

General Achievement Trends — Alabama

K-12 enrollment — 735,605

The raw data used to develop these state profiles, including data for additional grade levels and years before 2002, can be found on the CEP Web site at www.cep-dc.org. Click on the link on the left for No Child Left Behind. In the Document Library, look for the most recent report on student achievement since 2002. Below the name of the report, click on the link for View State Profiles and Worksheets. Scroll down the page, and click on the Worksheet links for any state.

Overall Achievement — Key Findings

General results

The tables in this profile present state test results in reading and math at three achievement levels (basic, proficient, and advanced) and at one grade each at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. These data are more complete than the percentage of students scoring proficient that is the main indicator used to determine adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act.

In general, nearly all Alabama students reached the **basic** level of achievement. Results were mixed in reading at the **proficient** and **advanced** levels, but students made consistent gains in math.

Specific results

- Since 2005, virtually all Alabama students have reached the **basic** level of performance in both reading and math. The percentage scoring basic and above has remained at 100% in grades 4 and 11 and has hovered around 98-99% in grade 8.
- In reading, the percentage of students scoring at the **proficient** level and above increased slightly at the elementary grade analyzed, rose at a moderate-to-large rate at the middle school level, and declined at a moderate-to-large rate at the high school level. In math, there were moderate-to-large gains in the percentage proficient and above at all three grade levels analyzed.
- In 2008, more than half (53%) of Alabama's 4th graders had reached the **advanced** level in reading, and 50% had reached it in math. Between 2005 and 2008, the percentage of students performing at the **advanced** level increased slightly at the elementary grade analyzed but declined at a moderate-to-large rate at the high school level. In math, the percentage advanced grew at a moderate-to-large rate at both the elementary and middle school levels and increased slightly at the high school level.

Data Limitations

Years of comparable percentage proficient data	2005 through 2008
Years of data needed to compute effect sizes	2004 through 2008 for overall trends, grade 4 reading and math and grade 8 reading 2005 through 2008 for overall trends, grade 8 math 2007 through 2008 for subgroups No grade 11 effect size data available
Disaggregated data for all subgroups and comparison groups	Subgroup scale score data (means, standard deviations, and numbers of test-takers) not available until 2007 Scale score data not available for grade 11 students, low-income students, and students who are <i>not</i> low-income Scale score data not available for comparison groups of students who are <i>not</i> disabled or are <i>not</i> English language learners (ELLs), so these subgroups are compared with all tested students in the state in effect size analyses
Numbers of test-takers by subgroup	Not available until 2007 for all subgroups. Not available for grade 11 or for low-income students.

Test Characteristics

The characteristics highlighted below are for the state reading and mathematics tests used for accountability under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Test(s) used for NCLB accountability	Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test (ARMT), grades 3–8 Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE), grade 11 Alabama Alternate Assessment, grades 3–8 and 11
Grades tested for NCLB accountability	3–8, 11
State labels for achievement levels	AL uses four achievement levels: I, II, III, and IV. For our analyses we treated II as Basic, III as Proficient, and IV as Advanced.
High school NCLB test also used as an exit exam?	Yes (AHSGE)

First year test used	2004: First year of use for NCLB for ARMT reading grades 4, 6, and 8; ARMT mathematics grades 4 and 6; AHSGE reading grade 11; and AHSGE mathematics grade 11 2005: First year of use for NCLB for ARMT reading grades 3, 5, and 7; and ARMT mathematics grades 3, 5, 7, and 8
Time of test administration	Spring
Major changes in testing system (2002–present)	2003–04: ARMT assessments implemented, replacing the Stanford-10 in grades 4, 6, and 8 for reading and in grades 4 and 6 for mathematics. (Stanford 10 scores were not used for NCLB accountability.) 2004–05: ARMT assessments implemented, replacing the Stanford-10 in grades 3, 5, and 7 in reading and in grades 3, 5, 7, and 8 in mathematics 2005–06: Displaced Hurricane Katrina students disaggregated for this administration only
Comments	The scale scores associated with some of the achievement levels for some of the grades were changed in 2005. Therefore, the percentages proficient for 2005 and later years cannot be compared with the percentage proficient for 2004. However, since the scale did not change, comparison of scale scores for 2005 and later years can be compared with scale scores for 2004.

Overall Achievement — Percentages Proficient

Figure AL-1. Percentage of Students Scoring at the Proficient Level and Above in Reading

