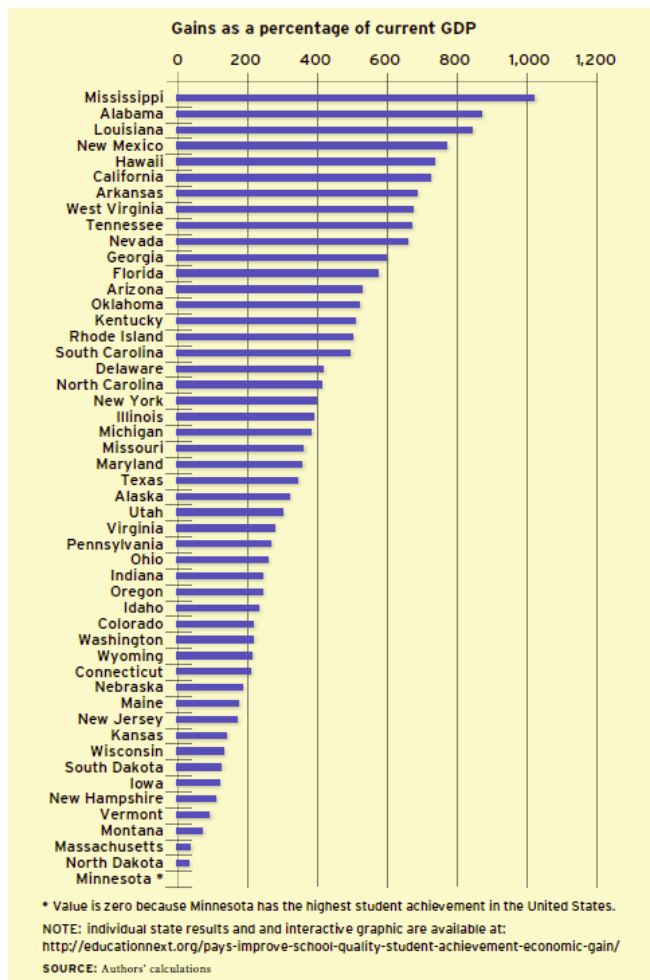
¹ Economic gain over the expected lifetime of a person born today (80 years), expressed in trillions of 2015 dollars.

“As the skills of today’s students improve, the skills of tomorrow’s workers advance,” said coauthor **Eric A. Hanushek, senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University and research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research.**

As shown in the graphic to the right taken from the analysis, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, New Mexico, and Hawaii would benefit the most were they to match Minnesota’s educational performance while North Dakota, Massachusetts, and other high-performing states that perform similar to Minnesota would see the least.

“Even in North Dakota and Massachusetts, the current value of gains over the next 80 years would amount to 70 percent of current state GDP,” the report notes.

The analysis, “It Pays to Improve School Quality: States That Boost Student Achievement Could Reap Large Economic Gains,” evaluates states’ educational performances based on a combination of eighth-grade math scores on NAEP, as well as math scores on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), which help to adjust for individuals born outside of the United States.



The analysis notes that the nation’s new education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), “sharply diminished” the federal government’s role in school accountability, instead giving states much of the responsibility for improvements in student achievement.

“Large economic benefits should accrue to states that take advantage of this new flexibility,” the report notes. “Realizing these gains does require a sustained commitment on the part of a state’s political leaders. But such commitment to better schools has already given rise to dramatic gains in the United States (for instance, in Massachusetts) and abroad (as in South Korea). If we are to achieve prolonged economic growth in our nation, we have little choice but to strengthen the skills of our people.”

“It Pays to Improve School Quality: States That Boost Student Achievement Could Reap Large Economic Gains” is available at <http://educationnext.org/pays-improve-school-quality-student-achievement-economic-gain/>.

