

Archived Information

Objective 1.1: States develop challenging standards and assessments for all students in the core academic subjects.

National Need

National Concerns. As we begin the 21st century, educators in the United States are called on to meet the challenge of ensuring that *all* students in *every* school meet high expectations for achievement. Data show that some children are at great risk of being left behind in an economy driven by expanded information, increased knowledge, and higher skills. In some schools, and most often in high-poverty schools, student achievement and expectations are low. Gaps in student achievement between high- and low-poverty students and between minority students and their peers have persisted and in some cases widened in recent years.

American public education is rising to meet the challenge of higher expectations and achievement. Across the Nation, states and school districts are more focused than ever on helping students master challenging material by setting high standards for learning, holding schools and students accountable for performance, and providing schools and students with the assistance they need to improve.

Much progress has been made, but there is much work still to be done. Almost all states have standards in place, but independent reviews suggest that standards vary in rigor across the states. Setting high standards is just a first step. Making sure that all students reach high standards requires states to implement system-wide strategies to align curriculum, assessments, teacher training, and instruction with challenging standards. Accountability for student performance must be shared by: schools, teachers, students, and families. These systemic changes take time and will be a continuing challenge for public education.

Our Role. Meeting the goal of helping all children reach high standards is a cross-cutting objective in which every Federal education program has a role to play. In particular, the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), along with the creation of Goals 2000, has supported the development of challenging state standards and assessments, and brought Federal program support and accountability in line with state and local reform efforts. Title I of the ESEA is focused on ensuring that all students meet high standards, especially students who are at risk of educational failure in economically disadvantaged communities. Particularly through these key programs, the Department of Education (ED) is helping states, districts, and schools to develop challenging content and student performance standards and assessments; bring standards into the classroom; hold schools accountable for results; and assist states, districts, and schools in aligning all aspects of their educational systems with high standards of learning.

In addition, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998 (Perkins III) requires that states use their Federal vocational education funding to support the development of challenging academic standards. Perkins III provides grants to states to improve the academic performance of students through various strategies, including professional development and innovative instructional approaches. It also requires that students who participate in vocational education meet the same challenging academic standards as all students in the state.

Recent reports suggest that ED has played an important role in raising standards. A 1998 report by the General Accounting Office on the activities of Goals 2000 praised the program for its work in helping states and districts implement standards-based reform. The report noted, "Many state officials report that Goals 2000 has been a significant factor in promoting their education reform efforts and, in several cases, was a catalyst for some aspect of the state's reform movement. State and local officials said that Goals

2000 funding provided valuable assistance and that, without this funding, some reform efforts either would not have been accomplished or would not have been accomplished as quickly.” In addition, a recent Department survey shows that almost half of district administrators report that Title I is a force behind bringing about standards-based reform in the district to a moderate or great extent, and 60 percent report that Title I is driving standards-based reform in the highest poverty schools in the district.

By the 2000-01 school year, the ESEA requires states to have their final standards and assessment systems in place. To prepare states for meeting this statutory requirement, ED has widely circulated guidance and held training workshops for states on the evidence that they will need to submit to the Department to verify that standards and assessments are implemented. ED supports the use of peer review teams, including researchers and state and local practitioners, to review evidence on state standards and assessment systems.

As states make progress in developing challenging content and student performance standards, ED will increasingly focus on helping states and districts monitor performance, building the capacity of schools and teachers to deliver high-quality curriculum and instruction, and providing students with the support they need to meet high standards for learning. Programs such as the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSR) program, and the Reading Excellence Act (REA) programs support this focus. The Department’s proposal for reauthorizing the ESEA would continue and strengthen the commitment to rigorous standards for all and accountability for results.

Our Performance

How We Measure. The performance indicators for this objective focus on state progress in developing state content, student performance standards, and aligned assessments. The indicators include measures of the rigor of standards and assessment systems, as well as measures of the extent to which standards are moving from states to use by teachers in schools and classrooms.

