

23 **B-52. Standardized Testing of Students**

24 [The National Education Association opposes standardized testing that is mandated
25 by local, state, or national authority. The Association also opposes the use of these
26 tests to compare one student, staff member, school, or district with another, especially
27 when the threat of loss of compensation, prestige, control, or resources is attached.

28 [The Association urges its affiliates to work to eliminate the misuse of standardized
29 tests and high-stakes testing wherever they currently exist. Instead, affiliates should
30 advocate the design and use of a variety of developmentally appropriate assessment
31 techniques that are bias-free, reliable, and valid. These assessment measures must be
32 viewed within the context of a continuum of education strategies for the individual
33 student. Such assessments are best developed on site as an integral part of an
34 instruction plan.]

35 *The National Education Association believes that standardized tests should*
36 *only be used to improve the quality of education and instruction for students.*
37 *Standardized tests are most useful when selected by educational professionals*
38 *closest to the classroom and integrated with assessment information specific to*
39 *local programs. Affiliates should advocate the design and use of a variety of*
40 *developmentally appropriate assessment techniques that are bias-free, reliable,*
41 *and valid. When a test is mandated at the state or national levels, it should only*
42 *be used to evaluate programs toward meeting state or national standards and/or*
43 *goals.*

- 1 *The Association opposes the use of standardized test when—*
2 *a. Used as the criterion for the reduction or withholding of any educational*
3 *funding*
4 *b. They inappropriately compare students, teachers, programs, schools,*
5 *communities, and states*
6 *c. Used as a single criterion for high-stakes decision making*
7 *d. They do not match the developmental levels or language proficiency of the*
8 *student*
9 *e. Student scores are used to evaluate teachers or to determine compensation or*
10 *employment status*
11 *f. Programs are specifically designed to teach to the test.*

12 *The administration of a standardized test includes the responsibility to*
13 *educate the stakeholders in the purpose of the test, the meaning of test results,*
14 *and the accurate interpretation of conclusions. (78, 97)*
15

April 17, 1996

EDUCATION WEEK on the WEB



Governor Signs Standards Bill In *Maine* After Weeks of Debate

By Jeff Archer

Gov. Angus S. King Jr. of *Maine* signed an educational-standards bill last week that, eventually, will institute a definition of what students in the state should know and be able to do.

The signing followed weeks of heated debate in the Statehouse that often left supporters doubting the bill's chances. The final version lacked many of the bill's original provisions, and lawmakers did not appropriate \$2 million intended to help acquaint Maine teachers with the new standards.

Despite the revisions, supporters of the so-called learning-results law were pleased their proposal survived an ideological battle similar to those that have threatened standards legislation in other states. As elsewhere, opponents in *Maine* saw the standards as an intrusion on local control.

The compromise bill passed with bipartisan support, 94-42 in the House and 22-8 in the Senate.

"I thought the vote was going to be much closer," said Democratic Rep. Michael F. Brennan, a key House supporter. "But fundamentally, people agree with the idea that if you *raise standards*, students will perform better."

A Lobbying Blitz

House approval seemed less likely three weeks ago when proponents guessed they had about 20 supporters out of the chamber's 151 members, said Sen. Jane A. Amero, the bill's Republican sponsor.

More than 70 lawmakers sent a letter of protest to the Independent governor, prompted by concerns the bill's requirements would be financially burdensome to districts and that its language was both value-laden and vague. (See Education Week, April 3, 1996.)

But supporters launched a lobbying blitz in the legislative session's final days, and many of *Maine*'s largest corporations released their lobbyists to push the bill. Ms. Amero added.

"These CEOs are saying we need people coming out of our schools with more skills," she said.

While it was always short on specifics, the measure originally included several broadly defined goals in eight subject areas. Under English, for example, one goal was to "demonstrate an understanding of enduring themes of literature."

Lawmakers stripped the measure of such goals, leaving the eight subject areas and a set of guiding principles to be used in drafting more specific requirements.

The standards and related assessments would be in place by the 2002-03 school year.

Second Opinions

Lawmakers disagreed on the importance of not funding the \$2 million earmarked for training educators on the new standards.

"I don't think the money not being appropriated this year is a big problem," Ms. Amero said, explaining that until the standards are approved there is little substance to base training on.

But Rep. William Lemke, a Democrat who led the opposition in the House, said that

without the money, the bill was "not dead, but barely kicking."

"This bill had a problem on every page of it," he said. "This thing is going to get killed when we go back in."

Copyright © 1996 Editorial Projects in Education
© 1996 Editorial Projects in Education

Executive Summary



[\[return to contents\]](#)

The quality of the academic standards in America's schools is one of the most pressing issues on the minds of parents and public. It is also something that teachers and others who work in schools care deeply about. Making Standards Matter is an annual report by the American Federation of Teachers designed to analyze the quality of the academic standards in the fifty states and to monitor the extent to which those standards will drive major changes in the schools.

We first issued Making Standards Matter in the summer of 1995, five years after the first National Education Summit and one year after the Clinton administration's Goals 2000 and Title I programs were authorized by Congress. The good news was that nearly every state was working to set common academic standards for their students. But good intentions were not necessarily resulting in strong standards. We made it clear in our report that most states had more work to do to strengthen their standards and we warned that the lack of rewards and consequences attached to state standards would severely diminish their effectiveness.

Much work has taken place in the states over the past year and we try to capture that work in this edition of Making Standards Matter. We once again report on how many states are committed to setting common academic standards for their students and we analyze the quality of the standards against criteria that we feel are important. We also report on states' intentions to assess whether students are meeting the standards, to provide extra academic help to students who are not meeting the standards, and to attach meaningful consequences to the standards so that students and others take them seriously. Below are our major findings and our recommendations for moving forward. These items are elaborated on in Sections II and III of this report.

Major Findings

The commitment to standards-based reform remains very strong in the states—states are developing common academic standards for their students

States view the core disciplines as the proper organizing vehicle for academic standards, but vague language and insufficient grounding in content remains a problem

More states recognize the need for internationally competitive standards, but few have taken steps in this direction and none have done a thorough job

Despite the weaknesses of their standards, states do not need to start from

scratch&emdash;most have strong standards in one or more subjects that can be used as models to improve the others

States are having more difficulty setting strong standards in English and social studies

All but a few states will develop assessments to measure whether their students are meeting the state standards, but the standards are not strong enough in most states to provide a solid foundation for the assessments

Less than half of the states plan to make their standards "count" for students

Only 10 states require and fund intervention programs to help low-performing students reach the state standards

In the states where graduation exams are in use or being planned, there are clear trends toward increased rigor and alignment with state standards

Eight states will offer "differentiated diplomas" as a way of motivating students to reach high standards

Recommendations for Moving Forward

1. States need to be supported in their efforts to raise standards
2. States need help to make sure their standards are rigorous and internationally competitive
3. States should look to the strongest standards in other states as a guide when developing or revising their own
4. States should supplement their standards with curriculum frameworks that provide clearer guidance to districts and schools without sacrificing local control.
5. States need to make sure their assessments are based on strong standards
6. States should establish plans for phasing in consequences
7. States must provide extra help to students who are not meeting the standards

This second edition of our report comes at a crucial time for education in this country. Several months ago, at the second National Education Summit, the nation's governors, business and education leaders committed themselves to the pursuit of world-class academic standards for America's children. This report offers a glimpse into where the states are on this agenda today and how far they have to go in the future.

[\[return to contents\]](#)

AMERICA READS INITIATIVE

“We must do more to help all our children read.” These are some literacy programs that have proven successful.

1. *Success for All:*

- A national reading program developed by Johns Hopkins University for increasing the reading achievement of disadvantaged students.
- It has been piloted in Houston, Columbus and Memphis since 1994.
- A 1995 evaluation of the Houston program indicates that students in the program had significantly higher composite post-test achievement scores than students in comparison schools. It is funded in-part by Title I money.

2. *Reading Recovery:*

- A national program (running in at least Boston, Louisville and St. Louis) that targets first grade students who have difficulty in reading. Title I funds help to support the program.
- An evaluation of Boston’s program (which was initiated in 1990) found that 89% of the 155 children in the program were successfully discontinued, as they read at or above the grade reading level.
- The program also addresses other issues affecting the overall learning ability of the child.

3. *Philadelphia’s Children’s Literacy Initiative program:*

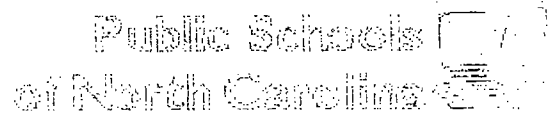
- Kindergarten classrooms are generously supplied with good books, and teachers are trained for seven weeks on teaching reading.
- The children of two public elementary school kindergartens where the program is used are now scoring well above the national average on tests measuring vocabulary, reading and writing skills. Both schools are in the city’s most impoverished neighborhood.
- The program costs \$250 per kid. [Bob Chase’s column, 3/9/97]

4. *Teaching All Children to Read:*

- A collaboration between Georgia State University and Atlanta Public Schools to train teachers and enhance reading performance of students by encouraging the teachers to teach reading every day.

6. *Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies in Reading:*

- Students work in pairs according to their reading ability (a strong reader works with a weak reader).
- The students are taught how to read together and then work in their pairs three times a week for 35 minutes for at least 15 weeks.
- The Dept of Education designated this program “an effective instructional program” in 1995.



Standards and Accountability

Like many other states, North Carolina is searching for appropriate ways to define what public school students and graduates should know and be able to do and how to hold them accountable.

In July 1996, the North Carolina Education Standards and Accountability Commission will present benchmark standards for students at grades 4, 8, 10 and 12, in addition to other recommendations. These benchmarks will represent the first formal attempt in North Carolina to hold students accountable for their performance.

The Standards and Accountability Commission was created by the North Carolina General Assembly in 1993 to ensure that all graduates of North Carolina public schools have mastered the skills to become productive workers and successful in life. The purpose of the commission is to develop high and clearly defined education standards, specifying the skills and knowledge that high school graduates should possess to be competitive in the modern economy. The commission is also developing fair and valid assessments to assure that high school graduates meet these standards.

After lengthy study of education issues and review of research, the Standards and Accountability Commission has recommended

- that North Carolina adopt six competency areas for student proficiency: communications, using numbers and data, problem solving, processing information, teamwork, and using technology
- that high school students choose from a College Prep or College Tech Prep curricula with no option for a general curriculum
- that the State Board of Education develop broad, general curriculum frameworks for each subject area, leaving local teachers and school systems flexibility for selecting content.

As part of the work of the Commission, it has supported 15 teams of teachers that are developing and field-testing authentic assessment tasks. Also, 30 educators across the state have been trained to use authentic assessments with students.

Other work of the Commission includes:

- designing a model for exit projects for high school students to demonstrate proficiencies required for graduation
- piloting a balanced and rigorous assessment system in four local school systems
- designing models for an education system that allows students different amounts of time to complete their high school studies
- designing a staff development plan to help teachers and schools carry out the reforms recommended by the Commission.

[- Home](#)

[- State Board](#)

[- General Assembly](#)

[- Department](#)

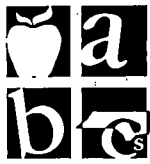
[- Resources](#)

[- Reform](#)

[- Local Systems](#)

[- Publications](#)

Comments to Greg Cook at gcook@dpi.state.nc.us

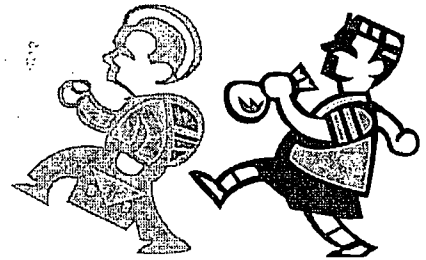


Incentives and Recognition

Accountability is a key element of The ABCs of Public Education, the reform plan that began in 1996 throughout North Carolina. Individual schools are held accountable for improving student achievement and reaching reasonable goals for student learning. Incentives and recognition go hand-in-hand with accountability.

Incentive Awards

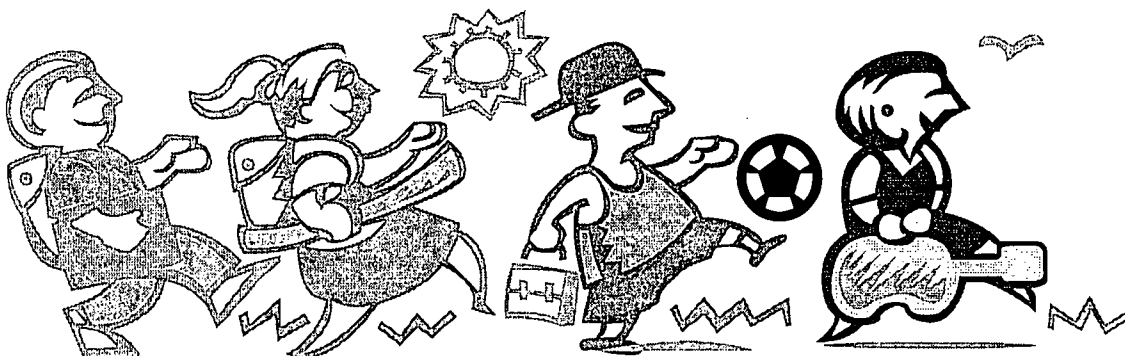
To recognize and reward local educators and schools that exceed their goals, the General Assembly has provided funding for School Incentive Awards. All schools achieving exemplary growth standards will have the opportunity to receive incentive awards averaging between \$500 and \$1,000 per staff member. Teachers, principals, assistant principals, instructional support personnel and teacher assistants assigned to a school with exemplary growth are all eligible to receive incentive awards.



Incentive bonuses will be awarded in the summer after students' final test scores have been tabulated so that student achievement gains for the year can be measured. School personnel may choose to accept the incentive awards as bonuses to personnel or they may choose to use the money for some other purpose, as outlined in the school's improvement plan. This plan is voted on and approved by a majority of school personnel.

Recognition

Schools that receive incentive awards have clearly made significant gains in student progress during the school year. Other schools, too, however, may have made significant progress or they may have consistently large percentages of their students scoring at or above grade level on End-of-Grade tests. The State Board of Education wants to recognize these achievements also.



Student Growth	Criteria	Recognition	Estimated #/%
Top 25	top 25 schools in student growth	• banquet honoring 5 representatives from each school • dated banner to hang in school • certificate • school incentive award	• 25 schools
Exemplary	meets 110% student growth standard	• certificate • school incentive award	• 30 to 35% of schools
Expected	meets 100% student growth standard	• certificate	• 15 to 20% of schools • 50% of schools at or above expected growth
Student Performance			
Excellent	at least 90% at grade level standard and meets expected growth standard	• banquet honoring 5 representatives from each school • dated banner to hang in school • certificate	• 8 (.5%) schools • 21 or 1.3% are within three percentage points of standard
Distinguished	80.0 through 89.9% at grade level standard	• plaque to hang in school • certificate	• 157 (10.0%) schools • 10.5% of schools are at or above standard

Accountability

The accountability portion of The ABCs of Education is an effort to restore faith in public education. Accountability benefits everyone. Parents have some assurance that their children are getting a good education. Teachers have measurable proof that their students are learning. Principals know how their schools are faring overall on important indicators of student achievement. The public is reassured that tax dollars for schools are bringing results in student achievement.

Accountability

- sets school-level standards for student growth and performance;
- measures student performance and achievement school-by-school;
- provides consistent monitoring of student achievement school-by-school;
- identifies and recognizes high levels of student growth and performance at the school and district level;
- identifies schools and districts with unacceptable performance and growth and provides assistance and/or intervention when necessary; and
- begins in the classrooms with teachers.

Testing

Accountability cannot happen without a way to measure student achievement. That's where testing comes in.

The ABCs retains core pieces of the testing program and cuts the overall amount of state-required testing:

- Grades K-8

- End-of-Grade tests in reading and mathematics

- Grades 4 and 7, writing test

High School

High school accountability goes into effect in 1997-98. In the meantime, high school students will be tested in 1996-97 using the End-of-Course tests in Algebra I, English I and II, Biology, U.S. History and Economic, Legal and Political Systems.

Also, the North Carolina Test of Computer Skills is a graduation requirement for eighth-graders beginning with the Class of 2001.

Setting Standards

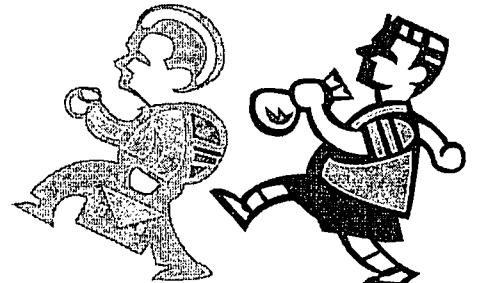
After testing is complete, results will be examined to determine if students are meeting the expectation of a year's worth of growth for a year's worth of schooling.

Here's where standards come into play. For the ABCs, the standard that schools are expected to achieve is called "expected growth." Some will do better than what is expected and some will fall short.

Schools that exceed the expected growth standard by 10 percent will have achieved what's called "exemplary growth." This is even better than the average growth for one year's work.

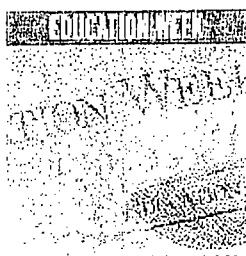
Standards for growth will be calculated for each school by the Department of Public Instruction based on three years of growth information plus a formula developed to measure growth. For technical specifics on the formula, please contact your local testing coordinator or the Department of Public Instruction, 919/715-1200.

