

**The Nation's Report Card on 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading 2011;  
 An exploration of achievement gaps by income, race, language and disability.**

**Executive summary**

Only one-third of fourth-grade students are proficient in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). An examination of different sub-groups indicates that there are large gaps in achievement by income, race, language and disability. This analysis demonstrates that we have to raise overall student achievement and intentionally close achievement gaps.

**Historical Timeline/ Perspective on Education**

In 1867 the Federal Office of Education, now called the U.S. Department of Education, was established to help states create stronger schools. In 1954, the Supreme Court determined that schools segregated by race are unequal. In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was enacted. The ESEA provided financial support to local education agencies<sup>i</sup> for the education children of low-income families “to expand and improve their educational programs by various means (including preschool programs)”. In 1975, Congress passed a federal mandate that requires all schools districts to educate students with disabilities.

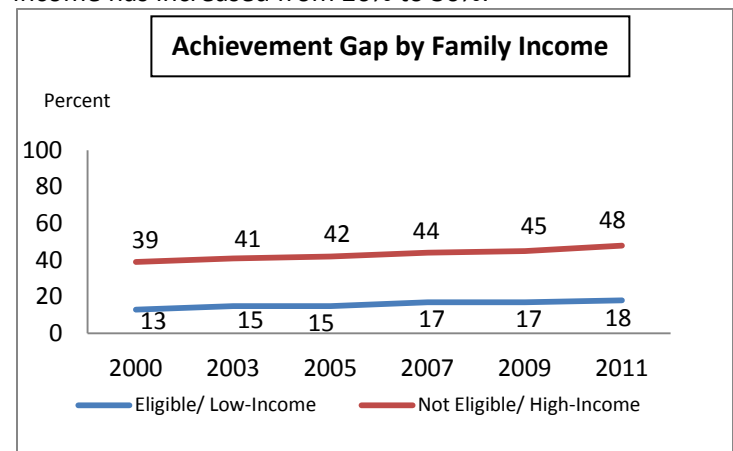
The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 requires states to test all students; analyze proficiency data by sub-groups; create standards for all groups; and attain 100% proficiency in reading and math by 2014.

**The National Assessment of Educational Progress**

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as “the Nation’s Report Card,” began collecting student test score data in 1969. A sample of American students is assessed biannually with national tests in various subjects. This provides a gauge of what students know and can do in different subjects. The data in this report refer to a national sample of public school students in 50 states and the District of Columbia.

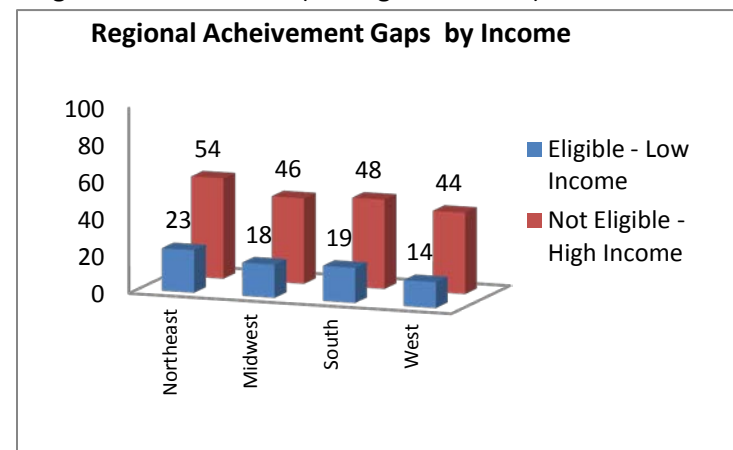
**Achievement Gaps**

*Income*  
**National.** The 2011 NAEP results indicate that income impacts reading proficiency. Only 18% of students in low-income families (determined by eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch) are proficient in reading. In comparison, almost 50% of students in high-income families were proficient in reading<sup>ii</sup>. In the last ten years, proficiency has increased for students from low-income families, but the achievement gap by income has increased from 26% to 30%.



**Figure 1. Percentage of 4<sup>th</sup> grade students at or above proficient in reading by income.**

*Regional.* Students in low-income families have the highest levels of proficiency in the Northeast (23%) and the lowest levels of proficiency in the West (14%). Achievement gaps by income exist in all regions and range from 28% to 31% (See Figure 2 below).



