

KERA UPDATE

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About The Kentucky Education Reform Act

#70

Kentucky's 2002 NAEP Reading Is FLAT #1: Of CATS, KDE's "Gains," Credibility

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2002 reading scores have been released, and the results raise strong questions about Kentucky's CATS assessment.

Here is what the official National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) report says about Kentucky's NAEP scores:

For grade 4:

"The average scale score for students in Kentucky was 219. This was higher than that of 1992 (213) and *was not found to differ significantly from that in 1998*(218)." (*Emphasis Added*)

For grade 8:

"The average scale score for students in Kentucky was 265. *This was not found to differ significantly from that in 1998* (262)." (*Emphasis Added*)

Quotes From: *The Nation's Report Card: State Reading 2002, Report for Kentucky*, NCES 2003-526 KY, NCES, Washington, DC, Page 1.

Thus, during a period when Kentucky's CATS assessment showed steady progress in both 4th and 8th grade reading, NAEP showed improvement, if any, was so small that it could not be detected. So, NAEP adds new evidence to the long-existing trend line from the ACT college entrance test that also says Kentucky's assessment program creates an inflated picture of educational progress.

The new NAEP report says something else important. Page 29 discusses possible problems with scores when there have been changes in exclusion of students:

"Comparisons of achievement results across states and within a state across

years should be interpreted with caution if the exclusion rates vary widely."

Tables in various printed and on-line NAEP reports show that Kentucky's 4th grade readers had a huge, 250% increase in exclusion from 1994 to 1998. And, the state's exclusion rate remained high, well above the national average, in 2002. Kentucky's 8th grade NAEP reading exclusion also soared dramatically in 2002, moving above the national average rate.

Here's what those exclusion increases mean for Kentucky. Because Kentucky has above average exclusion on the recent NAEP reading tests, Kentucky's recent scores are probably inflated and must be considered questionable. We cannot confidently compare our NAEP scores to scores from other states. We cannot confidently compare our recent scores to our own scores from earlier NAEP testing, either.

Now, contrast the first statement in KDE's news release about the 2002 NAEP to the actual NCES findings above. KDE says:

"The results of the 2002 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in reading show that Kentucky's 4th- and 8th-graders continue to make gains, the Kentucky Department of Education announced today."

From: KDE News Release #03-036, June 19, 2002.

KDE's announcement goes on to claim that the state is performing above national average and provides a number of tables with scores from the NAEP reports. The numbers appear to be correctly reported, but the very important caution about exclusion impacts on the accuracy of those scores is notably omitted by KDE.

So, KDE's news release is misleading. KDE can't claim continued progress based on the 2002 NAEP. The NAEP people say so themselves — clearly! By claiming gains, KDE betrays ignorance of the science of statistics and does a disservice to the citizens of Kentucky in the process.

In addition, KDE completely ignores the NCES' caution about exclusion. KDE's elaborate NAEP score tables prove nothing because Kentucky's recent scores are corrupted by exclusion changes. But, KDE admits none of this, further eroding their credibility in the process.

Sadly, the quality of KDE's score reporting is not a new problem. In 1995, the Kentucky Office of Education Accountability (OEA) convened a panel of nationally recognized testing experts to examine Kentucky's school assessment program. The Panel felt so strongly about KDE's score reporting that this subject became one of their major recommendations.

"Material provided to the press and the public should provide alternative interpretations of the results when such alternative interpretations are plausible."

From: *Review of the Measurement Quality of the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System, 1991—1994*, Prepared for the Kentucky OEA, Page 9.

Of course, the fact that Kentucky's 2002 NAEP performance is flat isn't an alternative interpretation; it is the MAIN finding. But, the OEA Panel's general intent applies. KDE needs to do a much better job of conveying all the facts to the public.

And, KDE shouldn't stoop to distorting the facts in a desperate effort to make CATS look good. Kentucky deserves better.