



The Nation's Report Card: What's the Georgia Story?

**Analysis prepared by Policy and Research Director Susan Walker
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Last week the results of the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in mathematics were released, allowing states and the country to assess how well our fourth- and eighth-grade students are performing in this critical subject area. The NAEP is administered every other year to representative samples of students in every state and is scored on a scale of 0-500.

Overall, the 2009 results indicate that there has been no significant change in the performance of the nation's fourth-graders in mathematics from 2007 to 2009. State results, however, show increases in average scores from 2007 to 2009 for eight states and decreases for four states. In Georgia, the average score of fourth-grade public school students was 236, which was lower than the national average of 239 and not significantly different from Georgia's 2007 score.

The overall results for eighth-graders in the nation reveal that student performance at this grade level continues to improve. The national average mathematics score for eighth-grade students was higher in 2009 than in all previous assessment years. Scores also increased from 2007 to 2009 in 15 states including Georgia, and no states showed a decline. Eighth-graders in Georgia scored an average of 278, slightly lower than the national average of 282.

While the overall results of the NAEP provide policymakers in Georgia some evidence that our state is making progress, the true benefit of the assessment lies in the wealth of extensive data that is made available to us and can be used to further our understanding of student outcomes in the state's public education system. This year, an in-depth analysis of NAEP results suggests that despite some progress, alarming gaps still exist between the performance levels of white, black, and Hispanic students, and between students eligible and non-eligible for the free and reduced lunch program.

Consider these insights found by digging deeper into the results of the 2009 Mathematics NAEP:

- While Georgia's overall eighth-grade math score increased from 275 in 2007 to 278 in 2009, the only student subgroup to show significant improvement was females, as compared to males. For white, black, and Hispanic, and low-income and non low-income

eighth-grade students in Georgia, there was no significant change in average scores over the two-year period.

- 67 percent of Georgia's eighth-grade students performed at or above basic on the NAEP. As a state, Georgia ranks 39th in the nation on this measure.
- The percentage of white students in Georgia's eighth grade who performed at or above basic was 80 percent. Only 59 percent of Hispanic students and 50 percent of black students scored at the same proficiency level. This white-black performance gap (30 percentage points) in 2009 was not significantly different from the gap in 2007 or in 2005. Similarly, this white-Hispanic gap (21 percentage points) was not significantly different from the gap in 2007, 2005, or 2003.
- Among eighth-grade students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, only 53 percent performed at or above basic on NAEP, as compared to 80 percent of students who were not eligible for the lunch program. The gap between these two groups (27 percentage points) was not significantly different from the gap in 2007 or 2005.
- 78 percent of Georgia's fourth-grade students performed at or above basic on the NAEP. As a state, Georgia ranks 38th in the nation on this measure.
- In the fourth grade, 90 percent of Georgia's white public school students performed at or above basic on the math NAEP. Only 62 percent of black students and 75 percent of Hispanic students scored at the same proficiency level.
- Among public school fourth-graders who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, only 68 percent performed at or above basic on the math NAEP, as compared to 91 percent of students not eligible for the lunch program.

Georgia does have accomplishments to celebrate in education. With recent state-level attention to curriculum and teacher quality, the improvement of our eighth-grade students on the math portion of the NAEP will hopefully become a long-term trend. However, the wealth of information contained in the 2009 Nation's Report Card gives Georgians much more reason to keep working hard than to stop for a pat on the back. The data presented above should speak for itself. The continuing gaps between performance levels of our students should be cause for new commitment to excellence for *all* students in Georgia – **now!**

The Georgia Partnership values stakeholder involvement in public education. We would like to hear from you, and we welcome your comments and questions on the 2009 NAEP results. Drop Policy & Research Director Susan Walker your thoughts at swalker@gpee.org.

-Steve Dolinger