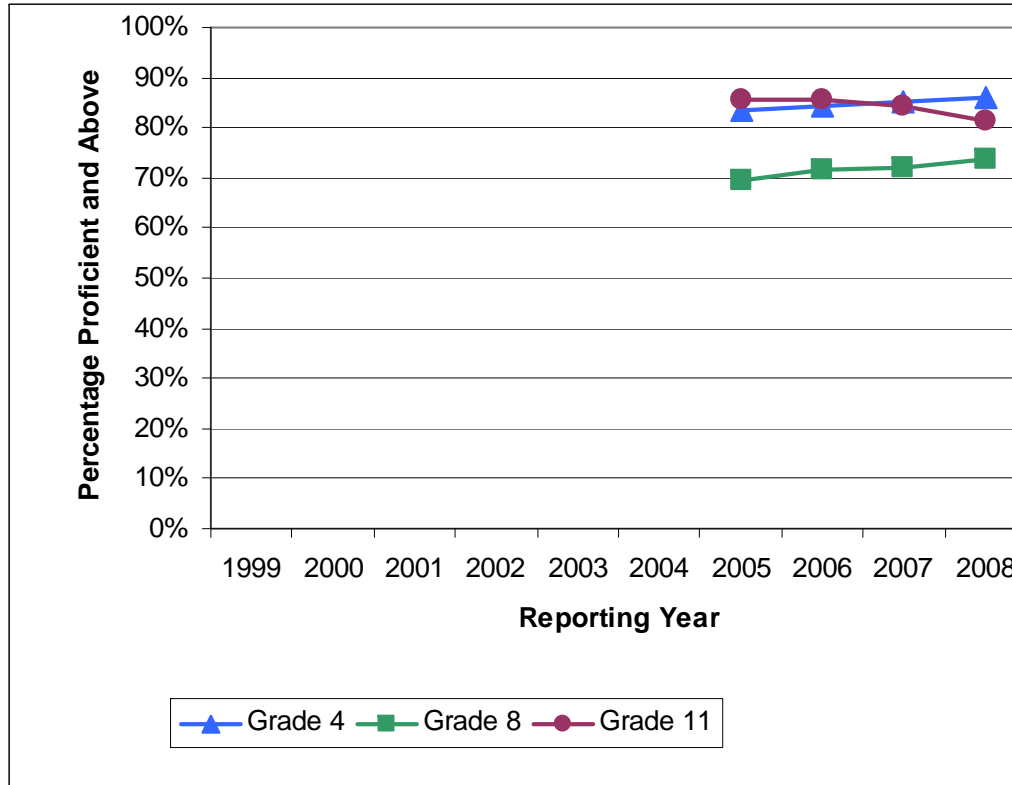


Table AL-1. Percentage of Students Scoring at the Proficient Level and Above in Reading

Grade Level	Reporting Year										Pre-NCLB Average Yearly Percentage Point Gain 1999-2002 ¹	Post-NCLB Average Yearly Percentage Point Gain 2002-2008 ¹
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008		
Grade 3							81%	84%	85%	85%	NA	1.4
Grade 4							83%	84%	85%	86%	NA	0.9
Grade 5							81%	81%	85%	84%	NA	1.1
Grade 6							82%	83%	85%	87%	NA	1.7
Grade 7							75%	74%	77%	79%	NA	1.3
Grade 8							70%	72%	72%	74%	NA	1.5
Grade 11							86%	86%	84%	81%	NA	-1.5

Table reads: The percentage of 3rd graders who scored at the proficient level and above on the state reading test increased from 81% in 2005 to 85% in 2008. The average yearly gain in the percentage proficient in grade 3 reading was 1.4 percentage points per year after NCLB was enacted.

¹Averages are subject to rounding error.

Figure AL-2. Percentage of Students Scoring at the Proficient Level and Above in Mathematics

