

# SREB

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Helping States Improve Education

## Set for Success:

### *Improving Reading and Mathematics Achievement in the Early Grades*

2008

Southern  
Regional  
Education  
Board

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#### CHALLENGE TO LEAD SERIES

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This report was prepared by Crystal Collins and Marilyn Thomas, research associates; Joan M. Lord, vice president, Education Policies; and Sue Street, director, Education Policies.

It is part of the *Challenge to Lead* education goals series, directed by Sue Street. For more information, e-mail [sue.street@sreb.org](mailto:sue.street@sreb.org). *Goals for Education: Challenge to Lead* is available on the SREB Web site at [www.sreb.org](http://www.sreb.org). A full listing of the goals, including reports on each goal, is printed on the inside back cover.

## *A Message from the President of SREB*

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**E**veryone knows that reading and mathematics are crucial *subjects* in the early grades. They also become the most critical *tools* for learning in all academic subjects by the time students reach the middle grades. Unless these tools are well-developed, students likely will struggle to catch up throughout their school years. If schools can help them build stronger reading and math skills by the fourth grade, more students are set for success.

*Set for Success: Improving Reading and Mathematics Achievement in the Early Grades* is one of a series of reports on the progress of SREB states in meeting ambitious education goals. The *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education reflect the aim of SREB states to lead the nation in educational progress. The goals are designed to focus you and other state policy-makers on helping students make smooth transitions from one grade to the next — from the time they enter school until they graduate from college or specialized career training. The goals also focus on closing achievement gaps for racially and ethnically diverse groups; for students from low-income families; and for students who live in urban, suburban and rural areas.

The goals are designed to focus state policy-makers on helping students make smooth transitions from one grade to the next — from the time they enter school until they graduate from college or specialized career training.

SREB states show progress in student achievement in the early grades. Some SREB states have revised their academic standards in recent years to make them more rigorous. Recent scores on state tests and on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show these efforts are paying off:

- Many SREB states' assessments showed gains in the percentages of students meeting state academic standards in 2007.
- Two SREB states — Alabama and Georgia — had the nation's largest gains in 2007 in the percentages of students scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level in fourth-grade reading. Alabama also had the largest gain in the percentage at or above the NAEP Proficient level in fourth-grade reading. West Virginia had the largest gains in the percentages at the NAEP Basic and Proficient levels in math.
- Achievement gaps between black and white and between Hispanic and white students narrowed on the 2007 NAEP in the SREB median states in both reading and math.
- Students from low-income families in SREB states outperformed their counterparts nationwide on the 2007 NAEP.

This report also shows many remaining challenges for SREB states:

- Many states' academic standards still appear low. This is particularly true for reading. As one state school superintendent recently put it, low state standards “set people up with low expectations” and “lull” them into a sense that children are doing good work when they are not.

- Even with considerable progress on both state assessments and NAEP, **many children still are not reaching the NAEP Basic level** — which is only *partial* mastery of the subject. In short, far too many children still have not mastered basic skills by fourth grade.
- **Demographic forecasts** in most SREB states indicate that it will not be easier to make progress in the future. The proportion of children from low-income families is rising in SREB states. Hispanic populations are increasing in most SREB states — including children and their parents who may not speak English. In the future, SREB states should be prepared to help more students who come from traditionally less-educated families.

State policy-makers need to know that federal Reading First funds, which have helped states develop reading programs for the neediest children, are vulnerable to budget reductions. SREB states need to be ready to invest in some program components that have been launched using Reading First funds, such as reading coaches and professional development for school staffs.

This report concludes with an examination of state intervention programs designed to help students who do not meet state standards by the end of third or fourth grade. SREB state leaders need to be sure that state policies do not require that these students be retained without providing the right interventions for them. Just as important, they need to provide students who are promoted to the next grade with the support they need to ensure their success.

Let's make sure SREB states have ambitious academic standards, meet the demands of our changing population, and provide the extra help many students need to succeed in the early grades — and be well-prepared for the middle grades.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David S. Spence". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dave Spence

# Set for Success:

## *Improving Reading and Mathematics Achievement in the Early Grades*

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

One of the *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education

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**S**uccess in reading and mathematics in the early grades is critical to every child's future in school — and beyond. SREB's *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education, adopted in 2002, recognize these subjects as the foundation for learning. One of the goals calls for *all* children in SREB states to meet state standards in reading and mathematics — regardless of racial/ethnic group, economic status, English proficiency or disability. The goal also calls for all children in SREB states to score at the Basic achievement level in these subjects on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and for higher percentages to score at the NAEP Proficient level than their peers nationwide.

SREB states are making progress toward this goal. Over the last four years, most SREB states have increased the percentages of children meeting their state's standards in reading and mathematics, and many SREB states have seen strong gains in student performance on NAEP. But the number of SREB states in which students are exceeding national percentages on NAEP has not grown since 2003. Achievement gaps between groups of students also persist — although they are narrowing in many states.

Known as the Nation's Report Card, NAEP is given every two years to a sample of students in each state. The tests assess students in specific grade levels for competency in key subject areas, including fourth grade in reading and mathematics.



**Even though your state tests and NAEP are different, comparing the results of these assessments can help you evaluate your state standards and make informed policy decisions.**

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Even though your state tests and NAEP are different, comparing the results of these assessments can help you as a state policy-maker or education leader evaluate your state standards and make informed policy decisions. This report provides these comparisons for your state and discusses what they mean, examines achievement gaps among student groups, and makes recommendations for further action.

SREB states have received funding under the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* to improve reading instruction in the early grades. Reading First, a “scientifically based” reading program, helps states assist schools with high proportions of struggling readers and children from low-income families. It is often credited with

increasing achievement on state reading assessments, although research on its effectiveness has not been concluded. Although it has provided substantial funding over the last six years, its funding for 2008 has been reduced. This report describes the Reading First programs in SREB states.



**Reading First is often credited with increasing achievement on state reading assessments.**

Many SREB states tie their policies about individual grade-level promotion or retention in the early grades to student success on state assessments. If children in these states do not pass the grade-level test, they are retained — and are taught the same instructional material a second time. The alternative, “social promotion,” promotes students to the next grade without the skills to succeed. A third approach — identifying students with learning problems and providing early intervention — offers

a promising alternative for struggling students. This report documents retention policies in SREB states and discusses an intervention program currently in place in the region.

This report answers several key questions to help you more effectively monitor and improve the progress of your state’s students in the early grades:

- Are increasing percentages of students in the early grades meeting your state’s standards in reading and mathematics?
- Are all students in the early grades scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading and mathematics? Are they meeting or exceeding the percentages of students in the nation scoring at the NAEP Proficient level?
- Are your state’s reading and mathematics standards in the early grades set at the right level?
- Are achievement gaps between some groups of students narrowing in your state?
- What is your state doing to ensure that all students learn to read in the early grades?
- How can your state intervene to help struggling students move on to the next grade?



#### QUESTION 1:

### **Are increasing percentages of students in the early grades meeting your state’s standards in reading and mathematics?**

**Y**es, most SREB states are increasing the percentages of students meeting state standards. Twelve SREB states that tested fourth-grade students in reading in both 2005 and 2007 made gains, and 12 that tested in mathematics in both years also made gains. These gains, however, were modest. The SREB median states gained 4 percentage points in reading and 3 percentage points in mathematics on state assessments over the

two-year span. At this pace, states are not likely to meet the current timetable of *No Child Left Behind* — which requires that all students meet state standards by 2014. (See Table 1. Also see Appendix A for assessments used in SREB states.)

*No Child Left Behind* requires states to establish academic standards in key subjects (including reading and mathematics), to test students in these subjects in grades three through eight and once in

high school, and to report the results. Your state must report the percentages of all students who meet state standards and the percentages of specific groups who meet these standards: those from certain racial/ethnic groups, those from low-income families, those with limited English proficiency, and those with disabilities.

Why are the requirements of *No Child Left Behind* important? Because they promote state standards, which are the framework not only for a comprehensive and rigorous curriculum, but also for an open and effective accountability system. Getting state standards and assessments right in the early grades is critical. Without a reading and

math curriculum that is appropriately rigorous, and without assessments that are tied to the curriculum, the results of state assessments are meaningless.

Because standards are developed independently by each state, they are different in every state. (That is why — although it is tempting — you should avoid comparing the percentages of students meeting standards in other states and focus instead on the progress your state’s students are making.) Are the percentages of your students meeting standards increasing? How fast? How are specific groups performing in your state?

Table 1

Percent of Fourth-Graders Meeting or Exceeding State Standards										
	Reading					Mathematics				
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
SREB Median	62	75	81	82	85	68	71	75	78	78
Alabama	— <sup>1</sup>	77	83	84	85	— <sup>1</sup>	72	74	78	78
Arkansas	62	69	52	61	59	61	65	50	60	65
Delaware	— <sup>2</sup>	— <sup>2</sup>	— <sup>2</sup>	82	82	— <sup>2</sup>	— <sup>2</sup>	— <sup>2</sup>	78	76
Florida	60	70	71	66	68	54	64	64	67	69
Georgia	80	79	87	81	85	74	76	75	79	78
Kentucky	62	67	68	70	72	— <sup>2</sup>	— <sup>2</sup>	— <sup>2</sup>	— <sup>2</sup>	60
Louisiana	59	60	64	64	69	58	53	61	62	64
Maryland	— <sup>2</sup>	75	81	82	86	— <sup>2</sup>	70	77	82	86
Mississippi	87	88	89	88	90	74	80	79	82	81
North Carolina	81	83	82	83	85	92	93	92	65	68
Oklahoma	— <sup>2</sup>	— <sup>2</sup>	83	86	90	— <sup>2</sup>	— <sup>2</sup>	75	79	82
South Carolina	31	38	35	42	42	34	36	40	42	41
Tennessee	— <sup>2</sup>	81	87	88	88	— <sup>2</sup>	80	87	88	90
Texas	85	85	79	82	84	87	86	81	83	86
Virginia	— <sup>2</sup>	— <sup>2</sup>	— <sup>2</sup>	86	87	— <sup>2</sup>	— <sup>2</sup>	— <sup>2</sup>	77	81
West Virginia	— <sup>1</sup>	73	81	82	83	— <sup>1</sup>	69	75	77	79

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

<sup>1</sup> Alabama scores were reported as percentile rankings in 2003. West Virginia received a waiver from state assessments from the U.S. Department of Education for 2003.