Schools where students do not achieve a year's worth of growth for a year's worth of work — that do not meet the expected growth standard — and that are low-performing, will be provided assistance by a state-level team of practicing and retired educators from public schools, universities and community colleges.



APRIL 9, 1997

EDUCATION WEEK on the WEB



N.C. Consensus Pushes for New Set Of Reforms

By Kathleen Kennedy Manzo

In North Carolina, where critics have decried the plethora of stop-and-start education reforms over the past two decades, a confluence of previous initiatives and uncommon agreement among officials and educators may be leading to the strongest and most effective round of reforms yet.

Student-achievement gains on national tests, the most dramatic of any state's, have moved North Carolina from among the bottom performers to the middle of the pack. Schools are demanding higher standards, students are performing better on state tests, and districts have acquired more local control. And, now, lawmakers are showing bipartisan support for a bill to increase teacher pay and accountability as another means of improving classroom instruction.

"I think our focus now on standards, safe schools, excellent teaching, and a good start for every child are what we are going to stick with," Gov. James B. Hunt Jr. said in a recent interview. "All kinds of folks are coming together on education issues, many people who have never stood together before. Education is something that is so important, so fundamental, that it ought to transcend partisan politics."

Targeting Attrition

The newest piece in the reform package is the proposed Excellent Schools Act, Gov. Hunt's plan to address the state's high teacher-attrition rate. Last month, GOP Speaker of the House Harold Brubaker and Senate President Pro Tem Marc Basnight, a Democrat, stood with the Democratic governor to announce their co-sponsorship of the bill, which would raise starting teachers' salaries from \$21,330 to \$25,000. It would also offer raises and bonuses to teachers who earn extra credentials, who teach at high-performing schools, or who take on mentoring duties.

In return, teachers would be expected to meet higher standards. The proposal directs the state school board to compel teacher education institutions to administer tougher entrance exams, to create a more rigorous certification test, and to make teachers get their licenses renewed every five years.

The Senate passed the bill 43-3 late last month and sent it to the House, where the major point of contention appears to be the \$285 million price tag.

The governor has several other legislative initiatives he is also pushing: continuing development of rigorous student standards, doubling the Smart Start program--the state's version of Head Start--to reach youngsters in each of North Carolina's 100 counties, and proceeding with the transformation of the state board from a regulatory to a service agency.

Document

7 Pages

For more information about education in North Carolina, see our [North Carolina State Page](#).

Read our [North Carolina Report Card: Grades on eight major indicators](#); our [North Carolina Summary: A summary of the state's school system](#); and our [North Carolina Data: Scores and statistics in more than 75 areas](#), from our January 1997 special report, [Quality Counts](#).

Gov. Hunt said that efforts to *raise standards* have contributed to a 17-point jump in 8th graders' performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress mathematics test since 1990. And his latest quest to improve teaching, he said, is the capstone of his efforts. "If you get the teaching right, most of the rest will follow."

Many credit the leadership and determination of the governor, who has built his career on education reform. Not only is Mr. Hunt in his fourth nonconsecutive term as North Carolina's governor; he has a prominent national role as chairman of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

"To call Jim Hunt an education governor is to understate the case," said Mike Ward, the state superintendent for public instruction. "He has a remarkable capacity to generate buy-in. There is a better spirit of collaboration than we've experienced in a long time."

Educators and lawmakers say the governor's focus on education, combined with a strong state board, a new state superintendent, and cooperation from lawmakers, educators, and the business community, has created a feeling of cautious optimism that the current reforms will take hold.

"There are a lot of people, including myself, entering the new administration of Governor Hunt with optimism," said John N. Dornan, the executive director of the Public School Forum of North Carolina, a nonprofit research center. "We have had a terrible history of lack of consensus among key state leaders on the direction of our schools."

The recent cooperation has been unprecedented, many North Carolinians say, and not just between the legislature and the governor. The state school boards' association and the North Carolina Association of Educators, though often at odds, collaborated recently to draft new teacher-tenure and-dismissal policies, which will be turned into legislation.

But some observers are not so willing to give Mr. Hunt the credit. Instead, they say the gains have been pushed by the legislature, which last year passed a plan calling for higher academic standards and accountability measures, and the state school board, which has dismantled a highly centralized state system to give more control to districts and schools.

"Real efforts in education reform, in my opinion, began last term when the state House became majority Republican," said Sen. Austin M. Allran, the ranking Republican on the education committee. "That's when most of the reform efforts were initiated by the legislature, and the effort was quite bipartisan."

Others agree that the legislature has played a strong role. "I think a lot of legislators came into office in the last few years already believing that education reform was the direction we needed to go in," said Sen. Leslie Winner, a Democrat who co-chairs the education committee. "But I think Governor Hunt has kept it front and center."

Looking at Links

A nonpartisan education research group, which has been trying to track the cause of school improvements, links some of the progress to Mr. Hunt. For the past year, the Raleigh-based Center for Research in Education has been analyzing state education policies and their impact on test scores.

"It's pretty clear to me that we've moved out of the cellar," said Suzanne E. Triplett, the senior program manager who is conducting the study. "North Carolina in the early 1990s on every measure was one of the lowest-performing states. In a very short period, North Carolina is beginning to perform at the national average.

"There is almost a direct line between the changes and Governor Hunt's initiatives," she said. "Governor Hunt has been the leader and the direction for the reforms. I'm not sure you can link [Gov. Hunt and higher achievement] directly, but they sure do parallel each other."

On the Web

Read the text of N.C. House Bill 351: The Excellent Schools Act.

Read about other reform initiatives from the Public Schools of North Carolina Web site.


© 1997 Editorial Projects in Education



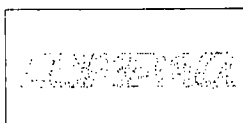
North Carolina

CONTENTS

Policymakers have responded to the pressure for change but not always in unison. Lawmakers call the shots on many school policy decisions mainly because they hold the K-12 purse strings. The state pays about 64% of the \$6 billion cost of public education--a higher proportion than all but seven other states.

But legislators compete with other political powers in Raleigh to set school policy. State schools superintendents are elected and traditionally have wielded considerable clout.

Browse
Education Week's
Web Connection
Your On-line Source
Of Information From
Education Marketers



North Carolina governors have been education activists for nearly a century, and Gov. Hunt, the state's current chief executive, is no exception. The Democrat is a self-proclaimed "education governor," and in his four terms since 1976, he's proved himself a tough, savvy politician who understands and enjoys the minutiae of school policy.

As chairman of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the governor has made national certification of teachers a top priority in his state, persuading lawmakers to pass one of the country's most generous pay increases for teachers who get certified. As a result, North Carolina has 65 board-certified teachers, more than any other state. "There is no governor more erudite on teaching and education issues," says Barnett Berry, a professor of education leadership and policies at the University of South Carolina. "He works hard at it."

With so many political players handling the reins of school policy, North Carolina has been awash in well-intentioned ideas. But some argue that the state has lacked a coherent, unifying vision for the goals and structure of its K-12 system. Although policymakers have been quick to embrace new ideas, they've been just as quick to jettison them as too costly when an immediate payoff in student improvement didn't materialize.

A pilot approved in 1983 to test a 200-day school year, for example, stalled halfway through its three-year run when one of the two participating districts backed out in the face of public opposition. Similarly, while the Charlotte-Mecklenburg district garnered national headlines in the early 1980s for installing a career-ladder system designed to reward teachers with more responsibility and better pay, the state balked at expanding a 16-district pilot of the idea begun in 1985.

State leaders know that their approach to reform has been scattershot, but some believe that over the past two years they have finally put together a cohesive master plan--and political structure--for the future of the state's education system.

Republicans took control of the North Carolina House of Representatives in 1994 after a campaign in which they pledged to dismantle the state education department and transfer the savings to districts. The end result: About 300 of the department's more than 700 employees were given pink slips, and \$21 million was cut from the agency's \$53 million budget.

But Gov. Hunt and Mr. Robinson, appointed by the governor as chairman of the state board of education in 1994, seized the Republican downsizing initiative as an opportunity to tie the hands of at least one major school policymaker and to create a new, unified vision for education in the state. In the 1995 legislative session, Republicans got their cost savings, but they also approved legislation that virtually stripped the state schools superintendent of all power.

The governor and Mr. Robinson also used the GOP-driven shake-up to advance the "ABC" plan, which was devised by the state board. Once fully installed by the 1997-98 school year, this plan will give the state's 2,000 schools greater flexibility and put in place an assessment system to hold them accountable for student performance.

As the plan is envisioned by Gov. Hunt and Mr. Robinson, the state will turn over to local educators many matters now decreed from Raleigh. The school calendar, class size, textbook selection, and other instructional matters will largely be decided locally.

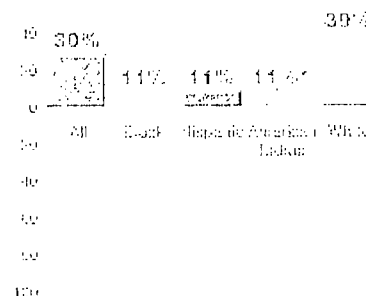
In return for this new flexibility, the state will hold individual schools, not districts, accountable for improving student skills in the basics. Starting with the 1995-96 school year, the state eliminated nearly half of its extensive testing system; about 40 exams had been mandatory.

The pared-down system will assess student performance in reading, writing, and mathematics only. The state will measure students' progress in these areas annually and insist on a certain level of improvement. Fifth graders, for example, will not be judged on what last year's 5th graders did on a test but rather on how well they performed in the 4th grade.

The annual progress of its students will determine a school's standing. If children show remarkable progress from one year to the next, the school's faculty and staff will receive a cash bonus from the state that could go to salaries or resources for the school. If students do not improve, however, the school would receive technical assistance or could eventually be taken over by state officials.

1994 NAEP Reading, 4th Graders

Percentage of students scoring at or above proficient.



Source: The Education Trust

National Center for Education Statistics

Note: "0" equals proficient.

*Interpret with caution due to small sample.

JUNE 11, 1997

EDUCATION WEEK on the WEB

EDUCATION WEEK on the WEB



In Twist, Consensus Growing On Academic *Standards* in Va.

By Kathleen Kennedy Manzo

In the continuing argument over academic *standards*, disagreement over how they are defined, how rigorous they should be, and how they should be implemented and assessed is all too common.

Browse
Education Week's
Web Connection
Your On-line Source
Of Information From
Education Marketers

Yet, in the case of Virginia's "*Standards of Learning*," now winding down its first year of implementation in more than 1,700 schools throughout the state, an unusual consensus has emerged among many educators, scholars, lawmakers, and parents. They agree that the state's *standards* for science, mathematics, English language arts, and history and social sciences are clear and concise, rigorous, and heavy on content.

That is not to say that they are uniformly loved--or hated. But the characteristics of the *standards* are both their strength and their weakness, educators say.

And they are also the reason that the Virginia model is gaining national attention and acclaim as educators and policymakers in at least nine other states look for guidance in crafting their own.

Borrowing Freely

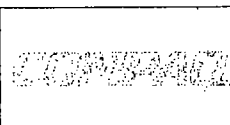
Virginia's efforts at writing *standards* did not come easy. First, they had to be revived by Republican Gov. George F. Allen after his predecessor scrapped an earlier plan amid criticism that the *standards* were too vague.

Then, hundreds of people flocked to hearings to discuss the *standards* before their approval two years ago. Debate erupted early, especially over the history and social sciences section, which many parents and teachers feared covered an unrealistically ambitious amount of material. The debate continues in Virginia, where high-stakes tests to measure how well students meet the *standards* are planned to be rolled out next year.

Nonetheless, officials in at least a half-dozen states are undertaking a careful review of the document, which provides grade-by-grade guidelines for what students are to be taught in the four disciplines. Several states plan to borrow heavily from Virginia, saying much of the hard work of defining what students need to know has already been done and requires only to be adapted to the needs of each state.

"The Virginia document is one of those that states ought to look to if looking for a guide to writing *standards*," said Matthew Gandal, the author of an annual report by the American Federation of Teachers that grades states on the clarity and specificity of their *standards*, though not their intellectual rigor. ("By AFT's *Standards*, Only 15 States

Access the full on



See the page on
National *Standards*
in our Politics
Watch section.

Read about
"*Standards and
Assessment*," in the
50 states in our
special report,
Quality Counts.
See how we graded
the states on
standards, and read
each state's report
card.

Read our story,
"Districts Pare
'Electives' for Core
Courses," Dec. 11,
1996.

Read our
commentary
special report, "The
Politics of
Standards," June 5,
1996.

Deserve Passing Grade," Aug. 7, 1996.) The AFT report identified Virginia as the only state with exemplary *standards* in all four core areas.

"There is no reason state *standards* should be held up at state borders," Mr. Gandal said.

'Mom's English'

Several states are doing just that as they launch their own efforts at creating or updating *standards* in core subjects, including the state that once served as the nation's curriculum bellwether.

Members of a California commission that the legislature appointed to draft *standards* for the public schools there say Virginia's blueprint is a valuable resource.

"Supporters Worry
Goals 2000
Changes Hurt
Standards Efforts,"
May 8, 1996.

"Part of the reason we wanted to look at them is that they are well known. But when you take a close look at them, they are concise and rigorous, and they are grade-by-grade, which is unusual," said Sheila Byrd, the deputy director of the California panel. Commission members recently reviewed eight sets of *standards*--California's own frameworks, those of other states, districts, and nonprofit groups, and even other countries'--and will adapt the best aspects of each into the state's own document. The Virginia *standards* won the highest marks from the commission, Ms. Byrd said.

Officials in South Carolina say they are planning to follow Virginia's lead. Other states, including Idaho, Louisiana, *Maine*, Michigan, Texas, Vermont, and Wisconsin, have also expressed interest in the Virginia model.

The guidelines have especially won favor from conservative groups and parents who are demanding that basics be stressed.

The Virginia *standards*, especially in history, have gained favor among parents because of their clarity and rigor, education scholar Diane Ravitch said.

"Parents really want their kids to learn history. They are fed up with the social studies approach and airy pedagogical jargon," said Ms. Ravitch, a senior research scholar at New York University and a former assistant secretary in the U.S. Department of Education. She has long been embroiled in national and state-level debates over history *standards*.

Leah Vukmir is heading a campaign by more than 300 parents throughout Wisconsin to use the Virginia *standards* as a guide in fashioning that state's own.

"We want to know why we are spending money on tutors when [children] should be learning these things in school," said Ms. Vukmir, the president of the grassroots organization Parents Raising Educational *Standards* in Schools. "Parents like the Virginia standards because they are written in plain 'Mom's English.' They want to know what is expected of their child each year," she said.

'Trivial Pursuit'

Ample opposition and criticism have balanced out the praise.

Ellen Wright, who chairs the California commission, said that while the Virginia model is a good guide for writing *standards*, it is not an ideal. Although they are loaded with facts, Virginia's frameworks do little to put them in context, she said.

What's more, the history portion has been mocked by critics as nothing more than a game of "Trivial Pursuit," in which students are crammed with names, dates, and other facts with no real understanding of the relationships among them. In fact, Massachusetts officials ran into heated opposition this year when a committee proposed a history framework that it adapted from Virginia. ("With Vote Set, Mass. Board Still at Odds Over History *Standards*," in This Week's News.")

Within Virginia, educators have also complained that the state expects the new *standards* to be implemented too quickly.

Many Virginia districts are taking advantage of the state's option of formulating their own *standards*, if they exceed the state's requirements, to better match the developmental needs of students.

"The *standards* have made us really take a second look at what we are expecting of our children," said Sara R. Shoob, an assistant principal at Cub Run Elementary School in Fairfax County, Va. "But I think a lot of these *standards* are asking kids to memorize rote facts. They are just too narrow."

On the Web

Order our special report, "Struggling for Standards." A user's guide to the national *standards* movement that examines the issues and controversies surrounding the history and impact of this topic. Published in 1995. Available on disk. Cost is \$6.

"Standards-Based Reform: What Does It Mean For the Middle Grades?" This 1995 report by Anne Wheelock looks at how academic *standards* are shaping the middle grades.

"Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education." This report looks at issues relating to *standards* and their implementation in a variety of subject areas including the arts and physical education. It is offered by the Mid Continent Regional Education Laboratory, which has a variety of products and services relating to *standards*. McREL also allows outsiders to search their *standards* and benchmarks database.

"A Survey of State Standards-Setting Efforts." This document is an excerpt from "A Comprehensive Guide to Designing Standards-Based Districts, Schools, and Classrooms" by Robert J. Marzano and John S. Kendall. The report provides a listing of *standards* and curriculum frameworks for each state.

"Standards & Education: A Roadmap for State Policymakers." This briefing from the Education Commission of the States describes how states should go about raising educational *standards*.

"Improving America's Schools: Standards." This newsletter, one of a series of Newsletters on Issues in School Reform from the U.S. Department of Education, provides an overview of the variety of *standards*-setting activities occurring in elementary and secondary education in this country.

"State Responsibility for Student Opportunity: Commitment and Issues." A November 1995 policy statement from the Council of Chief State School Officers. Schools must change so that all students meet higher standards--and states must provide leadership for this process.

