



What You Need to Know About Reading Proficiency Data

Following our release of the **WNY Reading Report Card** and the news about potential changes to the **New York State reading assessments**, there have been a lot of questions about reading proficiency data. We thought that it would be useful to provide some context.

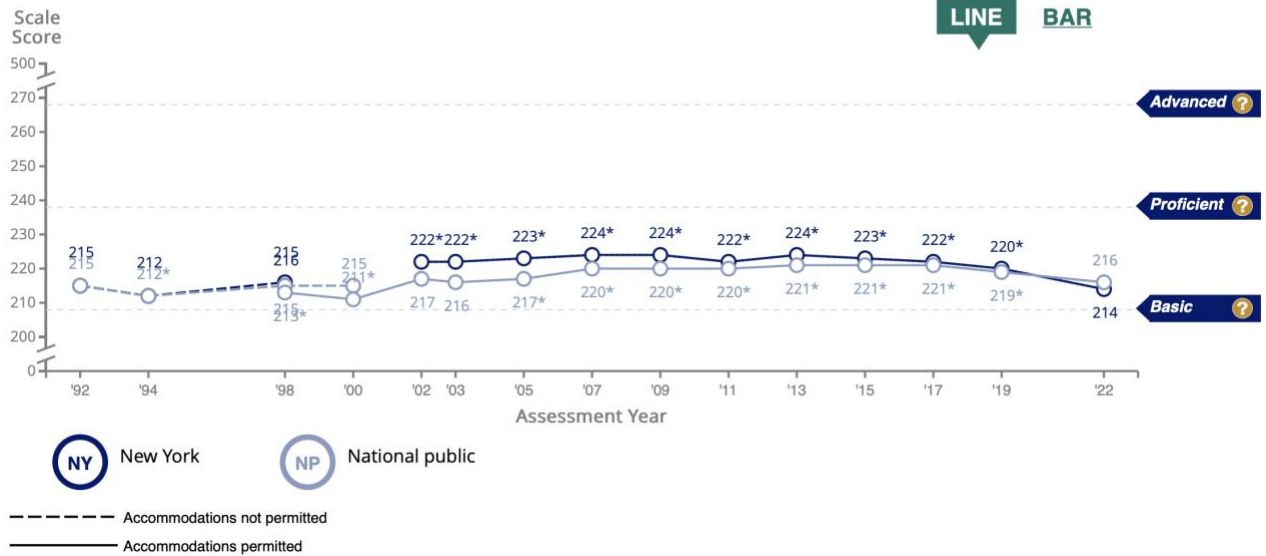
Below are a few key points:

1. **The “gold standard” of assessments is the Nation’s Report Card, which is produced by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).** These assessments are used to “compare student achievement in states and other jurisdictions and to track changes in achievement of fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-graders over time in mathematics, reading, writing, science, and other content domains.”
2. **The NAEP data is particularly helpful when comparing reading proficiency scores across states and, importantly, tracking changes in reading proficiency over time at the state and national level.**
3. By contrast, the reading proficiency data from the New York State Education Department (NYSED) is not comparable with the data released by other states due to differences in standards. **In addition, the NYSED data is less useful in tracking changes in reading proficiency over time due to changes in performance standards.** The differences in reading proficiency standards across states, as well as the changes to performance standards at the state level over time, explain why researchers use NAEP data to compare reading proficiency across states and track changes in achievement over time.
4. **The NAEP data shows that reading proficiency scores in New York State have not improved over 3 decades.** The data shows that the “balanced” literacy approach to reading instruction has not been more effective than the whole language approach that was used during the 1990s. This was true prior to the decline in reading proficiency scores associated with the pandemic.



GRADE 4 | READING

Average scale scores for grade 4 reading, by All students [TOTAL] and jurisdiction: 1992, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019, and 2022



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress

- New York State now ranks 36th in the U.S. in 4th grade reading proficiency.** New York ranked in the top 15 states in terms of 4th grade reading proficiency during much of the 2000-10 period. Over the last 5 years, New York has fallen further, going from 25th to 36th, with just 30% of 4th grade students testing proficient. As New York State has fallen from 15th to 36th in just over a decade, neighboring states have generally remained in the top 10-15 in the U.S. in 4th grade reading proficiency.

