



October 2007

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Commentary: Ready for High School?

The recently released National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2006 results were, for the most part, encouraging. (You can access the NAEP results [here](#).) Reading scores for 4th graders and math scores for 4th and 8th graders were higher across the board than ever before. While fewer students are scoring at the Below Basic level, gains were seen at higher achievement levels as well. It is also heartening that the persistent achievement gap between minority and white students has narrowed slightly.



However, for all the positive news, the NAEP results also point to something rather troubling: only 30% of students scored Proficient or above in 8th grade reading and math. As more states raise their high school standards and graduation requirements to ensure that all graduates are ready for postsecondary and career success, the NAEP results remind us that many students are entering high school unprepared for the rigorous challenges they will face.

There is a valid debate as to whether proficiency on 8th grade NAEP is a viable benchmark of what it takes to succeed in rigorous high school courses, and ultimately, whether 12th grade NAEP measures what students need for postsecondary success. While it is true that NAEP was not designed to be a measure of college and career readiness, the National Assessment Governing Board, who oversees the exams, has expressed plans to move NAEP in this direction in the future. (Read previous Achieve commentary about this [here](#).)

Meanwhile, a new study by the National Center for Education Statistics suggests that scoring Proficient on NAEP is already a solid predictor of students' postsecondary success. (You can download the study [here](#).) The study used the NELS:88 sample to determine how the high school class of 1992 fared in college in relation to their scores on 12th grade NAEP. The findings, while a bit dated, are instructive: Of the students who took the 1992 12th grade mathematics NAEP test, one out of every five (21%) who scored Basic required at least one remedial math course in college -

roughly consistent with the national average (22%). Over half of students scoring Below Basic required remediation. In contrast, a mere 2% of the students scoring Proficient required any remediation in math. Furthermore, over 80% of students scoring Proficient went on to earn a two- or four-year college degree, whereas fewer than 60% and 30% of students scoring Basic and Below Basic students, respectively, earned college degrees.

Solid preparation in math and reading is critical for the successful completion of the rigorous high school curriculum necessary for students to meet the challenges of postsecondary education, careers and life. Students who enter high school without this foundation will face an uphill battle. States and school systems that are serious about the "college and career readiness for all" goal must confront this challenge head on. It is not enough to set higher standards in high school without also ensuring that expectations are vertically aligned all the way down to elementary school. Students who are not meeting these learning goals deserve early attention and support well before they enter high school.

New from Achieve

Washington State Joins ADP Network

Achieve is pleased to announce that the state of Washington has joined the [American Diploma Project \(ADP\) Network](#). The Network now includes 30 states that are dedicated to aligning standards, curriculum, and assessment as well as ensuring that every high school graduate is prepared for college and work. Together, Network members are responsible for educating nearly 60% of all U.S. public school students.

Common Algebra II Test Update

The end-of-course Algebra II exam is the largest effort a group of states has ever undertaken to develop a common assessment based on common standards. Nine ADP Network states - Arkansas, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island - formed the consortium initially and a number of other states are in the process of joining. Field testing of the Algebra II exam is taking place this month (October 2007), and the test will be operational in spring 2008. A fact sheet that answers frequently asked questions is available, including information on the core test content and how states can become members of the consortium. [More...](#)

Achieve's President Michael Cohen Testifies at NCLB Hearing

Achieve's President Michael Cohen testified at the House Committee on Education and the Workforce Hearing on No Child Left Behind (NCLB) on September 10. He drew

from Achieve's decade of research and experience in standards based reform to comment on a handful of key provisions in the "Discussion Draft" of the NCLB reauthorization bill, with the objective of suggesting ways this reauthorization can help improve the quality of state standards and assessments, particularly in high schools. [Read his full testimony.](#)

Moving North Carolina Forward: High Standards and High Graduation Rates

After conducting a thorough policy analysis, Achieve and Jobs for the Future suggested in a report to North Carolina ways it can create a more coherent, intentional, and aligned assessment and accountability system to improve both achievement and graduation rates for struggling and out-of-school students. The report includes a preliminary framework for next generation high school accountability indicators that recognize and reward schools that help all students graduate on time with a college and career-ready diploma. The recommendations were presented to an independent Blue Ribbon Commission on Testing and Accountability in North Carolina. This report was part of *Moving Forward: High Standards and High Graduation Rates*, a joint project of Achieve, Inc., and Jobs for the Future and funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York. [More...](#)

Georgia Adopts College and Career-Ready Graduation Requirements

Georgia's State Board of Education passed a new high school Graduation Rule in mid-September, eliminating the existing tiered diploma system and adopting a set of college- and career-ready requirements for all students. The new policy, as well as the recently adopted college- and career-ready content standards, are aligned with the expectations of the University System of Georgia and were crafted by representatives from local school districts, the Department of Education, the University System, the Department of Adult and Technical Education, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, and members of education stakeholder groups and the business community.