© 1997 Editorial Projects in Education

AUG. 7, 1996

EDUCATION WEEK on the WEB



AFT logo

Visit the AFT's
page on standards.

By AFT's Standards, Only 15 States Deserve Passing Grade

By Karen DiegmueLLer

Only 15 states deserve passing grades for their efforts to set academic standards, based on criteria the American Federation of Teachers uses in a report that was scheduled for release this week.

But the teachers' union mainly examines how specific a state's standards are and skirts the question many educators believe should be at the heart of the endeavor: How intellectually challenging are the guidelines that describe what students should know and be able to do?

As a result, states that have been lauded widely for their student achievement may get the same grade in the report as states that usually fall near the bottom in rankings on national assessments.

Though national experts on standards-based reform said they found the AFT's approach lacking in some respects, they praised the union for taking on the task. The 900,000-member union, they noted, is the only group that has been willing to take a stab at judging each state's standards for precollegiate learning and announcing the results to the public.

Given the dearth of other widely circulated evaluations, the report, "Making Standards Matter," has the potential to influence policymakers and the public in the continuing push to set high expectations for students.

Subject by Subject

The report marks the progress of states for the second consecutive year and, in general, includes the same criteria it used in 1995.

Since then, however, the focus on standards has shifted dramatically from the national level to the states, particularly as a result of the education summit of governors and corporate leaders in March and the resulting agreement by the National Governors' Association to create an entity to help guide standards projects. (See [related story](#) in This Week's News.)

The report makes no claim to addressing all the issues related to standards-setting. "While we do not attempt to judge the overall quality or rigor of the content covered in each state, we do point out obvious holes," it says.

"If you're not clear and specific, you can't even make a judgment," said Matthew Gandal, the author of the report. "The first step needs to be clarity, specificity, and content. Then you can judge whether it is rigorous or not."

Mr. Gandal said the union hoped that the entity approved by the governors would pick up where the AFT report leaves off and judge the quality of the standards.

The AFT looked at whether a state was developing standards in the four core areas—math, science, English, and social studies; whether the standards were clear and specific enough to provide the basis for a core curriculum; whether the standards included the subjects, body of content, and how closely the standards were benchmarked. For example, the more grade-level benchmarks included, the better a state usually fared.

The union also asked states if they had consulted international standards, were devising an assessment system linked to the standards, and planned to use the assessments to determine grade promotion or graduation.

Few states reported having such high-stakes testing, although 20 said they intended in the future to require students to pass a graduation exam based on state standards. The

FEB. 12, 1997

EDUCATION WEEK on the WEB

EDUCATION WEEK on the WEB



Focus on Basics Key to Clinton Call For Testing

By Lynn Olson

Washington

President Clinton re-entered the contentious debate over national **standards** and testing this month with a proposal designed to avoid the pitfalls of the past.

His call for voluntary new national tests in reading and math could help move the discussion of academic **standards** back into the realm of ordinary citizens. Critics have described some of the existing **standards** documents as jargon-laden treatises written only for insiders.

Mr. Clinton is clearly seeking to respond to anxiety that children are not learning the basics. He even framed his proposal in the language of parental rights, co-opting an appeal most often made by conservatives.

The plan, unveiled in the president's State of the Union Address, won support from surprising quarters: Chester E. Finn Jr. and Diane Ravitch, two assistant secretaries of education under Republican presidents, both praised the idea. So did Republican Gov. John Engler of Michigan. Even some GOP members of Congress were receptive.

"I think that what is very smart about the president's approach is he's focusing on math and reading, which are probably the least controversial subjects," said Ms. Ravitch, a senior research scholar at New York University. "Everybody agrees these are basic skills."

The plan also received accolades from groups representing big businesses, including the National Alliance of Business and the Business Roundtable.

Even so, the plan has not deflected criticisms. "It is the nationalization and federalization of education," said Kris Ardizzone, the legislative director for the Eagle Forum, the conservative group led by Phyllis Schlafly. "That's something the federal government is not empowered to do."

"Adding another test is not going to, by itself, improve anything," said Monty Neill, the associate director of the testing watchdog group FairTest.

Learning From Mistakes

President Clinton's plan would be limited to a reading test in grade 4 based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress and a mathematics test in grade 8 based on the Third International Mathematics and Science Study. ("Clinton Gives Top Billing to Education Plan," Feb. 12, 1997.) NAEP is a congressionally mandated

Government

Politics

See the related story in This Week's News. ["Political Shift Emboldens Clinton To Urge Tests."](#)

Read the **Standards** and Assessments section of ["Quality Counts,"](#) our recent special report on the condition of public education in the 50 states.

Read the related story from [Quality Counts](#), ["Compact for Change,"](#) about a community-based project that embraces high **standards** for all students.

Read our story,
"Math, English
Standards
Released in Calif.,"
Nov. 27, 1996.

Education Plan," Feb. 12, 1997.) NAEP is a congressionally mandated assessment that is given to a national sample of students in grades 4, 8, and 12; TIMMS is an international study that recently compared students' performance in math and science in 41 countries.

Focusing on two subjects in two grades and voluntary tests, Mr. Clinton hopes to avoid any specter of a federal curriculum.

"We were trying very deliberately to create a climate in which this can move forward without causing everyone to refight the old battles," Michael Cohen, the president's education adviser, said last week.

Read our story,
"Survey Seeks To
Identify 'Essential'
Standards," Nov.
6, 1996.

One of the mistakes that advocates of national *standards* made initially, said John Barth, the director of education policy studies for the National Governors' Association, "is that we didn't make it explicitly clear that you have to lay a foundation in basic learning in the early years in order to get to some higher-order thinking skills."

"If we can keep the debate on the right topics this will probably help," Mr. Barth said of the president's proposal. "If it becomes just more political holy wars over this stuff, then we're taking several steps backward."

'Already Have *Standards*'

Read Point One of
the president's
10-point plan:
National *Standards*
of Academic
Excellence.

Mr. Clinton also shifted the debate by focusing on the *standards* embedded in two widely respected, existing tests instead of those crafted in recent years by groups representing subject areas throughout the curriculum.

In doing so, he sidestepped the whole issue of whether the model national *standards* written by those groups are good enough.

"We already have widely accepted, rigorous national *standards* in both reading and math," Mr. Clinton said in a speech to the Maryland legislature last week, "and widely used tests based on those *standards*."

In reading, the *standards* Mr. Clinton is talking about are the reading frameworks and performance *standards* for NAEP, which set forth criteria for whether students are performing at a basic, proficient, or advanced level. The goal is to have every 4th grader perform at the basic level or above in reading. Only 60 percent scored that well in 1994.

In math, the *standard* is the framework for developing the TIMMS assessment; there are no real performance *standards*. The test simply identifies the international average across all of the countries that participated in the study in 1995-96.

Currently, only 45 percent of U.S. students perform at the international average; the goal is to have every 8th grader reach that mark. ("U.S. Students About Average in Global Study," Nov. 27, 1996.)

George Madaus, a professor of education and public policy at Boston College, said: "My position has always been that the national *standards* themselves don't mean anything until you have a test. It's the test that comes to operationalize and define the standards."

Many observers have worried that states are not setting rigorous enough *standards*. The tests envisioned by Mr. Clinton would provide them with a benchmark.

Effect on State *Standards*

The subject groups that wrote voluntary national *standards* in math and English praised Mr. Clinton's proposal.

"We see these national tests as focusing a lot of attention on the community resolve that's needed to make sure that our kids get the education in math that they need," Linda P. Rosen, the executive director of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, said last week.

She has offered the group's expertise to the Department of Education in drafting the specifications for the new tests. "My point was that we wanted test specifications that were grounded in what we view as important in the United States," she said.

Alan E. Farstrup, the executive director of the International Reading Association, which developed model English *standards* in collaboration with the National Council of Teachers of English said, "I think in the area of reading, the NAEP framework is quite solid and a reasonable document."

"My only concern," he added, "is that there's a lot happening at the state level in developing *standards*, and that needs to be somehow meshed with what the president has in mind."

Few observers thought Mr. Clinton's proposal would lessen the emphasis on state *standards*-setting. "I think state *standards* is still the way we're moving," said Milton Goldberg, the executive vice president of the National Alliance of Business.

But he and others said they hope states can begin to identify a common core that all students should know, regardless of where they live.

Working Out Details

Under the president's plan, the Education Department would spend some \$7 million this year and over the next several years to develop the 90-minute tests. The actual work would be done through competitive contracts with outside experts, with broad public input. New tests would be written annually.

The federal government would neither administer nor score the tests. Instead, it would license interested test publishers, states, and districts that could give them as part of their own testing programs.

The first round of tests would be ready in 1999 and would be offered free to school districts. In following years, states and schools would pay about \$5 per student to participate, although the government would continue to pay for test development.

After each test administration, the entire test, along with answers and scoring guides, would be released. And the test and supporting materials would be available on the Internet so that parents, students,

and teachers could know what was expected to reach the *standards*.

By making the test questions public the Education Department also hopes to avoid some of the controversy that has surrounded NAEP. Licensing the tests to commercial test publishers also avoids criticisms that the government is competing with them for business.

Michael H. Kean, the vice president for public and governmental affairs for CTB/McGraw-Hill, a leading test-maker, said it was too early to tell whether the proposal would win the backing of test publishers.

It is anticipated that about 80 percent of the test items would be multiple choice and that about 20 percent would require students to produce their own answers.

Another Test Needed?

Some observers, such as Mr. Neill of FairTest, the National Center for Fair & Open Testing, questioned whether creating new tests was a judicious use of resources and would help students who already were failing in school.

Mr. Neill also suggested that teachers would feel pressured to teach to the tests--something that he believes would work to inflate NAEP scores, eventually sabotaging the usefulness of the existing national assessment.

Similar arguments contributed to the defeat of President Bush's testing proposals in his America 2000 plan.

Others wondered whether the \$5-per-student fee would be an adequate amount, given the scope of the plan. "The development costs might be OK," said William J. Randall, the chairman of the governing board that oversees NAEP. "But I have not seen a \$5-per-student test in 10 years that was worth much."

Mark D. Musick, the president of the Southern Regional Education Board, also worried about sustaining participation once the federal money is gone. Getting states and schools to participate in NAEP has been a problem in the past.

"You could say that it will be so valuable that the states will see it and run with it," Mr. Musick said. "I think you're going to need something that goes a little bit beyond that."

State officials in Democratic-led Maryland already have said they will incorporate the new tests into their state's program.

Ken S. Stroupe, the press secretary for Republican Gov. George Allen of *Virginia*, said: "Presumably the tests would be geared toward the national *standards* and not toward *Virginia's* academic *standards*. And, frankly, *Virginia's* academic *standards* are better than this one-size-fits-all that's being adopted by Washington."

Staff Writer David J. Hoff contributed to this report.

On the Web

Read background materials for the president's initiative on national *standards*, including, "[Mastering the Basics Once and for All: Reaching for High *Standards* in Reading and Math.](#)" and "[Technical Information on the National Reading and Math Tests.](#)"

See "[A Survey of State *Standards*-Setting Efforts.](#)" from the Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory Web site.

Standards and Education: A Roadmap for State Policymakers. This briefing from the Education Commission of the States describes how states should go about raising educational *standards*.

50 Ways To Teach Them Grammar. Diane Ravitch writes in this April 1996 opinion piece that the governors --Democratic and Republican alike--who oppose national *standards* are all wrong.

What Should Children Learn? Paul Gagnon in *The Atlantic Monthly*, December 1995. Starting school reform by first deciding what every child should learn strikes most people as only common sense, writes the author. Only the vastly inertial educational establishment considers it radical, he says.

Performance *Standards*: How Good Is Good Enough? A brief for the 1996 National Education Summit by Ann Borthwick and Kate Nolan of the New *Standards* Project.

Improving America's Schools: *Standards*. This newsletter, one of a series of [Newsletters on Issues in School Reform](#) from the U.S. Department of Education, provides an overview of the variety of *standards*-setting activities occurring in elementary and secondary education in this country.

Developing Content *Standards*: Creating a Process for Change. This October 1993 brief from the Consortium for Policy Research in Education outlines some lessons suggested by past and current efforts to develop ambitious *standards*.

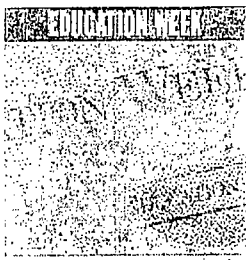
State Responsibility for Student Opportunity: Commitment and Issues. A November 1995 policy statement from the Council of Chief State School Officers. Schools must change so that all students meet higher standards--and states must provide leadership for this process.

[Return to Table of Contents](#) [Home](#) [About Us](#) [Contact Us](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Terms of Use](#)

© 1997 Editorial Projects in Education

MARCH 12, 1997

EDUCATION WEEK on the WEB



Testing Ventures Tied to *Standards* Take Flight

By Millicent Lawton

If you tapped into the voice mail of the man overseeing Colorado's new student assessment last week, you got more than just a greeting.

Unsolicited, Don Watson's voice announced the April and May dates

Government
& Politics

For background, past stories, and related Web links, please see our [Issues Page on Assessment](#).

Unsolicited, Don Watson's voice announced the April and May dates when the statewide test of student achievement is to be given for the first time.

The message is not only a public service. It is also emblematic of a testing system plagued with uncertainty in the past couple of months, including when it would get under way and where its funding would come from.

But Mr. Watson and his colleagues are forging ahead and now plan to launch the testing program April 28.

Read our story, ["Political Shift Emboldens Clinton To Urge Tests,"](#) Feb. 19, 1997.

Though less pummeled than Colorado's, new testing ventures linked to academic *standards* are appearing all over the country. This spring marks the birth of either a whole new statewide assessment system, as in Florida, or new pieces of a recently introduced one, as in Utah and Kansas.

In other states, such as *Maryland*, state officials are making the commitment to create new examinations.

In either case, such planned or existing state assessments are aligned with *standards* that the state has recently set for what students should know and be able to do. That way, tests in a given state can measure how well students are achieving the specific goals that educators have set for them.

Read our story, ["Focus on Basics Key to Clinton Call for Testing,"](#) Feb. 19, 1997.

That scenario has been pursued by state policymakers at least since 1989, when the nation's governors and President Bush met in Charlottesville, Va., a seminal moment in the movement to set high academic expectations for U.S. students. And it's particularly been the aim since it became clear politically that the states--not any federally created body--would be the ones deciding just how high to set those *standards*.

Aligning assessments with state *standards* "is a natural evolution and consequence of what we've been engaged in for a number of years," said Christopher T. Cross, the president of the Council for Basic Education in Washington, which promotes high *standards* in schools. "It's the bow wave of what will be actions in many states."

Read our story, ["Advisory Panel Presents National-Test Plan to Bush,"](#) Jan. 23, 1991.

"What's encouraging to me," said Mr. Cross, who was an assistant secretary of education in the Bush administration, "is we're really following through on a strategy and direction that has considerable support and around which there is remarkable consensus."

Colorado Retools

In Colorado, Mr. Watson, the student-assessment supervisor, perhaps wishes there had been more consensus there in recent weeks. In January, just two months after the state school board formally awarded the contract for writing the state's rigorous new assessment, the exam's future was thrown into question.

With the start of the legislative session, lawmakers balked at the \$1.6 million first-year cost of the testing program. Some thought they had been promised a price tag more like \$600,000. A state education department request for supplemental funding never made it out of the

joint budget committee, Mr. Watson said.

After legislators made clear their displeasure, the testing system--which has been on a mercilessly tight schedule--was retooled. And the education department has vowed to find the money it needs from within its own coffers, without squeezing districts or laying off workers.

Originally, every 4th grader was to be tested in either reading, writing, or geography, and testing was to get under way April 14. Now, there's a two-week delay, and geography has been shelved. Every 4th grader will take both reading and writing instead.

"It's playing havoc with everything, logistically and technically," Mr. Watson said of the furor and changes. "I have joked about 'which assessment are we going to work on today?'"

Nonetheless, Colorado's content *standards* are well regarded and seen as challenging.

And now, after negotiations between officials in the education department and state legislators, Mr. Watson said last week, "We're on track." But, on a realistic note, he added: "That doesn't mean it couldn't get derailed."

Florida Debut

This month in Florida, meanwhile, students in grades 4, 5, 8, and 10 are taking reading and math field tests for the new Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. Once officials see how the field tests go, the first testing that will count will be given next January and February, said Thomas Fisher, the testing director for the state education department.

The new, \$8 million-a-year testing is aligned with the Sunshine State *Standards*, which the state board adopted last May. The exam will provide results about the performance of individual students as well as help the state monitor how schools and districts are doing.

The new tests both complement existing statewide tests and replace old ones. They fill the void left in 1990 when the state canned its minimum-competency testing in grades 3, 5, and 8, Mr. Fisher said.

In addition to a separate essay test of writing for three grades and another 10th grade reading and math test, students currently must pass the state's high school competency test before they can graduate.

With the advent of the new assessment, the existence of the 11th grade graduation test "will become an obvious problem next year," Mr. Fisher said, "because the minimum-competency test is going to be easier than the FCAT."

A decision has yet to be made, Mr. Fisher said, but the 10th grade test could become the exit exam. Or, he said, any student who does well enough on the new comprehensive assessment might not have to take the competency test.

Delaware, too, is working hard to have its new testing system debut next school year with assessments in language arts and math for grades

3, 5, 8, and 10.