National Assessment of Educational Progress - 4th Grade Reading Proficiency Data									
State	2017			2019			2022		
	Percentage Proficient	Percentage Above Basic	National Ranking	Percentage Proficient	Percentage Above Basic	National Ranking	Percentage Proficient	Percentage Above Basic	National Ranking
New York	36%	68%	25	34%	66%	28	30%	58%	36
National Average	35%	67%		35%	67%		32%	61%	
Difference	1%	1%		-1%	-1%		-2%	-3%	
Massachusetts	51%	80%	1	45%	76%	1	43%	70%	1
New Jersey	49%	78%	2	42%	72%	2	38%	67%	5
Connecticut	43%	74%	4	40%	70%	7	35%	64%	8
Pennsylvania	40%	71%	13	40%	68%	10	34%	64%	9
Vermont	43%	73%	8	37%	68%	16	34%	62%	22

Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress, WNY Education Alliance

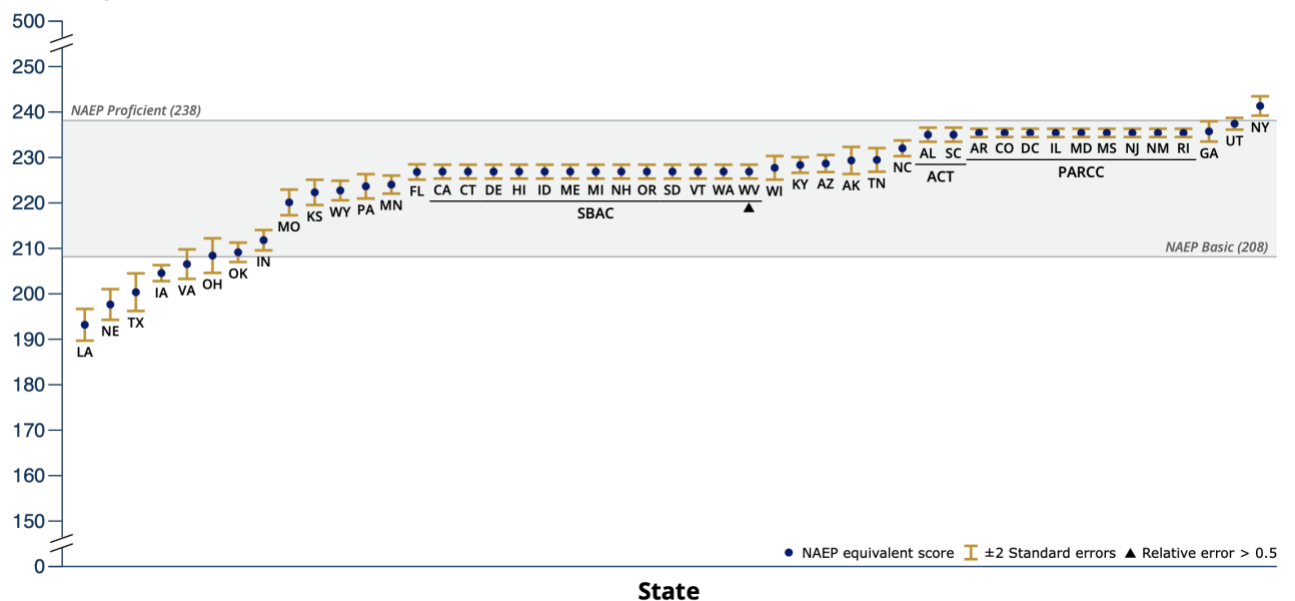


6. **As New York’s reading proficiency scores have fallen using NAEP data, NYSED has reduced State performance standards for reading proficiency.** According to NAEP, NYSED’s 4th grade reading proficiency performance standards were above the NAEP Proficient level in 2015, making them the most rigorous in the country.

NAEP equivalent scores of state grade 4 Reading standards for proficient performance, by state: 2015



NAEP Equivalent Score



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress

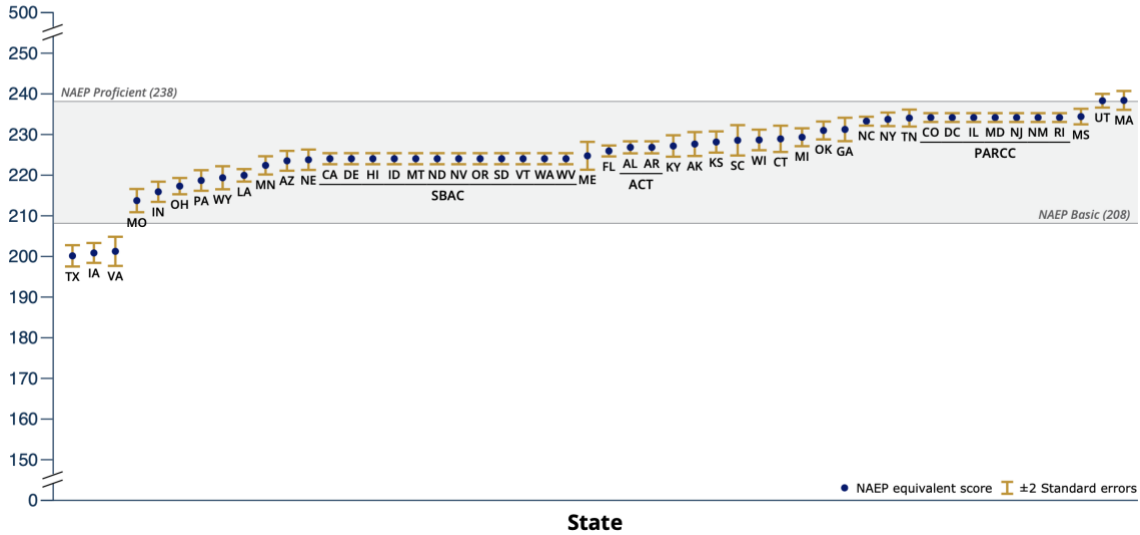
However, by 2017, NYSED’s reading proficiency performance standards had fallen below the NAEP Proficient level, making the State’s 4th grade reading assessment the 12th toughest in the U.S.



