

# **The Nation's Report Card™ Mega-States Frequently Asked Questions**

## **What is The Nation's Report Card™?**

The Nation's Report Card™ presents results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). NAEP is the largest continuing and nationally representative assessment of what our nation's students know and can do in subjects such as mathematics, reading, science, writing, geography, U.S. history, civics, and other subjects. Standard administration practices are implemented to provide a common measure of student achievement. NAEP results can be used by teachers, principals, parents, policymakers, and researchers to assess progress and develop ways to improve education in the United States.

NAEP is a congressionally mandated project of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), within the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the U.S. Department of Education. The National Assessment Governing Board sets policy for the NAEP program.

## **What is the Mega-States Study?**

The Mega-States report describes student academic achievement in the five largest states ("Mega-States") in the United States. The study was conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) at the request of the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB).

The Mega-States report includes reading, mathematics, and science results for fourth- and eighth-graders in the nation and in the Mega-States.

## **Why focus on the Mega-States?**

California, Florida, Illinois, New York, and Texas – the five Mega-States – are home to nearly one-third of the nation's public schools and enroll close to 40 percent of the nation's public school students. The importance of these Mega-States goes beyond the sheer size of their population. They now serve more than half of the nation's English language learners (ELL), as well as some of the largest concentrations of children from lower-income families. As policymakers and educators look at the nation's changing demographics and explore ways to close achievement gaps, the educational progress of children in these states is of interest far beyond their state borders.

## **What is the demographic makeup of the Mega-States?**

The Mega-States are at the forefront of the demographic shifts in our nation. The nation's student population has changed significantly between 1990 and 2011. In 1990, seven percent of eighth-grade students nationally were Hispanic, compared to 23 percent in 2011. At the same time, the percentage of White students fell from 73 percent to 54 percent.

The Mega-States mirror this change. In fact, in California and Texas, Hispanic students are now the majority, with 52 percent and 51 percent of the student population, respectively. California, Texas, New York, and Florida had the largest increases in the immigrant population over the last decade. And most of our nation's ELL students are being educated in the Mega-States. California enrolls nearly 1.5 million ELL students—the largest number in the nation and more than twice the amount of any other Mega-State.

NAEP uses the percentages of students who are eligible for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) as a proxy for income. Students from lower-income families are eligible for either free or reduced-price school lunches, while students from higher-income families are not. Compared to the national average, California, Florida, and Texas all have higher proportions of students who are eligible for the NSLP. New York' proportion is about the same as the national average, while Illinois' is lower.

### **What results are included in the report?**

The Mega-States report includes results for fourth- and eighth-graders in the nation as well as results specific to the five Mega-States.

The report provides an in-depth look into the performance of specific student groups and performance by subject in the Mega-States, including:

- academic performance over time and in the most recent assessments;
- comparisons to the nation and among the five Mega-States;
- highlights of gains for student groups, including those that performed higher than their peers in the nation; and
- student performance at or above the NAEP *Proficient* level.

### **Are students with disabilities (SD) and English language learners (ELL) included in the Mega-States results?**

Yes. NAEP's goal is to be as inclusive as possible when assessing the achievement of our nation's students. Testing accommodations are provided for students with disabilities (SD) and English language learners (ELL) to include as many students as possible. Even with the availability of accommodations, however, some students may still be excluded.

### **Are private schools included in the results for the Mega-States?**

No. The results presented by each subject area are for public school students only.

### **What additional results are available?**

There are a variety of tools available on the NAEP website at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard> that allow for further exploration of the results.

- The NAEP Data Explorer (<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>) allows users to examine results by student demographic characteristics and by responses to questionnaires completed by students, teachers, and school administrators.
- The NAEP Questions Tool (<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/itmrlsx/>) provides a sample of actual questions that were answered by students. The tool also has performance results on all publicly released NAEP questions.

Links to other resources:

NAEP Release Site

<http://nationsreportcard.gov/>

NAEP Frameworks

<http://www.nagb.org/publications/frameworks.htm>

NAEP Achievement Levels

<http://www.nagb.org/publications/achievement.htm>