By the 1997-98 school year, each state was to have adopted challenging content standards, in at least reading and math, that specify what all children are expected to know, as well as challenging performance standards that describe students’ mastery of the content standards. States are to adopt or develop student assessment systems that are aligned with standards in at least reading/language arts and math. These final assessments, which states must implement by the 2000-01 school year, are to be administered at least once during grades 3-5; 6-9; and 10-12, and are to allow for reporting based on standards. The assessments are to include reasonable adaptations and accommodations for students with diverse learning needs, including students with limited English proficiency (LEP). The assessments must allow for disaggregation and reporting at the state, district, and school levels of students’ results by gender, major racial/ethnic group, English proficiency status, migrant status, disability, and economic status. ED has developed detailed guidance for states and a peer review process for examining evidence on final state standards and assessment systems.

The initial challenge for states was to develop challenging content and student performance standards. The second challenge is to implement standards in the classroom. For this reason, this objective includes a measure of the extent to which standards actually move into the classroom. The indicator reflects a need to move to actual implementation of the standards—particularly for disadvantaged students in high-poverty schools where expectations for achievement are often low.

Indicator 1.1.a. By the end of the 1997-98 school year, all states will have challenging content and student performance standards in place for 2 or more core subjects.

Assessment of Progress. Positive trends toward the targets for both content and performance standards. The goal for 1999 was for all states to have content standards in place. As of 1999, the Department of Education has approved the development process for content standards in 48 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (see Figure 1.1.a.1). One additional state is still in the process of developing state content standards, and the other state has submitted evidence to the Department that is now under review. The goal for 1999 was to have the development process for state performance standards approved for 38 states. To date, 24 states and Puerto Rico have demonstrated to the Department that they have completed the development of both content and student performance standards (see Figure 1.1.a.2). Results on performance standards fall short of the target because many states are developing student performance standards along with their final assessment systems, which are not required to be in place until the 2000-01 school year. Rather than developing student performance standards as a template for assessments to come online later, many states are developing their assessment instruments and constructing performance standards from pilot tests of their new assessments. States will submit evidence that performance standards are in place as part of the peer review process for final state standards and assessment systems.

Figure 1.1.a.1

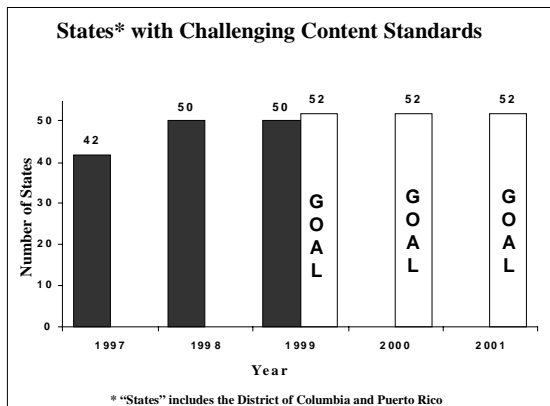
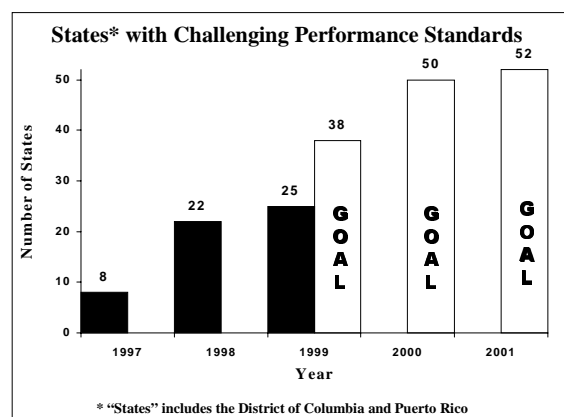


Figure 1.1.a.2



Source: Fig. 1.1.a.1 and 1.1.a.2. Consolidated State Plans, Department of Education review of evidence submitted by states to demonstrate their standards and assessment development process. *Frequency:* Annual. *Next Update:* 2000. **Validation procedure:** Data verified through ED peer review process. Although states are not required to submit their standards to the Department of Education for review, they must demonstrate that they have developed content and performance standards. Upon completing the development of standards, each state is required to submit evidence to the Department that standards are in place and that a rigorous process was used to adopt standards. This evidence is examined by teams of peer reviewers, including researchers and state and local practitioners, to assess whether states have met statutory requirements. The peer reviewers offer several ways for states to demonstrate that the content and performance standards were challenging, including conclusions from an independent peer review panel convened by the state to review its standards; a detailed description of the process the state used to develop its standards and review their rigor (for example, a process to benchmark state standards to nationally recognized standards, which includes input from experts and other stakeholders); or evidence that student performance on an aligned state assessment is comparable to student performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). **Limitations of data and planned improvements:** States are expected to submit evidence that standards are in place; however, states are not required to submit their standards to ED. Therefore, the Department can only evaluate whether states used a rigorous process in developing and adopting standards, not the quality of the standards themselves.