NAEP equivalent scores of state grade 4 Reading standards for proficient performance, by state: 2017



NAEP Equivalent Score



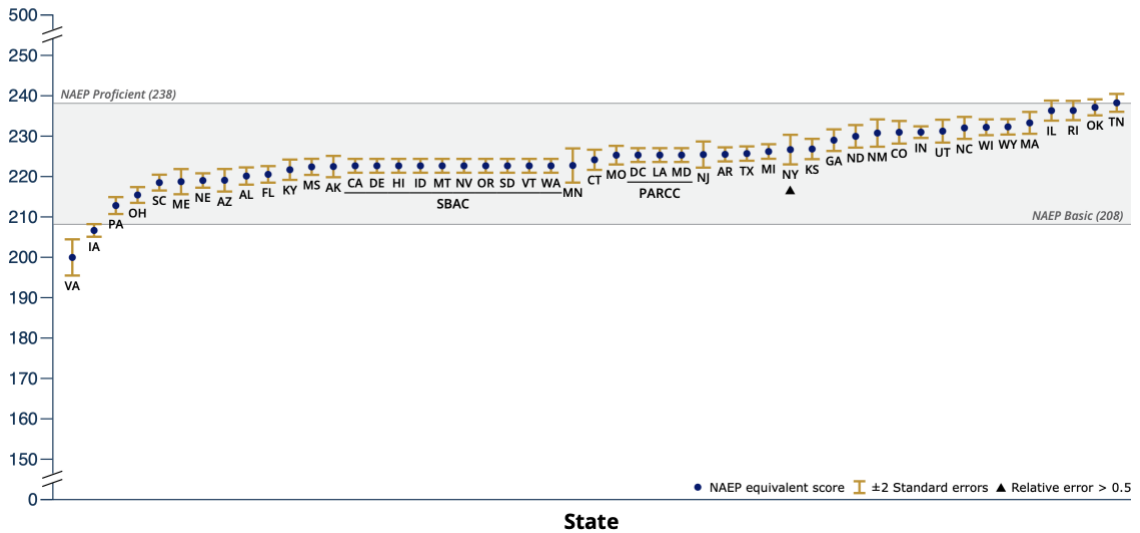
Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress

And, in 2019, NYSED's 4th grade reading proficiency performance standards fell further, between the NAEP Proficient level and the NAEP Basic level, ranking 16th in the nation.

NAEP equivalent scores of state grade 4 Reading standards for proficient performance, by state: 2019



NAEP Equivalent Score



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress



After listening to the New York State Board of Regents meeting reviewing potential changes to State assessments, we expect New York State's reading proficiency performance standards (cut scores determined by teachers) to decline further. If the level determined to be proficient falls further, it will only widen the gap between the NAEP Proficient level for 4th grade reading and the level at which NYSED determines that 4th grade students are proficient in reading.

In short, expectations in New York State are falling with academic achievement.

7. The reading proficiency scores from NAEP are cited by educators, literacy experts, and state education departments when they declare that there is a reading crisis in the country. Many states, including the higher-achieving states that surround New York State, have made changes to their reading instruction to address the flat-to-declining proficiency scores over the last 30 years. **With New York State having fallen to 36th in the U.S. in 4th grade reading proficiency, how is it possible then that the reading crisis doesn't also exist in Western New York and New York State more broadly?**
8. The NYSED data is not as useful when evaluating reading proficiency trends over time given the changes to performance standards. Rather, the reading proficiency data from NYSED is useful in comparing achievement levels across districts in New York State and different groups of students. **In the WNY Reading Report Card, we used the data to quantify the achievement gap** (the difference in proficiency between economically advantaged and disadvantaged students) and to track which districts are outperforming and underperforming expectations when adjusting for differences in income levels.
9. All stakeholders need to acknowledge that we have a reading crisis in our region, as highlighted by the NAEP data. **The noise around NYSED proficiency data is a distraction from the serious conversation that stakeholders here should be having about what can and should be done to improve reading instruction in schools and increase literacy rates in Western New York.** This is happening in almost every other part of the U.S.
10. The reading proficiency data from NYSED informs us about the causes of the reading crisis in our region, **namely that the continued use of reading curricula and instructional practices that are not backed by research are disproportionately impacting economically disadvantaged students (including minorities), English Language learners (ELLs), and children with dyslexia.**

Let's stop worrying about optics and start helping ALL children learn to read.