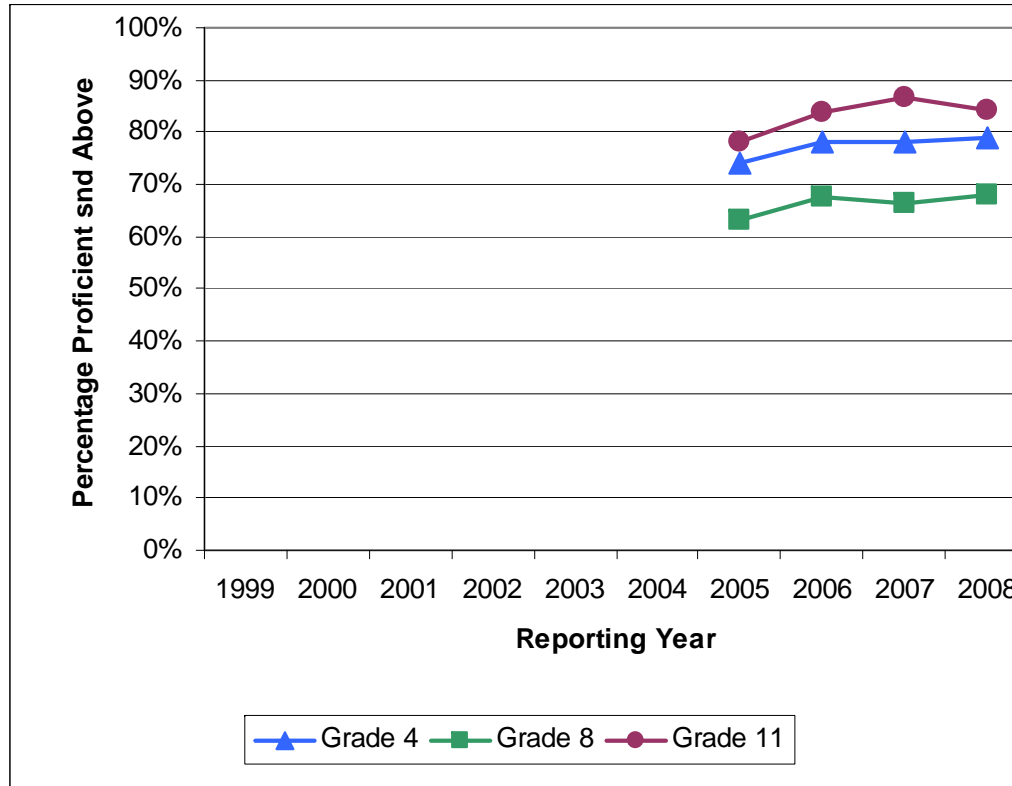


Table AL-2. Percentage of Students Scoring at the Proficient Level and Above in Mathematics

Grade Level	Reporting Year										Pre-NCLB Average Yearly Percentage Point Gain 1999-2002 ¹	Post-NCLB Average Yearly Percentage Point Gain 2002-2008 ¹
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008		
Grade 3							74%	78%	77%	78%	NA	1.2
Grade 4							74%	78%	78%	79%	NA	1.6
Grade 5							72%	77%	77%	78%	NA	2.1
Grade 6							67%	75%	73%	72%	NA	1.8
Grade 7							57%	59%	60%	61%	NA	1.4
Grade 8							63%	68%	66%	68%	NA	1.7
Grade 11							78%	84%	86%	84%	NA	1.9

Table reads: The percentage of 3rd graders who scored at the proficient level and above on the state math test increased from 74% in 2005 to 78% in 2008. The average yearly gain in the percentage proficient in grade 3 math was 1.2 percentage points per year after NCLB was enacted.

¹Averages are subject to rounding error.

Overall Achievement — Percentages Advanced, Proficient, and Basic

How to read figures 3 and 4 and tables 3 and 4

The stacked bars in figures 3 and 4 show the percentages of students scoring at the basic, proficient, and advanced levels on the state tests used for NCLB accountability. The following information may be helpful in interpreting the figures:

- The percentage proficient and above—the benchmark used to determine adequate yearly progress under NCLB—is the sum of the middle and top segments of the bars (percentage proficient plus percentage advanced).
- The percentage basic and above is the sum of all three segments of the bars (percentage basic plus percentage proficient plus percentage advanced).
- The sums that result from adding the segments of the bars in these ways correspond with the percentages proficient and above, and basic and above, shown in tables 3 and 4. In a few instances, however, the sums in the figures may differ from those in the tables by a percentage point due to rounding.
- The bars do not total 100% because students who score *below* the basic level are not displayed.
- By looking at the percentages in each segment of the bars, one can see how achievement trends at the three levels interact. Ideally, one would want to see increases at all three levels, as more students move from below basic to basic achievement, from basic to proficient, and from proficient to advanced. But other scenarios may also be illuminating. For example, gains may occur in the percentage basic even if the percentage proficient and above has stayed the same, suggesting that progress has been made in moving students from the below basic to the basic level. Or, if the percentage proficient has grown while the percentages basic and advanced have shrunk, this suggests most of the academic attention was focused on moving “bubble kids” from the basic to proficient levels, with little or no attention to the highest- and lowest-performing students.
- Some states use different labels for their achievement levels instead of basic, proficient, and advanced. The specific state labels are listed in the Test Characteristics section at the beginning of this profile.

Figure AL-3. Percentages of Students Scoring at the Advanced, Proficient, and Basic Levels in Reading

