Bert Stoneberg - Re: Fordham Foundation's Press Release (19-Oct-05)

From: Bert Stoneberg
To: XXXXX; Marilyn Howard
Date: 10/27/2005 10:28 AM
Subject: Re: Fordham Foundation's Press Release (19-Oct-05)

Senator XXXXX and Superintendent Howard,

Senator XXXXX, you ask whether there is an explanation for the differences between Idaho's ISAT scores and NAEP scores as presented in the Fordham Foundation's October 19, 2005, press release. I'm sorry, but an explanation would be pointless! The Fordham Foundation's research team used an inappropriate method of analysis, exhibited a general lack of understanding about NAEP data and reporting, and failed to consider how differences between NAEP and state testing programs may have affected the observed percentages at the various performance levels. Its findings are simply wrong.

I don't know how to discuss technical issues in assessment and research without being a little bit technical, so please stick with me as I try to explain my position regarding the Fordham Foundation's press release..

The Fordham Foundation's research team looked at the point increase in the percentage of students scoring proficient on a state's NCLB test. Then at the point increase in the percentage of students in the state scoring *Basic* or *Proficient* on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). When increases on the state's NCLB test were higher than on NAEP, differences were attributed to the states "blurring the truth to make themselves look better." The foundation declared Idaho among the "worst offenders."

The National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) sets policy for all aspects and elements of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the U.S. Department of Education administers NAEP. Since the No Child Left Behind Act says that the Secretary of Education may use NAEP results to confirm state results, NAGB appointed an Ad Hoc Committee on Confirming Test Results to study how this might be done correctly. The committee report entitled *Using the National Assessment Educational Progress to Confirm State Test Results* was published in March, 2002. The report says,

"Informed judgment and a 'reasonable person' standard should be applied in using National Assessment data as confirmatory evidence for state results. Confirmation should not be conducted on a 'point by point' basis or construed as a strict 'validation' of the state's test results." (p.8)

In short, the Fordham Foundation's research team failed the "reasonable person" standard when it elected to conduct a point-by-point analysis of state vs. NAEP scores. The Fordham Foundation's communications office magnified that failure many times over by publishing it to the world via the press release.

The press release also exhibits pervasive confusion about the meaning of the terms basic, proficient and advanced as states use them and the terms *Basic*, *Proficient*, and *Advanced* as NAEP uses them. It, for example, wrongly blasted one state because its students were 88 percent state proficient on one test, but only 26 percent NAEP *Proficient*. A NAEP validity study in 2004, supported by a NCES contract, concluded that the *Basic* performance level is NAEP's most comparable statistic with a state's "proficient" performance level established to report adequate yearly progress (AYP) as required by the No Child Left Behind Act (Mosquin and Chromy, 2004).

The Ad Hoc Committee supported using NAEP to confirm state results, but noted that major differences between NAEP and state tests need to be explored and reported as part of any analysis. Some of the many

potential differences of concern are:

- content coverage in the subjects,
- sequencing of content in the subjects,
- definitions of subgroups,
- changes in the demography within a state over time,
- sampling procedures and rules for excluding students from testing,
- standard-setting approaches,
- reporting metrics,
- student motivation in taking the state test versus taking NAEP,
- teacher/principal expectations for students participation in state tests and NAEP,
- mix of item formats (multiple choice, short answer, and constructed response),
- test difficulty,
- method of presentation (computer or pencil-and-paper),
- tools student may use during the test (dictionary, calculator, etc.),
- whether the test is timed, and etc.

"These potential differences may be minimal or great in number and in size. They cannot reasonably be expected to operate in all states in equal fashion. The greater the differences between a state test and NAEP, the greater the complexity in using NAEP as confirmatory evidence for the state's test results, and the greater the cautions in interpretation that should accompany the confirmatory evidence." (p.9)

Publications are available that address the three issues discussed above: appropriate methodology for using NAEP to confirm state results; differences between state and NAEP definitions of performance levels; and differences between a state's testing program and NAEP. It seems that the Fordham Foundation's research team either was unaware of these publications (i.e., failed to conduct a review of the literature about NAEP) or chose to ignore their content. Fatal flaws, indeed, for a research team from a foundation with a stated mission to produce solid research.

References

Ad Hoc Committee on Confirming Test Results. (2002). *Using the National Assessment of Educational Progress to Confirm State Test Results*. U.S. Department of Education, National Assessment Governing Board: Washington, D.C.

