

SREB

Mastering Reading and Mathematics in the Early Grades

2004

Southern
Regional
Education
Board

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CHALLENGE TO LEAD SERIES

This report was developed by a team of SREB staff members, including Joan Lord, director of educational policies; Robin Wade, educational policies research associate; and Joseph Creech, special consultant.

It is part of the *Challenge to Lead* education goals' series, directed by Joan Lord. For more information, contact her at joan.lord@sreb.org. *Goals for Education: Challenge to Lead* is available on the SREB Web site at www.sreb.org. A full listing of goals, plus the indicators for the early grades, is printed on the inside back cover.

A Message from the President of SREB

Master reading and mathematics in the early grades. It's fundamental. Capture the energy and curiosity of young children and focus them on the basic building blocks of learning — reading and mathematics. This is the goal, *but we are not yet bringing all children to mastery of the fundamentals of reading and mathematics. And, more disturbing, we are not successful with nearly as many minority and poor youngsters as we must be.*

Mastering Reading and Mathematics in the Early Grades is one of a series of reports on the progress of SREB states in meeting their ambitious goals of educational improvement. The goals, known as *Challenge to Lead*, reflect the stated aim of SREB states to lead the nation in educational progress. They focus state educational reform on helping students make smooth transitions from one grade to the next — from the time they enter school until they graduate from college. These goals focus on closing gaps between performance and standards for ethnically diverse groups; for boys and girls; for rich and poor students; and for

students who live in urban, suburban, and rural areas. They also seek to create an education system of schools, colleges and universities that works to promote student achievement.

Challenge to Lead's goal for the early grades keeps our focus on young children until they can all read and do arithmetic well enough to succeed in the middle grades. We are a long way from meeting the goal. But the good news is that student achievement is improving — notably so in some cases. More than two-thirds of the students in the median SREB states met state standards in reading and mathematics 2003. The percentages of students scoring at or above the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Basic level in fourth-grade mathematics in median SREB states in 2003 was 22 percentage points higher than the median SREB states' percentages in 1992.

Along with the gains in SREB states over the past decade, this report also highlights the significant questions and challenges that remain.

■ **Are state standards set high enough?**

- How does the percentage of your students meeting or exceeding standards compare with percentages in other states? How do your state test results compare with the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress? Are students who do well in the early grades ready to develop academic knowledge and skills in a variety of subjects?

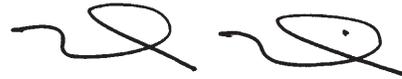
■ **Can states get all students ready for the next level of schooling when so many students have not yet mastered the content for their grade level?**

- Too many fourth-grade students score below the NAEP Basic level in both reading and mathematics. In six SREB states, 40 or more percent of students score below the NAEP Basic level.

■ What will it take to close achievement gaps?

- The percentages of black students in every SREB state scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level at fourth-grade fell far short of the goal and far behind the performance of white students.
- Boys lag behind girls in meeting state standards in early grades in reading and in mathematics.
- Children from low-income households — those eligible for the National School Lunch Program — trail others by significant margins.

This report concludes with policy information on reading in the early grades, including how federal funds for reading programs are distributed to districts and schools, and what states are requiring of students who do not meet state standards at the end of third or fourth grade. Programs that can help students catch up are essential. And getting the right policies on promotion and retention will be critical for states as they work to ensure that all children succeed in mastering the fundamental skills of reading and mathematics in the early grades.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'M' followed by a cursive 'Musick'.

Mark Musick
President

Mastering Reading and Mathematics in the Early Grades

Achievement in the early grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.

Challenge to Lead

The *Challenge to Lead* goal for early grades students is first about student achievement in reading and mathematics. The goal is that students in the early grades in your state — regardless of their economic status, school location, ethnicity or gender — will be as proficient in reading and mathematics as youngsters anywhere in the nation. *Challenge to Lead* warns that failure to achieve our goal is unacceptable; otherwise, “*what we are talking about 10 or 20 years later are more dropouts, more people qualified for only the lowest-paying jobs, and more people occupying prison cells.*”

So, how will you know whether students in your state are achieving at high levels and whether they are prepared for a challenging middle-grades curriculum? Ask two questions about your state.

- *Is achievement improving in my state for all students and for all groups of students?*
- *How are students in my state performing compared to regional and national measures?*

This report will help you answer these questions. It will help you know if your state is making sufficient progress and if you are getting students ready for the middle grades. The analyses are based

on student achievement test scores and on other data from state report cards, which were begun by SREB states in the 1990s and are now required by the *No Child Left Behind Act*. The latest results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress are included in this report.

You will know that your state is leading the nation when:

- all students meet *state* academic standards in reading and mathematics in the early grades;
- achievement gaps in meeting state standards are closed for all groups of children in the early grades;
- fourth-grade students who are at or above the Basic achievement level in reading and mathematics on the National Assessment of Educational Progress reach 100 percent; and
- percentages of fourth-grade students who score at or above the Proficient achievement level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress in reading and mathematics exceed national percentages.

Are SREB states improving the percentages of students meeting state standards in reading and mathematics?

State standards can help a state know whether its students are making progress if the standards are part of the accountability system — and if the accountability system is straightforward, understandable and rigorous. SREB states have led the nation in setting standards and developing educational accountability systems. Since the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, however, SREB states have had to update their accountability systems to conform to federal reporting requirements. *No Child Left Behind* requires states to report the percentages of students who meet their achievement levels for racial/ethnic groups, for boys and girls, for students with disabilities and for students eligible for the National Lunch Program and those who are not eligible. States must test students in reading

and mathematics in the early grades. *No Child Left Behind* also requires state assessment programs to test all students and to hold schools accountable if they test fewer than 95 percent of all students or fewer than 95 percent of students in any group for which reporting is required.

Because state testing programs involve all students and require public reporting of information, states have been careful in changing the assessments themselves or how they report scores. *No Child Left Behind* stipulates that states set at least three achievement levels for reporting student progress. The number of levels that states have actually set varies from three to five. (See Box 1. See also Appendix A for assessment measures and achievement levels used in SREB states.) Fourteen SREB states now report student achievement of students in the early grades based on the percentages that meet or exceed state standards in reading and mathematics.

Box 1

What does it mean for student performance to meet or exceed state standards?

The *No Child Left Behind Act* requires that states set at least three benchmarks for reporting student achievement: **basic, proficient and advanced levels**, although states may use different terms. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements in states are measured against the percentages of students who meet or exceed state standards, identified in this legislation as “proficient.” The Act also requires that states bring 100 percent of students to their standards — the *No Child Left Behind* proficient level — by 2014.

See Appendix A for state achievement levels and assessment measures.

■ Different Tests, Different Standards

While comparisons over time within a state can track student achievement on state standards, comparisons among states tell us very little. States use different tests and set different standards for “passing.” For example, tests with one set of passing standards resulted in one state having fewer than 40 percent of its students meeting its standards in mathematics in 2003, and another with a different test and different standards had 95 percent do so. The wide variations in the percentages of students “meeting state standards” raises questions about standards that state leaders may want to address. Policy-makers in those states with the highest percentages and those with the lowest percentages of students meeting state standards should want to understand their results. (See Table 1.)