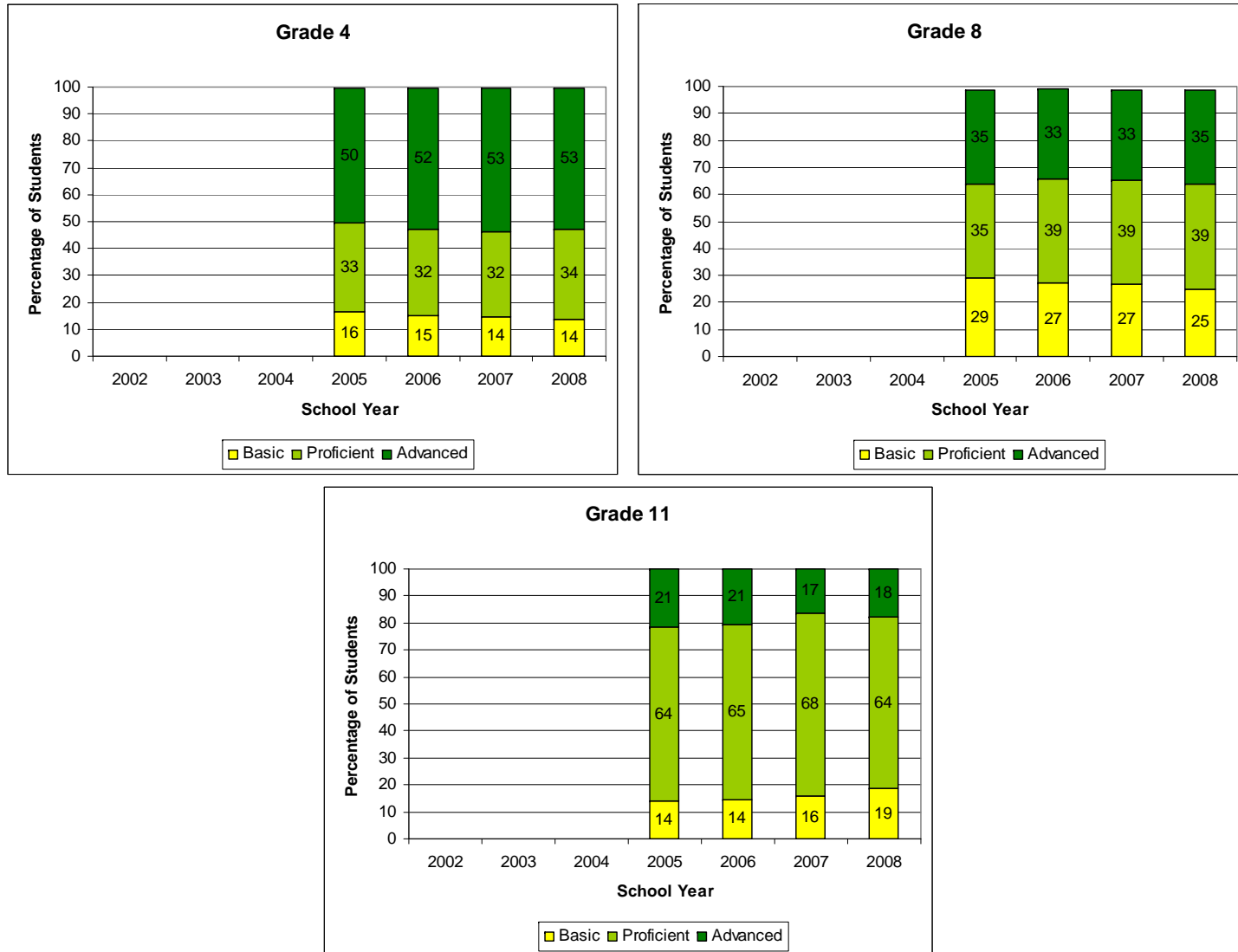


Table AL-3. Percentages of Students Scoring at the Advanced, Proficient and Above, and Basic and Above Levels in Reading

Achievement Level	Reporting Year							Average Yearly Percentage Point Gain ¹
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	
Grade 4								
Advanced				50%	52%	53%	53%	0.8
Proficient and Above				83%	84%	85%	86%	0.9
Basic and Above				100%	100%	100%	100%	0.0
Grade 8								
Advanced				35%	33%	33%	35%	0.0
Proficient and Above				70%	72%	72%	74%	1.5
Basic and Above				98%	99%	99%	99%	0.0
Grade 11								
Advanced				21%	21%	17%	18%	-1.2
Proficient and Above				86%	86%	84%	81%	-1.5
Basic and Above				100%	100%	100%	100%	0.0

Table reads: The percentage of 4th graders who scored at the advanced level on their state reading test increased from 50% in 2005 to 53% in 2008. During this period, the average yearly gain in the percentage advanced was 0.8 percentage points per year in grade 4 reading.

¹Averages are subject to rounding error.

Figure AL-4. Percentages of Students Scoring at the Advanced, Proficient, and Basic Levels in Mathematics

