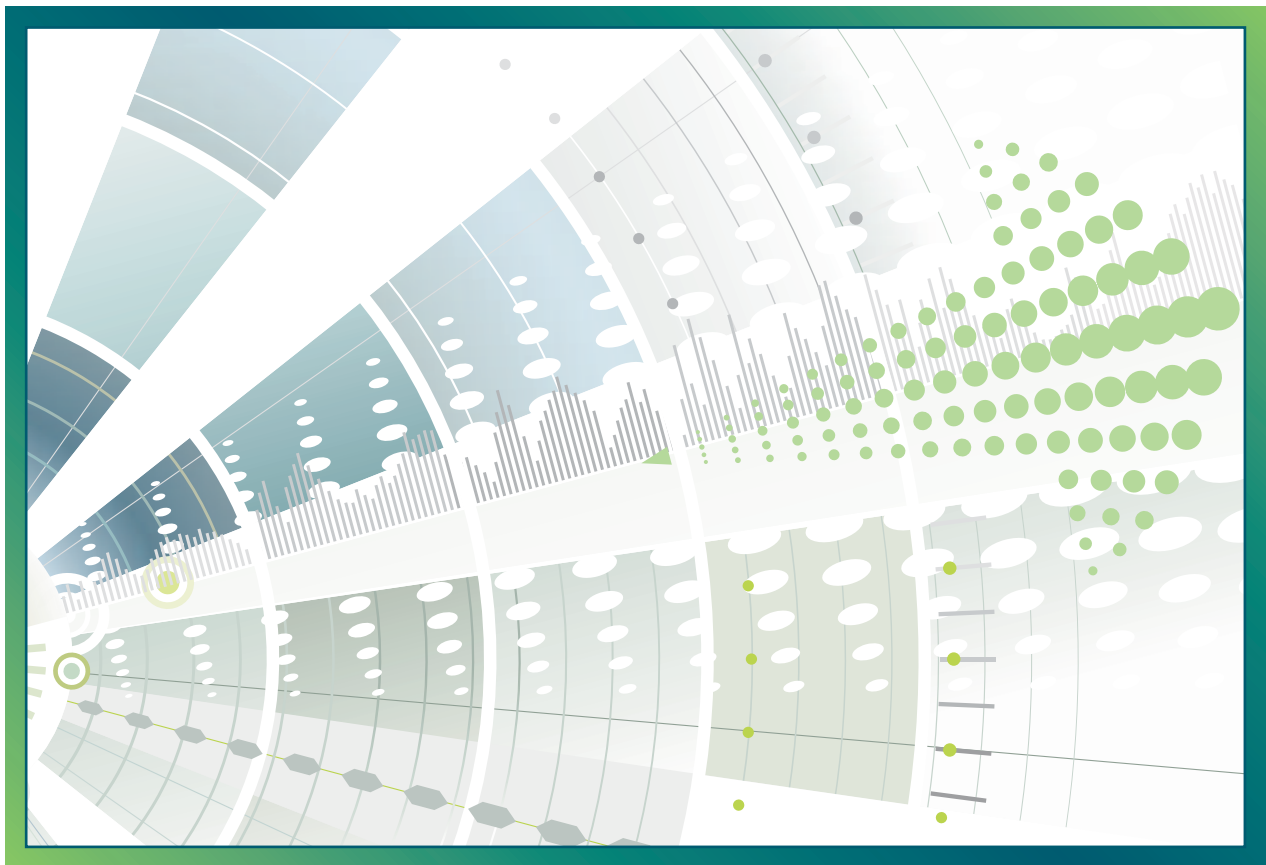


*Student Achievement Policy Brief #2:
Asian American Students*

Policy Implications of Trends for Asian American Students



Policy Implications of Trends for Asian American Students

Introduction and Summary

Asian American students, who comprise almost 5% of public school students in the U.S., are a very diverse group. In the aggregate, Asian Americans often have the highest achievement on state tests among major racial/ethnic subgroups. But this overall high performance can sometimes lead educators and policymakers to overlook the needs of low-achieving Asian American students, many of whom are immigrants, refugees, or English language learners (ELLs). This brief looks at the performance of Asian American students on state reading and mathematics tests and considers the policy implications of these achievement trends.

Part 1 summarizes key results for Asian Americans on the state tests used for accountability under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Included are trends since 2002 in the percentages of Asian American students reaching the proficient and advanced levels of achievement on state tests, as well as various analyses of 2008 state test data for Asian Americans and other racial/ethnic groups. The information in part 1 is drawn from an immense set of test data from all 50 states that was gathered by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) with technical support from the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) and was verified by state officials. For the past three years, CEP has used these data to do an ongoing study of state test score trends. Previous CEP reports with more detailed findings about achievement for various subgroups and for students overall can be accessed at www.cep-dc.org.

Part 2 of this brief considers the policy implications of Asian American achievement trends. We arrived at these implications after reviewing studies by other researchers about possible factors affecting the achievement of Asian American students.

Our own achievement studies and our review of other research revealed several key findings and policy implications about the state test performance of Asian American students:

- ***Rising achievement.*** Since 2002, Asian American students as a group have made gains on state tests. For example, the percentage of Asian American students scoring at the proficient level in grade 4 reading increased in 26 out of 33 states with sufficient test data and with sufficiently large Asian subgroups. In grade 4 math, the percentage proficient for Asian Americans increased in 29 out of 33 states. In some cases, gains for Asian American student have outpaced those for other racial/ethnic subgroups, which means that other subgroups will have to improve at an even faster rate to close the gap.
- ***Highest-performing racial/ethnic group.*** According to the median¹ percentages of students scoring proficient in 2008 across all states with sufficient test data, the Asian

¹ The median is the middle number in a list of numbers ordered by value, so that half of the numbers in the list are greater in value than the median and half are less. As used in this paper, the median percentage proficient for a specific subgroup in a particular subject and grade (such as Asian American students in grade 8 math) represents the midpoint across all of the states with sufficient data and with sufficiently large Asian American subgroups; half of these states had percentages proficient above the median and half had percentages proficient below.

American subgroup was the highest-performing racial/ethnic subgroup in math at all three grade levels analyzed (4, 8, and high school) and in reading at grades 4 and 8. In high school reading, the median percentages proficient for whites and Asian Americans were the same. Asian American 4th graders also outperformed other racial/ethnic subgroups at the advanced level of achievement on state tests. Patterns were similar in five of the six states that together enroll more than half of the nation's Asian American students. The main exception was Hawaii, which has a high percentage of Native Hawaiian students, who are included in the Asian subgroup for NCLB purposes. In Hawaii, the white subgroup outperformed the Asian American subgroup across the board.