**Figure 2. Percentage of 4<sup>th</sup> grade students at or above proficient in reading by income.**

*State.* A quarter of students in low-income families were proficient in reading in Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont. These states had the highest percentage of proficient students in low-income families followed by Maryland (24%), Florida (24%) and Pennsylvania (24%). Nineteen states had higher percentages of proficiency than the national average of 18%. Students in low-income families had the lowest levels of proficiency in Louisiana (14%), New Mexico (14%), Alaska (13%), California (12%) and the District of Columbia (10%). See Appendix 1 to see a comparison between 2009 and 2011.<sup>iii</sup>

States that have the largest achievement gaps by income based on 2011 NAEP reading proficiency are Connecticut (40%), Massachusetts (37%), Colorado (36%), Virginia (34%) and the District of Columbia (35%). Refer to figure 3.

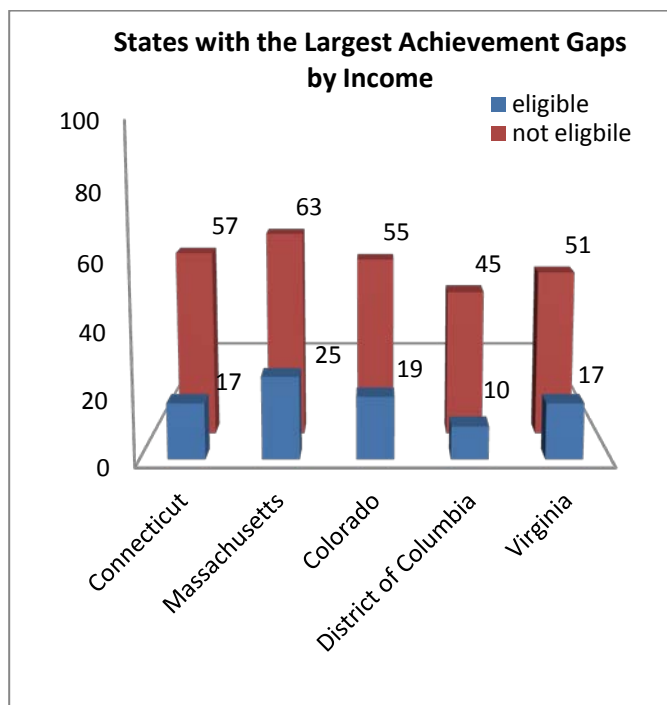


Figure 3. Percentage of 4<sup>th</sup> grade students at or above proficient by income.

*Large Cities.* Students in low-income families in the largest cities had very low levels of proficiency in comparison to students in high-income families in large cities (see Figure 4 below<sup>iv</sup>). Large cities in the Northeast had higher rates of proficiency than large cities in other regions. Students in low-income families

had proficiency rates of 26% (New York City) and 23% (Miami-Dade).

In several large cities, proficiency was less than ten percent for students in low-income families: Baltimore City (9%), Cleveland (8%), Detroit (5%), Fresno (9%), Los Angeles (9%), Milwaukee (8%) and Philadelphia (9%). Large cities with the highest achievement gaps by income are Atlanta (44%), Austin (45%) and San Diego (37%).

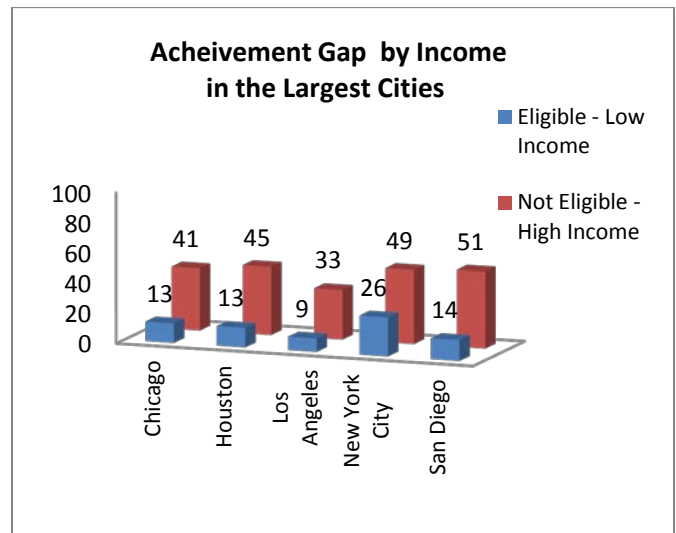


Figure 4. Percentage of 4<sup>th</sup> grade students at or above proficient by income in large cities.