<sup>2</sup> These states did not report results for fourth-graders in the years and subjects shown.

Sources: State departments of education.

Many SREB states have revised their standards, assessments and cut scores since *No Child Left Behind* was enacted in an effort to ensure greater rigor. For some states, these revisions have resulted in lower percentages of students meeting state standards immediately after their implementation. When states change their state standards, rework their state tests or adjust cut scores, it can impact the percentages of students who meet state standards.

To understand trends in your state's results, you need to follow not only the results of your state's assessments but also the changes that

your state makes in standards and practices. For example:

- Arkansas revised state tests and set new cut scores in 2005.
- Georgia instituted new state standards in reading in 2006 and in mathematics in 2007.
- Kentucky began using new tests in 2007.
- North Carolina raised state mathematics standards in 2006.
- Texas raised state standards annually from 2003 to 2005.



#### QUESTION 2:

**Are all students in the early grades scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading and mathematics? Are they meeting or exceeding the percentages of students in the nation scoring at the NAEP Proficient level?**

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**F**ourth-graders in SREB states are making progress, but they have not yet reached the *Challenge to Lead* goal that all students should score at or above the NAEP Basic level — and that percentages at the higher NAEP Proficient level should exceed national percentages. (See Box 1 for definitions of the NAEP achievement levels.)

#### **Fourth-graders show more progress in math than in reading at the NAEP Basic level**

In the SREB median states, fourth-graders have made steady progress in both reading and mathematics at the NAEP Basic level. In reading, they gained 5 percentage points from 2003 to 2007; in math, they gained 7 percentage points. (See Table 2.)

More than 80 percent of fourth-graders scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in **mathematics** in the SREB median states and in the nation in

2007. In addition, the percentage of fourth-graders scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level in mathematics has gone up in every SREB state by at least 20 percentage points — and in many, by 30 points — since 1992. In the SREB median states, it rose 29 points since 1992 — on average about 2 points per year. These results are encouraging. Still, many fourth-graders have not mastered basic skills in math.

However, only about two-thirds of fourth-graders scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in **reading** in the SREB median states and in the nation in 2007. The percentages in the SREB median states have gone up only 8 points since 1992 — on average about half a point per year. This means that too many fourth-graders still score below the NAEP Basic level in reading — defined as *partial* mastery of grade-level knowledge and skills.



Box 1

**How does NAEP define its achievement levels?**

Three achievement levels for the National Assessment of Educational Progress were established by a panel of educators, elected officials, business leaders and state representatives:

- **Basic:** *Partial mastery* of the knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at a given grade level.
- **Proficient:** Solid academic performance for each grade assessed. *Demonstrated competence* over challenging subject matter.
- **Advanced:** *Superior* performance.

Table 2

**Percent of Fourth-Graders Scoring At or Above NAEP Basic Level**

	Reading				Mathematics			
	1992 <sup>1</sup>	2003	2005	2007	1992 <sup>1</sup>	2003	2005	2007
United States	60	62	62	66	57	76	79	81
SREB Median	57	60	<b>62</b>	65	52	74	<b>79</b>	<b>81</b>
Alabama	51	52	53	62	43	65	66	70
Arkansas	56	60	<b>63</b>	64	47	71	78	<b>81</b>
Delaware	57	<b>71</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>73</b>	55	<b>81</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>87</b>
Florida	53	<b>63</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>70</b>	52	<b>76</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>86</b>
Georgia	57	59	58	<b>66</b>	53	72	76	79
Kentucky	58	<b>64</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>68</b>	51	72	75	79
Louisiana	46	49	53	52	39	67	74	73
Maryland	57	<b>62</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>69</b>	55	73	<b>79</b>	80
Mississippi	41	49	48	51	36	62	69	70
North Carolina	56	<b>66</b>	<b>62</b>	64	50	<b>85</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>85</b>
Oklahoma	<b>67</b>	60	60	65	<b>60</b>	74	<b>79</b>	<b>82</b>
South Carolina	53	59	57	59	48	<b>79</b>	<b>81</b>	80
Tennessee	57	57	59	61	47	70	74	76
Texas	57	59	<b>64</b>	<b>66</b>	56	<b>82</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>87</b>
Virginia	<b>67</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>87</b>
West Virginia	<b>61</b>	<b>65</b>	61	63	52	75	75	<b>81</b>

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

State percentages that are equal to or greater than the national percentages are shown in **bold**.

<sup>1</sup> Accommodations for testing students with disabilities were permitted in 2003, but not in 1992. These accommodations were not shown to create any significant differences in either the scale scores or the percentages of students scoring at or above NAEP achievement levels.

Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress.

## SREB states are making progress at the NAEP Proficient level in both subjects

SREB states have made substantial progress in meeting the *Challenge to Lead* goal that higher percentages of students should score at the NAEP Proficient level in both reading and mathematics than their peers nationwide. In 1992, only two SREB states — Oklahoma and Virginia — met the goal in reading, and two — Maryland and Virginia — in math. In 2007, seven SREB states met the goal in *either* reading or math, and four

states achieved it in *both* subjects:

- In **reading** — Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Maryland and Virginia
- In **math** — Delaware, Florida, Maryland, North Carolina, Texas and Virginia

Yet all of the states that met this goal in 2007 had done so by 2003. Two states that had reached the goal in 2003 did not keep pace with increases at the national level in 2007 and therefore no longer meet this goal: North Carolina in reading and South Carolina in math. (See Table 3.)

Table 3

Percent of Fourth-Graders Scoring At or Above NAEP Proficient Level								
	Reading				Mathematics			
	1992 <sup>1</sup>	2003	2005	2007	1992 <sup>1</sup>	2003	2005	2007
United States	27	30	30	32	17	31	35	39
SREB Median	24	28	28	29	13	27	32	35
Alabama	20	22	22	29	10	19	21	26
Arkansas	23	28	<b>30</b>	29	10	26	34	37
Delaware	24	<b>33</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>40</b>
Florida	21	<b>32</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>34</b>	13	<b>31</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>40</b>
Georgia	25	27	26	28	15	27	30	32
Kentucky	23	<b>31</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>33</b>	13	22	26	31
Louisiana	15	20	20	20	8	21	24	24
Maryland	24	<b>32</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>40</b>
Mississippi	14	18	18	19	6	17	19	21
North Carolina	25	<b>33</b>	29	29	13	<b>41</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>41</b>
Oklahoma	<b>29</b>	26	25	27	14	23	29	33
South Carolina	22	26	26	26	13	<b>32</b>	<b>36</b>	36
Tennessee	23	26	27	27	10	24	28	29
Texas	24	27	29	30	15	<b>33</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>
Virginia	<b>31</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>42</b>
West Virginia	25	29	26	28	12	24	25	33

Notes: The SREB median is the average of the two median SREB states.  
State percentages that are equal to or greater than the national percentages are shown in **bold**.

<sup>1</sup> Accommodations for testing students with disabilities were permitted in 2003, but not in 1992. These accommodations were not shown to create any significant differences in either the scale scores or the percentages of students scoring at or above NAEP achievement levels.

Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress.

### Some state gains at the NAEP Basic and Proficient levels lead the nation

Three SREB states led the nation in raising the percentages of fourth-graders scoring at or above the NAEP Basic and Proficient levels in reading and mathematics from 2005 to 2007:

- Alabama fourth-graders led the nation in gains in reading at the NAEP Basic and Proficient levels, increasing by 9 percentage points and 7 percentage points, respectively.
- Georgia fourth-graders made the nation's second-largest gain at the NAEP Basic level in reading, with an increase of 8 percentage points.
- West Virginia fourth-graders led the nation in gains in mathematics: 6 percentage points at the NAEP Basic level and 8 percentage points at the Proficient level.



#### QUESTION 3:

### Are your state's reading and mathematics standards in the early grades set at the right level?

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**Y**our state's NAEP results can help you answer another important question: Are your state's academic standards rigorous enough — or even too rigorous? One way to gauge the rigor of state standards is by comparing students' performance on state assessments with their performance on NAEP. Fourth-grade reading standards in most SREB states fall short in this comparison. Math standards fare somewhat better.

**In most SREB states, the percentages of students who meet state standards are closer to the percentages scoring at the NAEP Basic level than those at the NAEP Proficient level.** Because the NAEP Basic level represents only partial mastery of a subject at a grade level — not competency — state leaders should work to ensure that standards are set higher than this level and closer to the higher NAEP Proficient level.

**In reading**, 12 SREB states had much higher percentages of fourth-graders who met or exceeded state standards than scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in 2007. State reading standards in these states appear to be *lower* than the NAEP Basic level: Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina,

Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia. Setting standards too low in the early grades may lead to too few students being prepared for the next grade level and for success in the middle grades and high school. (See Table 4.)

Arkansas, Florida and Kentucky appear to have state standards set at a level *similar* to the NAEP Basic level in reading. One SREB state — South Carolina — had a much lower percentage of fourth-graders who met or exceeded state standards than scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading in 2007. State standards in South Carolina appear to be *higher* than the NAEP Basic level. Setting state standards higher than the NAEP Basic level and closer to the NAEP Proficient level helps to ensure students are ready for college and careers.

**In mathematics**, four SREB states had higher percentages of fourth-graders who met or exceeded state standards than scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in 2007. State math standards in these states appear to be *lower* than the NAEP Basic level: Alabama, Maryland, Mississippi and Tennessee.