- **Differences by subject and grade level.** The main exception to the general pattern of Asian American students outperforming other racial/ethnic groups occurred in high school reading, where white students did better than Asian American students in most states with sufficient data and a sufficiently large Asian subgroup. Generally speaking, instances in which the Asian American subgroup outperformed other subgroups were somewhat less common in reading than in math, and less common at the high school level than at the elementary or middle school levels. These findings suggests a need for stronger efforts to improve achievement among Asian American students who are English language learners and to explore reasons why Asian American student achievement declines in high school.
- **Lower-achieving Asian students.** The high performance of the Asian American subgroup as a whole tends to mask the academic needs of Asian American students who are not doing as well. In some states in certain subjects and grade levels, the Asian American subgroup performs markedly below the white subgroup. This may be because the Asian American group includes significant percentages of students who are recent immigrants or refugees, have limited English proficiency, or come from Asian ethnic groups with unique educational challenges.
- **Policy implications.** Schools, districts, states, and the federal government could develop policies to improve achievement for Asian American students who are not high achievers. These might include such actions as further disaggregating Asian American achievement data by language minority and ethnic groups to determine which students need additional services; improving educators' cultural awareness and effectiveness in working with various ethnic groups of Asian American students; and improving assessment and instruction for ELLs. On the positive side, policymakers, educators, and community leaders could draw from the Asian American experience to foster factors such as student motivation, effort, and parental involvement that could improve learning for all racial/ethnic groups.

Other policy briefs in this series examine the implications of our findings about achievement for African American and Latino students.

Background on Asian American Students

This policy brief focuses on the achievement of the Asian American subgroup in the aggregate, which is how test scores are tracked for NCLB accountability. But it is important to keep in mind, as explained in **box A**, that the catch-all term “Asian American” encompasses both low- and high-performing individuals, as well as students from very diverse ethnic, linguistic, and economic backgrounds.

Box A. Diversity within Racial/Ethnic Subgroups

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, schools and districts must collect and separately report test results and other achievement data for each major racial/ethnic subgroup in the state, as well as for low-income students, English language learners, and students with disabilities. The most common racial/ethnic subgroups tracked by states include African American, Asian American, Latino, Native American, and white students. Schools, districts, and states must report the percentages of students in each major subgroup scoring at the proficient level on state tests.

These aggregate test results conceal the considerable diversity found within every racial/ethnic group. Each group includes high- and low-achieving students, as well as students in the middle of the achievement scale. Each group has students from low-income, middle-class, and affluent families and from a range of family circumstances. Each group encompasses children from a variety of nationality and cultural backgrounds. For example, the culture of a Filipino student may be very different from that of a Japanese student, just as the culture of a child who is a recent immigrant from Cambodia is unlike that of an Indian American child with roots in Virginia for many generations. In addition, each racial/ethnic group includes, to varying degrees, students who are recent immigrants and refugees and students whose native language is not English.

Aggregate reporting of test results can also mask the existence of subpopulations within the larger group that have unique educational needs. For example, Hmong children are likely to have different educational needs than Chinese American children whose families have lived in the American West since the 19th century.

Although an analysis of trends for racial/ethnic subgroups as a whole can shed light on critical educational issues, one should keep in mind the diverse composition of the subgroup.

The 4.8% of U.S. students who are Asian American (U.S. Department of Education, 2009a) includes Chinese, Vietnamese, Asian Indian, Korean, Filipino, Japanese, Cambodian, and Laotian students, among others. In addition, nearly all states count Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian students in the Asian American subgroup for NCLB accountability purposes, even though they are a distinct group with unique educational challenges. Separate state test data for Pacific Islanders are typically not available, so the Asian American data in this report also include Pacific Islanders.

The Asian American subgroup includes many immigrants, refugees, and first-generation U.S.-born children, as well as children whose families have been in this country for many generations. Refugees, such as the Hmong from Laos, may have faced trauma, hunger, or war, and had very little formal education in their native country, in contrast with children of highly educated Asian immigrants. Nearly one out of four Asian American students has limited English proficiency and/or lives in a linguistically isolated household where parents have limited English proficiency (White House Initiative, 2009). A wide variety of languages are represented among Asian Americans who are English language learners.

About 10% of Asian American children under 18 live in families with incomes below the poverty level, roughly the same percentage as for white children and less than the national average of nearly 16%. However, some Asian ethnic groups, such as Vietnamese students, have notably higher poverty rates, as do Pacific Islanders/Native Hawaiians (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

Although the dropout rate for Asian American students is lower on average than for other racial/ethnic subgroups (U.S. Department of Education, 2010), some Asian ethnic groups, such as Hmong, Laotian, and Cambodian students, have staggering dropout rates of 35% or more (White House Initiative, 2009).

The test data that states provided for our achievement studies do not further disaggregate Asian American results according to students' ethnic or economic backgrounds, immigration or refugee status, or ELL status. For that reason, it is not possible to compare test results based on these characteristics, but these differences should still be considered in discussions of Asian American achievement.

Part 1. State Test Results for Asian American Students

To understand better the achievement of Asian American students, we looked at trends since 2002 in the percentages of Asian American students scoring at the proficient and advanced levels on state tests. We then took a closer look at various types of test results for 2008 for Asian American students and other racial/ethnic subgroups.

Not all states had comparable data going back to 2002 because some states have changed their testing programs or cut scores for proficiency since that time. To address this situation, our analyses of achievement trends over time included only those states that had at least three consecutive years of comparable test data extending through 2008, the most recent year available at the time we collected data for our 2009 achievement studies. In addition, states were excluded from our analyses if the number of Asian American test-takers was small (fewer than 500 students for the particular grade level and subject being analyzed).²

Because of the enormous amount of data involved in analyzing test results for 50 states, five subgroups, two subjects, and up to eight testing years, our analyses focused on grade 4, grade 8, and the high school grade tested for NCLB (usually grade 10 or 11). In some cases we looked at data for all tested elementary and middle school grades (3-8) to confirm whether the trends found at grades 4 and 8 held true at other grades.

