

New York City Students Show Slight Gains on Test Scores

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New York City public school students posted tiny gains this year on the bulk of federal academic tests that were last administered in 2011, though the city's fourth graders showed no growth at all in reading scores over the last two years.

But new results from the testing program known as N.A.E.P., the [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#), show a picture of steady though incremental improvement in performance over the span of the [Bloomberg administration](#), though city students continue to perform below the national average, both in absolute terms and in the proportion of students who have achieved proficiency in either reading or math.

More than a snapshot of achievement, the scores released Wednesday illuminate overall increases the city's fourth and eighth graders have made in math and reading since 2003, the year after Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg took office.

For New York City's fourth graders, the average reading score rose to 216 out of 500 this year, up 10 points from 2003. Nationally, the average fourth-grade reading score rose by four points, to 221. On math tests, the city's fourth-grade average score rose to 236, up 10 points from 2003; the national score rose by seven points, to 241.

In the past decade, the city has chipped away at an achievement gap with the national average, even as cities with similar proportions of children from low-income families have risen from far lower bases of performance. Today, New York keeps pace with other large cities in the proportion of low-income children who reach proficiency in reading and math.

Still, achievement gaps between whites and blacks, and whites and Hispanics persist in New York. The results this year show that the city has, on average, smaller gaps between racial groups than are seen in other large cities as well as smaller gaps between students from low-income families and those from wealthier homes. But in New York, there has been little improvement on that front over the last decade.

Shael Polakow-Suransky, the City Education Department's chief academic officer, said a persistent factor had been the city's "very high" number of new immigrants who need time to learn English and perform well.

He said the overall gains mirrored increases in the city's graduation and college readiness rates. He predicted greater breakthroughs in future years as new curriculum standards and more rigorous teacher evaluations take hold.

"The reforms the mayor has instituted have had a powerful impact and the work is not finished yet," said Mr. Polakow-Suransky.

A good way to prompt gains is to focus on children younger than age 5, said Michael Mulgrew, the president of the city's teachers' union, the United Federation of Teachers, who cited Mayor-elect Bill de Blasio's pledge to expand prekindergarten programs. "We hope someday that promise will be filled," he said.

Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, said that while some analysts might look for proof that their prescriptions had worked or that those of their opponents had not, such interpretations were usually "wide of the mark."

The national test, unlike others that change repeatedly, is seen as a reliable measure of performance. It is given every two years. Students across the country see the same material, but only in small, representative samples. Nationally, the results were encouraging for large cities, showing them closing the gap with the national average, though glacially.

Among cities, Los Angeles and the District of Columbia showed the most growth over the past two years. Washington stood out for being the only big city district to raise scores in both grade levels and subjects in those years. Nevertheless, a higher proportion of New York students achieved proficiency in reading and math at the fourth and eighth grade levels than in either Los Angeles or Washington.