Indicator 1.1.b. By 2001, all states will have assessments aligned to challenging content and performance standards for 2 or more core subjects.

Assessment of Progress. Target not met. States are not required by Title I to have final state assessments aligned with challenging standards in place until the 2000-01 school year. To date, no state has yet submitted evidence to the Department of Education that final assessments are complete and implemented. Final assessments must include all students, and states must be able to disaggregate performance by student groups.

The 1999 goal of 28 states having final assessments in place was based on an early review of state progress on implementing ESEA requirements. According to that review, in 1997-98, 14 states indicated that they had in place assessments aligned to state content standards (see Figure 1.1.b.1). However, to date, the Department has not formally approved any state final assessment system. This approval process will begin in 2000.

As an indicator of the rigor of state standards, Figure 1.1.b.2 compares student performance on state assessments with student performance on the state National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment. The results indicate that states' own performance measures may be more or less rigorous when compared with an independent assessment such as NAEP.

Figure 1.1.b.1

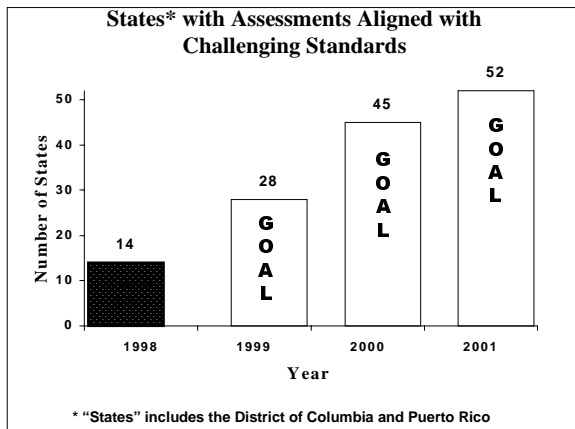
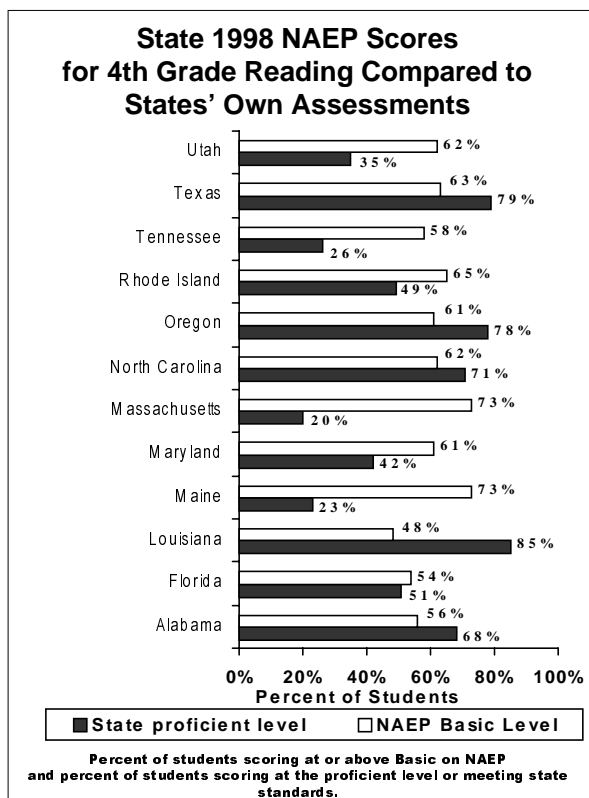


