

Maryland Income Disparity Widens on National Reading Test

Bold Action Needed to Narrow Gap, Get Federal Funding

Executive Summary

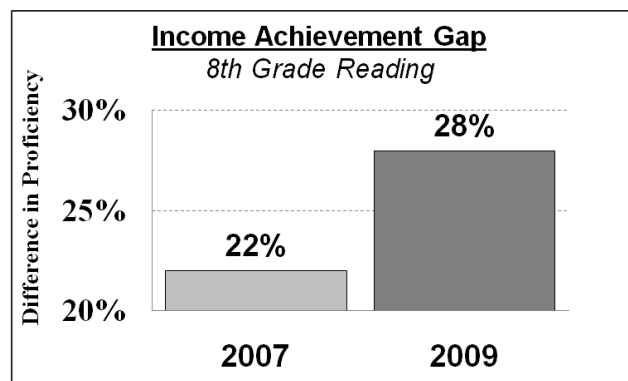
The reading proficiency gap between lower-income and other Maryland students grew significantly in 2009, based on national tests. Overall results improved very modestly. To address achievement gaps and win federal funds, Maryland must take bold action to provide equal access to talented staff and early interventions to all struggling students.

Background

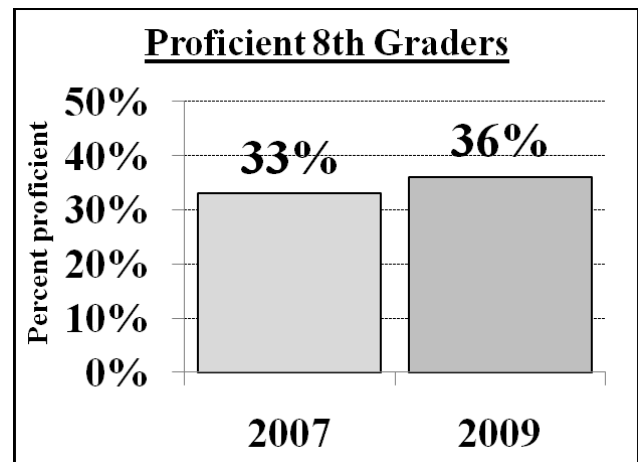
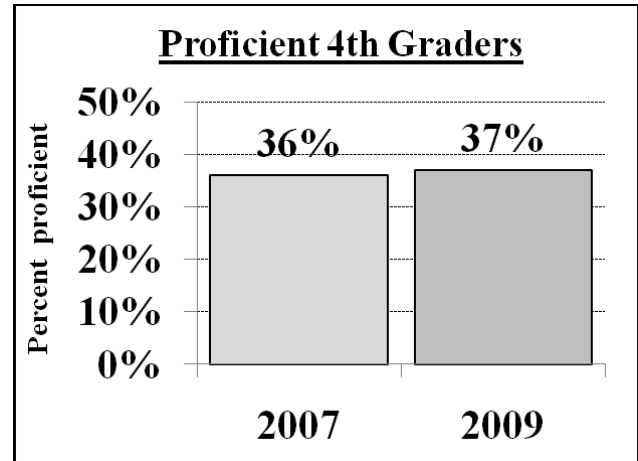
The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is given to a sample of students in each state every two years. Reading results for 2009 were recently released.

Findings

The proficiency gap among low-income and other students in Maryland grew. For eighth graders, the income achievement gap increased significantly, by 6 percentage points, going from a 22-percentage-point difference in 2007 to a 28-percentage-point difference in 2009. For fourth graders, the gap widened from 30 to 31 percentage points. The achievement gap between white and African-American students remained large and nearly unchanged, at 32-percentage-points in fourth grade and 31-percentage-points in eighth grade.



Overall proficiency rates increased modestly from 2007. Proficiency rates among fourth graders increased by one percentage point, from 36 to 37 percent. In eighth grade, proficiency increased by three percentage points to 36 percent, up from 33 percent.

