

# UNEVEN AT THE START

## Differences in State Track Records Foreshadow Challenges and Opportunities for Common Core



The Education Trust

### TO THE POINT

- ▶ The Common Core State Standards represent a serious stretch for students and schools in all states, but that stretch is far bigger in some states than in others.
- ▶ Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress show that some states have a far stronger track record in raising the performance of all students, low-income students, and students of color, while other states are lagging far behind.
- ▶ No state can afford to implement the new standards without an honest appraisal of where its students and educators are at the starting gate.

All states have a lot of work ahead of them to reap the potential benefits of the new, more rigorous standards for all groups of students. But our data show the range of performance and improvement across states means that some states have much further to go than others.

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## Differences in State Track Records Foreshadow Challenges and Opportunities for Common Core

BY NATASHA USHOMIRSKY

As of today, 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted a new set of academic standards in literacy and math. Written by content experts across K–12, business, and higher education, the Common Core State Standards represent what our young people need to know and be able to do to be successful after high school. Five states sat out the voluntary cross-state effort, but they, too, adopted their own versions of “college- and career-ready” standards.

In almost every jurisdiction, these new standards represent a serious stretch, both for students and for schools. But while nobody is talking much about this, the truth is that the stretch is far bigger in some states than in others. While there is much work to be done in even the leading states to lift all students to the college- and career-ready level, let’s be honest: The distance between where students in lagging states are today and where the new standards require them to be is far, far greater.

And it’s not just current performance that will likely matter in getting students to the new standards. What also matters is what states have done over time. In recent years, some states have made substantial gains in student learning, while others have stagnated. Although prior trends don’t guarantee future performance, past improvement may indicate greater capacity to raise student achievement and ultimately get all students to meet college- and career-ready expectations.

To that end, no state can afford to implement the new standards without an honest appraisal of where its students and educators are at the starting gate and careful inventory of the improvement knowledge and tools that exist not only within state boundaries, but across the country. Without doing so, states run the risk of investing lots of energy and resources without fully realizing the potential benefits of these new, more rigorous standards for kids.

In this paper, we look at state track records in raising student achievement in a national context. We ask, how fast or slow have the states improved in the past decade, compared with the nation as a whole. And, we ask, how does a state’s current performance compare with others. To be clear, simply being above-average does not mean a state is ready for the transition to Common Core. National averages are far too low, especially for low-income students and students of color. All states have a lot of work ahead of them to reap the potential benefits of the new, more rigorous standards for all groups of students. But our data show the range of performance and improvement across states means that some states have much further to go than others.

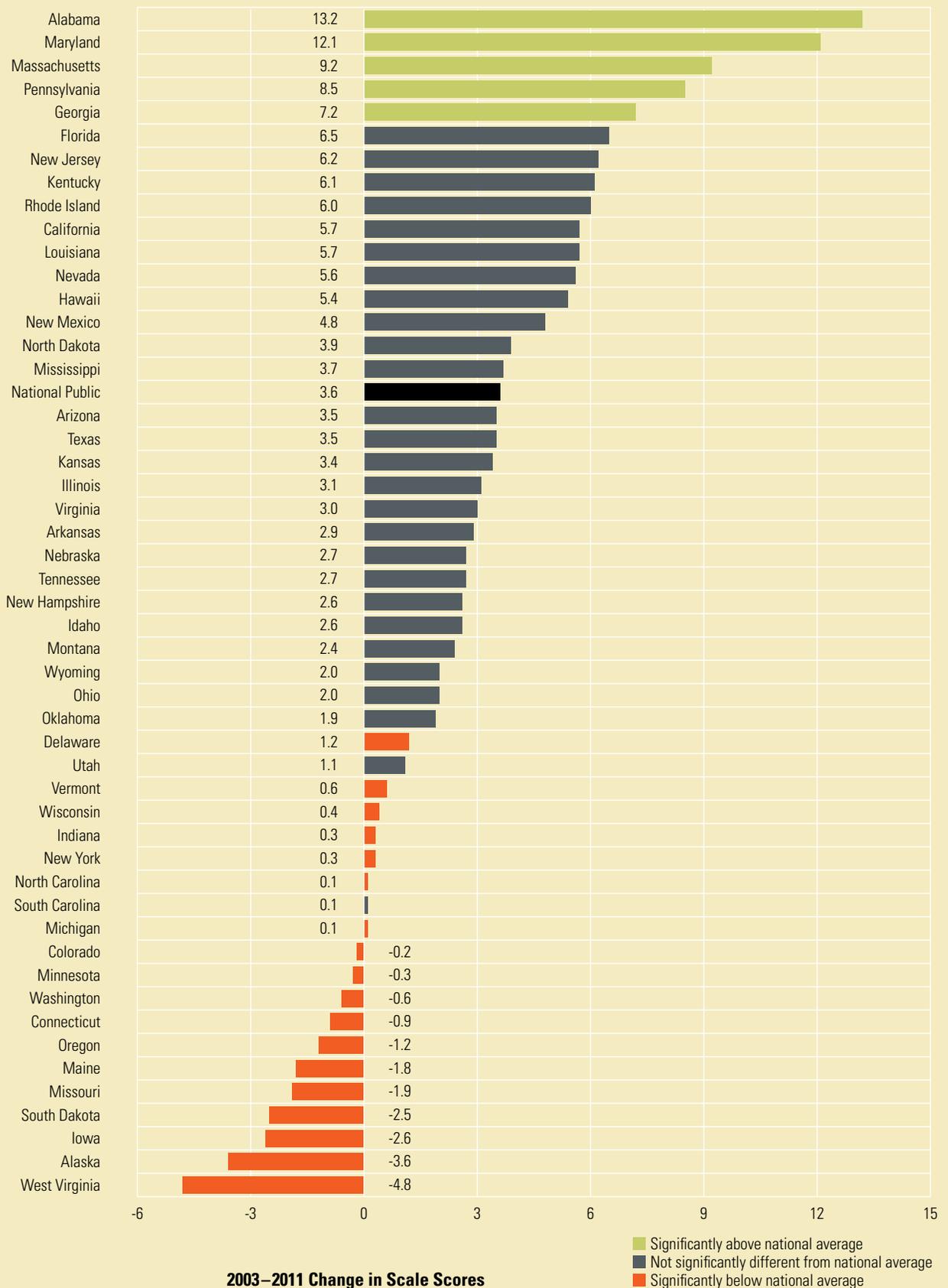
We assess state performance and improvement for all students and for low-income students and students of color. Why? Because some states — like Massachusetts and Maryland, for example — have strong track records for all groups of students they serve, while states like Wisconsin and Connecticut have done reasonably well on average, but not for one or more student groups. The bottom line is no state that fails to adequately serve all of its children, by providing them with learning opportunities and resources they need to master the standards, can achieve the promise of new, college- and career-ready expectations.

We hope this analysis will provide a useful framework for state leaders, service providers, and advocates engaged in Common Core implementation efforts, by unveiling potential challenges as well as opportunities. Together, these data remind all of us to think harder about the depth and breadth of assistance both educators and students will require, think harder about what we’ve learned from both successful and not-so-successful improvement efforts in the past, and think harder about what must happen to ensure that improvements are broadly realized.

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**Figure 1: State Improvement on NAEP — 4th-Grade Reading, All Students**



States are ranked based on unrounded scale scores.