Table 4

**Percent of Fourth-Graders Meeting or Exceeding State Standards,  
and Scoring At or Above NAEP Basic and Proficient Achievement Levels**

	Reading						Mathematics					
	State Standard		NAEP Basic Level		NAEP Proficient Level		State Standard		NAEP Basic Level		NAEP Proficient Level	
	2005	2007	2005	2007	2005	2007	2005	2007	2005	2007	2005	2007
United States	Not Applicable		62	66	30	32	Not Applicable		79	81	35	39
SREB Median	81	85	<b>62</b>	65	28	29	75	78	<b>79</b>	<b>81</b>	32	35
Alabama	83	85	53	62	22	29	74	78	66	70	21	26
Arkansas	52	59	<b>63</b>	64	<b>30</b>	29	50	65	78	<b>81</b>	34	37
Delaware	— <sup>1</sup>	82	<b>73</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>34</b>	— <sup>1</sup>	76	<b>84</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>40</b>
Florida	71	68	<b>65</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>34</b>	64	69	<b>82</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>40</b>
Georgia	87	85	58	<b>66</b>	26	28	75	78	76	79	30	32
Kentucky	68	72	<b>65</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>33</b>	— <sup>1</sup>	60	75	79	26	31
Louisiana	64	69	53	52	20	20	61	64	74	73	24	24
Maryland	81	86	<b>65</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>36</b>	77	86	<b>79</b>	80	<b>38</b>	<b>40</b>
Mississippi	89	90	48	51	18	19	79	81	69	70	19	21
North Carolina	82	85	<b>62</b>	64	29	29	92	68	<b>83</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>41</b>
Oklahoma	83	90	60	65	25	27	75	82	<b>79</b>	<b>82</b>	29	33
South Carolina	35	42	57	59	26	26	40	41	<b>81</b>	80	<b>36</b>	36
Tennessee	87	88	59	61	27	27	87	90	74	76	28	29
Texas	79	84	<b>64</b>	<b>66</b>	29	30	81	86	<b>87</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>
Virginia	— <sup>1</sup>	87	<b>72</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>38</b>	— <sup>1</sup>	81	<b>83</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>42</b>
West Virginia	81	83	61	63	26	28	75	79	75	<b>81</b>	25	33

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

State percentages that are equal to or greater than the national percentages are shown in **bold**.

<sup>1</sup> These states did not report results for fourth-graders in the years and subjects shown.

Sources: National Assessment of Educational Progress and state departments of education.

Georgia, Oklahoma, Texas and West Virginia appear to have state standards set at a *similar* level to the NAEP Basic level in math. The eight remaining SREB states — Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia — had lower percentages of fourth-graders who met or exceeded state standards than scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in 2007. State standards in these states appear to be *higher* than the NAEP Basic level.

A 2007 study by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) generally supports these conclusions. Using 2005 state-assessment and NAEP results, the study compared state standards and NAEP “frameworks” (the blueprint that determines the academic content that NAEP uses to assess students by subject and grade level) in both reading and mathematics. The study concluded that 10 of the 13 SREB states in the study — Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Missis-

issippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas and West Virginia — had state standards in reading that fell below the NAEP Basic level. This means that the reading standards in these states may have been *less* rigorous than the NAEP Basic level in 2005. The study also concluded that three SREB states — Arkansas, Kentucky and South Carolina — had reading standards that fell between the NAEP Basic and Proficient levels. This means that the reading standards in these states may have been *more* rigorous than the NAEP Basic level but *less* rigorous than the NAEP Proficient level. No SREB state had reading standards close to the NAEP Proficient level.

State standards in SREB states appeared to be set at higher levels in mathematics than in reading, according to the NCES study. Three of the 12 states examined in the study had math standards in 2005 that fell below the NAEP Basic level — Mississippi, North Carolina and Tennessee. This means that the math standards in these states may have been *less* rigorous than the NAEP Basic level. Eight states had math standards above the NAEP Basic level — Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Oklahoma, Texas and West Virginia. This means that the math standards in these states may have been *more* rigorous in 2005 than the NAEP Basic level but *less* rigorous than the NAEP Proficient level. Only one SREB state — South Carolina — had math standards in 2005 close to the NAEP Proficient level.

Several SREB states have made changes in state standards since 2005. Researchers might come to different conclusions for those states, where state assessment results in 2007 differ significantly from 2005 because the state standards changed. Most notably, North Carolina increased the rigor of its state standards in math after 2005. In 2007, fewer students met that state’s standards, while slightly more scored at the NAEP Basic and Proficient levels. North Carolina’s state standards appeared to be set at about the right level in 2007, *higher* than the NAEP Basic but *lower* than the NAEP Proficient levels.



**Getting your state standards right can have an impact on schools “in need of improvement” under *No Child Left Behind*.**

Why does all of this matter? Because getting your state standards right in the early grades will help ensure that students are prepared for future success in school. If your state sets standards too low, too many students will not be ready for college and careers when they graduate from high school. Equally important, these standards are also the basis for measuring school performance under *No Child Left Behind*. If your state sets standards too high, too many students may score lower than they should and too many schools may be labeled as “in need of improvement.” State policy-makers should set their state standards so that students who regularly meet them are the ones who are performing competently and are ready to move on to the next grade level. **States should strive to set standards, assessments and cut scores at levels that are higher than the NAEP Basic level and closer to the NAEP Proficient level.**

**SREB states need to take the next step beyond getting standards right**

Once standards are right, states need to ensure that teachers are using them to guide instruction. Teachers need to understand the levels of knowledge and the skills students are expected to gain in the grade they teach. It also helps teachers if they know the standards for the grades preceding and following the one they teach. If they have this information, they can know what to expect from their students and what they must prepare students to do.

**GeorgiaStandards.Org**  
Georgia Department of Education

The Georgia Department of Education’s GeorgiaStandards.Org Web site provides a one-stop place for teachers, parents and students who are looking for information and resources on standards-based instruction. The Web site’s goal is to “provide a dynamic, interactive, online resource that will enhance and support teaching and learning in Georgia, with the Georgia Performance Standards as the main focus.”

Teachers can see the Georgia Performance Standards by grade and subject. Ideas and options for teaching standards-based lessons, including lesson plans, are differentiated for various students, including those with disabilities, limited English proficiency and special talents.

Other resources include suggestions for linking lessons to calendar events, professional learning opportunities, guides for developing class units of study, online teacher resources and a variety of computer-based tools for teachers.

Georgia’s Web site is a pacesetter in providing online, standards-based resources for teachers, parents and students.

Giving teachers such a comprehensive picture was difficult in the past. Today, however, many states provide interactive Web sites that list the academic standards by subject and grade level and also provide lesson plans, assessments and other resources to link the standards to learning expectations. Some of these Web sites provide ways for teachers to work together to develop class

materials that can be shared and used as models of standards-based lessons. Georgia has developed such a Web site for teachers, parents and students. Teachers can access a secure space on the site designed just for them so they can share assessment materials among their peers. (See Box 2. See Appendix B for similar Web sites in SREB states.)



**QUESTION 4:**

**Are achievement gaps between some groups of students narrowing in your state?**

**T**he answer is yes, in many cases. NAEP analyzes performance on its assessments by different student groups. To understand where your state stands on closing gaps, it is helpful to look at achievement by racial/ethnic group and household

income on NAEP and state assessments. NAEP also offers insight into performance by students in large urban school districts through a special project called the Trial Urban District Assessment.

## Gaps in meeting state standards, by racial/ethnic group

The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for SREB states to close achievement gaps on state assessments. In 2007, Hispanic and black fourth-grade students continued to lag behind white students in both reading and mathematics on these assessments in every SREB state. Yet, many SREB states are successfully narrowing these gaps. (See Table 5.)

Nine of 14 SREB states for which information is available narrowed the gap between black and white students in **reading** from 2005 to 2007. Gaps in these states ranged from 6 percentage

points to 30 points in 2007. Seven of the states narrowed the gap between Hispanic and white students in reading. Gaps in these states ranged from 8 percentage points to 27 points in 2007.

In **mathematics**, nine of 12 SREB states for which information is available narrowed the gap between black and white students over the period. Gaps in these states ranged from 9 percentage points to 34 points in 2007. Eight of the states narrowed the gap in math between Hispanic and white students. Gaps in these states ranged from 5 percentage points to 26 points in 2007.

Table 5

### Percent of Fourth-Graders Meeting or Exceeding State Standards in Reading and Mathematics, by Racial/Ethnic Group

	Reading						Mathematics					
	White		Black		Hispanic		White		Black		Hispanic	
	2005	2007	2005	2007	2005	2007	2005	2007	2005	2007	2005	2007
SREB Median	88	91	70	76	73	77	82	85	62	67	67	70
Alabama	89	91	75	76	73	74	82	85	62	67	62	69
Arkansas	60	67	31	37	44	44	59	74	28	42	47	55
Delaware	— <sup>1</sup>	89	— <sup>1</sup>	70	— <sup>1</sup>	79	— <sup>1</sup>	85	— <sup>1</sup>	61	— <sup>1</sup>	69
Florida	81	79	56	50	65	61	74	78	44	51	59	65
Georgia	93	92	81	77	78	76	84	87	64	68	67	73
Kentucky	70	75	48	55	60	68	— <sup>1</sup>	63	— <sup>1</sup>	42	— <sup>1</sup>	50
Louisiana	78	78	52	57	67	67	77	79	47	47	67	63
Maryland	90	93	70	77	73	80	87	93	62	77	69	81
Mississippi	95	95	84	86	84	87	89	90	69	73	80	83
North Carolina	89	91	72	76	72	77	>95 <sup>2</sup>	79	85	48	88	59
Oklahoma	88	93	70	82	72	80	82	86	54	67	65	74
South Carolina	48	55	21	25	25	28	54	56	23	22	29	30
Tennessee	91	92	77	79	74	79	91	93	76	81	80	87
Texas	88	92	69	75	73	79	90	93	67	75	76	83
Virginia	— <sup>1</sup>	91	— <sup>1</sup>	80	— <sup>1</sup>	77	— <sup>1</sup>	86	— <sup>1</sup>	69	— <sup>1</sup>	70
West Virginia	82	83	73	77	73	74	76	79	66	70	73	74

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

<sup>1</sup> These states did not report results for fourth-graders in the years and subjects shown.

<sup>2</sup> North Carolina reports percentages on a scale of 0 to >95. A score above 95 is reported as >95, “greater than” that percent.

Sources: State departments of education.

*No Child Left Behind* has placed a national focus on the importance of closing achievement gaps among various groups, including students from different racial/ethnic groups and students from low-income families. The federal law holds states accountable for getting all students to high levels of achievement and requires that states report the percentages of students from these groups who meet state standards. If students in these groups are not making adequate progress toward annual targets, schools and districts face consequences — ranging from requirements to offer educational services to underperforming students, to restructuring schools.



