

Education report

Ohio kids do much worse on U.S. tests than state's

By Catherine Candisky *THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH*

A day after the Ohio House voted to abolish new and tougher student assessments and place limits on state testing, a new report shows that Ohio students are far less prepared for college and career than they and their parents might think.

According to the analysis released on Thursday, Ohio has among the largest gaps between results on state proficiency tests and those on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP, which is considered the most accurate measure of student achievement.

“When Ohio parents read that their child is proficient, they expect it to mean something,” said Chad L. Aldis, vice president for Ohio policy and advocacy at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. “This report should serve as a wake-up call for policymakers about the importance of telling families the truth about student achievement.”

Half or fewer of Ohio students judged proficient in reading and math on state exams were rated as proficient on the NAEP, indicating that state tests are less challenging.

The report by Achieve Inc., a nonprofit group that supports higher standards and assessments, said Ohio and other states “continue to mislead the public about whether students are proficient.” The findings were based on tests given in the 2013-14 school year.

State education officials noted that those state tests were replaced this school year with more rigorous exams that they hope will close the gap.

“In Ohio, we appreciate all these reports, but telling us we’re not good is not news to us. That’s why we’re doing the things we’re doing,” said John Charlton, spokesman for the Ohio Department of Education.

Ohio’s scores on the NAEP have not improved in more than a decade. The tests are given every two years to a sampling of fourth- and eighth-graders in all 50 states.

“There is good reason for the new third-grade reading guarantee, new learning standards, more rigorous assessments. We need to stay the course; otherwise, we

continue to fall behind,” Charlton said.

But Ohio’s use of new Common Core standards and Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers tests have come under fire from critics who argue that they are too hard and take too much time away from classroom learning.

On Wednesday, the House approved House Bill 74, which would end PARCC tests in Ohio and limit state achievement tests to three hours per year. Last month, the House passed a two-year state budget after adding language to eliminate PARCC and cut \$33 million for testing.

Rep. Andrew Brenner, R-Powell, a sponsor of House Bill 74, said he shares concerns raised in the report and supports higher expectations for students but that implementation of PARCC exams was a mess.

“I’m all for more rigor, but let’s just not take up so much of the school year” preparing for and taking exams, he said. “We could have saved millions and just kept the tests we had and raised the ‘cut scores.’”

In the Senate, Kris Jordan, R-Powell, introduced a bill this week to abolish Common Core standards in English/language arts and math. Two weeks ago, the Senate Advisory Committee on Testing recommended scaling back twice-a-year PARCC tests to once a year and reducing overall testing time.

The Kasich administration supports keeping PARCC but reducing the time students spend on standardized exams.

According to the Achieve analysis, there was a difference of 49 percentage points between Ohio’s results on the fourth-grade reading test and on the NAEP. There was a 40 percentage-point gap on eighth-grade math exams.

More than half of the states showed a discrepancy of 30 percentage points or more.

“Parents and educators deserve honest, accurate information about how well their students are performing,” Achieve President Michael Cohen said.

“Giving tests that are well-aligned to rigorous standards is an important step. To provide students, parents and educators with more accurate information, states must also set rigorous ‘cut scores’ so that ‘proficiency’ means that students have a solid grasp of the material.” ccandisky@dispatch.com

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