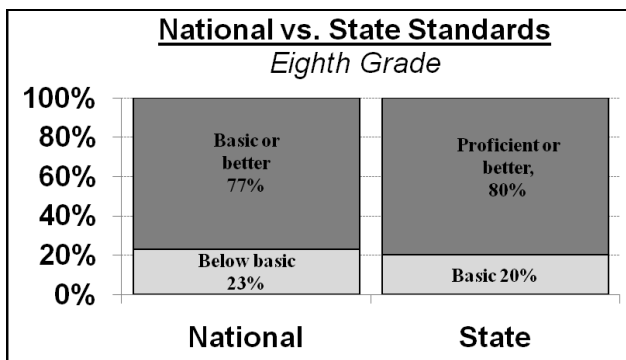
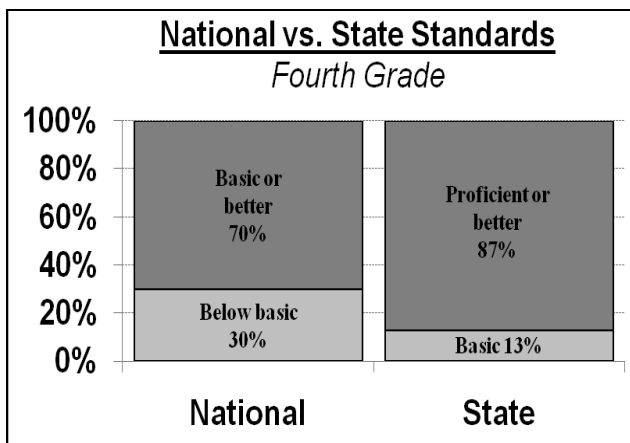
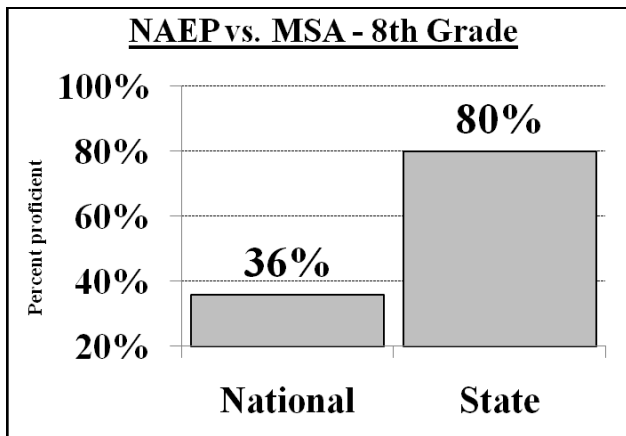
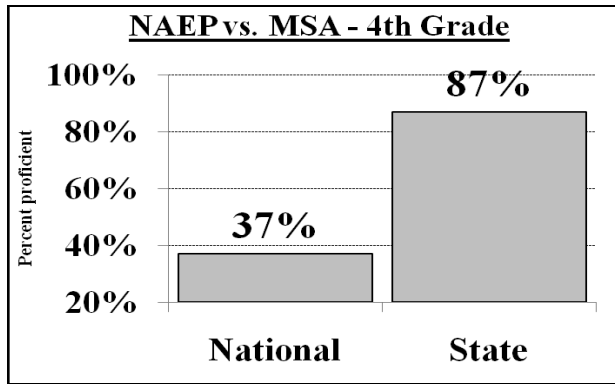


Discussion

The results continue to show that the passing marks on Maryland tests is far lower than national tests. On the Maryland School Assessment (MSA), 87 percent of fourth graders were proficient, compared to 37 percent on the NAEP. Similarly, 80 percent of eighth graders were proficient on the MSA compared to 36 percent on the NAEP.

The percent of students who are *proficient* on the MSA is almost the same as the percent of students who are *basic* on the NAEP. For eighth grade, 77 percent of students are basic or better on the NAEP, compared with 80 percent proficient or better on the MSA. For fourth grade, 70 percent of students are considered basic or better on NAEP, compared to 87 percent of students considered proficient or better on the MSA.





Recommendations

Despite modest progress on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the large and widening gap between low-income, minority and other students in Maryland requires immediate attention. These students are a growing segment of the State’s population, and their success in school will have a significant impact on the State’s economy as a whole.

In addition, narrowing achievement gaps is a key purpose of federal funding, both the new Race to the Top grants and existing Title I program. Unless it takes bold actions, Maryland is not going to win the Race to the Top grant. Indeed, the Obama Administration wants to allocate Title I funds based on this criteria rather through automatic formulas.

1. The State must ensure that local school districts use state funds allocated for low-income students to expand early and effective interventions for these students. Districts are receiving more than \$1 billion in state compensatory education funding, including a \$100-million increase for next year.
2. The State needs to ensure that schools with disadvantaged students have equal access to talented teachers, principals and other staff. This will require offering financial incentives and intensive professional development to encourage staff to come and stay in these schools. Principals will need greater authority, both to encourage proven leaders to come to challenging schools and to create a learning environment that increases staff retention.
3. Maryland needs to shift as quickly as possible to more rigorous assessments. The State has joined with other states in supporting common core standards and has said it will adopt them quickly and then use new assessments based on them. The State needs to set rigorous passing levels for these assessments. Until these tests are in place, the State can focus attention on students who are not achieving at the *advanced* level on state tests.