Additional findings for racial/ethnic subgroups are discussed in CEP's 2009 report, *State Test Score Trends Through 2007-08, Part 3: Are Achievement Gaps Closing and Is Achievement Rising for All?*

GAINS BY ASIAN AMERICAN STUDENTS SINCE 2002

Generally speaking, Asian American students have improved their achievement on state tests since 2002, the year NCLB was enacted. Between 2002 and 2008, the percentage of Asian Americans scoring at the proficient level on state tests increased in both math and reading in the vast majority of states with sufficient data. (The percentage proficient is the main indicator of progress used for NCLB accountability.) We had percentage proficient data for the Asian American subgroup for 183 out of a possible 300 trend lines (two subjects times three grade levels times 50 states). The 183 total excludes states with fewer than three years of data

² These and other rules for analysis for CEP's achievement studies were developed with advice from a panel of experts in education testing and education policy. Members of the expert panel include Laura Hamilton, senior behavioral scientist, RAND Corporation; Eric Hanushek, senior fellow, Hoover Institution; Frederick Hess, director of education policy studies, American Enterprise Institute; Robert L. Linn, professor emeritus, University of Colorado; and W. James Popham, professor emeritus, University of California, Los Angeles.

between 2002 and 2008 and states with fewer than 500 Asian American students tested at a given grade. Out of the 183 trend lines, there were 149 gains and 29 declines. As shown in **table 1**, which focuses on grade 4, 26 of the 33 states with sufficient comparable data and sufficiently large Asian American subgroups showed gains in the percentage proficient for Asian Americans in grade reading, and 29 out of 33 states with sufficient data showed gains in grade 4 math. Asian Americans also showed progress in a large majority of states at the advanced level of achievement. These patterns were similar to the rising trends observed for other major racial/ethnic subgroups.

Table 1. Number of states showing various trends for Asian American 4th graders between 2002 and 2008*

Subject & proficiency level	States with gains	States with declines	States with no net change	States with sufficient data
Reading				
Proficient	26	6	1	33
Advanced	22	9	1	32
Math				
Proficient	29	4	0	33
Advanced	29	3	0	32

Table reads: Between 2002 and 2008, 26 of the 33 states with sufficient data and sufficiently large Asian subgroups showed gains in the percentage of Asian American students scoring at the proficient level on state reading tests, while 6 states showed declines for this subgroup, and 1 showed no net change.

*Not all states had comparable data going back to 2002 because they had made changes in their state testing systems or cut scores.

Because the Asian American and white subgroups are typically the highest-scoring racial/ethnic subgroups, our analyses of racial/ethnic achievement gaps did not focus on the white-Asian American gap. But it is worth noting that in many instances, the Asian American subgroup made greater gains between 2002 and 2008 than the white subgroup, ending up farther ahead of white students than when they started. This means that white students, as well as other racial/ethnic subgroups, will have to improve at an even faster rate to close gaps with Asian Americans.

ACHIEVEMENT IN 2008 FOR ASIAN AMERICANS AND OTHER RACIAL/ETHNIC SUBGROUPS

Obtaining a national picture of achievement for different racial/ethnic subgroups is complicated because state tests vary widely in their content, difficulty, format, cut scores for various achievement levels, and other characteristics. For this policy brief, we compared the median percentages proficient on 2008 state tests for Asian Americans and four other racial/ethnic subgroups across all of the states with at least three years of comparable data through 2008. The median percentage proficient for a specific subgroup, subject, and grade (such as Asian American students in grade 8 math) represents the midpoint in a list of percentages proficient in rank order from all states with sufficient data; half of these states had percentages proficient that were higher than the median and half had percentages that were lower. Medians were calculated for grades 4, 8, and the high school grade tested for NCLB.

States were excluded from the median calculations for a particular racial/ethnic subgroup if the number of test-takers for that subgroup was fewer than 500 for a specific grade and subject. Depending on the grade and subject, between 10 and 15 states were excluded due to small Asian American subgroups in reading, and between 14 and 15 states were excluded for this reason in math. Between one and eight states were excluded because they had too few years of comparable data for Asian Americans. In some states, the Asian American subgroup was compared with fewer than four other racial/ethnic subgroups because other subgroups (most often Native Americans) were too small.

As displayed in **table 2**, the national median percentage proficient in math for 2008 was higher for Asian American students than for other subgroups all three grade levels analyzed. In grade 4 math, for example, the median was 88% for Asian American students, 56% for African American students, 67% for Latino students, 63% for Native American students, and 82% for white students, the second highest-performing group.

Table 2. Median percentages of students scoring proficient on state tests for Asian Americans and other racial/ethnic subgroups, 2008					
Subject & grade	Asian American	African American	Latino	Native American	White
Reading					
Grade 4	83%	58%	64%	62%	81%
Grade 8	83%	58%	58%	57%	81%
High school	78%	53%	56%	57%	78%
Math					
Grade 4	88%	56%	67%	63%	82%
Grade 8	86%	46%	55%	54%	77%
High school	81%	45%	50%	44%	71%

Table reads: In grade 4 reading, the median percentage of students scoring proficient on state tests was 83% for the Asian American subgroup, 58% for African Americans, 64% for Latino students, 62% for Native Americans, and 81% for white students.

Note: Subgroups were excluded from the calculations in this table if the number of test-takers was small (fewer than 500 students in the grade level analyzed) or if data for a particular subgroup were missing for other reasons.

In reading, the median percentage proficient was slightly higher for Asian American students than for white students at grades 4 and 8, and was the same as for white students in high school.

There is a great deal of variation among states in terms of the difficulty of their tests and the location of cut scores to determine proficiency, as well as demographics and actual achievement levels. States with low percentages proficient may have harder tests or higher cut scores than states with high percentages proficient. To give an indication of the range among states, we identified the lowest and highest percentages proficient in any state for each racial/ethnic subgroup in a particular subject and grade. **Table 3** shows these ranges from lowest to highest for Asian American students.

Table 3. Lowest and highest percentages proficient in any state for Asian American students, 2008

Subject & grade	Lowest	Highest
Reading		
Grade 4	55%	96%
Grade 8	50%	97%
High school	48%	98%
Math		
Grade 4	47%	97%
Grade 8	34%	96%
High school	29%	98%

Table reads: In grade 4 reading, the lowest percentage proficient in any state for Asian American students was 55%, while the highest percentage proficient in any state for this subgroup was 96%.

Note: Subgroups were excluded from the calculations in this table if the number of test-takers was small (fewer than 500 students in the grade level analyzed) or if data for a particular subgroup were missing for other reasons.

At the individual state level, Asian Americans were the highest-performing racial/ethnic subgroup in a large majority of states. The tables in the appendix show the 2008 percentages proficient in reading and math at grades 4, 8, and high school for the major racial/ethnic subgroups in each of the 50 states. In many states, including some where Asian Americans outperformed white students, the difference between these subgroups was just 1 or 2 percentage points.