Figure 1.1.b.2



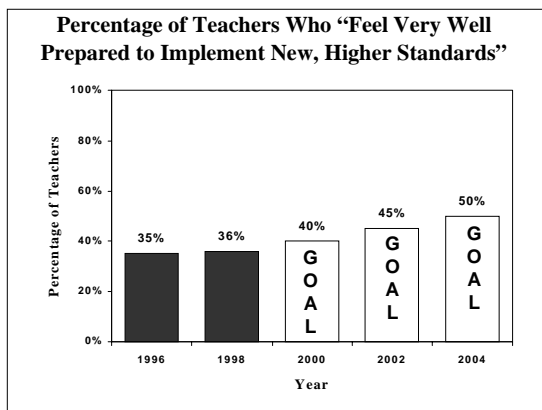
Source: Fig. 1.1.b.1. Schenck and Carlson, "Standards-Based Assessment and Accountability in American Education: A Report on States' Progress (draft)" 1998; Fig. 1.1.b.2. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), National Center for Education Statistics; Council of Chief State School Officers/U.S. Department of Education, State Education Indicators with a Focus on Title I 1999. **Frequency:** Fig. 1.1.b.1 ongoing beginning in 2000. **Next Update:** 2000. Fig. 1.1.b.2 annual for state assessments, NAEP biannual. **Next Update:** 2000. **Validation procedure:** Figure 1.1.b.1 includes an early estimate of states with assessments aligned with standards based on a review of consolidated state plans submitted to the Department of Education in 1996-98. These data were supplied by states several years before final assessments were required to be in place and no formal verification procedure applied. Data based on ED peer reviews of final state assessments will begin to be available in 2000. Figure 1.1.b.2 compares student achievement in reading on the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) with achievement on various state assessments collected by the Department of Education in collaboration with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The data were validated by NCES and CCSSO review procedures. **Limitations of data and planned improvements:** Figure 1.1.b.1: The 1998 estimate for aligned assessments and standards was based on self-reported and incomplete data during the transitional assessment period. The criteria used to make this estimate is not the same as what will now be required as part of the Department's peer review process for state standards and assessment systems—which will include more rigorous

evidence of alignment (including inclusion policies and reporting) and technical quality. Beginning in 2000, the peer review of final standards and assessment systems will yield a more accurate report of states' status. Figure 1.1.b.2: N/A.

Indicator 1.1.c. Increasing percentages of teachers will feel very well prepared to implement new higher standards.

Assessment of Progress. No significant change between 1996 and 1998. No 1999 data available because data are collected every 2 years. Related data released from the Longitudinal Evaluation of School Change (LESCP) in Title I schools demonstrate a challenge to achieving this target. In the 1998 LESCP, among a sample of 71 high-poverty schools receiving Title I funds, slightly less than half of teachers were “very familiar” with the content and performance standards of their state or district in mathematics and reading. No 2001 goal has been set because the next data collections will be in 2000 and 2002.

Figure 1.4.a.1



Source: Teacher Quality Fast Response Survey (FRS). *Frequency:* Every 2 years. *Next Update:* 2000. **Validation procedure:** Data validated by NCES's review procedures and *NCES Statistical Standards*. **Limitations of data and planned improvements:** Indicator is based on teacher self-reported data. In addition, the exact question differed across the 2 years of data collection: in 1996, teachers reported how well prepared they were to implement “new, higher standards”; in 1998, teachers reported how well prepared they were to implement “state/district standards.” In 2000, teachers will report how well prepared they are to implement “state/district standards.” This indicator is intended to be a measure of teachers’ readiness to implement standards. However, in some cases, it may inadvertently only measure whether a teacher is aware of the standards.

How We Plan to Achieve Our Objective

How ED’s Activities Support the Achievement of this Objective. ED strategies are focused on helping states develop challenging standards, adopt aligned assessments, implement standards-based reform, and help students with special needs meet high standards. In 1999, the development of the ESEA reauthorization proposal, among other things, was a major strategy for the Department. Other strategies include supporting standards-based reform at the state and local level, overseeing compliance reviews of state standards, assessment, and accountability systems; producing and disseminating guidance and support materials on standards and assessments; providing technical assistance and consultants to states on standards and assessment issues; and developing policies to effectively move standards into the classroom through professional development and public awareness campaigns.