Table 1

**Percent of Fourth-Grade Students
Meeting or Exceeding State Standards in SREB States
2001 and 2003**

	Grade level tested	Reading/ language arts		Mathematics		
		2001	2003	2001	2003	
SREB Median		70	71	63	74	
Alabama	4	PR ¹	PR ¹	PR ¹	PR ¹	Alabama reports scores in the national percentile ranks of its average students, not in the percentage of students at each achievement level.
Arkansas	4	47	61	43	60	Maryland and Texas adopted new tests, and their 2003 data cannot be compared with previous results.
Delaware	3	74	79	71	74	Oklahoma reported 2001 scores for “traditional” students only, excluding students in special education programs.
Florida	4	53	60	45	54	Tennessee began reporting the percentages of students scoring at achievement levels in 2003.
Georgia	4	74	80	62	74	West Virginia received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education to delay implementation of its accountability system.
Kentucky	4/5 ²	58 ²	62 ²	34 ²	38 ²	
Louisiana	4	59	59	54	58	
Maryland	3	—	58	—	65	
Mississippi	4	81	87	63	74	
North Carolina	4	75	77	87	95	
Oklahoma	5	—	64	—	65	
South Carolina	4	81	76	67	80	
Tennessee	3	—	80	—	79	
Texas	4	—	85	—	87	
Virginia	3	65	72	77	83	
West Virginia		—	—	—	—	

Notes: “—” indicates percentages not available.

The SREB median is the average of the two median SREB states.

¹ Scores were reported in percentile ranks.

² Reading scores: fourth grade. Mathematics scores: fifth grade.

Sources: State education report cards.

Table 1 Summary

Meeting or Exceeding State Standards

- Four SREB states — Georgia, Mississippi, Tennessee and Texas — report that 80 percent or more of their students in the early grades met state standards in reading or language arts in 2003. Four SREB states — North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia — report that 80 percent or more of their students in the early grades met state standards for mathematics.
- In three SREB states — Florida, Louisiana and Maryland — 40 percent or more of students in the early grades did not meet state standards in reading. In four SREB states — Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky and Louisiana — more than 40 percent of children tested did not meet standards in mathematics.

How do students in SREB states compare nationally at the Basic and Proficient achievement levels in reading and mathematics on the National Assessment of Educational Progress?

Because of significant differences among student achievement tests, passing scores, and the terms used to describe “passing” in the SREB states, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) serves as a common measure for comparing students at the same grade level among states. (See Box 2 for definitions of the NAEP achievement levels.)

■ Progress at the NAEP Basic and Proficient Achievement Levels

The percentages of fourth-grade students who scored at or above the NAEP Basic level equaled or exceeded the national percentage of 62 in seven SREB states: Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia. Even so, fewer than two-thirds of fourth-grade students scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in most SREB states.

The results are somewhat better in mathematics. In 2003, both in the nation and among SREB states, three of four students scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in mathematics, and in six SREB states percentages of students equaled or exceeded the national percentage: Delaware, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia.

While it may be a legitimate starting point for a state to seek to bring equal percentages of students to the NAEP Basic level as to its state standards, it is not good enough. The NAEP Basic level denotes *partial* mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills, according to the group who set the standard. States should bring all their students to the NAEP Basic achievement level and then aim higher — toward the Proficient level. Students who reach the NAEP Proficient level in key subjects in the early grades are clearly ready for the next level of schooling. (See Box 2. See Table 4 for state results.)

Box 2

How does NAEP define the achievement levels?

Achievement levels for the National Assessment of Educational Progress were established by a group that includes educators, elected officials, business leaders and public representatives.

- **Basic:** Partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade.
- **Proficient:** Solid academic performance for each grade assessed. Demonstrated competence over challenging subject matter, including subject-matter knowledge, application of such knowledge to real-world situations, and analytical skills appropriate to the subject matter.
- **Advanced:** Superior performance.

Table 2

**Percent of Fourth-Grade Students
At or Above NAEP *Basic Achievement Level*
1992 and 2003**

State	Reading		Mathematics	
	1992	2003	1992	2003
Nation (public)	60	62	57	76
SREB median	57	60	52	74
Alabama	51	52	43	65
Arkansas	56	60	47	71
Delaware	57	71	55	81
Florida	53	63	52	76
Georgia	57	59	53	72
Kentucky	58	64	51	72
Louisiana	46	49	39	67
Maryland	57	62	55	73
Mississippi	41	49	36	62
North Carolina	56	66	50	85
Oklahoma	67	60	60	74
South Carolina	53	59	48	79
Tennessee	57	57	47	70
Texas	57	59	56	82
Virginia	67	69	59	83
West Virginia	61	65	52	75

Accommodations in testing for students with disabilities were not permitted in 1992; they were permitted in 2003. The National Center for Education Statistics reports no significant differences in either the scale scores or the percentages of students scoring at or above NAEP achievement levels for students permitted accommodations and those not permitted accommodations. There were some differences noted in a few state scores or percentages. See: http://nces.ed.gov/programs/quarterly/vol_515_1/q4_2.asp

Some SREB states met or exceeded the national percentage of students scoring at or above the NAEP Basic achievement level in 2003. Their percentage scores are shaded.

- Percentages of students in seven SREB states met or exceeded the national percentage in reading.
- Percentages of students in six SREB states met or exceeded the national percentage in mathematics.

Notes: Shaded state percentages equal or exceed the national percentage.

The SREB median is the average of the two median SREB states.

Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Table 2 Summary

The NAEP Basic Achievement Level

- In 2003, the percentages of fourth-grade students in seven SREB states — Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia — equaled or exceeded the national percentage of fourth-grade students scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading. In 1992, only three SREB states could make that claim.
- In three SREB states — Delaware, Florida and North Carolina — percentages of students scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading increased by at least 10 percentage points. Seven additional SREB states — Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, South Carolina and West Virginia — outpaced the national increase of two percentage points. Yet all SREB states fell considerably short of the goal of having *all* fourth-grade students score at or above the NAEP Basic achievement level in reading.

(continued on page 6)

Table 2 Summary (continued)

The NAEP Basic Achievement Level

- In 2003, the percentages of fourth-grade students who scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in mathematics equaled or exceeded the national percentage in six SREB states: Delaware, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia. Only two states did so in 1992.
- In every SREB state, the percentages of students scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level in mathematics increased by at least four percentage points.

Table 3

Percent of Fourth-Grade Students At or Above NAEP *Proficient Achievement Level*

State	Reading		Mathematics	
	1992	2003	1992	2003
Nation	27	30	17	31
SREB Median	24	28	13	27
Alabama	20	22	10	19
Arkansas	23	28	10	26
Delaware	24	33	17	31
Florida	21	32	13	31
Georgia	25	27	15	27
Kentucky	23	31	13	22
Louisiana	15	20	8	21
Maryland	24	32	18	31
Mississippi	14	18	6	17
North Carolina	25	33	13	41
Oklahoma	29	26	14	23
South Carolina	22	26	13	32
Tennessee	23	26	10	24
Texas	24	27	15	33
Virginia	31	35	19	36
West Virginia	25	29	12	24

Accommodations in testing for students with disabilities were not permitted in 1992; they were permitted in 2003. The National Center for Education Statistics reports no significant differences in either the scale scores or the percentages of students scoring at or above NAEP achievement levels for students permitted accommodations and those not permitted accommodations. There were some differences noted in a few state scores or percentages. See: http://nces.ed.gov/programs/quarterly/vol_515_1/q4_2.asp.

