



U.S. Department of Education  
National Assessment of  
Educational Progress

# The Nation's Report Card and State Assessments

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), often referred to as the Nation's Report Card, is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in core subjects such as reading and mathematics. Data from the Nation's Report Card are valued by educators and parents and are widely used by policymakers to evaluate and improve America's educational system. NAEP is considered the gold standard of large scale assessments because of its high technical quality and because it represents the best thinking of assessment specialists, education experts, teachers, and content specialists from around the nation.

As part of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), all states and school districts that receive Title I funds must participate in NAEP assessments in reading and mathematics at grades 4 and 8 every other year. Each year they must also give students in grades 3-8 state assessments in mathematics and reading/language arts. State assessments must be based on the state's academic content standards.

How do NAEP and state assessments relate? Together, they can be used to further inform the debate over the future of our country's educational system.

	<b>The Nation's Report Card</b>	<b>State Assessments</b>
<i>Purposes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A national measure of student performance and how performance is changing over time.</li> <li>• Students across the nation participate in the same assessment.</li> <li>• The only tool that allows valid comparisons between a state and other states, or a state and the nation.</li> <li>• Provides results for the nation, states, and some large urban districts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designed to reflect individual state content standards.</li> <li>• Track progress toward state education goals.</li> <li>• Measure school and district adequate yearly progress (AYP) under NCLB.</li> <li>• Provide state, district, school, and individual student data.</li> </ul>
<i>Frameworks</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The independent National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) through an inclusive process that includes a diverse group of stakeholders, including state education experts, develops frameworks, which provide the "blueprints" for the various assessments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• States develop their own assessment blueprints based on their content standards through inclusive processes that involve a diverse group of stakeholders.</li> <li>• Some states have used the NAEP frameworks to inform their own content standard and assessment development.</li> </ul>

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<i>Achievement Levels</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NAGB sets achievement levels (<i>Basic, Proficient, and Advanced</i>) that describe what students should know and be able to do.</li> <li>• These achievement levels are independent of any state achievement levels.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The terms used for and definitions of state achievement levels vary by state and they vary from NAEP's terms.</li> <li>• State assessments are designed to test whether students are proficient in key subjects based on the state's own content standards.</li> <li>• NCLB requires that all students reach proficiency on their state test by the end of the 2013-14 school year</li> </ul>
<i>How students are assessed</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NAEP measures student achievement using multiple-choice, short constructed response, and extended constructed response questions.</li> <li>• NAEP assesses students with disabilities and English language learners using most of the accommodations that states use on their tests. In some cases, these students are excluded because NAEP does not allow an accommodation that a state allows, e.g. reading aloud the reading test.</li> <li>• In order to lessen the burden on schools, NAEP field staff administers the assessments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• States measure student achievement using a wide variety of assessment formats, including multiple-choice, constructed response, performance events, portfolios, alternative assessments, and computer-based assessments.</li> <li>• Each state assesses students with disabilities and English language learners according to their own inclusion and accommodation policies.</li> <li>• School district personnel administer the assessments</li> </ul>
<i>Who takes the test</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NAEP assesses a representative sample of 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students from each state in reading and mathematics every other year. These assessments are required by NCLB.</li> <li>• NAEP also periodically tests 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students in other subjects such as science, writing, civics and geography. In 2005, NAEP assessed a nationally representative sample in science in grades 4, 8 and 12. In addition, most states chose to participate in having a representative sample assessed in science in grades 4 and 8.</li> <li>• Not every student takes NAEP, and each participating student takes only a portion of the test.</li> <li>• Student participation in NAEP is voluntary. However, some states do require that their students participate if they are selected for NAEP.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By the 2005-06 school year, states are required to administer reading and mathematics assessments annually to all students in grades 3-8 and to one high school grade.</li> <li>• States required to administer science assessments (by 2007-08 school year) to one high school grade and at least once in grades 3-5 and in grades 6-8.</li> <li>• All students are required to participate in the state's assessment program.</li> </ul>

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<i>How data are used</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The President and Congress use NAEP results in setting education policy.</li><li>• State leaders and state educators use NAEP to compare their state with the nation and other states.</li><li>• Teachers can use NAEP assessment frameworks, sample questions, and scoring guides to help in designing lesson plans and tests.</li><li>• States are neither rewarded nor sanctioned based on their results.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Governors, state legislatures, state leaders, and state educators use state results in setting education policy.</li><li>• The results are used to measure progress of schools, districts, and the state towards AYP goals. Schools that do not meet their AYP goals for two consecutive years face a variety of sanctions.</li><li>• Local policymakers use state assessment data to examine school and group performance and help allocate resources.</li><li>• Principals, teachers, and parents use student-level data from state assessments to examine the performance of students to see where they need improvement.</li><li>• Most states have publicly available resource materials for use by teachers in planning for instruction and for assessments.</li><li>• In some states, results are used for promotion/retention decisions and/or graduation requirements.</li></ul>

**More information is available online.** The Nation's Report Card has produced more than 600 reports in its history. The main NAEP assesses 4th-, 8th-, and 12th-grade students and the long-term trend NAEP chronicles trends over time in the performance of 9-, 13-, and 17-year-olds. Results for the nation, states, regions, and select large urban school districts are reported by a variety of demographic characteristics, school factors, and instructional practices. More information about NAEP can be searched and/or downloaded from the NAEP website at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>. Information about state assessments is also available online on state department of education web sites, which you can also reach via the NAEP web site.