

Student Achievement

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Key Policy Points	99
Student Achievement in Georgia	99
I. Overview	99
II. Gaps in Student Achievement	99
III. International Measures of Student Achievement	100
IV. National Measures of Student Achievement	101
V. Georgia Measures of Student Achievement	111
Emerging Policy Concerns for Student Achievement	115

QUICK DEFINITION

The ultimate goal of any instructional strategy, curriculum, or education reform initiative is to raise student achievement – to boost individuals' knowledge and increase children's preparedness for future endeavors. As the standards-based education movement has taken hold in recent decades, measuring and reporting student achievement has become an even more critical component of public education. State and federal accountability systems have raised the bar for school performance and have led to an increased reliance on standardized tests of student achievement.

Assessments at the state, national, and international levels are used frequently to evaluate student achievement in core subjects. The results of these assessments reveal where students are achieving proficiency and where much work remains to be done. Further, these results are used to compare student performance in different countries and among various states. Analysis of student achievement can bring about significant controversy, as it often reveals different levels of performance between males and females, between urban, suburban, and rural students, and particularly among various ethnic or racial groups.

KEY POLICY POINTS

- State education leaders and policymakers are relying increasingly on the results of standardized student assessments to gauge school, district, state, and national educational progress.
- The greater push for accountability in education has resulted in a much greater use of standardized tests within schools and classrooms. However, the use of these assessments is not without controversy. Many critics argue that students are being tested too much, that tests unfairly advantage one student subgroup over another, and that a battery of standardized assessments are not an adequate measure of students' knowledge and skills.
- To fully understand the achievement of students, educators and policymakers must look comprehensively at all available data and information. Scores on a particular assessment capture only one moment in time; educational leaders must examine year-to-year trends in achievement as well as aggregate and disaggregated data.
- Many factors affect the performance of students on any given measure of achievement. When drawing conclusions or making comparisons based on assessment data, policymakers must consider the larger context shaping results. The following questions are critical to ask: How is student performance being measured? How was an assessment designed? Which students are being assessed? How are results being calculated and reported?

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN GEORGIA

I. OVERVIEW

The true test of any educational reform initiative, teacher training program, or new curriculum is the impact it has on student success. In this era of increased scrutiny of public education, Georgia boasts a record of progressive action over recent years that has resulted in notable gains in our student achievement. Yet our work is far from done. By carefully studying educational data at the national, state, and local levels, we can make strategic decisions about how to invest resources and plan interventions within our public schools to improve the outcomes for all students.

Presented in this chapter are the results of international, national, and state measures of student achievement.

II. GAPS IN STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

A close examination of student performance on national and state standardized assessments almost always reveals alarming disparities in academic achievement across lines of race and socioeconomic status. Commonly referred to as the achievement gap in education, the differences most often observed are those between many African-American and Hispanic students and their non-Hispanic white peers and between low-income and higher-income students.

In recent years, greater attention has been given to achievement gaps across the country, due in large part to the federal accountability mandates of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. NCLB holds schools accountable for the academic progress of every child, regardless of race, ethnicity, or income level, and therefore, the legislation has made closing achievement gaps a national priority. Additionally, this component of NCLB has brought greater transparency to state reported data, as annual report cards on states' education systems must present disaggregated data that clearly describe the performance of all student subgroups.

The importance of understanding and eliminating achievement gaps is critical as the United States grows more diverse. Southern states in particular have been significantly impacted by changing demographics as migration patterns have led to a greater percentage of Hispanic and African American residents in the South. Georgia is a prime example of a state experiencing historical demographic shifts. Today, black and Hispanic students in Georgia comprise almost 46 percent of student enrollment. Additionally, Georgia's free/reduced lunch eligible population has increased annually over the last three years and stands now at 50 percent. Unfortunately, the state's low-income, black, and Hispanic students lag significantly behind in performance compared to their white, Asian, and more advantaged peers. The future economic vitality and productivity of Georgia and of the nation will depend on the academic preparation and support all students receive in Georgia's public schools today.

In order to fully understand how the schools and students in our country and in Georgia are performing, policymakers must examine data at the aggregate and disaggregate levels. In order to effect positive educational change, leaders must study the general trends of all students on various standardized tests. Yet perhaps more importantly, they must explore and question the persistent gaps in achievement among student subgroups. For that reason, this chapter of the Primer presents both aggregate and disaggregated data wherever possible.

III. INTERNATIONAL MEASURES OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The increasing globalization of the world economy has heightened the focus of business, political, and educational leaders on the competitiveness of the American workforce. There is growing recognition that the educational performance of students has significant implications for any country's economic vitality. To compare the achievement of students across the globe and gauge a country's economic potential, many nations participate in international assessments of student achievement. Two such measures, in which the United States takes part, are the Programme for International Student Assessment and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study.

Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a triennial survey of the knowledge and skills of 15-year-olds. It is the product of collaboration between participating countries and economies through the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and draws on leading international expertise to develop valid comparisons across countries and cultures.

Three PISA surveys have taken place so far, in 2000, 2003, and 2006, focusing primarily on reading, mathematics, and science, respectively. In the years that a specific subject is not the primary focus of the PISA, data is still collected on student performance in that area in order to provide trend comparisons.

More than 400,000 students from 57 countries making up close to 90 percent of the world economy took part in PISA 2006. All 30 OECD member countries participated in the 2006 assessment, as well as 27 partner countries and economies. Nationally-representative samples were drawn, representing 20 million 15-year-olds. The focus of the assessment was on science, but the assessment also included reading and mathematics and collected data on student, family, and institutional factors that could help to explain differences in performance.

Table 8.1 shows the United States' performance over multiple years on the PISA. Because PISA performance data are based on samples of students from each country, it is not possible to report the exact rank order of countries' performance. However, it is possible to report the possible range of a country's rank among other participating OECD nations. Thus, the actual ranking of the United States on any given year of the PISA lies somewhere between the highest possible and the lowest possible rankings listed in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1. United States' Performance on PISA

2000 PISA - 31 OECD Countries Participating		
	Highest Possible Rank	Lowest Possible Rank
Science	11	21
Mathematics	16	23
Reading	10	20
2003 PISA - 29 OECD Countries Participating		
	Highest Possible Rank	Lowest Possible Rank
Science	17	23
Mathematics	22	24
Reading	10	19
2006 PISA - 30 OECD Countries Participating		
	Highest Possible Rank	Lowest Possible Rank
Science	18	25
Mathematics	24	26
Reading	n/a	n/a

Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, PISA Results, www.pisa.oecd.org.

Note: The United States did not participate in the Reading portion of the 2006 PISA.

Since the first administration of the PISA in 2000, the United States has lost ground among other participating OECD countries. In both science and mathematics, the United States' rankings have fallen over the years.

Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)

The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) provides reliable and timely data on the mathematics and science achievement of U.S. students compared to that of students in other countries. TIMSS is organized by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) in Amsterdam the Netherlands. In the United States, TIMSS is supported by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

Each participating country, like the United States, is required to draw random samples of schools. In the United States, a national probability sample is drawn for each study that resulted in over 480 schools and almost 19,000 students participating in 2003. Each TIMSS assessment is administered to 4th and 8th graders in the areas of mathematics and science. TIMSS data has been collected in 1995, 1999, 2003, and 2007. The results of TIMSS 2007, in which 55 countries participated, will be released on December 9, 2008.

Following are highlights from the performance of American students on the 2003 TIMSS:

- ▶ In mathematics, U.S. fourth-grade students scored 518, on average, exceeding the international average of 495. U.S. fourth-graders outperformed their peers in 13 of the other 24 participating countries and performed lower than their peers in 11 countries.
- ▶ In mathematics, U.S. eighth-graders scored 504, on average. This average score exceeded the international average of 466 as well as the average scores of their peers in 25 of the 44 other participating countries. U.S. eighth-graders were outperformed by students in nine countries.
- ▶ In science, U.S. fourth-graders scored 536, on average, which was higher than the international

average of 489. Of the 24 other participating countries, fourth-graders in 16 countries demonstrated lower science scores, on average, than fourth-graders in the United States, while students in three countries – Chinese Taipei, Japan, and Singapore – outperformed their peers in the United States.