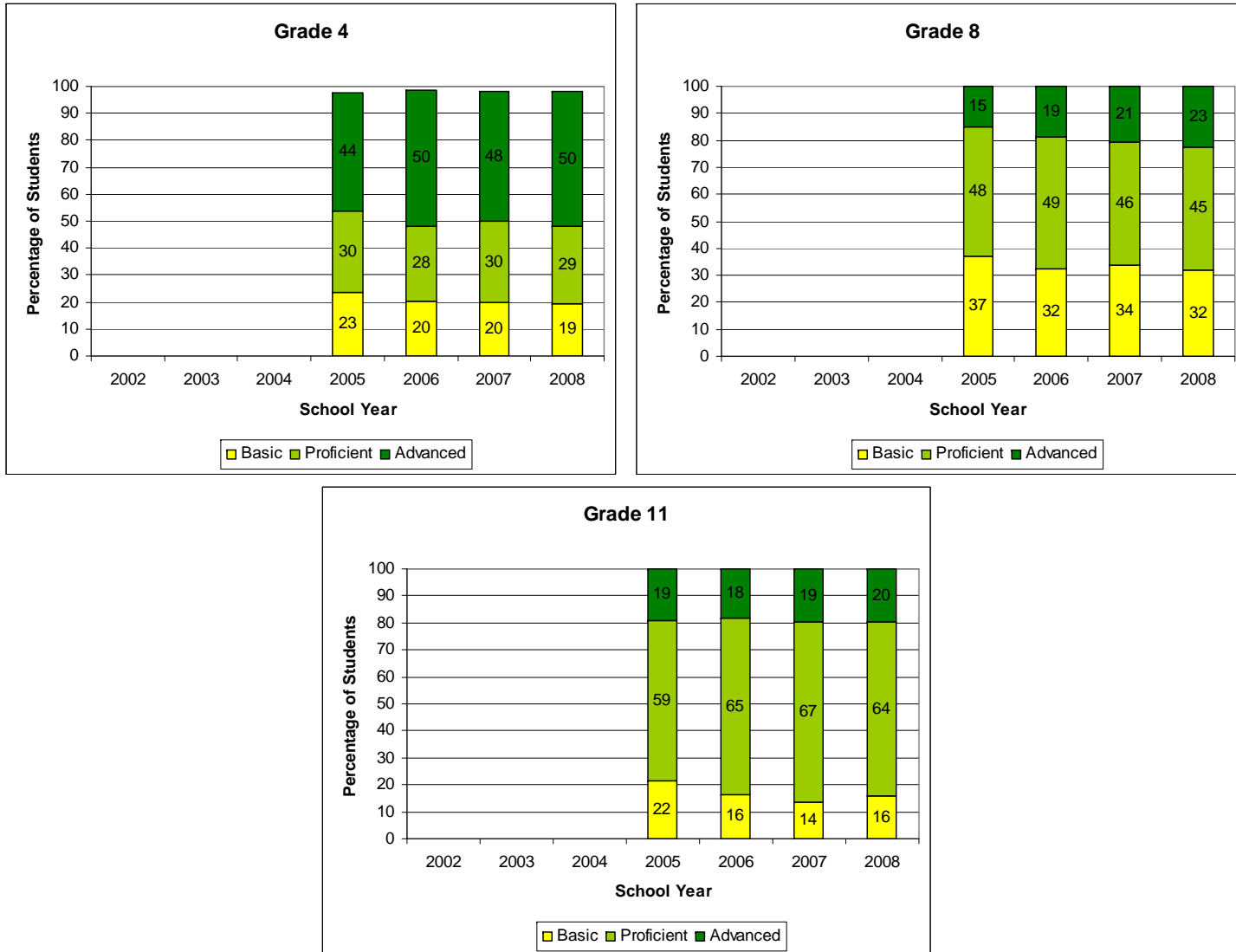


Table AL-4. Percentages of Students Scoring at the Advanced, Proficient and Above, and Basic and Above Levels in Mathematics

Achievement Level	Reporting Year							Average Yearly Percentage Point Gain ¹
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	
Grade 4								
Advanced				44%	50%	48%	50%	2.1
Proficient and Above				74%	78%	78%	79%	1.6
Basic and Above				97%	98%	98%	98%	0.2
Grade 8								
Advanced				15%	19%	21%	23%	2.5
Proficient and Above				63%	68%	66%	68%	1.7
Basic and Above				100%	100%	100%	100%	0.0
Grade 11								
Advanced				19%	18%	19%	20%	0.2
Proficient and Above				78%	84%	86%	84%	1.9
Basic and Above				100%	100%	100%	100%	0.0

Table reads: The percentage of 4th graders who scored at the advanced level on their state math test increased from 44% in 2005 to 50% in 2008. During this period, the average yearly gain in the percentage advanced was 2.1 percentage points per year in grade 4 math.

¹Averages are subject to rounding error.

Overall Achievement — Effect Sizes

How to read figures 5 and 6 and tables 5 and 6

An **effect size** is a statistical tool that conveys the amount of difference between test results using a common unit of measurement which does not depend on the scoring scale for a particular test. An effect size is computed by subtracting the **mean scale score** (the average score) on a test for one year, such as 2006, from the mean scale score for another year, such as 2007, then dividing the result by the average standard deviation. (The **standard deviation** is a measure of how much test scores tend to deviate from the mean—in other words, how spread out or bunched together scores are.) If the mean score has not changed, then the effect size is 0. An effect size of +1 indicates an increase of 1 standard deviation from the previous year's mean score. Effect sizes can also be used to calculate differences in scores between two subgroups of students.

Tables 5 and 6 show mean scale scores, standard deviations, and the **accumulated annual effect size** (AAES), which is the cumulative gain in effect size over a range of years. For example, to determine the accumulated annual effect size between 2006 and 2008, one would calculate the change in effect size from 2006 to 2007, and from 2007 to 2008, then add the results together. In figures and tables 5 and 6, 2002 (or the closest year with comparable data) was used as a starting point (0.00) to calculate accumulated annual effect sizes after NCLB was enacted (and before, if available). Steady gains in AAES are represented by negative numbers before 2002 rising to positive numbers after 2002, so that pre- and post-NCLB trends can be shown on the same trend line. A positive AAES before 2002 or a negative AAES after 2002 indicates a decline in performance over time.

