

“Check the Facts: Few States Set World-Class Standards”

A One-Page Reaction by Bert Stoneberg (OregonData@hotmail.com)

May 13, 2008

In their scheme of things, Peterson and Hess¹ used the NAEP scale to designate three states – Massachusetts, South Carolina and Missouri – as having “world class standards.” In the process, they classified my state – Idaho – among a group of 12 states that have pitched their expectation far below the other states. So what?

There is no reason to expect that setting a “world-class standard” will cause “world-class achievement.” Indeed, a recently released research study using the NAEP scale and state standards and achievement scores found little relationship between the rigor of a state’s standard and the overall achievement of its students.²

What happens when the overall reading and mathematics achievement in grades 4 and 8 on NAEP 2007 in the three Peterson and Hess “world-class standards” states is compared to the overall achievement in one of their “low expectation” states such as Idaho? Zero correlation! This is clearly illustrated in the following table:

How did overall student achievement on NAEP 2007 in Massachusetts, South Carolina and Missouri with their “world class standards” compare to Idaho with its expectations for students that are “far below the other states”?

	Massachusetts	South Carolina	Missouri
Reading			
Grade 4	Higher*	Lower*	Not Significantly Different*
Grade 8	Higher	Lower	Not Significantly Different
Mathematics			
Grade 4	Higher	Lower	Not Significantly Different
Grade 8	Higher	Not Significantly Different	Lower

* On NAEP 2007, grade 4 reading achievement (1) in Massachusetts was higher than in Idaho, (2) in South Carolina was lower than in Idaho, and (3) in Missouri was not significantly different from Idaho.

“Proficient” has several meanings. *It is important to understand clearly that the [NAEP] Proficient achievement level does not refer to “at grade” performance. Nor is performance at the Proficient level synonymous with “proficiency” in the subject. That is, students who may be considered proficient in a subject, given the common usage of the term, might not satisfy the requirements for performance at the NAEP achievement level.*³

¹ Peterson, P.E., and Hess, F.M. (2008, Summer). Check the facts: Few states set world-class standards. *Education Next*, 8(3). Retrieved May 13, 2008, from <http://www.hoover.org/publications/ednext/18845034.html>

² McLaughlin, D.H., Bandeira de Mello, V., Blankenship, C., Chaney, K., Esra, P., Hikawa, H., Rojas, D., William, P., and Wolman, M. (2008). *Comparison Between NAEP and State Reading Assessment Results: 2003* (NCES 2008-474). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC. Retrieved May 13, 2008, from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2008474>

³ Loomis, S.C., and Bourque, M.L. (Eds.) (2001). *National Assessment of Educational Progress achievement levels 1992-1998 for reading*. National Assessment Governing Board, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, D.C. Retrieved May 13, 2008, from <http://www.nagb.org/pubs/readingbook.pdf>