



NAEP score worries are misleading

By Marilyn Shank and Dr. Vic Smith, Indiana Coalition for Public Education

The outcry about Indiana and U.S. student performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress is misleading.

NAEP reports the percentage of each state passing on three levels: basic, proficient and advanced. Most observers of NAEP – including Diane Ravitch -- consider “passing” to be the percentage of students passing the **basic** standard, not the proficient one.

Those pushing to diminish the performance of public schools like to use the **proficient** score, because it makes public schools look bad.

After Ravitch served as U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education in the President George H.W. Bush administration, she served for seven years on the National Assessment Governing Board, which supervises NAEP. In an article titled “The Myth of Charter Schools,”¹ Ravitch says: “The highest level of performance, ‘advanced’ is equivalent to an A+, representing the highest possible academic performance. The next level, ‘proficient,’ is equivalent to an A or a very strong B. The next level is ‘basic,’ which probably translates into a C grade.”

Would it be reasonable to expect 37 to 47 percent of all Indiana’s students to achieve at least the **proficient** level in math and reading if you understand it to be a grade of A or a very strong B? Yes. That’s a score we should celebrate.

Is it reasonable to expect 67 to 84 percent of all Indiana’s students to achieve at least the **basic** level in math and reading if you understand it to be what we call the average grade of C? Yes, we should celebrate that as well.

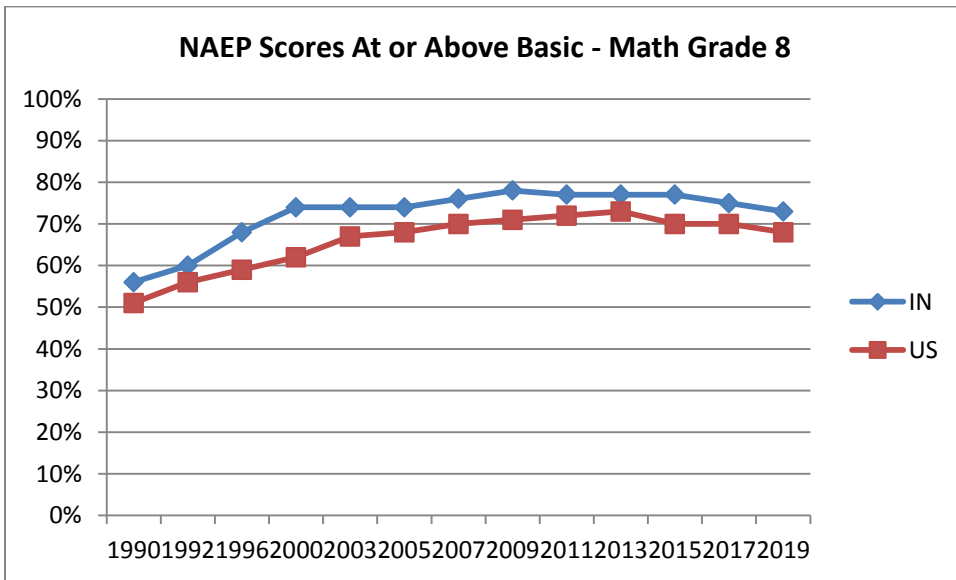
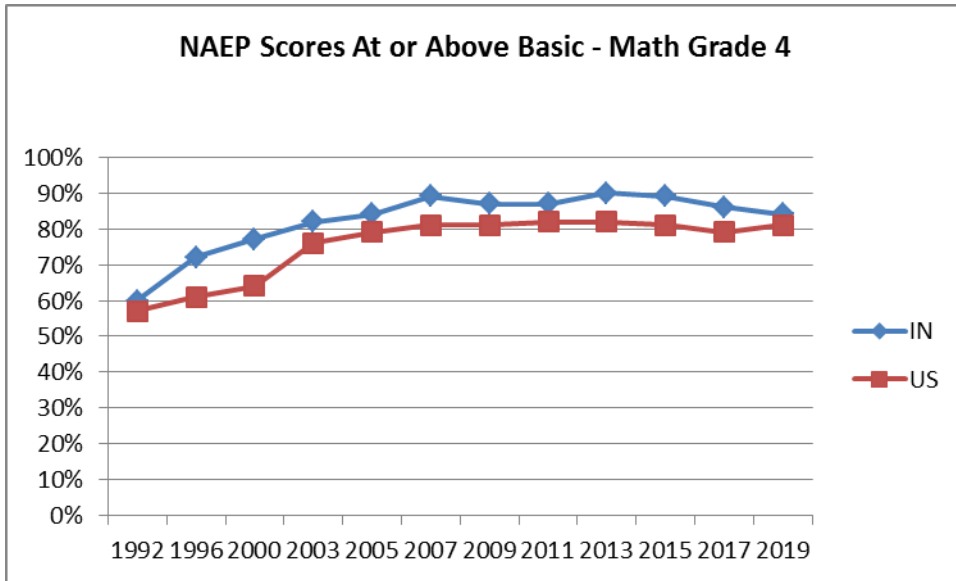
It is important to remember three things about NAEP scores:

