

REGION AT A GLANCE

What the Test Scores Do—and Don't—Reveal *By Richard Greenough*

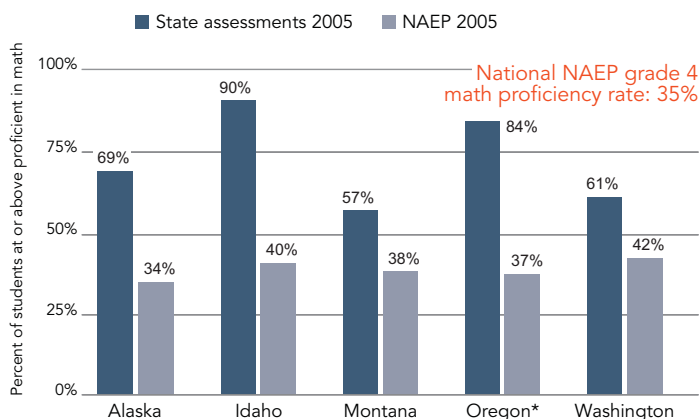
Criterion-referenced tests (CRTs), like those used for standards-based testing and the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), can show wide variability in proficiency levels—even for the same group of students. Given differences among states in the standards adopted, assessment design, and proficiency cut scores, it's not unexpected that students who perform quite similarly on NAEP show wide variability in proficiency on the state standards-based assessments.

For example, although Idaho had very high proficiency rates on its state math assessment at both the elementary and middle school levels, its students are not necessarily “doing better” than Washington students who performed at relatively high levels on the NAEP, but had relatively low proficiency rates on state assessments. Overall, fourth-grade NAEP proficiency rates in math were in a narrow range from

34 percent to 42 percent for the five Northwest states. In contrast, proficiency rates on the state assessments varied from 57 percent to 90 percent. That's a range of 33 points versus only eight points on NAEP. At the middle school level, the range was 18 points on the state assessments versus seven on NAEP.

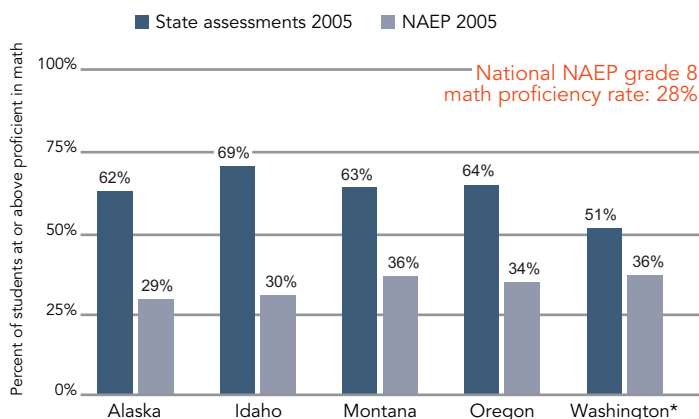
Comparing the NAEP and state results might lead to questions for further consideration. While Washington had the next to lowest proficiency rate among the five Northwest states on elementary-level math assessments, it had the highest fourth-grade math proficiency rate on NAEP 2005. These results suggest that states such as Washington—with tougher standards, assessments, cut scores, or some combination of the three, and a longer term effort at alignment to standards—might do better on NAEP, at least in math at the elementary school level.

GRADE 4 STUDENTS' MATH PROFICIENCY RATES



*Grade 5 students for Oregon state assessment

GRADE 8 STUDENTS' MATH PROFICIENCY RATES



*Grade 7 students for Washington state assessment

Sources:

NAEP Data—http://nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_2005/s0006.asp

Alaska—www.eed.state.ak.us/tls/assessment/results.html

Idaho—www.sde.state.id.us/admin/isat/

Montana—www.opi.state.mt.us/Measurement/Measurement_Data.html

Oregon—www.ode.state.or.us/search/results/?id=233

Washington—<http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/>