

cape Council for American Private Education outlook

"Voice of the Nation's Private Schools"

March 1997 • Number 223

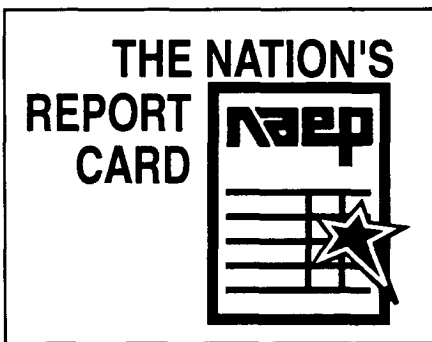
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Math Scores on Upswing

Private School Scores Are Highest in the Nation

Math scores in the United States rose significantly since 1990 but still have a long way to go. That was the heart of the message from U.S. Education Secretary Richard Riley when he presented the nation its report card in math last month.

Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicate that students in grades 4, 8, and 12 have made steady progress in math achievement since 1990. Average scores on NAEP's 500-point



and 8, and 14 points in grade 12. The average gains for all schools in the nation were 11 points in grade 4, 9 points in grade 8, and 10 points in grade 12.

The report also notes that the percentage of students across the nation achieving at or above both the *Basic*

level (partial mastery of fundamental skills) and *Proficient* level (solid academic performance) increased measurably since 1990 (see chart, page 2). For example, the percentage of students at or above the *Basic*

level in grade 4 rose from 48 percent to 62 percent in public schools and from 65 percent to 80 percent in private schools. The percentage of 4th grade students at or above the *Proficient* level jumped from 12 percent to 20 percent in public schools, and from 20 percent to 33 percent in private schools.

In presenting the results, Education Department officials had particular praise for states with the highest grade 8 scores in the nation as well as for states that showed the most improvement in those scores. None of the cited states, however, had higher scores than the nation's private schools, and only one

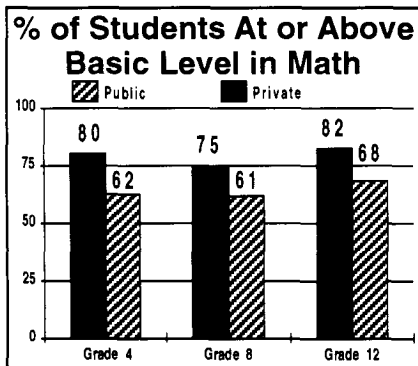
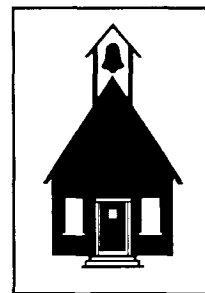
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Clinton Calls for National Tests

Tonight, I issue a challenge to the nation: Every state should adopt high national standards, and by 1999, every state should test every 4th grader in reading and every 8th grader in math to make sure these standards are met." With these words in his annual address to Congress and the nation, President Clinton set in motion a first-ever national testing program that carries enormous consequences for education, including private education.

Part of the President's far-reaching *Call to Action for American Education*, the testing program is moving on a fast and certain track. If the President's plan unfolds as proposed, there will be national tests in 4th grade reading and 8th grade math by 1999. Because the tests are voluntary, the Administration does not have to secure legislation to authorize their development or implementation. So, defying the ancient wisdom that nothing gets done quickly in Washington, the U.S. Department of Education is planning to have the tests developed in 1997, piloted in 1998, and administered in schools across the nation in the spring of 1999. The President and the Secretary of

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state made greater progress. (North Carolina's scores climbed 17 points from 251 in 1990 to 268 in 1996.) Secretary Riley's message to state leaders was this: "If your state isn't on either of these lists — if you're not leading the nation

that there remains considerable room for improvement. And when one takes a look at the percentage at the *Advanced* level (defined as "superior performance"), the case that greater growth is needed seems airtight. Only 2 percent of public school students and 4 percent of

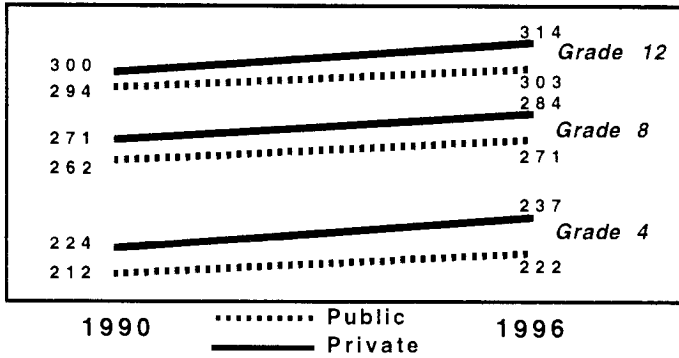
private school students have attained the *Advanced* level in grade 4, and at grade 8 the respective figures are 4 percent and 6 percent.