Hispanic students and those from low-income families are growing at faster rates in most SREB states than they have in the past.

Narrowing gaps between racial/ethnic groups is not easy. Two groups identified as potentially “at risk” — Hispanic students and those from low-income families — are growing at faster rates in most SREB states than in the past. Changes in these populations in most SREB states over the last decade have been dramatic and have made narrowing achievement gaps more difficult.

- The Hispanic population in SREB states grew by more than 6.6 million from 1996 to 2006, with 10 SREB states reporting growth of more than 100,000 Hispanic residents. The Hispanic populations in Florida and Texas, for instance, increased by more than 1.5 million and nearly 3 million residents, respectively.
- Many SREB states have seen double-digit increases since 1990 in the percentages of children among their school-aged populations

from low-income households. According to SREB’s 2007 report *Ready to Start: Ensuring High-Quality Prekindergarten in SREB States*, 12 SREB states — Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and West Virginia — now have a majority of their student populations from low-income households.

One state — Texas — has been particularly successful in narrowing the achievement gap between Hispanic and white students. From 2005 to 2007, the gap between Hispanic and white fourth-graders meeting state standards in mathematics decreased by 4 percentage points, at the same time that the Hispanic student population was increasing and the state was raising its academic standards.

SREB states continue to make progress in improving the performance of black, Hispanic and white students on NAEP — a first step in closing gaps. Of the 11 SREB states with results for both black and Hispanic students, seven increased the percentages of students in each group scoring at or above the NAEP Basic achievement level in *both* reading and mathematics from 2003 to 2007.

In 11 SREB states, black students made greater gains at the NAEP Basic level in **reading** than white students from 2003 to 2007 and were able to narrow the achievement gap slightly. Hispanic students made greater gains in reading than white students in six SREB states, narrowing the gap between these two groups over the same period.

In 12 SREB states, black students narrowed the gap by making greater percentage-point increases than white students at the NAEP Basic level in **mathematics**. Hispanic students made greater gains than white students in 10 of the SREB states that reported results in math in 2007, narrowing the gap.

In the SREB median states, greater percentages of black, Hispanic and white fourth-graders



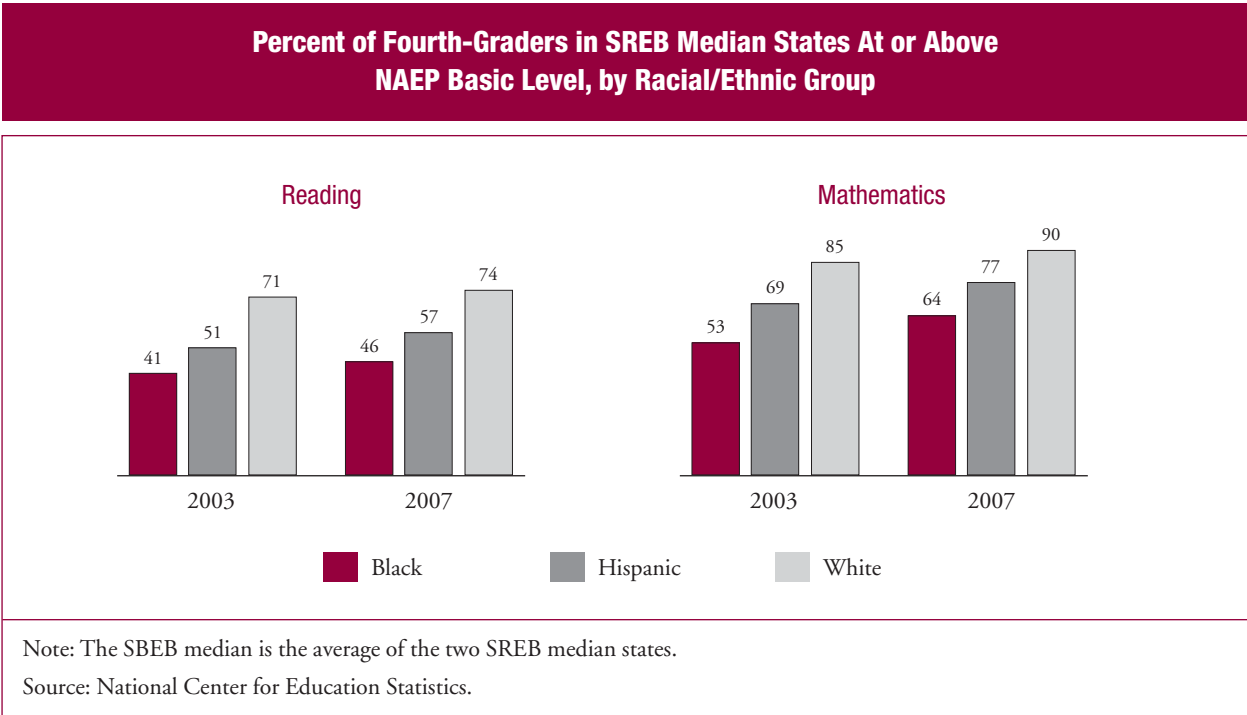
scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading and math in 2007 than 2003. Hispanic students made the greatest gains in reading — 6 percentage points compared with 5 percentage points for black students and 3 points for white students. Black students made the greatest gains in math — 11 percentage points, compared with 8 percentage points for Hispanic students and 5 points for white students.

The gaps between black and white students, and Hispanic and white students, narrowed in the SREB median states in both reading and math. In reading, the gap between Hispanic and white students who scored at or above the NAEP Basic level narrowed from 20 percentage points in 2003 to 17 percentage points in 2007. In math, the gap between black and white students at or above the NAEP Basic level narrowed from 32 percentage points in 2003 to 26 percentage points in 2007. These results indicate that SREB states are narrowing the achievement gaps for black and Hispanic students, but work remains as SREB states aim for all students to reach high levels of achievement in reading and math. (See Figure 1.)

**SREB states lead the nation in NAEP achievement by fourth-graders from some racial/ethnic minority groups.** SREB states have had notable success in improving performance of some groups compared with their national peers in reading and math, at both the NAEP Basic and Proficient levels.

- In 2007, seven SREB states ranked in the top 10 states in the nation in the percentage of Hispanic fourth-graders scoring at or above the **NAEP Basic level in reading**: Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Texas and Virginia. Delaware and Virginia ranked in the top 10 nationally in the percentage of black fourth-graders scoring at this level.
- Five SREB states ranked in the top 10 in the nation in the percentage of Hispanic fourth-graders scoring at or above the **NAEP Basic level in math**: Delaware, Florida, North Carolina, Texas and Virginia. Four states ranked in the top 10 in the percentage of black fourth-graders scoring at this level: Delaware, Florida, Texas and Virginia.

Figure 1



- Five SREB states were in the top 10 in the percentage of Hispanic fourth-graders scoring at or above the **NAEP Proficient level in reading**: Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and Virginia. Virginia was in the top 10 in the percentage of black fourth-graders scoring at this level.
- Six SREB states were in the top 10 in the percentage of Hispanic fourth-graders scoring at or above the **NAEP Proficient level in math**: Florida, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina, Texas and Virginia. Three states were in the top 10 in the percentage of black fourth-graders scoring at this level: Delaware, Texas and West Virginia.



**A higher percentage of children from low-income families in SREB median states have scored at or above the NAEP Basic level over the last four years than their peers nationwide.**

Several SREB states also experienced double-digit gains in the performance of black and Hispanic fourth-graders at the NAEP Basic level in reading and math from 2003 to 2007.

- In **reading**, three SREB states increased the percentage of black fourth-graders scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level by double digits: Alabama, Florida and Virginia. For the percentage of Hispanic fourth-graders scoring at this level, Delaware, Georgia and Texas did so.
- In **math**, Arkansas and Delaware increased the percentage of both black and Hispanic fourth-graders scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level by 10 or more percentage points. Florida,

Louisiana, Maryland and Oklahoma did so for black fourth-graders, and Georgia and Tennessee did so for Hispanic students.

### **Gaps in performance on NAEP related to income disparities**

Quite predictably, fourth-graders from low-income families fall short of “all other” children in SREB median states on NAEP reading and math assessments: 51 percent compared with 79 percent at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading, and 72 percent compared with 91 percent in math in 2007. Students in these states did not close the gap between low-income and all other children in reading from 2005 to 2007, but they did close the gap slightly in math. (See Table 6.)

Although these gaps remained considerable, *they were narrower than the gaps of other fourth-graders from low-income families nationwide in both reading and math in 2003, 2005 and 2007.* This means that a higher percentage of children from low-income families in the SREB median states have scored at or above the NAEP Basic level over the last four years than their peers nationwide.

At the NAEP Proficient level, the gap between low-income and all other fourth-graders was also large in the SREB median states in 2007: 26 percentage points in reading and 30 points in math. But just as they did at the NAEP Basic level, fourth-graders in SREB states outperformed their peers nationwide at the NAEP Proficient level in both reading and math in 2003, 2005 and 2007. Performance by fourth-graders nationwide improved in each of these years, but students in SREB states maintained their lead.

- In **reading**, the percentage of fourth-graders from low-income families in eight SREB states met or exceeded the national percentage scoring at or above the NAEP Proficient level in 2007.
- In **math**, the percentage of these students in seven SREB states met or exceeded the national percentage.

