



The 2008 Georgia Report Card for Parents

Overview

The Georgia Public Policy Foundation's *Report Card for Parents* is primarily designed to give parents information about their schools. It also provides valuable information for discussions that will help parents make informed decisions about the quality of public education in Georgia.

This year's report ranks **1,190** elementary schools based on third grade test scores, **1,183** elementary schools based on fifth grade test scores, **486** middle schools based on eighth grade test scores and **380** high schools based on End-Of-Course-Test scores.

The testing and evaluation of Georgia's children generate an enormous amount of statistical data. The *Report Card for Parents* transforms this mountain of data into an understandable ranking of Georgia's public schools.

The *Report Card*: a) analyzes the factors most important to parents, b) reduces statistical information to a concise and understandable form, and c) presents information about Georgia's elementary, middle and high schools that is accessible and easily comprehended.

The primary measure of student achievement in the report for elementary and middle schools is the average of the percentage of students passing the reading and math sections of the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). This average is referred to as the Achievement Score. For high schools, the Achievement Score is calculated based on student performance on all of the Georgia End-Of-Course-Tests. End-Of-Course-Tests are given in the following subjects: Ninth Grade Literature and Composition, American Literature and Composition, Algebra I, Geometry, Biology, Physical Science, United States History, and Economics/Business/Free Enterprise.

Because there is a strong link between poverty and test scores (the higher the poverty rate, the lower the test scores), the report includes two other criteria *for information purposes only*. The first is the poverty rate — the percentage of students taking the tests who qualify for the federal free/reduced-price lunch program. The second is a poverty index that measures how well a school is performing relative to its poverty rate. All information in the report is from the 2006–2007 school year.

How Parents Can Use This Report

To judge the quality of their children's schools, parents must have quality information about academic performance. Student achievement is the touchstone for evaluating the success of all education efforts. To improve public education for all students we must

know whether students are progressing every year. For the vast majority of parents, assessing the quality of a school can often be a difficult task with unfamiliar terms and voluminous data. This report serves to provide parents with the simple facts that will aid in the assessment of the education received by their children. In this *Report Card*, schools are ranked by clear, objective results, and parents are presented with a statistically-reliable, annual measurement of student progress.

It is important to remember that many factors affect a school's performance. Any questions or concerns arising from this report should first be discussed with teachers, principals and local school board members before drawing definitive conclusions.

We believe parents should become actively involved in their schools and resist being passive, uninformed consumers. The information in this report should be used to open a dialogue between parents, teachers, administrators, elected officials and civic organizations.

For more detailed information, contact:

- Your school
- Georgia Department of Education (<http://gadoe.org/>) at (404) 656-2800 or askdoe@doe.k12.ga.us
- The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (<http://gaosa.org/>) at (404) 463-1150 or GOSA@gov.state.ga.us
- Georgia Public Policy Foundation (<http://www.gppf.org>) at (404) 256-4050 or gppf@gppf.org

Definition of Terms

All data were provided by the Georgia Department of Education or the Governor's Office of Student Achievement.

Quintile: This provides a quick approximation of where each school falls in the statewide distribution based on its achievement score. The number of stars corresponds to the quintile rank of the school. The schools ranked in the top 20 percent receive five stars, the next 20 percent receive four stars and so on, with the lowest 20 percent receiving one star.

Rank: The rank is determined by the Achievement Score. The Percentage Exceeding Standards serves as a tiebreaker. Where both measures are equal, the schools are given the same ranking.

Achievement Score: For elementary and middle schools, the Achievement Score is the average of the percentage of students in the school that met or exceeded standards on the Reading and Math section of the CRCT. For high schools, the Achievement Score is the total number of students that met or exceeded standards on all End-Of-Course-Tests given by that school divided by the total number of students taking those tests.

Percentage Exceeding Standards: For elementary and middle schools, this is the average of the percentage of students in the school that exceeded standards on the Reading and

Math section of the CRCT. For high schools, the Achievement Score is the total number of students that exceeded standards on all End-Of-Course-Tests given by that school divided by the total number of students taking those tests.

