

The Common Core Is an Opportunity for Education Equity

May 19, 2014

The Common Core State Standards hold promise for low-income students, students of color, English language learners, and students with disabilities, who traditionally perform significantly worse than their peers. The Common Core helps address inequity in education by ensuring all students are taught to the same high standards and held to the same rigorous expectations. This helps make sure that ZIP codes do not determine education quality. The Common Core-aligned assessments are integral to realizing the promise of the standards; they act as a quality-control check to ensure all students receive a high-quality education.

A Common Core-aligned curriculum will create a more challenging and exciting classroom experience. Students will explore concepts deeply, work together to solve complex problems, and engage in project-based learning—instead of focusing on worksheets and rote memorization. The Common Core-aligned assessments, developed by two non-profit consortia of states,¹ set a rigorous and high benchmark against which all students will be measured.

Highlighting educational gaps

- **Students of color and low-income students have less access to more rigorous coursework.** Black students are 28 percent less likely than their white peers to enroll in algebra in eighth grade—a significant predictor of future academic success—even when they are high performers in fifth-grade math.² This problem persists in high school: Only 29 percent of schools with the highest percentage of black and Latino students offer calculus, compared with 55 percent of schools with the lowest percentage of black and Hispanic students.³
- **Students of color and low-income students are more likely to be taught by inexperienced and out-of-field teachers.** In high-poverty schools,⁴ 27 percent of classes are taught by out-of-field teachers compared with only 14 percent in low-poverty schools.⁵ In high minority schools,⁶ twenty-two percent of teachers have three or fewer years of experience, compared with only 13 percent in low-minority schools.⁷

The **National Assessment of Educational Progress**, or NAEP, is a nationally representative assessment of the knowledge and skills American students actually have. Students are tested periodically in mathematics, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, U.S. history, and—beginning this year—technology and engineering literacy.¹⁴ NAEP exams are administered uniformly across the country and provide a common metric of student performance across states and urban districts. NAEP- and Common Core-aligned assessments are similarly rigorous and evaluate the knowledge and skills students need to be ready for college and the workforce.

- **Students of color; low-income students; students with disabilities; and English language learners, or ELLs, are less likely to graduate from high school on time.**⁸

During the 2009-10 school year, only 66 percent of black students, 71 percent of Hispanic students, and 69 percent of Native American students graduated in four years, compared with 83 percent of white students. According to 2010-11 school year state-level data, less than half of states had graduation rates above 60 percent for students with disabilities and ELLs.⁹

Students of color and low-income students have lower college outcomes

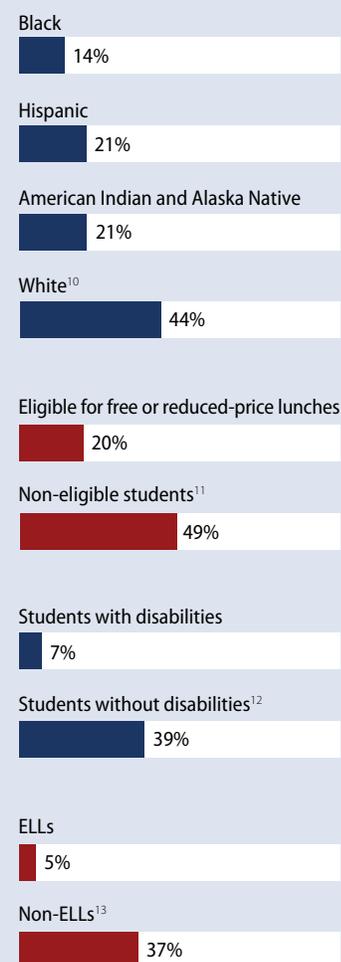
- Between 1995 and 2009, there was a disparity by race in college enrollment rates at the 468 most selective four-year colleges in the nation.¹⁵ Eighty-two percent of new white enrollments attended these schools, while only 13 percent and 9 percent of new Hispanic and black enrollments, respectively, attended them.
- At public institutions, nearly one-third of first-year black and Hispanic students enroll in remedial courses.¹⁶
- Among full-time, first-time students seeking bachelor's degrees, 40 percent of black students, 52 percent of Hispanic students, and 40 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native students earned a degree in four years, compared with 63 percent of white students.¹⁷
- By age 24, young adults from families in the highest income quintile are more than seven times as likely to have earned a bachelor's degree as students from families in the lowest income quintile.¹⁸