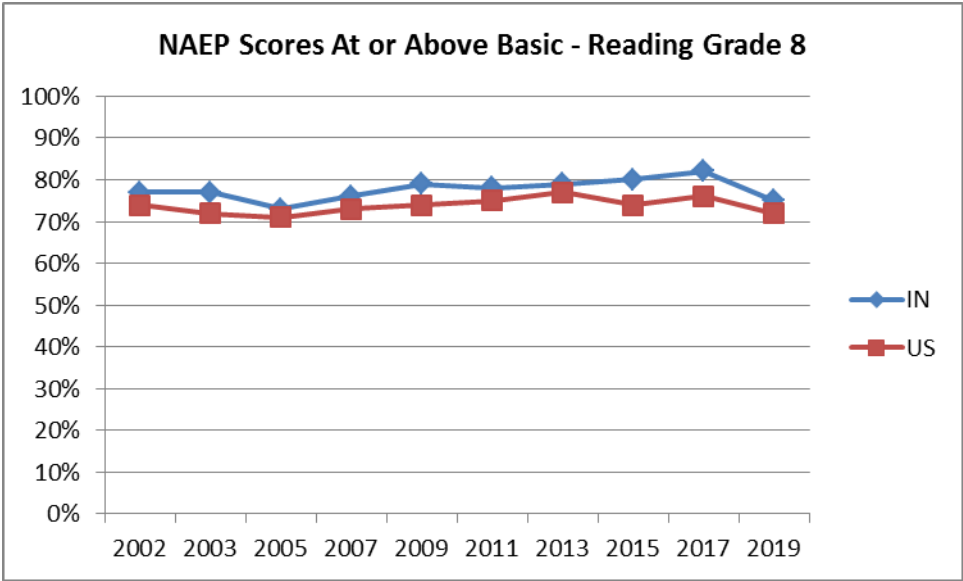
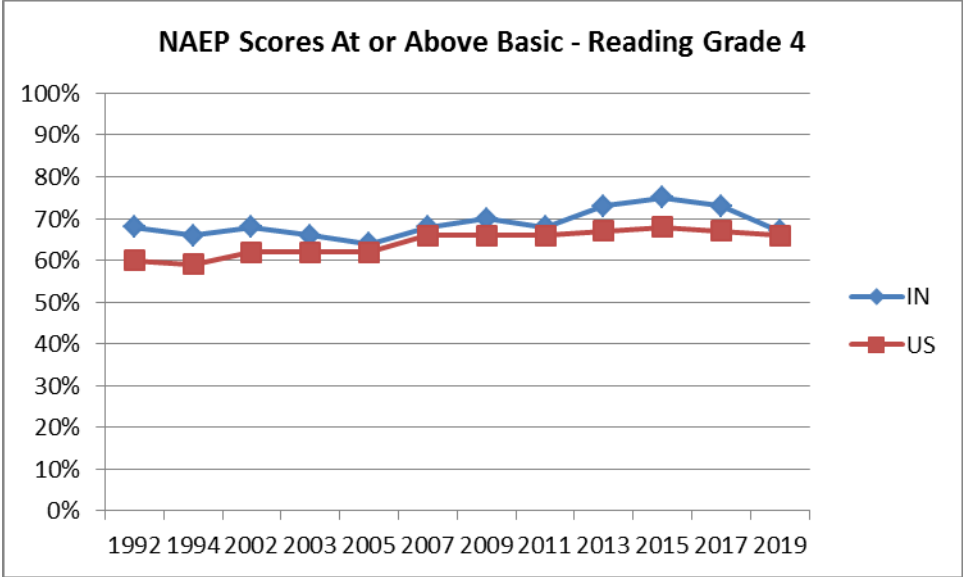
1. Indiana’s students have outperformed the national average on every NAEP basic assessment since the assessments first began in 1990.
2. NAEP average scores will vary a bit. You may wring your hands if there is an occasional biennial drop, or claim victory when there’s a biennial increase, but it makes far more sense to look at long-term trends.
3. The long-term trend shows a steady increase in math scores both nationally and for Indiana; reading scores have been relatively stable.