- ▶ In science, U.S. eighth-graders scored 527, on average, which exceeded the international average of 473. Eighth-graders in the U.S. outperformed their peers in 32 of the 44 other participating countries and performed lower, on average, than their peers in seven countries. Their performance did not measurably differ from that of students in five countries.

IV. NATIONAL MEASURES OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Students in all states are often assessed using the same national tests. By examining the data from these national achievement measures, policymakers and educators can begin to compare the educational status of different states and regions. National measures of student achievement include the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the SAT, the ACT, the Advanced Placement Exams, and high school graduation rates.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

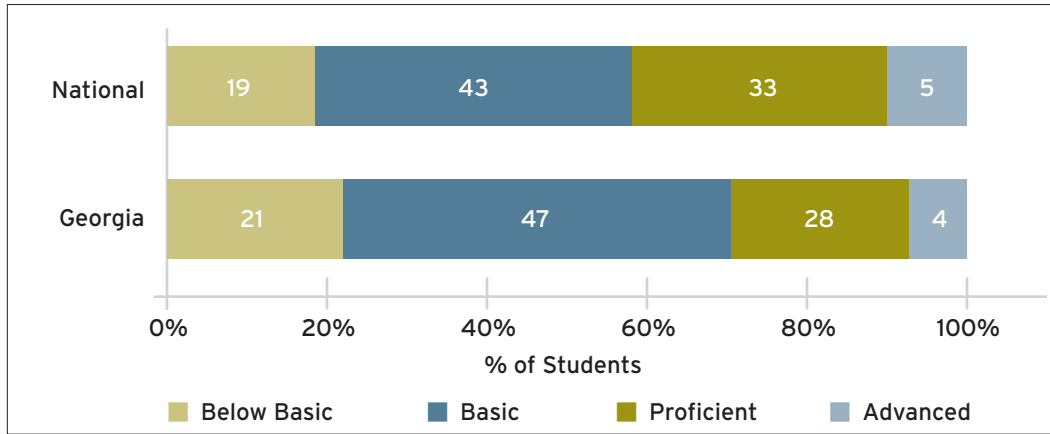
Commonly known as the “Nation’s Report Card,” the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) is a congressionally-mandated project of the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The purpose of the national assessment is to gather information that will aid educators, legislators, and others in improving the educational experience of youth in our country. Its primary goals are to measure the current status of the educational attainments of young Americans and to report changes and long-term trends in those attainments.

NAEP is administered at least once every two years in reading and mathematics in grades 4, 8, and 12. The assessment is given to statistically representative samples of students from each state, and results are commonly used to compare student performance from state to state.

On the 2007 administration of NAEP, Georgia students scored at all-time highs in math and reading. The biggest gains were seen in reading. Shown in Figures 8.1-8.4 are the performance of

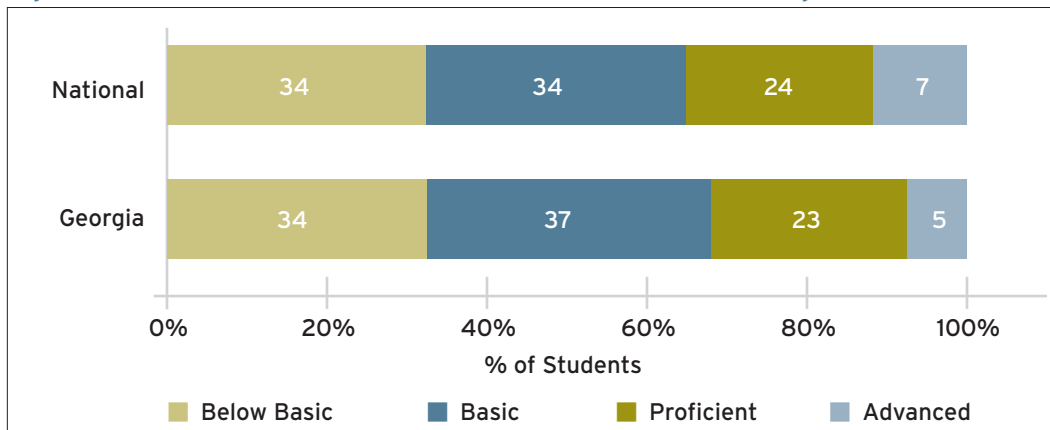
Georgia's students in comparison with that of the national average on four tests: 4th grade mathematics; 4th grade reading; 8th grade mathematics; and 8th grade reading.

Figure 8.1. 2007 NAEP Achievement-level Results, 4th Grade Mathematics



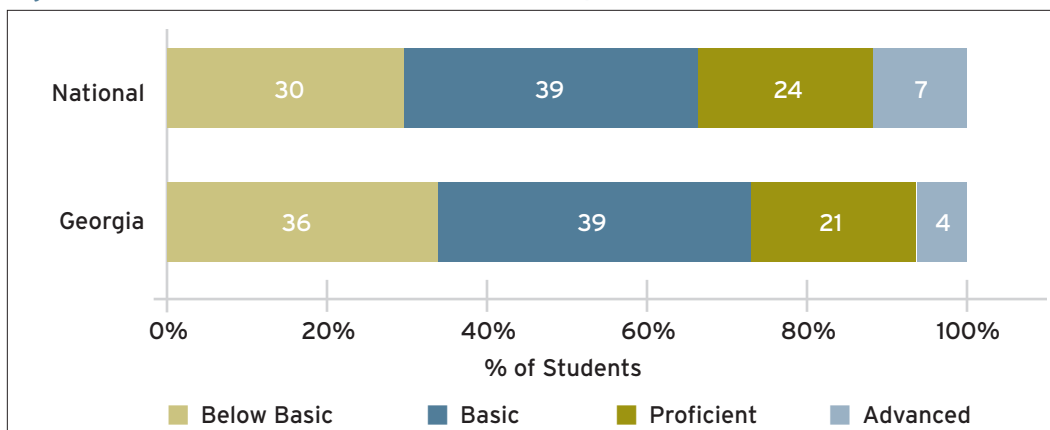
Source: National Center for Education Statistics, "The Nation's Report Card," <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>.

Figure 8.2. 2007 NAEP Achievement-level Results, 4th Grade Reading



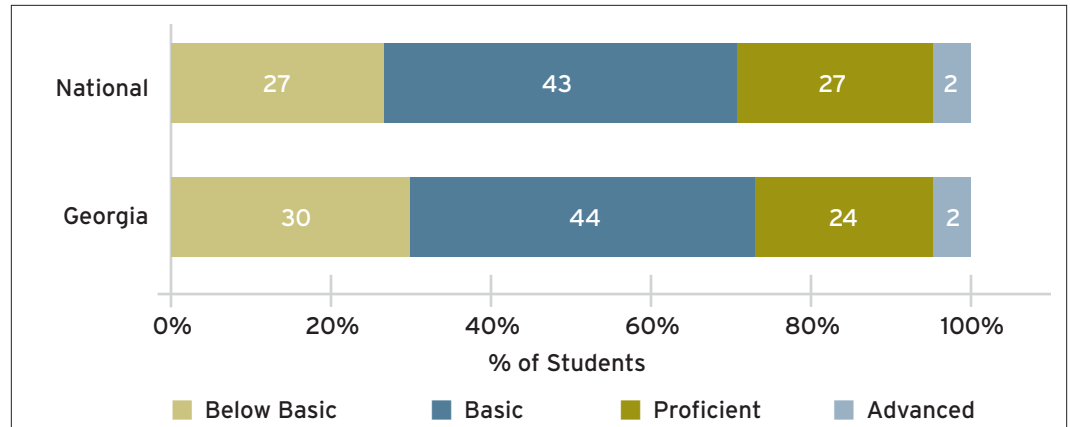
Source: National Center for Education Statistics, "The Nation's Report Card," <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>.