## A FIRST LOOK: FOURTH-GRADE READING

To compare state track records in raising student achievement, we use data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the only assessment with comparable results for all 50 states, to answer three questions:

1. From 2003 to 2011, did the state **improve** faster or more slowly than the nation as a whole? The rate of **improvement** tells us how student performance has changed over the years, and may indicate which states have greater capacity to raise student achievement. (We look at the 2003–2011 timeframe because 2003 was the first year all states were required to participate in NAEP, and 2011 is the latest year of data available.)
2. In 2011, did the state **perform** better or worse than the national average? Current **performance** offers the latest snapshot of how that state is doing on behalf of its students.
3. What do **improvement and performance** tell us about states? Together, these indicators provide a far richer picture of a state's **track record** than either does alone. For example, a low-performing state that is making above-average or faster gains is very different from a low-performing state that is also improving more slowly than the country as a whole.

To illustrate these questions, and demonstrate what we learn by asking them, let's first take a look at state data on fourth-grade reading for all students.

States demonstrated a wide range of trajectories: While Alabama and Maryland gained more than 12 scale score points, West Virginia actually lost almost five points.

## Results for All Students

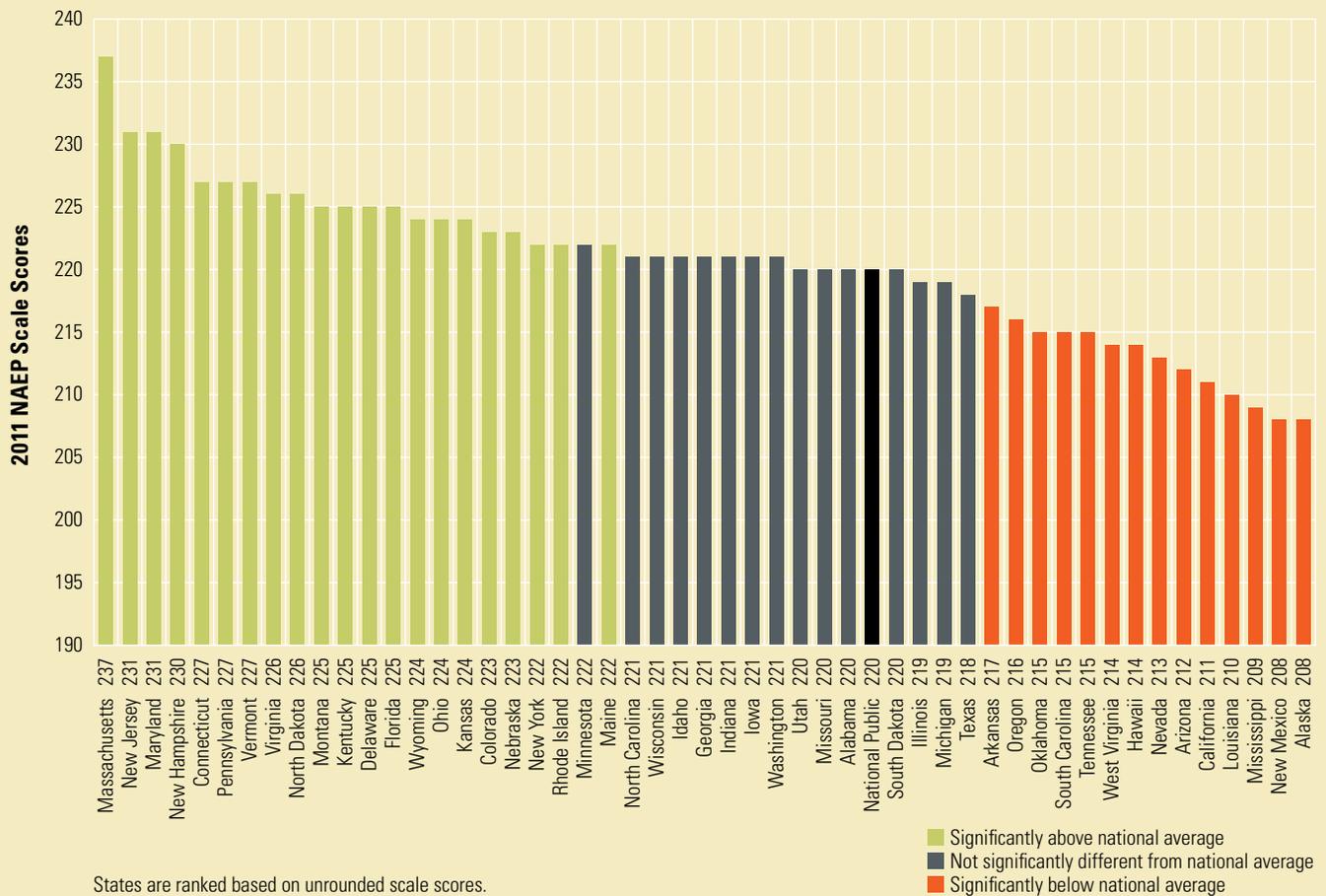
*Figure 1* shows how much states' fourth-grade reading scores **improved** — or declined — between 2003 and 2011. Green bars represent states that improved significantly faster than the nation did on average, while orange bars represent those that improved significantly more slowly. As you can see, states demonstrated a wide range of trajectories: While Alabama and Maryland gained more than 12 scale score points, West Virginia actually lost almost five points.

In *Figure 2*, we examine each state's 2011 fourth-grade reading **performance** for all students. Again, green bars represent states that performed significantly better than the national average, and orange bars represent those that performed significantly worse. As with improvement, results vary widely. The difference between fourth-grade reading performance in Massachusetts (the highest performing state) and Alaska (the lowest) is about 29 scale score points. To put this number in context, remember that the *fastest improving* state gained about 13 points — less than half of this amount — during the past eight years.

So which states have the strongest overall track record — measured using both performance and improvement — in fourth-grade reading and which have the weakest? To look at both performance and improvement simultaneously, we've developed a system that assigns points to states based on how they compare to the rest of the country. For each indicator, states get one point when they are significantly above average, no points when they are average, and lose a point when they are significantly below average. Then we look at the percentage of points they earned or lost, and sort from highest to lowest. The results are in *Figure 3*. (See *About the Analysis* sidebar on page 6 for more information.)

Massachusetts, Maryland, and Pennsylvania (shown in green rows in *Figure 3*) earned 100 percent of the possible points. They improved faster than the nation as a whole and demonstrated stronger performance in 2011. Thus, these states have the strongest track records when it comes to overall performance in fourth-grade reading. Oregon, West Virginia, and Alaska, on the other hand, lost 100 percent of the points. They not only demonstrated weaker performance than the nation, but improved more slowly as well. These states demonstrated the weakest track records based on overall fourth-grade reading results.

**Figure 2: State 2011 Performance on NAEP — 4th-Grade Reading, All Students**



The remaining states showed mixed track records. New Jersey and 11 other states marked in light green in Figure 3 performed significantly better than the national average in 2011, but improved at about the same rate as the nation. Georgia and Alabama, on the other hand, performed at about the national average in 2011, but showed significantly higher improvement since 2003. Although these 14 states' track records are not as strong as those of Massachusetts, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, each of these states has an above-average track record when it comes to overall fourth-grade reading results.