Figure AL-5. Reading Achievement Trends in Terms of Effect Sizes

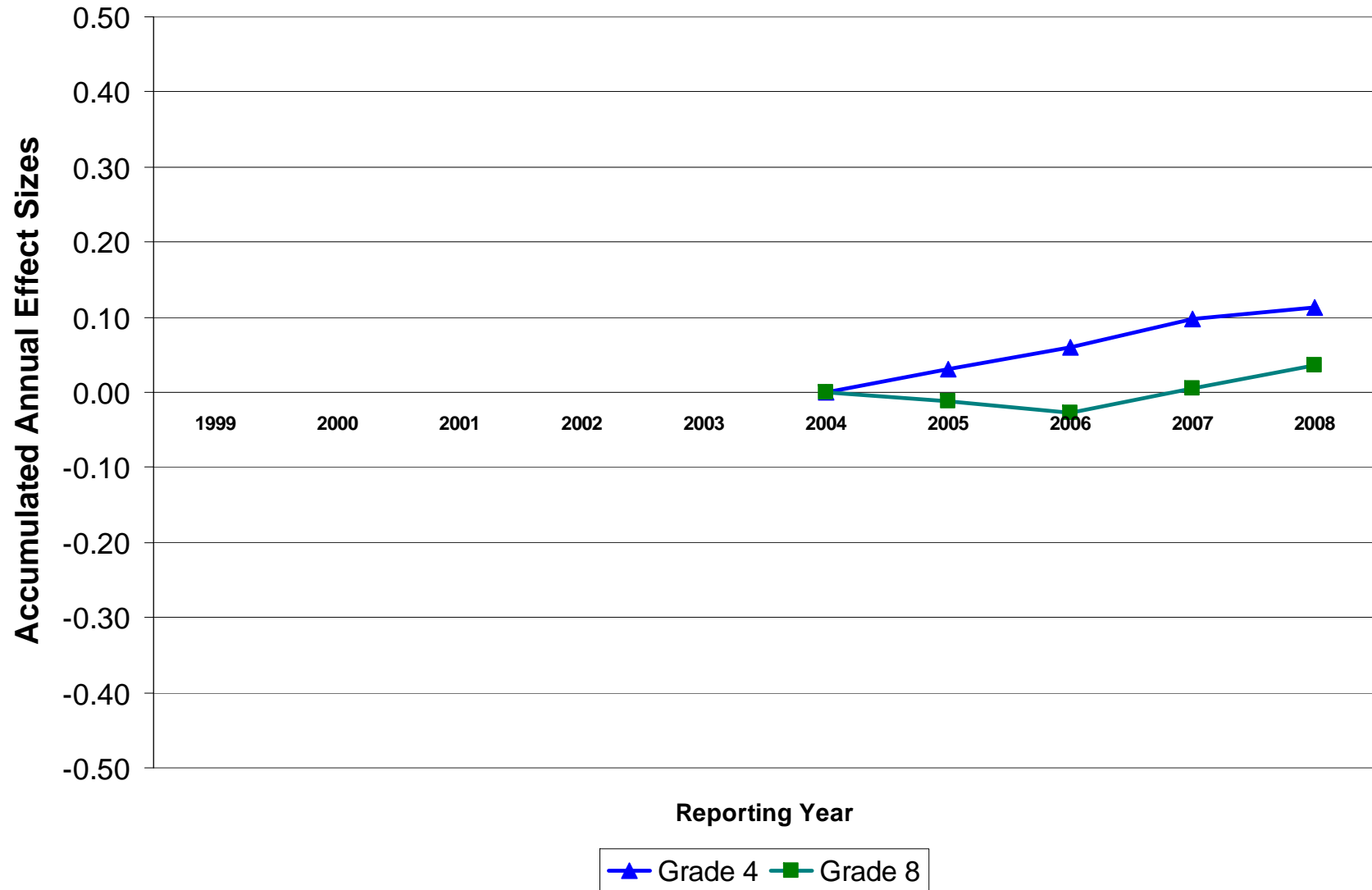


Table AL-5. Reading Achievement Trends in Terms of Effect Sizes

Grade Level	Reporting Year										Pre-NCLB Average Yearly Effect Size Gain 1999-2002 ¹	Post-NCLB Average Yearly Effect Size Gain 2002-2008 ¹
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008		
Grade 4	MSS (SD)					637.6 (38.6)	638.8 (38.8)	639.9 (38.4)	641.3 (38.3)	641.9 (38.2)		
	AAES					0.00	0.03	0.06	0.10	0.11	NA	0.03
Grade 8	MSS (SD)					671.7 (32.7)	671.3 (34.3)	670.8 (32.8)	671.9 (33.0)	672.9 (33.1)		
	AAES					0.00	-0.01	-0.03	0.01	0.04	NA	0.01
Grade 11	MSS (SD)											
	AAES											

Table reads: The mean scale score (MSS) of 4th graders on the state reading test increased from 637.6 in 2004 to 641.9 in 2008. The standard deviation (SD) for the mean scale score in 2004 was 38.6. Using 2004 as a starting point (0.00), the accumulated annual effect size (AAES) for grade 4 reading totaled 0.11 by 2008. For the post-NCLB period, the average yearly gain in effect size at grade 4 was 0.03.

Note: The Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test (ARMT) for grades 3-8 is scored on a scale of 300-900.

¹Averages are subject to rounding error.

