



D.C. Student Test Scores Show Uneven Progress

Over the past five years, both DC Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter schools (PCS) have seen significant growth in secondary reading and math scores on the state test known as the District of Columbia Comprehensive Assessment System (DC CAS). However, scores have not improved as much at the elementary level. Reading and math scores for DCPS elementary students decreased for the second year in a row in 2011, raising questions about whether the high-profile education reform campaign in the District has hit a wall.¹

While Mayor Vincent C. Gray and school officials have emphasized areas showing double-digit gains since 2007, more than half of all elementary students in DCPS and public charter schools scored below grade-level proficiency in the 2010–11 school year in reading and math. Secondary students did not fare much better: Only 48.2 percent are proficient in reading and 52.8 percent are proficient in math.² The lack of proficiency in the elementary grades is particularly concerning. Research shows proficiency in reading by the end of third grade can “make-or-break” children’s educational future.³

It is important to note that student learning and achievement can be measured in many different ways. Standardized tests like the DC CAS are only a piece of the puzzle, but they are the main tool currently used to measure district and school-wide achievement. The D.C. government and the U.S. Department of Education are currently investigating possible cheating on the DC CAS due to a high volume of wrong-to-right erasures in some schools.

What is the DC CAS?

The DC CAS is a standardized test administered to all DCPS students and public charter school students each April. The test measures how well students understand grade-level material based on D.C. content standards. Reading and math are tested in grades 3–8 and 10; science is tested in grades 5 and 8; biology is tested in high school and written

composition is tested in grades 4, 7 and 10. Student scores are categorized as advanced, proficient, basic and below basic.⁴

How are DC CAS scores used?

Scores are used to determine whether schools have met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), as required by the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), commonly referred to as No Child Left Behind. AYP is used to determine school progress and has implications for federal funding. In the 2010–2011 school year, 28 percent of assessed schools that will remain open for the upcoming school year made AYP in reading, math or both.⁵ Scores are also factored into DCPS teacher evaluations under the system known as IMPACT, which was introduced under former D.C. Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee. Scores do not affect a student’s GPA or promotion to the next grade.

2010–11 DC CAS Results

Results from the 2010–11 DC CAS tell different stories depending on the subject and group tested. Figures below compare DCPS and public charter school students.⁶ Charter schools serve 40 percent of all D.C. public school students.⁷

Elementary Grades

In both reading and math, public charter school students saw a slight increase in performance while DCPS students saw a slight decrease.

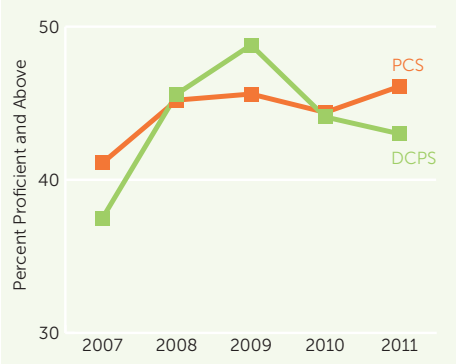
We would like to thank Mary DuPre, our Education Pioneer intern, for producing this snapshot. For more information, please contact Kate Kairys, policy analyst, at DC Action for Children, at kkairys@dckids.org.

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Reading:

- 43 percent of DCPS elementary school students scored proficient or above — down 1.1 percentage points from 2010.
- 46.1 percent of public charter school students scored proficient or above — up 1.7 percentage points from 2010.

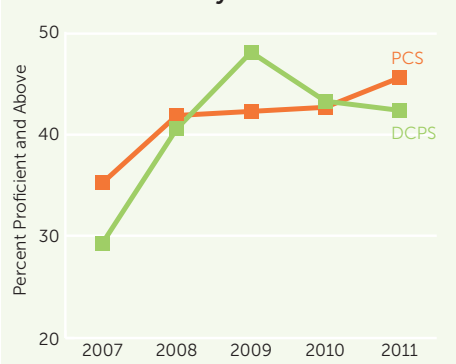
Figure 1:
DC CAS Elementary Reading Scores



Math:

- 42.3 percent of DCPS elementary students scored proficient or above — down 0.9 percentage points from 2010. Proficiency peaked at 48 percent in 2009.
- 45.5 percent of public charter school students scored proficient or above — up 2.9 percentage points from 2010.

Figure 2:
DC CAS Elementary Math Scores

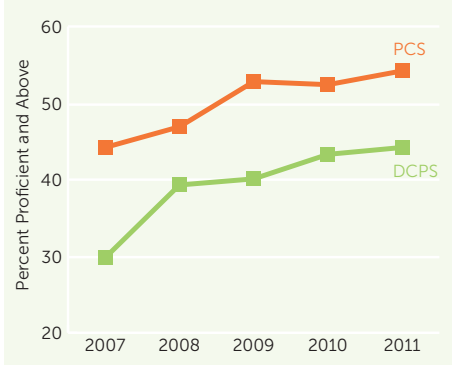


Secondary Grades

In reading, secondary students in both DCPS and public charter schools saw continued gains, but charter school students consistently outperform DCPS students by about 10 percentage points.

- 44.2 percent of DCPS students scored proficient or above — up 0.9 percentage points from 2010.
- 54.2 percent of public charter school students scored proficient or above — up 1.8 percentage points from 2010.

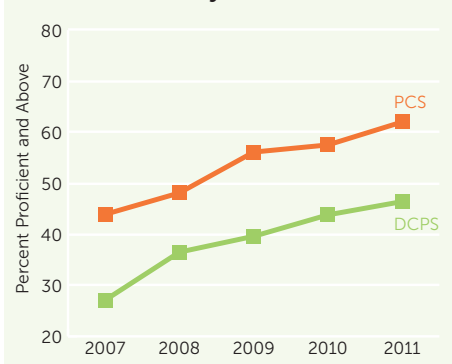
Figure 3:
DC CAS Secondary Reading Scores



The most substantial gains have been in secondary math scores.

- 46.4 percent of DCPS students scored proficient or above — up 2.6 percentage points from 2010.
- 62 percent of public charter school students scored proficient or above — up 4.5 percentage points from 2010.

Figure 4:
DC CAS Secondary Math Scores



As in reading scores, there is a gap of more than 10 percentage points between public charter schools and DCPS. When comparing DCPS and public charter schools, it is important to remember that there is a wide range of performance among public charter schools. Some far surpass the DCPS average on the DC CAS while others perform worse than DCPS.

How do District students compare to students nationally?

Despite several years of improved test scores, students in the District continue to score well below the national average in both reading and math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). NAEP is the only standardized test given nationwide and allows comparisons across all 50 states and two jurisdictions (District of Columbia and the Department of Defense schools). NAEP scores for 2011 will be available in the fall.⁸

1. Turque, B. (2011, July 8). D.C. schools test scores a mixed bag. *The Washington Post*.

2. District of Columbia, Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). (2011, July 11). *OSSE announces 2011 DC CAS scores for reading and mathematics*. [Press release].

3. Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2010). *Early warning! Why reading by the end of third grade matters*.

4. District of Columbia Public Schools. (2011). *D.C. comprehensive assessment system (DC CAS)*. Accessed at <http://dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/In+the+Classroom/How+Students+Are+Assessed/DC+CAS>

5. OSSE. (2011, Aug 2). *Office of the State Superintendent of Education releases "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) results for District schools*. [Press release].

6. The D.C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education is the source for all the data in the figures.

7. OSSE. (2011, July 8). *DC CAS results release 2011*. [Press release].

8. National Center for Education Statistics. (2009). *The nation's report card*.