On the other end of the spectrum, the 20 states marked in orange show below-average track records. Indiana and eight other states performed at about the same level as the nation in 2011, but demonstrated significantly slower improvement since 2003. If these states remain on this lagging improvement trajectory, they will eventually fall behind the rest of the

nation. Tennessee, Oklahoma, and nine other states, in the meantime, improved at about the same rate as the nation, but still demonstrated performance that was significantly below average in 2011. These states may not be falling further and further behind, as are Oregon, West Virginia, and Alaska, but neither are they catching up with the rest of the country.

Finally, the 10 states marked in yellow demonstrated track records that were similar to the national average. New York, Maine, and four other states improved more slowly than the national average, but demonstrated above-average performance in 2011. Idaho, Utah, Illinois, and Texas performed and improved at about the same level as the country as a whole.

**Figure 3: Percent of Points Earned or Lost, by State — 4th-Grade Reading, All Students**

	Percent of Possible Points Earned	Total Number of Points Earned	Points Earned, Improvement	Points Earned, Performance
Maryland	100%	2	1	1
Massachusetts	100%	2	1	1
Pennsylvania	100%	2	1	1
Florida	50%	1	0	1
Kansas	50%	1	0	1
Kentucky	50%	1	0	1
Montana	50%	1	0	1
Nebraska	50%	1	0	1
New Hampshire	50%	1	0	1
New Jersey	50%	1	0	1
North Dakota	50%	1	0	1
Ohio	50%	1	0	1
Rhode Island	50%	1	0	1
Virginia	50%	1	0	1
Wyoming	50%	1	0	1
Alabama	50%	1	1	0
Georgia	50%	1	1	0
Colorado	0%	0	-1	1
Connecticut	0%	0	-1	1
Delaware	0%	0	-1	1
Maine	0%	0	-1	1
New York	0%	0	-1	1
Vermont	0%	0	-1	1
Idaho	0%	0	0	0
Illinois	0%	0	0	0
Texas	0%	0	0	0
Utah	0%	0	0	0
Indiana	-50%	-1	-1	0
Iowa	-50%	-1	-1	0
Michigan	-50%	-1	-1	0
Minnesota	-50%	-1	-1	0
Missouri	-50%	-1	-1	0
North Carolina	-50%	-1	-1	0
South Dakota	-50%	-1	-1	0
Washington	-50%	-1	-1	0
Wisconsin	-50%	-1	-1	0
Arizona	-50%	-1	0	-1
Arkansas	-50%	-1	0	-1
California	-50%	-1	0	-1
Hawaii	-50%	-1	0	-1
Louisiana	-50%	-1	0	-1
Mississippi	-50%	-1	0	-1
Nevada	-50%	-1	0	-1
New Mexico	-50%	-1	0	-1
Oklahoma	-50%	-1	0	-1
South Carolina	-50%	-1	0	-1
Tennessee	-50%	-1	0	-1
Alaska	-100%	-2	-1	-1
Oregon	-100%	-2	-1	-1
West Virginia	-100%	-2	-1	-1

## ABOUT THE ANALYSIS

This analysis measures state track records by comparing each state's performance and improvement on the NAEP to the performance and improvement of the U.S. as a whole.<sup>1</sup> States that demonstrate above-average performance and gains are considered to have the strongest track records, while those with below-average performance and improvement have the weakest track records.

To examine state track records across subjects and grades for each student group, we used a points system where states gained points for above-average performance or gains, and lost points for being below average. More specifically:

- States that **improved** significantly faster than the national average between 2003 and 2011 earned one point, and those that improved significantly more slowly lost one point. States whose improvement was not statistically different from average received zero points. Some data, on the surface, may seem different or denote progress, but we rely on significance tests to determine if the changes are truly different.
- States that **performed** significantly better than the national average in 2011 earned a point, while those that performed significantly worse lost a point. States whose performance was not statistically different from the national average earned zero points. Here, too, we relied on significance tests to determine whether apparent differences are truly different.

We repeated these steps for fourth and eighth-grade reading and math, respectively, summed all of the points that a state earned or lost, and divided that total by eight — the maximum number of points that a state could earn across the subject and grade areas.

In measuring state track records, we compare each state's performance and improvement for a given group of students to

the respective national averages for that group. To be clear, The Education Trust firmly believes that all students must be held to the same high standard. Today, however, no state is performing as well as it should for its low-income students and students of color. Since one of the goals of this analysis is to benchmark state performance nationally, we compare each state's results for a given group to the averages for that group to allow for greater differentiation.

When it comes to improvement, comparing each state's gains for low-income, African American, and Latino students to these respective groups' averages actually holds states to a higher standard.<sup>2</sup> Between 2003 and 2011, each of these groups made gains that were equal to or higher than those of the all-student group.

Please note that while all states are included in the analysis, some states are missing data for one or more groups of students.

### A Note on American Indian Students

Due to the small number of states that had performance and improvement data for American Indian students, we include data for this group only in the appendix to this paper. It is important to note, however, that nationwide, schools are not only performing worse for this group than they are for all students, but they are improving more slowly as well. This is simply unacceptable. The Education Trust's forthcoming fact sheet, "The State of Education for Native Students," will examine how schools in the U.S. as a whole are performing for American Indian/Alaska Native students. We hope that these data will help spark much needed conversation and action to ensure that we, as a nation, turn these trends around.

1. All NAEP data, including significance test results, were downloaded from the NAEP Data Explorer for Main NAEP. Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP Data Explorer, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>.
2. Low-income students are students who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals.



## Beneath the Averages: Results for Low-Income Students

Of course just because a state has an above-average, or even average, track record for students overall does not mean that it fares the same for low-income students and students of color. That's why it's critical to look at group performance and improvement, too.

*Figure 4* presents data on the extent to which states **improved** the performance of their low-income fourth-graders in reading. Between 2003 and 2011, some states made substantial gains for this group of students; Maryland and Alabama, for example, both gained more than 15 points. Connecticut and several other states, however, stagnated, and in West Virginia, scores declined by more than seven points.

As *Figure 5* shows, states also demonstrated a wide range of **performance** in 2011, with some states doing significantly better than the national average for low-income students, and others, significantly worse.