Indiana students’ NAEP scores are even more impressive when you consider that Indiana’s public schools are still struggling with low teacher pay and education budgets that barely keep up with inflation as scarce resources are competitively divided among three separate systems of taxpayer-funded schools: traditional public schools, private voucher schools and charter schools.

¹ “The Myth of Charter Schools,” Diane Ravitch, *New York Review of Books*, Nov. 11, 2010.

The charts showing trends for NAEP scores over the last 29 years follow:





Actual scores for both the basic and proficient levels are available in the addendum.



Addendum to NAEP score worries are misleading

NAEP Scores – Math Grade 4

Year	Basic (at or above a grade of C)			Proficient (at or above strong B to A)		
	IN	US	IN/US Gap	IN	US	IN/US Gap
1992	60%	57%	3%	16%	17%	-1%
1996	72%	61%	11%	24%	19%	5%
2000	77%	64%	13%	30%	22%	8%
2003	82%	76%	6%	35%	31%	4%
2005	84%	79%	5%	38%	35%	3%
2007	89%	81%	8%	46%	39%	7%
2009	87%	81%	6%	42%	38%	4%
2011	87%	82%	5%	44%	40%	4%
2013	90%	82%	8%	52%	41%	11%
2015	89%	81%	8%	50%	39%	11%
2017	86%	79%	7%	48%	40%	8%
2019	84%	81%	3%	47%	41%	6%

NAEP Scores – Math Grade 8

Year	Basic (at or above a grade of C)			Proficient (at or above strong B to A)		
	IN	US	IN/US Gap	IN	US	IN/US Gap
1990	56%	51%	5%	17%	15%	2%
1992	60%	56%	4%	20%	20%	0%
1996	68%	59%	9%	24%	22%	2%
2000	74%	62%	12%	29%	25%	4%
2003	74%	67%	7%	31%	27%	4%
2005	74%	68%	6%	30%	28%	2%
2007	76%	70%	6%	35%	31%	4%
2009	78%	71%	7%	36%	33%	3%
2011	77%	72%	5%	34%	34%	0%
2013	77%	73%	4%	38%	34%	4%
2015	77%	70%	7%	39%	32%	7%
2017	75%	70%	5%	38%	34%	4%
2019	73%	68%	5%	37%	33%	4%

NAEP Scores – Reading Grade 4

Year	Basic (at or above a grade of C)			Proficient (at or above strong B to A)		
	IN	US	IN/US Gap	IN	US	IN/US Gap
1992	68%	60%	8%	30%	27%	3%
1994	66%	59%	7%	33%	28%	5%
2002	68%	62%	6%	33%	30%	3%
2003	66%	62%	4%	33%	30%	3%
2005	64%	62%	2%	30%	30%	0%
2007	68%	66%	2%	33%	32%	1%
2009	70%	66%	4%	34%	32%	2%
2011	68%	66%	2%	33%	32%	1%
2013	73%	67%	6%	38%	34%	4%
2015	75%	68%	7%	40%	35%	5%
2017	73%	67%	6%	41%	36%	5%
2019	67%	66%	1%	37%	35%	2%

NAEP Scores – Reading Grade 8

Year	Basic (at or above a grade of C)			Proficient (at or above strong B to A)		
	IN	US	IN/US Gap	IN	US	IN/US Gap
2002	77%	74%	3%	32%	31%	1%
2003	77%	72%	5%	33%	30%	3%
2005	73%	71%	2%	28%	29%	-1%
2007	76%	73%	3%	31%	29%	2%
2009	79%	74%	5%	32%	30%	2%
2011	78%	75%	3%	32%	32%	0%
2013	79%	77%	2%	35%	34%	1%
2015	80%	74%	6%	37%	32%	5%
2017	82%	76%	6%	41%	35%	6%
2019	75%	72%	3%	37%	33%	4%