

# Looking At The ISSUES

June 22, 2007

## New Study says States Vary Widely on Academic Standards

Last week *Issues* reported on the findings of a study by the Center for Education Policy (CEP)<sup>1</sup> that math and reading achievement has increased since the passage of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. CEP looked at test data from all 50 states. The good news in the CEP report was followed a week later by another report underscoring a sobering reality. Academic standards were found to vary drastically from state to state. The study found, for example, that a student considered proficient in 4th grade reading in Mississippi or Tennessee would fall woefully short of meeting proficiency in states like South Carolina or Massachusetts.

These findings came from the U.S. Education Department's Institute for Educational Sciences (IES) who mapped state proficiency standards onto the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP).<sup>2</sup> NAEP is often considered the gold standard in testing. It is a national test, that isn't. Samples of schools in all 50 states participate, but the test has no relationship to NCLB, nor is it used by any state to meet its obligations under the law. This mapping had never been done before and for the first time, a common measure exists to assess the individual standards adopted by each state through that state's testing. IES considered this mapping important because each state can select its own standards and tests under NCLB.

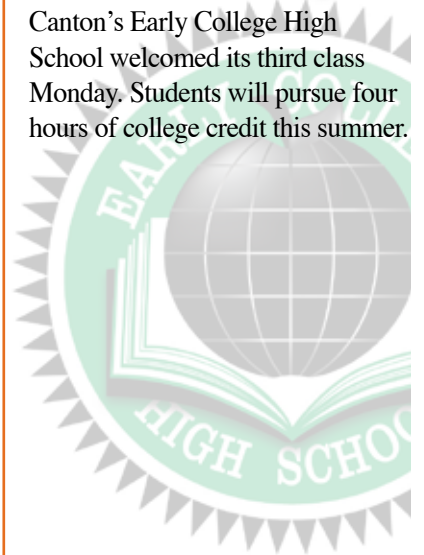
Critics were encouraged by the results, calling for national standards and tests. By midweek, Education Secretary Spellings took the unusual step of responding in a strongly worded op-ed piece in the *Washington Post*:<sup>3</sup>

*Why do I believe this approach is wrong? First, it goes against more than two centuries of American educational tradition. Under the Constitution, states and localities have the primary leadership role in public education. They design the curriculum and pay 90 percent of the bills. Neighborhood schools deserve neighborhood leadership, not dictates from bureaucrats thousands of miles away... the debate over national standards would become an exercise in lowest-common-denominator politics.*

Ohio's results vary according to this new system of measurement. Fourth grade reading doesn't meet the NAEP basic cut score; 8th grade reading might, given a margin of error. Fourth grade and eighth math are both above the basic cut score. In fairness, only a handful of states reach proficient in any category; no one does in 8th grade reading.

## Looking At The Week

Canton's Early College High School welcomed its third class Monday. Students will pursue four hours of college credit this summer.



<sup>1</sup>Chudowsky, N., Chudowsky, V., & Kober, N. (2007). *Answering the question that matters most: Has student achievement increased since No Child Left Behind?*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Education Policy, available online at <http://www.cep-dc.org>

<sup>2</sup>(2007). *Mapping 2005 State Proficiency Standards onto NAEP Scores: Research and Development Report*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, NCES 2007-482. Available at: <http://nces.ed.gov/nation-sreportcard/pubs/studies/2007482.asp>

<sup>3</sup>"A National Test We Don't Need", This op-ed by Secretary Spellings appeared in the *Washington Post* on June 9, 2007, available at: <http://www.ed.gov/news/opeds/edit/2007/06112007.html>