Poverty Rate: This represents the percentage of students taking the tests who are eligible to receive free/reduced-price lunch. In order to have the most accurate data for comparisons, the poverty rate was calculated based on the students taking the tests, not the entire population of that particular school. Therefore, the school's reported poverty rate will probably not match the poverty rate used in this report card.

Poverty Index: The Poverty Index measures how well a school is performing relative to its poverty rate. A score above zero indicates better than expected performance, below zero indicates lower than expected performance, and zero indicates that the school is performing as expected.

There is a high correlation between poverty rates and test scores. (See charts on page five and six.) Using statistics, it is possible to predict test scores based upon a given poverty rate. Using this prediction as the standard of comparison, the predicted test score compared to the actual test score gives an indication whether a school is underperforming or overperforming given their level of poverty.

The poverty index is based on a linear regression of Achievement Scores and Poverty Rates. The difference between the projected Achievement Score and the actual Achievement Score is expressed in terms of standard deviations and rounded to a whole number.

AYP: This indicates whether the school has met the federal AYP criteria. According to the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, "Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is one of the cornerstones of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). It is a measure of year-to-year student achievement on statewide assessments."

School Spending and Centralized System Spending: School Spending Per Full-Time Equivalency (FTE) was determined by dividing the funds expended at the school site level (as reported to the Georgia Department of Education) by the number of students in the school as determined by the October 2006 FTE count. Centralized System Spending was calculated by dividing all remaining funds not allocated to a particular school (as reported to the Georgia Department of Education) by the number of students in the system as determined by the October 2006 FTE count.

These are all operating expenditures. Capital expenditures and debt service are not included, but can be obtained on the Governor's Office of Student Achievement's Web site – see below for details.

It is important to note that not all school systems allocate spending in the same manner. For example, spending by the school system on transportation or facility maintenance may benefit a particular school but may not be reported at the school level if the school system

chooses not to individually allocate those expenses. Individuals interested in learning more about financial procedures should contact a local school system official.

The data used are the same as the spending data that can be obtained at the Georgia Department of Education Web site (http://app.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/fin_pack_revenue.entry_form), with the exception that this data includes expenditures categorized under the School Food Services function and School Nutrition Service Fund. The Web site above provides a detailed list of the funds and functions that are included and excluded in their calculations.

The Governor's Office of Student Achievement also provides spending data on their Web site, but this data include capital spending, which is excluded here. Neither the DOE or Governor's Office of Student Achievement Web sites provide the spending data at the school level.

Additional Information

How should I interpret the ranking?

There are several ways to evaluate your school's ranking. First, look at the school's progress over time. Is the school improving or declining? Second, compare your school to other schools of similar size and poverty percentage. Finally, there is no substitute for personally visiting schools and talking to teachers, administrators, parents and students.

Why was my school not listed in this report?

In order to be included in this report, a school must have 2007 testing data for the third, fifth, eighth or high school grades. For example, a school that just began operation this fall or a K-2 elementary school would not be included.

Why is some information not available for my school?

Missing data may result if the school were not able to administer the test or if fewer than 10 students participated in the test.

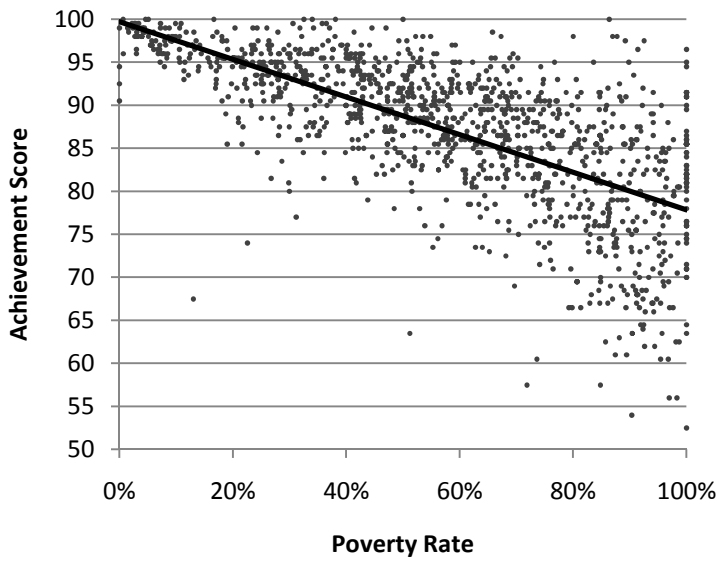
Why do we focus on test scores?