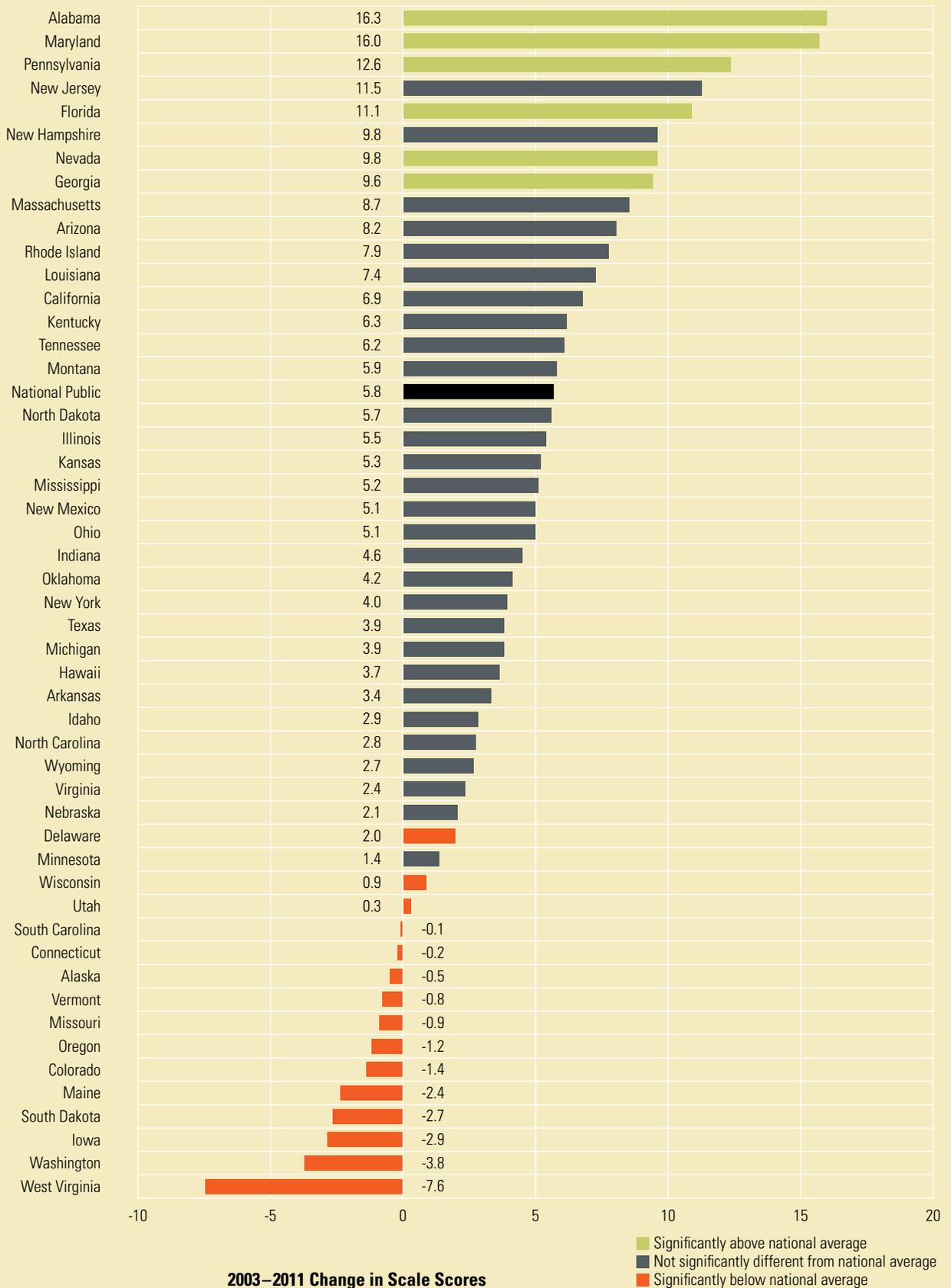
When we look at both **performance and improvement** for low-income students, three states — Florida, Maryland, and Pennsylvania — emerge as above-average (*Figure 6*). Maryland and Pennsylvania, two of the states with the strongest track records based on overall fourth-grade reading performance demonstrated above-average performance and gains for low-income students as well. Florida, which was not among the states with the strongest track record based on overall scores, had one of the strongest track records for low-income students. On the other hand, Massachusetts, which had earned all of the possible points based on overall results, demonstrated above-average performance for low-income students, but earned zero points for improvement.

On the other end of the spectrum, Alaska and South Carolina demonstrated the weakest track records for low-income fourth-graders in reading. Both of these states improved more slowly and performed worse for this group than the nation as a whole.

...Just because a state has an above-average... track record for students overall does not mean that it fares the same for low-income students and students of color.

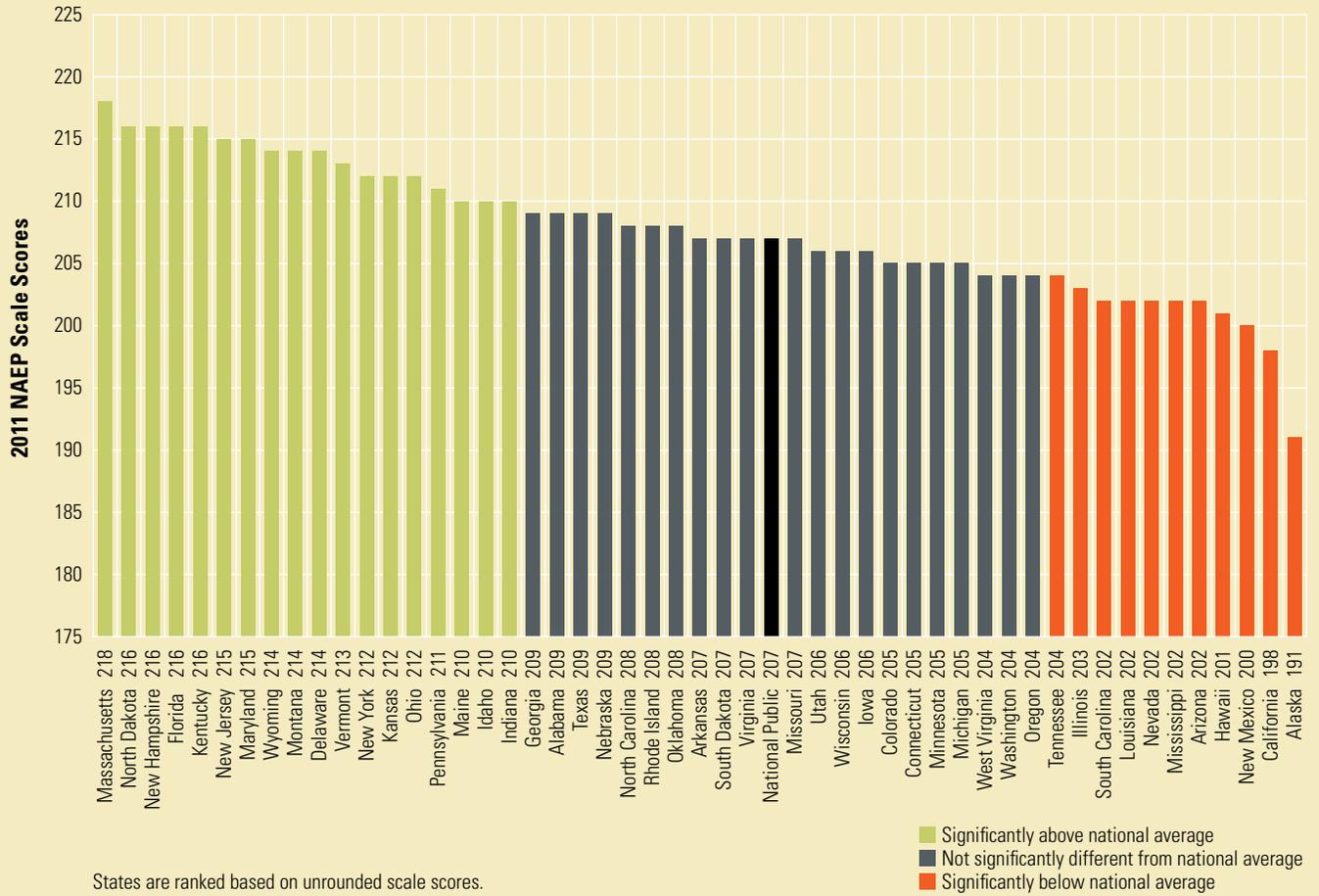
It's important to note that several states also had weaker track records for low-income students than for students overall in fourth-grade reading. For example, Illinois and Utah demonstrated average track records for students overall, but each performed worse or improved more slowly on behalf of its low-income students than the nation as a whole. While these states' overall fourth-grade results are at least keeping up with national trends, their low-income students' trajectories are cause for concern.