In the 1998-99 year, the state would inaugurate exams in science and social studies. The assessments are to include multiple-choice questions, open-ended responses, and hands-on tasks.

How High the Stakes?

Other states, including Utah and *Maryland*, are adding new pieces to assessment systems that have already gotten under way.

This spring, Utah will give a new secondary-level math test for the first time and field-test a secondary science exam.

The new state tests reflect recently revised state core curriculum *standards*, said Barbara Lawrence, the coordinator of evaluation and assessment for the state education department.

In 1995, Utah kicked off its new elementary math exam, and last year did so with its elementary science test. Other subject tests will follow, such as the field test of elementary language arts in 1999.

The *Maryland* state school board last month moved into new territory by creating tough new end-of-course tests for high school students in English, math, science, and social studies.

For several years, the state has given challenging assessments in grades 3, 5, and 8 that were created in conjunction with state *standards*.

The high school tests, which would begin in 1999, would provide individual student scores, unlike those in the lower grades. They would replace the state's low-level competency tests that high school students now must take to graduate.

Still to be decided is whether a student's performance on the tests would be linked to the award of a high school diploma, said Mr. Cross, who is also the president of the *Maryland* state board.

Concerns from parents and others about the potential high-stakes nature of the new high school tests prompted state schools Superintendent Nancy S. Grasmick last month to vow to convene an advisory panel of community members, educators, and students.

On the Web

Standards & Education: A Roadmap for State Policymakers. This briefing from the Education Commission of the States describes how states should go about raising educational *standards*.

Performance Standards: How Good Is Good Enough? A brief for the 1996 National Education Summit by Ann Borthwick and Kate Nolan of the New *Standards* Project.

Improving America's Schools: Standards. This newsletter, one of a series of *Newsletters on Issues in School Reform* from the U.S. Department of Education, provides an overview of the variety of *standards*-setting activities occurring in elementary and secondary education in this country.

Improving America's Schools: Creating Better Student Assessments. This newsletter, one of a series of *Newsletters on Issues in School Reform* from the U.S. Department of Education, provides an overview of the issues affecting state student-assessment

systems, including assessment requirements under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1994.

Copyright 1997 by Educational Resources Information Center

© 1997 Editorial Projects in Education

February 21, 1996

EDUCATION WEEK on the WEB



States Move To Toughen Exit Exams

By Millicent Lawton

In the drive to make higher academic expectations a reality, some states are moving to toughen up the tests students must pass to receive a diploma.

For many educators and employers, the high school diploma has lost its significance as all too many students graduate with few skills or low-level ones.

Some states require high school students to pass so-called competency exams in order to graduate. But to better prepare students for college and the workplace, education reformers say, schools must insist that students go beyond demonstrating their literacy, for example, to showing they can do literary analysis.

Maryland, which launched a highly regarded program of rigorous tests for 3rd, 5th, and 8th graders in 1991, decided last month to junk the "functional tests" that a decade of high school students has had to pass to graduate. State officials want to replace them with a battery of 10 tests that continue the tough *standards* that have been applied to the younger students. In New York state, Commissioner of Education Richard P. Mills in December proposed phasing out the state's minimum-competency test and requiring all high school students to take the more rigorous regents' exams. To date, the regents' exams have been taken largely by college-bound students.

And in Wisconsin, Gov. Tommy G. Thompson last month proposed a mandatory high school exit exam. But instead of having statewide *standards*, the plan would allow the state's 426 local districts to have their own performance *standards* and their own exit exams. (See Education Week, Feb. 7, 1996.)

"You could conceivably have 426 different definitions of proficiency or [high school] completion," said Steven Dold, an assistant superintendent in the Wisconsin education department.

The governor's idea is unlikely to appear as legislation until next January, Mr. Dold said.

Mr. Thompson has charged an education task force with looking into the issue.

'Front of the Pack'

The plan for new high school assessments in *Maryland* is part of a broad and ambitious effort by the state to put its students on an even footing with the best students worldwide.

In terms of what other states are doing, *Maryland* is "right at the front of the pack," said Christopher T. Cross, the president of the state board of education and the president of the Council for Basic Education in Washington. The state's battery of tests "makes it unique, gives it much more depth and richness" than high school graduation tests in other states, he said.

Mr. Cross said he hopes for the day when solid scores on the high school assessment battery qualify a student for admission to the state university system or for higher pay in the workplace.

The state board plans to have *Maryland* students, beginning with those who will graduate in 2004, pass a battery of 10 tests: three in English, three in social studies, and two each in mathematics and science. The tests will be given at the end of the courses that cover the material in that area.

Each exam--a mix of multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay questions--will incorporate a fifth content area called "skills for success." The skills include how to work with others, communicate, use technology, and think critically.

Teachers, content specialists, and college professors have spent two years developing

the curriculum to be tested, known as the "core learning goals." Educators and business leaders came up with the skills for success, along with support from the *Maryland* Business Roundtable for Education, a group of about 70 corporate executives.

Preparing students for such assessments will require changes in high school curricula and in teacher training, and funding for such efforts remains to be worked out. Computers and other electronic telecommunications equipment will help some remote schools offer the coursework needed to prepare students for the assessments, officials said.

The new assessment program will not come cheap, either. Its annual cost could run to \$19 million once all the tests are in place, and many students will have to take them more than once to pass, said Ronald A. Peiffer, the assistant state superintendent for school and community outreach. But that price tag likely would drop to \$13 million a year as time passed and fewer students needed to retake the test, he said. The program's budget must get annual approval from the state legislature, which appears supportive, Mr. Peiffer said.

Initially, about 50 percent of students will fail the new tests, Mr. Peiffer predicted. But that should drop off to just 25 percent within two or three years, he said. Students will receive many chances to take retake the tests, and Mr. Peiffer said he did not expect a significant change in the graduation rate.

Mr. Cross said *Maryland* could save some money if it could share the cost of developing test items with other states that are trying to do the same. The new testing costs could also be offset by cuts elsewhere in the education department, Mr. Peiffer said.

The new tests, unlike the current ones, promise to challenge students.

Virtually all high school students now pass *Maryland's* so-called functional tests, which are administered in reading, math, writing, and citizenship. About 97 percent of students pass the reading test in the 9th grade. Some students pass the tests as early as the 7th and 8th grades, Mr. Cross said.

"Clearly, that's not sufficient any longer," he said.

The new tests will ensure that the same *standard* for excellence applies to all students, no matter where they attend school--urban Baltimore, rural Garrett County in the western part of the state, or academically renowned Montgomery County, a Washington suburb.

"That's what this [assessment] is designed to deal with," Mr. Cross said, "so that we know children in whatever jurisdiction they're in will be getting a comparable education."

Not Only College-Bound

New York could be headed toward similar rigorous, systemic changes.

Commissioner Mills has proposed that 9th graders entering high school next fall be required to take the regents' exam in English, instead of competency tests in reading and writing, in order to graduate. Students take what are known as regents-level courses to prepare for the exam.

For each successive entering freshman class, another regents' exam requirement would be added: in math, then social studies, then science.

Under Mr. Mills' plan, which includes raising *standards* in all the academic subjects, the competency tests would be eliminated by 1999.

His proposal also would raise the minimum score needed on the regents' exams to get credit toward the state's so-called regents' diploma. School districts would still be able to issue local diplomas to students who did not meet the regents' cutoff.

In the 1994-95 school year, 40 percent of high school students statewide received a regents' diploma. About 70 percent of students statewide have taken at least one regents-level course.

"It's a rigorous program that, in these days of higher *standards*, all children in New York state need to subscribe to, not just the college-bound," said Bill Hirschen, a spokesman for the state education department.

© 1996 Editorial Projects in Education

EDUCATION WEEK on the WEB



Keeping Tabs on Quality

COVER STORY

BY LYNN OLSON

America's public school systems are riddled with excellence but rife with mediocrity.

For more than a decade, Americans have been deluged with negative reports about their schools. And politicians have responded with promises: U.S. students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement by 2000. Every student will master challenging academic content. All children will start school ready to learn.

These are admirable goals. But they are far from being fulfilled. And today most Americans remain frustrated and confused about the quality of the public school systems. Polls suggest that taxpayers increasingly are disenchanted with public education.

Subscribe to
Education Week!

There has been modest progress, but a tremendous variation in school quality persists. Our public school systems are riddled with excellence but rife with mediocrity.

It is the classic good news/bad news scenario:

Student test scores have inched up, with some real improvements in math and science. But, overall, student achievement is about the same or only slightly better than it was in the early 1970s. Scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress--which tests a representative sample of students nationwide--indicate that fewer than half the students tested can do challenging work at their grade levels.

African-American, Hispanic, and American Indian students score much lower than white students in every subject in every grade. During the 1970s and early 1980s, minority students made dramatic gains in achievement. But since the late 1980s, progress has stalled. And in some subjects and some grades the gap is widening once again. (See "Race and Demography.")

Contrary to popular belief, U.S. students generally outperform students from other large countries on international assessments of basic literacy. Our 8th graders score above average on international assessments in science but below average in mathematics.

Meanwhile, millions of students attend school each day in crumbling facilities, to learn from teachers who have not majored in the subject areas they teach, in schools that are too big for them to be known well.

Many children in our poorest urban and rural areas attend schools

that lack even the barest necessities, from up-to-date textbooks to functioning toilets. Some of these school systems spend thousands of dollars less per child than those in the more affluent suburbs.

The question is not whether public schools are better or worse than they used to be. The question is whether public schools are good enough to prepare all children for the next century.

It is an issue that should concern every American. A mediocre education will act as a ball and chain in the high-tech, information-oriented society in which we now live. Today, people who know more earn more. And they are less likely to be unemployed. A college graduate today earns twice as much as a high school graduate and nearly three times as much as a high school dropout.

But education is not just an individual concern. No nation can rise above the level of its people's abilities for very long. To solve the formidable problems the United States faces and to capitalize on the incredible opportunities the future holds, we will need all the brainpower, talent, and energy we can muster.

To help Americans address the question of whether our schools are preparing all children adequately, *Quality Counts* examines the actions states have taken to raise student achievement.

The first of what will be an annual *Education Week*/Pew Charitable Trusts report on the condition of education in the 50 states, *Quality Counts* compiles statistics on more than 75 specific indicators. It evaluates state policies and practices based on this information. And it assigns grades to states in the same way that teachers routinely assign grades to young people. It also includes a narrative on each state, based on surveys and interviews with educators, policymakers, citizens, and business leaders. The primary aim is not to rank states against each other, but to establish a baseline against which future state progress can be measured.

The report cards are not the kind that students would rush home to their parents.

In the four categories that the report examines--adopting challenging academic standards and measures of student progress, improving the quality of teaching, spending enough dollars and distributing them equitably and wisely, and creating a school climate that supports teaching and learning--most states rated at best a C. Their performance was generally mediocre, and many turned in barely passable grades. This translates into student achievement well below a level that can sustain this nation economically and politically.

Standards and Assessments. Most states are setting standards for what students should learn and how well they should learn it. They also are developing tests that measure how well students meet the standards. It is in this category that states earned the best grades--22 A's and 13 B's. But these grades may be misleading because there is no measure of how rigorous state standards are. And many state systems are still being developed.

Teaching Quality. Despite increased attention to teaching quality, there was not a single A and only 8 B's. Nationally, almost one in four secondary teachers do not have a degree in the subject that they teach. Only a handful of states now require teachers to major in a subject other than education to earn a teaching license.

Financing. States are spending more money for education than they did 10 years ago, and the increases have generally outpaced inflation. But too few of the additional dollars have reached regular classrooms to support teaching and learning. Inequities in spending across school districts plague most states. And resources for education are expected to be universally tight in the next decade. The prognosis: Educators are going to have to produce more with less. Only five states received A's for the adequacy of their education spending, five received A's for the equitable distribution of resources, and none received A's for how money is spent.

School Climate. States earned their lowest grades in this all-important category. School climate includes measures of safety and discipline. But it also looks at class and school size, the autonomy that schools have to make decisions, and whether schools support learning and have a clear sense of mission. Only four states received B's. Large schools and classes make it particularly difficult to create a climate conducive to learning. In 15 states, more than half of elementary school classes exceed 24 students. In 36 states, the majority of secondary school English teachers routinely face 80 or more students a day. Nearly half the students in most states attend elementary or high schools that are bigger than research suggests is optimal to promote learning.

Why Is Progress So Difficult?

The nation's slow progress when it comes to education cannot be blamed on a lack of effort. States have passed a dizzying array of education laws in the past dozen years. But few state policies have succeeded in producing better schools. Why?

The problems outside of schools have gotten worse. Schools over the past several decades have had to cope with extraordinary challenges. More and more students are poor, do not speak English, and come from single- or no-parent homes. Teachers have to compete with a popular culture that glorifies entertainment and materialism and undermines traditional values. In the face of such problems, schools have done well just to keep from sliding backward.

Given these conditions, too many teachers, administrators, and school boards think the problem is in the children--not in the schools. They refuse to believe that fundamental change is needed and are unwilling--or unable--to change the way schools are organized and run. "Just send us better children, and we'll do a better job" is their message.

Politicians too often are unwilling to do the hard work needed to understand the issues and craft workable solutions. They fail to take the long view--to make the unpopular decisions and expensive investments today that will bear fruit well after they have left office.

Visit our new
POLITICS WATCH
An overview of
President Clinton's
Education plan

Too often, the participants in the power structure--unions, school boards, politicians, and advocacy groups--are more concerned about protecting turf and their vested interests than they are about the welfare of children.

Despite the frequent warnings of school failure, the public has not demanded better schools. Often, parents and other residents in local communities have reacted negatively to school change. And the public seems increasingly unwilling to tax itself to support public education. Those who pay the highest price for school failure are those with the least power to do anything about it--the poor, immigrants, and minorities. Many poor and minority students have the deck stacked against them when it comes to education. Across the country, such students are less likely to have access to qualified teachers, up-to-date textbooks and materials, and challenging curriculum.

 ur vast, complex, and disjointed system of education also makes real change extraordinarily difficult.

The United States does not have a national system of education, although we often talk as if we did. We have 50 state systems and over 14,000 school districts. There are more than 80,000 public schools, 2.5 million teachers, and 44 million public school students. Within this universe, there are incredible extremes. New York City--with more than a million schoolchildren--is so populous that it would rank 13th nationally in student enrollment if it were a state. In contrast, the entire state of Nebraska has about 1.6 million residents--but 662 school districts. More than half of those districts consist of a single elementary school. Given this diversity, a one-size-fits-all solution is out of the question.

NEXT PAGE

© 1997 Editorial Projects in Education Inc.

EDUCATION WEEK on the WEB



Keeping Tabs on Quality

CONTINUED

Our tradition of strong local control of schools also makes it hard to move forward as a nation. In Nebraska, for example, small rural communities routinely battle school consolidation efforts. Connie Spellman, the education chairwoman at the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, says the state lacks the leverage to mandate that schools adopt higher academic standards. "Local control can be a wonderful strength, and it can be an incredible weakness," she says.

Large and unwieldy state bureaucracies further undercut progress. Often, the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing. At a meeting on college-admissions standards last summer, Californians listed no fewer than a dozen efforts to raise the expectations for student achievement. "There are an enormous number of competing centers of power," noted one participant. "Is this a Tower of Babel or can we pull it all together?"

Skirmishes among the branches of government can be fierce. Last October, Democratic Gov. Zell Miller of Georgia asked the entire state school board to resign, hoping to end months of bickering between the group and state Superintendent Linda C. Schrenko. "The only way to correct this state of affairs, I have concluded, is simply to start over," he wrote. The rift between the elected Republican schools chief and the gubernatorially appointed board had become so severe that the board had voted to hire its own lobbyist and public relations firm, separate from the education department.

Subscribe to
Education Week!

The on-again, off-again nature of state reform efforts further stymies results. As the political leadership changes, so does the agenda. John Dornan, the director of the Public School Forum of North Carolina, directed a study of barriers to school reform in the Southeast. "After the first year, we all were just struck by how many initiatives had stopped and started since 1983," he says. "Last year's panacea is this year's throwaway. It would be laughable if the impact of it wasn't so tragic. When we did focus groups and case studies, the degree of cynicism and anger and frustration at the school-building level was, for anyone concerned about school reform, really frightening."

The job of fixing schools would be difficult even if policymakers, politicians, and the public agreed on goals and solutions, but they don't. Today, nearly all states are pursuing reforms based on high standards for student achievement, tests that measure whether students have met those standards, and new ways to hold schools and districts accountable for results.

But a vocal and determined group of reformers believes that a better way to improve the schools is through competition. If parents and students could choose among public, private, and religious schools, they argue, good schools would get better. And bad ones would improve or go out of business. Since Republican Gov. Tom Ridge took office in Pennsylvania in 1995, for example, he has championed private school choice. Two attempts to pass voucher bills that included private and religious schools have failed since 1994. But the issue is sure to resurface in a future legislative session. In Connecticut, Republican Gov. John G. Rowland also vigorously advocates vouchers and other forms of private school choice.

Visit our new
POLITICS WATCH
An overview of
President Clinton's
Education plan

Finally, a major obstacle to school improvement is money. Some politicians argue that increasing education budgets means throwing good money after bad. But educators in virtually every state report financial pressures. Many are struggling to hold their ground in the wake of booming student enrollments,

rampant child poverty, and rising rates of violence and drug abuse in the neighborhoods surrounding their schools. School-finance lawsuits that challenge the equitable distribution of education spending are currently pending in a dozen states.

