

August 16, 2004

Achievement in California: Where Are We Now?

Today marks California's 7th release of STAR testing data. Fortunately, there is progress. Overall, reading and math achievement is climbing. This progress is primarily the result of the capacity and efforts of thousands of teachers, school administrators, and state and local policymakers who are rising to the challenge of ensuring that all students are taught to California's world class standards.

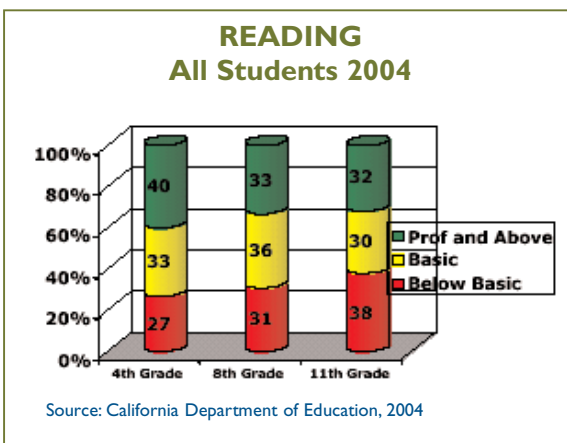
But, we recognize that some progress is not enough progress. Too few students reach proficient levels and the achievement gap separating California's low-income students and students of color from their peers remains stagnant, and at the high school level is widening.

OVERALL RESULTS

This year, the percentage of students scoring at or above proficient in reading on the California Standards Test (CST) increased in both 4th and 8th grades. California's middle schools posted the highest gains: 8th grade reading increased from 30% in 2003 to 33% today.

And even though 4th graders are doing math at about the same level as last year (holding steady at 45% proficient or above), they've stayed the course on improvement, and moved up from 37% in 2002.

Still, too few students read at proficient levels. For instance, about 40% of California's 4th graders reach proficient or above, while 27% have not been taught even to the basic level. The story is worse in middle school and high school, with only about a third of 8th and 11th graders reaching proficiency.



RESULTS BY ETHNICITY AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

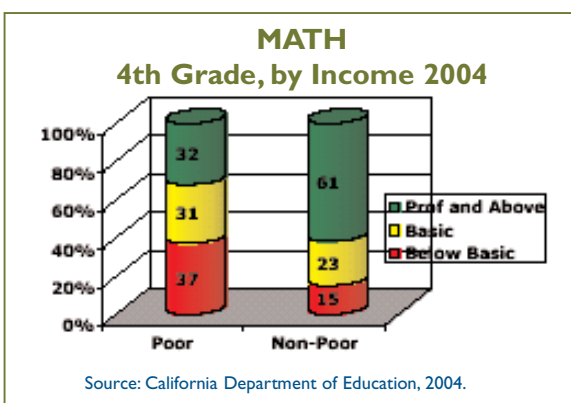
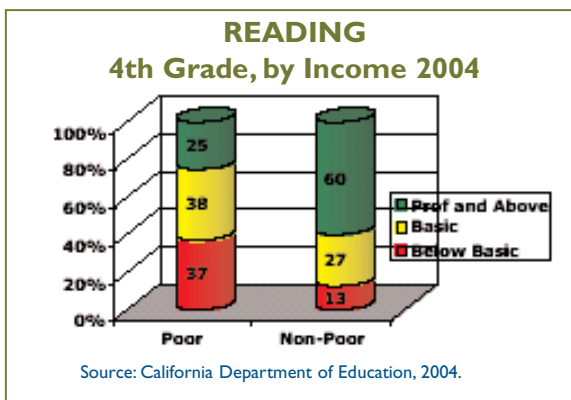
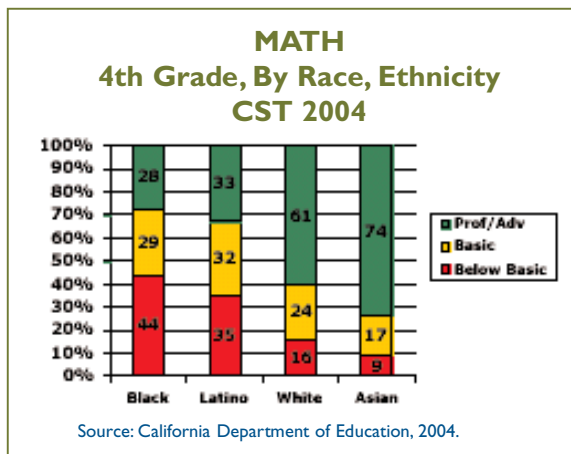
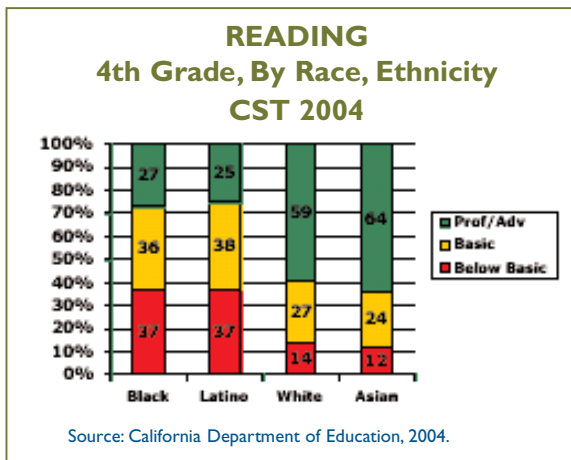
Underneath these averages there are huge achievement gaps that separate California's Latino, African American and low-income students from their peers.