Figure 8.3. 2007 NAEP Achievement-level Results, 8th Grade Mathematics



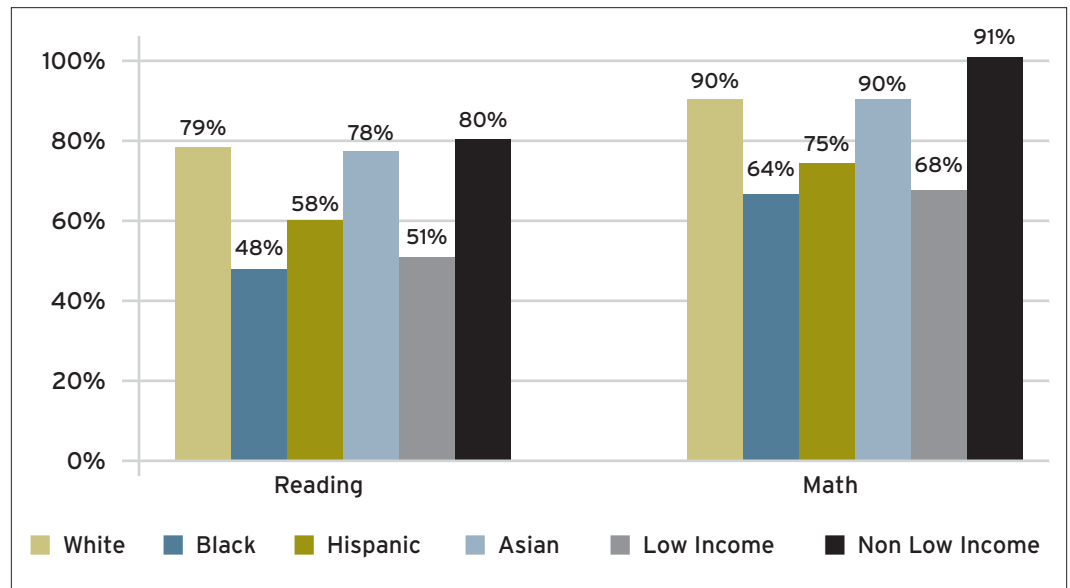
Source: National Center for Education Statistics, "The Nation's Report Card," <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>.

Figure 8.4. 2007 NAEP Achievement-level Results, 8th Grade Reading



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, "The Nation's Report Card," <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>.

**Figure 8.5. Georgia Performance on 4th Grade NAEP 2007
Percent of Student Groups At or Above Basic Level of Proficiency**



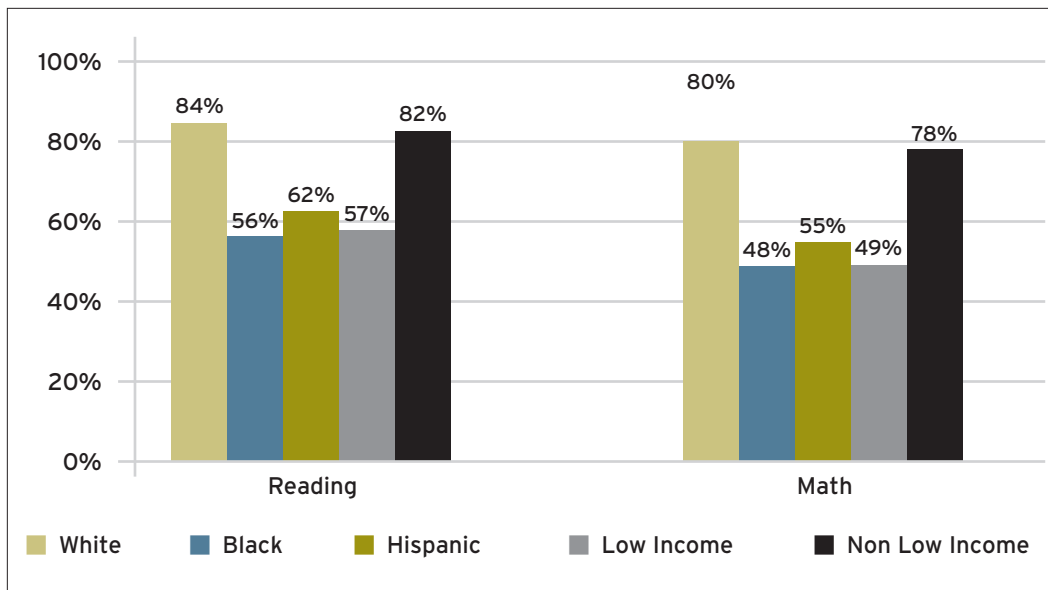
Source: National Center for Education Statistics, "The Nation's Report Card," <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>.

However, the 2007 results of the NAEP also show that in Georgia, wide gaps persist in the achievement of students in different racial and socioeconomic subgroups. In the 2007 assessment of 4th grade reading, 42 percent of our nation's white students performed at or above proficiency, as compared with only 14 percent of black students and 17 percent of Hispanic students. Glaring achievement gaps also occurred in the 2007 mathematics assessment of 8th graders. While 41

percent of the nation's white students scored at or above proficiency, only 11 percent of black students and 15 percent of Hispanic students achieved the same outcome.

Similarly, low-income students continue to lag behind their wealthier peers in the critical areas of reading and mathematics proficiency. For our nation's 4th graders, a gap of 27 percentage points exists between the proportion of poor and non-

Figure 8.6. Georgia Performance on 8th Grade NAEP 2007
Percent of Student Groups At or Above Basic Level of Proficiency



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, "The Nation's Report Card," <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>.
 Note: 8th grade scores are not reported for Asian students, as the number tested did not meet the reporting standards.

poor students scoring at or above proficiency in reading. This same gap separates poor and non-poor students on the NAEP measure of 8th grad mathematics. Figures 8.5 and 8.6 illustrate the discrepancies in Georgia's student performance on the 2007 NAEP.

SAT Reasoning Test (SAT) and ACT Test

In Georgia, students applying to a school within the University System of Georgia must take either the ACT or SAT. These assessments are both standardized college entrance exams. Scores on these tests are usually reported as state averages, and states are often ranked according to those averages. It is important to note that in most states, students are not required to take these assessments. Many college entrance exams are taken only by a particular group of self-selected students. For this reason, the percentage of students taking the ACT and SAT can vary widely from state to state.

SAT Reasoning Test (SAT)

Because the SAT is designed to measure an individual students' level of achievement, the College Board (which administers the SAT program) discourages educators from using aggregate scores as the single measure to rank or rate teachers, educational institutions, districts, or states. Nonetheless, the SAT is widely used as a benchmark for gauging student attainment among states. Table 8.2 shows the SAT performance of selected states. Included in the table are the five states with the highest average SAT score of high school graduates as well as the average performance of the 16 states that comprise the Southern Regional Education Board.

As with the results of many standardized assessments, average SAT scores in Georgia vary widely among different ethnic groups. Additionally, the percentage of test-takers by ethnicity does not match the demographic composition of Georgia's total public school student enrollment. Shown in Table 8.3 are the total mean scores for Georgia students by ethnicity.

Table 8.2. Average SAT Scores for Selected States, 2007

	STATE	AVERAGE SAT SCORE: READING, WRITING, & MATH COMPOSITE	PERCENT OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES WHO TOOK THE SAT
Highest Performing States	Iowa	1807	4%
	Illinois	1793	8%
	Minnesota	1776	9%
	Missouri	1775	6%
	Wisconsin	1760	6%
16 SREB States	Tennessee	1711	13%
	Arkansas	1709	5%
	Oklahoma	1708	6%
	Louisiana	1699	7%
	Kentucky	1685	10%
	Mississippi	1677	4%
	Alabama	1673	9%
	West Virginia	1528	20%
	Virginia	1520	73%
	Maryland	1498	70%
	Delaware	1479	72%
	North Carolina	1486	71%
	Texas	1481	52%
	Georgia	1472	69%
	Florida	1472	65%
South Carolina	1459	62%	
TOTAL	National Average	1511	48%

Source: College Board, 2007 *College Bound Seniors: Tables and Related Items*, www.collegeboard.com.

ACT Test

Much like the SAT, the ACT® test assesses high school students’ general educational development and their ability to complete college-level work. The test includes questions in four subject areas: English, math, reading, and science. Though it is not designed as a comparative tool for states’ educational performance, the ACT is often used to measure the performance of schools and states. Table 8.4 shows the ACT performance of selected states. Included in the table are the five states with the highest average ACT score of high school graduates as well as the average performance of the 16 states that comprise the Southern Regional Education Board.