Yet despite all these obstacles, there is enough research and anecdotal evidence about successful schools to tell us what is most likely to improve schooling and student performance. The problem is creating public awareness and support for these solutions, so that policymakers and educators will apply them and have the patience to stick with them.

Even if states make substantial, sustained, and focused efforts now to improve the schools and raise student achievement, it will take time for state policies to filter down to the classroom. That is particularly true in a large, highly decentralized system such as ours.

But it's time to make the reality match the rhetoric.

Student Achievement: Progress and Pause

The *Education Week*/Pew report does not give states a letter grade for student achievement and academic course-taking. Instead, it ranks states by how well their students perform on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. NAEP is the single best source of national data on student performance.

In both math and science, student performance has improved since the early 1980s. In reading, there have been minimal changes. And in writing, the results are mixed. No state has more than half its students performing at the "proficient" level on naep, which indicates they can do challenging work at their grade levels and are ready to move on.

In math, for example, only 21% of 4th graders in 1992 could solve this problem correctly: "George buys two calculators that cost \$3.29 each. If there is no tax, how much change will he receive from a \$10 bill?" Some of the progress we have made as a nation can be ascribed directly

to state efforts to increase academic rigor. Forty-two states have raised the course requirements for students to graduate from high school since 1983, when *A Nation at Risk* first warned of a "rising tide of mediocrity" in our schools.

Today, half of all public high school graduates have completed the core academic curriculum recommended in the report: four years of English and three years each of math, science, and social studies. That figure is up from only 13% in 1982.

Subscribe to
Education Week!

Nationally, students also are taking more upper-level math and science courses, including geometry, Algebra 2, chemistry, and physics. Students also are enrolled in more Advanced Placement courses, which teach college-level material in high school. This may be one reason why the test scores of 17-year-olds in science and math have rebounded after declining in the 1970s.

Nonetheless, of the 39 states responding to a survey by the Council of Chief State School Officers in 1994, none had half of their students enrolled in both upper-level science and math courses that year.

Only two states--Maryland and Utah--currently have as many as one-third of their 8th graders enrolled in algebra. Yet studies show that taking algebra in 8th grade can add up to greater math achievement in high school.

According to the Third International Mathematics and Science Study, which scrutinized the curriculum and teaching in 41 nations, the content taught in U.S. 8th grade math classrooms is at a 7th grade level in comparison to other countries.

In Japan and Germany, for example, 13-year-olds study algebra and geometry intensively. In the United States, 13-year-olds take a less-challenging curriculum of arithmetic, fractions, and a little algebra.

Utah provides a good example of what states can accomplish when they focus on academic course-taking. The state provides cash rewards to schools to offer more Advanced Placement courses. Today, three out of four schools in the state offer ap classes and 59% of high school students are enrolled in upper-level mathematics. South Carolina has required all school districts to offer ap exams since 1984. In the past decade, the number of ap exams taken in the state has more than doubled, to 13,124.

Standards, Assessments: Where's the Rigor?

When it comes to standards and assessments, states averaged a B for effort, and 22 states earned an A. But we do not know much about whether state standards and assessments are sufficiently rigorous.

One of the weaknesses of American education is that we lack clear goals for what students should learn and how well they should learn it.

By the late 1980s, it had become clear to most educators and policymakers that simply raising course requirements was not enough. States also began to set standards for what students should know and be able to do in the core academic subjects and how well they should be able to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

In the 1990s, standards-based reform has emerged as the principal strategy at the state level for improving the schools. Today, all but three states--Iowa, Montana, and Wyoming--have made the commitment to develop state standards in the academic disciplines. In addition, in 1995, 43 states conducted some form of statewide testing of students.

At last year's National Education Summit in Palisades, N.Y., the governors and key business leaders reiterated their support for states and school districts to set clear and common standards for student learning.

One reason standards-based reform has so much appeal is that it is a wedge issue. It necessitates all kinds of other desirable changes. Once states raise the standards for what children should know and be able to do, textbooks and tests must be revised to reflect the standards, and teachers must learn how to teach them.

Evidence from one school district in Colorado shows how clear standards and better tests can raise student achievement. Beginning in 1988, Weld County School District 6 set clear standards for students in the core academic subjects. It defined how well students should be able to perform to meet its standards. And it measured progress both in the classroom and through districtwide tests. The tests did not just ask students to fill in the blanks. Students also had to justify and explain their reasoning in writing.

[PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

[NEXT PAGE](#)

© 1997 Editorial Projects in Education Inc.



Keeping Tabs on Quality

CONTINUED

For a K-4 standard on data, probability, and statistics, for example, the standards state that students, among other things, should be able to "construct, read, and interpret displays of data, including tables, charts, pictographs, and bar graphs" and "interpret data using the concepts of largest, smallest, most often, and middle."

Subscribe to
Education Week!



Read California's Draft Interim Content and Performance Standards to see a sample standard from 6th grade history-social science.

In one exercise to measure 4th graders' knowledge and skills, students are shown five "mystery graphs" and asked to select which of the five shows the heights of 4th graders in inches. Then they justify their selections in writing.

By 1994-95, the district's test scores in math, reading, and writing had risen across the board. And performance had improved for poor and Hispanic students, as well as for middle-class and white students. Scores on college-admissions tests also improved.

"We have learned that if you are clear on what you want students to know and be able to do, and if you can provide baseline data and monitor progress, teachers can and will focus on strategies in the classroom that will create significant gains in student achievement," explains Superintendent John Pacheco in a report released by the state.

Despite such success stories, we don't know much about the quality or rigor of states' standards and assessments. No group in the country currently evaluates the rigor of standards-setting across the 50 states and informs the public of its conclusions. The American Federation of Teachers looks at whether state standards are "clear and specific enough" to write a curriculum or to be of use to classroom teachers. But it does not evaluate how rigorous the standards are.

One indication that states differ widely in how much they expect students to know was provided last year by the Southern Regional Education Board. It found that only 13% of Delaware's 8th graders met the standard for acceptable math performance in their state. In contrast, 83% of Georgia's 8th graders met the state math standard. Yet when 8th graders from both states took the 1992 NAEP math test, Delaware's students scored higher than students in Georgia.

"State standards for student achievement are so dramatically different that they simply don't make sense," concludes Mark D. Musick, the president of the sreb. "We need conversations among state leaders to understand exactly what it is that states with high standards expect students to learn and how this is different from what states with low standards expect."

Some people have suggested that what we really need is a national curriculum and a system of national examinations, similar to those in European countries. They argue that students in Georgia need to learn the same amount of mathematics as students in Delaware or anywhere else in the United States.

Education historian Diane Ravitch made precisely that point in an Op-Ed piece in *The Washington Post* last April. She questioned why anyone would want such a thing as "Oregon math, New York science, and Nebraska English."

"It's simply naive to believe that each state should have different standards in science, mathematics, English, and other important subjects," Ms. Ravitch wrote. "Students in my neighborhood need to know exactly the same math and science that are taught in the best schools in other cities, states, and nations."

But the politics of state and local control in the United States make a national curriculum highly unlikely. Controversy over the early drafts of voluntary national standards in U.S. history and English convinced many people that achieving national standards was impossible.

Visit our new
POLITICS WATCH
An overview of
President Clinton's
Education plan

The governors have made it clear that while they want to raise academic standards, they also want to retain the authority to do so on their own terms. They don't want anyone looking over their shoulders to tell them if their standards are rigorous enough, unless they specifically ask for the advice. And many local school

districts don't want states looking over their shoulders either.

In many states, standards-setting efforts have run aground on the shoals of political controversy. Minnesota has been trying to set standards for what students should know and be able to do to graduate from high school since the late 1980s. But in a state with strong local control, one observer describes the process as "tortuous" at best.

In Idaho, Anne Fox, the conservative Republican superintendent of education--elected on a back-to-basics slate--and a more moderate education community cannot agree on what the standards should be.

Iowa abandoned its effort to set statewide goals for student learning in 1993. A state steering committee had proposed "outcomes" in nine areas, including lifelong learning, problem-solving, diversity, group membership, and environmental responsibility. Opponents, many of them associated with conservative Christian groups, criticized the goals as vague, too far removed from the basics, and an attempt to impose "politically correct" values on the curriculum.

"I just don't have enough support in the state to move it forward," admitted then-State Director of Education William L. Lepley, who said he wished he had focused more on academic content. Mr. Lepley resigned shortly after the defeat, and the state opted instead to hold districts accountable for whether they had defined their own goals. It is widely agreed that the issue is dead for now--"clobbered," as one

observer put it.

Fights over statewide testing programs can be just as fierce as fights over the standards themselves. California abandoned its statewide testing program in 1995, after parents alleged that it was too value-laden and subjective. Gov. Pete Wilson also complained that it could not provide test scores for individual students.

At least one state seems to have found a good middle ground between raising standards at the state level and maintaining local control. Michigan has adopted standards at the state level for what students should know and be able to do in the various subjects. Districts can opt to use them. But the state testing program is based on the standards, as is state accreditation of schools.

"You could probably make the argument that we have a de facto state core curriculum because of our testing programs and school accreditation program that relies heavily on test results," says Mike Addonizio, an associate professor of educational administration at Wayne State University in Detroit. He argues that the Michigan solution meets the concerns both of advocates of local control and those who want strong state oversight of education.

Colorado's assessment system is still under development. But it also has finessed the balance between state and local control. The state has adopted well-regarded model standards for what students should learn in six academic subjects. Local school districts must meet or exceed the model state standards. And they must revise their curricula, instruction, tests, and continuing education for teachers to reflect the standards. William J. Randall, a former Colorado state superintendent of education, describes this compromise between state oversight and strong local control as a "stroke of common sense." And strong state leadership from Mr. Randall and Gov. Roy Romer has kept the standards-setting effort moving forward.

Subscribe to
Education Week!

Given how politically difficult it is to raise standards, some states might be tempted to give up. The New York state reading test, for example, includes this simple passage:

"Bears are big. They need a lot of food. Bears eat meat. They eat bugs. They eat berries. They eat honey. They eat fish, too. Bears feed in the spring. They feed in the summer. They feed in the fall. Bears look for food then. They fish."

Thousands of 3rd graders cannot read that passage. But New York is raising its standards rather than lowering them. "Students who are reading at low levels in the elementary grades will have no chance in high school," says Richard P. Mills, the state commissioner of education.

Once states have standards and aligned assessments in place, students' performance should have consequences for them and their schools.

A few states have ventured fearlessly into this area, making schools and districts more accountable for how well their students achieve. Texas is a prime example. The state tracks student test scores, dropout figures, and attendance rates. The data are used to rate schools and accredit school districts. Sanctions for low-performing sites range from public hearings to a state takeover, in which the principal and all of the school staff can be removed. In a new twist, the state will replace cash bonuses previously given to top-performing schools with up to \$5,000 in cash rewards for principals.

"Accountability, coupled with aligning authority and responsibility to local levels, is the best systemic change we can possibly make to achieve excellence for every child," Gov. George W. Bush told reporters at an education conference last summer.

More than half the states now say they provide rewards or sanctions for schools or school districts based on test performance. But a far smaller number of states provide clear incentives for students to achieve more. Only 14 states plan to promote or graduate students based on whether they have met state standards. Most states are still struggling to find the right balance between rewards and consequences, state control and local freedom.

[← PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

[NEXT PAGE →](#)

© 1997 Editorial Projects in Education Inc.

EDUCATION WEEK on the WEB



Keeping Tabs on Quality

CONTENTS

Susan H. Fuhrman, the co-director of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education at the University of Pennsylvania, explains why such accountability measures remain so controversial. "Most states are doing it. But it's technically difficult. It's politically difficult. And it's costly, if you're going to put money into the rewards, or make the sanctions meaningful, or provide meaningful assistance and remedies," she says. "For all those reasons, it's very, very hard. It starts with how to measure performance, but it doesn't end there."

Subscribe to
Education Week!

prev page =
14 states =
promote or
grad. st.
based on
whether they
meet state
standards

States are even more leery about imposing high stakes for students--like withholding a diploma--until the standards and assessments have been in place for a reasonable time. Many argue that there should be no real consequences for young people until all students have access to the resources and teaching needed to achieve the standards. When Texas and Ohio required their high school students to pass a test to earn a diploma, they ended up in court--even though the tests were geared to the 8th or 9th grade level.

Teaching Quality: A Top Priority?

Another area in which states have begun to focus their policymaking is the quality of teaching. But they clearly have a long way to go. States averaged a C in this category.

"A caring, competent, and qualified teacher for every child is the most important ingredient in education reform," argued the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future last fall. "Access to competent teaching must become a new student right."

During the 1970s and 1980s, many states raised teacher salaries, took some initial steps to strengthen how teachers are educated, and required that teachers pass a test to be licensed.

States have continued to work to upgrade the status and quality of teaching during the 1990s. They have done so by adopting three approaches common to most other professions: strengthening the institutions that prepare teachers, raising requirements for who can enter the profession, and providing experienced teachers with incentives to seek national certification.

4 In 28 states; more than 90% of new teacher candidates now graduate from schools of education that meet national standards for the quality of their programs. The standards have been developed by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, which represents both

teacher training institutions and subject-matter organizations. In states such as Arkansas and Nevada, all schools of education must meet neate standards. South Carolina's state institutions must meet the standards by 1999.

More than half the states now belong to a group that is working to strengthen how new teachers are tested and licensed, known as the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium.

Twenty states provide financial or other incentives for veteran teachers to seek certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The private organization was created in 1987 to certify individuals who have met its criteria for expert, accomplished teaching.

Many people think that improving teacher testing, licensure, and accreditation will strengthen teaching and make it a true profession, like law or medicine. But only time will tell whether this approach really leads to greater learning in the classroom.

Despite the push to improve teaching, most states are still a long way from that goal. Large percentages of teachers in every state still are teaching out of their areas of expertise. In 14 states--Arizona, Arkansas, California, Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia-- 40% or more of secondary school teachers do not hold a degree in the subject they teach.

A dozen states require a college major other than education for both elementary and secondary teachers to earn a teaching license.

Large numbers of teachers are allowed into the classroom each year with emergency, temporary, or no licenses. The percentage of inadequately licensed teachers ranges from a high of 12% in Hawaii and 11% in California to a low of 1% in Kansas, Michigan, Vermont, and Wyoming.

States have been much slower to fund continued on-the-job training for existing teachers, so that they can learn to do their jobs better. There are some exceptions. Vermont and Kentucky stand out for their efforts to pay for ongoing education for the existing teaching force.

Visit our new
POLITICS WATCH
An overview of
President Clinton's
Education plan

Before 1990, Kentucky did not provide any state dollars for continuing education for teachers. But after the state *raised its standards* for what students should know and be able to do, it stepped up to the plate to help teachers hone their skills. For the 1996-97 school year, the state appropriated \$14.5 million to support continuing education for about 42,000 teachers and administrators. State law requires that 65% of that money go to individual schools to support their plans for how to improve student learning. This amounts to about \$23 per student per year.

John Northrop, an associate commissioner of education in Kentucky, says, "We remain concerned about a minority of teachers, principals, and superintendents who say in surveys that they doubt it is realistic to

set significantly higher expectations for all children. The challenge is to provide the incentives and support necessary to change their attitudes and practice."

Minnesota also earns good grades for its attention to teacher quality. The state has created a board with a teacher majority to license new teachers. In the future, individuals will have to demonstrate what they know and can do to earn a teaching license, not just complete a required set of courses.

Funding: Adequacy, Equity, and Allocation

Not far in the background of most state discussions about how to improve schools lurks the question of money. States averaged a C+ for the adequacy of their spending on education. They averaged a C- for how education dollars are spent. And they averaged a B- for the equitable distribution of funds. Six states--Alaska, California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Texas--got a D for wide disparities in educational spending.

Nationally, we spend about \$244 billion each year on public education at the precollegiate level. This is usually the largest cost item in state budgets. Yet many researchers predict that educators are going to have to do more with less. Booming student enrollments, modest income growth, and an aging population all bode ill for large increases in school budgets. Cutbacks in federal aid for other social services will put additional pressure on states and localities to shift monies outside of education.

Huge differences remain in the spending on education across states, stemming, in part, from differences in wealth. New Jersey, for example, can tax its residents less for education than Maine and still outspend the New England state simply because New Jersey is more affluent.

But there are also relatively wealthy states, such as Massachusetts, that simply have chosen not to invest as much in education as they could. According to a study prepared for the Finance Project in Washington, Massachusetts increased its effort by nearly 30% in the 1970s, but decreased it by about 25% during the 1980s and early 1990s. A regional recession, combined with a tax-limitation measure approved by voters, sharply reduced state coffers. A revived economy and a 1993 school-reform law that provided some new revenue for education have improved the situation somewhat. Even so, Edward Moscovitch, one of the architects of the new law's finance provisions, says, "Statewide school spending is rising no faster than enrollment growth and inflation."

Subscribe to
Education Week!

Vast inequities in student spending also exist within states. Although many states are trying to address these issues, few have resolved them. For 25 years, New Jersey has been wrangling in the courts and state legislature over how to resolve glaring discrepancies in per-pupil spending across school districts. It ranks near the bottom on an analysis of equity conducted by the U.S. General Accounting Office. But New

Jersey is hardly alone. State systems for financing education have been declared unconstitutional in 13 states. And 12 other states have litigation pending.