- **Challenging state content and student performance standards.** To ensure that states follow a rigorous process for continually upgrading and improving challenging content and performance standards, the Department has created a peer review process to examine the evidence submitted by states about the process they used to adopt challenging standards; providing technical assistance to states through peer consultants, comprehensive assistance centers, and regional labs; and raising public awareness of standards and assessment issues.

- **Peer consultants.** The Department of Education is helping states develop performance standards by supporting teams of peer consultants to work with the states. The peer consultants convene Title I, assessment, and other state officials and experts to clarify issues, give technical assistance, and help develop a timeline for the implementation of standards.
 - **Handbook and guidance.** ED has also published a handbook on performance standards developed by a collaboration of about 20 states—the State Collaborative on Assessments and Student Standards (SCASS)—that are working together through the Council of Chief State School Officers on standards and assessment issues. The handbook has been broadly disseminated and is being used as a guide for several workshops the Department is holding for states facing challenges in putting performance standards in place.
- **Assessments aligned with high standards.** Using Title I and Goals 2000 grants, ED helps states meet the statutory requirements that they have assessment systems in place to measure student performance against state standards for at least reading and mathematics by 2000-01. ED has published detailed guidance and technical handbooks on standards and assessment requirements under ESEA Title I. To help disseminate this information, ED will continue to conduct regional training sessions for states. These sessions have included national experts and leading state practitioners and focus on issues such as how to develop standards, how to align assessments with those standards, how to report and disaggregate data, and how to ensure that all students are included. Goals 2000 has sponsored peer consultant visits by leading practitioners in standards and assessments to states that requested assistance with their standards and assessment development process. Integrated review teams will continue to focus on the implementation of aligned assessment systems during their visits to states.
- **Help students with special needs meet high standards.** ED is helping states make assessments inclusive of students with limited English proficiency (LEP) and students with disabilities. This ensures that states include these students in their accountability systems through appropriate accommodations on assessments, and ED develops model alternative assessments for states to use when students cannot be accommodated in the regular assessment program. ED efforts include the development of an LEP toolkit and training on inclusion and issues related to assessment for students with special needs.
- **Reauthorization of ESEA.** The Department has developed a reauthorization proposal that will help build the capacity of schools and teachers to deliver challenging curriculum and engaging instruction aligned to high standards. These proposals include promoting staff development to ensure that teachers have the knowledge and skills necessary to help all students meet high standards and using technology to support student learning.

How We Coordinate with Other Federal Agencies

- **Research and Development.** ED is building on the math and science activities funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and is working with NSF to learn from and build on the systemic initiatives.
- **Implementing Standards.** ED is working with the National Education Goals Panel, as well as various organizations and associations to promote strategies to implement standards in the classroom. ED is also helping agencies that operate schools, such as the Department of Defense and the Department of the Interior (Bureau of Indian Affairs), to develop and implement high standards for all students.
- **Assessments Issues.** ED is working with the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to disseminate information on state-of-the-art assessment techniques. There is also significant coordination on standards and assessment issues within the U.S. Department of Education. The Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) heads up a Standards Team in the Department that includes representatives from offices within ED. OESE has worked closely with the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) and the Office of Bilingual Educational Minority Languages Affairs (OBEMLA) on inclusion guidelines.

Challenges to Achieving Our Objectives

The Department's emphasis on standards and aligned assessments for all students has contributed to progress in the development of content and performance standards in mathematics and reading/language arts in the states.

First, the *1999 National Assessment of Title I, Promising Results, Continuing Challenges*, identified several challenges related to standards. The pace of progress in the development of performance standards is lagging because states are concurrently developing and implementing their assessments. Gauging the rigor and quality of standards is also a challenge. The development of state content and performance standards is an ongoing process requiring constant revision, improvement, and raising of expectations and standards. To be meaningful, standards at the state level must be accompanied by ongoing efforts to bring standards to the classroom level, to equip teachers to help students meet standards, and to set in place measures of accountability for meeting expectations. The Title I evaluation report recommends that strategies be developed to ensure that the progress of *all* students—particularly disabled children and those with limited English proficiency—is considered as systems for setting goals and measuring and reporting progress for various groups are established.