



New York City Student Achievement on National Tests during Mayoral Control: A Comparative Perspective 2003 to 2011

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Introduction

As New York City prepares to elect a new mayor in November 2013, it is important to evaluate student achievement under mayoral control. The Bloomberg administration often claims that New York City schools have experienced unparalleled achievement under mayoral control, and offers state tests scores as evidence of this fact. The National Assessment of Education Progress Trial Urban District Assessment (NAEP TUDA), an additional measure of student achievement, however, paints a much different picture.

This paper details the NAEP TUDA assessment, explaining what it is, how education professionals view it, and how it contributes to a discussion of mayoral control of New York City schools. NAEP TUDA, a valuable additional measure of student achievement, provides important insight into the performance of our city's schools over time. The NAEP TUDA assessment also provides a comparative context in which to view achievement of New York City schools alongside other major city school districts across the nation.

An examination of the performance of the New York City school district on the NAEP TUDA from 2003-2011 indicates that New York City is actually falling behind many other comparable large cities. In 4th and 8th grade math New York City experienced the slowest rate of improvement for the percentage of students achieving basic level from 2003 to 2011 compared to other comparable cities. From 2003 to 2011 New York City had the slowest rate of improvement in the percentage of students reaching proficiency level in 8th grade math and 8th grade reading.

These test scores reveal two very alarming trends in New York City. In math, New York City was the only City to experience a decline in the students at or above proficient from 2003 to 2011. In 8th grade, in both math and reading, New York City experienced the smallest gains from 2003 to 2011. Interestingly, Boston and Houston school districts experienced larger gains in several of the major test areas. Given the differing structures of the school systems, this type of comparison throws into question the relationship between governing structure and student achievement.

The Test

The National Assessment of Education Progress is administered by the National Department of Education Statistics, which is itself part of the U.S. Department of Education. By design, the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) provides a common yardstick by which to measure the academic achievement of students across the nation. Using samples of students, the main NAEP assessment measures the ability of groups of students in a variety of subject areas. This assessment does not report scores for individual schools or districts, but rather for populations of students and subgroups within those populations.

The NAEP TUDA, however, provides a measurement of student progress for many of the nation's largest urban school districts. In 2002, NAEP began administering the test in certain subjects and was administered in reading, mathematics, science and writing in 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011. Participating urban districts include New York City, Boston, Chicago, District of Columbia, Los Angeles, Charlotte, Austin, San Diego, Atlanta, Houston, and Cleveland.

The NAEP results are important for several reasons. First, this test provides a valuable additional perspective on student achievement that complements the state tests. While many schools increasingly focus on preparation for state tests, it is not common practice to prepare students for NAEP tests, which given the format of the test, may believe to be more difficult to do. Based on this fact, some argue that NAEP results are more likely to reflect actual learning rather than test preparation.

New York State Test Score Overhaul

State tests tend to change frequently, and in 2010 New York State overhauled the test score system. The State dramatically increased the test score threshold for proficiency in reading and math in grades 3-8 for 2010. In New York City, the percentage levels of students achieving proficiency in grades 3-8 dropped 26 points in English Language Arts and 28 points in math. This drastic test score recalibration makes it very difficult to draw comparisons of student improvement before and after 2010, underscoring the importance of looking to the NAEP TUDA assessment to get a clear picture of achievement over time.

New York City and other TUDA Cities

Of the eleven districts that have participated in the NAEP TUDA exam since 2003, there are five districts that are comparable to New York City: Boston, Houston, Los Angeles, Chicago and DC. These districts have poverty rates that are similar to New York City and as a result provide an appropriate context in which to evaluation NYC student achievement. Other large cities in New York State which NYC is often compared to have much higher poverty rates and many other differences that make it difficult to draw valid comparisons.

Of these five districts, Houston is the only city that has never experienced mayoral control of their school systems. Boston, Los Angeles, Chicago and DC have all implemented some variation of mayoral control. The degree of control varies considerably in many of these cities. The various governing structures and how they relate to student achievement will be discussed later in this paper.

Families with Children Under 18 in Poverty		
	#	%
Cleveland	21, 624	32.3
Atlanta	14,959	31.9
New York	266,616	25.8
Los Angeles	122,289	25.3
Washington DC	15,231	24.5
Chicago	84,598	23.1
Boston	13,811	22.2
Houston	59,498	21.8
San Diego	24,012	15.9
Austin	10,265	13

Achievement Level Results - Basic

Achievement level results are measured by two main benchmarks: the percentage of students at or above basic and the percentage of students at or above proficient. This section will discuss both of these achievement levels in the four major test areas.