**Figure 4: State Improvement on NAEP – 4th-Grade Reading, Low-Income Students**



States are ranked based on unrounded scale scores.

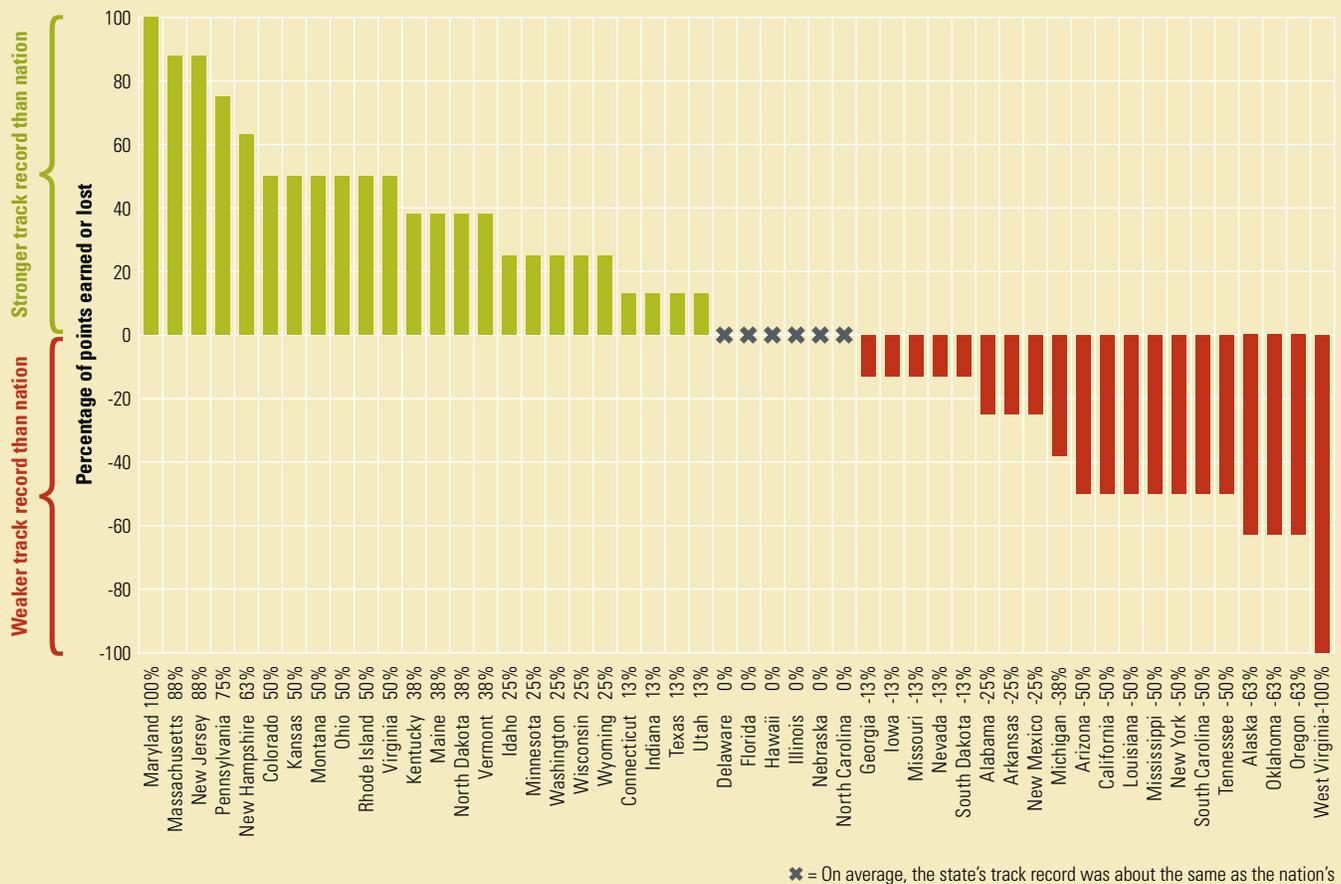
**Figure 5: State 2011 Performance on NAEP — 4th-Grade Reading, Low-Income Students**



**Figure 6: Percent of Points Earned or Lost, by State – 4th-Grade Reading, Low-Income Students**

	Percent of Possible Points Earned	Number of Points Earned	Points Earned, Improvement	Points Earned, Performance
Florida	100%	2	1	1
Maryland	100%	2	1	1
Pennsylvania	100%	2	1	1
Idaho	50%	1	0	1
Indiana	50%	1	0	1
Kansas	50%	1	0	1
Kentucky	50%	1	0	1
Massachusetts	50%	1	0	1
Montana	50%	1	0	1
New Hampshire	50%	1	0	1
New Jersey	50%	1	0	1
New York	50%	1	0	1
North Dakota	50%	1	0	1
Ohio	50%	1	0	1
Wyoming	50%	1	0	1
Alabama	50%	1	1	0
Georgia	50%	1	1	0
Delaware	0%	0	-1	1
Maine	0%	0	-1	1
Vermont	0%	0	-1	1
Arkansas	0%	0	0	0
Michigan	0%	0	0	0
Minnesota	0%	0	0	0
Nebraska	0%	0	0	0
North Carolina	0%	0	0	0
Oklahoma	0%	0	0	0
Rhode Island	0%	0	0	0
Texas	0%	0	0	0
Virginia	0%	0	0	0
Nevada	0%	0	1	-1
Colorado	-50%	-1	-1	0
Connecticut	-50%	-1	-1	0
Iowa	-50%	-1	-1	0
Missouri	-50%	-1	-1	0
Oregon	-50%	-1	-1	0
South Dakota	-50%	-1	-1	0
Utah	-50%	-1	-1	0
Washington	-50%	-1	-1	0
West Virginia	-50%	-1	-1	0
Wisconsin	-50%	-1	-1	0
Arizona	-50%	-1	0	-1
California	-50%	-1	0	-1
Hawaii	-50%	-1	0	-1
Illinois	-50%	-1	0	-1
Louisiana	-50%	-1	0	-1
Mississippi	-50%	-1	0	-1
New Mexico	-50%	-1	0	-1
Tennessee	-50%	-1	0	-1
Alaska	-100%	-2	-1	-1
South Carolina	-100%	-2	-1	-1

**Figure 7: State Track Records Across Subjects and Grades for All Students**



### THE REST OF THE STORY: ALL GRADES, SUBJECTS, AND GROUPS

In the remainder of this paper, we examine state track records in reading and math at the fourth and eighth-grade level for students overall, as well as for low-income, African American, and Latino students. Because only eight states had both fourth and eighth-grade reading and math results for American Indian students, data for this group are provided in Appendixes A and B.

To measure a state’s track record across subjects and grades for a particular group, we repeated the steps described earlier for fourth and eighth-grade reading and math, respectively. We then summed all of the points that a state earned or lost, and divided that total by eight — the maximum number of points that a state could earn across the four subject and grade areas.