#### Race/Ethnicity

In this issue brief, achievement gaps by race are examined using the three largest groups (White, Hispanic and Black) enrolled in public schools.<sup>v</sup> Achievement gaps between the three largest racial groups have existed for decades. See figure 5.

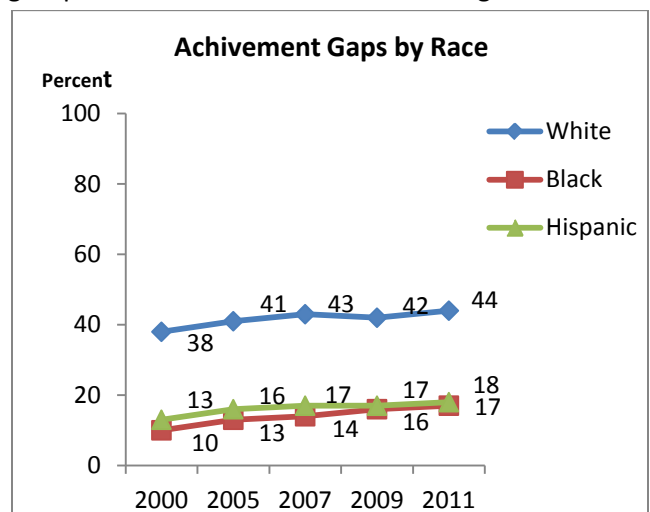


Figure 5. Trend in NAEP Fourth-Grade Reading Proficiency by Race/ Ethnicity

**Achievement Gap between White and Black Students.**  
 There are higher percentages of White students at proficient (33%) and at advanced (11%) in comparison to Black students at proficient (14%) and at advanced (2%).

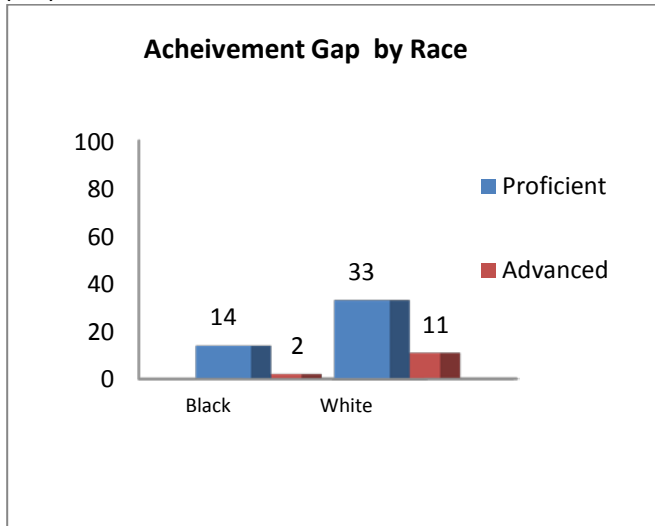


Figure 6. Proficiency levels by race for 4<sup>th</sup> grade students.

Nationally the gap between White and Black students is 27%. Black students have the highest proficiency levels in the Northeast (20%) and the West (19%). Regionally the highest gap is in the Northeast (29%) and the lowest gap is in the West (21%). See figure 7 below.