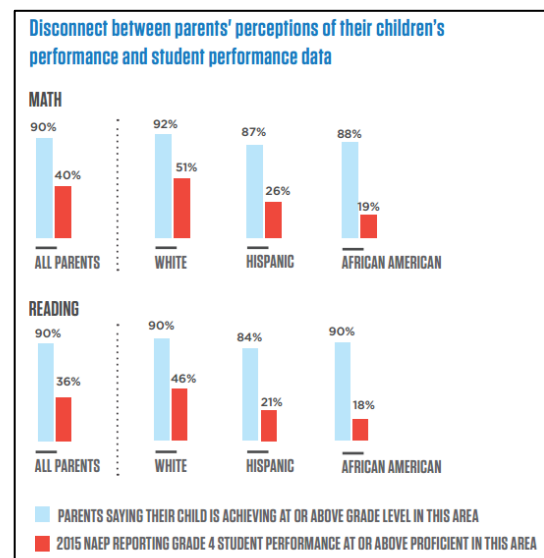


HEARTS AND MINDS OF PARENTS: Survey Reveals Disconnect Between Parents' Perceptions of Child's Performance Versus Achievement Data

A new national survey reveals large disconnects between how well parents believe their children perform academically and their actual performance. It also finds that parental aspirations for their child to go to college are much higher than data on the percentage of children who get to and through college. Results from the survey, which was commissioned by Learning Heroes, a nonprofit that helps parents support their child's academic success, are contained in *Parents 2016: Hearts & Minds of Parents in an Uncertain World*.

According to the survey, 90 percent of all parents believe their child is achieving at or above grade level in math and reading. However, only 40 percent of fourth-grade students actually scored at or above proficient in math and only 36 percent did so in reading. Similar disconnects exist when the data is broken down by race, as shown in the image to the right taken from the report.

Regarding postsecondary education, 75 percent of parents say that it is “absolutely essential” or “very important” that their children go to college and receive a degree. The percentage of high school graduates who actually enroll in college the October after graduating, however, is only 66 percent. And only 54 percent of students who enter college ultimately graduate within six years.



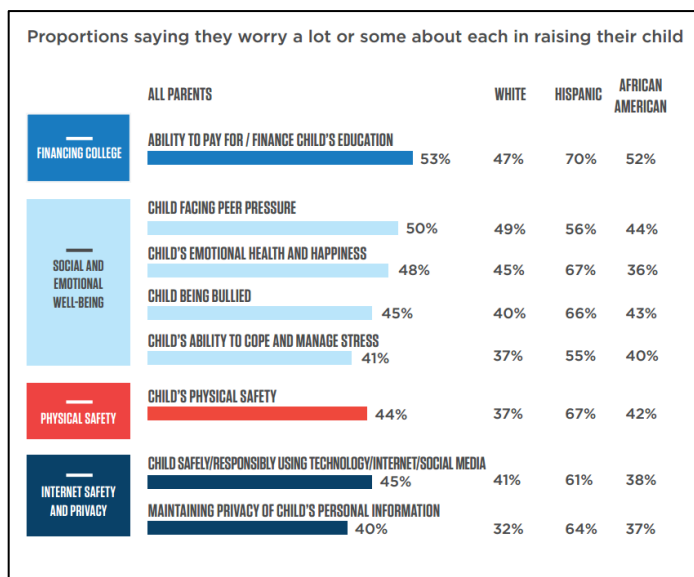
When broken out by race, the survey results show that fewer white parents (67 percent) believe college is absolutely essential or very important for their children, compared to 90 percent of Hispanic parents and 83 percent of African American parents. The percentage of students who actually graduated from college within six years is only 54 percent for white students, 42 percent of Hispanic students, and 37 percent of African American students.

“Although most parents say their child is meeting the expectations and goals for his/her grade level, and believe it is important for their child to go to college, the survey also detected an underlying lack of confidence (40 percent of parents) that their child will be well-prepared when the time comes,” the report notes.

When asked who bears the greatest responsibility for their child's education success, 43 percent of parents said that responsibility lies with them while 37 percent said the child. Only 16 percent said the same thing about the teacher.

