



Education Consumers Foundation

Correcting TCAP Grade Inflation: What to Expect Next Year

It has long been acknowledged that reported scores on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) are among the most inflated in the country. In fact, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce recently gave Tennessee an 'F' when ranking states' truth in advertising for reporting K-12 outcomes.

Recognizing that more reliable reporting was needed, the Tennessee State Board of Education has adopted the scoring model of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a more rigorous national assessment (also known as "America's Report Card"). It is not known whether the state will adopt the exact reporting standards used by NAEP; however, it is widely expected that the percentages of students reaching proficiency on the 2010 TCAP will be substantially lower than those reported in 2009.

Given this likelihood, the Education Consumers Foundation commissioned a study to see how schools and districts would fare if their current TCAP scores were converted to the standards set by NAEP. It allows the public and their representatives, including school board members and legislators, to get a clear sense of the magnitude of the coming changes and begin addressing performance issues in order to improve student outcomes.

What the analysis shows

- Statewide, there is a tremendous discrepancy in the proficiency rates of Tennessee students as reported by TCAP and NAEP. According to the TCAP, 89% of 4th graders are proficient or advanced in math; NAEP reports just 29% of Tennessee students as proficient or advanced. (These are actual, not estimated, numbers. NAEP does report statewide averages.)

- A review of TCAP results versus estimated NAEP outcomes at the district and school levels shows similarly dramatic differences. For example, the Metro Nashville schools currently report 81.8% of 4th grade students as proficient/advanced in math and 81.0% in reading. If Tennessee adopts NAEP-level rigor in its reporting, scores will drop to 15.1% and 13.2% respectively. Similar gaps are found at the 8th grade level.
- At the high school level, reporting gaps average 40 points. This is due primarily to the lower reported proficiency rates on the TCAP assessment than to any improvements on the NAEP. For example, Hillsboro High School in Davidson County reports 43.0% and 55.1% proficient/advanced rates on the TCAP in math and reading, which translates to 5.2% and 15.3% respectively on projected NAEP outcomes.

How it was done

This analysis was conducted by Asora Education Enterprises, a consulting firm that has performed similar analyses in several other states.

What happens next

The state plans to set its reporting standards after the 2010 test results have been compiled; however, there is an effort being led by business groups to set the score cut points before the end of the school year. In either case, educators, parents, and taxpayers are likely to see dramatically reduced proficiency rates in the final report.

With the advance notice provided by ECF's analysis, educators, policymakers, and parent representatives have an opportunity to begin addressing the school performance issues that are likely to become evident in the 2010 state educational report card.

To see the district- and school-level analysis for Tennessee, along with background information outlining the analytical methods used by Asora Education Enterprises, visit:

www.education-consumers.org