At the 4th Grade:

- White, Asian and middle class 4th graders are twice as likely as their Latino, African Americans and low-income peers to score proficient or above in reading.
- The opposite is true when it comes to the percentages of students not taught to even the basic levels: Latino and African American 4th graders are over 2 * as likely as their White peers, and 3 times as likely as their Asian peers to score below or far below basic in reading.
- Patterns are similar in mathematics across racial and economic lines.

Too few students reach proficient levels and the achievement gap separating California's low-income students and students of color from their peers remains stagnant, and is, in fact, widening.



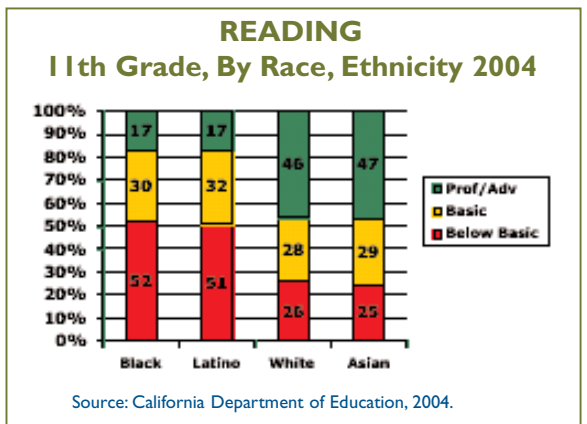
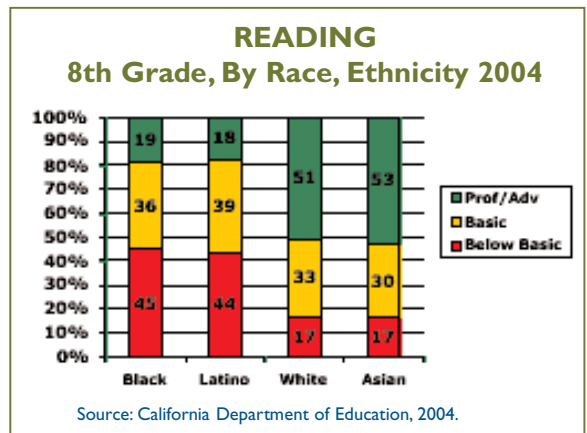


RESULTS BY MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

The situation is even worse at the secondary level, when students should learn the knowledge and skills they will need to succeed in life after high school.

Fewer students in every subgroup are proficient, and the wide gaps persist.

- In middle school, only 18% of California's Latino 8th graders and 19% of African Americans read at proficient or above, compared to 51% and 53% of White and Asian 8th graders.
- About 1/2 of 10th graders aren't meeting the minimum competency skills tested in the high school exit exam.
- We're losing ground in high school English: after steady, albeit small, increases over the last few years, the percentage of students proficient and above in 11th grade English went down to 32% this year, from 33% in 2003. Indeed, over half of California's Latino and African American 11th graders are performing below or far below basic in reading.