Table 6

Percent of Fourth-Graders from Low-Income Families <sup>1</sup> Scoring At or Above NAEP Basic Level												
	Reading						Mathematics					
	Low Income			All Others			Low Income			All Others		
	2003	2005	2007	2003	2005	2007	2003	2005	2007	2003	2005	2007
United States	44	46	50	75	77	79	62	67	70	88	90	91
SREB Median	<b>48</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>75</b>	75	<b>79</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>72</b>	85	89	<b>91</b>
Alabama	37	40	47	71	69	<b>79</b>	50	53	57	84	83	86
Arkansas	<b>49</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	74	<b>78</b>	<b>80</b>	61	<b>69</b>	<b>73</b>	84	89	<b>91</b>
Delaware	<b>56</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>92</b>
Florida	<b>49</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>93</b>
Georgia	43	43	<b>51</b>	74	75	<b>80</b>	59	65	68	84	89	<b>91</b>
Kentucky	<b>53</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>76</b>	74	<b>80</b>	<b>62</b>	65	<b>70</b>	83	86	90
Louisiana	38	42	43	70	75	73	59	66	67	85	89	88
Maryland	40	39	48	74	<b>77</b>	<b>79</b>	52	62	64	85	88	88
Mississippi	38	38	42	72	69	73	53	61	62	84	88	87
North Carolina	<b>48</b>	44	49	<b>78</b>	75	77	<b>73</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>93</b>
Oklahoma	<b>49</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>75</b>	73	76	<b>65</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>75</b>	86	88	<b>91</b>
South Carolina	<b>45</b>	43	44	<b>76</b>	73	75	<b>69</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>91</b>
Tennessee	42	43	44	68	73	76	54	60	64	80	86	88
Texas	<b>48</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>53</b>	72	<b>78</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>94</b>
Virginia	<b>47</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>92</b>
West Virginia	<b>57</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>75</b>	72	73	<b>68</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>73</b>	83	84	89

Notes: The SREB median is the average of the two SREB median states.  
State percentages that are equal to or greater than the national percentages are shown in **bold**.

<sup>1</sup> Students are considered “low income” if they are approved for the National School Lunch Program. In 2007, children from households of four with an annual income up to about \$37,000 were eligible for the program.

Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Even with this success, the gaps make clear that students from low-income families still have far to go when compared with other students. In order for all groups to reach goals and close achievement gaps, they will need to improve. Low-income, black and Hispanic students will need to improve at accelerated rates over their peers. SREB states’ efforts to assist them are paying off, but continuing efforts are required.

### Progress on the NAEP Trial Urban District Assessment

Results from this special NAEP study show progress in SREB states for another important population: students in large urban school districts. The Trial Urban District Assessment compares the NAEP reading and math performance of public school fourth-graders in 11 urban districts with their peers in other large central cities and

Table 7

**Percent of Fourth-Graders Scoring At or Above NAEP Basic Level,  
Trial Urban District Assessment**

	Reading				Mathematics			
	2003	2005	2007	Change 2005 to 2007	2003	2005	2007	Change 2005 to 2007
United States	62	62	66	4	76	79	81	2
Central cities	47	49	53	4	63	68	70	2
Atlanta	37	41	48	7	50	57	61	4
Austin	— <sup>1</sup>	61	62	1	— <sup>1</sup>	85	83	-2
Boston	48	51	54	3	59	72	77	5
Charlotte	<b>64</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>66</b>	1	<b>84</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>85</b>	-1
Chicago	40	40	44	4	50	52	58	6
Cleveland	35	37	39	2	51	60	53	-7
District of Columbia	31	33	39	6	36	45	49	4
Houston	48	52	49	-3	70	77	80	3
Los Angeles	35	37	39	2	52	58	60	2
New York City	53	57	57	0	67	73	79	6
San Diego	51	51	55	4	66	74	74	0

Notes: “Central cities” have a population of 250,000 or more.

The district with the highest percentages of students at the NAEP Basic level is shown in **bold**.

<sup>1</sup> Austin did not participate in the Trial Urban District Assessment in 2003.

Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress.

with all fourth-graders in the nation overall, including results by racial/ethnic group and household income. (See Table 7.)

Four urban districts in SREB states — Atlanta, Austin, Charlotte and Houston — were among the 11 districts participating in the study over the last several years. Fourth-graders in these four districts led on several key measures.

- The percentages of fourth-graders scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level in **reading** in Austin and Charlotte outperformed their study peers in 2005 and 2007. Charlotte’s fourth-graders also outpaced the overall percentage of U.S. fourth-graders in reading in 2003 and 2005 and equaled the national percentage in 2007.
- In Austin, Charlotte and Houston, the percentages of fourth-graders scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level in math exceeded those of their study peers in 2005 and 2007. Charlotte’s fourth-graders topped the national percentage in 2003, 2005 and 2007, and Austin’s fourth-graders topped it in 2005 and 2007.
- Atlanta was the only participating district in SREB states with “statistically significant” percentage gains (i.e., gains sufficient to ensure they did not result from a sampling error) in both reading and math in fourth grade from 2005 to 2007. Atlanta made the largest gain in the percentage of fourth-graders scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading — 7 percentage points — over the period.

The study also showed that students from certain racial/ethnic minority groups and those from low-income families in these four urban districts made progress.

- Higher percentages of black and Hispanic fourth-graders in Charlotte scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in both reading and math in 2007 than did fourth-graders in those minority groups in the nation.
- Houston had the highest percentage of Hispanic fourth-graders scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level in math among all 11 districts and in the nation.
- Higher percentages of fourth-graders from low-income families in Austin, Charlotte and Houston scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in math in 2007 than did those students in the nation.



#### QUESTION 5:

### What is your state doing to ensure that all students learn to read in the early grades?

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**S**REB state leaders have long recognized that providing effective reading programs to ensure that children read competently by the fourth grade is an essential function of the early grades. All SREB states receive funds from the federal Reading First program, a part of *No Child Left Behind*, to help their public school districts improve reading instruction. In addition, many SREB states invest state funds to complement or extend reading efforts in local districts.

SREB states have received substantial Reading First funds since 2003 — including \$379 million in 2007 alone. This funding was significantly reduced in the 2008 federal budget allocation — and the direct effect will be felt well into 2009. This means that your state will be challenged to find new sources of funds for its early grades reading programs if it is going to maintain them at current funding levels. (See Table 8.)

#### How Reading First supports reading instruction in your state

When states accept Reading First funds, they agree to use the funds to provide only scientifically based reading instruction. The federal law requires

Reading First programs to incorporate five elements of effective reading instruction in primary grades: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. States can award the funds only to districts with high proportions of students with weak reading skills *and* students from low-income families. Some SREB states award funds to all eligible school districts, while others fund only the districts that may benefit most. In both cases, the districts choose which schools receive funds. The percentages of schools in SREB states receiving Reading First funds are relatively small — for example, about 7 percent of elementary schools in the SREB median states in 2005. (See Appendix C for the numbers of eligible districts and schools awarded in your state.)

The funds may be used for professional development in reading instruction for *all* early grades teachers statewide (even those not in Reading First schools). Districts also may use the funds to buy instructional materials and hire specialized personnel — often called reading coaches — to help classroom teachers in Reading First schools implement the five elements. In addition, states may use 20 percent of the funds to administer,

Table 8

Federal Funding for Reading First				
	Amount of Award (in millions)			
	2003	2005	2007	2008 Estimate <sup>1</sup>
SREB states	\$331	\$394	\$379	\$145
Alabama	16	19	18	7
Arkansas	10	12	11	4
Delaware	2	2.5	2	0.9
Florida	47	55	50	19
Georgia	29	33	33	13
Kentucky	14	15	15	6
Louisiana	20	25	23	9
Maryland	12	12	12	5
Mississippi	12	16	16	6
North Carolina	21	27	28	11
Oklahoma	13	14	12	4
South Carolina	14	15	16	6
Tennessee	15	20	19	7
Texas	82	103	102	39
Virginia	18	18	16	6
West Virginia	6	7	6	2

<sup>1</sup> Estimated FY 2008 Allocations: Title I, Part B – Reading First State Grants, January 2008.  
Source: U.S. Department of Education.

monitor and report on progress, which is required by the program's contract with states.

**State Reading First programs are facing challenges.** Federal funding for Reading First nationwide has fallen from just over \$1 billion in 2007 to \$393 million in 2008, a decrease of approximately 60 percent. The reduction has been attributed primarily to charges of program mismanagement soon after the program was implemented — concerns that appear to have been resolved. For SREB states, the total allocation dropped from \$379 million to \$145 million — approximately the same percentage as nationwide.

Early drafts of the 2009 federal budget include funding at approximately the same amounts as in 2007. The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) has supported this restoration of funding, and

many federal financial analysts have expected Congress to restore the funds. But the current 2009 budget draft for Reading First may yet be vulnerable — perhaps to the general economic downturn, to national election transitions and to results from ongoing program evaluation.

*No Child Left Behind* requires that the U.S. DOE seek regular, independent evaluations of Reading First. Early evaluations — which were generally positive — examined the alignment of the program's components with state standards and assessments, the level of program implementation, and the degree to which implementation matched the legislation. The program's final impact study, commissioned by the federal Institute of Education Sciences (IES), is due to be released in January 2009.

IES issued an interim final impact study in May 2008 that has raised concerns. This interim report compares the achievement of Reading First students from 2005 and 2006 with comparable students by estimating the impact of Reading First in helping students reach *grade level* in reading comprehension — one of the five elements of primary grades reading instruction. The study also compares implementation of instructional practices in Reading First schools with those in comparable schools. The study concludes that Reading First has not made a “statistically significant” impact on reading comprehension thus far.

However, the study does show that Reading First schools spent “significantly” more time on implementing critical instructional components of the program, including more time teaching phonics.

Reading First leaders in SREB states told SREB that they believe the interim report overlooked important *gains* in reading comprehension while focusing primarily on the program’s goal of *grade-level achievement* after only a few years of program implementation. One state director reported, for example, that Reading First schools made “double the gains (on state reading tests) as other schools last year.” Another questioned the study’s design because it compared students from Reading First schools who were taught by teachers trained in Reading First professional development seminars with students from non-Reading First schools taught by teachers who had had the same Reading First training.

### Lessons learned from state reading programs

Some SREB states have invested heavily in early grades reading programs — many, in state-funded reading programs that predated Reading First. These states are in the best position to weather the recent cut in Reading First funding. They have coordinated their efforts with the federal program since it was launched — both extending the federal program and complementing it. They realized that struggling readers are found in *all* schools and are not limited to low-income families. They also knew that the number

of children from low-income families — who are more likely to need extra help — would outpace Reading First resources if the state did not invest in early grades reading programs beyond their normal per student allocations. In fact, some states recognized that state and Reading First funding *together* were likely inadequate to meet students’ needs, and they merged their efforts with federal funding streams such as Title I — or sought grants for training and assistance. Examples of SREB states that have expanded or complemented their early grades reading programs in these ways are highlighted below.

