



Council of the Great City Schools

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Report Shows Urban School Progress Climbing

Trends in Math and Reading on State Assessments in 2004 Analyzed

WASHINGTON, March 28 – Student achievement in the nation’s major city public school systems continued to climb in 2004, defying public perception of stagnant urban academic performance.

Students in 65 city school systems in 38 states have posted new gains in math and reading on state-mandated assessments since 2003, when results on urban school progress were cited in evaluating the first year of the federal *No Child Left Behind* law.

The new report released today by the Council of the Great City Schools called *Beating the Odds V* shows additional gains, indicating that an upward trend in urban education appears to be solidifying.

Between the 2001-2002 and 2003-2004 school years, the percentage of urban fourth graders scoring at or above proficiency in mathematics on state tests rose from 44.1 to 55.3, an 11.2 percentage point increase. For eighth graders, the percentage climbed from 36.5 to 43.8, a jump of 7.3 percentage points.

In reading, urban schoolchildren also posted gains, but not as fast as in math. From 2001-02 to 2003-04, the percentage of fourth graders scoring at or above proficiency in reading on state tests rose from 43.1 to 51.0 – nearly an eight percentage point increase. For eighth graders, the percentage rose from 37.2 to 39.9, a mere two percentage point hike.

Increases in Percentages of 4th and 8th Grade Urban Students Scoring at or above Proficiency in Reading and Math*

	2002	2003	2004	Change
4 th Grade Reading	43.1%	48.1%	51.0%	+7.9
4 th Grade Math	44.1%	50.8%	55.3%	+11.2
8 th Grade Reading	37.2%	38.5%	39.9%	+2.7
8 th Grade Math	36.5%	39.4%	43.8%	+7.3

*Percentages based on differing state proficiency levels, enrollment counts and districts using identical tests in all three years.

“The progress in urban schools is not a fluke,” says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. “It is consistent with the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Achievement) scores for large central cities and appears to show real headway by urban educators in raising student achievement.”

The Council's fifth annual report on *Beating the Odds* gives city-by-city analysis of how inner-city schools are performing on the academic goals and standards set by their respective states to measure student achievement and to hold districts and schools accountable for results.

Up through 2004, the study finds in *math* assessments that:

- 70.8 percent of cities had improved in all grades tested—up from 47 percent in the 2001 analysis;
- 21.7 percent of cities had improved in all grades tested faster than their states—up from 4 percent in 2001;
- 95.4 percent of cities had improved in at least half the grades tested—up slightly from 92 percent in 2001;
- 68.3 percent of cities had improved in at least half the grades tested faster than their states—up from 47 percent in 2001;
- 57.5 percent of all grades tested had reduced the achievement gaps between white and African American students—up from 49 percent in 2001; and
- 54.7 percent of all grades tested had reduced the achievement gaps between white and Hispanic students—the same as 2001.

In *reading*, the study shows that:

- 41.5 percent of cities had improved in all grades tested—up from 35 percent in the 2001 analysis;
- 15.0 percent of cities had improved in all grades tested faster than the state—up from 6 percent in 2001;
- 89.2 percent of cities had improved in at least half the grades tested—up slightly from 80 percent in 2001;
- 56.7 percent of cities had improved in at least half the grades tested faster than the state—up from 34 percent in 2001;
- 63.8 percent of all grades tested had reduced the achievement gaps between white and African American students—the same as 2001; and
- 53.2 percent of all grades tested had reduced the achievement gaps between white and Hispanic students—down from 68 percent in 2001.

Math Trends

Of all *grades* tested in the big-city school systems, 91.1 percent had shown gains in math scores and 54.2 percent had improved faster than their states.

Although urban schools show gains in math performance, the big cities still lag behind state and national averages. However, three major urban school districts – Albuquerque, Anchorage and San Francisco – had higher math scores than their states in *all* grades tested.

Other school systems that had average math scores in half or more of the grades tested in 2004 that were higher than their respective states were Broward County (Fort Lauderdale), Hillsborough County (Tampa) and Palm Beach County in Florida, as well as Portland, Ore.

Reading Trends

Overall reading trends show that 77.2 percent of all *grades* tested in the big-city school systems had shown gains in reading scores – 45.8 percent had improved faster than their states.

Similar to math, reading scores in urban schools were generally below state and national averages. But Albuquerque, Anchorage and San Francisco had higher reading scores than statewide averages in *all* grades tested.

Other urban districts – Broward County (Fort Lauderdale), Charleston, Hillsborough County (Tampa), Portland, Ore., San Diego and Seattle -- had average reading scores in half or more of the grades tested that were higher than their respective states.

Achievement Gaps

Beating the Odds also presents data on racially identifiable achievement gaps, language proficiency, disability and income, as well as urban school demographic conditions and funding.

“The study shows some preliminary evidence that gaps between poor and non-poor, English language learners and native English speakers, and special education and non-special education students may be starting to narrow.” Casserly points out.

Some 48.7 percent of grades tested showed some narrowing of the gaps in *math* between poor and non-poor students; 50 percent of grades showed some narrowing of the math gaps between English language learners and others; and 20.3 percent of grades showed some narrowing of the math gaps between disabled and nondisabled students.

Likewise, some 55.3 percent of grades tested showed some narrowing of the gaps in *reading* between poor and non-poor students; 42.4 percent of grades showed some narrowing of the reading gaps between English language learners and others; and 37.0 percent of grades showed some narrowing of the reading gaps between disabled and nondisabled students.

Urban Environment

America’s big-city school systems are generally different from their suburban and rural counterparts, serving a demographically different student body and operating in a political and financial environment that is often more complex, contentious, and competitive than smaller nonurban systems.

The data from the new report show that students in the nation’s major urban public school systems are twice as likely as their peers nationwide to be eligible for a free or reduced priced lunch and to be English language learners. Yet, some 2.3 million urban school youngsters (30.9 percent) attend schools in a district whose average expenditure per pupil was below statewide averages.

The Council of the Great City Schools is a national coalition representing 65 of the largest urban public school systems in the United States.