As with the results of many standardized assessments, average ACT scores in Georgia vary widely among different ethnic groups. Additionally, the percentage of test-takers by ethnicity does not match the demographic composition of Georgia’s total public school student enrollment. Shown in Table 8.5 are the total mean scores for Georgia students by ethnicity.

Advanced Placement (AP) Exams

The rigorous Advanced Placement program is administered by the College Board. AP courses are an optional component of some students’ high school curriculum and are designed to prepare students for college-level learning. Currently, the

Table 8.3. Mean SAT Scores of Georgia Students by Ethnicity

ETHNICITY	NUMBER OF TEST TAKERS	PERCENT OF TOTAL TEST TAKERS	AVERAGE SAT SCORE: READING, WRITING, & MATH COMPOSITE
Asian/Asian American	3,024	5%	1581
Black/African American	15,559	26%	1286
Mexican/Mexican American	703	1%	1392
Other Hispanic	1,213	2%	1437
White	33,536	56%	1553
STATE TOTAL	59,562	100%	1472

Source: College Board, *2007 College Bound Seniors: Georgia State Profile Report*, www.collegeboard.com

Note: Table shows only selected ethnicity categories; therefore, numbers and percentages do not add to the given total.

Table 8.4. Average ACT Scores for Selected States, 2007

	STATE	AVERAGE ACT SCORE	PERCENT OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES WHO TOOK THE ACT
Highest Performing States	Massachusetts	23.5	15%
	Connecticut	23.2	16%
	Washington	23.1	16%
	New York	22.9	21%
	New Hampshire	22.9	15%
16 SREB States	Delaware	21.7	9%
	Maryland	21.6	14%
	Virginia	21.4	18%
	North Carolina	21.0	16%
	Kentucky	20.7	77%
	Oklahoma	20.7	71%
	Tennessee	20.7	96%
	West Virginia	20.6	66%
	Arkansas	20.5	75%
	Texas	20.5	30%
	Alabama	20.3	81%
	Georgia	20.3	34%
	Louisiana	20.1	79%
	Florida	19.9	54%
	South Carolina	19.6	43%
Mississippi	18.9	96%	
TOTAL	National Average	21.2	42%

Source: ACT, Inc., *Average ACT Scores by State: 2007 ACT-Tested Graduates*, www.act.org.

Table 8.5. Mean ACT Scores of Georgia Students by Ethnicity

ETHNICITY	NUMBER OF TEST TAKERS	PERCENT OF TOTAL TEST TAKERS	AVERAGE ACT COMPOSITE SCORE
Asian/Asian American	889	3%	22.7
Black/African American	9,201	31%	17.2
Hispanic	757	3%	19.8
White	13,673	46%	22.0
STATE TOTAL	29,064	100%	20.3

Source: ACT, Inc., *ACT High School Profile Report: The Graduating Class of 2007: Georgia*, www.act.org.
 Note: Table shows only selected ethnicity categories; therefore, numbers and percentages do not add to the given total.

College Board AP program consists of 37 courses in 22 subject areas. After completing an AP course, students are able to take the nationally standardized AP exam for that subject area. The final grade is reported on a scale of 1 to 5. In general, an AP grade of 5 is equivalent to the average score for college students earning grades of A, while the grades of 4, 3, and 2 are equivalent to college grades of B, C, and D, respectively. Most colleges and universities award course credit to students who score a 4 or a 5 on the AP exam.

Not all students have access to AP courses. Some school districts with more financial and human resources may offer a greater number and variety of AP courses. Georgia has worked in recent years to expand students' access to AP courses through the Georgia Virtual School.

Presented in Table 8.6 are the overall results of AP performance in Georgia's public schools. Table 8.7 provides disaggregated data on the AP performance of Georgia public school students by ethnic group.

Table 8.6. Advanced Placement Performance in Georgia, 2007

Number of Students Taking Tests	43,280
Number of Tests Taken	68,143
Number of Test Scores 3 or Higher	35,922
Percentage of Test Scores 3 or Higher	52.7%

Source: College Board, *Summary Reports: 2007*, www.collegeboard.com.
 Note: Table presents data for Georgia's public school students only.

Table 8.7. Advanced Placement Performance in Georgia, 2007, by Selected Ethnic Group

	ASIAN	BLACK	MEXICAN AMERICAN/HISPANIC	WHITE
Number of Students Taking Tests	4,129	8,615	1,728	25,878
Number of Tests Taken	8,269	11,697	2,518	40,996
Number of Test Scores 3 or Higher	5,371	2,681	1,217	24,323
Percent of Test Scores 3 or Higher	65.0%	22.9%	48.3%	59.3%

Source: College Board, *Summary Reports: 2007*, www.collegeboard.com.
 Note: Table presents data for Georgia's public school students only.

Graduation Rates

The social and economic viability of a community strongly correlates with the number of high school graduates it produces. Failure to complete high school has a number of troubling effects on an individual and his or her family, such as reduced earning potential, unemployment, and limited opportunities to pursue certain job and educational opportunities. Yet the educational attainment of an individual also has a profound impact on his or her community. As the number of high school non-graduates rises, communities bear the costs of reduced revenue to local businesses, increased costs to support unemployed and underemployed citizens, increased costs for health care for the poor, and the need to import college and technical school graduates to fill the needs of the local workforce.

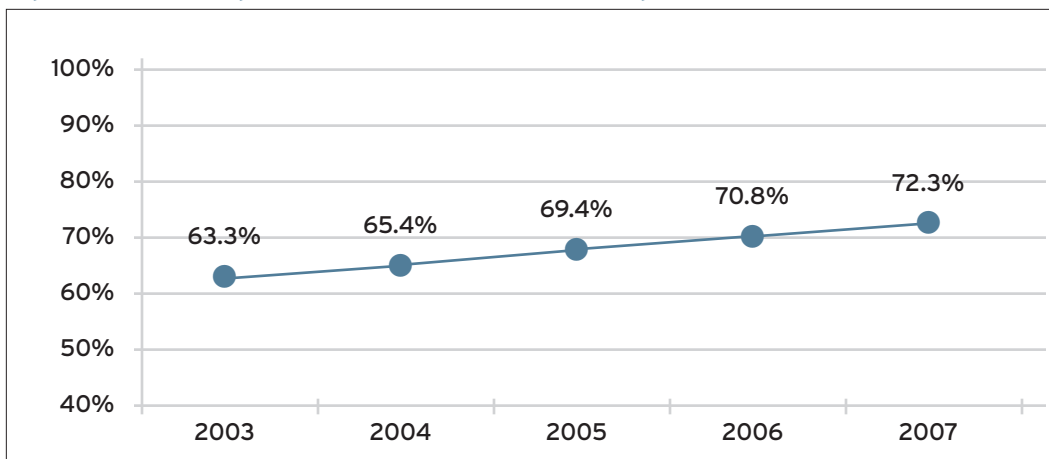
Over recent years, Georgia has successfully increased the public high school graduation rate. As shown in Figure 8.7, the rate in 2007 was 72.3 percent, which continued the trend of annual improvement. However, despite the rise in graduate rates over past years, Georgia still lags behind other states in the percentage of high school students earning a diploma. The most recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics ranks Georgia among the bottom five states in the nation for public high school graduation rates.

Figure 8.8 presents the high school graduation rates of selected states. Included in the graph are the five highest performing states as well as the 16 states that comprise the Southern Regional Education Board.

It is important to note that many states use different formulas when calculating their high school graduation rates. In order to compare the graduation rates across all states, it is necessary to use research from a national database that employs common methodology for all calculations. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provides this data; however, because of the time required to collect and analyze the data, the most current graduation rates available from NCES are typically a few years dated.