Some SREB states met or exceeded the national percentage of students scoring at or above the NAEP Proficient achievement level. Their percentage scores are shaded. In 2003:

- Percentages of students in six SREB states met or exceeded the national percentage in reading.
- Percentages of students in seven SREB states met or exceeded the national percentage in mathematics.

Notes: Shaded state percentages equal or exceed the national percentage.

The SREB median is the average of the two median SREB states.

Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Table 3 Summary

The NAEP Proficient Achievement Level

- The percentages of fourth-grade students scoring at or above the NAEP Proficient level in reading in 2003 met or exceeded the national percentage in six SREB states: Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina and Virginia. A decade ago, only two SREB states could make that claim: Oklahoma and Virginia.
- Higher percentages of fourth-grade students in 15 of the 16 SREB states scored at or above the NAEP Proficient level in reading in 2003 than in 1992. In Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Maryland and North Carolina, the percentages of students scoring at or above the NAEP Proficient level increased by at least eight percentage points.
- Even in those SREB states where the percentages of students scoring at or above the NAEP Proficient level in reading exceeded the national percentage, nearly two-thirds of the fourth-grade students scored below the Proficient level and did not “demonstrate competency over challenging subject matter.”
- The percentages of fourth-grade students scoring at or above the NAEP Proficient level in mathematics in 2003 equaled or exceeded the national percentage in Delaware, Florida, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia.
- **Every SREB state increased the percentage of students who scored at or above the NAEP Proficient level in mathematics.** In North Carolina, the percentage point gain of students who scored at or above the NAEP Proficient level in both 1992 and 2003 was twice that of the nation.
- Yet more than two-thirds of the fourth-grade students in most SREB states did not score at or above the NAEP Proficient level in mathematics and did not, therefore, “demonstrate competency over challenging subject matter.”

■ **Some Gains at the Proficient Level are “Significant”**

Some gains in the percentages of students scoring at or above the NAEP Proficient level in the last five years were large enough to be statistically significant, meaning that they did not likely result from measurement error associated with testing a scientifically selected sample of students.

- Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia made significant improvement in the percentages of fourth-grade students at or above the

NAEP Proficient level in reading between 1998 and 2003. **Percentages of students in only 14 states nationally, including these seven, had statistically significant gains during this time.**

- Every SREB state that tested students in mathematics in both 2000 and 2003 made significant improvement in the percentage of fourth-grade students at or above the NAEP Proficient level between 2000 and 2003. (Delaware and Florida did not test in mathematics in 2000.)

■ **State Standards Compared with NAEP Basic and Proficient Achievement Levels**

What percentages of students meet state standards? What percentages of a state’s students score at or above the NAEP Basic and Proficient achievement levels? The answers to these questions provide insight into how states have set their stan-

dards. In all SREB states, the percentages of students who met a state’s standards are closer to the percentages of students at or above the NAEP Basic achievement level than to the percentages at or above the NAEP Proficient level. This is also true for states across the nation. It appears that states have set their standards at a level that NAEP defines as “partial mastery” — the Basic level. (See Table 4.)

Table 4

**Percent of Fourth-Grade Students Meeting or Exceeding State Standards
Percent At or Above the NAEP *Basic Achievement Level*, 2003**

State	Reading/language arts		Mathematics		
	State Standard	NAEP Basic Level	State Standard	NAEP Basic Level	
Arkansas	61	60	60	71	<p>Only those states are included that report on the performance of fourth-grade students in their state report cards using percentages who reach standards.</p> <p>Alabama reports on state standards differently. Delaware, Kentucky (for mathematics), Maryland, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Virginia did not test students in fourth grade.</p> <p>West Virginia received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education to delay implementation of its accountability system.</p>
Florida	60	63	54	76	
Georgia	80	59	74	72	
Kentucky	62	64	—	64	
Louisiana	59	49	58	67	
Mississippi	87	49	74	62	
North Carolina	77	66	95	85	
South Carolina	76	59	80	79	
Texas	85	59	87	82	

Note: “—” indicates percentages not available.
Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Table 4 Summary

State Standards Compared with the NAEP Basic Achievement Level

■ Florida and Arkansas report much lower percentages of students meeting or exceeding state standards in mathematics than the percentage scoring at the NAEP Basic achievement level in that subject. The fourth-grade mathematics standards in these states appear higher than the fourth-grade NAEP Basic achievement level in mathematics.

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State Standards Compared with the NAEP Basic Achievement Level

- Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina and Texas, on the other hand, report that considerably more students met or exceeded the state standards in reading than scored at or above the NAEP Basic achievement level in reading. Their fourth-grade reading standards appear lower than the fourth-grade NAEP Basic achievement level.
- Three states report that about the same percentages of their students met or exceeded their standards as scored at the NAEP Basic levels. About the same percentages of Arkansas' fourth-grade students in reading, Georgia's fourth-grade students in mathematics and Kentucky's fourth-grade students in reading met state standards and scored at or above the NAEP Basic level on the corresponding subject area test. Standards in the early grades in these states appear similar to the fourth-grade NAEP Basic levels.

Why does this matter? Standards set the content, pace and rigor for the curriculum. They guide teachers and principals in diagnosing whether a student is performing at grade level. A state that has set low standards will not likely bring all children to national achievement levels. Standards are also linked to the Adequate Yearly Progress requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act*. They are the basis for school performance assessments. For those states that have grade

retention policies, a student's failure to meet standards triggers everything from parent conferences to required summer school to retention in the same grade level for another year.

Policy-makers should also be concerned that nearly all state standards are closer to the NAEP Basic level than to the higher NAEP Proficient level. States appear not to have set "demonstrated competence over challenging subject matter" as the standard for their students.



Are student achievement gaps closing for all groups of students?

Gaps in the performance of various groups on state assessments and on the National Assessment of Educational Progress existed in the 1990s and continue today with little evidence of significant progress. The size and severity of the gaps raise concerns about performance of schools in meeting the needs of students from certain racial/ethnic groups; of students from families with low household income; of males and females; of students living in cities, suburban areas and rural areas; of those with disabilities; and of those with limited

English proficiency. By 2003, 11 SREB states had reported data for groups of students on the state's assessments, as required by the *No Child Left Behind Act*. The data that are available show wide gaps in the percentages of groups of students who met state standards.

Two particular gaps — those between Hispanic and white students and those between students with limited English proficiency and native English speakers — are related and they are becoming even more critical for the 11 SREB

states in which the Hispanic populations more than doubled from 1990 to 2000. In fact, the Hispanic population in each of six SREB states increased by more than 100,000 people and in each of 10 SREB states by more than 60,000 people. The increases averaged 71 percent for all SREB states

■ Gaps among Groups of Students in Achieving State Standards

As noted already, variability in state tests, in state standards and in state terms for achievement levels mean that comparisons of states' test scores are not meaningful. Gaps within a state are the real

issue, and they are apparent in the 11 SREB states reporting achievements by groups in 2003. Neither the percentages of black nor Hispanic students who met state standards in any state equaled the percentages of white students who met state standards. The percentages of black students who met state standards in mathematics trailed the percentages of white students who met state standards by between five and 36 percentage points in those 11 states. Black and Hispanic students are more likely to come from low-income families, and students from low-income families and those with limited English proficiency are among the least successful in meeting state standards. (See Table 5.)