STATES WITH THE LARGEST ASIAN AMERICAN ENROLLMENTS

Asian American students are not distributed evenly throughout the country; some states have many and most states have relatively few. The median percentages proficient in table 1 do not take into account differences in population. Therefore, as an additional check, we compared percentages proficient for Asian Americans and other racial/ethnic subgroups in the six states with the highest number of Asian American students, according to both the data on numbers of test-takers collected for our achievement studies and enrollment data from the Common Core of Data in the U.S. Department of Education (n.d.). These states include California, New York, Texas, Hawaii, New Jersey, and Washington; together they enroll more than half of the Asian American test-takers in the country.

As shown in **table 4**, our findings in five of these six states generally confirmed the pattern for Asian Americans that we observed using medians. Hawaii was a notable exception. In this state, the white subgroup outperformed the Asian American subgroup in all six subject/grade combinations; the other racial/ethnic subgroups in Hawaii were too small to include in our analysis. This trend probably occurs because for NCLB purposes, the Asian American subgroup in Hawaii also includes Native Hawaiians, a group that tends to have high levels of poverty, high dropout rates, and other educational challenges. The other exception occurred in high school reading in California, where white students outperformed Asian Americans by one percentage point.

Table 4. Percentage of students in racial/ethnic subgroups scoring proficient on 2008 state tests in the states that together enroll more than 50% of the Asian American test-takers nationwide

State	Reading					Math				
	Asian American	African American	Latino	Native American	White	Asian American	African American	Latino	Native American	White
Grade 4										
CA	78%	43%	41%	48%	74%	86%	46%	52%	50%	74%
NY	83%	56%	57%	61%	80%	94%	72%	77%	78%	90%
TX	94%	73%	78%	85%	91%	96%	73%	81%	84%	91%
HI	59%	n	n	n	74%	47%	n	n	n	58%
NJ	93%	67%	73%	n	89%	95%	68%	76%	n	92%
WA	78%	58%	52%	54%	77%	64%	31%	31%	32%	60%
Grade 8										
CA	69%	32%	31%	39%	63%	72%	24%	29%	30%	54%
NY	70%	38%	38%	42%	68%	88%	49%	55%	61%	80%
TX	97%	87%	89%	94%	96%	93%	61%	69%	78%	85%
HI	63%	n	n	n	78%	34%	n	n	n	43%
NJ	92%	62%	68%	n	90%	88%	38%	50%	n	79%
WA	76%	52%	52%	49%	69%	64%	28%	30%	32%	57%
High school										
CA	70%	37%	37%	50%	71%	82%	31%	37%	46%	68%
NY	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
TX	94%	81%	83%	86%	92%	87%	46%	54%	63%	76%
HI	66%	n	n	n	76%	33%	n	n	n	41%
NJ	91%	65%	69%	n	90%	91%	45%	57%	n	85%
WA	83%	63%	63%	62%	82%	56%	19%	23%	25%	50%

Table reads: In California, which has a large number of Asian American test-takers, 78% of Asian American students scored proficient in grade 4 reading, compared with 43% of African American students, 41% of Latino students, 48% of Native American students, and 74% of white students.

Note: NA = data not available; n = state percentage was not calculated because state had fewer than 500 test-takers per grade level and subject for this subgroup.

ASIAN AMERICAN STUDENT PERFORMANCE AT ALL TESTED GRADES

To check whether our findings about Asian American achievement at grades 4, 8, and high school were similar for other grades tested for NCLB accountability, we also examined percentages proficient at grades 3, 5, 6, and 7 for the Asian American and white subgroups in all states with sufficient comparable data and sufficiently large subgroups. Specifically, we looked at the number of instances in which the Asian American subgroup had a higher percentage proficient than the white subgroup in the same state, grade, and subject. For example, the comparison between these subgroups in Missouri in grade 4 reading would count as one instance. Across all states with sufficient data, all tested grades, and two subjects (reading and math), we made 491 such comparisons.³

³ The 491 instances include 216 instances in grades 3-5, 210 in grades 6-8, and 65 in the tested high school grade.

In general, we found that adding more grades supported the basic pattern. Across all tested grades and both subjects, the Asian American subgroup outperformed the white subgroup at the proficient level in two-thirds (66%) of the 491 instances analyzed, as displayed in **figure 1**. In 23% of these instances, white students outperformed Asian American students, and in 11% of instances the two subgroups scored virtually the same (less than a 1-point difference in the percentage proficient).

Figure 1. Percentage of instances in which Asian American or white students were the highest-performing subgroup across all tested grades in reading and math combined, 2008

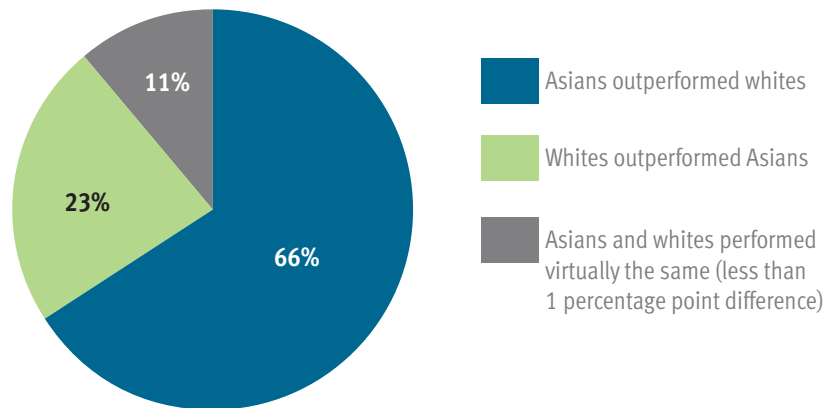


Figure reads: In 66% of the instances analyzed for the same state, subject, and grade level, Asian American students had higher percentages proficient than white students. In 23% of these instances, the white percentage proficient was higher than the Asian American percentage proficient, and in 11% of instances the percentage proficient was virtually the same for both groups (a difference of less than a 1 percentage point).

Note: States were excluded from the calculations in this table if they had small numbers of Asian American test-takers—fewer than 500 students per grade level—or were missing data for other reasons.

We did find differences by subject and grade span, however. **Table 5** shows data from all tested grades broken out by subject and grade span (grades 3-5, 6-8, and high school). As the table makes clear, the Asian American subgroup led other subgroups more often in math than in reading, and far more often in the lower grades than in high school. Asian American student performance was strongest relative to other groups in grades 6-8. The most obvious exception to the pattern of high Asian American performance was in high school reading—here, the Asian American subgroup outperformed the white subgroup in just 22% of the instances analyzed, compared with 59% of instances in grades 6-8 and 51% in grades 3-5.