In fourth grade Math in New York City the percentage of students at or above basic improved by nine points from 2003 to 2011. All other comparable cities experienced larger gains during this time.

While other comparable large cities experienced upward trends between 2007 and 2011, New York City scores decreased during this time. The percentage of students at or above basic remained stagnant from 2007 to 2009, and actually decreased by three points from 2009 to 2011. All other comparable large cities either remained the same or improved during this time.

In eighth grade math in New York City the percentage of students at or above basic improved by six points from 2003 to 2011. All other comparable TUDA cities experience considerably larger gains during this time

The decline in the percentage of students at or above basic in 4th and 8th grade math indicates that other cities are improving at much faster rates than New York City. Further, the NAEP TUDA reveals an alarming trend from 2009 to 2011. While other cities were improving the percentage of students at or above basic, New York City actually decreased in fourth grade math and showed no improvement in 8th grade math.

% At or Above Basic in 4 th Grade Math						
	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2003-2011
New York City	67	73	79	79	76	9
Boston	59	72	77	80	80	21
Houston	70	77	80	82	82	12
Los Angeles	52	58	60	61	63	11
Chicago	50	52	58	62	64	14
DC	36	45	49	57	58	22

% At or Above Basic in 8 th Grade Math						
	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2003-2011
New York City	54	54	57	60	60	6
Boston	48	58	65	68	68	20
Houston	52	58	65	69	72	20
Los Angeles	32	38	45	45	49	17
Chicago	42	45	49	52	60	18
DC	29	31	34	38	42	13

In fourth grade reading in New York City the percentage of students at or above basic improved by nine points from 2003 to 2011. The nine point improvement in New York City is on par with many other comparable large cities. From 2009 to 2011, the percentage of students at or above basic in New York City declined by one point. With the exception of DC which decreased by two points, all other comparable large cities experienced gains during this time.

From 2003 to 2011, the percentage of students at or above basic in 8th grade reading improved by three points. With the exception of DC which declined by one point, all other comparable cities also made gains.

% At or Above Basic in 4th Grade Reading						
	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2003-2011
New York City	53	57	57	62	61	8
Boston	48	51	54	61	62	14
Houston	48	52	49	55	57	9
Los Angeles	35	37	39	40	45	10
Chicago	40	40	44	45	48	8
DC	31	33	39	46	44	13

% At or Above Basic in 8th Grade Reading						
	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2003-2011
New York City	62	61	59	64	65	3
Boston	61	61	63	68	63	2
Houston	55	59	63	64	64	9
Los Angeles	43	47	50	54	56	13
Chicago	59	60	61	60	64	15
DC	47	45	48	48	46	-1

Achievement Level Results - Proficient

In New York City, the percentage of students at or above proficient in 4th grade math increased by 12 points from 2003 to 2011. Cities such as Boston, Houston and DC all experienced larger gains during this time. From 2009 to 2011, New York City was the only city to experience a decline in the percentage of students at or above proficient.

Proficiency level results for 8th grade math are even more alarming. New York City gained three points from 2003 to 2011. All other cities experienced much larger gains.

In 2003, New York City started out considerably far ahead of cities such as Boston and Houston. By 2011, however, New York City fell behind both of these cities. As in 4th grade math, New York City was the only city to experience a decline in the percentage of students at or above proficient from 2009 to 2011.

% At or Above Proficient in 4th Grade Math						
	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2003-2011
New York City	21	25	34	35	33	12
Boston	12	22	27	30	33	21
Houston	18	26	26	30	32	14
Los Angeles	13	18	19	19	20	7
Chicago	10	13	16	18	20	10
DC	7	9	14	19	23	15

% At or Above Proficient in 8th Grade Math						
	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2003-2011
New York City	21	21	22	26	24	3
Boston	18	22	27	32	33	15
Houston	13	16	20	24	27	14
Los Angeles	7	11	14	13	16	9
Chicago	9	11	13	15	20	11
DC	6	7	8	11	15	9

In 4th grade reading in New York City, the percentage of students at or above proficient increased by eight points. While this gain is on par with other comparable large cities, Boston and DC experienced larger gains during this time.

In 8th grade reading in New York City, the percentage of students at or above proficient increased by only two points from 2003 to 2011. All other large cities with the exception of Boston experienced larger gains during this time. In both 8th grade reading and 8th grade math, New York City made minimal progress relative to other large school districts, experiencing the slowest rates of improvement of all these comparable large cities.

