

Few Baltimore City Students Proficient on National Math Test *But Some Results are Positive and Participation Reflects Positively on District*

Executive Summary

The participation of Baltimore City students in a national testing program reflects very positively the willingness of the district to be accountable to a rigorous academic standard. The results show that Baltimore schools are certainly not worst in the nation, but they are also a sober reminder of how much progress is still needed.

Background

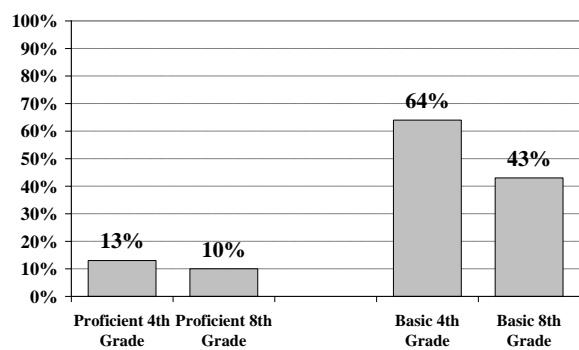
The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is used to compare student achievement. Representative samples of students are tested in each state. Sample sizes normally allow reporting only for each state, not districts within a state. Recently, Baltimore City voluntarily allowed enough of its students to take the NAEP to allow for meaningful results at the district level. The U.S. Department of Education just released the 2009 math outcomes.

Findings

NAEP groups students into four different achievement levels: below basic; basic; proficient; and advanced. When comparing states, the USDE uses proficiency, i.e., proficient or advanced. However, for the results from the 18 urban districts, the USDE charts use basic or above for comparison, even though students scoring basic are not considered at grade level.

Thirteen percent of Baltimore City fourth graders were proficient on the NAEP, as were 10 percent of eighth graders.

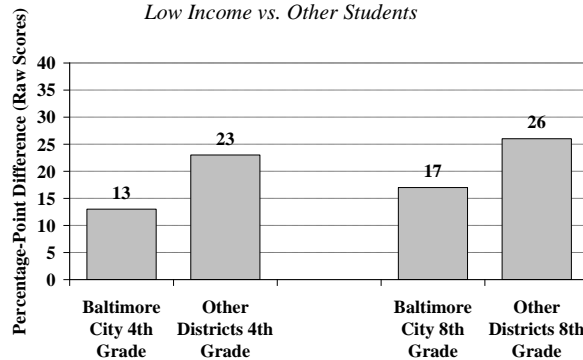
Baltimore City Students on National Math Test



Altogether 18 large, urban districts participated. Ranking based on proficiency, two districts did worse than Baltimore City in fourth grade, and three did worse in eighth. Considering students who scored basic, Baltimore City was in the middle in fourth.

When looking at raw test scores for comparable subgroups of students in other large cities, Baltimore City is closer to average. African-American students in Baltimore City achieved at roughly the same level as other African-American students in large cities. Baltimore City also had a smaller Black-white gap in fourth grade, and there was a smaller gap between low-income and higher-income students.

Achievement Gaps By Income
Low Income vs. Other Students



Discussion

The Baltimore City school system deserves significant praise for voluntarily participating in the national testing program. With such a low percentage of students performing at a proficient level, the results are a sobering reminder that Baltimore City has a long way to go before its students are getting the skills needed to compete in an increasingly competitive international economy. Fortunately, district officials recognize the challenge.

The results also show just how far Maryland has lowered its own academic standards. Last year, 84 percent of Baltimore City fourth graders passed the state math test; whereas, only 13 percent passed the national test. Having easier state tests deprives many students of the interventions they need to acquire adequate skills; having passed the state tests, they are viewed as no longer needing extra help.