The difference between the math and reading achievement of Asian American students could be attributed to the fact that many of the students in this subgroup are English language learners, who by definition have difficulty with reading in English. It is unclear, however, why the reading performance of Asian Americans dips in high school relative to white students. Some possible explanations merit further investigation. Research indicates that immigrants who arrive in the U.S. as adolescents are more likely to have difficulty in school than those who arrive at a younger age (Ima & Rumbaut, 1989). Asian American high school students who are ELLs may find fewer opportunities for intensive interventions to help them learn English or learn to read. In addition, some Asian American students with academic problems may remain in high school while their peers from other racial/ethnic

Table 5. Percentage of instances in which Asian American or white students were the highest-performing subgroup across all tested grades by subject and grade span, 2008

Subject & grade span	Asian Americans outperformed whites	Whites outperformed Asian Americans	Asian Americans and whites performed virtually the same*
Reading			
All grades combined	51%	31%	18%
Grades 3-5	51%	32%	17%
Grades 6-8	59%	25%	16%
High school grade tested	22%	50%	28%
Math			
All grades combined	80%	15%	5%
Grades 3-5	76%	17%	7%
Grades 6-8	84%	13%	3%
High school grade tested	79%	18%	3%

Table reads: In grades 3 through 5 across all of the states with sufficient data and sufficiently large Asian and white subgroups, the Asian American subgroup had a higher percentage proficient than the white subgroup in reading in 51% of the instances analyzed, while whites had a higher percentage proficient than Asian Americans in 31% of the instances. In 18% of the instances analyzed for these grades, the percentage proficient was virtually the same for the Asian American and white subgroups.

Note: States were excluded from the calculations in this table if they had fewer than 500 Asian American test-takers at the grade level being analyzed or were missing data for other reasons.

*The Asian American and white subgroups were considered to have performed virtually the same if there was less than 1 percentage point difference between them.

groups have already dropped out. In some urban areas, Asian American gangs are a negative influence on older students (Kim & Goto, 2000). At the same time, incidents of violence and bullying against Asian American students by other students have been reported in certain cities (AALDEF, 2010a; 2010b). Finally, interruptions in schooling may be a factor for high school students who are refugees.

ASIAN AMERICAN GRADE 4 ACHIEVEMENT AT THE ADVANCED LEVEL

In addition to analyzing percentages proficient, we also looked at the percentage of students in various subgroups scoring at or above at the advanced level of achievement in 2008 on state tests. Because of the large quantity of data involved, our 2009 study of advanced-level achievement focused on grade 4 only.

As shown in **table 6**, Asian American 4th graders outperformed the white subgroup at the advanced level, particularly in math. The median percentage of Asian American 4th graders scoring advanced was 46% in math and 37% in reading—higher than the white percentages advanced of 36% in both reading and math and greater than the comparable percentages for other racial/ethnic subgroups (not shown in the table).

Table 6. Performance of Asian American and white 4th graders at the advanced level on state tests, 2008

Subject	Asian American median % advanced	White median % advanced	States in which Asian Americans outperformed whites at advanced level	States in which whites outperformed Asian Americans at advanced level	Number of states with sufficient data
READING	37%	36%	AL, AR, CA, CT, FL, GA, IL, IA, IN, LA, MA, MD, MI, MO, NC, NJ, NV, NY, OH, OK, OR, PA, SC, TN, TX, VA, WA (27 states)	AK, AZ, CO, HI, KS, MN, UT, WI (8 states)	35
MATH	46%	36%	AL, AZ, CA, CO, CT, FL, IA, IL, IN, KS, LA, MA, MD, MI, MO, NC, NJ, NV, NY, OH, OK, OR, PA, SC, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA (29 states)	AK, AR, HI, MN, WI (5 states)	34

Table reads: Among the states with sufficient data and sufficiently large Asian and white subgroups, the 2008 median percentage of 4th graders scoring at the advanced level of achievement on state tests was 37% for Asian Americans and 36% for white students in reading. Asian 4th graders outperformed white 4th graders at the advanced level in 27 of the 35 states with sufficient data.

Note: States were excluded if they had small numbers of Asian American or white test-takers (fewer than 500 students per grade level) or were missing data for other reasons.

LOWER ASIAN AMERICAN PERFORMANCE IN SOME STATES

The overall high performance of the Asian American subgroup has contributed to the stereotype that Asian Americans are the “model minority” that excels academically without special attention. This view ignores the fact that some Asian American students are struggling academically and require additional services to succeed. As noted above, nearly one in four Asian American students is an English language learner. Some are also recent immigrants or refugees, and some have fled traumatic situations in their home countries. Some Asian American students come from low-income families and may face other problems associated with poverty.

In four states—Alaska, Hawaii, Minnesota, and Wisconsin—the Asian American subgroup had notably lower achievement on state tests than the white subgroup at grades 4, 8, and high school in both reading and math. **Table 7** compares the percentages proficient for Asian

Table 7. Percentages proficient in states in which the Asian American subgroup performed lower the white subgroup at three grade levels in math and reading, 2008

State	Grade 4 reading		Grade 8 reading		High school reading		Grade 4 math		Grade 8 math		High school math	
	Asian Amer.	White	Asian Amer.	White	Asian Amer.	White	Asian Amer.	White	Asian Amer.	White	Asian Amer.	White
Alaska	79%	90%	83%	92%	71%	90%	74%	83%	68%	77%	60%	71%
Hawaii	59%	74%	63%	78%	66%	76%	47%	58%	34%	43%	33%	41%
Minnesota	62%	79%	54%	72%	58%	78%	64%	77%	52%	63%	29%	38%
Wisconsin	74%	87%	76%	90%	62%	82%	76%	83%	73%	83%	62%	77%

Table reads: In Alaska, the 2008 percentage proficient in grade 4 reading was 79% for the Asian American subgroup, compared with 90% for the white subgroup.

American and white students in these states. In some cases, the white subgroup outperformed the Asian American group by as much as 15 to 20 percentage points. In Wisconsin, for example, the percentage proficient in high school math was 62% for Asian American students, compared with 77% for white students; in Minnesota, the percentage proficient in high school reading was 58% for Asian American students, compared with 78% for white students.

In one additional state, Kansas, Asian American students had notably lower percentages proficient than white students in reading only at grades 4, 8, and high school.