**Alabama** made a strong commitment to improving reading skills, especially in the early grades, through the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI), created in 1998. It was among the first states to receive Reading First funds because the ARI had many of the same components as Reading First and was prepared to implement the full program quickly. ARI is a grant program that



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Education leaders attributed Alabama fourth-graders’ impressive 9 percentage-point gain on NAEP in reading in 2007 — which made the state a national leader — to the Alabama Reading Initiative.

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requires schools to apply for funding and make commitments to program objectives. Like Reading First, the ARI provides principals and teachers with professional development on improving reading instruction, including summer institutes for whole school staffs. Since Reading First funds became available, Alabama has used its federal

funding to complement ARI *and* has expanded its state investment. In 2004, the Alabama Legislature appropriated \$40 million for the ARI — more than twice the state’s Reading First appropriation that year. By 2008, all 794 public schools serving kindergartners through third-graders in Alabama were participating in the initiative. In 2008, the Legislature appropriated \$64 million for the ARI to ensure program strength, even before the Reading First budget reductions were announced.

The first group of fourth-graders to complete the ARI curriculum from kindergarten through third grade took the NAEP fourth-grade assessment in 2007. The results showed an impressive 9 percentage-point gain for Alabama’s fourth-graders scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading, compared with fourth-graders in 2005 — the largest gain in the nation. State education leaders attributed the success to the ARI.

**Florida** also has made a strong state-level commitment to grade-level reading competence for all students by 2012. It launched *Just Read, Florida!* in 2001 to coordinate its statewide reading effort. At the same time, it launched the state’s Center for Reading Research to study reading, reading instruction and reading materials, to disseminate information and to provide technical assistance to districts and schools. Florida allocated nearly \$115 million to schools and districts in 2008 to carry out their reading programs. The state also allocated \$18 million to *Just Read, Florida!* for statewide efforts. Most of the state-level activities were focused on educator support, but they also included programs to promote parent involvement, and community and corporate engagement. Florida’s program has developed several distinctive elements. *Just Read, Florida!* has hosted an annual leadership conference on improving literacy for more than 4,000 principals, reading coaches and district administrators. Program staff members also have worked closely with parents, corporations and medical groups to encourage student reading outside school. For example, *Just Read, Florida!* has partnered with the state’s Division of Libraries to

promote library use and with Reach Out and Read, a national nonprofit organization that promotes early literacy through pediatricians’ offices.

The **Kentucky** Legislature passed the Read to Achieve Act in 2005 to provide grants to schools to help teachers improve students’ reading skills in the early grades. The 2005 appropriation was \$7 million; by 2008, it had grown to \$24 million. The law requires every elementary school to provide assessments and interventions for students who are not proficient readers. Kentucky also provides professional training so teachers can provide reading instruction to all students.



*Just Read, Florida!* features a research center; a leadership conference; and parent, community and corporate engagement.

Beginning in 1999, the **South Carolina** Reading Initiative (SCRI) received just over \$3 million per year for four years from the General Assembly, for a total of nearly \$13 million. Beginning in 2001, South Carolina received \$26 million from a federal grant for SC READS to provide professional development for K-3 teachers in the state’s 32 highest-needs schools. South Carolina Reading First began in 2004 and was built on the efforts of the earlier state reading programs. The state received \$16 million in Reading First funds in 2007. The same year, South Carolina allocated \$60 million in state lottery proceeds to help low-performing early and middle grades schools serve students from low-income families.

Begun in 1997, the **Texas** Reading Initiative serves all grades; funding specifically for the early grades is not separately identified. However, the initiative does complement Reading First efforts by providing leadership academies for kinder-



garten and first-grade teachers, student assessments through the Texas Primary Reading Inventory for kindergartners through second-graders, and individualized instruction for all students based on continual classroom assessment and the identification of students who need intervention from specialized reading teachers.

For all of these states, professional development was key in order to ensure that all children — not just those in high-poverty schools — were taught by teachers who knew how to assess their needs and intervene to help them. In addition, they invested in classroom assessments, technical assistance to ensure that teachers used the methods and materials as they were intended, and professional development for principals.

### **What can your state do to continue to improve reading programs in the early grades that lead to more successful readers?**

Regardless of fluctuations in the economy, outcomes of elections and Reading First evaluations, SREB states need to plan for reductions in Reading First funds in 2009 — and beyond. According to many state Reading First officials, professional development budgets, salaries for reading coaches and summer academies will be most vulnerable in 2009. They report that fewer schools are likely to receive Reading First funds. Cutting funds from Reading First schools means reducing resources for struggling young readers — often, from families with the fewest resources to help them.

Many state leaders are looking for alternative funds — such as those from Title I and state dollars — to bridge the next year in hopes that Reading First funding will be restored. But they note that most federal funding streams already support many other programs. Some states can carry forward Reading First funds left from prior years into 2009 to lessen the impact of the cuts made in 2008. But these carry-over funds will eventually run out, and states need long-range plans for financing reading programs. In states that depend entirely on federal funds to supplement their per student allocations for early grades

reading programs, progress in helping struggling readers will likely stall.

Reading First funds have been predictable and substantial in the past, enabling many states to expand their reading programs steadily since 2003. A continued expansion on the scale of Reading First is difficult, perhaps impossible, to replace at the state level in the current, uncertain financial climate. Yet, the earlier federal investment in reading — for the training of teachers and purchase of instructional resources — already has been made. So even if the cuts in Reading First are permanent, your state already has reaped benefits that can serve as a foundation to expand state reading programs.

Education leaders and policy-makers should follow the lead of those who have made an investment in early grades reading programs, keeping in mind that Reading First funds have served only a relatively small percentage of schools. SREB states should:

- provide regular professional development, hire reading coaches to support the work of classroom teachers and provide summer academies for training whole school staffs.
- fund programs to intervene when necessary to help struggling readers — in all schools, not only Reading First schools.
- offer leadership academies for superintendents, principals and reading coaches.
- make technical assistance available to schools to identify appropriate instructional materials and strategies for teaching reading.

State leaders know that reading in early grades is essential to learning in school. Too many children complete fourth grade without the reading skills they need to be successful in the middle grades. When Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings reviewed the interim report on Reading First, she concluded, "Moving the needle on reading is a hard thing to do." She added, "I don't think anyone's going to assert that the cure will be less focus and fewer resources." State leaders will likely be tapped for resources needed to strengthen and expand current state reading programs.

QUESTION 6:

## How can your state intervene to help struggling students move on to the next grade?

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**A**ll SREB states have policies aimed at helping young students who struggle to meet grade-level standards. Some states require retention (repeating a grade), and others recommend retention when students do not meet these standards. States also differ in the programs they make available to struggling students to help them meet requirements at key grade levels — generally, grades three and four. Some states require all students who do not meet state standards in one of these grades to follow individual improvement plans, receive accelerated instruction or attend summer programs. Others leave retention decisions and intervention program options up to local school districts. (See Table 9 for state policies on retention of students.)



**Low-achieving students need innovative, individualized intervention to address their needs and to give them a chance to succeed.**

Research shows that retention has a negative affect on student completion of high school. One study documented that the probability of dropping out of school jumped 27 percentage points for a student retained in a single grade compared with a student not retained. However, research on those who are promoted without the requisite skills shows they fare no better. These students rarely catch up academically to their peers and often drop out of school before graduation. The

problem of how to help struggling early grades students is particularly daunting because research indicates that third grade may be the last chance schools have to help them master fundamental skills — before they get so far behind their peers that they cannot catch up.

This means that policy-makers face a challenge. Public opinion generally supports ending “social promotion,” a practice of moving students to the next grade with their peers even though they may not have met grade-level standards. Yet, developing an effective retention policy is difficult. Low-achieving students who must repeat a grade are poorly served when they are issued the same instructional materials from the same teacher a second year. These children need innovative, individualized intervention to address their needs and to give them a chance to succeed. Placing a child in the same grade *again* without making other changes is unlikely to help the child improve. It is important for you as a policy-maker to know how effective your retention policy is in improving long-term student achievement in your state.

As states develop retention policies, they should develop clear, parallel policies that outline intervention strategies that support their policies. The intervention strategies should identify students who are not achieving at grade level early enough so teachers can provide extra help. They can then support these students before they fall so far behind that retention becomes a possibility. Such aggressive intervention strategies can often prevent retention.

But once students have failed to meet grade-level standards, intervention strategies are still important as a part of remediation during the time the student is retained. Students who are repeating a grade need research-based intervention strategies

to help them make accelerated progress toward grade-level standards. They need teachers to assess them regularly to ensure that they are strengthening the deficient skill areas.



**Students who are repeating a grade need research-based intervention strategies to help them make accelerated progress toward grade-level standards.**

**Florida’s retention policy and intervention program serves both to prevent retention and remediate students who have been retained.** Enacted in 2002, Florida’s statute on retention and supplemental help specifically and successfully addresses the needs of low-performing third-graders who are struggling in reading. To be promoted, third-graders are required to score at or above Level 2 (of five levels) on the reading section of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT).

A key part of Florida’s program is its effort to identify and respond to problems early. Florida’s early grades teachers administer the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment four times each year. They and their administrators use the assessment information to identify struggling readers and to tailor instruction to meet their needs. This system of assessment, instruction and intervention is often referred to as a “response to intervention” (RTI) instructional model. Florida uses the RTI instructional model in Reading First schools to help teachers with struggling readers — both in an effort to keep them on grade level and as a remediation strategy for students who are repeating a grade.

Florida’s policy requires that schools develop academic improvement plans for each retained student that identifies that student’s specific academic needs. The policy also includes these provisions:

- Each retained student has at least 90 minutes of uninterrupted reading instruction each day.
- Each retained student who does not achieve grade level after retesting is placed in an accelerated class with a highly qualified teacher.
- Students who are retained but reach grade level by November 1 of the following school year are promoted at midyear. They are provided support as they make the transition to the higher grade level.
- Schools must provide a transitional instructional setting for students already retained but still not ready for promotion.