Specifically, Georgia's new graduation course requirements eliminates the two distinct College Preparatory and Technology/Career Diplomas and requires all students to complete four years of math, including content through and beyond the level of Algebra II, and four years of science. The new Graduation Rule goes into effect next year and will first

News Clips

- 1. Tennessee Seeking the Best Measures of Success.**

Tennessee is working to improve the rigor of education through the Tennessee Diploma Project, the state's affiliate with the American Diploma Project. Under Gov. Bredesen's leadership, Tennessee joined the ADP network in January 2007 and is one of 30 states

impact the expected graduating class of 2012. Georgia is the 15th state to adopt college- and career-ready graduation requirements for all students. [More...](#)

now involved.

[More...](#)

2. **Ohio Looks to Make Its Students Globally Competitive.**

Last year Ohio State Superintendent Susan Tave Zelman commissioned a study designed to establish international academic benchmarks for its public school students. The idea is to prepare students for a global economy.

[More...](#)

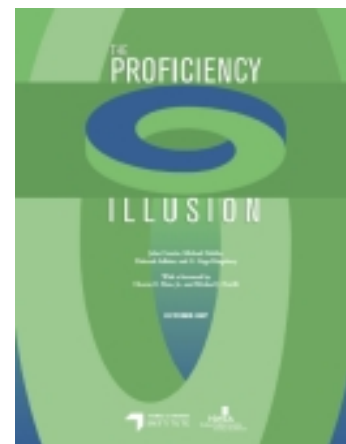
3. **Kentucky Teacher Receives Award.**

Carrie Lichtenberg has won the 2007 National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Kentucky Teacher Excellence Award. Lichtenberg helped develop a rigorous English curriculum for high school as part of the American Diploma Project.

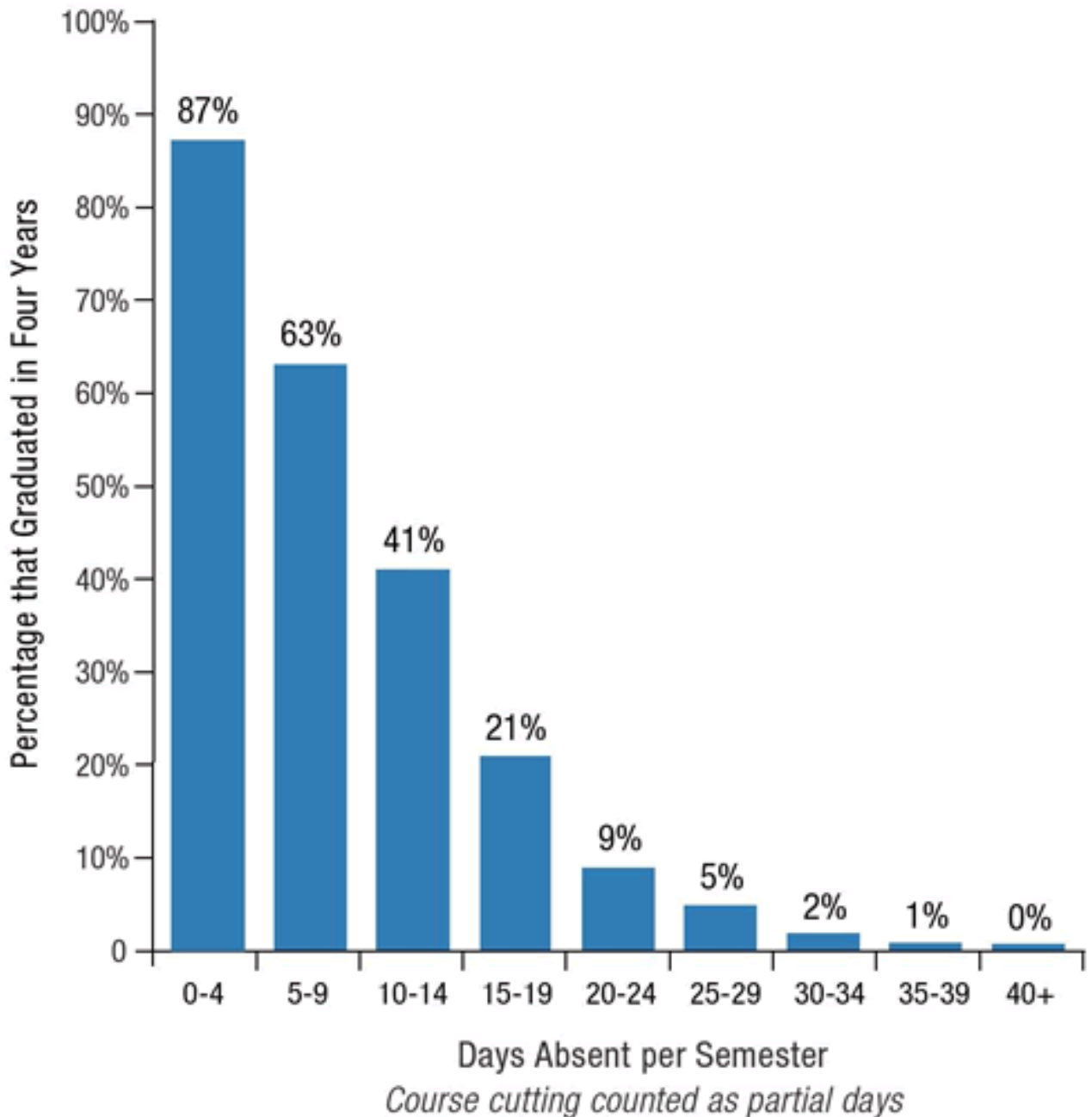
[More...](#)