% At or Above Proficient in 4th Grade Reading						
	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2003-2011
New York City	21	23	25	29	29	8
Boston	15	17	20	24	27	12
Houston	17	21	17	19	24	7
Los Angeles	11	14	13	13	15	4
Chicago	14	14	16	16	18	4
DC	11	11	14	19	21	10

% At or Above Proficient in 8th Grade Reading						
	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2003-2011
New York City	22	19	20	22	24	2
Boston	22	23	23	23	24	2
Houston	14	17	18	18	18	4
Los Angeles	11	13	13	15	16	5
Chicago	15	17	17	17	21	7
DC	10	12	12	15	15	5

Achievement Gap & NAEP TUDA

NAEP has as one of its mandates the goal of measuring the performance of subgroups within a given population. By measuring the achievement gap with reference to average scores, the NAEP results are able to capture precisely how certain students are performing relative to their peers. Such a consideration reveals little progress in closing the achievement gap between white students and their black and Hispanic peers from 2003-2011.

In 4th grade reading, the white-black achievement gap closed by four points from 2003 to 2011. The narrowing of the gap occurred between 2003 and 2007. There was no improvement made with regard to narrowing the achievement gap between 2007 and 2011. From 2003 to 2011 in 4th grade math, the white-Hispanic achievement gap increased by two points. It is important to note that NAEP reports that neither the change in the black-white achievement gap or the white-Hispanic achievement gap is statistically significant.

In 8th grade reading, the white-black achievement gap closed by two points from 2003 to 2011. The white-Hispanic achievement gap increased by two points during this time. NAEP reports that neither of these changes is statistically significant.

In 4th grade math, the white-black achievement gap and the white-Hispanic achievement gap both closed by three points. NAEP reports that neither the narrowing of the white-black achievement gap or the white-Hispanic achievement gap is statistically significant. In 8th grade math, the white-black achievement gap closed by six points from 2003-2011. During this time the white-Hispanic achievement gap increased by two points.

From 2003-2011, New York City made little progress in relation to closing the achievement gap. The white-Hispanic achievement gap narrowed in only one out of four subject areas. The white-black achievement gap closed in all four subject areas, but none of these improvements are statistically significant.

4th Grade Math Scores by Race/ Ethnicity					
	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011
White	244	245	249	254	248
Black	219	222	227	227	226
Hispanic	220	226	230	230	227
Asian	247	253	257	258	251

8th Grade Math Scores by Race Ethnicity					
	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011
White	289	286	289	295	292
Black	253	257	258	261	262
Hispanic	260	259	262	261	261
Asian	286	295	299	309	304

4th Grade Reading Scores by Race/ Ethnicity					
	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011
White	231	226	232	235	235
Black	201	206	206	208	209
Hispanic	205	207	203	208	207
Asian	227	235	230	235	230

8th Grade Reading Scores by Race/ Ethnicity					
	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011
White	270	269	270	271	271
Black	245	241	240	246	248
Hispanic	247	247	241	243	246
Asian	264	271	268	270	273

Governance & Student Achievement

In recent years many cities across the nation have implemented some form of mayoral control of the public school system. The systems vary in the degree of control given to the mayor. In New York City, the Mayor unilaterally appoints eight of the 13 members of the Panel for Education Policy (PEP), including the chancellor. Each Borough President appoints one member of the PEP. The members of the PEP serve at the pleasure of the Mayor.

In several test areas, Boston and Houston in particular experienced greater improvement from 2003-2011. Interestingly, Houston is the only school system in this study that does not have mayoral control, and Boston has a much more multilateral decision making process. In Boston, the Mayor appoints members from a list of candidates recommended by a 13-member Citizens Nominating Panel composed of parents, teachers, principals, and representatives of business and higher education. Boston School Committee members are appointed to serve four-year staggered terms. When vacancies exist, the Mayor selects members from a list of candidates recommended by a Citizens Nominating Panel composed of parents, teachers, principals, and representatives of the business and higher education communities.

An examination of New York City school performance on national tests reveals little progress relative to other comparable large cities. New York City started out ahead of many of these cities. However, due to slower rates of improvement, New York City has begun to fall behind in several of the major test areas. Interestingly, cities such as Boston and Houston have experienced gains on par with and often better than New York City. Given their differing governing structures, this report indicates that mayoral control in the way it has been experienced in New York City may not be directly related to student achievement as measured by performance on national tests.