Citing the findings of the recent Third International Mathematics and Science Study

(TIMSS), Secretary Riley noted that only 20 percent of American students are taking algebra by the end of 8th grade, compared to other advanced nations where the vast majority of students take it. He said the TIMSS results demonstrate we need to re-examine what we teach and how we teach it. "Our children are smarter than we think," he said. "I can't say that enough."

Single copies of the report are available through the National Library of Education at 1-800-424-1616.

Average Math Scale Scores



or improving — see these results as an opportunity to re-examine what is happening in your classrooms."

Even though private schools are leading the nation and improving, there is still a great deal to be done. As the Secretary put it, in talking about the nation's scores, "...we cannot rest on our laurels. Our national scores may be going up, but we are still far behind world class standards." The relatively low percentage of students nationwide at the *Proficient* level suggests in itself

% of Students At or Above Key Levels in NAEP Math Test

	1990		1996	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
Grade 4				
Basic	48	65	62	80
Proficient	12	20	20	33
Advanced	1	2	2	4
Grade 8				
Basic	51	63	61	75
Proficient	15	17	23	33
Advanced	2	1	4	6
Grade 12				
Basic	57	65	68	82
Proficient	12	12	15	24
Advanced	1	1	2	2

Court Watch

• Voucher supporters and opponents squared off last month before the **Ohio Court of Appeals**. Oral arguments were presented by both sides in prelude to a decision regarding the constitutionality of Cleveland's school choice program, the first-ever state-sponsored voucher program to include religious schools. Not surprisingly, the focus of the judges during the session was on First Amendment issues. A decision is expected in about three months.

• The U.S. Supreme Court inched closer to a possible decision on how and where public school districts must serve special education students enrolled in private schools. The Court decided to review a brief filed by the National School Boards Association (NSBA) in the matter of *Board of Education v. Russman* (96-776). The U.S. Second Circuit Court of Appeals ruled last June that under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a New York school district must pay for on-site special education services, including a full-time aide, for a students attending a religious school. In a brief filed to get the Supreme Court to overturn the Second Circuit decision, NSBA argues that if school districts were obliged to provide special education services to children attending private schools, they would not be able to sustain the costs.

• U.S. District Judge Marcel Livaudais of the Eastern District of Louisiana has ruled that the participation of religious school students in Title VI of the Improving America's Schools Act (formerly Chapter 2 of ESEA) is constitutional. The program requires school districts to provide equitable secular, neutral, and non-ideological services, materials, and equipment to students in private schools. The judge ruled in *Helms v. Cody*, that the benefits provided under Title VI are "neutrally available without reference to religion."



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Education have already begun to use their bully pulpits to encourage every state and school district in the country to join the national testing bandwagon.

According to information provided by the U.S. Department of Education, the 4th grade reading tests will be based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading test, and the 8th grade math test will be based on the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS), an internationally normed test. Thus, parents in Savannah will be able to compare their children's progress to that of students in Seattle, Syracuse, and when it comes to math, even Singapore.

The Administration's hope is that the tests will jump-start significant growth in student performance. In reading, one goal of the program is for every student to read independently and well by 4th grade; another goal is for every student to reach at least the *Basic* level on the NAEP exam (59 percent of public school students and 77 percent of private school students currently do). Math goals include mastery of the basics, a good introduction to algebra and geometry by grade 8, and attainment by every student of at least the international average on the TIMSS exam.

The Education Department will fund development of new tests each year and will cover the costs of administration the first year, though it is not yet clear whether that policy will extend to private schools that elect to administer the tests. It is expected that at least some states and districts will incorporate the national tests within their regular assessment programs. Once administered in a given year, the tests will be made available on the Internet so that parents will know what their children will need to know to do well on the tests.

Private schools will eventually have to decide whether to give the tests or not to give the tests. Either course will require careful thought and a plan of action. For if a school chooses to administer the tests, it will have to ensure that its students master the advanced knowledge and skills the tests will measure.

And if it chooses not to administer the tests, it will have to be prepared to justify that decision to parents who, like the rest of the nation, will have endured an extensive media campaign touting the tests.

While private school officials can recite by rote the traditional and persuasive arguments against participation in mandatory government testing programs, they need to realize there are special circumstances surrounding this particular proposal. First and foremost, the proposed tests are voluntary; any pressure to give them will come from parents, not the government. Second, the tests will deal with straightforward subject matter. As President Clinton put it in a recent speech to the Maryland State Legislature: "Anybody who says that a country as big and diverse as ours can't possibly have national standards in the basics — I say from Maryland to Michigan to Montana, reading is reading and math is math."