The federal government may soon take action to address the discrepancies in the methods states employ to calculate graduation rates. In April 2008, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings announced that she would take administrative steps to ensure that all states use the same formula to calculate how many students graduate from high school on time and how many drop out. At the time of press of this publication, additional details of Spellings' proposal had not been released.¹

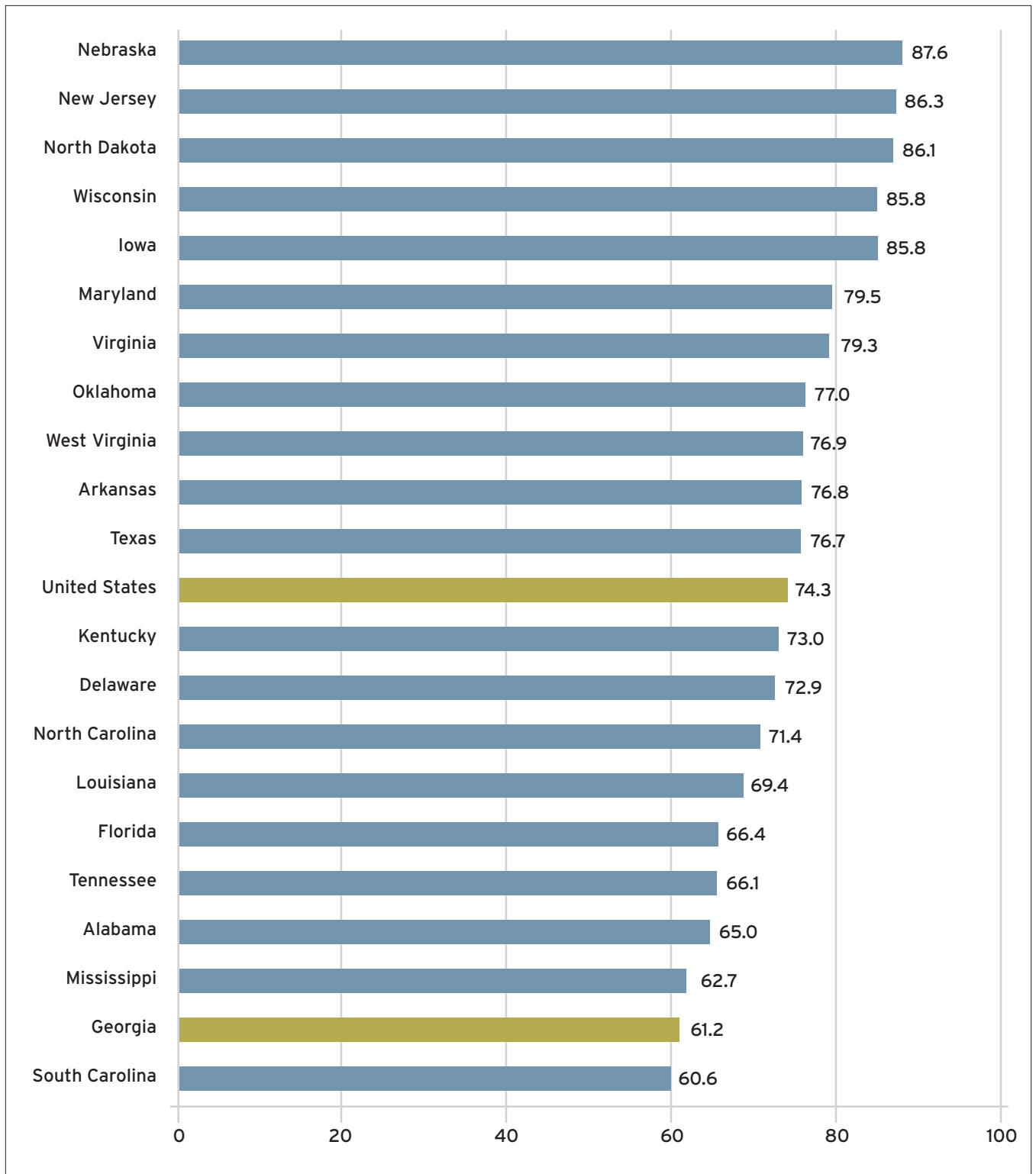
Figure 8.7. Public High School Graduation Rates in Georgia, 2003-2007



Source: Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement State Report Cards, www.gaosa.org.

¹ U.S. Department of Education, "Press Release: U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings Announces Department Will Move to a Uniform Graduation Rate, Require Disaggregation of Data," April 1, 2008, www.ed.gov.

Figure 8.8. Public High School Graduation Rates by Selected State, 2004

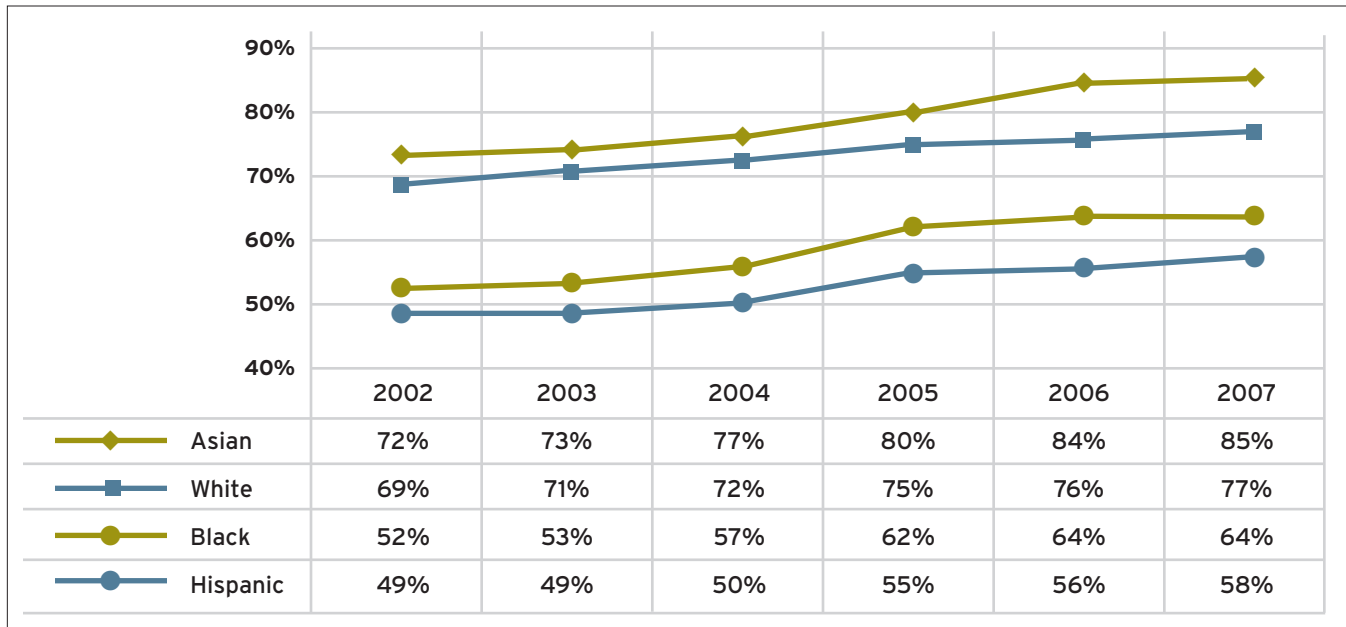


Source: National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education 2007*, www.nces.ed.gov.

Perhaps not surprisingly, large disparities in Georgia’s graduation rate are found across ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Shown in Figures 8.9 and 8.10 are high school graduation rates by ethnic group and income status. While the year-to-year

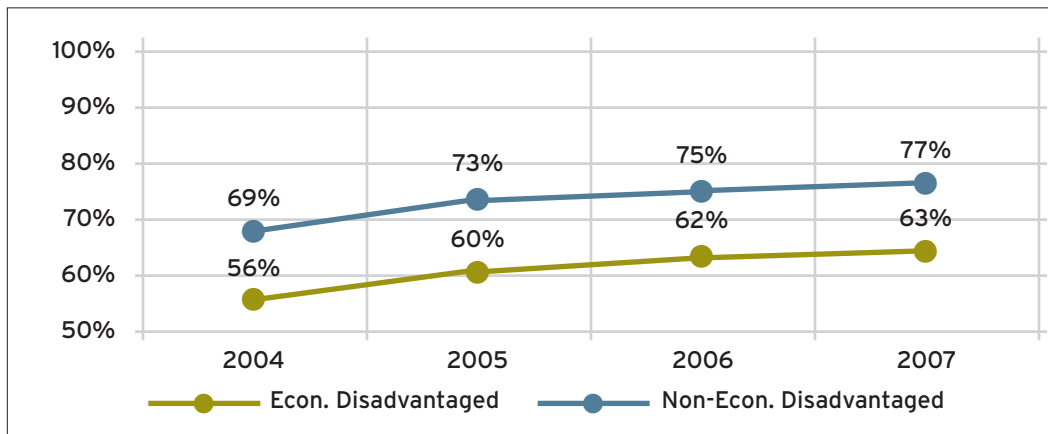
trends are promising – all subgroups are improving rates of graduation – the lingering gaps suggest that Georgia’s educators and policymakers have much work to do to ensure that all students are prepared for success in college, career, and life.

