

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Chapter Summary

Keeping Illinois competitive requires that our students perform competitively in international, national, and state measures of what they know and can do. Even though Illinois appears to be average, as opposed to competitive, the academic achievement gaps between low-income, black, and Hispanic students and their Asian, white, and “not low-income” peers are larger than the national averages. These discrepancies point to a need to raise the middle group of students as well as to raise those at the low end of the scale. On the other hand, the First in the World Consortium and Naperville showed that Illinois has some of the top performers in the world. On national tests, Illinois Asian students are highly competitive.

This chapter also presented the results of the NAEP and the Illinois state assessments, which both report the percentages of students who meet various levels of achievement. It might be assumed that the NAEP “proficient” level should compare with the Illinois “meet standards” level. That is true in terms of definitions, since the U.S. “proficient” and the Illinois “meet standards” establish the targets that all students should reach. Actual achievement in meeting these similar targets is, however, quite different. Illinois performance on the rigorous NAEP assessments at the “proficient” level is significantly lower than performance on the ISAT and PSAE “meets standards” level. In 2005, 54% of the 8th grade students “met” or “exceeded” the Illinois standards on the ISAT mathematics exam, but only 28% of the Illinois students reached at least the “proficient” level on the national exam. Similar disparities occur in other subjects and grade levels and are common across all but a few states. *No Child Left Behind* requires that all states participate in NAEP, so that state results may be compared with national benchmarks. Additional research is needed in Illinois to determine the reasons for the extreme discrepancies between NAEP and ISAT results.

The bottom line, regardless of which test is reviewed, is that Illinois needs to address the low performance of low-income, black, and Hispanic students. Just as India and China have moved millions of residents in poverty towards a knowledge-based workforce, Illinois also needs to raise the achievement levels of the low-achieving populations. Strides have been made with the Hispanic population; however, more and faster progress is imperative.

The bottom line, regardless of which test is reviewed, is that Illinois needs continually to address the low performance of low-income, black, and Hispanic students.