

Superintendent Calls for Better Job in Providing Equitable Education

Preliminary state results of the 1993 Washington State Student Assessment Program were released last month by the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Over 188,000 students in grades 4, 8, and 11 were tested in the fall of 1993. Students in grades 4 and 8 were tested in reading, mathematics, language, science, social studies and spelling. Students in grade 11 were tested in English/language arts, history/social studies, mathematics and science.

According to State Superintendent of Public Instruction Judith Billings, the 1993 score showed little change compared to last year's results. In grades 4 and 8, Washington students are at or above the national norm group performance in the six areas tested, except

grade 4 mathematics and spelling and grade 8 spelling.

In grade 11, Washington students are slightly lower than the state norm group* performance in three of the four areas tested, and the same in one subject area. *(1993 Washington state norm group.)

Both the national norm group (grades 4 and 8) and the state norm group (grade 11) average percentile scores are 50 for all subject areas.

Billings added, "Once again I am very concerned about our students' scores. Maintaining our current level of performance is not good enough.

When students are grouped according to race/ethnicity, a very troubling picture appears, which reveals significant disparities in performance

among our students. I believe we need to do a better job of providing equitable educational opportunities for all students."

The October 1, 1993, school district enrollment reports reveal that students of a race or ethnic background other than Caucasian make-up 20.06 percent of Washington's total student population.

Billings added, "Our state constitution directs the state to make ample provision for the education of all its children without distinction of race, color, economic status or gender.

These disparities in performance among our ethnic groups are significant indicators, which tell us that we need to do a better job in meeting the unique needs of our students.

Based on what we know about our student population, it is clear to me that state funding for education should not be cut, but in fact increased."

National studies indicate that a positive correlation exists between students' economic status and achievement levels.

Between 1980 and 1990, Washington state experienced a 31.8 percent growth in the school age poverty population, according to a 1993 report on school age demographics prepared by the United States

General Accounting Office.

In addition, Washington state experienced a 105.3 percent growth in the school age children in poor immigrant families between 1980 and 1990, and a 28.1 percent growth in the total school age children in immigrant families.

Billings also emphasized, "Parents should review these test results as well as other information about their children's progress on a regular basis to assist teachers with improving their performance in school.

As partners in their children's education, parents have a critical role to play. Schools need parents to reinforce the value of education.

(Note: The school age poverty population is defined as persons 5 to 17 living in families with incomes below the poverty level. Immigrant school age children are defined as those children 5 to 17 who are foreign born or living in a family where the mother is foreign born and immigrated to the U.S. during the previous 10 years.)

Figure 2. Average Percentile Scores by Race/Ethnicity, Grade 8, 1993

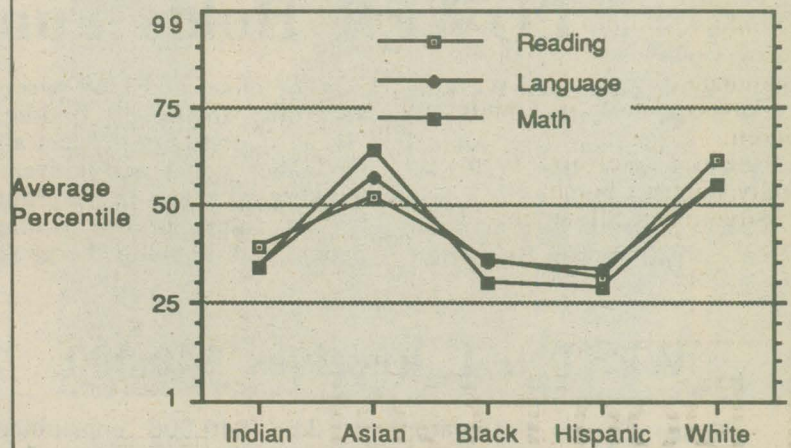
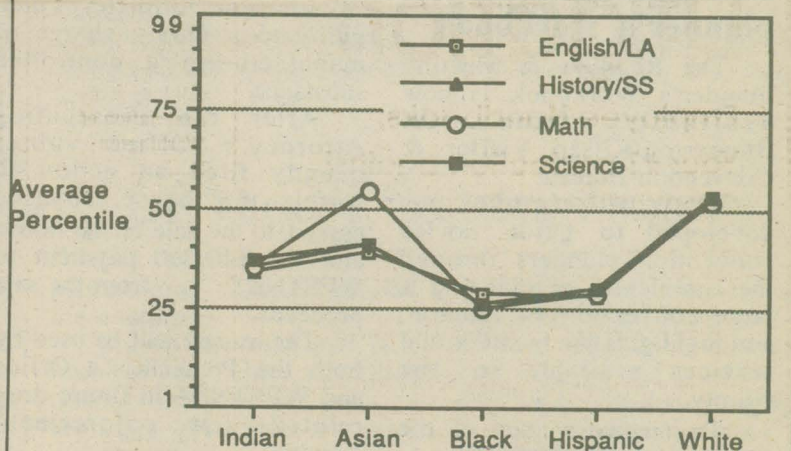


Figure 3. Average Percentile Scores by Race/Ethnicity, Grade 11, 1993



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dropouts is double that of high school graduates. About 90 percent of our welfare recipients have completed less than 12 years of school. Today, we are competing with our brains in world markets, and the only way to succeed is with well-educated workers. An effort to correct our dropout problem now can mean a better future for the whole nation.

What can you do? Start close to home. If you have children, keep them in school. Whether you have children or not, help your local

school board, teachers, and other parents deal with the problem through community programs. Most of all, try to impress the lifelong importance of a complete education on the young people you know.

When one in four students drops out of school, we must be losing our minds.

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