Mosquin, P., and Chromy, J. (2004). *Federal Sample Sizes for Confirmation of State Tests in the No Child Left Behind Act*. NAEP Validity Studies Panel, American Institutes for Research: Washington, D.C.

>>> Marilyn Howard 10/24/05 5:58 PM >>>
Dear Senator XXXXX, I am forwarding your question to Dr. Stoneberg who is the NAEP Testing Coordinator at the SDE. He will respond to your question. Marilyn Howard

>>> "XXXXX" <aaaaaaaaaa.com> 10/24/05 4:59 PM >>>
Dr. Howard – Is there an explanation for the difference in Idaho and NAEP scores in reading as the attached articles says?

Thomas B. Fordham Foundation

http://www.edexcellence.net/foundation/about/press_release.cfm?id=19

Press Release - October 19, 2005

Contact:
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For Immediate Release:

Gains on State Reading Tests Evaporate on 2005 NAEP

Has a "Race to the Bottom" Begun?

Gains on State Reading Tests Evaporate on NAEP

Decline in 8th Grade Scores Points to "Middle School Slump"

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Almost twenty states have reported gains from 2003 to 2005 in the percentage of eighth-graders rated "proficient" (or the equivalent) in reading on their own state tests. Among those states, however, only three show *any* progress at even the "basic" level on the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress, according to an analysis by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. None of these states made any progress in eighth grade reading at NAEP's "proficient" level.

The worst offenders are **Alabama**, **California**, **Idaho**, **Arizona**, **Maryland**, **Virginia** and **Kentucky**, each of which reported an additional five to 11 percent of eighth grade students becoming proficient over the past two years as gauged by state test results, yet none of which showed any progress on NAEP from 2003 to 2005. (Six of these states actually declined.) This poses an important question: are states lowering their own standards and/or making it easier to pass their tests, or do these differences reflect idiosyncratic state approaches to standards and curricula? (See figure 1.)

The three states that posted gains in eighth-grade reading on both their own assessments and NAEP were **Delaware**, **Tennessee**, and **North Dakota.** Even there, however, we find large discrepancies between the percentage of students scoring at the proficient level on the state's test versus those scoring proficient on NAEP. In Tennessee, for example, 88 percent of eighth-graders were deemed proficient in 2005 on the state reading assessment, while only 26% reached this level on NAEP.

Eighth grade is not unique. At the fourth grade level, only 8 of 25 states reporting gains from 2003 to 2005 showed even one-third as much progress at the "basic" level of NAEP (see figure 2). Progress was generally smaller still at the NAEP "proficient" level.

"The much-discussed 'race to the bottom' appears to have begun," said Fordham Foundation president Chester E. Finn, Jr. "If states ease their standards, construct simple-minded tests, or set low passing scores, they can mislead their own citizens and educators into thinking that just about everyone is proficient. Congress had the wisdom to insist that NAEP function as an 'external audit' of state (and national) progress toward proficiency under NCLB. Now we see just how important this is. Plenty of governors and state school chiefs have rushed to announce strong gains on state tests that evaporate under the scrutiny of 'the nation's report card.' This poses a credibility problem for standards-based reform and raises questions about the states' abilities to stick to their accountability guns in the age of No Child Left Behind."

Using data compiled by *Education Week*, Fordham's research team examined gains made from 2003 to 2005 on state assessments (for all states with available and comparable data), then compared these gains to changes in the percentage of students scoring at the basic-and-above and the proficient-and-above levels on NAEP to determine which jurisdictions show gains on *both* their own state tests and the national benchmark test.

"If states can't be trusted to hold the line on accountability, the inevitable solution may be a national approach to standards and tests," said Foundation vice president Michael J. Petrilli. "While you might expect to see stronger gains on state tests tied to state standards and curricula, a significant amount of those gains should show up on a benchmark test like NAEP, especially at the lower 'basic' level. Otherwise you have to ask whether states are blurring the truth to make themselves look better."

The news that national 8th grade reading scores actually *declined* also raises concerns about America's middle schools.

"The push for 'scientifically-based reading instruction' appears to be helping, at least in small ways, at the 4th grade level," said Finn. "But once students reach the middle grades, their reading prowess depends above all on vocabulary and comprehension. They must understand what they are reading. Too many of our schools have been rushing to purge substantive content from these grades, especially in trendy middle schools, either because of anxiety that the material might upset someone or because educators have given up on the ability of kids that age to learn anything important. It's past time to replace our concern over their self-esteem and their hormones with alarm about what is and isn't registering on their intellects."