Although our achievement data do not include information about the backgrounds of Asian American students, other evidence suggests that variations in performance among states may be partly explained by differences in subgroup composition, such as a different mix of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and income levels. In Minnesota and Wisconsin, for example, a substantial share of the Asian American student population is Hmong, a group that tends to have low income and educational levels—about 45% of adult Hmong Americans have no formal schooling (AALDEF, 2008). In the St. Paul Public Schools district, which has the largest Hmong student population in the U.S., about 90% of the Asian American students are Hmong (Watkins, 2006). Hmong children often have higher dropout rates, lower English proficiency, and lower achievement levels than many other Asian American groups, and many are English language learners (AALDEF, 2008). These factors could account for the lower performance of the Asian American subgroup in these two states.

The Asian American student populations in Hawaii and Alaska are also unique. In Hawaii, students who are Asian American/Pacific Islander make up 73% of the state's K-12 enrollment; many of the state's students are Native Hawaiian, a group with historically lower income and educational attainment (U.S. Department of Education, 2009b; Hawaii Department of Education, n.d.). In Alaska, Filipinos are the largest ethnic group among the Asian American population; in this state, Filipino families tend to have higher dropout rates and lower income levels relative to many other Asian ethnic groups (Alaska History and Cultural Studies, n.d.).

Part 2. Policy Implications

Although our own achievement studies did not gather evidence about the reasons underlying the Asian American trends identified in part 1, we do believe it is critical for policymakers, educators, and others to consider the policy implications of these findings. To understand these implications better, we reviewed several studies by other research organizations of factors that appear to contribute to the high performance of Asian American students as a group and the lower performance of some Asian American students. These studies, which appear in the reference list at the end of this brief, point to a variety of factors that could be the focus of policy actions.

Many of the factors that seem to have a bearing on high achievement for Asian students relate to home environments and social structures outside of school. For example, many Asian American parents set high expectations for their children's education, as evidenced by such activities as monitoring their children's school performance, obtaining information about school curriculum and college requirements, encouraging participation in out-of-school learning activities, and holding their children responsible for their own learning. This may reflect the fact that many Asian immigrant parents were often very motivated to come to the U.S. and made sacrifices to provide their children with better educational and economic opportunities. Perhaps mirroring the values of their parents, many Asian American

students are themselves strongly motivated and put considerable effort into schoolwork. Asian Americans spend a greater than average time on school assignments and engage in helpful study habits, such as forming study groups (Peng & Wright, 1994; Zhao & Qiu, 2009; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992; Nickerson & Kritsonis, 2006; Liu, 2006).

At the same time, Asian American students are less likely to be top-performers in reading and at the high school level in general. Furthermore, some Asian American children struggle in school, and some Asian ethnic groups are beset by unique educational challenges. Policymakers need to dig deeper into the reasons for this situation and develop policies that recognize and address the needs of Asian American students who need additional services.

Based on these factors, local, state, and federal governments might consider the following types of policies to strengthen achievement for Asian American students, especially those with lower achievement:

- Continue to disaggregate achievement data by subgroup and to hold schools accountable for subgroup progress in whatever accountability system replaces NCLB
- Further disaggregate Asian American student achievement data by ELL status and by ethnic subpopulations within the Asian subgroup as part of the longitudinal data systems being developed by states
- Pay greater attention to the language, economic, and migration backgrounds of various Asian American ethnic groups and develop interventions and instructional programs attuned to their special needs
- Refine language proficiency assessments, test accommodations, and other testing policies for ELLs to better inform teaching and learning
- Improve classroom instruction and interventions for Asian American students who are ELLs
- Provide preservice and in-service professional development to improve the cultural awareness and effectiveness of teachers and school leaders in working with Asian American students
- Develop or refine programs that expand learning opportunities for ELLs and for other struggling Asian American students

On the positive side, drawing from the Asian American experience, schools, districts, states, and the federal government could also consider the following types of policies to foster student motivation and improve learning for all racial/ethnic groups:

- Assess students' attitudes, interests, and values and develop policies to improve motivation among students and to encourage high expectations for achievement among educators
- Work closely with families and communities of all racial/ethnic subgroups and language minority groups to strengthen their involvement in schools and build home-school relationships that reinforce learning

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Appendix

Table A-1. Grade 4 percentages of students in racial/ethnic subgroups scoring proficient on state tests, 2008

State	Reading					Math				
	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White
AK	n	79%	82%	62%	90%	n	74%	73%	56%	83%
AL	78%	95%	79%	n	91%	69%	93%	72%	n	85%
AR	48%	69%	54%	n	75%	54%	76%	67%	n	82%
AZ	62%	82%	58%	51%	83%	64%	88%	66%	56%	85%
CA	43%	78%	41%	48%	74%	46%	86%	52%	50%	74%
CO	82%	94%	80%	83%	95%	79%	95%	83%	84%	96%
CT	45%	82%	43%	n	81%	61%	93%	63%	n	90%
DE	69%	n	77%	n	89%	62%	n	73%	n	88%
FL	53%	82%	64%	75%	81%	54%	87%	66%	76%	80%
GA	81%	95%	83%	n	93%	57%	90%	67%	n	80%
HI	n	59%	n	n	74%	n	47%	n	n	58%
IA	56%	78%	61%	n	80%	55%	85%	65%	n	83%
ID	n	n	64%	n	87%	n	n	72%	n	87%
IL	56%	88%	59%	n	84%	69%	95%	77%	n	93%
IN	55%	78%	58%	n	78%	55%	84%	63%	n	78%
KS	71%	87%	73%	n	91%	71%	92%	77%	n	90%
KY	51%	n	65%	NA	74%	51%	n	63%	NA	74%
LA	60%	83%	65%	n	80%	53%	88%	69%	n	81%
MA	25%	56%	23%	n	56%	26%	66%	28%	n	56%
MD	82%	96%	84%	n	94%	81%	97%	84%	n	95%
ME	n	n	n	n	64%	n	n	n	n	61%
MI	69%	92%	77%	83%	89%	69%	95%	79%	85%	91%
MN	44%	62%	47%	53%	79%	38%	64%	43%	50%	77%
MO	27%	55%	31%	n	51%	22%	62%	33%	n	50%
MS	36%	n	87%	n	63%	42%	n	83%	n	68%
MT	n	n	n	55%	82%	n	n	n	42%	70%
NC	41%	71%	43%	47%	43%	55%	88%	67%	66%	84%
ND	n	n	n	52%	80%	n	n	n	54%	81%
NE	81%	90%	86%	85%	94%	85%	95%	91%	85%	95%
NH	n	n	54%	n	75%	n	n	44%	n	69%
NJ	67%	93%	73%	n	89%	68%	95%	76%	n	92%
NM	48%	n	44%	36%	69%	32%	n	33%	25%	55%
NV	44%	70%	45%	53%	69%	50%	79%	58%	61%	75%
NY	56%	83%	57%	61%	80%	72%	94%	77%	78%	90%
OH	59%	90%	69%	n	86%	49%	88%	59%	n	81%
OK	86%	95%	88%	92%	91%	67%	91%	75%	82%	87%
OR	76%	87%	66%	77%	87%	64%	83%	59%	69%	82%

