September 2, 2011

From the annual National Center for Education Statistics ([NCES](http://nces.ed.gov/)) analysis of state proficiency standards compared to National Assessment of Educational Progress ([NAEP](http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/)) scoring scales:

“NCLB required states to develop their own assessments and set proficiency standards to measure student achievement. Each state controls its own assessment programs, including developing its own standards, resulting in great variation among the states in statewide student assessment practices. This variation creates a challenge in understanding the achievement levels of students across the United States.”

Since 2003, NCES has supported research to compare the proficiency standards of NAEP with those of individual states. The latest report was recently released and is available <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/studies/statemapping/>.

What did this year’s report tell us about Kentucky’s and other states’ assessments as compared to NAEP results?

         In grade 4 reading, 35 states have proficiency cut scores that are below the basic cut score on NAEP. Fifteen states have proficiency cut scores between basic and proficient. No state has a cut score for proficient that equals the NAEP proficiency cut score. Kentucky has the 17th-highest cut score on this comparison, and it is slightly below the basic level on NAEP.

         In grade 8 reading, 16 states are below NAEP’s basic level, and 34 states are between basic and proficient on the NAEP scale. No state has a proficiency score equal to or above NAEP proficiency levels. Kentucky ranks 12th among the states, and the Kentucky proficient level is between the NAEP basic and proficient levels.

         In grade 4 math, seven states have proficient cut scores below the NAEP basic level; one state (Massachusetts) has a proficient cut score at or above NAEP proficient cut score; and 42 states are between basic and proficient. Kentucky ranks 22nd and is between basic and proficient.

         In grade 8 math, Kentucky ranks 15th and is between basic and proficient. Massachusetts is the only state with proficient cut scores at or above the NAEP proficient level.

What does this mean? Kentucky’s cut scores for our state assessments are, for the most part, in the top third of states, and when compared to NAEP levels, our cut scores are between basic and proficient levels.

As we implement the new accountability system, the Kentucky Board of Education ([KBE](http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Administrative%2BResources/Kentucky%2BBoard%2Bof%2BEducation/)) will set student performance levels for novice, apprentice, proficient and distinguished. The KBE will receive guidance and advice from many groups of stakeholders. Our National Technical Advisory Panel for Assessment and Accountability ([NTAPAA](http://www.lrc.ky.gov/krs/158-00/6454.pdf)) and our School Curriculum, Accountability and Assessment Council ([SCAAC](http://www.education.ky.gov/kde/administrative%2Bresources/testing%2Band%2Breporting%2B/kentucky%2Bschool%2Btesting%2Bsystem/advisory%2Bgroups/school%2Bcurriculum%2Bassessment%2Band%2Baccountability%2Bcouncil.htm)) will play key roles.

My recommendation to the KBE will focus on establishing levels that are linked closely to college/career readiness. We have hired experts to establish these levels from 8th grade back to 3rd grade. Our high school end-of-course assessments already have these levels linked to [PLAN](http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Administrative%2BResources/Testing%2Band%2BReporting%2B/Reports/EXPLORE%2Band%2BPLAN%2BData%2B2007_2011.htm) and [ACT](http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Administrative%2BResources/Testing%2Band%2BReporting%2B/Reports/2011%2BACT%2BTested%2BJuniors.htm) results.

What does this mean to parents, students, teachers, principals, superintendents and the public? They will see proficiency levels in Kentucky move from 70 percent or higher in many grade levels to proficiency levels more closely aligned to NAEP and college readiness results.

Many states are moving in this direction. Recently, Tennessee took this major step. Virginia, Michigan, North Carolina, Georgia and others are moving to proficiency levels that predict college/career readiness.

This is the right thing to do for our children and their future. The percentages of proficient students may drop, and readers should understand the reasons why. The key will be communication that there are new standards and new expectations, and it will not be appropriate to compare results from the spring 2012 assessment to those from the 2011 assessment. Hopefully, our media representatives will get that message. Now is the time to start the conversation at the state and local levels.

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