Ronald F. Ferguson, a professor of education at Harvard University, suggests why money matters. He analyzed student test scores and other district-level data in Texas to see why some districts perform better than others. Districts with lower estimated spending had lower test scores after all else was held constant. The reason, he suggested: Wealthier districts appeared to spend more on smaller class sizes. They also hired more-educated and better-prepared teachers.

West Virginia stands out for its efforts to adequately finance all its schools. About 64% of the state's population resides in rural areas, and three out of 10 children live in poverty--a rate surpassed only by Mississippi and Louisiana. Yet West Virginia ranks at the top of all the states on equity and second from the top for its efforts to fund education. This positive performance can be traced back to a state supreme court decision in 1982 that forced West Virginia to revise its public education system. West Virginia also performs far better on national assessments of student learning than would be predicted based on its demographics.

Of course, money by itself is not the answer to poor student achievement. "For years, the public has observed that increasing the money spent on education has not increased student test scores," says the Consortium on Productivity in the Schools. "The problem is with identifying a wise use of money."

[PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

[NEXT PAGE](#)

© 1997 Editorial Projects in Education Inc.



Oregon

BY LYNN OLSON

Money may be the biggest pothole in Oregon's otherwise clear path to reform.

Subscribe to
Education Week!

Oregon trailblazed one of the most ambitious school-reform plans in the nation in 1991. And with true pioneer grit, it has stayed the course, despite controversy and midcourse corrections. But now a decision by voters to clamp down on property taxes for the second time in six years could hamstring state progress and erode school funding.

Other states in Oregon's position might not have bothered with educational change. Its college-bound students score first nationwide on the SAT I: Reasoning Test among the 23 states in which at least 40% of students take the exam. And, according to a national survey, Oregon's adults have the highest literacy level in the country. That fact led the Oregon Progress Board, which has a legislative mandate to measure the quality of life in the state against key benchmarks, to boast in 1995 that "Oregonians are measurably the best-educated people in America right now."

"I know that we don't always rank as high as our SAT scores might indicate," says Bruce Adams, the president of the Oregon Education Association, "but, still, we've always felt pretty good about our schools and that you could get a good education here."

It was Oregon's changing economic picture, however, that gave birth to its reform plan. This Northwest corner of the United States always has been known for its natural resources and beauty: from the fertile Willamette Valley and the rainy, windswept coast to the snow-capped peaks of the Cascades and the dry desert regions to the east. When many Americans think about Oregon, they might recall the spotted owl debate of the late 1980s that pitted angry loggers against die-hard environmentalists.

But in the past few decades, the state has shifted from its traditional reliance on timber and agriculture to an economy built increasingly around high-tech industries. Today, the timber state is also home to Nike, Tektronix, Intel Corp., and Sequent Computer Systems. And it has the third-largest concentration of electronic-chip plants in the United States.

Concerned that its high school graduates were not prepared for this new world, lawmakers in June 1991 overwhelmingly passed the Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century.

The act's not immodest goal was to make the Oregon workforce "the

best educated and best prepared in America by the year 2000 and equal to any in the world by 2010."

One of its main purposes was to *raise* the *standards* for high school students. The law required students at about grade 10 to earn a "certificate of initial mastery" based on what they know and can do rather than time spent in class. Juniors and seniors pursue a "certificate of advanced mastery" that combines academic studies with career-related experiences. The law also required alternative learning environments for young people who did not meet the standards, expanded preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds, lengthened the school year, and mandated site councils at every school.

Partly because of the law, Oregon became the first state in the nation to win approval of its Goals 2000 plan from the federal government in January 1995.

Oregon also was one of six states permitted to take advantage of the federal government's new "EdFlex" initiative, which gives some states increased flexibility in how they spend their federal education dollars.

But a vigorous backlash threatened the reforms in 1995. Rural districts complained that they lacked the resources to implement the new requirements. Teachers argued that students would drop out of school at age 16, once they had earned the certificate of initial mastery.

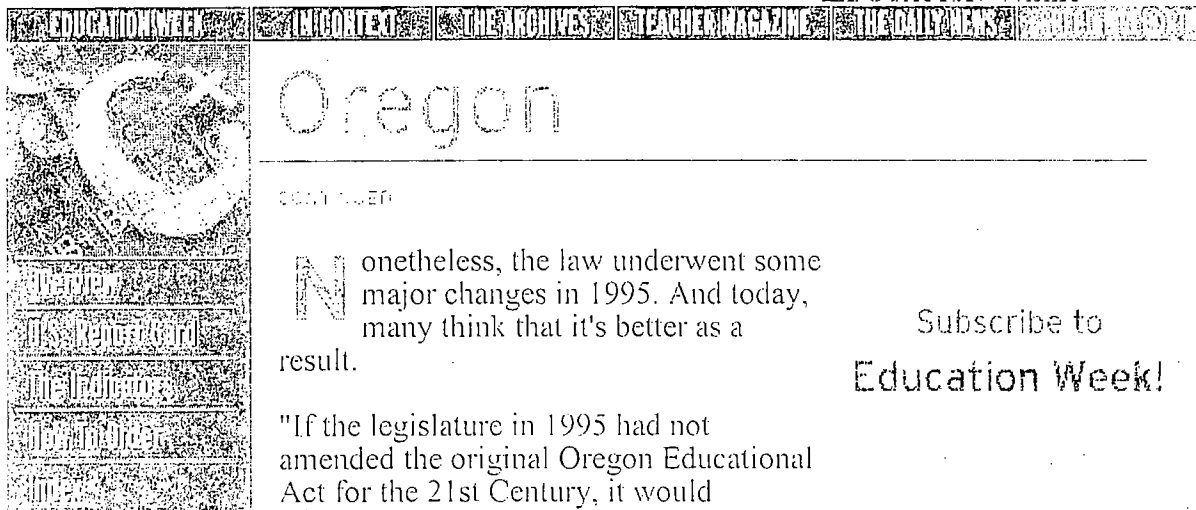
Parents protested that their children would be locked into career choices too early. And most educators maintained that the time lines were too short; school districts were required to begin offering the certificate of initial mastery by the end of the 1996-97 school year.

The strongest opposition came from conservative groups, which charged that the new standards were too vague and reduced the focus on academics. "We want schools to educate rather than job train," says Gayna Flake, a member of Parents for Academic Excellence, which tried to organize a ballot drive to repeal the law in 1996.

So far, the act has survived thanks to the strong advocacy of Norma Paulus, the state schools superintendent, and the state's business community. Both the Oregon Business Council and Associated Oregon Industries have stood behind the law. Gov. John Kitzhaber, a Democrat, also threatened to veto any measure that eliminated the certificates.

NEXT PAGE >

© 1997 Editorial Projects in Education Inc.



CONTINUED

Nonetheless, the law underwent some major changes in 1995. And today, many think that it's better as a result.

Subscribe to
Education Week!

"If the legislature in 1995 had not amended the original Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century, it would probably be dead," says John Marshall, the director of legislative services for the Oregon School Boards Association.



Legislators specified that the certificates must be based on "rigorous academic content standards" in English, math, science, social studies, foreign languages, and the arts.

They required that young people be able to move easily among career pathways. They also pushed back the time lines for carrying out the law and delayed indefinitely the implementation of a longer school year.

"The legislature removed the fuzzy language that some people were misinterpreting," Ms. Paulus says. "It spelled out very specifically the high academic standards we are trying to reach."

Last September, the state board of education officially adopted the standards through grade 10, which already had been reviewed by thousands of Oregonians in draft form. In a report released last August, the American Federation of Teachers describes the content standards as a "good start," although they are not clear or specific enough to meet the union's criteria for approval.

A separate team of experts, brought in by Ms. Paulus to critique the unfinished documents, also praised the state for its "excellent work," although it too noted that the draft content standards were not specific enough. The standards have since been refined and adopted by the state board.

But even the AFT went out of its way to praise the state's performance standards, which describe the quality of work that students must do to perform at acceptable levels.

"Other states are also trying to develop performance standards that define 'how good is good enough,'" the AFT wrote in its report, "but in our judgment, Oregon has taken this idea further than any other state."

To receive a certificate of initial mastery, sophomores in 1998-99 must meet a set standard on statewide assessments in reading and math as well as on classroom assignments in reading, writing, speaking, and math. By 2002-03, sophomores will have to meet standards in all nine

subjects covered by the law.

Of 10th graders who took the statewide tests last year, only 31% would have met the new math standard, and 47% the new reading standard.

Ms. Paulus has stressed that few students will meet the standards initially but that the state should not lower the bar. The state now is working on upgrading standards for the final two years of high school. Students may choose to exceed these requirements and earn a credential in a career field either during or after high school.

Still, the law continues to have vocal critics. Last fall, two conservative Christian groups filed a federal lawsuit seeking to overturn the reforms on the grounds that they compel students to uphold government beliefs and values.

The bigger threat, however, is a financial one. In 1990, voters approved Measure 5, which capped local property taxes and required the state to make up the lost revenues. As a result, Oregon flip-flopped from a locally funded to a state-funded school system, with more than half of all revenues now coming from the state.

So far, a booming economy has enabled the state to replace the lost property taxes out of the general fund, which is primarily generated by personal-income taxes.

But Oregonians are putting less effort into funding education than they once did. In 1982, at the height of a recession, they were spending 4.54% of their personal income on the public schools. Last year, at a time of explosive economic growth, they were spending only 3.86%. School funding has not kept pace with enrollment growth.

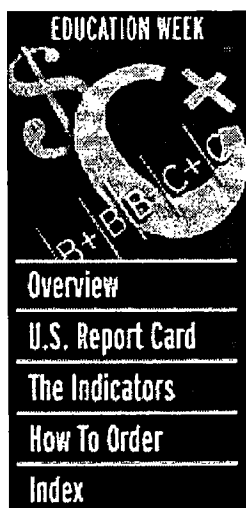
As a result, class sizes have grown statewide, and the average number of instructional days has dropped. According to the state department of education, the number of Oregon students has increased almost 9% since 1991, while the number of teachers increased just 1.9%.

Oregon's student-teacher ratio of 19.8-to-1 is above the national average of 17.3-to-1. What's more, student enrollment is expected to climb throughout the decade, with the fastest growth among minority students. That could put substantial pressure on a school system that traditionally has been white and largely homogeneous.

[← PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

[NEXT PAGE →](#)

© 1997 Editorial Projects in Education Inc.


COMPAQ

Read the essay that explains what we mean by "Student Achievement."

The Nation's Report Card

Congress mandated the National Assessment of Educational Progress more than a quarter of a century ago. Since 1969, it has periodically monitored student achievement in reading, writing, math, science, history/geography, and other fields in grades 4, 8, and 12. It is the only ongoing national survey of students' educational achievement.

Until 1988, NAEP was limited to measuring student progress on a national basis. That year, Congress authorized trial assessments at the state level in order to provide data allowing states to compare themselves with one another and with other nations in international comparisons.

In 1990, 37 states participated in the first state assessment for 8th grade math. Two years later, 43 states provided student samples for testing in 4th and 8th grade math and 4th grade reading. In 1994, 4th grade reading assessments were conducted in 39 states. Forty-five states participated in the 1996 math assessments, the results of which will be released early this year.

Known as the nation's report card, NAEP is now the only assessment that provides student scores that are comparable among the participating states and can be used to monitor trends in student achievement over time.

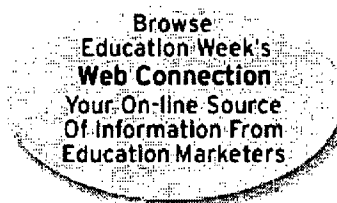
NAEP assessments include both multiple-choice questions and performance tasks that require students to demonstrate directly what they can do, such as writing an essay, making a map, or solving a math problem.

NAEP summarizes the results of its assessments on a proficiency scale that ranges from 0 to 500. Students' scores on that scale also place them into an achievement level--advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic.

The NAEP achievement levels are based on the collective judgments of a broadly representative panel of teachers and others about what students should know and be able to do in a particular subject at a specific grade level. The achievement levels are cumulative--that is, the proficient level assumes mastery of the basic level and the advanced level presumes mastery of both the basic and proficient levels.

Students who read or do mathematics at the proficient level are capable of solid academic performance for their grades. They demonstrate competency over challenging subject matter, including knowledge of the subject and application of it to real-world situations. They also demonstrate analytical skills appropriate to the subject matter. Students at the advanced level do superior work.

Students who perform at the basic level achieve only partial mastery of



data

the knowledge and skills needed for proficient work at each grade. Students who read or do math at the basic level, for example, may have some difficulty doing grade-level work. Students who score below basic in reading and math are likely to have serious difficulty doing grade-level work in their academic courses as they move through school.

Below are sample questions for 4th grade readers and two sample math problems for 8th graders.

Grade 4 Reading:

Students read "Hungry Spider and the Turtle," a West African folktale that humorously depicts hunger and hospitality through actions and conversations of two very distinct characters. The ravenous and generous turtle who is tricked out of a meal by the gluttonous and greedy spider finds a way to turn the tables and teach the spider a lesson.

Question: Who do you think would make a better friend, spider or turtle? Explain why.

Sample response: "I think turtle because instead of get angry with spider he just pad [sic] him a lesson." This was an acceptable response because the student identified the character who would make a better friend and supported his choice with evidence from the story.

Sixty-two percent of all the test-takers answered correctly; 70% of the students who achieved at the basic level got the right answer; and 80% of the students who achieved at the proficient level answered correctly.

Question: Why did spider invite turtle to share his food?

- A. To amuse himself
- B. To be kind and helpful
- C. To have company at dinner
- D. To appear generous

Forty percent of all test-takers chose D, the right answer; 45% of students at the basic level answered correctly; and 73% at the proficient level answered correctly.

Question: Think about spider and turtle in the story. Pick someone you know, have read about, or has been in the movies or on television and explain how that person is like either spider or turtle.

Sample response: "A boy named Patrick in the book called Indian in the Cupboard. He is selfish like spider. He wants all the plastic toys. A girl named Omri im [sic] that book is not selfish. She's willing to share the toys with

Patrick." On a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being unsatisfactory, this answer received a 3.

Sample response: "I think spider reminds me of the rabbit in the book The Great Race because the rabbit thought that he could trick and beat the turtle easily. Turtle reminds me of the turtle in The Great Race because the turtle outsmarted the rabbit and won the race." This response received a 4.

Twenty-nine percent of all test-takers scored 3 or above; 33% of students at the basic level scored 3 or above; and 54% of students at the proficient level scored 3 or above.

Grade 8 Basic:

Problem: Jill needs to earn \$45 for a class trip. She earns \$2 each day on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays; and \$3 each day on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. She does not work on Sundays. How many weeks will it take her to earn \$45?

Answer: 3 weeks

Fifty-nine percent of all test-takers got the correct answer; 64% of students at the basic level answered correctly.

Grade 8 Basic:

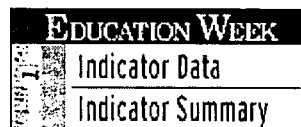
Problem: Tracy said, "I can multiply 6 by another number and get an answer that is smaller than 6."

Pat said, "No, you can't. Multiplying 6 by another number always makes the number 6 or larger."

Who is correct? Give a reason for your answer.

Answer: Tracy is correct. If you multiply the number 6 by any number less than 1, the answer will always be less than 6.

Forty-eight percent of all test-takers got the correct answer; 73% of students at the proficient level answered correctly.





EDUCATION WEEK on the WEB

IN CONTEXT

THE ARCHIVES

TEACHER MAGAZINE

THE DAILY NEWS

SPECIAL REPORT

Data Sources and Notes

Standards

Go directly to:

[Student Achievement: Data Notes](#)

[Student Achievement: Additional Sources of Research](#)

[Standards & Assessment: Data Notes](#)

[Standards & Assessment: Additional Sources of Research](#)

[Quality of Teaching: Data Notes](#)

[Quality of Teaching: Additional Sources of Research](#)

[School Climate: Data Notes](#)

[School Climate: Additional Sources of Research](#)

[Resources: Data Notes](#)

[Resources: Additional Sources of Research](#)



Student Achievement: Data Notes

1. Percent of 4th graders at a proficient or advanced level on the 1994 NAEP reading exam: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "NAEP 1994 Reading Report Card for the Nation and the States," January 1996.

2. Percent of 8th graders at a proficient or advanced level on the 1992 NAEP math exam: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Revised Mathematics Assessment Data for 1990," 1992 National Assessment of Educational Progress, November 1996. These percentages correct for technical errors in previously published NAEP results.

Browse
Education Week's
Web Connection
Your On-line Source
Of Information From
Education Marketers

3-9. Reading: see #1 above. Math: see #2 above.

10. State-funded preschool programs for disadvantaged in 1995: National Center for Children in Poverty, "Map and Track: State Initiatives for Young Children and Families," 1996.

11. Percent of public high schools offering AP courses in 1996: Unpublished tabulations from the College Board and the Educational Testing Service.

12. Percent of 8th graders taking algebra in 1992: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "State-by-State Background Questionnaire Data Appendix: NAEP 1992 Mathematics Assessment, Grades 4 and 8," October 1994.

13. Percent of students taking upper-level math courses in 1994: Council of Chief State School Officers, "State Indicators of Science and Mathematics Education," 1995. This information is reported by the state departments of education.

