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Alabama’s New Assessments Narrow “Honesty Gap” in Reporting Student Proficiency, According to National Report

Montgomery, Ala. – A report published today by Achieve ranks Alabama as one of the nation’s “Top Truth-Tellers” in academic reporting, affirming that the Alabama State Board of Education’s efforts to improve transparency and quality in public education to Alabama students are working.

The report acknowledges that many states’ test and reporting processes show widely different results than the data collected by NAEP, bringing into question the true level of college and career preparedness in several states across the country. While there is no one assessment that can show everything educators need to know to inform instruction, NAEP provides a time-tested and trusted benchmark by which states and families can assess student progress and address proficiency gaps.

As the State Board of Education embarked upon Plan 2020, they embraced a solid set of academic standards, the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards (CCRS), that better prepares students for the high expectations of today’s workforce, colleges and universities. The Board recognized, and set out to change, the significant gap in between what was considered proficient on the state’s former assessment, the Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT), and what is considered proficient by the nationally recognized gold standard, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Alabama now uses the ACT (Aspire, 3-8 grades, Plan 10th grade) to evaluate student performance and inform instruction.

The Achieve report examines what states reported in 2013-14 as their proficiency levels, as compared to NAEP proficiency levels in 4th and 8th Grade reading and math. Those considered “Truth-Tellers” have a difference in proficiency levels of 15 percentage points or fewer. In 4th Grade reading, Alabama was a Top Truth-Teller along with New York, Wisconsin, Utah, Massachusetts, Missouri, Minnesota, and Tennessee. In 8th Grade math, Alabama was a Top Truth-Teller along with the aforementioned states and Michigan, N. Carolina, Nevada, Colorado, Wyoming, Washington, Kentucky, and West Virginia.

State Superintendent of Education, Dr. Tommy Bice, said for too long there has been a false sense of security concerning exactly how prepared Alabama high school graduates are for what awaits them after graduation.
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“When you consider the number of students who were entering college and having to take remedial courses three months after graduating from high school; or students who were seeking to enter the workforce, but did not having the necessary skills to obtain gainful employment, there was obviously a disconnect,” Bice said. “Our primary mission is to make sure the students who graduate from Alabama high schools have the ability to enter institutions of higher learning without remediation, or enter the workforce with relevant and sought after skill sets and credentials.”

In all areas, Alabama has seen a significant reduction in the differential between proficiency as determined by NAEP and that determined by the state. The disparity between Alabama and NAEP in 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 has reduced as follows:

In 2012-13, the differential in 4th Grade reading was -57. In 2013-14 it was -7. In 2012-13, the differential in 8th Grade reading was -55. In 2013-14 it was -23. In math, the 2012-13 differential in 4th Grade math was -52, in 2013-14 it was -15. In 8th Grade math, the differential was -57 in 2012-13. In 2013-14 it was -9.

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