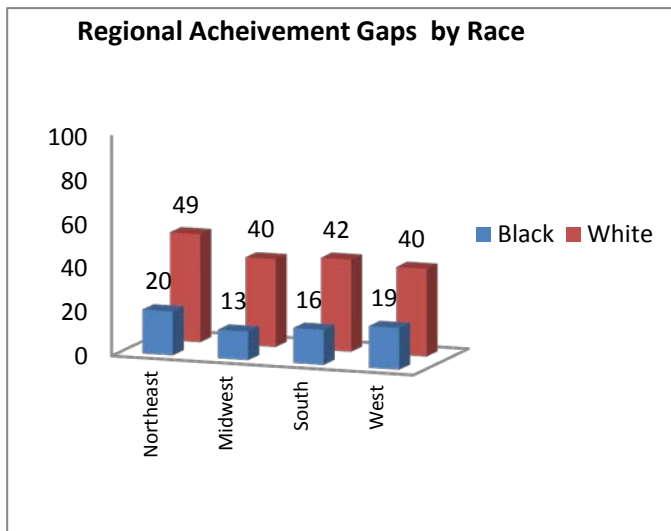


Figure 7. Percentage of 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading proficiency by race

The states with the smallest proficiency gaps in 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading between White and Black students are North Dakota (9%), Hawaii (12%), West Virginia (13%) and Alaska (16%). The District of Columbia has the highest gap of 62%. The states with the largest gaps are Connecticut (41%), Massachusetts (35%) and Maryland (34%).

Cities also have large achievement gaps by race (see figure 8). The District of Columbia and Atlanta have the highest achievement gap (64%) between Black and White students.

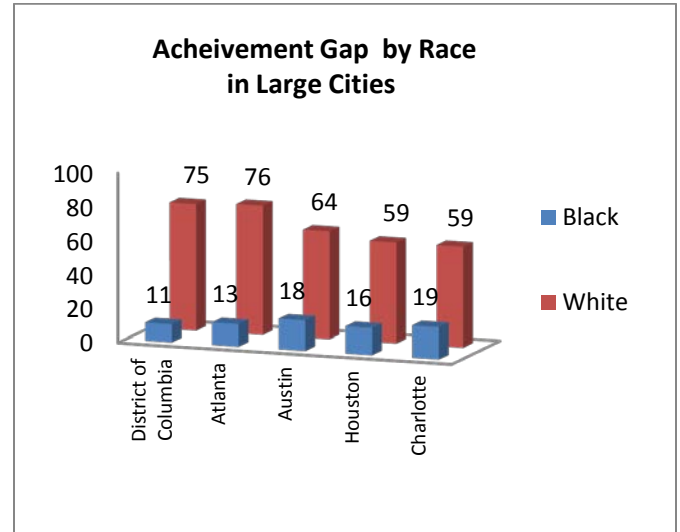


Figure 8. Percentage of 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading Proficiency by Race

**Achievement Gap between White and Hispanic Students.**

There are higher percentages of White students at proficient (33%) and advanced (11%) in comparison to Hispanic students at proficient (16%) and advanced (3%).

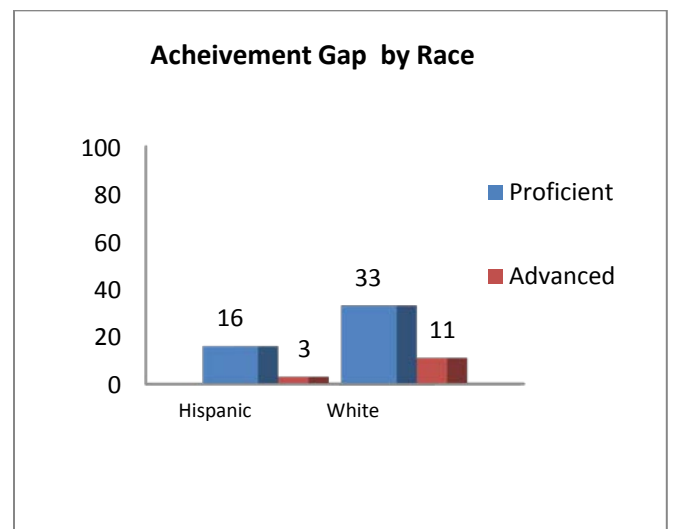


Figure 9. Proficiency levels by race for 4<sup>th</sup> grade students.

Nationally, the gap between White and Hispanic students is 25%. Regionally, Hispanic students have the highest proficiency levels in the South (22%) and the lowest levels of proficiency in the West (13%). See figure 10 below.

The highest regional gaps between Hispanic and White students are in the North East (28%) and the West (27%). The lowest regional gaps are in the South (20%) and the Midwest (22%).