Figure 8.9. Georgia High School Graduation Rates, by Student Ethnicity



Source: Georgia Governor’s Office of Student Achievement State Report Cards, www.gaosa.org.

Figure 8.10. Georgia High School Graduation Rates, by Student Income Level



Source: Georgia Governor’s Office of Student Achievement State Report Cards, www.gaosa.org.

Note: Economically disadvantaged refers to students who qualify for the federal free lunch program.

V. GEORGIA MEASURES OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

At the state level, Georgia conducts several annual assessments that allow students, parents, schools, and districts to measure educational performance. The results of these tests can provide information about needed classroom interventions or the effectiveness of a curricular program. The most commonly used measures of student achievement in Georgia include the Criterion Referenced Competency Tests, the Georgia High School Graduation Test, and the End-of-Course Test. (Additional assessments of student performance are discussed in the chapter “Standards, Assessments, and Accountability.”)

Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT)

Each spring, the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCTs) are administered to students in reading, English/language arts, and mathematics in grades 1-8, and in science and social studies in grades 3-8. Scores below a specified level of performance on the CRCT indicate that a student does not meet the standard in that subject area. Students performing at this level may need additional instructional support. For Georgia’s students in grades 3, 5, and 8, performance on the state CRCT carries increased weight, as an insufficient

score in these critical grades can result in retention. Students in the 3rd grade who score below grade level in reading and students in the 5th and 8th grades who score below grade level in reading and/or mathematics must be provided additional instruction and subsequently retested. Georgia law mandates that if a student scores below grade level again on the retest, he or she must be retained.²

Table 8.8 shows the number of children in Georgia who scored below grade level on select grade and subject level CRCT assessments in 2007.

Insufficient grade-level success serves as a predictor of student retention and non-completion of high school. Specifically, a student who does not meet the major milestones of early literacy and numeracy will be less likely to graduate from high school and succeed in postsecondary education. Research has shown that students who are not reading on grade level by the end of 3rd grade are much less likely to graduate from high school.³ Similarly, children who are not calculating geometry and algebra on grade level by the end of 8th grade are less likely to be successful in post-secondary education.⁴ Based on this research, this section presents detailed data on the performance of Georgia’s students on the 3rd grade reading CRCT and the 8th grade mathematics CRCT.

Table 8.8. 2007 Georgia Performance on the CRCT (Selected Grades and Subjects)

CONTENT AREA	GRADE	# STUDENTS TESTED	% NOT MEETING STANDARDS	# STUDENTS NOT MEETING STANDARDS
Reading	3rd	125,624	15.0 %	18,844
	5th	121,143	14.5 %	17,566
	8th	124,297	11.5 %	14,294
Mathematics	3rd	125,906	9.5 %	11,961
	5th	121,418	11.9 %	14,449
	8th	124,434	18.7 %	23,269

Source: Georgia Governor’s Office of Student Achievement State Report Cards, www.gaosa.org.

² A team comprised of the parent, a teacher, and an administrator can unanimously promote the student to the next grade level despite CRCT performance. Source: Georgia Department of Education Promotion and Retention Guidance, www.gadoe.org.

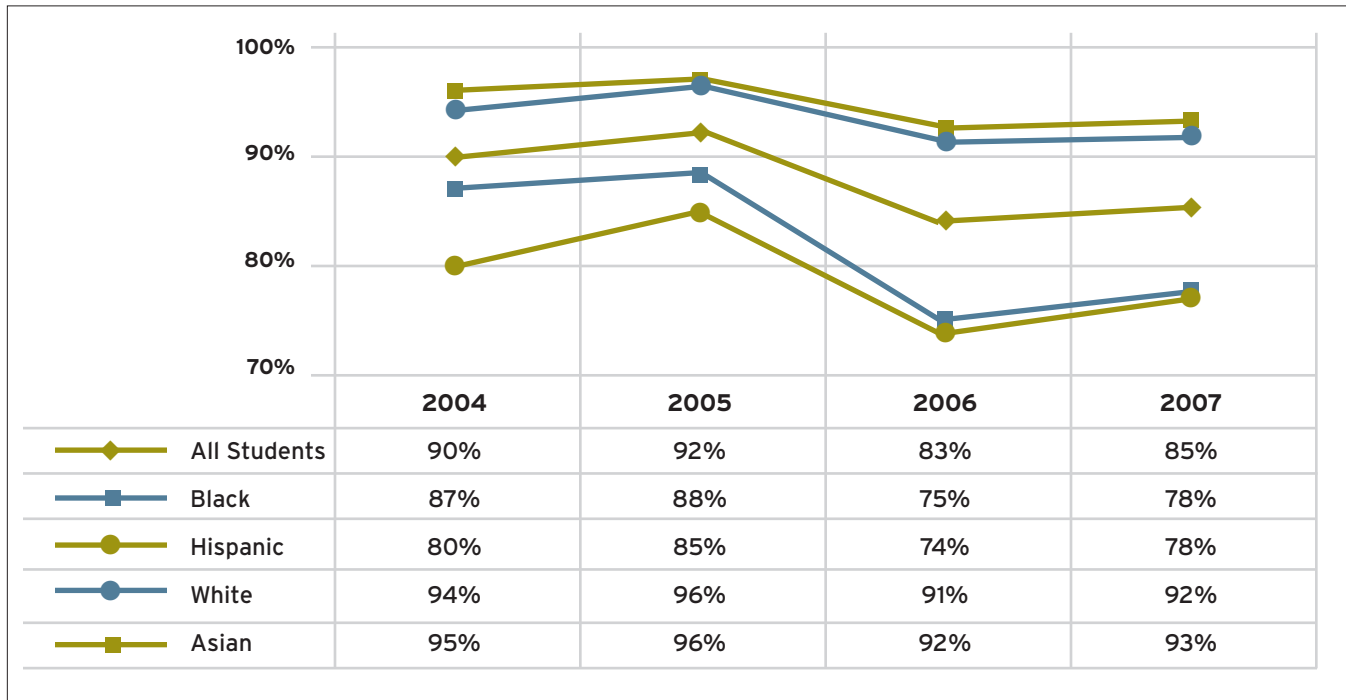
³ Education Commission of the States, “P-16 Quick Facts,” www.ecs.org.

⁴ Closing the Achievement Gap Advisory Council, “Closing the Achievement Gap; Definition and Approach,” Nov. 13, 2002.

Presented in Figures 8.11 and 8.12 are data on 3rd grade CRCT achievement; Figures 8.13 and 8.14 contain data on 8th grade CRCT achievement. While Georgia has made progress, the gaps that

persist among student subgroups are indicators that not all students in our state are being adequately prepared to achieve academic success.

