

Few Baltimore City Students Proficient on National Reading Test*Sobering Results Show Need for Improvements in Instruction and Interventions***Executive Summary**

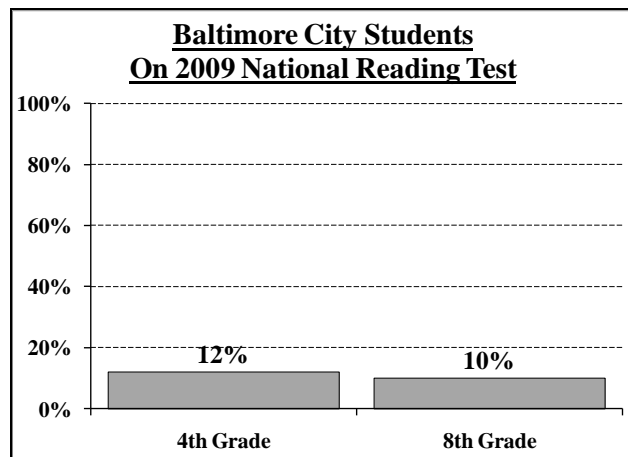
Few Baltimore City students achieved proficiency on the reading National Assessment of Educational Progress. This is a sobering reminder of how far Baltimore City has to go to provide its students with the skills needed to compete in the global economy. Dramatic increases will require significant improvements in the quality of instruction and the availability of interventions for failing students.

Background

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is used to compare student achievement. Sample sizes normally allow reporting only for each state, not districts within a state. Last year, 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 recently released the reading results.

Findings

NAEP has four achievement levels: below basic; basic; proficient; and advanced. Twelve percent of Baltimore City fourth graders were at least proficient; 10 percent of eighth graders were proficient or better.¹



¹ The Annie E. Casey Foundation in a recent report said that the proficiency level “is the closest to the level required by global realities.” It explicitly rejected using the basic level, “which indicates just partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills.” Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Early Warning! Why Reading By the End of Third Grade Matters* (2010).

Of the 18 large, urban districts that participated, only three districts did worse than Baltimore City in fourth grade, and only one did worse in eighth grade.

Discussion

The Baltimore City school system deserves significant praise for voluntarily participating in the national testing program. However, 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.

As this is the first year that Baltimore City participated, the NAEP results cannot measure whether schools are improving. It is also not particularly valuable to compare low-income African-American students in Baltimore City with similar students in other districts. The school system’s stated goal is to provide Baltimore City with a strong education, not to exceed the exceedingly poor track record elsewhere.²

Dramatic increases in the percentages of Baltimore City students achieving proficiency on the NAEP will require intensive professional development for teachers on how to use research-based instructional strategies in the classroom. Students will need more access to tutoring, summer school and other proven interventions at the earliest sign of difficulty.³

There is no substitute for the tough job of making significant improvements in the quantity and quality of instruction. The challenge for Baltimore City will be how to ensure that research-based instruction and interventions are in place, given the limited financial resources and the latitude given to principals and third-party operators of schools.

² Maryland is replacing its assessments with new ones developed with other states. These assessments are more likely to have proficiency levels similar to the NAEP.

³ In a recent study, Advocates for Children and Youth found that students in a sample of Baltimore City schools did not have access to intensive academic interventions; small group interventions were available, but it was not clear whether they were sufficient. Advocates for Children and Youth, *Schools Can Provide Better Interventions for Struggling Readers* (2010).