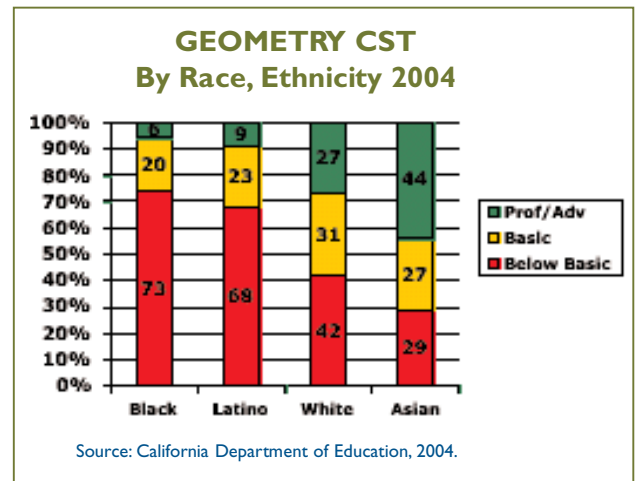
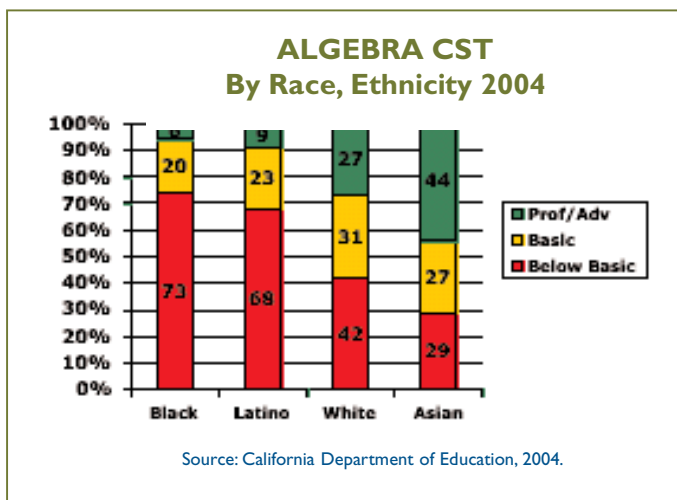
Research is clear that the knowledge and skills typically taught in California’s college prep curriculum (Algebra, Geometry and Algebra II) reflect the demands of today’s workplace. Far too few students in California ever even take these courses. At present, only one in six school districts in California offer California’s college prep curriculum to all students. Opportunities are especially scarce in districts serving low-income students and students of color.

And, even those students that do take the necessary courses aren’t mastering the skills they’ll need.

Take Algebra for example: progress came to a halt this year. Only 18% of Algebra test takers score at proficient or above, down from 22% in 2002. Worse, the percentage of students below the basic level has increased from 46% in 2002 to 56% this year. And there are enormous gaps:

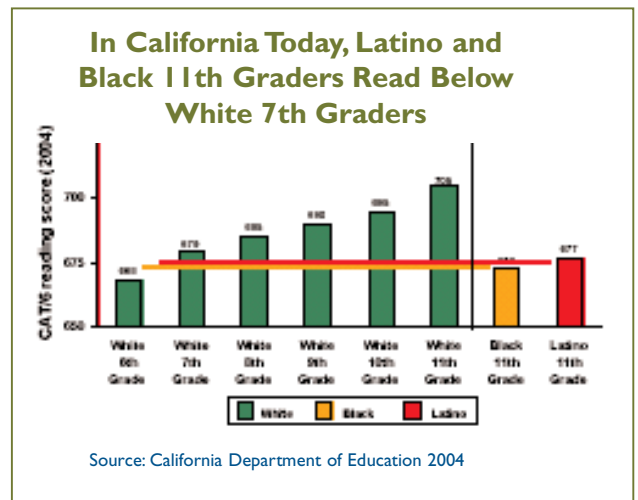
- Asian students were seven times more likely than African Americans to score proficient or above in Algebra. White students were 1/4 times more likely than African Americans to score proficient.
- Though the gaps aren’t quite as large between Latino students and their Asian and White colleagues, there remain huge disparities: Asian and White students are over 3 times more likely than their Latino colleagues to reach proficiency levels.