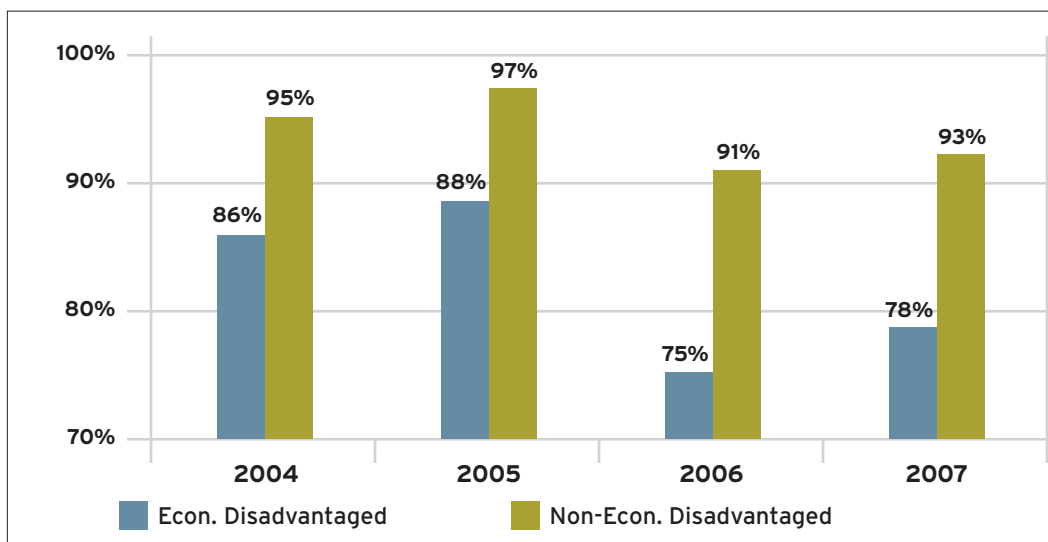
Figure 8.11. 2007 Georgia Performance on the 3rd Grade Reading CRCT: Percent of Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards by Ethnicity



Source: Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement State Report Cards, www.gaosa.org.

Note: Dips in student scores from 2005 to 2006 are attributable to the new, more rigorous reading curriculum, which was tested for the first time in 2006.

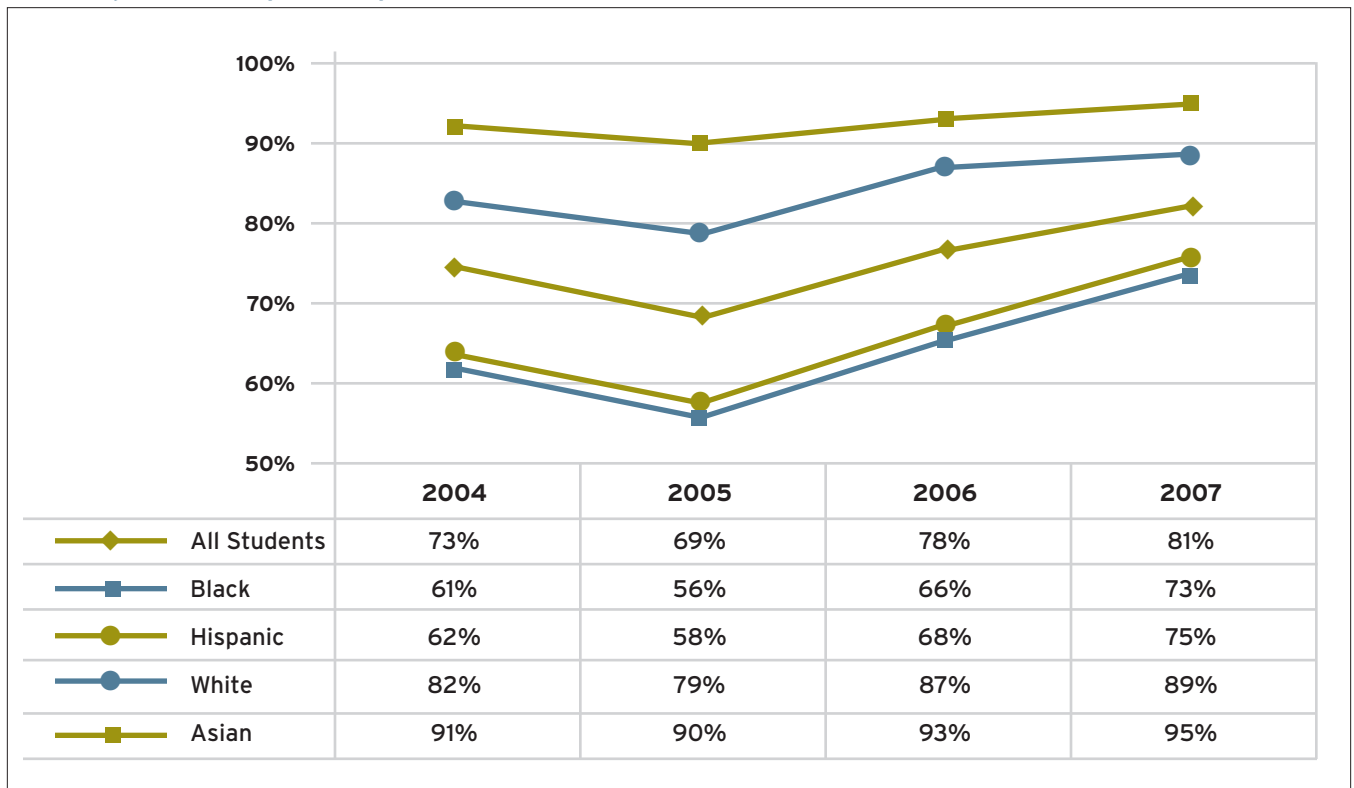
Figure 8.12. 2007 Georgia Performance on the 3rd Grade Reading CRCT: Percent of Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards by Economic Status



Source: Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement State Report Cards, www.gaosa.org.

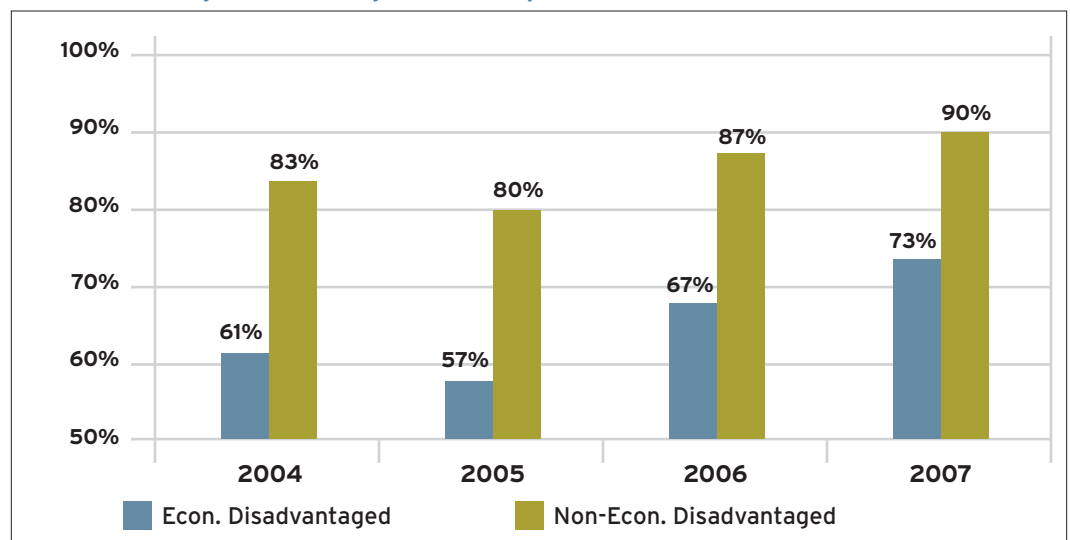
Note: Economically disadvantaged refers to students who qualify for the federal free lunch program. Dips in student scores from 2005 to 2006 are attributable to the new, more rigorous reading curriculum, which was tested for the first time in 2006.

Figure 8.13. 2007 Georgia Performance on the 8th Grade Mathematics CRCT: Percent of Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards by Ethnicity



Source: Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement State Report Cards, www.gaosa.org.

Figure 8.14. 2007 Georgia Performance on the 8th Grade Mathematics CRCT: Percent of Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards by Economic Status



Source: Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement State Report Cards, www.gaosa.org.
 Note: Economically disadvantaged refers to students who qualify for the federal free lunch program.

Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT)

All students seeking a Georgia high school diploma must pass the Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT) in four content areas: science, mathematics, social studies, and English/language arts. These graduation tests provide valuable information for students, educators, and parents about student strengths and areas for improvement. The tests identify students who may need additional instruction in the concepts and skills required for a diploma.

