

Alabama's New Assessments Narrow "Honesty Gap" in Reporting Student Proficiency, According to National Report

Alabama jumps from the bottom to the top among "truth-telling" states

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(Montgomery, AL) – Today the nationally-recognized education reform organization, Achieve, released an analysis of student proficiency scores on state assessments compared to scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), considered a "gold standard" in student assessments. The report's data show several states – including Alabama – have dramatically narrowed the "Honesty Gap" in recent years between their own results and those from the NAEP.

Achieve's analysis reveals that under the old Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test (ARMT), the discrepancy between the percentage of students deemed "proficient" on the ARMT and the NAEP in 4th and 8th grade reading and math was one of the largest in the nation (i.e. students were classified as on or above grade-level in reading or math when in reality they were not). In contrast, using the new ACT Aspire, this discrepancy is so small that the report hails Alabama as a "truth-telling" state. The ACT Aspire was given to 3rd through 8th graders for the first time in 2013-14, replacing the ARMT.

For more details on the percentages, please see the report.

"We are encouraged by this report," said Dr. Tommy Bice, Alabama State Superintendent of Education. "It reassures us that the decisions we have made to raise the bar, challenge our students and use a more honest assessment system has put Alabama on the right path toward improving education for all students. We know that our students can work hard and achieve at high levels, and now we can say confidently we've set the bar to where it should be to prepare them for success in life after high school."

A+ released a policy brief in fall 2013 explaining the landscape of Alabama's state assessments and the expected change in standardized test scores when switching to the more rigorous ACT Aspire. ([Access the report and explanation here.](#))

"What this means is that the new state assessments raise the bar for students and are more closely aligned with rigor of the NAEP, which has been used for years to compare effectiveness of states' educational systems," said Thomas Rains, A+ Policy Director. "We expected lower levels of proficiency because the new assessments expect more of students. The Achieve analysis illustrates that Alabama's new assessments provide more honest feedback for teachers and parents, helping students achieve at higher levels," Rains said.

The Collaborative for Student Success, a national organization supporting local adoption and implementation of higher education standards, issued a release characterizing this difference in state test scores and NAEP scores as an "Honesty Gap." This is in reference to parents having received a skewed portrait of student performance with former state assessments.

The NAEP, often referred to as the "Nation's Report Card," is given every two years to a random sample of students nationwide to serve as a common metric for all states' educational systems. The NAEP is known to set a high bar for what it expects from students. By contrast, most state-level standardized tests created individually by states as a requirement of the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act—like the ARMT—set low bars for

student proficiency. In states that set a low bar for student proficiency like Alabama, sometimes more than twice as many students were deemed “proficient” on a state test as on the NAEP.

By closing the gap between what states tests and the NAEP say, Alabama is providing a clearer and more honest picture of student achievement.

According to Bice, Alabama has been in the process of implementing changes for about five years that will give parents more accurate information about their students’ academic performance, beginning with the adoption of higher academic standards and the implementation of its strategic “Plan 2020.” The Alabama State Board of Education adopted the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards in 2010, based on academic standards adopted in almost all other states in math and English. These standards raised expectations of what teachers and students should achieve at the completion of each grade level, and laid the foundation for deeper learning and real-life application of knowledge. Alabama then chose the ACT suite of assessments aligned to the standards, including the ACT Aspire, that provide parents, students, teachers and administrators a more accurate measurement of how students and schools are performing as compared to the NAEP.

“Parents and educators deserve honest, accurate information about how well their students are performing, and the extent to which they have a solid foundation for their continued learning,” said Michael Cohen, president of Achieve. “Tests are not the only source of this information, but they are certainly an important one. We don’t do our students any favors if we don’t level with them when test results come back.”

Achieve data can be found here: [LINK](#)

A+ Education Partnership’s policy brief, “Standardized Testing in Alabama and Nationwide,” can be downloaded here:

http://www.aplusala.org/uploadedFiles/File/Policy_Brief_Academic_Standards_in_Alabama_rev05232014.pdf

Collaborative for Student Success press release and state analysis can be found here: www.HonestyGap.org

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