Conclusion

The Common Core will improve education quality for all students—particularly traditionally underserved students. Raising standards and preparing all students for college and careers will help reduce the disparities identified for low-income students, students of color, ELLs, and students with disabilities.

These numbers don't square

Percentages of students who scored at the proficient or advanced level on the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress eighth-grade math assessment:



Endnotes

- 1 Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, "About PARCC," available at <https://www.parcconline.org/about-parcc> (last accessed March 2014). Smarter Balanced, "About," available at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/about/> (last accessed March 2014).
- 2 Jill Walston and Jill Carlivati McCarroll, "Eighth-Grade Algebra: Findings from the Eighth-Grade Round of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99 (ECLS-K)" (Washington: National Center for Education Statistics, 2010), available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2010016>.
- 3 U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, "Civil Rights Data Collection," available at <http://ocrdata.ed.gov/> (last accessed March 2014).
- 4 A high-poverty school has 75 percent or more students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. A low-poverty school refers to schools with 15 percent or fewer students from low-income families.
- 5 The Education Trust with Richard M. Ingersoll, "Core Problems: Out-of-Field Teaching Persists in Key Academic Courses and High-Poverty Schools" (Washington: The Education Trust, 2008), available at <http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/SASSreportCoreProblem.pdf>
- 6 A high-minority school has 75 percent or more black, Hispanic, American Indian and Alaska Native, and Asian American and Pacific Islander students. A low-minority school has 10 percent or fewer nonwhite students.
- 7 Analysis of 2003-2004 Schools and Staffing Survey data by Richard Ingersoll, University of Pennsylvania and the Education Trust, 2007.
- 8 Robert Stillwell and Jennifer Sable, "Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2009-10" (Washington: National Center for Education Statistics, 2013), available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013309rev.pdf>.
- 9 U.S. Department of Education, *Provisional Data File: SY2010-11 Four-Year Regulatory Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates* (2012), available at <http://www2.ed.gov/documents/press-releases/state-2010-11-graduation-rate-data.pdf>.
- 10 2013 eight-grade math assessments generated using NAEP Data Explorer at National Center for Education Statistics, "NAEP Data Explorer," available at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/> (last accessed March 2014).
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 National Center for Education Statistics, "National Assessment of Educational Progress: NAEP Overview," available at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/> (last accessed March 2014).
- 15 Anthony Carnevale and Jeff Strohl, "Separate and Unequal: How Higher Education Reinforces the Intergenerational Reproduction of White Racial Privilege" (Washington: Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, 2013), available at <https://georgetown.app.box.com/s/zh9ilgzba9ncmr16ral>.
- 16 Dinah Sparks and Nat Malkus, "Statistics in Brief: First-Year Undergraduate Remedial Course taking: 1999-2000, 2003-04, 2007-08" (Washington: National Center for Education Statistics, 2013), available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013013.pdf>.
- 17 Scott A. Ginder and Janice E. Kelly-Reid, "Enrollment in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2012; Financial Statistics, Fiscal Year 2012; Graduation Rates, Selected Cohorts 200409; and Employees in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2012" (Washington: National Center for Education Statistics, 2013), available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013183.pdf>.
- 18 Tom Mortenson, "Bachelor's Degree Attainment by age 24 by Family Income Quartiles, 1970 to 2010," *Postsecondary Education OPPORTUNITY* 235 (2012), available at http://www.postsecondary.org/last12/235_112pg1_16.pdf.