**Florida’s policy already has shown promise.**

- In 2006, the Manhattan Institute reported that third-graders in Florida who were retained and received intervention made significant gains in reading two years after repeating the grade, compared with similar students who were promoted even though they did not score at Level 2.
- That same year, the Florida Legislature’s Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability found that 62 percent of retained third-graders improved their test scores to Level 2 or higher after retention and intervention. Twice as many scored at Level 3 or higher as scored at Level 2 upon retest. Almost two-thirds maintained Level 2 or

**Third-graders in Florida who were retained and received intervention made significant gains in reading two years after repeating the grade, compared with similar students who were promoted.**

Table 9

Retention Policies for Students Who Do Not Meet State Standards				
	Retention Policy			Comments
	<i>Retention required for students who do not meet state standards</i>	<i>Retention recommended for students who do not meet state standards</i>	<i>What states are doing to support failing students</i>	
Alabama				Policies on promotion and retention are determined by the school district.
Arkansas	Only for non-participation in Individual Improvement Plan		Individual Improvement Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools develop individualized remediation plans for students who do not meet state standards. Students who do not participate in the plan can be retained.</li> </ul>
Delaware	✓		Summer school and/or Individual Improvement Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students who fail the state test must attend summer school, retake and pass the test to be promoted.</li> <li>Those almost passing can be promoted with an Individual Improvement Plan. Districts can define other indicators. Students may not be retained more than twice for lack of progress.</li> </ul>
Florida	✓		Progress-monitoring plans and remediation programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools and students' parents develop a progress-monitoring plan to address deficiencies and possible remediation for students who fail the state reading test. Students receive intensive reading instruction and are placed in alternative environments after being retained two or more times.</li> </ul>
Georgia	✓		Accelerated, differentiated or additional instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Third-, sixth- and eighth-graders are required to meet grade-level requirements for promotion. Those who don't meet them receive extra instruction and are then retested. If they fail the retest, a committee may decide to retain them.</li> </ul>
Kentucky				Policies on promotion and retention are determined by the school district.
Louisiana	✓		Summer remediation programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fourth- and eighth-graders who fail the state reading and math exams must attend summer school and be retested. If they fail the retest, they are retained. Students also may be retained for excessive absences or failing grades.</li> </ul>
Maryland				Policies on promotion and retention are determined by the school district.
Mississippi		✓	Special services and/or intervention teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Third- and seventh-graders who fail the state test receive special services provided by the district in the subsequent grade level and are then retested.</li> <li>If they fail to meet the benchmark again, an intervention team decides whether to promote or retain them.</li> </ul>

Sources: State departments of education, June 2007.

Table 9 (continued)

Retention Policies for Students Who Do Not Meet State Standards				
	Retention Policy			Comments
	<i>Retention required for students who do not meet state standards</i>	<i>Retention recommended for students who do not meet state standards</i>	<i>What states are doing to support failing students</i>	
North Carolina		✓	Retests and focused intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Districts provide interventions — including extended instructional opportunities — for third- and fifth-graders who do not meet state standards. Local policy must be consistent with statewide policies.</li> </ul>
Oklahoma	Only for students who do not complete a summer academy	✓	Summer academies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers recommend students for summer academies after third grade if they do not meet reading competencies. Those who do not meet standards may be retained. Students not meeting standards in math receive remediation dependent on funding.</li> </ul>
South Carolina	✓		Action Plans for students; summer school and/or comprehensive remediation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is an Action Plan for third- through eighth-graders who do not meet state standards.</li> <li>Students below basic after a year on the plan must attend summer school or a remediation program. After a second year with a plan, students still below grade level are retained.</li> </ul>
Tennessee				Policies on promotion and retention are determined by the school district.
Texas	✓		Accelerated instruction and multiple attempts to meet state benchmarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Third-graders must pass the statewide reading assessment or receive approval of a grade-placement committee to be promoted into the next grade. Otherwise they receive accelerated instruction and are retested.</li> <li>Students who fail again continue accelerated instruction or take an alternative exam. If they fail a third time, they are retained.</li> </ul>
Virginia				Policies are established at the division level; schools use the state assessment results as part of a set of criteria for determining the promotion or retention.
West Virginia				Policies on promotion and retention are determined by the school district.

Sources: State departments of education, June 2007.

higher scores in fourth grade, compared with only 44 percent of those who scored at Level 1 in third grade but were promoted.

The study also reported that, after the retention policy and intervention strategies were implemented, all students who scored at Level 1 in third grade — regardless of whether they were retained or promoted — scored better in

fourth grade than similar students in previous years.

These results counter previous findings in other states and indicate that the specifics of Florida's intervention program — more than a policy of retention — account for the state's success in aiding struggling readers.

## In Summary: What You and Your State Can Do to Meet the Challenges Ahead

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**S**REB states have made significant progress in building the foundation for student success in reading and mathematics in the early grades. More students are meeting standards on state assessments, and more students are scoring at or above both the Basic and Proficient levels on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Achievement gaps are narrowing between groups of students. Most notably, children from low-income families in SREB states have higher achievement results on NAEP than their counterparts nationwide.

*Still, results in reading and mathematics show that far too many fourth-graders do not have the basic skills they need to make a smooth transition to the middle grades.* You and other state leaders need to take action on the information and strategies in this report to help more students become ready for the middle grades.

- All SREB states need to **ensure that their state academic standards are set at the right level** so that students are appropriately challenged. By now, state leaders know whether your state's academic standards in each grade and subject are set too low, about right or too high. You and others have been able to compare students' results on state assessments with results on NAEP at key grade levels. In the past few years, many SREB states have made their state standards more rigorous. For many of these states, this work needs to continue. Other states still need to make adjustments to ensure that students meet high standards and are prepared for academic work in the middle grades and beyond.
- SREB states also should **provide more professional development for teachers, principals and other education leaders** to help them link state standards, assessments and curricula to student learning. Enhanced professional development and better training are particularly

important when states raise the rigor of their standards or change the curriculum. States also need to provide teachers with the resources they need to design curriculum and learning experiences for students that are based on the standards — for example, Web sites linking the standards to instructional practice.

- All SREB states need to **meet the demographic challenges** they are facing. Nearly all SREB states are projected to have more Hispanic children enrolled in public school in the years ahead. All SREB states also have had dramatic increases in children from low-income families. This means that schools will have a greater proportion of children whose first language is not English and who may need tutoring and individualized instruction — at the same time that the schools are attempting to help *all* children reach higher achievement levels. Principals and teachers will need more training to help the whole school staff meet the changing needs of students. School districts need to plan ahead to ensure that the right kinds of instructional programs and materials are available so that all children are well served — even as the population surrounding the schools changes.
- SREB states need to **consider making an investment in early grades reading programs** so they can continue the gains they have made through the federal Reading First program — which recently had its funding greatly reduced. Some SREB states had state reading programs before Reading First was created, and others made significant state investments to expand the scope of Reading First even before the funding reduction. These states realize that Reading First cannot serve all of the struggling readers in their states. Some invested in additional professional development, materials and assessments, and others

invested in expanding programs beyond the schools included in the Reading First program. Additional SREB states need to consider making investments of these kinds to ensure more students are reading on grade level by fourth grade.

- SREB states should **link their statewide retention policies to effective intervention strategies** to help ensure that all children succeed in developing basic skills. Research shows that requiring a student who fails to meet state academic standards to repeat a grade is not an effective remediation strategy unless it is coupled with an intervention program to help the student catch up. Likewise, promoting a student who has not reached grade level is not effective unless the student receives extra support in the higher grade. In either case,

focused intervention strategies can make the difference.

The early grades should set students for success in the middle grades. Policy-makers and education leaders in SREB states already know most of what it takes to make this happen. By now, these are familiar themes — but they remain essential for the success of young students: strong academic standards and assessment systems — including classroom-based tools; high-quality, well-trained teachers and school leaders; sound, research-based instruction; and focused intervention programs for struggling students.

Once your state's policies, standards and programs are in place, policy-makers face the challenge of ensuring that school districts have the resources necessary to produce good results. Success for early grades students depends on it.

Appendix A

**2007 State Accountability Systems Used in Conjunction With *No Child Left Behind***

	Assessments	State Categories for Reporting <i>NCLB</i> Student Achievement	Parallel State System
Alabama	AL Reading and Mathematics Test (ARMT) AL High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE) AL Alternate Assessment AL Direct Assessment of Writing	Level IV <b>Level III</b> Level II Level I	No
Arkansas	AR Benchmark Exam AR End-of-Course Exam AR Alternate Portfolio Assessment	Advanced <b>Proficient</b> Basic Below Basic	No
Delaware	DE Student Testing Program (DSTP)	Level 5 Level 4 <b>Level 3</b> Level 2 Level 1	Yes
Florida	FL Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) FL Alternative Assessment Report	Level 5 Level 4 <b>Level 3</b> Level 2 Level 1	Yes
Georgia	GA Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) GA Alternate Assessment Enhanced GA High School Graduation Tests (EGHSGT)	Level 3/Pass Plus <b>Level 2/Pass</b> Level 1/Fail	No
Kentucky	KY Core Content Test (KCCT) Augmented Norm Referenced Test	Distinguished <b>Proficient</b> Apprentice Novice	Yes
Louisiana	LA Educational Assessment Program for the 21st Century (LEAP 21) Graduation Exit Examination for the 21st Century (GEE 21) LA LEAP Alternate Assessments Program (LAA 1 and LAA 2)	Advanced Mastery <b>Basic</b> Approaching Basic Unsatisfactory	Yes
Maryland	MD School Assessments MD High School Assessments MD Alternate Maryland School Assessment	Advanced <b>Proficient</b> Basic	No
Mississippi	MS Curriculum Test (MCT) MS Subject Area Testing Program (SATP) MS Alternate Assessment MS Writing Assessment	Advanced <b>Proficient</b> Basic Minimal	Yes

Note: **Bold** denotes the level that the state has defined as “meets state standard.”

Sources: State departments of education.