The survey also explores parents' top concerns, which include how to pay for college, internet safety and privacy, as well as students' physical safety and social and emotional well-being, as shown in the graphic below.

To better inform parents about their child's education and prepare them to support their child's academic success, Learning Heroes created a "[Readiness Roadmap](#)" that provides parents with resources and tools, including academic expectations by grade; tips on paying for college; information on emotional health and happiness; conversation guides to make the most of parent-teacher conferences as well as conversations with their child; tools to help parents understand where their child might need additional support; and personalized resources to meet their child's individual needs.



Parents 2016: Hearts & Minds of Parents in an Uncertain World is available at <http://bealearninghero.org/downloads/LearningHeroes-ExecSummary-english.pdf>.



BENEFITS OF CTE: New Fordham Report Links Career and Technical Education to Students' School and Work Outcomes

Students who take more career and technical education (CTE) courses are more likely to graduate from high school, enroll in a two-year college, be employed, and earn higher wages, according to a new report from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Moreover, students who focus their CTE course work in an industry-aligned program of study realize greater benefits and are 21 percentage points more likely to graduate from high school than similar students, according to *Career and Technical Education in High School: Does It Improve Student Outcomes?*

The Fordham report analyzes data from the Arkansas Research Center to examine the impact of CTE on the secondary, postsecondary, and labor market outcomes for students who started ninth grade in 2008, 2009, and 2010. The study follows these students from ninth grade through the year after they should have graduated from high school (classes of 2012 through 2014). The report notes that Arkansas is one of only five states that links education and workforce data in a manner that allows researchers to perform this type of analysis.

Among the cohorts studied, 89 percent of Arkansas students completed at least one CTE class, with students taking 4.9 CTE courses on average, the report says. The study finds that "taking just one additional CTE course above the average increases a student's probability of graduating from high school by 3.2 percentage points and of enrolling in a two-year college the following year by 0.6 percentage points."

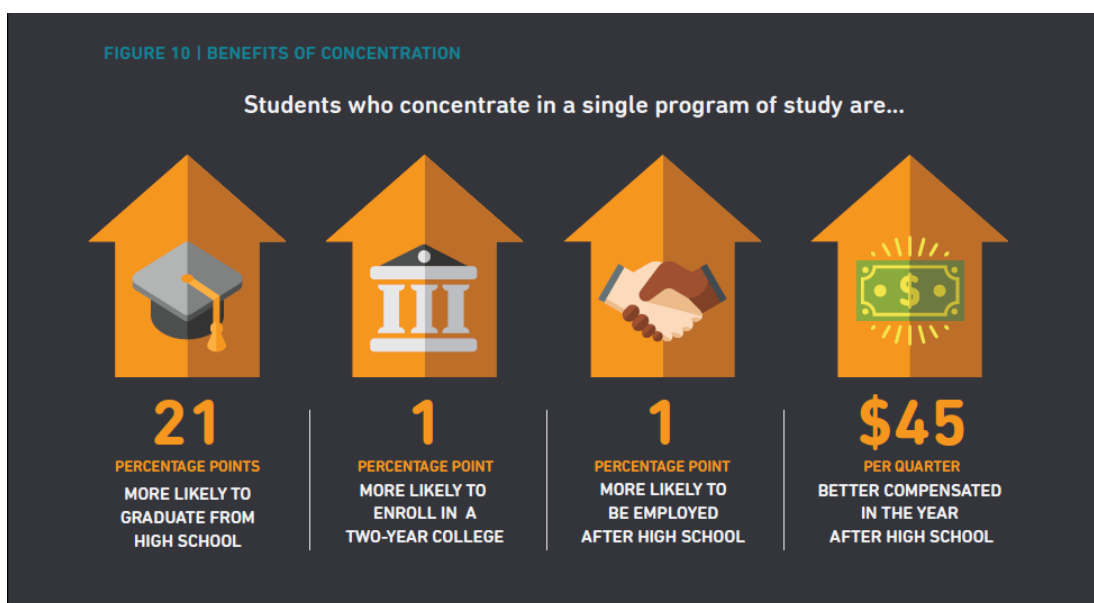
Pairing that additional class with dual enrollment, which allows a student to earn college and high school credits simultaneously, “magnifies the impact of an additional CTE course by doubling the probability that a student will enroll in a two-year college the year after [high school] graduation,” the report says.