Table A-1. Grade 4 percentages of students in racial/ethnic subgroups scoring proficient on state tests, 2008 *(continued)*

State	Reading					Math				
	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White
PA	45%	83%	49%	n	77%	56%	92%	64%	n	86%
RI	48%	n	40%	n	72%	36%	n	29%	n	63%
SC	28%	67%	33%	n	58%	22%	67%	31%	n	56%
SD	n	n	n	71%	93%	n	n	n	49%	85%
TN	85%	94%	82%	n	94%	83%	96%	87%	n	93%
TX	73%	94%	78%	85%	91%	73%	96%	81%	84%	91%
UT	58%	77%	54%	51%	82%	51%	81%	53%	53%	80%
VA	81%	94%	84%	89%	92%	74%	93%	76%	85%	89%
VT	n	n	n	n	69%	n	n	n	n	63%
WA	58%	78%	52%	54%	77%	31%	64%	31%	32%	60%
WI	57%	74%	66%	73%	87%	47%	76%	61%	65%	83%
WV	76%	n	n	n	82%	67%	n	n	n	77%
WY	n	n	62%	n	76%	n	n	68%	n	79%
US median*	58%	83%	64%	62%	81%	56%	88%	67%	63%	82%
Lowest	25%	55%	23%	36%	43%	22%	47%	28%	25%	50%
Highest	86%	96%	88%	92%	95%	85%	97%	91%	85%	96%

Table reads: In Alaska, 79% of Asian American students scored at the proficient level on the state grade 4 reading test. Comparable percentages proficient for other racial/ethnic subgroups were 82% for Latino students, 62% for Native American students, and 90% for white students. Results for African Americans are not included because the number of African American test-takers in Alaska was fewer than 500 at grade 4. Across all states with available data and with at least 500 African American test-takers in grade 4, the median percentage of African American students scoring proficient in grade 4 reading was 58%. Among these states, the lowest percentage proficient for African Americans in grade 4 reading was 25%, and the highest percentage was 86%.

Note: NA = data not available; n = state percentage was not calculated because state had fewer than 500 test-takers at this grade level.

*The median is the midpoint; half the states with data had percentages above this point and half had percentages below.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on data collected from state departments of education.

Table A-2. Grade 8 percentages of students in racial/ethnic subgroups scoring proficient on state tests, 2008

State	Reading					Math				
	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White
AK	n	83%	87%	71%	92%	n	68%	64%	51%	77%
AL	61%	85%	65%	80%	82%	53%	91%	63%	75%	77%
AR	45%	n	54%	n	75%	32%	n	46%	n	65%
AZ	59%	81%	54%	48%	80%	48%	81%	49%	42%	75%
CA	32%	69%	31%	39%	63%	24%	72%	29%	30%	54%
CO	80%	92%	77%	85%	93%	57%	88%	59%	65%	86%
CT	54%	89%	50%	n	87%	58%	93%	59%	n	91%
DE	68%	n	76%	n	89%	46%	n	56%	n	77%
FL	34%	69%	45%	58%	65%	46%	86%	61%	71%	78%
GA	86%	95%	83%	n	95%	49%	87%	55%	n	73%
HI	n	63%	n	n	78%	n	34%	n	n	43%
IA	45%	72%	48%	n	75%	46%	81%	55%	n	79%
ID	n	n	74%	n	91%	n	n	62%	n	82%
IL	69%	93%	74%	n	88%	61%	94%	75%	n	89%
IN	46%	74%	51%	n	73%	49%	84%	61%	n	80%
KS	63%	83%	63%	n	88%	50%	82%	54%	n	80%
KY	48%	n	57%	NA	69%	28%	n	39%	NA	54%
LA	42%	76%	58%	n	71%	39%	83%	56%	n	73%
MA	58%	81%	50%	n	81%	24%	68%	22%	n	56%
MD	58%	89%	62%	n	85%	41%	89%	51%	n	78%
ME	n	n	n	n	72%	n	n	n	n	52%
MI	58%	87%	65%	72%	83%	45%	89%	59%	67%	79%
MN	36%	54%	41%	42%	72%	23%	52%	28%	28%	63%
MO	24%	60%	33%	n	55%	17%	62%	32%	n	51%
MS	29%	n	n	n	61%	42%	n	n	n	68%
MT	n	n	n	58%	84%	n	n	n	29%	63%
NC	33%	65%	37%	38%	69%	50%	87%	59%	54%	80%
ND	n	n	n	52%	77%	n	n	n	45%	74%
NE	85%	94%	85%	82%	94%	80%	95%	85%	77%	82%
NH	n	n	n	n	68%	n	n	n	n	59%
NJ	62%	92%	68%	n	90%	38%	88%	50%	n	79%
NM	63%	n	58%	54%	77%	31%	n	29%	23%	55%
NV	37%	68%	40%	51%	69%	34%	70%	39%	45%	66%
NY	38%	70%	38%	42%	68%	49%	88%	55%	61%	80%
OH	58%	90%	66%	n	84%	46%	90%	58%	n	79%
OK	68%	87%	67%	82%	87%	69%	92%	74%	78%	86%
OR	50%	72%	40%	54%	71%	48%	81%	49%	57%	74%

Table A-2. Grade 8 percentages of students in racial/ethnic subgroups scoring proficient on state tests, 2008 (continued)