Appendix A, continued

**2007 State Accountability Systems Used in Conjunction With *No Child Left Behind***

	<b>Assessments</b>	<b>State Categories for Reporting NCLB Student Achievement</b>	<b>Parallel State System</b>
North Carolina	NC End-of-Grade Tests NC Alternate Assessments (NC EXTEND 2 and NCCLAS) NC Writing Assessments NC High School Comprehensive Tests	Level IV <b>Level III</b> Level II Level I	Yes
Oklahoma	OK Core Curriculum Tests (OCCT)	Advanced <b>Satisfactory</b> Limited Knowledge Unsatisfactory	No
South Carolina	SC Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT) SC High School Assessment Program (HSAP) SC Alternate Assessment (SC-Alt)	Advanced <b>Proficient</b> Basic Below Basic	Yes
Tennessee	TN Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP)	Advanced <b>Proficient</b> Basic	No
Texas	TX Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) State-Developed Alternative Assessment II (SDAA II) Locally Determined Alternative Assessment (LDAA) TX Assessment of Knowledge and Skills-Alt (TAKS-Alt) Reading Proficiency Tests in English (RPTE)	Commended Performance <b>Met the Standard</b> Did Not Meet the Standard	Yes
Virginia	VA Standards of Learning (SOL) VA Substitute SOL for Students with Disabilities Approved assessments linked directly to SOLs (AP, IB, SAT II subject tests)	Pass/Advanced <b>Pass/Proficient</b> Fails/Does Not Meet Standard	Yes
West Virginia	WV Educational Standards Test (WESTEST) WV Alternate Performance Task Assessment (APTA)	Distinguished Above Mastery <b>Mastery</b> Below Mastery Novice	Yes

Note: **Bold** denotes the level that the state has defined as “meets state standard.”

Sources: State departments of education.

## Appendix B

### SREB States' Departments of Education Standards-Based Instructional Resources on the Web

Alabama	Lesson plans, Web resources, content standards and courses of study are integrated for Alabama teachers in Alex: Alabama Learning Exchange. See <a href="http://alex.state.al.us/sitemap.php">http://alex.state.al.us/sitemap.php</a> .
Arkansas	The Arkansas Department of Education provides curriculum, frameworks and assessment resources in the Curriculum section of their Web site. See <a href="http://arkedu.state.ar.us/curriculum/curriculum.html">http://arkedu.state.ar.us/curriculum/curriculum.html</a> .
Delaware	The Delaware Department of Education's Web site, Curriculum and Instructions, provides the Delaware Recommended Curriculum, standards with model instructional units in content areas, and other helpful information. See <a href="http://www.doe.k12.de.us/programs/ci/">http://www.doe.k12.de.us/programs/ci/</a> .
Florida	The Florida Department of Education provides teachers with resources at the Educational Technology Clearinghouse (ETC) site. It includes standards, curriculum materials, and lesson plans that integrate technology and instruction. See <a href="http://etc.usf.edu/index.html">http://etc.usf.edu/index.html</a> .
Georgia	GeorgiaStandards.Org is a Web site provided by the Georgia Department of Education that provides information on state standards and curriculum resources. See <a href="http://www.georgiastandards.org/">http://www.georgiastandards.org/</a> .
Kentucky	Links to online lessons, teacher "strategies that work," suggestions for inquiry-based learning, and technology standards are provided through the Teacher Resources Web site. See <a href="http://www.kde.state.ky.us/KDE/Instructional+Resources/Technology/Teacher+Resources/default.htm">http://www.kde.state.ky.us/KDE/Instructional+Resources/Technology/Teacher+Resources/default.htm</a> .
Louisiana	Making Connections provides teachers with standards-based instructional materials that enhance teaching, learning and technology opportunities in Louisiana's K-12 schools. See <a href="http://mconn.doe.state.la.us/">http://mconn.doe.state.la.us/</a> .  PASS, Practice Assessment/Strengthen Skills is a Web-based practice test for Louisiana students on the LEAP 21 and GEE 21 that provides instruction to help students strengthen skills. See <a href="http://www.louisianapass.org/">http://www.louisianapass.org/</a> .
Maryland	The Maryland State Department of Education provides online instructional resources on its School Improvement in Maryland Web site that includes information on assessments, standards, data analysis, instruction and school improvement. See <a href="http://www.mdk12.org/">http://www.mdk12.org/</a> .
Mississippi	Marco Polo Discovers Mississippi provides lesson plans and Web resources. See <a href="http://marcopolo.mde.k12.ms.us/resources.html">http://marcopolo.mde.k12.ms.us/resources.html</a> .  For Mississippi Curriculum Frameworks, see <a href="http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/Curriculum/index_1.htm">http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/Curriculum/index_1.htm</a> .
North Carolina	The North Carolina Standard Course of Study provides a set of competencies for every content area and each grade and high school course. See <a href="http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/">http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/</a> .
Oklahoma	Marco Polo Discovers Passport to Student Success provides standards-based Internet content for K-12 teachers, including a searchable database of Oklahoma's Priority Academic Student Skills, lesson plan templates, state progress information, professional development opportunities, and wrap-around resources that augment Marco Polo lesson plans. See <a href="http://title3.sde.state.ok.us/mpsr/">http://title3.sde.state.ok.us/mpsr/</a> .
South Carolina	South Carolina: Teaching, Learning, and Connecting (SCTLC) links lesson plans, assessment items, reference works and online curriculum resources with South Carolina standards and the Marco Polo site. See <a href="http://www.sctlc.com/">http://www.sctlc.com/</a> . For Marco Polo, see <a href="http://www.marcopolo-education.org/">http://www.marcopolo-education.org/</a> .

Appendix B, continued

**SREB States' Departments of Education  
Standards-Based Instructional Resources on the Web**

Tennessee	A <i>Blueprint for Learning</i> , a companion document to the Tennessee Curriculum Standards, provides curriculum standards to teachers in a more accessible format. See <a href="http://www.state.tn.us/education/ci/standards/blueprint/index.shtml">http://www.state.tn.us/education/ci/standards/blueprint/index.shtml</a> .
Texas	Teachers can find curriculum standards, standards-based curriculum and other educational resources, such as lesson plans, at three Web sites:  For Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), see <a href="http://www.tea.state.tx.us/teks/">http://www.tea.state.tx.us/teks/</a> . For the Mathematics TEKS Toolkit, see <a href="http://www.utdanacenter.org/mathtoolkit/">http://www.utdanacenter.org/mathtoolkit/</a> . For the TEA Teachers' Toolbag, see <a href="http://www.tea.state.tx.us/tchrtoolbag/">http://www.tea.state.tx.us/tchrtoolbag/</a> .
Virginia	The Virginia Department of Education's Instructional Services Web site provides resources such as Virginia's Standards of Learning, Curriculum Framework, Enhanced Scope and Sequence, Test Blueprints, Released Tests, Project Graduation, ePAT and Online Tutorial. See <a href="http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/Instruction/sol.html">http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/Instruction/sol.html</a> .  Virginia Studies – Ready Resources for the Classroom assists teachers in implementing the Virginia Studies History and Social Science Standards of Learning. See <a href="http://vastudies.pwnet.org/intro/index.htm">http://vastudies.pwnet.org/intro/index.htm</a> .
West Virginia	The West Virginia Department of Education provides links to resources for lesson plans on their Web site, WVDE Lesson Plan. See <a href="http://wvde.state.wv.us/lessons/">http://wvde.state.wv.us/lessons/</a> .

Appendix C

**Districts and Schools in SREB States Awarded Reading First Funds, 2003 to 2005**

	School Districts					Elementary Schools				
	Number in the State	Eligible for Funds		Number Awarded Funds		Number in the State	Awarded Funds		Percent Awarded Funds	
		2003	2005	2003	2005		2003	2005	2003	2005
Alabama Reading First	165	36	46	36	46	944	75	92	8	10
Arkansas Reading First	291	92	119	39	36	728	68	72	10	10
Delaware Reading First	35	11	NA	7	7	139	12	16	9	12
Florida Reading First	74	NA	38	37	36	2,420	393	591	NA	24
Georgia Reading First	204	64	64	38	38	1,665	94	114	6	7
Kentucky Reading First	196	90	90	45	41	1,002	74	73	7	7
Louisiana Reading First	88	32	45	17	21	1,027	75	104	7	10
Maryland Reading First	25	9	9	9	9	1,083	25	47	2	4
Mississippi Reading First	163	56	56	22	34	600	38	66	7	11
North Carolina Reading First	216	44	44	39	39	1,786	91	98	5	5
Oklahoma Reading First	600	152	121	40	45	1,201	50	77	4	6
South Carolina Reading First	102	48	48	24	24	847	51	53	6	6
Tennessee Reading First	136	36	36	16	22	1,257	55	74	5	6
Texas Reading First	1,268	366	366	121	205	5,312	514	744	10	14
Virginia Reading First	226	66	69	43	43	1,485	76	89	5	6
West Virginia Reading First	57	22	22	21	21	583	39	38	6	7

“NA” indicates not available.

Sources: U.S. Department of Education and state departments of education.

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# *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education

The reports listed below for each goal, and other reports on the goals, are found at [www.sreb.org](http://www.sreb.org).

1. All children are ready for the first grade.  
*Ready to Start: Ensuring High-Quality Prekindergarten in SREB States*
2. Achievement in the early grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.  
*Set for Success: Improving Reading and Mathematics Achievement in the Early Grades*
3. Achievement in the middle grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.  
*Getting the Mission Right in the Middle Grades*
4. All young adults have a high school diploma — or, if not, pass the GED tests.  
*Getting Serious About High School Graduation*
5. All recent high school graduates have solid academic preparation and are ready for post-secondary education and a career.  
*Getting Students Ready for College and Careers*
6. Adults who are not high school graduates participate in literacy and job-skills training and further education.  
*Investing Wisely in Adult Learning is Key to State Prosperity*
7. The percentage of adults who earn postsecondary degrees or technical certificates exceeds national averages.  
*Creating College Opportunity for All: Prepared Students and Affordable Colleges*
8. Every school has higher student performance and meets state academic standards for all students each year.  
*Focusing on Student Performance Through Accountability*
9. Every school has leadership that results in improved student performance — and leadership begins with an effective school principal.  
*Schools Need Good Leaders Now: State Progress in Creating a Learning-Centered School Leadership System*
10. Every student is taught by qualified teachers.  
*Resolve and Resources to Get a Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom*
11. The quality of colleges and universities is regularly assessed and funding is targeted to quality, efficiency and state needs.  
*Holding Colleges and Universities Accountable for Meeting State Needs*
12. The state places a high priority on an education system of schools, colleges and universities that is accountable.  
*From Goals to Results: Improving Education System Accountability*

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 an ongoing effort to promote actions and measure progress. The goals raise further the sights of the 16 SREB states and challenge them to lead the nation.

