



## NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS PANEL

### NEWS RELEASE

EMARGOED Until 4/9/01

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### **NEW PANEL REPORT SHOWS MATH UP, WHILE GAP IN READING PERFORMANCE GROWS**

*Analysis of Alabama NAEP Data Shows Shrinking Gap Between Best and Worst Performers in 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Math, Gap Persists in Reading, 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Math and Between Minorities and Whites*

WASHINGTON, D.C. (April 9, 2001) – The National Education Goals Panel today released a new analysis showing that states are making more progress in mathematics achievement than in reading. The same report shows that good readers are getting better at the same time weak readers are losing ground. The report finds that most states have not been successful in reducing the achievement gap between white and minority students. It also highlights the significant achievement gap between the highest and lowest scoring students that is, in fourth grade reading, growing larger.

The new Goals Panel report, titled “*Raising Achievement and Reducing Gaps: Reporting Progress Toward Goals for Achievement*,” provides a new analysis of student achievement scores for states on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, NAEP. The report, written by Paul Barton, analyzes state NAEP data to identify state trends in performance of students in top and bottom quartiles of performance as well as changes in the student achievement gap between whites and minorities (black and Hispanic) and top and bottom quartiles. State-level NAEP results are available for student achievement in three areas: reading at the 4<sup>th</sup> grade level, mathematics at the 4<sup>th</sup> grade level and mathematics at the 8<sup>th</sup> grade level.

**Alabama** students showed similar performance in all three tested areas. In 8<sup>th</sup> grade math, scores were generally unchanged over the period reviewed, with the exception that scores increased for the top quartile of students. This may have contributed to an increase in the gap between the scores of white and minority students. Alabama students’ fourth-grade math performance was also largely unchanged except for an increase in the scores of students in the bottom quartile. Scores in 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading were unchanged except for an increase in the scores of students in the top quartile.

“The good news here, of course, is that the states are making real progress in mathematics,” said Governor Frank O’Bannon, chair of the National Education Goals Panel. “But, the findings of this report really underscore the need for most states to look again at their efforts improve reading. This shows that while our best readers are getting better, we need to pay attention to what is happening with our weak readers.”

The major findings of the report were that:

- *States are making more progress in mathematics achievement than in reading.* Between 1990 and 1996, the average student achievement score improved in 28 out of 32 states in 8<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics, and none declined. Meanwhile, in 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading from 1992 to 1998, only seven out of 32 states improved their scores and 4 states actually declined.

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- *Good readers are getting better at the same time weak readers are losing ground.* In half the states (18 out of 36) the performance of students in the bottom quartile in 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading declined, and performance improved in only three states. In contrast, the performance of students in the top quartile improved in 12 states and declined in none.
- *States have not reduced the achievement gap between top and bottom quartiles or between white and minority students.* In reading only one state reduced the achievement gap between the top and bottom quartiles. And only one state reduced the performance gap between white and minority students. In mathematics, eight states reduced the gap between the top and bottom quartiles at 4<sup>th</sup> grade and five did so at 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Also in mathematics, only two states reduced the gap between white and minority students at 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and one did so at 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

In addition to providing a more complete picture of overall academic performance, the Goals Panel report provides new information about individual state performance. Based on the new analysis of NAEP data, the four states showing improvement in the most indicators in math and reading performance, some evidence of reducing the gap between the best and the worst performers and/or narrowing the performance gap between whites and minorities. Those states are Connecticut, Kentucky, Mississippi (no data available for 8<sup>th</sup> grade math), and North Carolina. (Please see attached charts detailing state-by-state performance information.)

“The findings in this report show the usefulness of assessment tools like NAEP,” said Emily Wurtz, acting executive director of the National Education Goals Panel. “By looking at achievement patterns across multiple states, we see new areas where we should be focusing our resources and our energies. That is exactly why the members of the Goals Panel back increasing the frequency and use of the National Assessment of Educational Progress.”

Copies of “*Raising Achievement and Reducing Gaps*” please contact the National Education Goals Panel via Brian Turmail at (202) 842-3600 x 222. Copies of the report can also be downloaded from the Goals Panel website [www.negp.gov](http://www.negp.gov).

#### *About the National Education Goals Panel*

Created in July 1990, the National Education Goals Panel is a bipartisan body consisting of an equal number of Republicans and Democrats from the federal and state levels of government. The Panel is made up of eight governors, four members of Congress, four state legislators and two members appointed by the President. The eight National Education Goals call for greater levels of: student achievement; high school completion; teacher education and professional development; parental participation in the schools; adult literacy and lifelong learning; and safe, disciplined, and alcohol-and-drug-free schools. The Goals also call for all children to be ready to learn by the time they start school and for US students to be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.