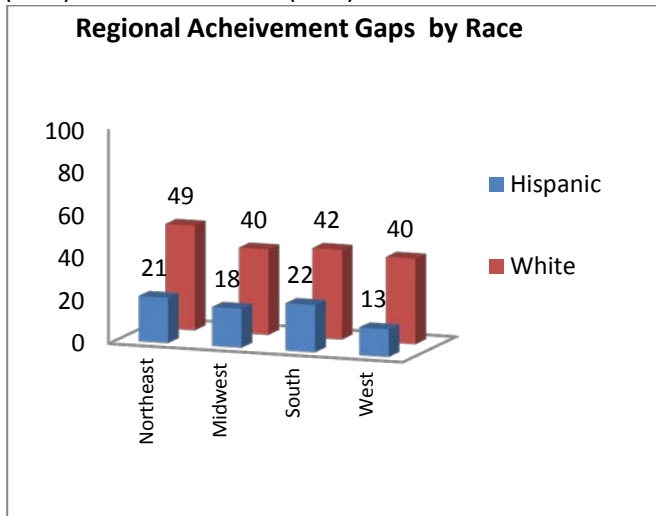


Figure 10. Percentage of 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading proficiency by race

Large cities with the lowest proficiency rates for Hispanic students are Philadelphia (5%), Detroit (6%), Los Angeles (8%) and Fresno (9%). In large cities, the average reading achievement gap is 33% between Hispanic and White students. The District of Columbia has the highest gap of 58%. Austin (46%), Houston (46%), San Diego (40%) and Charlotte (36%) are large cities with the widest gaps. See figure 11 below.

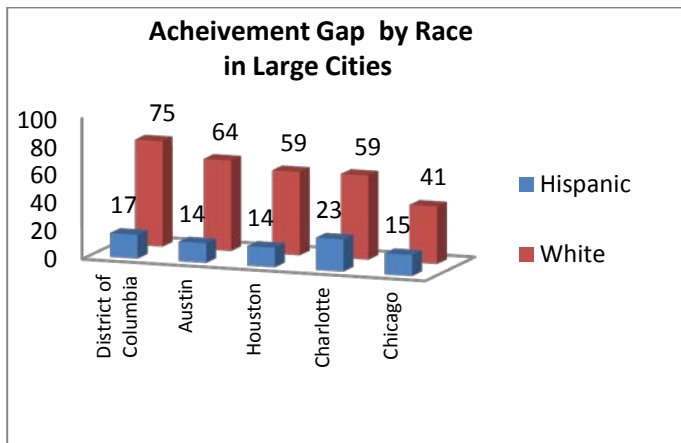


Figure 11. Percentage of 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading proficiency by race

### Language

Over 11 million school-age children speak a language other than English at home, representing about 20% of children in schools<sup>vi</sup>. The recent 2011 NAEP results show that 7% of English Language Learner (ELL) students are proficient in reading; the proficiency level has remained below 10% in the last ten years.

The national gap between ELL students and not ELL students is 28%. See figure 12 below.

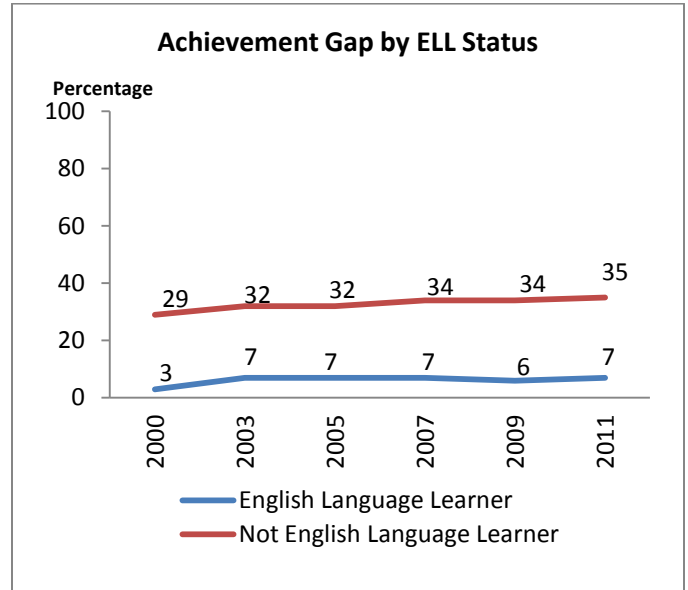


Figure 12. Fourth grade reading proficiency by ELL status.

