

TO: Senate Committee on Finance
FROM: Jeff Fannon, Vermont-NEA Executive Director
DATE: May 1, 2025
RE: Follow up re: H.454 and NAEP Scores

After I testified last week (Tuesday) in your committee about H.454, I was made aware that when I testified I inadvertently used 2022 8th grade reading results and not the January 2025 released results for 2024 8th grade reading scores on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). I decided to examine further Vermont's results on that standardized test and share with you what I learned.

First some guidance about the NAEP test itself. There are three levels of results: NAEP Proficient, NAEP Basic, and NAEP Below Basic. NAEP achievement levels are not the same as state-established proficiency levels. It's not unusual to see states post higher pass rates on their own statewide assessments than those reported for NAEP because state level assessments are what teachers teach their students. In 2022, only 13 states/jurisdictions had grade 4 math standards that mapped to NAEP Proficient. Most states - 37 in total (including Vermont) - map 4th-grade math standards to NAEP Basic. In grade 4 reading, 42 states map grade 4 standards to NAEP Basic (including Vermont); only 6 states map to NAEP Proficient. In simple terms, therefore, Vermont sets the bar at the "Basic" level, as do most states and teaches to the state assessment not necessarily to NAEP.

It's important to note the number of Vermont students reaching NAEP "Basic" level, as headlines about how few students are reaching NAEP "Proficient" are misguided and doesn't reflect what is being taught in Vermont. Here's an example of a [disclaimer](#) from the NAEP website: "It should be noted that the NAEP Proficient achievement level does not represent grade-level proficiency as determined by other assessment standards (e.g., state or district assessments)." The confusion is understandable, but what Vermont is teaching and asking of its students should be put into context when looking at NAEP results. No test is perfect, and no single assessment should be used to drive major policy decisions or adjudicate whether students are learning or schools are high quality.

Finally, no student answers all of the questions on the test - each student answers a subset of the questions, and each student answers questions for only one subject test. This is done in a way that maintains the validity of the test while reducing the test burden on any single student. Unlike the state assessment, schools and students do not receive their results from the test, so changes in teaching practices are impossible to achieve from NAEP. The reading and math NAEP results are just a semi-annual snapshot in time.

With that context, looking at Vermont's NAEP results show that Vermont publicly educated students are doing very well indeed.

In 2024, the average score of eighth-grade students in Vermont was 276. This was higher than the average score of 272 for students in the nation. (See, [Summary Statements](#))

In 2024, 75% of Vermont students scored at or above “Basic” on the grade 4 math assessment. 11 jurisdictions performed significantly higher; 32 performed similarly; 9 performed significantly lower.

In 2024, 64% of Vermont students scored at or above “Basic” on the grade 8 math assessment. 10 jurisdictions performed significantly higher; 15 performed similarly, and 27 jurisdictions performed significantly lower.

In 2024, 58% of Vermont students scored at or above “Basic” on the grade 4 reading assessment. 9 jurisdictions performed significantly higher; 27 jurisdictions performed similarly; 5 jurisdictions performed significantly lower.

In 2024, 67% of Vermont students scored at or above “Basic” on the grade 8 reading assessment. 6 jurisdictions performed significantly higher; 35 jurisdictions performed similarly; 10 jurisdictions performed significantly lower.

NAEP's 2024 results provided key insights on students' perceptions about their learning environments, and here again, Vermont did extremely well. Across states/jurisdictions, the percentages of fourth-grade public school students reporting that the statement “teachers care about the students” exactly or quite a bit described the teachers at their school ranged from 76% to 94%. In Vermont, 92% of fourth-grade public school students reported that the statement “teachers care about the students” exactly or quite a bit described the teachers at their school. While not statistically significant, this was 2 percentage points higher than the national public average of 90%, and it reflects the success of the student teacher relationships that, unlike typical standardized test scores, are so predictive of student success in life.¹

The NAEP results are packed with various data points from which any positive or negative inference can be drawn. What is consistent, however, is the poverty or achievement gap is real and constant throughout the many years of NAEP results. Addressing the poverty gap is why Vermont is trying to increase funding for students in poverty, i.e., student weights, but while laudable in the use of education fund dollars, it must be noted too that cuts in social service expenditures in the general fund are working at cross-purposes of increased students' weights for students living in poverty. The state's left hand and right hand should work together to address the needs of economically disadvantaged students.

Finally, the pandemic should not be dismissed but the NAEP results appear to be mixed in this regard. What is not mixed is the effect of poverty on student achievement. In 2024, overall NAEP scores increased in only one state for students who were identified as economically disadvantaged and declined in 3 states. Unfortunately, the 2024 achievement gaps widened since the last NAEP administration. The highest income decile districts were nearly 4 times more likely to recover in both math and reading than the lowest income decile districts.

Thank you for allowing me the chance to correct and update my testimony.

¹ See Professor Raj Chetty et al., “\$320,000 Kindergarten Teachers.” (“These gains in noncognitive skills are strongly associated with later earnings even though they aren’t as strongly predictive of later test scores.”) [star_summary.pdf](#)