To improve public education for all students we must know whether students are learning every year. Well-made tests are an analytical tool, enabling teachers to diagnose students' weaknesses and parents to monitor the achievement gains of their children.

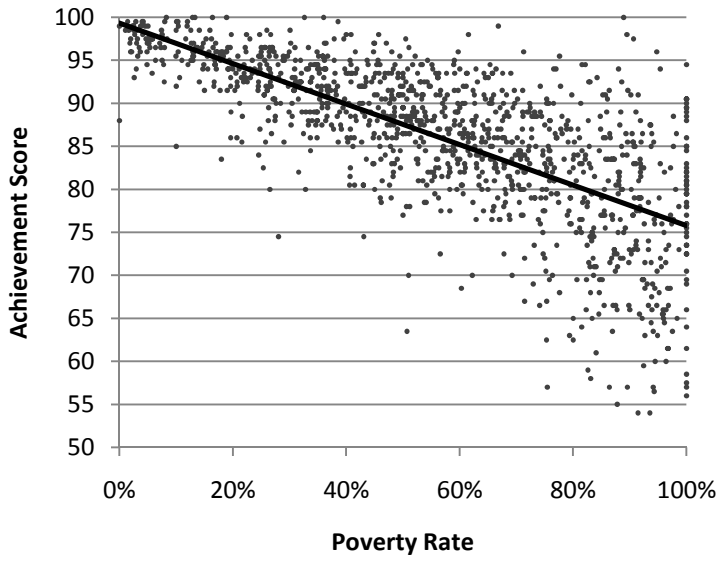
Achievement Scores and Poverty Rates

The graphs below show the relationship between the Achievement Scores and Poverty Rates. The dots represent each school in the rankings for that particular grade level. The solid trend line clearly shows the negative relationship – the higher the poverty rate, in general, the lower the test scores. The dots above the line represent schools achieving at a higher rate than predicted.

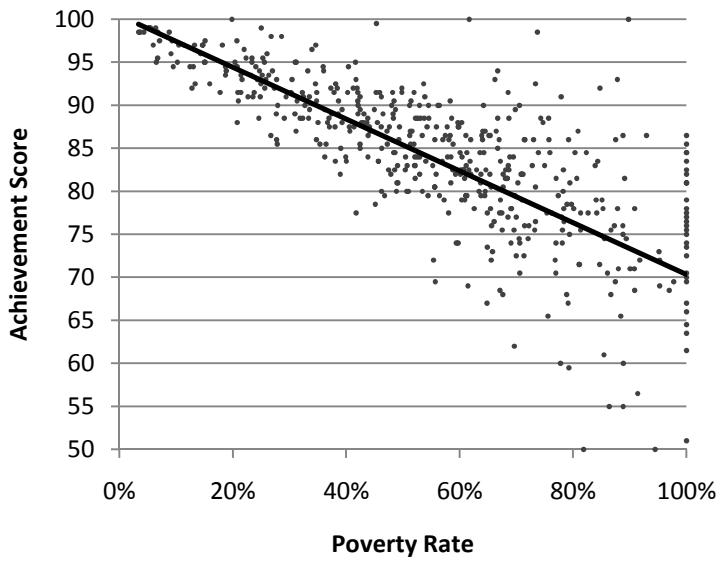
Achievement Score vs. Poverty Rate Third Grade



Achievement Score vs. Poverty Rate Fifth Grade



**Achievement Score vs. Poverty Rate
Eighth Grade**



**Achievement Score vs. Poverty Rate
High School**