Table 5

Percent of Fourth-Grade Students Meeting or Exceeding State Standards in Mathematics 2003

State	Grade Level Tested	Race/ethnicity ¹			Eligibility for National School Lunch Program	Gender		Limited English proficiency	Students with disabilities	
		W	B	H		M	F			
Delaware	3	84	56	67	62	75	73	51	41	Alabama, Arkansas, South Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia did not report group data.
Florida	5 ²	69	35	55	—	—	—	24 ³	16	Florida, Louisiana and Virginia did not report achievement for students who are eligible for the National School Lunch Program.
Georgia	4	83	62	64	64	72	76	50	42	
Kentucky	5	41	19	31	26	37	39	28	19	
Louisiana	4	76	40	65	—	57	58	58	34	
Maryland	3	79	47	53	45	64	66	38	37	
Mississippi	4	88	61	80	65	73	74	66	70	Oklahoma's disaggregated scores are reported only for "traditional" education students, which excludes students with disabilities and those with limited English proficiency.
North Carolina	4	95	90	93	91	94	95	90	81	
Oklahoma ^{4,5}	5	78	50	65	62	—	—	48	23	
Texas	4	94	78	83	82	88	87	74	80	
Virginia	3	88	71	77	—	83	83	75	59	

Notes: "—" indicates percentages not available, achievement levels not yet defined or results not comparable.

¹ Racial/ethnic categories: white, black, Hispanic.

² Florida reports group data for fifth-grade (but not fourth-grade) students, although it reports overall data for both grades. Table 1 reports performance for fourth-grade students.

³ For students who have lived in the United States for two or more years. The percentage for those who have lived in the United States for less than two years is 21.

⁴ Does not include scores for students with disabilities or those with limited English proficiency.

⁵ 67 percent of Oklahoma's American Indian students met state standards in mathematics in 2003.

Sources: State education report cards.

Table 5 Summary

Groups Meeting or Exceeding State Standards

- The percentages of black students and Hispanic students meeting or exceeding state standards trailed that of white students in both reading and mathematics in all of the states reporting state assessment results in 2003. Among these SREB states, the percentages of students meeting state standards in reading for white students range from 41 to 95 percent; the percentages for black students range from 19 to 90 percent; and the percentages for Hispanic students range from 31 to 93 percent.
- The gaps in mathematics' performance between boys and girls in fourth-grade are small. The largest gap in the nine SREB states reporting data is four percentage points. (Although not shown in the table, a greater percentage of girls met state standards in reading in every SREB state.)
- The percentages of students from low-income families — those eligible for free and reduced-price lunches — who met state standards were generally low. In all but two SREB states, fewer than two of three such students met state standards. The percentages in the eight states that reported data for these students ranged from 26 to 95.
- The percentages of students with limited English proficiency who met state standards ranged from a high of 90 percent to a low of 24 percent. In the median SREB states, only half of these students met state standards.
- Overall, students with disabilities met standards at the lowest percentages out of all the groups reported. The percentages of students with disabilities meeting state standards range from 16 to 81 percent.
- The differences among states are dramatic and should be carefully reviewed and considered so that policy-makers can understand what causes such comparatively large differences among states.

■ **Gaps Among Groups of Student on the National Assessment of Educational Progress**

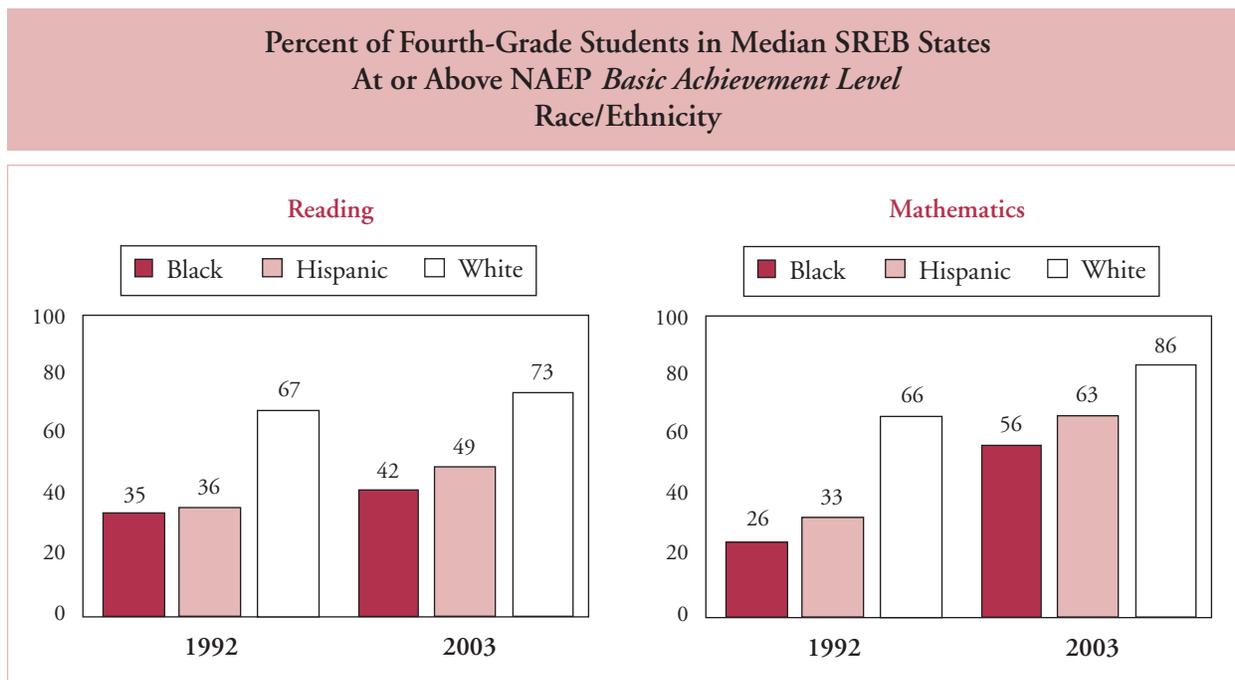
States can take pride in the progress they made between 1992 and 2003 in improving the performance of black and Hispanic students. Fourteen SREB states posted increases in the percentages of both black and Hispanic students who scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading between 1992 and 2003, and the two other SREB states posted increases in the percentages for one of these groups. In eight SREB states, black students made greater percentage point gains at the NAEP Basic level in reading than white students. These eight states reduced the achievement gaps.

Three SREB states — Delaware, North Carolina and Virginia — ranked among the top 10 states nationally for the percentages of black fourth-grade students who scored at or above the Basic level in reading in 2003. **Five SREB states — Delaware, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia — were the top five states nationally for the percentage of black fourth-grade students who scored at or above the Basic level in mathematics in 2003.** West Virginia ranked among the top ten. These results indicate that SREB states can — and indeed already do — lead the nation on these measures of educational progress.

Still, SREB states are a long way from *Challenge to Lead's* goal that 100 percent of students will score at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading and mathematics. Figures 1 through 4 show the gaps and gains in median

SREB states for racial/ethnic groups; students eligible and not eligible for free and reduced-price lunches; and for students living in central cities, suburbs/large towns and rural areas.

Figure 1



Notes: SREB median is the average of the two SREB median states.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics.