Serious Issue for Private Schools

Still, this is a troubling issue for private schools and one that will require serious thought and discussion. Some obvious and immediate questions that come to mind include the following:

Is this the first step on a slippery slope? Will national standards and voluntary tests in reading and math eventually lead to government standards, a one-size-fits-all curriculum, and mandatory tests in all the subjects?

How do the proposed tests fit with other tests a state or school might require of students? Is there overlap and duplication? Is too much instructional time already taken up by testing?

How will the costs associated with the administration and scoring of these tests be covered in private schools that choose to give them?

To help your school community start traveling through the testing thicket, you might want to review some of the extensive background materials on the national testing program which are available on the U.S. Department of Education's website at <http://www.ed.gov>.

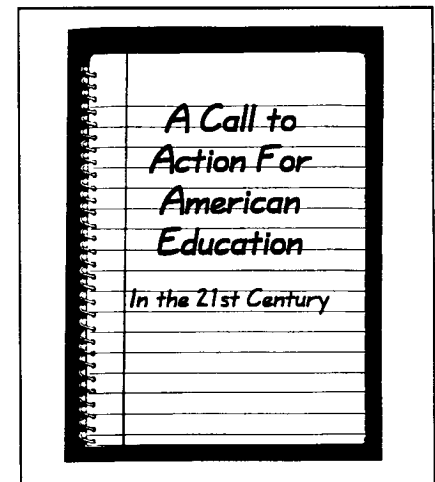
President's 10-Point Call to Action

- Set rigorous national standards, with national tests in 4th grade reading and 8th grade math to make sure our children master the basics.

- Make sure there's a talented and dedicated teacher in every classroom.

- Help every student to read independently and well by the end of the 3rd grade.

- Expand Head Start and challenge parents to get involved early on in their children's learning.



- Expand choice and accountability in public education.

- Make sure our schools are safe, disciplined and drug-free, and instill basic American values.

- Modernize school buildings and help support school construction.

- Open the doors of college to all who work hard and make the grade, and make the 13th and 14th years of education as universal as high school.

- Help adults improve their education and skills by transforming the tangle of federal training programs into a simple skill grant.

- Connect every classroom and library to the Internet by the year 2000 and help all students become technologically literate.





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• A private foundation called **School Choice Scholarships** has raised \$6 million to provide at least 1,000 public school students in New York City the opportunity to attend private schools next September. Scholarships of \$1,400 per year will be awarded by lottery to low-income students in grades 1 to 5, with preference given to children attending New York's lowest-performing public schools. The program was initially proposed and subsequently promoted by New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani.

• Princeton University researcher **Cecilia Rouse** has discovered that students enrolled in Milwaukee's private schools under Wisconsin's voucher program performed better in math than their counterparts in public schools. Rouse measured test scores of voucher students against those of students who had applied for vouchers but did not receive them. Her findings support those of

Harvard University researcher Paul Peterson, who last year concluded that students in the voucher program realized significant gains in reading and math.

• By setting high expectations, creating a climate of achievement, and providing individual encouragement, independent schools push average students to realize above-average performance. So concludes **Arthur G. Powell**, senior assistant at Brown University's Annenberg Institute for School Reform, in his new book, *Lessons from Privilege: The American Prep School Tradition*. The book and its author received considerable coverage in the February 26 edition of *Education Week*.

• Come September, high school students in **Lincoln Park, NJ**, will be able to attend the public, private, or religious school of their choice with tuition assistance from their public school district. The district is too small to have its own high school and currently pays a neighboring district \$9,200 per year to educate resident high school students. Un-

happy with the quality of education the Lincoln Park students were receiving, the school board voted 7-2 last month to initiate a voucher program which would provide parents between \$1,000 and \$4,600 a year toward tuition at area high schools, public or nonpublic.

• It's a jungle out there, and teachers can learn all about it through a series of exciting wildlife workshops held this summer at the world-famous **Bronx Zoo**. The three- to five-day workshops cover a variety of interdisciplinary curricula in grades K-12. Titles include *Pablo Python Looks At Animals* (K-3), *Habitat Ecology Learning Program* (4-6), *Voyage from the Sun* (4-9), and *Survival Strategies* (7-12). A \$240 fee includes extensive curriculum materials, lodging in New York City for five days, two meals per day, and a refund of 30 percent of airfare (up to \$150). Preference is given to teams of 2-3 teachers from a single school whose principal is able to provide implementation support.

For more information and an application (due March 28), call 1-800-YES-5131