State	Reading					Math				
	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White
PA	57%	88%	58%	n	84%	46%	88%	51%	n	77%
RI	41%	n	38%	n	70%	25%	n	24%	n	57%
SC	13%	50%	18%	n	39%	8%	47%	14%	n	30%
SD	n	n	n	50%	84%	n	n	n	38%	81%
TN	90%	97%	88%	n	96%	82%	96%	87%	n	93%
TX	87%	97%	89%	94%	96%	61%	93%	69%	78%	85%
UT	64%	87%	61%	57%	87%	53%	79%	51%	47%	78%
VA	71%	92%	75%	89%	89%	72%	94%	74%	88%	89%
VT	n	n	n	n	69%	n	n	n	n	59%
WA	52%	76%	52%	49%	69%	28%	64%	30%	32%	57%
WI	59%	76%	68%	75%	90%	37%	73%	55%	64%	83%
WV	72%	n	n	n	81%	59%	n	n	n	73%
WY	n	n	56%	n	73%	n	n	48%	n	71%
US median*	58%	83%	58%	57%	81%	46%	86%	55%	54%	77%
Lowest	13%	50%	18%	38%	39%	8%	34%	14%	23%	30%
Highest	90%	97%	89%	94%	96%	82%	96%	87%	88%	93%

Table reads: In Alaska, 83% of Asian American students scored at the proficient level on the state grade 8 reading test. Comparable percentages proficient for other racial/ethnic groups were 87% for Latino students, 71% for Native American students, and 92% for white students. Results are not included for African Americans because the number of test-takers in this subgroup was fewer than 500 at grade 8. Across all states with available data and with at least 500 African American test-takers at grade 8, the median percentage of African American students scoring proficient in grade 8 reading was 58%. Among these states, the lowest percentage proficient for African Americans in grade 8 reading was 13%, and the highest percentage was 90%.

Note: NA = data not available; n = state percentage was not calculated because state had fewer than 500 test-takers per grade level.

*The median is the midpoint; half the states with data had percentages above this point and half had percentages below.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on data collected from state departments of education.

Table A-3. High school percentages of students in racial/ethnic subgroups scoring proficient on state tests, 2008

State	Reading					Math				
	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White
AK	n	71%	n	61%	90%	n	60%	n	43%	71%
AL	71%	85%	70%	87%	87%	74%	94%	83%	90%	90%
AR	23%	n	33%	n	61%	41%	78%	57%	n	74%
AZ	67%	85%	60%	53%	87%	56%	85%	56%	47%	80%
CA	37%	70%	37%	50%	71%	31%	82%	37%	46%	68%
CO	77%	91%	77%	82%	91%	41%	77%	42%	52%	76%
CT	61%	90%	62%	n	91%	50%	89%	55%	n	90%
DE	54%	n	56%	n	80%	58%	n	47%	n	69%
FL	17%	53%	30%	41%	50%	46%	86%	64%	73%	80%
GA	NA	NA	NA	n	NA	87%	98%	91%	n	96%
HI	n	66%	n	n	76%	n	33%	n	n	41%
IA	53%	79%	57%	n	79%	45%	77%	56%	n	80%
ID	n	n	67%	n	89%	n	n	57%	n	80%
IL	25%	64%	31%	n	65%	21%	78%	33%	n	64%
IN	41%	67%	47%	n	73%	36%	74%	49%	n	70%
KS	62%	78%	62%	n	86%	50%	81%	58%	n	81%
KY	43%	n	49%	NA	62%	18%	n	29%	NA	41%
LA	45%	69%	52%	n	70%	48%	87%	60%	n	79%
MA	55%	77%	49%	n	80%	48%	85%	46%	n	78%
MD	73%	91%	77%	n	83%	74%	89%	81%	n	82%
ME	n	n	n	n	49%	n	n	n	n	42%
MI	34%	69%	43%	56%	68%	13%	67%	28%	35%	53%
MN	36%	58%	42%	48%	78%	7%	29%	12%	11%	38%
MO	17%	48%	26%	n	44%	18%	64%	32%	n	53%
MS	32%	n	n	n	68%	44%	n	n	n	71%
MT	n	n	n	50%	80%	n	n	n	23%	56%
NC	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
ND	n	n	n	42%	67%	n	n	n	n	58%
NE	78%	89%	82%	82%	91%	79%	90%	79%	75%	87%
NH	n	n	n	n	67%	n	n	n	n	14%
NJ	65%	91%	69%	n	90%	45%	91%	57%	n	85%
NM	45%	n	43%	35%	65%	25%	n	25%	17%	52%
NV	63%	82%	62%	n	84%	26%	62%	31%	32%	59%
NY	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
OH	69%	91%	75%	n	89%	54%	92%	67%	n	85%
OK	57%	83%	61%	72%	81%	58%	91%	67%	71%	81%
OR	40%	67%	39%	53%	71%	25%	68%	30%	36%	57%

Table A-3. High school percentages of students in racial/ethnic subgroups scoring proficient on state tests, 2008 *(continued)*

State	Reading					Math				
	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White
PA	36%	71%	38%	n	71%	27%	78%	31%	n	62%
RI	41%	n	40%	n	68%	6%	n	6%	n	27%
SC	43%	75%	51%	n	76%	38%	82%	50%	n	73%
SD	n	n	n	42%	71%	n	n	n	31%	70%
TN	94%	98%	95%	n	98%	72%	95%	86%	n	94%
TX	81%	94%	83%	86%	92%	46%	87%	54%	63%	76%
UT	n	84%	57%	59%	86%	n	74%	41%	41%	73%
VA	89%	97%	91%	97%	97%	80%	95%	85%	87%	92%
VT	n	n	n	n	68%	n	n	n	n	30%
WA	63%	83%	63%	62%	82%	19%	56%	23%	25%	50%
WI	38%	62%	49%	61%	82%	25%	62%	41%	50%	77%
WV	63%	n	n	n	74%	49%	n	n	n	69%
WY	n	n	n	n	68%	n	n	n	n	67%
US median*	53%	78%	56%	57%	78%	45%	81%	50%	44%	71%
Lowest	17%	48%	26%	35%	44%	6%	29%	6%	11%	14%
Highest	94%	98%	95%	97%	98%	87%	98%	91%	90%	96%

Table reads: In Alaska, 71% of Asian American students scored at the proficient level on the state reading/language arts test in the high school grade tested for the No Child Left Behind Act. Sixty-one percent of Native American students and 90% of white students scored proficient in high school reading/language arts. Results are not included for African American or Latino students because the number of test-takers in these subgroups was fewer than 500 in the tested high school grade. Across all states with available data and with at least 500 African American test-takers in the high school tested grade, the median percentage of African American students scoring proficient in high school reading/language arts was 53%. Among these states, the lowest percentage proficient for African Americans in high school reading was 17%, and the highest percentage was 94%.

Note: NA = data not available; n = state percentage was not calculated because state had fewer than 500 test-takers at this grade level.

*The median is the midpoint; half the states with data had percentages above this point and half had percentages below.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on data collected from state departments of education.

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