

# KERA UPDATE

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About The Kentucky Education Reform Act

#44

## Results Matter, But Only If You Have The Real Results

The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) recently published *Results Matter*, a tenth anniversary report on the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). As often happens when public agencies discuss their own performance, KDE's data has lots of spin. This creates a pressing need for better analysis. Thus, this *KERA UPDATE* is the second of several which examine specific data presentations in *Results Matter*.

This *UPDATE* deals with KDE's incomplete portrayals of Kentucky public school performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (the NAEP).

The graphs on page 83 in *Results Matter* show Kentucky and national average scores on several NAEP assessments. These generally portray Kentucky in a favorable way. However, it is important to recall that the court case that led to KERA and KERA's preamble itself both say that the state's children must compare favorably to students in other states. With that in mind, it is revealing to examine how Kentucky actually ranks among the states. We'll consider only NAEP state level assessments where trend lines exist. That includes 4th grade reading, and 4th and 8th grade math.

The results are summarized in the table. The comparisons here only include states that participated in NAEP in both of the listed years. *Despite Kentucky's increased scores on the math tests, the state lost position on both 8th grade comparisons. We were stagnant for 4th grade math. In reading, even though the national score fell a little more rapidly than Kentucky's, the state still dropped in rank from 21st to*

*22nd place.* So, if the goal is to improve our students relative to other states, *our NAEP rankings indicate we are headed in the wrong direction.*

Now, some, including KDE, claim that our 1998 NAEP reading score and rank go against this trend. That would be correct *if* the 1998 scores were acceptable and could be fairly compared to scores for other states and to earlier years. Sadly, that is not the case.

In 1998 many more Kentucky students with learning disabilities were excluded from taking the NAEP 4th grade reading assessment. Exclusion in 1998 was two and a half times that on both the 1992 and 1994 reading assessments. It seemed pretty obvious that if more weak students were excluded from testing on NAEP, then the scores could be artificially inflated. So, Educational Testing Service (ETS), which writes the NAEP, was asked study the situation. ETS reported in May 1999 that the impact was unknown because the excluded students from Kentucky were not tested in any way by NAEP. They didn't even participate in an experimental program. The reason for this was that virtually all of Kentucky's excluded students had a requirement in their individual education plans for all tests to

be read to them. That precluded participation in the NAEP reading assessment which was specifically intended to test printed text reading ability.

When the ETS report released, some in Kentucky were very unhappy and demanded another study. This second study is clearly flawed. It estimates performance for NAEP printed text reading by using KIRIS scores for the excluded students. But, the excluded students only got a spoken word comprehension test with KIRIS. These students didn't 'read' anything, so their KIRIS scores cannot be compared to the NAEP. Also, this flawed report's conclusions only 'hang together' if we accept the idea that much stronger students were significantly outscored by much weaker ones. Obviously, that is nonsense. Never-the-less, this clearly flawed report was accepted by some individuals who either didn't understand, or wanted to hide, the true situation. And, KDE relies on this flawed report when they claim the 1998 NAEP 4th grade reading results are valid.

Personally, I'll go with the opinion of the real experts at ETS (who also reject the second report). *The 1998 Kentucky 4th grade NAEP reading scores, are, and always will be, indeterminate.*

Kentucky's Rank in Various NAEP Assessments	Years Compared	Number of States Participating in Both Years	KY Rank First Year / Second Year
Grade 4 Reading	1992 and 1994 1992 and 1998	37 N/A	21 / 22 Indeterminate
Grade 4 Math	1992 and 1996	37	23 / 23
Grade 8 Math	1990 and 1996 1992 and 1996	30 35	19 / 20 21 / 22