One extra CTE class in high school also raises a student’s likelihood of employment during the year following graduation by 1.5 percentage points and boosts that student’s expected quarterly wages by 3 percent, the report says. Additionally, students with greater exposure to CTE courses are equally likely to pursue a four-year college degree as other students, the report says.

“[T]he evidence does not indicate that low-achieving students are being tracked into comparatively large numbers of CTE classes, and high-achieving students away from them,” the report explains. “Instead, it suggests that CTE is considered a desirable elective for the majority of students, and middle and high achievers are not shying away from it.”

Furthermore, the study shows that CTE “concentration”—taking a sequence of three or more classes in a career-targeted program of study—yields additional benefits. Concentrators complete more CTE courses on average than nonconcentrators (8.5 classes versus 3.4 classes). But they also realize advantages beyond those associated with greater CTE course work alone. In addition to being more likely to graduate from high school, CTE concentrators are more likely to enroll in a two-year college, be employed, and earn higher wages compared to similar students (based on demographics and test scores) who complete an *equivalent* number of CTE classes but do not concentrate in a sequenced program of study. (See the figure from the report below.)

CTE concentration has the greatest impact on students from low-income families, increasing their likelihood of graduating from high school by 25 percentage points over students from low-income families who do not concentrate their CTE course work. Approximately 30 percent of all Arkansas students concentrate their CTE classes in a coordinated program of study, the report says.



“Overall, this study adds to the growing body of evidence on the impact of high school CTE,” write **Fordham President Michael J. Petrilli** and **National Research Director Dara Zeehandelaar** in the foreword to the report. “Policymakers in other states should heed Arkansas’s example by increasing their investment in secondary CTE that is aligned to the demands of the local labor market. ... Connecting more young people with available opportunities by giving them the skills employers are seeking should be a national priority.”

As [Straight A’s reported previously](#), U.S. Secretary of Education John King has called on the U.S. Congress to reauthorize the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, which provides more than \$1.1 billion in funding for CTE programs in middle school, high school, and postsecondary education institutions.

Additionally, **Senators Tim Kaine (D-VA), Rob Portman (R-OH), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), and Kelly Ayotte (R-NH)** have introduced the [CTE Excellence and Equity Act](#), legislation supported by the Alliance for Excellent Education that would create a federal grant program to fund innovation in CTE through partnerships between school districts, employers, and institutions of higher education with the goal of preparing more students for postsecondary education and the workforce.

Fordham’s report *Career and Technical Education in High School: Does It Improve Student Outcomes?* is available at http://edexcellence.net/publications/career-and-technical-education-in-high-school-does-it-improve-student-outcomes?mc_cid=7d5bddf9fe&mc_eid=13fd2917e1.

For additional information about the CTE Excellence and Equity Act, read the Alliance’s fact sheet at <http://all4ed.org/reports-factsheets/cte-excellence-and-equity-act-s-2718/>.

Straight A’s: Public Education Policy and Progress is a free biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events in Washington, DC, and around the country. The format makes information on federal education policy accessible to everyone from elected officials and policymakers to parents and community leaders. Contributors include Jason Amos, editor; Kristen Loschert; Caroline Waldman; and Kate Bradley.

The Alliance for Excellent Education is a Washington, DC–based national policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all students, particularly those traditionally underserved, graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship. For more information, visit www.all4ed.org. Follow the Alliance on Twitter (www.twitter.com/all4ed), Facebook (www.facebook.com/all4ed), and the Alliance’s “High School Soup” blog (www.all4ed.org/blog).