14. Percent of students taking upper-level science courses in 1994: Council of Chief State School Officers, "State Indicators of Science and Mathematics Education, 1995." This information is reported by the state departments of education.

15. Dropouts: Percent of 16- to 19-year-olds not in school and not graduated in 1993: Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Kids Count Data Book, State Profiles of Child Well-Being," 1996. These figures represent three-year averages of data from the "Current Population Survey" conducted each month by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

16. Percent of 1994 graduates who enrolled in a two- or four-year college: State figures are from the National Education Goals Panel, "The National Education Goals Report: Building a Nation of Learners," November 1996. The percentage includes all 1994 public and private school graduates who enrolled in a two- or four-year college the following fall. National figure is from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "The Condition of Education," June 1996.

Student Achievement: Additional Sources of Research

Adelman, Clifford, *Lessons of a Generation: Education and Work in the Lives of the High School Class of 1972*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994.

Carnegie Task Force on Learning in the Primary Grades, "Years of Promise: A Comprehensive Learning Strategy for America's Children," New York, Carnegie Corporation of New York, September 1996.

Education Trust, "Education Watch: The 1996 Education Trust State and National Data Book," Washington, Education Trust, 1996.

Educational Testing Service under contract with the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Report in Brief: NAEP 1994 Trends in Academic Progress," Washington, U.S. Department of Education, October 1996.

Grissmer, David et al., "Student Achievement and the Changing American Family," Santa Monica, Calif., RAND Corp., 1994.

Smith, Julia B., "Does an Extra Year Make Any Difference? The Impact of Early Access to Algebra on Long-Term Gains in Mathematics Attainment," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Summer 1996, 18 (2), pp. 141-153.

Southeastern Regional Vision for Education, "Overcoming Barriers to School Reform in the Southeast," Tallahassee, Fla., SERVE, Sept. 8, 1994.

Southeastern Regional Vision for Education, "A New Framework for State Accountability Systems," Tallahassee, Fla., SERVE, Sept. 8, 1994.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education

Statistics, "The Condition of Education 1996" (NCES 96-304) by Thomas M. Smith, Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, June 1996.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Effective Schools in Mathematics: Perspectives from the NAEP 1992 Assessment," Washington, U.S. Department of Education, 1994.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Eighth-Grade Algebra Course-Taking and Mathematics Proficiency," *NAEP Facts*, February 1996.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "High School Seniors' Instructional Experiences in Science and Mathematics," Washington, U.S. Department of Education, 1996.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Pursuing Excellence: A Study of U.S. Eighth-Grade Mathematics and Science Teaching, Learning, Curriculum, and Achievement in International Context," Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996.

Standards & Assessments: Data Notes

1. Has the state adopted standards in the core subjects? *Education Week* gathered this information from several sources, including past publications of *Education Week*, information sent to us by the state departments of education, and Web sites maintained by state agencies. We also consulted the following publications: Council of Chief State School Officers, "Status Report: State Systemic Education Improvements," September 1996; Council of Chief State School Officers, "States Status on Standards: 1996 Update," June 1996; and American Federation of Teachers, "Making Standards Matter: An Annual Fifty-State Report on Efforts to Raise Academic Standards, 1996." Finally, *Education Week* staff talked to officials in 25 states to obtain the most current information available. The data are accurate as of Jan. 1, 1997. States that have developed "model" or "voluntary" state standards that are not mandatory for districts or are not related to any statewide assessment system--such as Montana and Wyoming--were listed as "no." We assigned South Dakota a provisional "yes" because it is too soon to tell whether the state will adapt its assessment plan to more explicitly measure student attainment of the standards. If not, South Dakota will receive a "no" for this category in next year's report.

2. Do the standards set high expectations for student learning? No organization currently evaluates each state's standards to determine whether they set high expectations for student learning.

3. How does the state measure student performance? *Education Week* collected this information from several sources, including the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory/Council of Chief State School Officers, "State Student Assessment Programs Database," May 1996; National Education Goals Panel, "Profile of 1994-95 State

Assessment Systems and Reported Results," June 1996; and materials sent to us by the state departments of education. We called state officials when information appeared unclear or contradictory.

4. Are all four core subjects assessed? National Education Goals Panel, "Profile of 1994-95 State Assessment Systems and Reported Results," June 1996; and the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory/Council of Chief State School Officers, "State Student Assessment Programs Database," May 1996.

5. Will students have to master the standards to graduate or be promoted? American Federation of Teachers, "Making Standards Matter 1996: An Annual Fifty-State Report on Efforts to Raise Academic Standards, 1996."

6. How does the state hold schools and/or districts accountable for student performance? Education Commission of the States, "Bending Without Breaking: Improving Education through Flexibility and Choice," 1996; and unpublished updates provided by the Education Commission of the States.

7. Did the state participate in the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress? National Center for Education Statistics.

Standards & Assessments: Additional Sources of Research

Bishop, John H., "The Impact of Curriculum-Based External Examinations on School Priorities and Student Learning," working paper, Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University, Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies, 1995.

Cohen, David, "What Standards for National Standards," *Phi Delta Kappan*, June 1995, pp. 751-757.

Consortium for Policy Research in Education, "Public Policy and School Reform, A Research Summary" (CPRE Research Report Series, Report #36). Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, graduate school of education, 1996.

Education Commission of the States, "Standards & Education: A Roadmap for State Policymakers," Denver, Education Commission of the States, March 1996.

Johnson, Jean et al., Public Agenda, "Assignment Incomplete: The Unfinished Business of Education Reform," New York, Public Agenda, 1995.

Kane, Cheryl M., National Education Commission on Time and Learning, "Prisoners of Time," research, Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, September 1994.

Massell, Diane, Michael Kirst, and Margaret Hoppe, "Persistence and Change: School Reform in Nine States," draft paper, Consortium for Policy Research in Education, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, graduate school of education, March 1996.

Musick, Mark D., "Setting Education Standards High Enough: An Open Letter to Educators, Parents, Governors, Legislators, and Civic and Business Leaders," Atlanta, Southern Regional Education Board, Summer 1996.

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory/Council of Chief State School Officers, "The Status of State Student Assessment Programs in the United States," annual report, Oak Brook, Ill., North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, May 1996.

O'Day, Jennifer A. and Marshall S. Smith, "Systemic Reform and Educational Opportunity," in Susan Fuhrman, ed., *Designing Coherent Education Policy: Improving the System*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1993.

Romer, Gov. Roy et al., "Standards Work: How Clear Standards and Better Assessment Have Worked to Improve Instruction and Increase Student Achievement in Two School Districts," March 1996.

Quality of Teaching: Data Notes

1. Percent of new teacher graduates from NCATE-accredited institutions: Unpublished tabulations from the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. These data account for approximately 90% of the nation's new teacher candidates.
2. Incentives for teachers to seek national board certification: National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, "State and Local Action Supporting National Board Certification: October 1996 Report."
3. State belongs to Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC): Council of Chief State School Officers.
4. State contributes to INTASC's development of rigorous assessments for teacher licensure: Council of Chief State School Officers. INTASC currently is supporting the development of two assessments for new teachers--a portfolio assessment and a test of teaching knowledge.
5. Percent of secondary teachers who hold a degree in the subject they teach: National Education Goals Panel, "1996 National Education Goals Report: Building a Nation of Learners," November 1996. "Secondary teachers" includes only teachers whose main assignment was in math, science, English, social studies, fine arts, foreign language, and special education. "Degree" refers to a degree in that teacher's main teaching assignment (mathematics) or a degree in how to teach that subject (mathematics education). The U.S. figure includes private school teachers; state figures are for public school teachers only. The data are from the U.S. Department of Education's 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey.
6. Percent of teachers who have temporary, emergency, or no license: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Schools and Staffing in the United States: A Statistical Profile, 1993-94," July 1996.

7. State requires a college major other than education for teaching license: Council of Chief State School Officers, "Key State Education Policies on K-12 Education: Content Standards, Graduation, Teacher Licensure, Time and Attendance," October 1996.
 8. Independent professional-standards board has been established in the state: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, "What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future," September 1996.
 9. State requires teacher education schools to incorporate K-12 standards into curriculum: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, "State Policies to Promote P-16 Collaboration: A Survey of Professional Development and P-12 Content Standards," June 1996.
 10. State requires courses in educational technology for teaching license: National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification, *1996-97 Manual on Certification and Preparation of Educational Personnel in the United States and Canada*, 1996. (Published by Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., Dubuque, Iowa.)
 11. Number of weeks required for student teaching: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, "What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future," September 1996.
 12. State requires and funds new-teacher-induction program: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, "What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future," September 1996.
 13. Percent of teachers participating in professional-development activities who received some form of support: Unpublished tabulation from the National Data Resource Center. Data are from the U.S. Department of Education's 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey.
 14. State requires assessment for initial teaching license: National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification, *1996-97 Manual on Certification and Preparation of Educational Personnel in the United States and Canada*, 1996. (Published by Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., Dubuque, Iowa.)
 15. Percent of teachers who had at least 9 hours of training in educational technology in 1994: Unpublished tabulation from the National Data Resource Center. Data are from the U.S. Department of Education's 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey.
 16. Percent of teachers who had at least 9 hours of training in teaching methods in 1994: Unpublished tabulation from the National Data Resource Center. Data are from the U.S. Department of Education's 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey.
 17. Percent of teachers who had at least 9 hours of training in student assessment in 1994: Unpublished tabulation from the National Data Resource Center. Data are from the U.S. Department of Education's 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey.
-

Quality of Teaching: Additional Sources of Research

Armour-Thomas, Eleanor, et al., "An Outlier Study of Elementary and Middle Schools in New York City: Final Report," New York, New York City Board of Education, 1989.

Cohen, D.K., Milbrey W. McLaughlin, and Joan E. Talbert, *Teaching for Understanding: Challenges for Policy and Practice*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1993.

Educational Testing Service under contract with the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "How School Mathematics Functions: Perspectives from the NAEP 1990 and 1992 Assessments," Washington, U.S. Department of Education, October 1994.

Ferguson, Ronald F., "Paying for Public Education: New Evidence on How and Why Money Matters," *Harvard Journal on Legislation*, Summer 1991, 28, pp. 465-498.

National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, "What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future," New York, National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, Teachers College, Columbia University, September 1996.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, "Quality in Teaching," Paris, France: OECD, 1994.

School Climate: Data Notes

1. Percent of elementary teachers with fewer than 25 students per class: Unpublished tabulation from the National Data Resource Center. Data are from the U.S. Department of Education's 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey. The tabulation excluded teachers in specialty areas, such as art, music, or special education.

2. Percent of English teachers with fewer than 80 students per day: Unpublished tabulation from the National Data Resource Center. Data are from the U.S. Department of Education's 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey.

3. State permits site-based management: Education Commission of the States, "Bending Without Breaking: Improving Education through Flexibility and Choice," 1996; and unpublished updates provided by the Education Commission of the States.

4. Percent of schools that have a decisionmaking body that includes teachers: Unpublished tabulation from the National Data Resource Center. Data are from the U.S. Department of Education's 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey.

5. State grants waivers of education regulations: Education Commission of the States, "Bending Without Breaking: Improving Education through Flexibility and Choice," 1996; and unpublished

updates provided by the Education Commission of the States.

6. Statewide open-enrollment program: Ibid.

7. Percent of secondary teachers who think that physical conflicts among students are a problem in their schools: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "SASS by State, 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey: Selected State Results," August 1996. The figure represents the percentage of teachers who thought the physical conflicts among students were a "moderate" or "serious" problem.

8. Percent of secondary teachers who think that student possession of weapons is a problem in their schools: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "SASS by State, 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey: Selected State Results," August 1996. The figure represents the percentage of teachers who thought the problem was "moderate" or "serious."

9. Percent of principals who have a great deal of control over hiring teachers: Ibid.

10. Percent of teachers in schools where teachers share similar beliefs about the school's mission: Unpublished tabulation from the National Data Resource Center. Data are from the U.S. Department of Education's 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey. The figure represents the percentage of teachers who responded "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree" to a question on this topic.

11. Percent of teachers in schools where there is a great deal of cooperation among teachers: Ibid.

12. Percent of teachers in schools where there are clear goals and priorities: Ibid.

13. Percent of teachers who have reported that student absenteeism is not a serious problem: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Schools and Staffing in the United States: A Statistical Profile, 1993-94," July 1996.

14. Percent of teachers who have reported that student apathy is not a serious problem: Ibid.

15. Percent of teachers who have reported that a lack of parent support is not a serious problem: Ibid.

16. Percent of students enrolled in elementary schools with 350 or fewer students: Unpublished tabulation by *Education Week* from the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data. The data are available at the National Center for Education Statistics Web site at <http://www.ed.gov/NCES/ccd/ccddata.html>.

17. Percent of students enrolled in high schools with 900 or fewer students: Ibid.

18. State provides for charter schools: Education Commission of the States, "Bending without Breaking: Improving Education through Flexibility and Choice," 1996; and unpublished updates provided by

the Education Commission of the States.

School Climate: Additional Sources of Research

Boozar, Michael A., "Segregation, Dropouts, and School Quality," unpublished paper, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1993.

Ferguson, Ronald F. and Helen F. Ladd, "How and Why Money Matters: An Analysis of Alabama Schools," in Helen Ladd, ed., *Holding Schools Accountable*, Washington, Brookings Institution, 1996, pp. 265-298.

Hultgren, Francine, Willis Hawley & Andrew Abrams, "The Essentials of Successful Schools," draft paper, College Park, Md.: University of Maryland, school of education, fall 1996.

Lee, Valerie and Julia B. Smith, "High School Size: Which Works Best, and for Whom?," draft paper presented to the American Educational Research Association, April 1996.

Mosteller, Frederick, "The Tennessee Study of Class Size in the Early School Grades," *The Future of Children*, summer/fall 1995, pp. 113-127.

Newmann, Fred M. and Gary G. Wehlage, "Successful School Restructuring, A Report to the Public and Educators by the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools," Madison, Wis., the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, 1995.

Sander, William, "Expenditures and Student Achievement in Illinois: New Evidence," *Journal of Public Economics*, October 1993, (52), pp. 403-416.

Sebring, Penny and Anthony Bryk, et al., "Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock," Chicago, Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1995.

Sizer, Theodore R., *Horace's Hope*, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1996.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Effective Schools in Mathematics: Perspectives from the NAEP 1992 Assessment," Washington, U.S. Department of Education, 1994.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "High School Seniors' Instructional Experiences in Science and Mathematics," Washington, U.S. Department of Education, 1996.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "How Safe are Public Schools: What Do Teachers Say?" Issues Brief, April 1996.

U.S. General Accounting Office, "School-Based Management Results in Changes in Instruction and Budgeting," Washington, U.S. General Accounting Office, August 1994.

Resources: Data Notes

1. Education spending per pupil in 1995, adjusted for regional cost differences: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Public Elementary and Secondary Education Statistics: School Year 1995-96," May 1996. Figures are estimates of "current" expenditures for 1994-95. Current, or annual, expenditures exclude spending for capital outlay and interest on debt. *Education Week* adjusted each state's estimated per-pupil expenditure using a "teacher cost index" developed by Jay Chambers for the National Center for Education Statistics. The index reflects how much it costs school districts in different regions to recruit and employ teachers with similar characteristics. For a short article describing the teacher cost index and the adjustment factor for each state, see the National Center for Education Statistics, *Developments in School Finance, 1995*, July 1996.
2. Percent change in inflation-adjusted spending per pupil from 1985 to 1995: *Education Week* calculated this statistic by subtracting each state's inflation-adjusted 1985 PPE from its 1995 PPE and dividing this difference by the inflation-adjusted 1985 PPE. The inflation-adjusted 1985 PPE was taken from the American Legislative Exchange Council, "Report Card on American Education, 1995," May 1996. The 1995 PPE was taken from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Public Elementary and Secondary Education Statistics: School Year 1995-96," May 1996.
3. State's relative fiscal effort in 1993 (out of 100%): U.S. General Accounting Office, "School Finance: Options for Improving Measures of Effort and Equity in Title I." The report gives three options for measuring effort on a state-by-state basis. We used option C, which eliminates artificial upper and lower bounds for measuring effort. The index is calculated by comparing each state's education spending to its total taxable resources per student. We adjusted the index to a 100-point scale by subtracting 0.25 from each state's effort factor.
4. Percent of 1994 education expenditures spent on instruction: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Revenues and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary School Education: School Year 1993-94," July 1996. "Instruction" denotes annual expenditures directly related to the interaction between teachers and students, such as teacher salaries and instructional supplies.
5. QED's measure of relative state investments in educational technology in 1995: Quality Education Data, "Education Market Guide & Mailing List Catalog, 1996 and 1997," 1996. The index rates states as high, medium, or low based on the availability to students and teachers of computers, modems, videodisc players, VCRs, CD-ROMs, and other hardware. The index takes into account a number of factors, such as grade level, school enrollment, and district spending.
6. Percent of schools reporting at least one building in need of

extensive repair or replacement in 1994: U.S. General Accounting Office, "School Facilities: America's Schools Report Differing Conditions," June 1996.

