**FACT SHEET**

**Educational Progress in Maine and the Harvard Study**

**Resources and information**

* “Achievement Growth: International and U.S. State Trends in Student Performance”  
  (Harvard’s Program on Education Policy and Governance)  
  <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/pepg/>
* NAEP State Profiles  
  State scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress  
  <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states/>
* NAEP  
  Everything you need to know about the assessment and its reports  
  <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>
* Maine DOE’s strategic plan  
  “Education Evolving: Maine’s Plan for Putting Learners First”  
  <http://www.maine.gov/doe/plan/index.html>

**Questions and Answers**

**Can test scores tell you whether a school is good or bad?**

No school should be labeled based solely on test scores, and we are not doing that here, either. Test scores – and the *growth* in test scores – are one valuable and important measure of progress. As a state, Maine is not showing any significant progress in test scores while other states are. This should be a significant concern to anyone interested in the education and future success of our students.

**It’s easier to show gains when you’re coming from behind than when you’re already at the top.**

This is generally true, but the evidence shows that states that were doing as well or nearly as well as Maine in 1992 have progressed more. Massachusetts and New Hampshire were even with Maine in 4th grade reading in 1992; both have risen while Maine’s scores (and percent of students proficient) have declined.

Meanwhile, Maine has lower scores in reading than all the New England states except Rhode Island. And is lower than all but Connecticut and Rhode Island in math.

**Isn’t Maine still near the top of states in its test scores?**

Yes, sort of. For example, Maine was ranked 3rd in the nation for its NAEP scores in 1992 and 12th in 2011. But Maine’s *progress* has been minimal – second-lowest in the nation, in fact. While Maine’s scores are essentially the same as 20 years ago, other states have seen their rise considerably.

Ranking and performance are not the same thing. Whether Maine is ranked #1 or #39 is not nearly as important as whether we are doing well. While Maine ranks near the top – 12th out of 41\*, by one measure – only half of our students are proficient in reading or math at the high school level; only 32 percent are proficient in 4th grade reading. And internationally, the U.S. is ranked in the middle. The bottom line: as a group, our students’ achievement levels are only OK, and not progressing.

Perhaps most telling are facts like these:

* The University of Maine campuses and community colleges tell us large numbers of students (one quarter at UMS; 51% at MCCS) are arriving in need of remedial work just to be able to do college level work. This is tremendously costly for students and their families. And, not surprisingly, many of these students do not complete college.
* Business owners say they cannot find workers with the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind needed to be successful in their companies.

The Harvard study was not an isolated piece of data in a sea of good news. It was one more (significant) piece of evidence confirming what has been obvious to education leaders in the state for years.

*\*The report did not include all 50 states because some did not have data going back to 1992.*

**So are Maine’s schools failing?**

Many Maine schools are doing excellent work, and are engaged in innovative practices that are showing promise. Maine is leading in some areas, such as the use of technology in the classroom. We have much to be proud of.

Still, we should not fool ourselves that everything is fine in education in Maine. We’ve rested on the laurels of our near-the-top test scores for years, even as they have not progressed at all.

We are not failing, but we are failing to improve and failing to meet the needs of too large a portion of our students.