Figure AL-6. Mathematics Achievement Trends in Terms of Effect Sizes

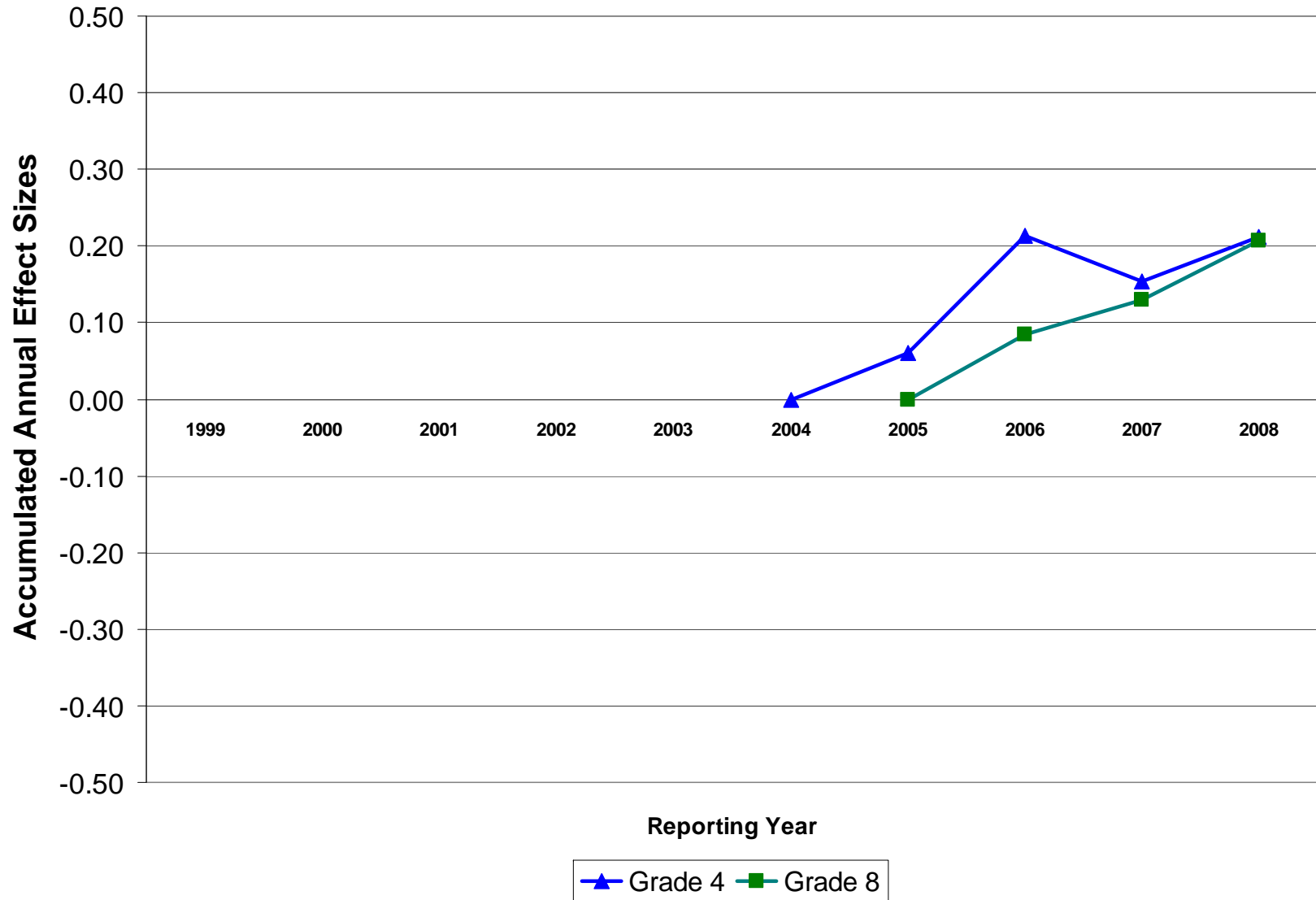


Table AL-6. Mathematics Achievement Trends in Terms of Effect Sizes

Grade Level		Reporting Year									Pre-NCLB Average Yearly Effect Size Gain 1999-2002 ¹	Post-NCLB Average Yearly Effect Size Gain 2002-2008 ¹	
		1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007			2008
Grade 4	MSS (SD)						627.5 (39.2)	629.8 (37.9)	635.6 (38.7)	633.4 (37.5)	635.6 (38.7)		
	AAES						0.00	0.06	0.21	0.15	0.21	NA	0.05
Grade 8	MSS (SD)							680.1 (31.9)	682.8 (32.4)	684.3 (34.6)	687.0 (36.8)		
	AAES							0.00	0.08	0.13	0.21	NA	0.07
Grade 11	MSS (SD)												
	AAES												

Table reads: The mean scale score (MSS) of 4th graders on the state math test increased from 627.5 in 2004 to 635.6 in 2008. The standard deviation (SD) for the mean scale score in 2004 was 39.2. Using 2004 as a starting point (0.00), the accumulated annual effect size (AAES) for grade 4 math totaled 0.21 by 2008. For the post-NCLB period, the average yearly gain in effect size at grade 4 was 0.05.