Similar patterns hold true in Geometry.



RESULTS BY THE END OF HIGH SCHOOL?

What does all this mean? By the end of high school, Latino and African American students have math and reading skills that are virtually the same as White 6th and 7th graders. Similar gaps exist in Mathematics.



And these, of course, are the students who make it to the end of high school. Between grade eight and graduation, we lose nearly 30% of students. That’s almost 150,000 students every year who are not making it to graduation day.

IS THE GAP CLOSING?

Overall the Latino–White gap and the gap between California’s low-income students and their more wealthy peers remained stagnant or decreased slightly. Similarly, the overall African American–White gap showed little improvement, and during the high school years, the gap actually widened.

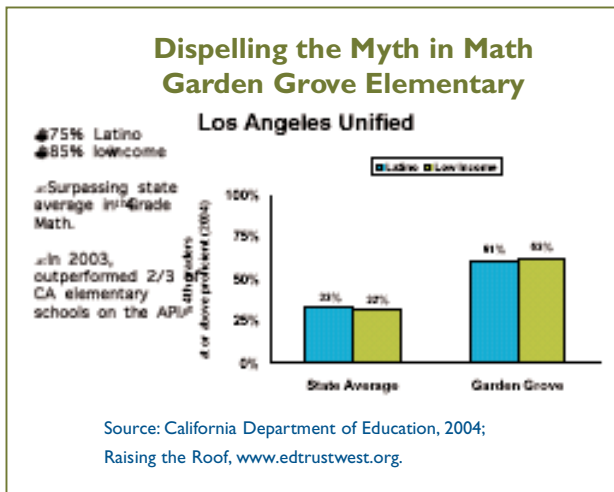


CHANGE IN CST ENGLISH GAP 2003 – 2004

	4 th Gr. English	8 th Gr. English	11 th Gr. English
Black – White Gap	0	0	+2
Latino – White Gap	-1	-1	0
Poor – Non Poor	0	0	-2

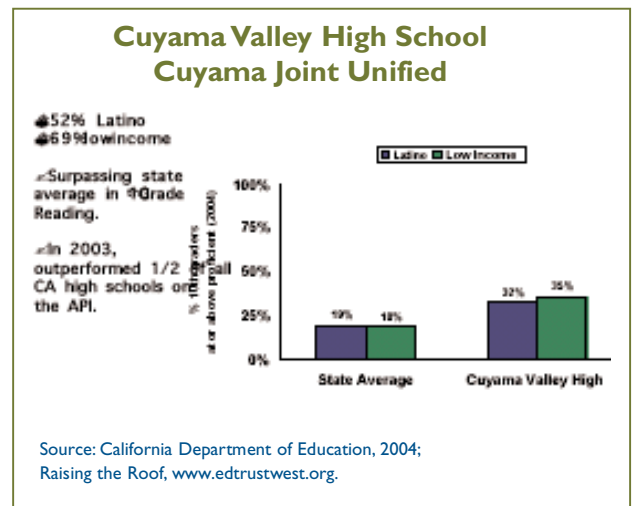
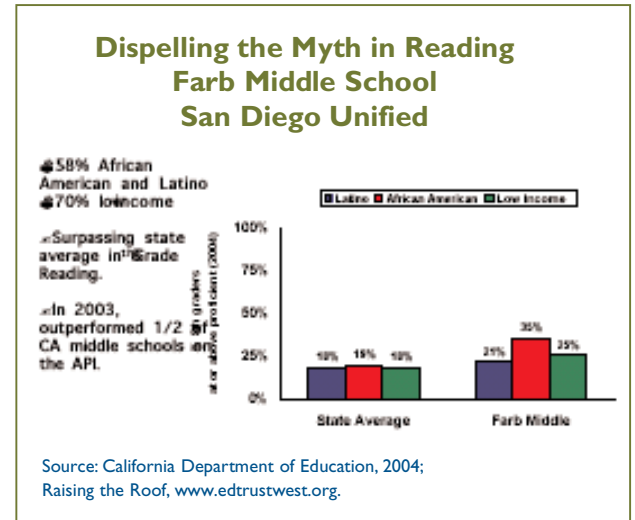
BUT IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THIS WAY...