Figure 1 Summary

***Gaps among Racial/Ethnic Groups Scoring at or above
the NAEP Basic Level***

- Greater percentages of black, Hispanic and white fourth-grade students scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading in 2003 than in 1992. Hispanic students made the greatest gains — 13 percentage points, compared with seven percentage points for black students and six percentage points for white students.
- Black, Hispanic and white students made even greater gains in mathematics than they made in reading. The percentages of both black students and Hispanic students who scored at or above the NAEP Basic level increased by 30 percentage points between 1992 and 2003.
- Accommodations for students with disabilities and limited English proficiency were not permitted in 1992 and they were permitted in 2003. See sidebar note on Table 2.

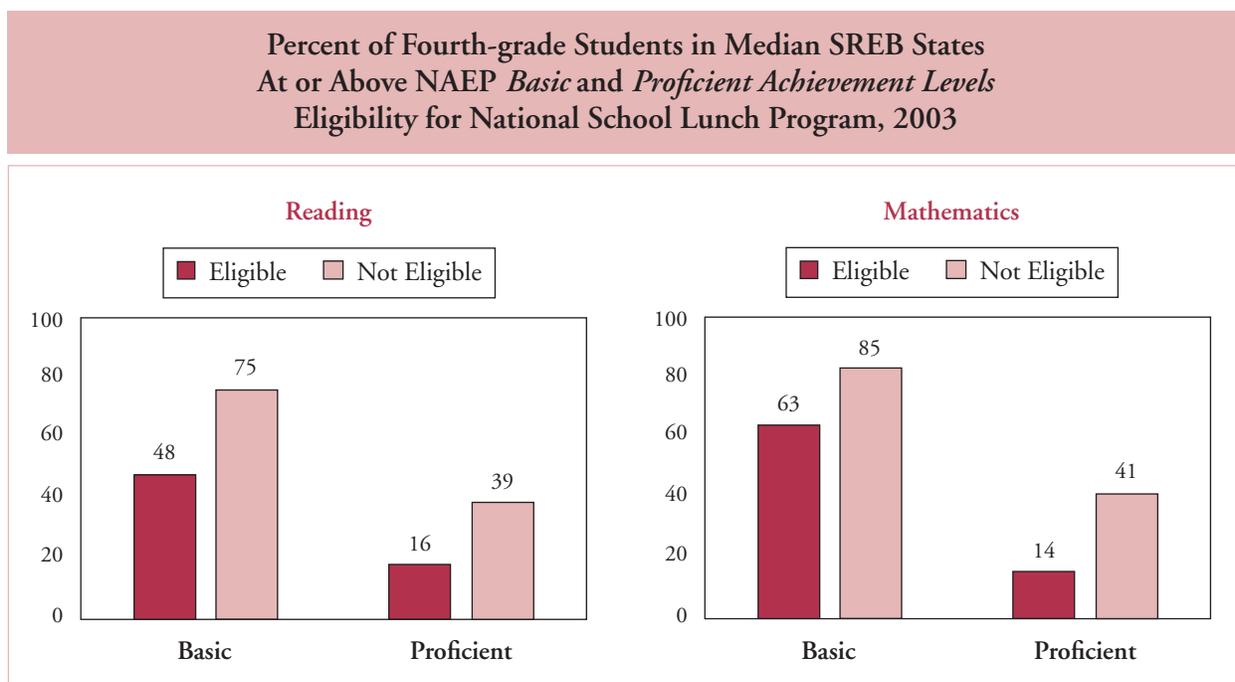
■ Gaps Related to Income Disparities

NAEP reports include scores for students who are eligible and not eligible for the National School Lunch Program. In SREB states, nearly 11 million public elementary and secondary students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunches, compared with 28 million students in the nation. In the median SREB states, 67 percent of students are eligible for the lunch program, compared with 58 percent in the nation. Generally, students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunches in SREB states score similarly to their national counterparts. The gap in achievement between students *eligible* for the lunch program in median SREB states and those *eligible* in the nation was less than four percentage points in reading and mathematics. Likewise, the gaps between students *not eligible* for the lunch program in median SREB states and those *not eligible* in the nation were less than four percentage points in reading and mathematics.

Yet the gaps within SREB states between those *eligible* for the lunch program and those *not eligible* for the lunch program are considerable — almost a 25 percentage point gap in reading for fourth-grade students who score at the NAEP Basic level and a 23 percentage point gap in mathematics. **A lower percentage of students from low-income families are mastering grade-level content than those from more affluent families.** (See Box 3.)

The percentages of students who scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading and who are eligible for the National School Lunch Program in SREB states range from 37 percent to 57 percent; and in mathematics the range is from 50 percent to 75 percent. These big differences among state results on the same test deserve our full attention. (See Figure 2 for performance in SREB median states.)

Figure 2



Note: SREB median is the average of the two SREB median states.

Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Figure 2 Summary

Gaps between Students Eligible and Not Eligible for the National School Lunch Program

- A lower percentage of fourth-grade students in SREB states who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading than students who are not eligible: 48 percent, compared with 75 percent. Lower percentages of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches also scored at or above the NAEP Proficient level than those not eligible: 16 percent, compared with 39 percent.
- Similar gaps are apparent for these groups in mathematics. A lower percentage of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in mathematics than students who are not eligible for the lunch program: 63 percent, compared with 85 percent. A lower percentage of eligible students also scored at or above the NAEP Proficient level than students who are not eligible: 14 percent, compared with 41 percent.

Box 3

National School Lunch Program

Students may receive reduced-price lunches if the household income for their family size is not greater than 185 percent of the poverty level (as set annually by the U.S. Bureau of the Census), and they may receive a free lunch if family income is not greater than 130 percent. Effective July 2004, children in a household of four are eligible for a free lunch if household income is no more than \$24,505. Children in a household of four are eligible for a reduced-price lunch if household income is no more than \$34,873.

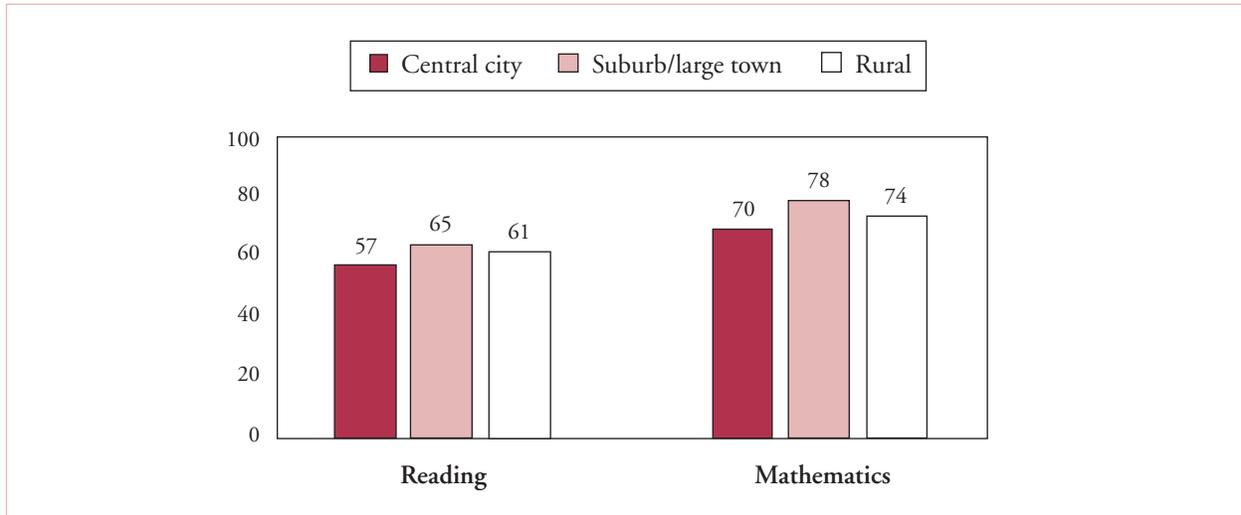
Source: United States Department of Agriculture.