Students identified as ELL had the highest level of proficiency in reading in South Carolina (20%), Vermont (16%), Kansas (16%) and Maryland (15%). Proficiency for ELL students was less than ten percent in 34 states and the District of Columbia. The states with the lowest level of proficiency for ELL students are South Dakota (2%), New Mexico (2%), Utah (2%), Idaho (2%), Alaska (2%), Washington (2%) and Arizona (1%).

*Regional Gaps.* Students identified as ELL have lower rates of proficiency in the West and Northeast. Regional gaps by language range from 25% - 36%. See figure 13 below.

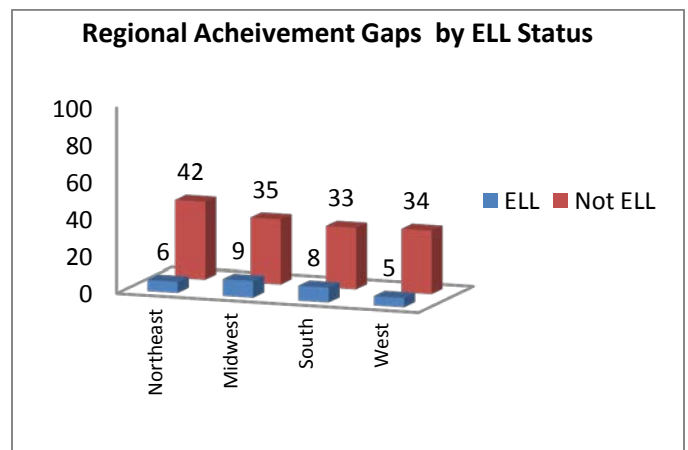


Figure 13. Fourth grade reading proficiency by ELL status.

**State Gaps.** The states with the largest achievement gaps by language are Massachusetts (42%), Connecticut (41%), Colorado (39%) and Washington (37%). Twenty states have higher achievement gaps than the national average (29%). The states with the smallest achievement gaps by language are South Carolina (9%), Louisiana (14%), the District of Columbia (15%) and Arkansas (18%).

**Disability**

There are currently about 6.5 million students with disabilities in the public school system.<sup>vii</sup> The results from the 2011 NAEP show that 11% of public school students with disabilities are proficient in reading.<sup>viii</sup> The majority of students with disabilities are not proficient in reading. See figure 14.

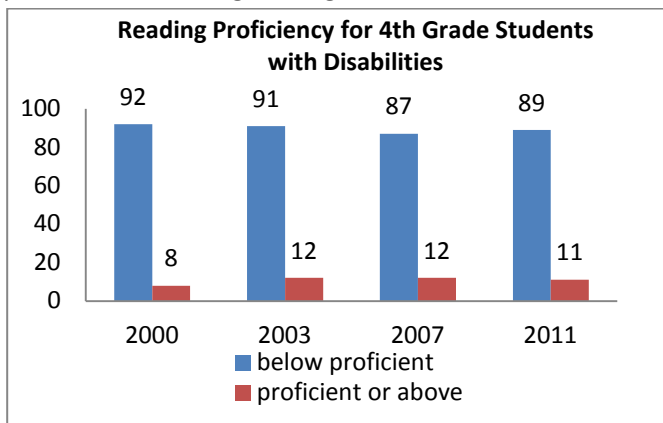


Figure 14. Percentage of 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading proficiency.

Proficiency levels have increased since 2000 for students with disabilities but the proficiency decreased from 12% to 11% from 2009-2011. The achievement gap between students with disabilities and their peers has increased from 21% to 24% in the last ten years. See figure 15 below.