There are some schools where high achievement is displayed across the board... Garden Grove Elementary School in Los Angeles Unified is 75% Latino and 85% of its students are low-income. Garden Grove's Latino and low income students are surpassing the state averages in math and last year scored in the top third of all elementary schools on the API.



There are schools that are excelling—at every level—throughout California. Farb Middle School in San Diego Unified is one example of a school making small gains across all sub-groups. Farb Middle is 58% Latino and African American, and 70% low-income. Latinos, African Americans and low-income 8th graders at Farb outperformed the state average in reading this year. And last year Farb Middle scored in the top half of all middle schools statewide.

Cuyama Valley High School is another example. Cuyama Valley High's Latino and low-income 10th graders are continuously outperforming their peers across the state.



WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE PLACES THAT GET RESULTS?

They provide teachers who are well prepared to teach the subject matter.

Students need teachers who know their subjects and know how to teach them. Yet, large numbers of students, especially those who are Latino, African American and low-income are taught by teachers who lack sufficient background in the subjects they teach.

They have clear goals: the role of standards.

Clear standards for what students should learn at benchmark grade levels are an invaluable tool for raising achievement and closing gaps. They are a guide—for teachers, administrators, parents and students—for the knowledge and skills students need to master. Standards represent a contract



between schools and their communities that these skills are the expectation for all their students.

They provide all students with challenging curriculums aligned with standards.

New standards and assessments won't make much of a difference if they are not accompanied by a rigorous curriculum lined up with those standards. Yet in too many places throughout California, some students are taught rich and challenging subject matter, while others are relegated to a low-level curriculum—one that is better aligned with the assembly-line jobs that are disappearing than with today's job market or college entry requirements. (For more information on the importance of a challenging curriculum, please see "Are California's High Schools Ready for the 21st Century?" available at www.edtrustwest.org.)

They provide extra instruction to students when they need it.

There is ample evidence that all children can achieve at high levels if they are taught at high levels. Indeed, the simple act of putting students in more rigorous college preparatory courses will improve achievement; the data are clear on that. But it is equally clear that for some students, passing the course or examination will require extra time and support.

HOW CAN WE PAY FOR THIS?

In California, schools that educate the greatest number of poor and minority children receive substantially less state and local money per student and per teacher than schools educating the fewest low-income and minority students. At a time when schools and districts throughout the state are rightly focusing on raising overall achievement and closing the achievement gap, California can and must do more to close the funding gap.

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF WE HAD THE WILL TO CLOSE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS, AND THE OPPORTUNITY GAPS THAT PRODUCE THEM?

It only takes one school to teach Latino, African American and low-income students at high levels to prove that it can be done. All around California and throughout the nation, there are hundreds of schools that are doing just

that. Underachievement among Latino, African American and poor students is a crisis, but as these communities show, raising subgroup achievement is not an insurmountable task.

BACK TO SCHOOL MEANS BACK TO WORK ON IMPROVING OUR SCHOOLS

The STAR and CAHSEE data released today are evidence of the work ahead. We must close the huge achievement gaps separating California's low-income students and students of color from their peer, and confront the opportunity gaps that produce them.

This latest edition of STAR and CAHSEE data confirms that while some progress is happening, there is much work left to be done. Stay tuned for the release of API and AYP results later this month to see whether California is making the kind of progress toward proficiency for all students required by state and federal accountability systems.

Please look for the second Education Trust—West report in this series on or about August 31st, 2004. That report will discuss the latest API and AYP data.

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About the Education Trust West

The Education Trust West is the West Coast presence of the national policy organization, the Education Trust. The Education Trust West works alongside policy-makers, parents, education professionals, business and community leaders, in cities and towns throughout California to help improve the academic achievement of all students from all subgroups and in all schools. Our mission is to help close the achievement gaps that divide California students along racial and economic lines, and to ensure that every high-school graduate is empowered and prepared to choose among all postsecondary options. As one state-level policymaker recently said, this work has made us "the conscience of the state." We wear that label proudly.