■ Gaps among Students whose Schools are Located in Various Types of Communities

The pattern of student performance related to community type in SREB states differs from the pattern in the nation. **Students in SREB median states living in central cities out-performed their national peers.** In reading, 57 percent of students in median SREB states from central cities scored at or above the NAEP Basic level, compared with 51 percent in the nation. In mathematics, 70 percent of students in median SREB states from central cities scored at or above the NAEP Basic level, compared with 67 percent in the nation. **In contrast, students in median SREB states from rural communities did not perform as well as their national peers.** In reading, 61 percent of students in median SREB states scored at or above the NAEP Basic level, compared with 66 percent in the nation. In mathematics, 74 percent of students in median SREB states scored at or above the NAEP Basic level, compared with 80 percent in the nation.

Figure 3

**Percent of Fourth-Grade Students in Median SREB States
At or Above NAEP *Basic Achievement Level*
School Location, 2003**



Notes: The term used in NAEP reports for “large town” or “suburb” is “urban fringe.”

SREB median is the average of the two SREB median states.

Source: National Assessment for Educational Progress.

Figure 3 Summary

Student Performance by School Location

- In SREB states, students from central cities lag behind students from suburbs/large town and rural areas in both reading and mathematics.
- Rural students lag behind students from suburbs/large towns.

What are states doing to ensure all students learn to read in the early grades?

Since the early 1990s, SREB states have allocated a significant proportion of state dollars to help children become good readers in the early grades. They put in place policies and programs designed to help children learn to read and to inform parents about how to help them. Two of the more significant efforts were the expansion of prekindergarten programs and the reduction in class size in elementary schools. Oklahoma and Georgia are recognized for their near-universal prekindergarten programs. Florida's referendum on class-size reduction has received considerable national attention. All SREB states implemented student assessment and school accountability programs. Using data from student assessment systems, many SREB states decided to establish policies on student progression and retention for the early grades. The purpose of all these policies is to try to ensure that students do not move to the middle grades before they master the skills they need to be successful.

The *No Child Left Behind Act* has also called attention to the importance of the *quality* of the reading programs that states adopt for their early

grades. This legislation established Reading First as a “high-quality, evidenced-based” reading program for the students of America. The legislation requires that state reading programs be based on scientific research. The U.S. Department of Education considers instruction in the following five elements essential components of a scientifically-based reading program: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. The U.S. Department of Education has tied approximately \$1 billion in annual funding to its Reading First initiative. Schools must adopt reading programs based on scientific research to be eligible for the funding. Reading First is designed to help students in kindergarten through grade three learn to read. (See Boxes 4 and 5.)

■ How is my state using the funding it receives for the Reading First Program?

Reading First funding goes to states based on the proportion of children living in poverty in the state. All SREB states have submitted proposals for

Box 4

District Eligibility: Reading First Funds

To be eligible for Reading First funding, a school district must have a high percentage of students reading below grade level. The district must also meet *at least one* of the following criteria:

- A federally identified empowerment zone or enterprise community is located in the district;
- A high percentage of schools in the district receive Title I funds; or,
- A high percentage of students in the district are counted for Title I allocations.

Districts apply to the state education agency, and Reading First funds are awarded based on the percentage of K-3 students in the districts reading below grade level. Districts may not receive a smaller percentage of state Reading First funds than the percentage of state Title I funds awarded to the district in the previous fiscal year.

Components of Effective Reading Programs

Phonemic Awareness — hearing, developing and using individual spoken sounds that work together to make words.

Phonics — using the relationships between the sounds of spoken language and the letters and spellings that represent them to recognize familiar and unfamiliar words.

Vocabulary Development — developing stored information about the meanings and pronunciation of words necessary for communication.

Reading Fluency — reading text accurately and quickly; recognizing words and comprehending at the same time.

Reading Comprehension — Understanding, remembering and communicating with others about what has been read.

Reading First funding and have been approved. All states do not allocate the funds to their districts in the same way, however. Policy-makers need to know how their states awarded Reading First funds. Very difficult decisions were made in all states, and policy-makers should understand the rationale for their state's decision.

Grant amounts per state are based on a formula that takes into account the proportion of students age five to 17 from low-income families, compared with the national average. States may reserve up to 20 percent of the total state-allocation for use at the state level for professional development, technical assistance and administration, and planning and reporting.

SREB states' agencies are using the funds in similar ways — all retaining 20 percent for state-wide uses and making the remainder available on a competitive basis to eligible districts. These state-wide funds allow states to provide professional development for all early grades teachers, not just those receiving Reading First grants. But states differ considerably in the proportion of eligible districts they have funded. The percentages range from 100 percent of eligible districts in Alabama and Maryland to 26 percent of eligible districts in Oklahoma. Each state is responsible for evaluating

Reading First proposals from eligible school districts and determining which will be funded. Some states have indicated that some eligible districts did not apply to them for funding and some applied but their proposals were not adequate. One state representative noted that a factor in determining awards in that state was insuring that funded schools received adequate grants to make a difference.

The challenge for states, even before the Reading First Program, was to provide sufficient resources for all schools so that all children can learn to read well in the early grades. Certainly, the Reading First Program is helping states provide funding. But it does not eliminate the need for states to continue spending their own dollars on reading.

Many states are targeting early-grades reading programs for increases in state funding. For example, in Alabama, funds were increased by \$27.5 million for a total of \$40 million for 2005. Using these funds, Alabama will begin to implement the Alabama Reading Initiative in all schools with grades K-3. West Virginia increased its funding to districts to support an ongoing reading program for young students. In 2004, Delaware's governor proposed funding to hire reading resource teachers for the 68 elementary schools without them. Indeed, a significant amount of state

Table 6

Reading First Funding by Districts and Schools

State	Program Name	First Round of Funding				
		Amount for 2003 school year	Number of districts/elementary schools in the state	Number of districts eligible ¹	Number of districts awarded funds	Number of schools awarded funds
Alabama	Alabama Reading First Initiative	\$16.1 million	128/900	36	36	75
Arkansas	Arkansas Reading First Project	\$10.2 million	310/711	92	39	68
Delaware	Delaware Reading First Program	\$2.2 million	19/127	11 ³	7	12
Florida	Just Read, Florida	\$47.2 million	67/2,179	67	37 ⁴	393
Georgia	Georgia Reading First	\$28.8 million	180/1,567	64	38	94
Kentucky	Kentucky Reading First	\$14.2 million	176/1,009	90	45	74
Louisiana ⁴	Louisiana Reading First	\$19.9 million	78/1,027	32	17	75 ²
Maryland	Maryland Reading First	\$11.7 million	24/1,083	9	9	25
Mississippi	Mississippi Reading Reform Model	\$11.5 million	152/581	56	22	38
North Carolina	North Carolina Reading First	\$21.4 million	120/1,723	44 ³	39 ³	91
Oklahoma	Oklahoma Reading First	\$13.0 million	544/1,224	152	40 ⁴	50 ²
South Carolina	South Carolina Reading Initiative	\$14.1 million	90/832	48	24	51
Tennessee	Tennessee Reading First	\$14.9 million	138/1,195	36	16	55
Texas	Texas Reading Initiative	\$81.6 million	1,040/4,965	366	121 ^{3,4}	514
Virginia	Virginia Reads: Every Minute Counts	\$17.5 million	135/1,459	66	43	76
West Virginia	Reading For All	\$6.3 million	55/609	22	21	39

¹ See Box 4 for district eligibility requirements.