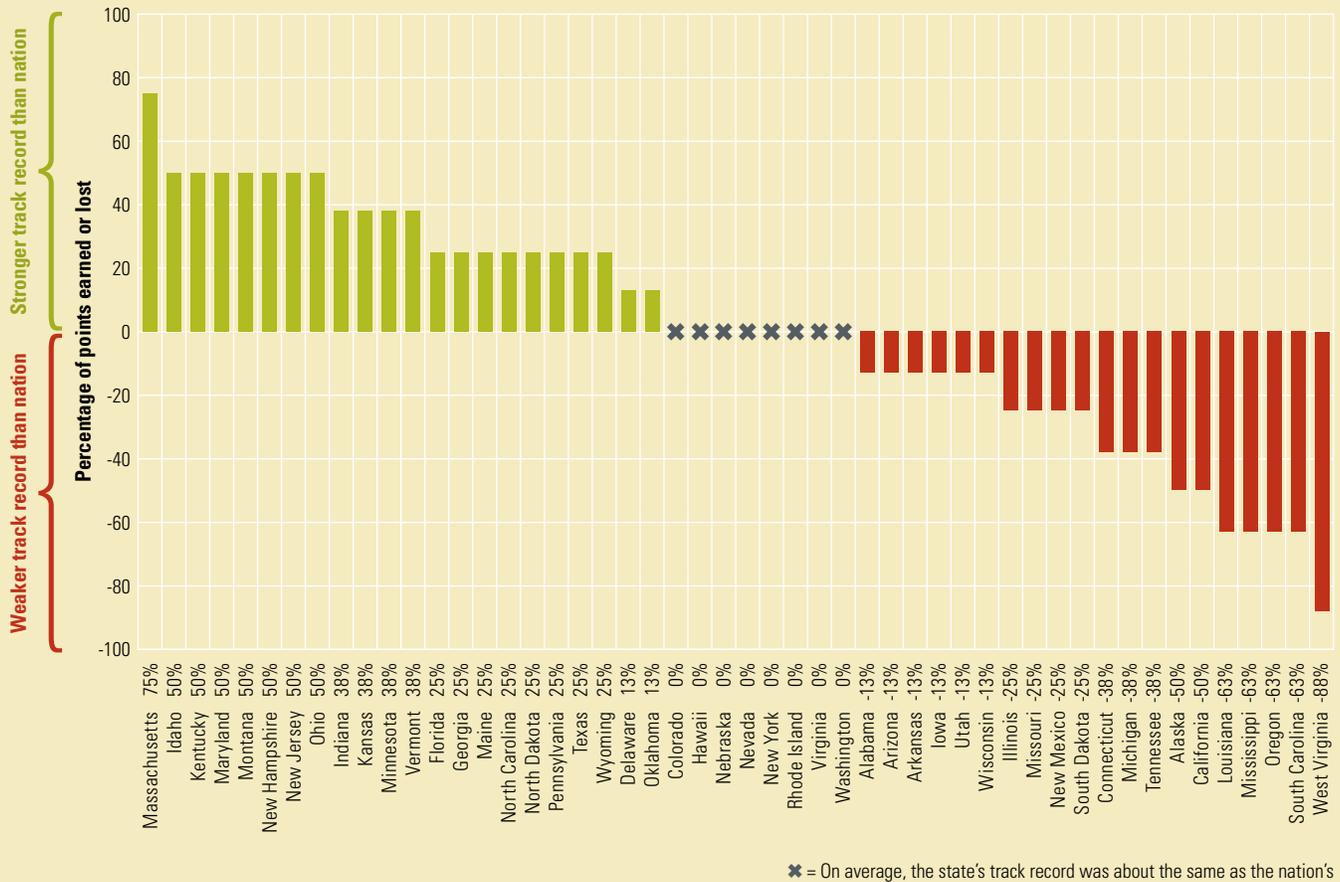
The results show that while some states have relatively strong track records across the board, others consistently lag behind. Moreover, some states appear to have strong track records, until one looks beneath the averages.

### HOW DID STATES DO FOR ALL STUDENTS ACROSS SUBJECTS AND GRADE?

Figure 7 shows the percentage of points that each state earned or lost based on its overall results across all four subjects and grades. For more detailed information, including actual NAEP scale scores and whether a state was above, at, or below the national average for a given metric, please see Appendixes A and B.

In Figure 7, green bars represent states that, on average, had a stronger track record for students overall across subjects and grades than the nation as a whole. These states performed better or improved faster than

**Figure 8: State Track Records Across Subjects and Grades for Low-Income Students**



the national average more often than not. A missing bar (marked by an “X”) indicates that, on average, a state’s track record was about the same as the nation’s. Finally, red bars represent states that, on average, had weaker track records than the nation as a whole. More often than not, these states improved more slowly or demonstrated lower performance than the U.S. average.

As Figure 7 shows, Maryland was the only state whose overall performance and improvement were above the national average in all four grade and subject areas. Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New Hampshire had similarly strong track records, earning more than half of the possible points.

On the other end of the spectrum, West Virginia was the only state whose all-student performance and improvement were below the national average in all subjects and grades. Oklahoma, Alaska, and Oregon

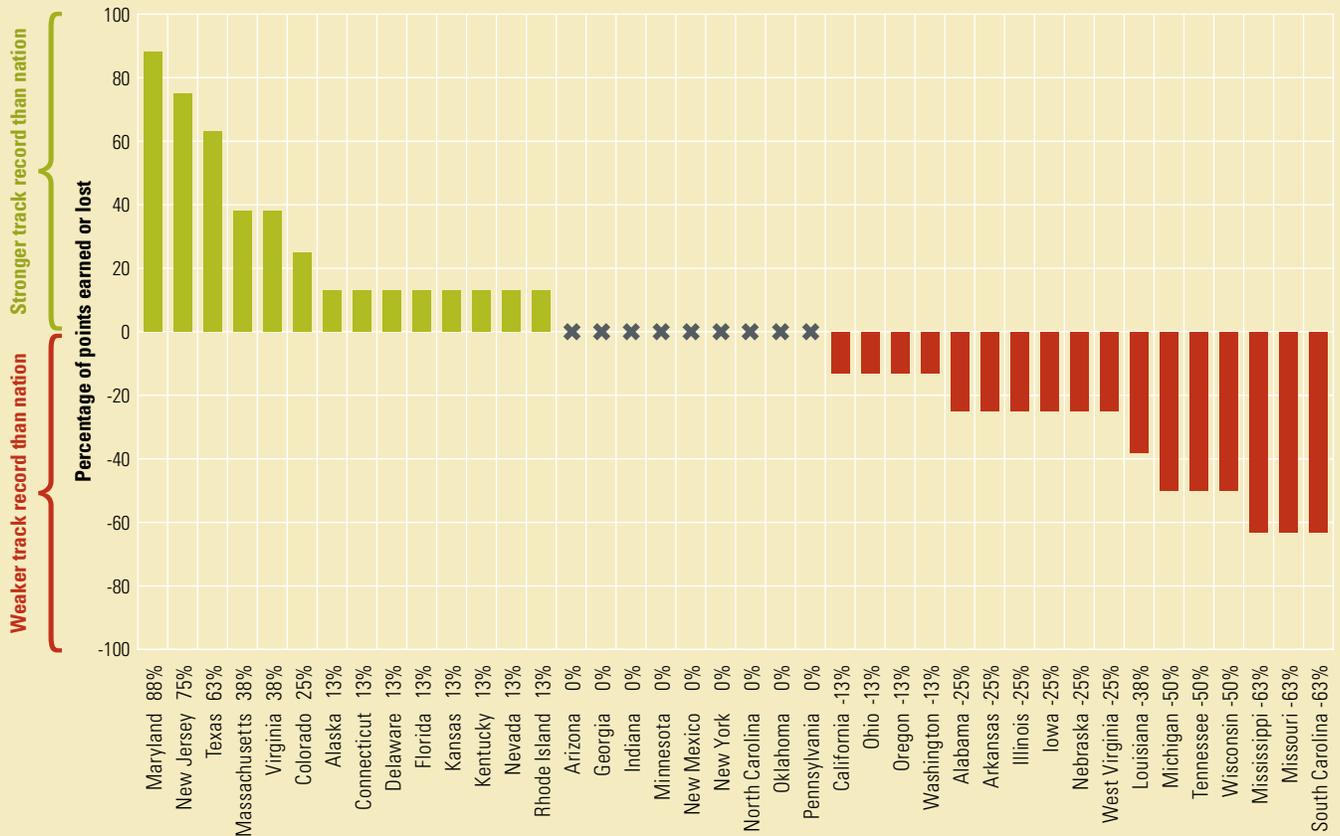
all had similarly weak track records, losing more than half of the possible points.