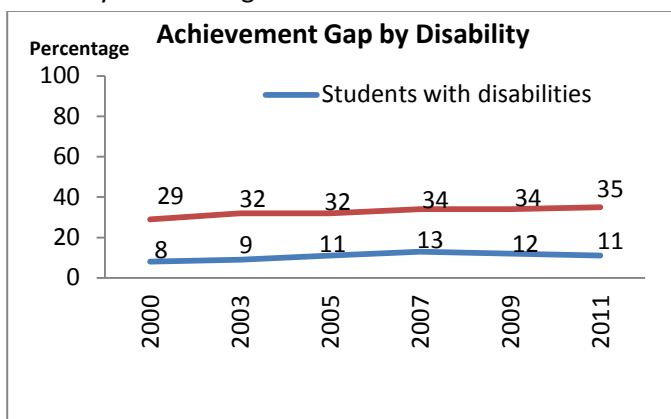


Figure 15. Percentage of 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading proficiency.

Students with disabilities in fifteen states had higher proficiency levels than the national average of 11%. Students with disabilities had the highest proficiency in Maryland (26%)<sup>ix</sup>, Massachusetts (22%) and New Jersey (21%). Students with disabilities had the lowest levels of proficiency in the District of Columbia (2%), Hawaii (2%), Alaska (5%), Arizona (5%), Mississippi (5%), and Rhode Island (5%).

Achievement gaps by disability widen when adding other factors such as race. See figure 16 below.

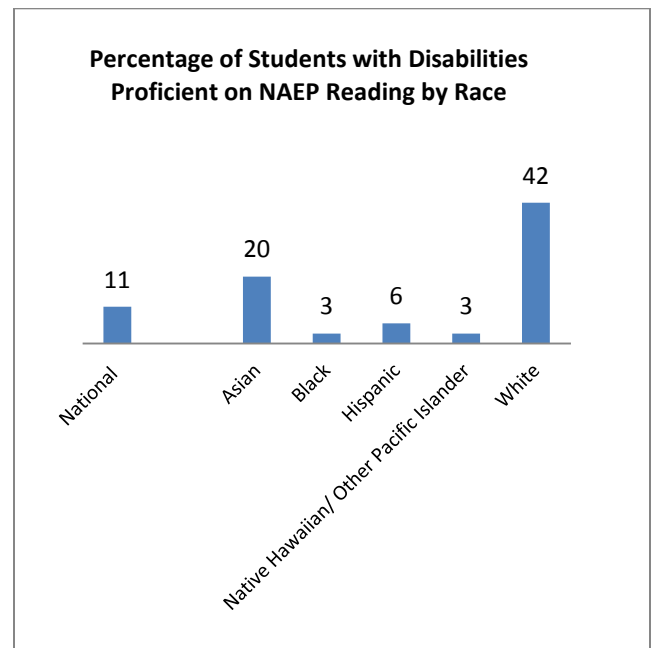


Figure 16. Percentage of 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading proficiency by race and disability.

**Conclusion**

The original purpose of the Elementary and Secondary Education act was to address inequality. The NAEP 2011 shows that place matters; outcomes are poorer for vulnerable students in large cities. Gaps are also wider in large cities. Unfortunately, achievement gaps by income, race, language and disability continue to exist almost fifty years later. The latest results indicate that we have to be more intentional about reducing and closing gaps so children regardless of the location where they live have equitable opportunities to be successful.

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<sup>i</sup> In school year 2006-2007 local education agencies served more than 17 million children from low-income families with targeted Title I funds designed to improve proficiency (National Center for Education Statistics;

<http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=158>

<sup>ii</sup> NAEP uses students' eligibility for the National School Lunch Program as an indicator of family income. Children from families below 130 percent of the poverty level are eligible for free meals; students in families with incomes between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals.

<sup>iii</sup> Appendix - chart

<sup>iv</sup> Based on 2009 data from NAEP.

<sup>v</sup> U.S. Census. School Enrollment Below

Postsecondary- Summary by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 2009. Table 253. [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)

<sup>vi</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2011). The Condition of Education 2011 (NCES 2011-033) Indicator 6.

<sup>vii</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2011). Digest of Education Statistics (NCES 2011-015), Chapter 2.

<sup>viii</sup> Nationally, 23% of grade 4 students with disabilities were excluded in NAEP reading. Exclusion percentages ranged from 6% (Iowa) to 59% (Maryland).

<sup>ix</sup> Maryland has the highest percentage of exclusion in terms of the number of students with disabilities excluded from NAEP reading as a percentage of identified students with disabilities.