² Proposed number of schools to receive funding.

³ Includes charter schools.

⁴ Some states awarded grants to consortia comprised of multiple districts. Florida awarded 26 grants to 37 districts. Oklahoma awarded 38 grants to 40 districts. Texas awarded 114 grants to 121 districts.

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data 2001-2002, U.S. Department of Education; Southwest Educational Development Laboratory; and state departments of education, June 2004.

funding — in addition to federal Reading First funding — will be needed in all SREB states to bring all children to state standards. State policy-makers need to ask how students in *all districts*

are being served, and how students not meeting standards — even if their schools are not eligible for federal funding — are getting the help they need to learn to read. (See Table 6.)



What are the state policies on promotion and retention of students?

Research confirms that we can raise student achievement for low-performing students with early identification of their problems followed by individualized programs to help them. SREB states have all adopted policies for helping students who are not on grade level in the early grades. Some states have set more specific policies than others. Some states have included holding students in the same grade for a second year — grade retention — as one of their efforts to insure student achievement. (See Table 7 for policies that apply to promotion and retention of students.)

While all SREB states have developed policies on assisting students who are below grade level in reading, Florida's new policy on supplemental help is very specific. In Florida, as soon as a child is diagnosed with a reading deficiency in kindergarten through third grade, the child is given intensive reading instruction. At the same time, the school must notify the child's parents of the reading deficiency. The school also tells the parent what supplemental services are being provided, what additional services are available, what strategies the parent might use with the child at home, and what the consequences are if the child is not reading on grade level at the end of third grade.

States that have developed policies to promote and retain students base them, at least partially, on student performance on state tests. SREB states that require students to repeat a grade do so after other approaches have been tried. Studies on the effectiveness of retaining students, however, have mixed findings. Low-achieving students who are retained in the same grade generally perform better

the next year than low-achieving students who are promoted to the next grade. But these gains do not last after the next year.

Florida's new policy on supplemental help specifies what services must be provided. Students are given at least 90 minutes of daily, uninterrupted instruction in a research-based reading program. Schools may also use small group instruction, reduced student-teacher ratios, more tutoring or mentoring, transition classes comprised of third and fourth grade students, or extended school days, weeks, or years. In addition to intensive instructional strategies during the school year, the school district may also offer summer reading camps. Districts must offer mid-year promotions to students who are able to catch up.

It is important for you as a policy-maker to know what the policies are in your state, and you should know whether the policies are working as they were intended. You should know what special instruction is available for children who are in danger of retention and for those who are not promoted. You should ask if these students successfully meet standards for promotion in subsequent years or if they still perform below grade level. In all cases, states must notify parents of the academic performance of their children. You need to ask if parents are getting information in time to help their children and if they are fully involved in decisions about their children. Table 7 provides a snapshot of state policies in SREB states on promotion and retention of students in the early grades.

Table 7

Promotion and Retention Policies in the Early Grades in SREB States For Students Who Do Not Meet State Standards

State	State retention policy for students who do not meet state standards in reading		Comments
	Require retention	Recommend retention	
Alabama			Policies on promotion and retention are determined by the school district.
Arkansas	Only for non-participation in improvement plan		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Policy begins with 2004-2005 school year. ● The schools develop an individualized improvement plan for students who do not meet state standards. ● Students must participate in their improvement plan, or they may be retained.
Delaware	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students who <i>almost</i> meet state standards can be conditionally promoted one time to the next grade. ● Students who do not meet state standards must attend summer school; if they are not “conditionally promoted,” they must retake and pass the test or be retained. ● No student may be retained more than two times for inadequate progress.
Florida	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students who perform below grade level in grades one to three receive intensive reading instruction. ● Students who do not meet state standards are retained unless the teacher recommends an exemption, and it is approved by the principal and superintendent.
Georgia	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Instructional support teams are established for students in grades one and two who are not achieving on grade level on the state test. ● Students who fail the grade-three state test are given special instruction and then are retested. ● If they fail again, they are retained.
Kentucky			Policies on promotion and retention are determined by the school district.
Louisiana	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students who do not meet state test standards are required to participate in summer school. They are then retested. ● If they do not pass the retest, they are retained.
Maryland			Policies on promotion and retention are determined by the school district.
Mississippi	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Third-grade students who do not meet state standards are recommended for retention. ● Fourth-grade students who failed both third and fourth grades are required to be retained.

Sources: State departments of education, May 2004.

Table 7 (continued)

Promotion and Retention Policies in the Early Grades in SREB States For Students Who Do Not Meet State Standards

State	State retention policy for students who do not meet state standards in reading		Comments
	Require retention	Recommend retention	
North Carolina	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students who do not meet state standards are given two chances to retest. If they still do not meet standards, a formal review is conducted to determine if they should be promoted; the principal makes the final decision. Students who are not promoted will be provided with personalized education plans the following year.
Oklahoma	Only for unsuccessful participation in a summer program required by the teacher	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In grades one to three, students who are not reading on grade level may receive special instruction, including tutoring on Saturdays and during summers. Schools must provide a new instructional program for students who are not on grade level at the end of grade three. Teachers may recommend them for retention. Teachers may make promotion of low-performing students contingent upon successful completion of a summer program.
South Carolina	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The schools must develop an academic plan for children who are not on grade level in the third grade. These students may be recommended for summer school or retention at the local level in accordance with district requirements. If students do not meet standards for a second year, they are retained.
Tennessee			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The state assessment is used as one measure of student achievement to identify students who have not met state standards. Schools are required to address the instructional needs of children who do not meet standards.
Texas	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students who fail the test receive accelerated instruction and are retested. For students who fail the test the second time, the school must provide an instructional program to meet the children's needs. Students who fail a third time are retained. Schools may use an alternative state-approved test for the third administration.
Virginia			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virginia requires that a student's performance on the state tests for grade three be considered as one factor in determining whether the child is ready to move forward or be retained. The state does not require local schools to use the test performance data exclusively for promotion or retention.
West Virginia			Policies on promotion and retention are determined by school district.

Sources: State departments of education, May 2004.

Challenges

... in standards and accountability

- Getting your state's content standards and student performance standards right is the first challenge. Standards drive curriculum content. They affect — or should affect — what topics and at what level teachers teach. Standards and achievement levels in many states are linked to student retention policies. If standards in your state are not right, they may allow students to be promoted who are not ready for the next grade level or to be retained who might be ready for the next grade.
- The standards are pivotal in your state's accountability systems. Schools in which student performance does not meet state standards are subject to a wide range of corrective actions, from requirements that they provide supplemental help for students to state oversight of schools. SREB states have already reviewed the content of their standards but some may need to take another look at them. In some states, adjustments will mean refining the tests themselves to ensure that the tests measure performance on the standards. Some states will reset the threshold levels identified for meeting state standards — that is, the score a student must achieve to “meet the standard.”