#### HOW DID STATES DO FOR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS?

As *Figure 8* shows, no state improved faster and performed better than the national average in all four subjects and grades for low-income students. Massachusetts came closest, earning 75 percent of the possible points. Idaho, Kentucky, Maryland, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Ohio also had fairly positive track records, earning half of the possible points.

No state was below average in both performance and improvement in all four subjects and grades for low-income students, but West Virginia came close, losing 88 percent of the possible points. The state showed less improvement for its low-income students than the country as a whole in each of the

**Figure 9: State Track Records Across Subjects and Grades for African American Students**



\* = On average, the state's track record was about the same as the nation's  
 States that do not appear in this figure did not have enough students in this group in 2003 and/or 2011 to report scale scores for one or more subject/grade areas.

four subject and grade areas tested on NAEP. This is particularly concerning given the state's low levels of performance: West Virginia's 2011 results were below the national average for low-income students in all subjects and grades with the exception of fourth-grade reading.

While West Virginia lost the greatest number of points, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oregon, and South Carolina demonstrated similarly weak track records for their low-income students. Each of these states lost more than half of the possible points due to below-average performance and/or improvement. (See Table 2A in Appendix A.)

**HOW DID STATES DO FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS?**

Maryland had the strongest track record for African American students, earning 88 percent of the possible

points (Figure 9). It performed above the national average for African American students in every subject and grade area, and improved faster in every subject and grade except eighth-grade math, where its gains were not significantly different from the national average. In addition to Maryland, New Jersey and Texas also had relatively strong track records, earning more than half of the possible points.

Missouri, Mississippi, and South Carolina had the weakest track records for African American students, losing more than half of the possible points. Each of these states was below average on performance and/or improvement in multiple subjects and grades, and none performed or improved faster than the nation in any grade and subject area. Wisconsin, Michigan, and Tennessee also had relatively weak track records, losing half of the possible points. (See Table 3A in Appendix A.)

**Figure 10: State Track Records Across Subjects and Grades for Latino Students**



\* = On average, the state's track record was about the same as the nation's  
 States that do not appear in this figure did not have enough students in this group in 2003 and/or 2011 to report scale scores for one or more subject/grade areas.

### HOW DID STATES DO FOR LATINO STUDENTS?

No state demonstrated above average performance and improvement for Latino students across all four subject and grade areas (*Figure 10*). Texas and Massachusetts showed the strongest track records, earning more than half of the possible points. Florida also demonstrated strong performance for Latino students, earning 50 percent of the possible points.

On the other end of the spectrum, Oregon had the weakest track record for Latino students, closely followed by California. Both of these states improved more slowly or performed worse than the nation for this group in multiple subjects and grades. Neither exceeded the national average for Latino students on any measure. (*See Table 4A in Appendix A.*)

### Bringing It All Together

This analysis shows that state track records for all students and for student groups vary widely. *Figure 11* presents the percent of points that each state earned or lost based on its performance and gains for all students, as well as for each group of historically disadvantaged students for which it had data.

Maryland, Massachusetts, and New Jersey have some of the strongest track records, not only for all students, but for low-income students and students of color as well.

West Virginia, Oregon, South Carolina, California, Mississippi, and Louisiana, on the other hand, have some of the weakest track records in the country, both for all students and for each group of historically underserved students.

**Figure 11: State Track Records for All Students and by Student Group**

	All Students	Low Income	African American	Latino
Alabama	-25%	-13%	-25%	NA
Alaska	-63%	-50%	13%	38%
Arizona	-50%	-13%	0%	-13%
Arkansas	-25%	-13%	-25%	0%
California	-50%	-50%	-13%	-50%
Colorado	50%	0%	25%	0%
Connecticut	13%	-38%	13%	-38%
Delaware	0%	13%	13%	25%
Florida	0%	25%	13%	50%
Georgia	-13%	25%	0%	38%
Hawaii	0%	0%	NA	13%
Idaho	25%	50%	NA	-13%
Illinois	0%	-25%	-25%	13%
Indiana	13%	38%	0%	0%
Iowa	-13%	-13%	-25%	-13%
Kansas	50%	38%	13%	25%
Kentucky	38%	50%	13%	NA
Louisiana	-50%	-63%	-38%	NA
Maine	38%	25%	NA	NA
Maryland	100%	50%	88%	38%
Massachusetts	88%	75%	38%	63%
Michigan	-38%	-38%	-50%	0%
Minnesota	25%	38%	0%	0%
Mississippi	-50%	-63%	-63%	NA
Missouri	-13%	-25%	-63%	NA
Montana	50%	50%	NA	NA
Nebraska	0%	0%	-25%	0%
Nevada	-13%	0%	13%	13%
New Hampshire	63%	50%	NA	NA
New Jersey	88%	50%	75%	25%
New Mexico	-25%	-25%	0%	13%
New York	-50%	0%	0%	-25%
North Carolina	0%	25%	0%	13%
North Dakota	38%	25%	NA	NA
Ohio	50%	50%	-13%	-13%
Oklahoma	-63%	13%	0%	0%
Oregon	-63%	-63%	-13%	-63%
Pennsylvania	75%	25%	0%	0%
Rhode Island	50%	0%	13%	-13%
South Carolina	-50%	-63%	-63%	NA
South Dakota	-13%	-25%	NA	NA
Tennessee	-50%	-38%	-50%	NA
Texas	13%	25%	63%	63%
Utah	13%	-13%	NA	-38%
Vermont	38%	38%	NA	NA
Virginia	50%	0%	38%	13%
Washington	25%	0%	-13%	-25%
West Virginia	-100%	-88%	-25%	NA
Wisconsin	25%	-13%	-50%	-13%
Wyoming	25%	25%	NA	25%

An NA signifies that the state did not have enough students in this group in 2003 and/or 2011 to report scale scores for one or more subject/ grade areas. Numbers represent the percent of points that each state earned or lost based on its performance and improvement for each student group. Green = Stronger track record than nation. Red = Weaker track record than nation. Yellow = On average, state's track record was about the same as the nation's.

Ohio and Washington both have relatively strong track records for students overall; on balance, these states showed above-average performance and/or improvement for this group. However, both of these states have a weaker track record for one or more of their underserved groups.

Florida and Delaware's all-student track record is about the same as the nation's, but both of these states are, on balance, doing better than the nation for one or more underserved groups. In Illinois, on the other hand, we see the opposite picture — the state is doing about the same as the nation for all students, but faring worse for its low-income and African American students.