In 2008, two of the subject-area GHSGT exams – science and English/language arts – were aligned to

the state’s new, more rigorous curriculum (the Georgia Performance Standards) for the first time. On these two exams, student scores were reported based on four levels of performance: below proficiency, basic proficiency, advanced proficiency, and honors. The two other subject areas – mathematics and social studies – remained aligned with the Quality Core Curriculum (Georgia’s previous curriculum) in 2008. On these two exams, student scores were reported in three levels of proficiency: did not pass, pass, and pass plus.

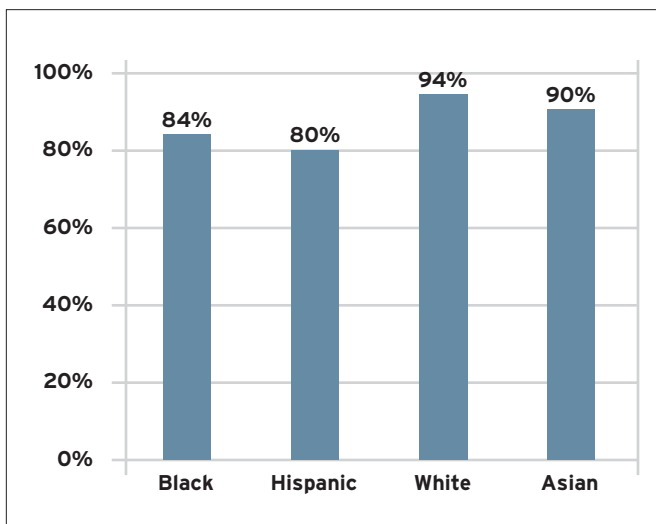
Shown in Table 8.9 are the general success rates on the 2008 GHSGT. Detailed data for each subject-area test are presented in Figures 8.15-8.18.

Table 8.9. 2008 Performance on the Georgia High School Graduation Test All 11th-grade First-time Test Takers

GPS-BASED GHSGT		PERCENT OF STUDENTS AT BASIC PROFICIENCY AND ABOVE	
English/Language Arts		90.0%	
Science		86.2%	
QCC-BASED GHSGT		PERCENT OF STUDENTS AT PASS AND PASS PLUS	
Mathematics		92.5%	
Social Studies		86.4%	

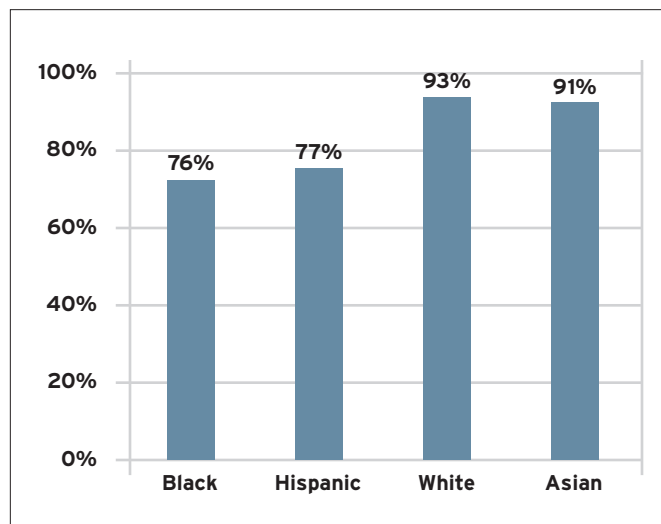
Source: Georgia Department of Education, www.gadoe.org.

Figure 8.15. 2008 Performance on the GHSGT English/Lang. Arts, by Ethnicity Percent of Students at Basic and Above



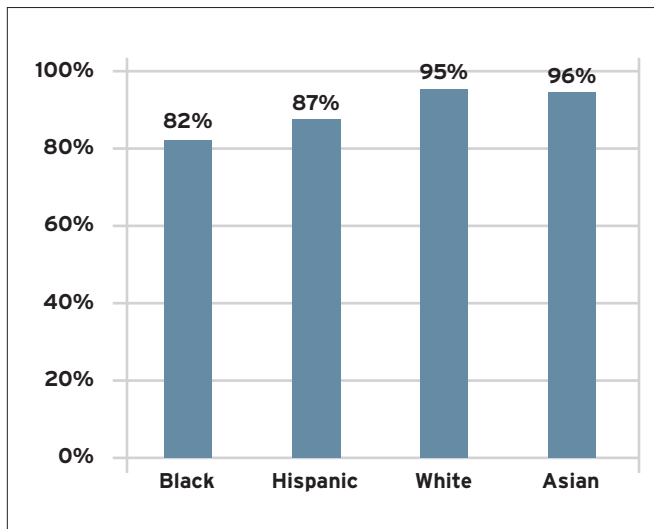
Source: Georgia Department of Education, www.gadoe.org.

Figure 8.16. 2008 Performance on the GHSGT Science, by Ethnicity Percent of Students at Basic and Above



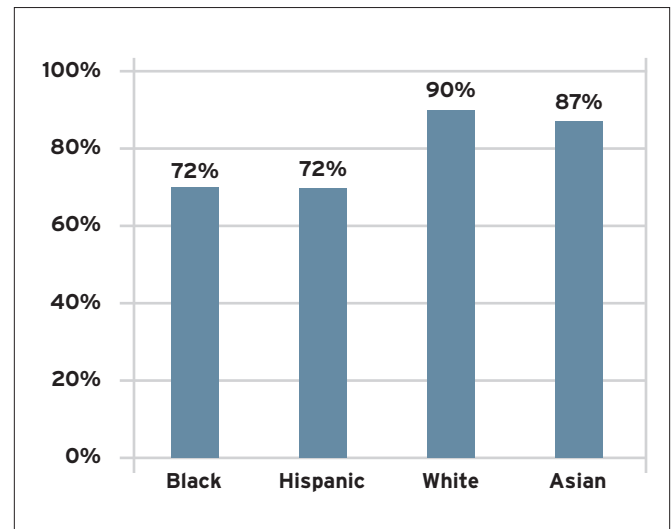
Source: Georgia Department of Education, www.gadoe.org.

Figure 8.17. 2008 Performance on the GHSMT Mathematics, by Ethnicity
Percent of Students at Pass and Pass Plus



Source: Georgia Department of Education, www.gadoe.org.

Figure 8.18. 2008 Performance on the GHSMT Social Studies, by Ethnicity
Percent of Students at Pass and Pass Plus



Source: Georgia Department of Education, www.gadoe.org.

End-of-Course Test (EOCT)

An additional state-level measure of student achievement in Georgia is performance on End-of-Course Tests (EOCT). Any student enrolled in and/or receiving credit for an EOCT course, regardless of grade level, is required to take the EOCT upon completion of that course. A student's achievement on the EOCT is calculated as part of his/her final course grade; however, the tests do not affect state accountability measures or students' high school graduation eligibility.

Analysis of Georgia's performance on EOCTs can be valuable, as students typically score lower on EOCTs than on the corresponding subject areas of the Georgia High School Graduation Test. Students take EOCTs throughout their high school career, and thus, the exams can provide a meaningful gauge of how prepared students are to progress through each grade level. Additionally, EOCTs are yet another measure of achievement in which large gaps exist between the performances of various student subgroups.

Aggregate and disaggregated data showing the performance of Georgia's students on EOCTs are available from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (www.gaosa.org).

EMERGING POLICY CONCERNS FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Student achievement is impacted by a host of inter-related educational issues. Policy action taken to improve curriculum standards, teacher and school leader quality, education finance, or early learning programs will ultimately help enhance the knowledge, skills, and preparedness of our public school students. While achievement data reveals that Georgia has indeed made great strides in the quest to provide an excellent education for all its youth, our state remains near the bottom on national rankings of graduation rates and national tests. Further, as our state's demography grows more diverse, lingering gaps in the performance of different student populations send a clear message that Georgia must remain focused on improving the achievement of all children. The challenge for policymakers and education leaders is to construct a viable plan for school success across the entire state of Georgia – a plan that replaces random acts with a focus on the interconnectedness of issues impacting our students' achievement.