Why is NAEP important for Oregon?

Each year some Oregon schools participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). In even years such as 2016, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) selects a small number of Oregon schools for national assessments in subjects including the arts, social studies, or technology and engineering literacy. In odd years such as 2017, NCES selects a much larger number of Oregon schools to produce state results in math and reading.

School leaders, teachers, parents, and students in Oregon often ask why participation in NAEP is worth their time and energy. This brief summarizes how NAEP provides Oregon with valuable information not available from other sources.

- NAEP has been a stable measure of student achievement since 1990;
- NAEP is the only source of comparable achievement data from all 50 states;
- NAEP informs educators, policymakers, parents and the public about the rigor of Oregon’s expectations for students.

NAEP: A Stable Measure of Student Achievement

NAEP has maintained assessment trend lines for over 25 years. Oregon’s NAEP results date back to 1990, when 8th graders participated in the first state-level NAEP math assessment. The grade 4 NAEP math trend line for Oregon begins in 1996, while the reading trend lines start in 1998. NAEP maintains the consistent administrative and technical procedures necessary to measure the same knowledge and skills over time.

There is value in having an historical perspective on achievement. For example, the most NAEP improvement in Oregon occurred in 4th grade math. The percentage of Oregon 4th graders performing at the lowest NAEP achievement level, below basic, has decreased significantly since 1996¹, from 35% to 21%. However, most of that improvement occurred between the NAEP 2000 and NAEP 2003 assessments.

Additional information about NAEP trends in Oregon is available in the Oregon Statewide Report Card and from the NAEP website.
NAEP: The Only Source of Comparable Achievement Data From All States

NAEP delivers the same assessments in the same way in every state. The content tested by NAEP is defined in assessment frameworks written by national committees that include content experts, teachers, school administrators, parents, and members of the general public. The NAEP assessments are designed to be “curriculum neutral” since content may be taught in different ways in different states and districts. Thousands of NAEP test items have been released for public use through the online NAEP Questions Tool.

State comparisons show that Oregon has weak relative performance at grade 4. The average NAEP math score for Oregon 4th graders is higher than average scores in just 6 other states, while the average NAEP reading score is higher than only 7 states. The average NAEP math score for Oregon 8th graders is above average scores in 16 states, and the average NAEP reading score is above average scores in 19 states.

Although Oregon student performance in grade 4 math improved more over time than performance in other NAEP grades and subjects, many other states, including Washington, had higher student achievement in 2015. More improvement in Oregon is possible.

NAEP: A Common Scale for Comparing State Expectations for Students

Because NAEP delivers the same assessments in the same way in every state, NAEP can serve as a common measure for comparing state expectations for student performance. State expectations are operationalized as achievement standards, which are the cut scores set on state assessments. NAEP research shows that achievement standards are very different in different states. NAEP illustrates this by mapping state assessment cut scores onto the common NAEP scale.

The report Mapping State Proficiency Standards Onto NAEP Scales: Results from the 2013 NAEP Reading and Mathematics Assessments shows that Oregon’s expectations for students on the OAKS assessments used in 2012 - 2013 were generally in the middle of the wide range of expectations across states. Oregon’s lowest expectations were for 4th grade reading, as shown in this graphic from the report:

![NAEP 2015 Grade 4 Math Average Scores](image)
Oregon set a low cut score on its 4th grade reading test compared to other states

Source: Figure 1. NAEP scale equivalents of state grade 4 reading standards for proficient performance by state: 2013, Mapping State Proficiency Standards Onto NAEP Scales: Results from the 2013 NAEP Reading and Mathematics Assessments

Oregon’s highest expectations were for 8th grade reading, the only NAEP subject and grade for which Oregon’s expectations were not significantly lower than Washington’s.

Oregon’s cut score on its 8th grade reading test compared to other states

Source: Figure 4. NAEP scale equivalents of state grade 8 reading standards for proficient performance by state: 2013, Mapping State Proficiency Standards Onto NAEP Scales: Results from the 2013 NAEP Reading and Mathematics Assessments
The state testing landscape has changed since 2013. In 2014-2015 Oregon, along with other states, administered the Smarter Balanced tests in English Language Arts and Mathematics. However, the majority of states continued to administer their own tests. Since NAEP was also administered in all states in 2015, NAEP can continue to provide a common scale for comparing the expectations for student achievement across states with different tests.

NAEP has served a unique role in American education since its creation in 1969. By providing a stable measure delivered in the same way across states, NAEP allows policymakers to make important comparisons of student performance over time and across state lines. In May 2015, the National Assessment Governing Board unanimously adopted a resolution to maintain NAEP trends even as state tests and testing policies continue to differ and to change over time.

For more information, contact Oregon’s NAEP State Coordinator, Beth LaDuca, at beth.laduca@state.or.us or (503) 947 – 5836.

Endnotes


2 The NAEP frameworks were written prior to the development of the Common Core State Standards. The NAEP Validity Studies Panel examined the relationship between the NAEP reading, writing, and math frameworks and the Common Core State Standards in a 2013 report which recommended “...that NAEP continue to play its historical role as an independent monitor.”