## CONCLUSION

The Common Core State Standards have the potential to dramatically raise the rigor of instruction — and thus the level of achievement — in schools across the United States. But these standards will also demand more of our students and teachers than has ever been demanded before. In order to realize the promise that these standards hold, states and districts will need to work hard — and work smart — to support their schools in making sure that all students get the learning opportunities they need to reach these college- and career-ready standards.

Today, no state is performing as well as we need it to, especially for its low-income students and students of color. Even in Massachusetts, where low-income student performance in most subject and grade areas is about the same as the national average for *all students*, wide gaps persist between this group and their higher income counterparts within the state. Similar gaps exist in other states with similarly strong track-records for this group.

What this analysis shows, however, is that some states have a far stronger track record when it comes to raising the performance of all students, low-income students, and students of color — while other states are lagging far behind. Moreover, it shows that while some states have been raising achievement for all groups of students, others have been moving their averages, but leaving some students behind.

Although states' past performance trajectories do not necessarily predict future outcomes, they can shed light on potential strengths and foreshadow future challenges. We hope that this analysis will be useful to all those involved in Common Core implementation, both in figuring out what the areas of greatest challenge might be, and in identifying knowledge and capacity to draw on in providing that support — within a state's own borders and across the nation.

## A MORE FINE-GRAINED LOOK AT THE DATA: THE STATE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND IMPROVEMENT TOOL

Our approach to looking at state track records offers an easy and transparent way of comparing each state's performance and improvement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. But just looking at the percent of points that a state earned or lost doesn't paint a precise-enough picture of how much a state improved or how it's performing today.

For this reason, to supplement the findings in this paper, the Ed Trust has created a State Academic Performance and Improvement Tool that provides a much clearer image of how a state is doing and how its performance and gains compare to both national averages and other states.

### Accessing the State Academic Performance and Improvement Tool

To access the State Academic Performance and Improvement Tool, go to [www.edtrust.org/NAEP\\_State\\_Scores](http://www.edtrust.org/NAEP_State_Scores). The tool generates scatterplots that show state performance and gains for students overall and by student group in fourth and eighth-grade reading and math, respectively. You will be asked to select the subject, grade, and group for which you would like to see data.

### What the scatterplots show

Here is an example of a scatterplot available via the State Academic Performance and Improvement Tool. It shows state results for Latino students in eighth-grade math.

**READING THE SCATTERPLOTS:** In each scatterplot, improvement is shown across the horizontal axis. The further to the right a state appears, the faster it is improving; the further to the left—the more slowly. Performance appears on the vertical axis.

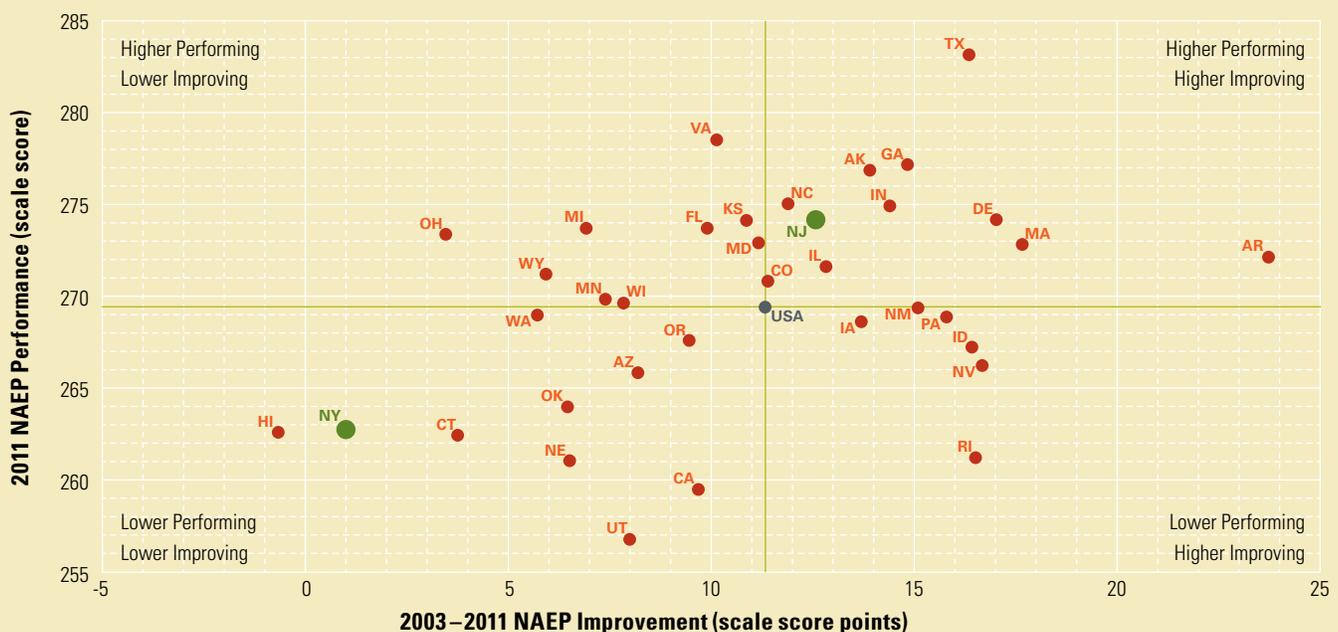
States higher up in the chart are higher performing; those toward the bottom are lower performing. The two green axes intersect at the national average; in the chart below, for example, we see that the nation as a whole improved Latino eighth-graders' performance in math by about 11 points since 2003. We also see that in 2011, the national average scale score for this group was 269.

**COMPARISONS TO THE NATIONAL AVERAGE:** Scatterplots offer another way of gauging how a state's performance and gains compare to the national average. States that appear in the upper right-hand quadrant were higher improving and higher performing than the nation as a whole, while states in the lower left-hand quadrant showed lower improvement and lower performance than national averages. States in the upper left-hand quadrant showed higher performance, but lower improvement than the nation. And those in the bottom right-hand quadrant were lower performing, but showed higher improvement than the nation. Please note that while the analysis in this paper takes statistical significance into account, the scatterplots do not show this level of detail.

**COMPARISONS BETWEEN STATES:** Importantly, in addition to showing how states compare with national averages, the scatterplots can also demonstrate how states compare with each other. For example, about one-fifth of students in both New York and New Jersey are Latino.<sup>1</sup> But as the scatterplot below shows, Latino students' eighth-grade math performance and gains for this group look very different. New Jersey is both performing better and improving faster in math on behalf of its Latino eighth-graders than New York.

1. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), April 2012, Public Elementary and Secondary School Student Enrollment and Staff Counts From the Common Core of Data: School Year 2010–11, Tables 1 and 2, available at: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/snf201011/index.asp>

## NAEP Performance and Improvement: Grade 8 Math, Latino Students



## **ABOUT THE EDUCATION TRUST**

The Education Trust promotes high academic achievement for all students at all levels — pre-kindergarten through college. We work alongside parents, educators, and community and business leaders across the country in transforming schools and colleges into institutions that serve all students well. Lessons learned in these efforts, together with unflinching data analyses, shape our state and national policy agendas. Our goal is to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement that consign far too many young people — especially those who are black, Latino, American Indian, or from low-income families — to lives on the margins of the American mainstream.



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