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## **Urban School Students Advance On State and National Tests**

### ***New Report Shows City-by-City Profiles of Urban School District Trends On Math and Reading Assessments***

WASHINGTON, March 22 – Students in the nation's big-city schools are advancing in mathematics and reading on both state and national tests, and there's evidence that racial achievement gaps are narrowing.

So reports a new study analyzing academic progress in 65 urban school systems in 37 states and the District of Columbia, which shows measurable test-score gains from 2006 to 2009 in fourth- and eighth-grade mathematics and reading on state assessments.

The upward trend parallels student achievement in large cities and city districts participating in the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), considered "The Nation's Report Card."

*Beating the Odds: Analysis of Student Performance on State Assessments and NAEP* by the Council of the Great City Schools examines performance on the academic goals and standards set by the states and consistent with the federal *No Child Left Behind* Act. The report is a compilation of state data on city-by-city percentages of urban public school students performing at or above "proficiency" and those who are scoring at the lowest levels.

"The study presents the best available picture of how America's urban public schools are performing on state tests and strongly suggests that they are making substantial progress in both reading and mathematics," says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. "But there's still a long road ahead as urban schools are making noticeable gains."

The gains have captured the attention of U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. "Across the country, we see many extraordinary schools and districts serving high-poverty populations that are succeeding year after year," he says of progress in urban education.

"We have to recognize and reward them for their excellence. More importantly, we need to learn from these examples and replicate their work elsewhere," he stresses.

## **State Math Achievement**

*Beating the Odds* finds that urban school students are performing better in mathematics than in reading on state-mandated tests.

Seventy-nine percent of big-city school districts increased the percentage of fourth-grade students who scored at or above proficient between 2006 and 2009, and 88 percent of districts increased eighth-grade student performance.

Forty-four percent of urban districts showed increased performance for all grades tested on their respective state assessments, with 95 percent showing increased performance for half or more of the grades tested.

Six school districts -- Albuquerque, Anchorage, Broward County (Fort Lauderdale, Fla.), Charleston, Palm Beach and Portland, Ore. -- showed both fourth- and eighth-grade math scores that were equal to or greater than their respective states.

Other urban districts -- Charlotte, Clark County (Las Vegas), District of Columbia, Long Beach, San Diego, San Francisco and Seattle -- had fourth-grade math scores matching or exceeding their states.

## **State Reading Achievement**

In reading, 73 percent of urban districts increased the percentage of fourth-grade students who scored at or above proficient between 2006 and 2009, while 71 percent of districts improved eighth-grade student performance.

Twenty-seven percent of districts showed increased performance for all grades tested on their respective state assessments, with some 74 percent showing increased performance for half or more of all grades tested.

The same school districts that outperformed their respective states in math did so in both fourth- and eighth-grade reading as well. And the districts that matched or exceeded their states in fourth-grade math also did so in fourth-grade reading.

## **National Test Assessments**

Considered a more rigorous assessment, NAEP is much different than the respective state-mandated tests.

*Beating the Odds* shows that students in large cities made significant gains on NAEP mathematics in both grades four and eight; reading in grade four.

"When analyzing both state and national assessments, it is evident that the academic gains by urban school students are real, and reform efforts by urban educators are bearing fruit," Casserly stresses.

The percentage of fourth graders in large cities who scored at or above proficient in math rose to 29 percent in 2009 from 24 percent in 2005, and to 24 percent from 19 percent in

eighth grade. The jump is considered statistically significant when compared with NAEP scores in public schools across the nation.

In reading, the percentage of fourth graders in large cities who scored at or above proficient jumped to 22 percent in 2007 from 20 percent in 2005, and was stagnant in eighth-grade scores at 20 percent in 2005 and 2007, matching a zero increase nationally as well.

North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system outperformed public schools nationwide in fourth-grade math on NAEP -- 45 percent compared with 38 percent, respectively. Also, another big-city school system, Austin in Texas, outpaced the nation's public schools in eighth-grade math -- 39 percent compared with 33 percent, respectively.

Moreover, a few big-city school districts saw black and Hispanic students score significantly higher than their counterparts in public schools across the nation.

### **Achievement Gaps**

*Beating the Odds* shows some progress in urban school districts reducing racial achievement gaps.

The majority of the big-city school systems -- 67 percent -- narrowed the gap between their fourth-grade black and white students statewide in math proficiency, and 62 percent in eighth grade. Between Hispanic and white fourth graders statewide, 76 percent of the urban school districts narrowed the gap, and 69 percent in eighth grade.

In reading, some 49 percent of the districts narrowed the black-white achievement gap among fourth graders statewide, and 53 percent among eighth-grade students. Some 57 percent of big-city districts narrowed the Hispanic-white achievement gap in reading in fourth grade statewide, and 53 percent at the eighth-grade level.

### **Urban Environment**

America's big-city school systems are more likely to enroll black, Hispanic or Asian American students; students from low-income families; and students raised in non-English speaking homes.

Although the big-city school districts enroll about 14 percent of the nation's public school students, they enroll about one-third of the nation's black and limited English proficient students, and about a quarter of the nation's Hispanic and economically disadvantaged students.

The report attributes the standards movement as the catalyst that triggered change in urban schools. It gave urban school administrators direction on what they were being held responsible for delivering, Casserly points out.

City-by-city profiles of the ninth edition of *Beating the Odds* can be found on the Council's Web site at [www.cgcs.org](http://www.cgcs.org).

*The Washington-based Council of the Great City Schools is a coalition of the nation's largest urban public school districts.*