... on the National Assessment of Educational Progress

- While SREB states are making progress in increasing the percentages of fourth-grade students who score at or above the NAEP Basic levels in reading and mathematics, they still have a long way to go to bring all fourth-grade students to that level. Not even two-thirds of fourth-grade students in most SREB states met or exceeded the NAEP Basic level in reading. And not even three-fourths in most SREB states met or exceeded the NAEP Basic level in mathematics. The gains over the last 10 years have been significant, but no SREB state achieved the goal of 100 percent at Basic level.
- The achievement gaps in your state and the nation continue after decades of reform efforts to close them. They remain a central problem facing America and require continuing commitment on the part of states to bring all students to state standards. We know what the barriers are that hinder student performance, and we know they do not occur in isolation from each other. We also know that even in the “advantaged” groups, significant numbers of students still do not score at or above state standards or the NAEP Basic level. In fact, *no group* has 100 percent of its members meeting state standards or scoring at the NAEP Basic level.

... in policies to support student achievement

- As districts and schools in your state strengthen their curricula, they should provide extra support for struggling students, allowing them to catch up to their grade level and continue to make progress. Isolating students from the academic work of their current grade level to strengthen skills and knowledge from past grade levels guarantees that students will not master the content of their current grade level. Schools must identify students who are at-risk of failing early and provide them with support systems, including resources before and after school as well as during the school day.
- What can help? Highly qualified teachers and school leaders may make the biggest difference in helping all students achieve your state's standards. School improvement depends on clear standards and performance goals, educational support systems that help students succeed in challenging work, school facilities that create rich learning environments, and communities that support their schools. Each of these components of school improvement has a better chance of making a difference if it is in the hands of teams of teachers and administrators who have strong content knowledge, teaching skills and leadership abilities.

... in reading success

- Your state is also challenged to make the best use of the federal Reading First program. Educators are responsible for identifying research-based reading programs appropriate for their schools and for delivering effective professional development courses for teachers of early-grades students. An even greater challenge will be meeting the needs of children who attend schools without Reading First grants. This is especially true for those states that use their federal funds to target some, but not all, of the schools eligible.
- The *No Child Left Behind Act* requires your state to provide supplemental services (such as tutoring and summer reading camps) to students who do not meet state standards. Your state should carefully monitor the performance of students who receive various services. Promotion and retention policies differ considerably. Policy-makers should monitor the effectiveness of the support students receive to determine if their students are better served by repeating the grade with special help or by moving on to the next grade with extra help.

Appendix A

Levels and Definitions of Student Achievement in SREB States

*(State standards of readiness are identified in **BOLD** in Achievement Column)*

State	Assessment	Achievement Level and Definition¹
Alabama	Not established	Not established
Arkansas	Benchmark Exams	Advanced = superior performance beyond proficient Proficient = well-prepared for next level of schooling Basic = substantial skills but only partial ability to apply skills Below basic = fail to show sufficient mastery of skills
Delaware	Delaware State Testing Program	Level 5 = distinguished (excellent) performance Level 4 = exceeds standard/very good Level 3 = meets standard (good) Level 2 = below the standard/needs improvement Level 1 = well below the standard/needs significant improvement
Florida	Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test	Level 5 = success with the most challenging content Level 4 = success with challenging content Level 3 = partial success but inconsistent performance with content Level 2 = limited success with challenging content Level 1 = little success with challenging content
Georgia	Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test	Exceeds standards Meets standards Does not meet standards
Kentucky	Kentucky Core Content Test	Distinguished Proficient (meets standards) Apprentice Novice
Louisiana	Louisiana Education Assessment Program for the 21st Century	Advanced = superior performance Proficient = well prepared in challenging subjects for next level of schooling Basic = fundamental knowledge and skills needed for next level of schooling Approaching basic = partial fundamental knowledge and skills for next level of schooling Unsatisfactory = lacks fundamental knowledge and skills for next level of schooling
Maryland	Maryland School Assessment	Advanced = demonstrates above-grade-level skills/solves complex problems Proficient = demonstrates grade-appropriate skills and knowledge Basic = demonstrates partial mastery of grade-appropriate skills and knowledge

¹ Definitions have been abbreviated but include phrases from state documents.

Sources: State departments of education, April 2004.

Appendix A (continued)

Levels and Definitions of Student Achievement in SREB States

*(State standards of readiness are identified in **BOLD** in Achievement Column)*

State	Assessment	Achievement Level and Definition ¹
Mississippi	Mississippi Curriculum Test	Advanced = performance clearly beyond that required at next grade level Proficient = mastery of knowledge and skills for success at next grade level Basic = partial mastery of knowledge and skills required for success at next grade level Minimal = requires additional instruction for success at next grade level
North Carolina	End-of-Grade Tests	Level IV = superior mastery Level III = consistent mastery Level II = inconsistent mastery Level I = insufficient mastery
Oklahoma	Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test	Advanced = consistent/thorough understanding of knowledge and skills Satisfactory = general understanding of knowledge and skills Limited Knowledge = partial understanding of knowledge and skills Unsatisfactory = limited level of understanding of knowledge and skills
South Carolina	South Carolina Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests	Advanced = exceeds expectations and is very well prepared for work at next level Proficient = meets expectations and is well-prepared for work at next level Basic = meets minimum expectations and is minimally prepared for work at next level Below basic = is not prepared for work at next level
Tennessee	Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program	Advanced Proficient Nearing proficient Progressing Step 1
Texas	Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills	Commended performance Meets standard Does not meet standard
Virginia	Standards of Learning	Advanced/pass Proficient/pass Does not pass
West Virginia	WesTest	Not established

¹ Definitions have been abbreviated but include phrases from state documents.

Sources: State departments of education, April 2004.

Challenge to Lead Goals for Education

1. All children are ready for the first grade.
2. Achievement in the early grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.
 - Percentages of all groups of students meeting state academic standards in reading and mathematics increase annually to reach 100 percent.
 - Achievement gaps in meeting state standards are closed for all groups of students.
 - Percentages of fourth-grade students who meet the Proficient achievement level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress are raised to above the national averages in reading, mathematics and science. All students meet the Basic achievement level.
3. Achievement in the middle grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.
4. All young adults have a high school diploma — or, if not, pass the GED tests.
5. All recent high school graduates have solid academic preparation and are ready for post-secondary education and a career.
6. Adults who are not high school graduates participate in literacy and job-skills training and further education.
7. The percentage of adults who earn postsecondary degrees or technical certificates exceeds national averages.
8. Every school has higher student performance and meets state academic standards for all students each year.
9. Every school has leadership that results in improved student performance — and leadership begins with an effective school principal.
10. Every student is taught by qualified teachers.
11. The quality of colleges and universities is regularly assessed and funding is targeted to quality, efficiency and state needs.
12. The state places a high priority on an education *system* of schools, colleges and universities that is accountable.

The Southern Regional Education Board has established these Goals for Education. They are built on the groundbreaking education goals SREB adopted in 1988 and on a decade-long effort to promote actions and measure progress. The new goals raise further the sights of the 16 SREB states and challenge them to lead the nation.

