



The Intended Meaning of NAEP Results

The primary purpose of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation’s Report Card, is to measure the educational achievement and progress of the nation’s students at established grades and ages in relation to the content of NAEP frameworks. NAEP results also enable comparisons of what representative students know and can do among states and jurisdictions, among various demographic groups, and over time.

The authorizing legislation for NAEP and the National Assessment Governing Board states that the purpose of the NAEP program is broadly to, “conduct a national assessment and collect and report assessment data, including achievement data trends, in a valid and reliable manner on student academic achievement in public and private elementary schools and secondary schools...” (Public Law 107-279, Section 303(b)(2)(B)). That legislation also prohibits NAEP from maintaining any system of personally identifiable information. Thus, NAEP assesses the educational progress of groups of representative students, not individuals.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) develops numerical score scales for each NAEP subject. NAEP scale scores convey the degree to which students have mastered the content described in the NAEP assessment frameworks, with higher scores indicating greater levels of mastery.

The Governing Board is charged with setting NAEP achievement levels and has established [general policy definitions](#) for *NAEP Basic*, *NAEP Proficient*, and *NAEP Advanced*. Percentages at or above achievement level cut scores indicate the percentage of students in a group who *meet or exceed* the knowledge and skills represented by specific content achievement level descriptions. These specific descriptions are found in the NAEP [assessment frameworks](#) and [reports](#). Additional information about the NAEP achievement level descriptions can be found in the Governing Board policy statement on [Developing Student Achievement Levels for NAEP](#).

NAEP results describe educational achievement for groups of students at a single point in time, progress in educational achievement for groups of students over time, and differential educational achievement and progress among jurisdictions and subpopulations. NAEP results measure achievement and progress; however, NAEP results alone cannot indicate either why or how progress has occurred. Educational policies and practices that concur with NAEP progress may have caused this progress or been coincidental.

There are several features of NAEP that distinguish it from many other assessment programs. For example:

- 1) NAEP produces results for the nation and participating states and jurisdictions, in public and private schools. NAEP does not produce results for individual students or schools.
- 2) NAEP measures progress based on successive cohorts of students. NAEP does not produce results about the growth of individual students or groups of students over time.
- 3) NAEP assessments are based on independent assessment frameworks developed through a national consensus approach described [here](#). NAEP frameworks do not represent any single state or local curricula.