For complete analysis of state vs. NAEP gains for 2003-2005, see tables below.

# # #

Figure 1:
Gains on State Tests vs. Gains on NAEP: 8th Grade Reading: 2003-2005

State	Change on State Test : Percentage of Students at or Above Proficient	Change on NAEP: Percentage of Students at or Above *Basic*	Change on NAEP: Percentage of Students at or Above *Proficient*
Alabama	11	-2	0
California	9	-1	-1
Idaho	9	0	0
Arizona	8	-1	-2
Delaware	8	3	0
Tennessee	8	2	0
Maryland	6	-2	-1
Virginia	6	-1	-1
Kentucky*	5	-3	-3
Indiana	3	-4	-5
Iowa	3	0	-2
New York	3	0	-2
North Dakota	3	2	-1
Oregon	3	-1	0
Georgia	2	-2	-2
North Carolina	2	-3	-2
Oklahoma	2	-2	-5
Missouri	1	-3	-3
South Dakota	1	0	-4
Colorado	0	-3	-5
Mississippi*	0	-5	-2
Wisconsin	0	0	-1
Wyoming	0	2	-3
Hawaii	-1	-3	1
Maine	-1	2	-4
Connecticut	-2	-3	1
Florida	-5	-2	-3
Texas	-5	-2	-2
Montana	-6	0	0
Alaska	N/A	3	0
Arkansas	N/A	-1	-1
Illinois	N/A	-2	-4
Kansas	N/A	1	-1
Louisiana	N/A	0	-2
Massachusetts	N/A	2	1
Michigan*	N/A	-2	-4
Minnesota*	N/A	2	0
Nebraska	N/A	3	0
Nevada	N/A	0	1
New Hampshire	N/A	-1	-2
New Jersey	N/A	1	0
New Mexico	N/A	0	-1
Ohio	N//A	0	2
Pennsylvania	N/A	1	4
Rhode Island	N/A	0	-1
Utah	N/A	-3	1
Vermont	N/A	-2	-3
Washington*	N/A	-1	1
West Virginia	N/A	-5	-2

* State did not offer reading test at grade 4. *Education Week* accepted test results from the next closest grade level.

Figure 2:
Gains on State Tests vs. Gains on NAEP: 4th Grade Reading: 2003-2005

State	Change on State Test : Percentage of Students at or Above Proficient	Change on NAEP: Percentage of Students at or Above *Basic*	Change on NAEP: Percentage of Students at or Above *Proficient*
Washington	12	3	3
Idaho	12	5	2
Florida	11	2	-2
Hawaii*	10	0	1
Tennessee	8	2	2
California	8	0	1
Michigan	7	-1	1
Georgia	7	-1	-1
New York	6	2	-1
Kentucky	6	1	2
Alabama[i]	6	1	0
Oklahoma*	5	0	-1
Delaware*	5	2	0
Virginia*	4	3	-2
Maine	4	1	2
Wyoming	3	2	0
Oregon*	3	-1	0
Iowa[ii]	3	-3	2
Indiana*	3	-2	-3
South Dakota	2	1	-2
Mississippi	2	-1	-1
Minnesota*	2	2	0
North Dakota	1	3	1
North Carolina	1	-4	0
Missouri*	1	-1	0
Wisconsin	-1	-1	-2
Montana	-1	2	-3
Colorado	-1	0	3
Connecticut	-2	-3	-1
Nevada*	-4	0	1
Texas	-6	5	0
Alaska	N/A	0	1
Arizona	N/A	-2	0
Arkansas	N/A	3	4
Illinois	N/A	1	3
Kansas	N/A	0	0
Louisiana	N/A	4	1
Maryland	N/A	3	0
Massachusetts	N/A	5	-1
Nebraska	N/A	2	1
New Hampshire	N/A	-1	0
New Jersey	N/A	-2	1
New Mexico	N/A	4	-3
Ohio	N/A	0	-1
Pennsylvania	N/A	4	-1
Rhode Island	N/A	0	3
South Carolina	N/A	-2	1
Utah	N/A	2	1
Vermont	N/A	-1	0
West Virginia	N/A	-4	4

[i] Alabama gains are from 2004 to 2005.
[ii] Iowa 2003 student achievement scores represent the average between scores from the 2002-03 and 2003-04 school years. The 2005 results are based on the 2004-05 school year only.
* State did not offer reading test at grade 4. *Education Week* accepted test results from the next closest grade level.