

POLICY ALERT: Test Results Mixed: Stay Focused On Readiness



ENLACE FLORIDA

MISSION:

to promote college readiness, access, and success for Latinos, African-Americans, and other underrepresented groups through research, communication, advocacy, and support.

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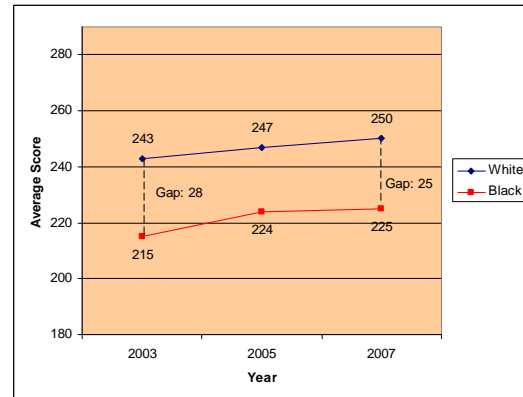
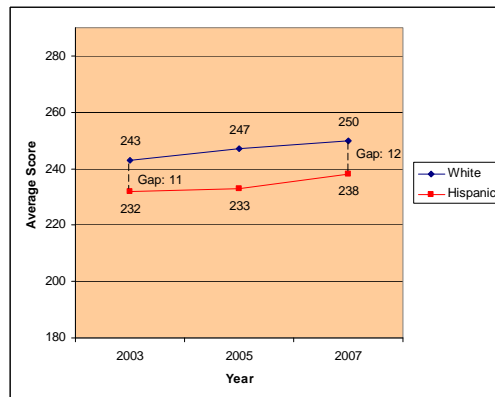
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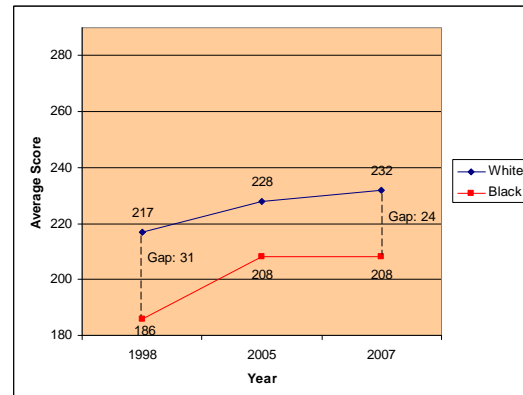
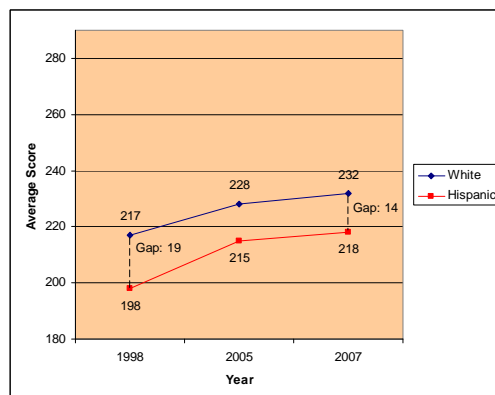
The release of third grade scores on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) by the Department of Education on May 21, 2009, offers an opportune time to reflect on our achievements and prepare for the challenges ahead. The percent of African-American and Hispanic third-graders performing Mathematics at or above grade level increased two points over last year, reducing the achievement gap between white and Hispanic and African American students by one point. However, the percent of third-graders reading at or above grade level declined from 72% in 2008 to 71% in 2009.

The preliminary results of the FCAT, as well as the results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) released last month, are a mixed bag. Both tests demonstrate that the academic performance of Florida's students has improved significantly in the last ten years, but not enough to eliminate the achievement gap, as some observers have implied. As shown in the following graphs, the achievement gap as measured in the 4th Grade NAEP tests narrowed between 3 to 7 points from 2003 to 2007. However, the achievement gap between White and Hispanic 4th-graders in math increased by 1 point between 2003 and 2007.

4th Grade Achievement Gap: Math



4th Grade Achievement Gap: Reading



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, go to: <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nde/statecomp/>

Given these trends, we should expect to find further evidence of progress as the Department of Education releases FCAT scores for other grades. While we are confident that Florida's public school students will ultimately eliminate the achievement gap, we are also aware that improvements in any standardized test scores do not necessarily indicate that our students are on the path toward workforce or college readiness. The extent to which our public schools prepare our students for success in higher education is a much more elusive and difficult concept to measure. We should of course do all that we can to measure academic progress, provided that we understand the benefits and limitations of standardized tests. ENLACE Florida applauds the efforts of Florida's students and teachers as they continue to strive toward excellence. Let this year's FCAT results remind us all of the need to keep reading instruction a priority in all grades while placing the goal of improving college readiness in the forefront of our policy decisions.

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