New Resources

- The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation has issued "The Proficiency Illusion," a new study comparing tests in twenty-six states to benchmarks laid out by the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA), in order to evaluate the varying proficiency cut scores for assessments. The reports suggests that the tests states use to measure student proficiency and academic progress under the No Child Left Behind Act are creating false impressions of success, especially in reading and in the early grades. [More...](#)
- The Education Trust recently released a report, "Graduation Matters: Improving Accountability for High School Graduation." The report contends that most states are setting low goals for improving graduation rates, and for ensuring that more low-income, minority, disabled and English language learner students earn a high school diploma. It documents goals set by the states for graduation rates under the NCLB, demonstrating how improvement targets are often so low that they undercut the aim of raising graduation rates. [Download the PDF.](#)
- The Consortium for Chicago School Research issued a new report entitled, "What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools." Working in cooperation with the district, researchers analyzed years of data and uncovered a number of surprising connections. As the figure below shows, nearly 90% of freshmen in Chicago public schools who missed less than a week of school per semester graduated within four years. Missing five to nine days a semester was enough to drop the graduation rate to 63%. The researchers argue that ninth grade is a make-or-break year and that there is much that educators can do to help students transition more successfully into high school. This report further examines elements of course performance that predict whether students will graduate, and offers recommendations as to what schools and families can do to keep more teens in school. These data can help states, districts, and schools identify the more effective interventions for individual students. [More...](#)



Four-Year Graduation Rates by Freshman Absence Rates



- The Center on Education Policy (CEP) released "State High School Exit Exams: Working to Raise Test Scores," highlighting the low standards set by the majority of exit exams, as well as a recent trend toward end-of-course examinations. CEP recommends continued research on the impact of statewide assessments on curriculum and instruction and the effectiveness of remediation and support programs. The report also recommends that states ratchet up the level of proficiency demanded by exit exams. [More...](#)
- WestEd has published a new report "Rethinking High



School: Preparing Students for Success in College, Career, and Life." The report, commissioned by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, profiles programs serving predominantly low-income, minority students in Oakland, Calif.; Mabton, Wash.; Houston, Texas; Bridgeton, N.J.; and Portland, Ore. While the programs' approaches do vary, each has demonstrated early progress, in areas such as improved test scores, graduation rates, and college enrollment for students. These programs share a common, effective framework of strong school leaders, rigorous coursework, and an emphasis on effective teaching. [More...](#)



Achieve Job Opportunities

Achieve is currently looking for a Director, Postsecondary Initiatives and a Director, Assessment Partnerships. For more information, go [here](#).

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