

THE Center for Education Reform



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With the release today of the 2000 Nation's Report Card results in mathematics, The Center for Education Reform offers the following analysis and commentary. For additional information, please call CER.

The Gap Persists

(August 2, 2001) The release of the 2000 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) math test results shows that overall, students are doing better in math – or are they? While aggregate national scores continue to rise, the racial achievement gap remains unchanged. Black and Hispanic students, traditionally disadvantaged in America's schools, are still not getting the quality of education they deserve. Furthermore, more than half of the highest performing students come from suburban schools, while barely a quarter of students in urban schools did as well, showing that students most in need are languishing in substandard schools.

Much debate has ensued over testing requirements in the education bill, currently in Congress, mandating that states disaggregate scores for racial groups. The NAEP results underscore the need for such breakdowns – and for quality standards that ensure all students are learning.

Texas, North Carolina and Georgia were the only states to make headway in closing the black-white achievement gap and Texas and Maryland were the only states to make gains in the white-Hispanic gap. Even so, 90 percent of Hispanic students in Maryland perform below proficiency.

College Prep

Unfortunately, scores for twelfth-graders were down across nearly all categories. Colleges across the nation are reporting increasing numbers of students requiring remedial math courses, and the NAEP scores indicate that trend may be worsening. Schools are failing to adequately prepare students for college-level work, a fact that bolsters those who advocate for assessing students before handing them diplomas.

Furthermore, barely a quarter of fourth- and eighth-grade students are performing at or above proficient levels, which simply isn't sufficient preparation for college level work. Students who lack a basic understanding of fundamental math skills are not ready for high-level courses in high school or college.

Calculators

By the same token, more and more math textbooks depend on calculators, but the impact of calculator use on young students in the process of learning basic math skills is clear. Fourth-graders who report using calculators everyday averaged 25 points lower on the NAEP than fourth-graders who never or hardly ever use calculators.

Math instruction in early grades forms the building blocks upon which higher-level math performance is built. Heavy reliance on calculators hampers students' ability to develop the foundations they need for upper-level math courses in high school and beyond.

Teacher Quality

High standards matter for teacher quality as well. Eighth-graders whose teachers majored in math or math education scored higher on average than students whose teachers majored in other fields, underscoring the need for teachers trained in subject material, rather than jargon.

As more states seek to develop rigorous standards, the NAEP will continue to serve as a useful benchmark for student performance, helping states to gauge the efficacy of their own standards and assessments. Creating a new supply of successful schools through mechanisms like charter schools and public-private partnerships is essential to closing achievement gaps and making schools work better for all children.

For more information and the full report, go to:
<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/mathematics/results/>

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The Center for Education Reform is a national, independent, non-profit advocacy organization providing support and guidance to individuals, community and civic groups, policymakers and others who are working to bring fundamental reforms to their schools. For further information, please call (202) 822-9000 or visit our website at <http://edreform.com>.