7. Relative equity in per-pupil spending among all districts in the state in 1992 (out of 100%): U.S. General Accounting Office, "School Finance: Options for Improving Measures of Effort and Equity in Title I." The report gives five options for measuring equity on a state-by-state basis. We used option D because it takes into account the per-pupil spending of all districts in the state. The index is calculated using a coefficient of variation, or the standard deviation of per-pupil spending among districts divided by the mean per-pupil expenditure. Each district's spending is adjusted for students who have disabilities, are poor, or have limited English proficiency, as well as for the district's relative purchasing power as measured by a "teacher cost index" (see #1 above). We adjusted the GAO index to a 100-point scale by subtracting 0.3 from each state's equity factor.

8. Unadjusted education spending per pupil in 1995: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Public Elementary and Secondary Education Statistics: School Year 1995-96," May 1996. Figures are estimates of current expenditures for school year 1994-95. Current, or annual, expenditures exclude spending for capital outlay and interest on debt.

9. Amount spent on education for every \$1,000 in per capita income in 1995. *Education Week* calculated this statistic by dividing each state's current education spending by its total personal income, then multiplying by 1,000. Current education expenditures are from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Public Elementary and Secondary Education Statistics: School Year 1995-96," May 1996. Total personal income figures are from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, July 1996 press release on state personal income.

10. Disparity between districts at the 5th and 95th percentiles in spending per pupil in 1992: Unpublished tabulation by *Education Week* from the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data CD-ROM.

11. Average teacher salary in 1995, adjusted for regional differences in the cost of living: American Federation of Teachers, "Survey and Analysis of Salary Trends, 1995," December 1995.

12. Teachers as % of total staff in 1995: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Public School Student, Staff, and Graduate Counts by State, School Year 1994-95," May 1996.

13. Number of pupils per multimedia computer in 1996: Quality Education Data, "Education Market Guide & Mailing List Catalog, 1996 and 1997," 1996. "Multimedia" denotes computers that are Macintosh or have a 386 or higher processor and are capable of supporting CD-ROM drives or sound and video cards.

Resources:
Additional Sources of Research

Chambers, Jay and William J. Fowler Jr., "Public School Teacher Cost Differences," Washington, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 1995.

Consortium on Productivity in the Schools, "Using What We Have To Get the Schools We Need: A Productivity Focus for American Education," New York, the Institute on Education and the Economy, Teachers College, Columbia University, August 1995.

Ferguson, Ronald F., "Paying for Public Education: New Evidence on How and Why Money Matters," *Harvard Journal of Legislation*, Summer 1991, 28, pp. 465-498.

Ferguson, Ronald F., and Helen F. Ladd, "How and Why Money Matters: An Analysis of Alabama Schools," in Helen Ladd, ed., *Holding Schools Accountable*, Washington, Brookings Institution, 1996, pp. 265-298.

Hanushek, Eric A., "The Impact of Differential Expenditures on School Performance," *Educational Researcher*, 18 (4), pp. 45-65.

Hedges, Larry V., Richard D. Laine, and Rob Greenwald, 1994. "Does Money Matter: A metanalysis of studies on the effects of differential school inputs on student outcomes" in *Educational Researcher* 23 (3), pp. 5-14.

Hickrod, Alan G., "Testimony to the Subcommittee on Education, Arts, and Humanities of the Committee on Labor and Human Resources, U.S. Senate," in *Developments in School Finance*, Washington, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1995.

Honeyman, David S., "The Condition of America's Schools," working paper, Center for the Study of Education Finance, Gainesville, Fla., University of Florida at Gainesville, 1995.

Murnane, Richard and Frank Levy, "Evidence from Fifteen Schools in Austin, Texas," in Gary Burtless, ed., *Does Money Matter*, Washington, Brookings Institution, 1996, pp. 93-96.

Orland, Martin E. and Carol E. Cohen, the Finance Project, "Meeting the Challenge of Devolution: How Changing Demographic and Fiscal Contexts Affect State Investments in Education," in *Developments in School Finance*, Washington, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 1995.

Parrish, Thomas et al. "Disparities in Public School District Spending 1989-1990," Washington, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1995.

Picus, Lawrence and Minaz Fazal, "The \$300 Billion Question: How Do Public Elementary and Secondary Schools Spend Their Money?" in *Developments in School Finance*, Washington, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1995.

Riddle, Wayne, "Public School Expenditure Disparities: Size, Sources, and Debates Over Their Significance," Washington, Congressional

Research Service, 1995.

Rothstein, Richard, with Karen Hawley Miles, "Where's The Money Gone? Changes in the Level and Composition of Education Spending, 1967-91," Washington, Economic Policy Institute, 1995.

Ruggiero, John, et al., "Equity Vs. Efficiency in the Provision of Educational Services," working paper, Dayton, Ohio, University of Dayton, April 1996.

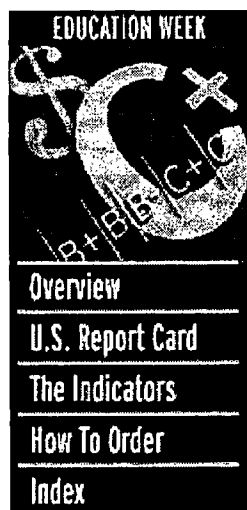
U.S. General Accounting Office, "School Facilities: Condition of America's Schools," Washington, U.S. General Accounting Office, February 1995.

U.S. General Accounting Office, "School Facilities: America's Schools Report Differing Conditions," Washington, U.S. General Accounting Office, June 1996.

U.S. General Accounting Office, "School Finance: Trends in U.S. Education Spending," Washington, U.S. General Accounting Office, September 1995.



© 1997 Editorial Projects in Education Inc.



Student Achievement

Objective: *All students achieving at high levels and engaged in challenging academic work.*

The bottom line for any education system is whether its students are achieving at high levels.

Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress are cause for genuine concern. In every participating state, a majority of 4th and 8th graders perform at the "basic" level or below in reading and mathematics. This means that they have only partially mastered the knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at their grade levels. Fourth graders performing at the basic level, for example, should show some understanding of fractions and decimals and be able to make simple inferences based on what they read.

Browse
Education Week's
Web Connection
Your On-line Source
Of Information From
Education Marketers

COMPAQ

See the accompanying story, "[NAEP: The Nation's Report Card](#)."

There is no state in which at least half the students perform at the "proficient" level or above. Proficient means that they have demonstrated competence over challenging subject matter and are well-prepared for the next level of schooling. In mathematics, for example, 8th graders at the proficient level should be able to make inferences from data and graphs; apply properties of informal geometry; and use addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and estimation to solve practical problems.

data

Every state still has a large percentage of students who perform at a "below basic" level. These students have not mastered even the fundamental skills and knowledge needed to do grade-level work.

In looking at achievement, we have focused only on state scores on NAEP tests for a reason: The assessment is the only ongoing source of information we have that lets us know how students are performing in a variety of subjects both at the national level and by state. The congressionally mandated study has been in place since 1969. Results on student performance at the state level have been available since 1990. (See "[NAEP: The Nation's Report Card](#).")

We did not give states a letter grade on their NAEP results. If we had, all would have failed. Instead, we have allowed the percent of students scoring at the "proficient" level to speak for itself. In the state report cards, we list the 1994 reading scores for 4th graders (the only grade for which state-level results were available that year) and the 1992 math scores for 8th graders (the highest grade at which state results were available that year).

Assessment

Some states chose not to participate in NAEP state-level tests in 1992

and 1994. For these states, you will see only the symbol N/A. Neither they nor we know how their students perform compared with those in other states or nationwide.

States also do extensive testing of their own, using a variety of assessments that vary in quality. And many states have reported student progress on their state-level tests. We did not include the results from state testing programs here because there is no way to compare the results across states. In some instances, what a state deems to be "proficient" performance is far below the target levels set by NAEP.

Moreover, some of the tests used are norm-referenced multiple-choice tests that are not appropriate to measure student achievement in a standards-driven system. Nonetheless, the media often publish these test scores as "report cards" on the quality of the public schools.

At best, these test scores can tell us whether students in one state are doing better or worse than the average for another group of students who answered the same set of questions.

The tests cannot tell us whether students have mastered a challenging body of knowledge and skills because norm-referenced tests only compare students to each other and not to an unwavering standard of performance. Our own survey found that 89% of superintendents and principals and 84% of teachers agree that multiple-choice standardized tests do not adequately measure how much children have learned in school.

Student scores on the SAT also are invoked to compare the quality of education in one state with that of another. But this too is misleading. The SAT I: Reasoning Test was designed to predict whether students are likely to succeed in the first year in college. Only a portion of a state's students take the exam and that percentage varies widely from one state to another. Some states have higher average scores because they have relatively few students taking the test. This says nothing about the quality of their education systems.

In addition, the SAT does not reflect whether young people have mastered the knowledge and skills that a state has identified as important. What teachers teach and what the SAT tests may be two different things.



One predictor of student achievement is whether students take a college-preparatory sequence in high school. According to data from the National Education Longitudinal Study, students who take a core academic sequence perform better than those who do not, and they are more likely to earn a

postsecondary degree.

We attempted to look at students' course-taking by state, how many dropped out of school, and how many enrolled in college. At the national level, we know that high school students are taking more rigorous courses now than they did in 1983, an important sign that expectations are going up. But what we discovered is that data about student course-taking at the state level are dismal. Many states cannot

provide the most basic information on what proportion of their young people are taking rigorous math, science, English, and social studies courses.

States also do shoddy recordkeeping when it comes to dropout and graduation rates. The definitions are not even comparable across states. We cannot tell, for example, what percent of 16- to 19-year-olds in a state have earned a high school diploma vs. a General Educational Development credential. Yet we know that those who hold a GED certificate do not fare as well economically.

This kind of information is crucial if we hope to raise student achievement.

Because the data on academic participation rates are so inadequate, we were unable to grade the states on this information. They all get an "incomplete." It would seem penny-wise and pound-foolish for state legislatures to invest so much money in school reform over the past 15 years and so little money in collecting the data that would tell them whether their laws and programs are having the desired effect.

We know that it is controversial to compare states based on test scores because students who come from families with higher incomes, fewer children, and higher education levels typically score higher on assessments. And the proportion of students who have these advantages varies greatly across states, school districts, and schools.

NAEP scores can be adjusted, based on such demographic characteristics, to make comparisons across states look fairer. But that does not change the underlying reality. Moreover, some states and schools do better than others in raising the achievement of all students. We can no longer use the excuse of a student's background to justify low achievement.

Therefore, we have reported state scores without adjustment. In another section of this report, we give examples of states whose students perform much better than their peers with similar backgrounds elsewhere. (See "[Race and Demography](#).")

[NEXT PAGE >](#)

[SUBSCRIBE](#) [ABOUT THIS SITE](#) [FEEDBACK](#) [SEARCH THE SITE](#) [JOBS](#) [HOME](#)

© 1997 Editorial Projects in Education Inc.



Student Achievement

Table 1 of 3: 4th Grade Scores.

States are ranked by their 4th grade reading proficiency scores. Ties are settled by using 8th grade math proficiency scores and then alphabetical order.

All figures are in percents. "N/A" indicates that the state did not participate in the NAEP exam. "?" indicates that information was not available. NAEP places all students in one of four achievement levels: advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic.

Navigation: Click on a state's initials on the ruler to go directly to that state's data. Click on the state name in the table to see the state's data in comparison to some of its neighbors.

State	4th Grade Scores					
	Reading at proficient or advanced, 1994	Reading at basic, 1994	Reading at below basic, 1994	Math at proficient or advanced, 1992	Math at basic, 1992	Math at below basic, 1992
U.S.	28	31	41	18	41	41
1. <u>Maine</u>	41	34	25	27	48	25
2. <u>North Dakota</u>	38	35	27	22	51	28
3. <u>Connecticut</u>	38	30	32	24	43	33
4. <u>New Hampshire</u>	36	34	30	25	47	28
5. <u>Massachusetts</u>	36	33	31	23	46	32
6. <u>Iowa</u>	35	34	31	26	46	28
7. <u>Wisconsin</u>	35	36	29	25	46	29
8. <u>Montana</u>	35	34	31	n/a	n/a	n/a
	4th Grade Scores					
	Reading at proficient or advanced, 1994	Reading at basic, 1994	Reading at below basic, 1994	Math at proficient or advanced, 1992	Math at basic, 1992	Math at below basic, 1992
9. <u>Nebraska</u>	34	32	34	22	45	33
10. <u>Minnesota</u>	33	32	35	26	45	29
11. <u>New Jersey</u>	33	32	35	25	43	32
12. <u>Indiana</u>	33	33	34	16	44	40
13. <u>Wyoming</u>	32	36	32	19	50	31
14. <u>Rhode Island</u>	32	33	35	13	41	46

41. <u>Michigan</u>	n/a	n/a	n/a	19	42	40
42. <u>Ohio</u>	n/a	n/a	n/a	16	41	43
43. <u>Oklahoma</u>	n/a	n/a	n/a	14	46	40
44. <u>Alaska</u>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	4th Grade Scores					
	Reading at proficient or advanced, 1994	Reading at basic, 1994	Reading at below basic, 1994	Math at proficient or advanced, 1992	Math at basic, 1992	Math at below basic, 1992
45. <u>Illinois</u>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
46. <u>Kansas</u>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
47. <u>Nevada</u>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
48. <u>Oregon</u>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
49. <u>South Dakota</u>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
50. <u>Vermont</u>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
U.S.	28	31	41	18	41	41

For a complete list of sources of data, see "[Data Sources and Notes.](#)"

Go to [Table 2: 8th Grade Scores.](#)

Go to [Main Student Achievement Data Page.](#)

SUBSCRIBE	ABOUT THIS SITE	FEEDBACK	SEARCH THE SITE	JOBS	HOME
---------------------------	---------------------------------	--------------------------	---------------------------------	----------------------	----------------------

© 1997 Editorial Projects in Education Inc.

15. <u>Missouri</u>	31	31	38	19	43	38
16. <u>Pennsylvania</u>	30	31	39	22	43	35
17. <u>Utah</u>	30	34	36	19	47	34
	4th Grade Scores					
	Reading at proficient or advanced, 1994	Reading at basic, 1994	Reading at below basic, 1994	Math at proficient or advanced, 1992	Math at basic, 1992	Math at below basic, 1992
18. <u>North Carolina</u>	30	29	41	13	37	50
19. <u>Colorado</u>	28	31	41	18	43	39
20. <u>New York</u>	27	30	43	17	40	43
21. <u>Tennessee</u>	27	31	42	10	37	53
22. <u>Washington</u>	27	32	41	n/a	n/a	n/a
23. <u>Maryland</u>	26	29	45	18	37	45
24. <u>Virginia</u>	26	31	43	19	40	41
25. <u>Texas</u>	26	32	42	15	41	44
26. <u>Kentucky</u>	26	30	44	13	38	49
	4th Grade Scores					
	Reading at proficient or advanced, 1994	Reading at basic, 1994	Reading at below basic, 1994	Math at proficient or advanced, 1992	Math at basic, 1992	Math at below basic, 1992
27. <u>Georgia</u>	26	26	48	15	38	47
28. <u>West Virginia</u>	26	32	42	12	40	48
29. <u>Arizona</u>	24	28	48	13	41	47
30. <u>Arkansas</u>	24	30	46	10	37	53
31. <u>Delaware</u>	23	29	48	17	38	45
32. <u>Florida</u>	23	27	50	13	39	48
33. <u>Alabama</u>	23	29	48	10	33	57
34. <u>New Mexico</u>	21	28	51	11	39	50
35. <u>South Carolina</u>	20	28	52	13	35	52
	4th Grade Scores					
	Reading at proficient or advanced, 1994	Reading at basic, 1994	Reading at below basic, 1994	Math at proficient or advanced, 1992	Math at basic, 1992	Math at below basic, 1992
36. <u>Hawaii</u>	19	27	54	15	37	48
37. <u>California</u>	18	26	56	12	34	54
38. <u>Mississippi</u>	18	27	55	6	30	64
39. <u>Louisiana</u>	15	25	60	8	31	61
40. <u>Idaho</u>	n/a	n/a	n/a	16	47	37



Virginia

CONTINUED

But educators and the public tangled over such issues as creation science, environmental studies, the use of phonics, and the treatment of historical events. "At one time, there was a required book list with religious material, unusual ties to 'Hooked on Phonics,' and name-calling between the far left and the far right," Ms. Strauss says.

Browse
Education Week's
Web Connection
Your On-line Source
Of Information From
Education Marketers



"It was a very difficult atmosphere for educators to get up and raise legitimate concerns," adds another educator, "because instructive critics were perceived as enemies. The attitude was, 'You're either for us or against us.'"

The result, however, is being touted as one of the most successful standards efforts to date if not one of the the most challenging. In the American Federation of Teachers' analysis of state standards last year, Virginia was in fact the only state to receive "exemplary" marks in all content areas. The AFT's report calls the standards both "extraordinarily clear and well-grounded in content" and "not too voluminous or overwhelming," even though they spell out what students should know and be able to do at every grade level.

Unlike Virginia, most states target only a few key grade levels.

"The standards of learning have deep, broad, bipartisan support, and I think that speaks louder than any sidebar conversation," says Richard T. LaPointe, the state superintendent of schools.

"I'm comfortable with them," Ms. Strauss says, "but there are more chapters to be had."

Last November, the state signed a \$12 million contract with Harcourt Brace Educational Measurement to write assessments tied to the standards, but details concerning how the tests will be used had not yet been decided. Those assessments, targeted for grades 3, 5, 8, and 11, will be field-tested this spring.

SBA