Note: The Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test (ARMT) for grades 3-8 is scored on a scale of 300-900.

¹Averages are subject to rounding error.

Key Terms

Percentage proficient (and above) — The percentage of students in a group who score at and above the cut score for “proficient” performance on the state test used to determine progress under NCLB. The Act requires states to report student test performance in terms of at least three achievement levels: basic, proficient, and advanced. Adequate yearly progress determinations are based on the percentage of students scoring at the proficient level and above.

Percentage basic (and above) — The percentage of students in a group who score at and above the cut score for “basic” performance on the state test used to determine progress under NCLB.

Percentage advanced — The percentage of students in a group who reach or exceed the cut score for “advanced” performance on the state test used to determine progress under NCLB.

Moderate-to-large gain — For the percentage basic, proficient, or advanced, an average gain of 1 or more percentage points per year. For effect size, an average gain of 0.02 or greater per year.

Slight gain — For the percentage basic, proficient, or advanced, an average gain of less than 1 percentage point per year. For effect size, an average gain of less than 0.02 per year.

Moderate-to-large decline — For the percentage basic, proficient, or advanced, an average decline of 1 or more percentage points per year. For effect size, an average decline of 0.02 or greater per year.

Slight decline — For the percentage basic, proficient, or advanced, an average decline of less than 1 percentage points per year. For effect size, an average decline of less than 0.02 per year.

Effect size — A statistical tool that conveys the amount of difference between test results using a common unit of measurement which does not depend on the scoring scale for a particular test.

Accumulated annual effect size — The cumulative gain in effect size over a range of years.

Mean scale score — The arithmetical average of a group of test scores, expressed on a common scale for a particular state’s test. The mean is calculated by adding the scores and dividing the sum by the number of scores.

Standard deviation — A measure of how much test scores tend to deviate from the mean—in other words, how spread out or bunched together test scores are. If students’ scores are bunched together, with many scores close to the mean, then the standard deviation will be small. If scores are spread out, with many students scoring at the high or low ends of the scale, then the standard deviation will be large.

Cautions and Explanations

Different labels for achievement levels — For consistency, all of the state profiles developed for this report use a common set of labels (basic, proficient, and advanced) for the main achievement levels required by NCLB. In practice, however, some states may use different labels, such as “meets standard” instead of proficient, and some states have established additional achievement levels beyond those required by NCLB.

Different names for subgroups — For the sake of consistency and ease of data tabulation, all of the state profiles developed for this report use a common set of names for the major student subgroups. In practice, however, states use various names for subgroups that may differ from those used here (such as using “Hispanic” instead of “Latino,” or “special education students” instead of “students with disabilities”). Moreover, a few states separately track the performance of subgroups not included in the analyses for this report.

Special caution for students with disabilities and English language learners — Trends for students with disabilities and English language learners should be interpreted with caution because changes in federal guidance and state accountability plans may have altered which students in these subgroups are tested for accountability purposes, how they are tested, and when their test scores are counted as proficient under NCLB. These factors could affect the year-to-year comparability of test results.

Inclusion of former English language learners — In many states, the subgroup of English language learners (also known as limited English proficient students) includes students who were formerly English language learners but who have achieved English language proficiency or fluency in the last two years. Federal NCLB regulations permit states to include these formerly ELL students (sometimes referred to as “redesignated fluent English proficient” students) in the ELL subgroup for up to two years for purposes of NCLB accountability.

Limitations of percentage proficient measure — The percentage proficient, the main gauge of student performance under NCLB, can be easily understood and gives a snapshot of how many students have met their state’s performance expectations. But it also has several limitations as a measure of student achievement. Users of percentage proficient data should keep in mind these limitations, particularly the following:

- * “Proficient” means different things across different states. States vary widely in curriculum, learning expectations, and tests, and state tests differ considerably in their difficulty and cut scores for proficient performance.
- * Although this study has taken steps to avoid comparing test data where there have been “breaks” in comparability resulting from new tests, changes in content standards, revised cut scores, or other major changes in testing programs, the year-to-year comparability of test results in the same state may still be affected by less obvious policy and demographic changes.
- * Changes in student performance may occur that are not reflected in percentage proficient data, such as an increase in the number of students reaching performance levels below and above proficient (such as the basic or advanced levels).
- * The size of the achievement gaps between various subgroups depends in part on where a state sets its cut score for proficiency. For example, if a proficiency cut score is set so high that almost nobody reaches it or so low that almost everyone reaches it, there will be little apparent achievement gap. By contrast, if the cut score is closer to the mean test score, the gaps between subgroups will be more apparent.

Difficulty of attributing causes — Although the tables above show trends in test scores since the enactment of NCLB, one cannot assume that these trends have occurred *because* of NCLB. It is always difficult to determine a cause-and-effect relationship between test score trends and any specific education policy or program due to the many federal, state, and local reforms undertaken in recent years and due to the lack of an appropriate “control” group of students not affected by NCLB.