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**STUDENT PROFICIENCY LEVELS VARY SIGNIFICANTLY BY STATE, NCES
STUDY FINDS**

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) – States vary widely in where they set their proficiency standards in fourth and eighth grade reading and mathematics, according to a new report released today by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The report compares the proficiency standards of states using the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) as the common metric.

Most state proficiency standards were within the NAEP *Basic* achievement level range, except in fourth grade reading, where most were below NAEP’s *Basic* level. Overall, only one state—New York—had standards that fell consistently within the NAEP *Proficient* range in both grades and subjects, though Massachusetts, North Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin all had standards in that range in at least two grades or subjects.

The report, *Mapping State Proficiency Standards Onto NAEP Scales: Results From the 2013 NAEP Reading and Mathematics Assessments*, uses NAEP as a benchmark to measure the relative rigor of state reading and mathematics standards given that each state has its own assessment system and standards for proficiency. This report, the fifth in the series, uses statistical methods to compare the score set by each state as proficient on its state assessment with the score NAEP sets for proficient on the NAEP assessment. Results are reported for reading and mathematics at fourth and eighth grades for the 2012-2013 school year. The report also analyzes 2011 and 2009 NAEP and state assessment data. This research study does not reflect changes states may have made to their proficiency standards after 2013.

“This study measures states’ proficiency standards at a specific point in time during the 2012–13 school year,” said Acting NCES Commissioner Peggy Carr. “Although a wide variation in standards persists, more and more states are implementing standards at or above the NAEP *Basic* level. We have seen over time that, in grades 4 and 8, states’ standards are mapping higher on the NAEP scale.”

The study compares state proficiency standards to scores on the NAEP scale by translating the point at which a state’s students were deemed proficient on the state assessment to a point on the

NAEP scale. That point, or the *NAEP equivalent score*, puts all states on a common scale, and helps identify a state's proficiency standard in relation to other states.

The report also documents changes in state proficiency standards over the years and the direction in which those standards changed. Although the wide variation in standards persists, the number of states with fourth grade reading standards at or above the NAEP *Basic* level increased from 15 in 2009 and 20 in 2011 to 25 in 2013. At eighth grade, the number increased from 35 in 2009 and 36 in 2011 to 41 in 2013.

In mathematics, the number of states with fourth grade standards at or above the NAEP *Basic* level also increased, from 44 in 2009 to 46 in 2011 and 47 in 2013. At eighth grade, 41 out of the 49 states included in the study had standards above the NAEP *Basic* level, an increase from 39 both in 2009 and 2011.

NAEP, also known as The Nation's Report Card, is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what our nation's students know and can do in various subject areas. Since NAEP assessments are administered uniformly using the same sets of test booklets across the nation, NAEP results serve as a common metric for all states and selected urban districts. The assessment stays essentially the same from year to year, with only carefully documented changes. This permits NAEP to provide a clear picture of student academic progress over time. A sample of students in every state participates in the administration of NAEP's fourth and eighth grade reading and mathematics assessments.

The full text of the report is available at:

<https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pubs/studies/2015046.aspx>

NCES is the statistical center of the Institute of Education Sciences located within the U.S. Department of Education. IES' mission is to provide rigorous evidence on which to ground education practice and policy.

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