

Bob Griffin

State Board of Education and Early Development

As I reported last year, we all have reasons to be optimistic about improvements, especially in improving early childhood literacy. As the Reading Committee Chair, it looks like we will see some more positive results in this number one priority of the state board.

In the last NAEP cycle in 2022, Alaska improved our standing in five out of the eight major NAEP measurements compared to the previous cycle in 2019. That is the first time that Alaska has improved our relative standing in the majority of NAEP measurements. Even with our recent improvements, our rankings in 7 of our 8 NAEP categories are still lower than they were in 2003, when Alaska was compelled to participate in NAEP testing under NCLB.

NAEP Test Results Alaska			2019	2022
Grade	Subject	Status	U.S. Ranking	
4th	Reading	Free or Reduced Lunch	51 st	51 st
4th	Math	Free or Reduced Lunch	50 th	48 th
4th	Reading	Non-Free or Reduced Lunch	51 st	50 th
4th	Math	Non-Free or Reduced Lunch	49 th	49 th
8th	Reading	Free or Reduced Lunch	50 th	51 st
8th	Math	Free or Reduced Lunch	46 th	42 nd
8th	Reading	Non-Free or Reduced Lunch	49 th	42 nd
8th	Math	Non-Free or Reduced Lunch	45 th	42 nd

Rankings are all 50 states and DC

4th Grade Reading NAEP Scores US States and DC = Free or Reduced Lunch

	2022		2019		2017		2015		2013		2011		2009		2007		2005		2003	
	FRL		FRL		FRL		FRL		FRL		FRL		FRL		FRL		FRL		FRL	
1	FL	215	FL	216	FL	219	FL	220	FL	218	MA	218	FL	217	ND	215	WY	216	VT	214
2	MS	212	WY	215	MA	219	MA	220	NH	216	ND	216	ND	216	MT	215	DE	214	MN	213
3	MA	209	MS	215	IN	215	KY	219	MD	216	NH	216	KT	215	MA	214	ND	214	WV	212
4	OR	210	MA	213	WY	215	WY	217	WY	215	FL	216	VT	215	WY	214	WA	213	WY	212
5	IN	209	KY	212	WV	215	IN	217	DE	215	KT	216	MA	215	DE	214	NH	213	DE	212
6	NV	207	ID	211	KY	215	VT	217	IN	215	NJ	215	DE	214	MN	213	MN	213	ND	210
7	KY	212	NV	211	NJ	214	NH	216	MN	214	MD	215	MT	214	FL	213	MT	212	MA	210
8	SC	205	NJ	210	OH	213	NC	215	MA	213	WY	214	NY	214	VA	213	KT	212	SD	210
9	HI	204	OH	210	VA	213	OK	214	KT	213	MT	214	NH	213	VT	212	MA	211	KY	209
10	LA	204	IN	209	KS	212	GA	214	VT	213	DE	214	KS	213	IA	212	SD	210	IA	209
11	ID	211	ME	209	NH	212	MN	214	ND	213	VT	213	WY	212	ID	212	VT	210	WA	208
12	MT	204	NE	209	NC	211	NJ	213	MT	212	NY	212	MN	212	NH	212	NY	210	MT	208
13	GA	204	ND	209	CT	211	UT	213	NJ	212	KS	212	NJ	211	KT	212	ID	210	NY	208
14	NH	204	CO	208	VT	211	MT	213	PA	211	OH	212	ID	211	KS	212	VA	209	MO	208
15	IA	204	OK	208	ID	211	NE	213	NY	211	PA	211	MO	210	OH	211	FL	209	ID	207
16	RI	203	NH	208	NY	211	OH	212	NC	211	MN	210	IN	210	NJ	210	MN	209	CO	207
17	NJ	203	UT	208	MO	211	ND	212	WV	211	ID	210	VA	210	WA	210	MO	209	NE	207
18	CO	203	NC	208	DE	210	MO	211	GA	211	IN	210	MD	210	SD	209	KS	208	OH	206
19	ID	203	MT	208	MT	210	WV	211	MO	211	GA	209	NE	210	NY	209	IA	208	KS	206
20	TX	203	SD	208	PA	210	RI	211	CO	210	AL	209	TX	209	OK	209	CO	208	NH	206
21	NY	202	VA	208	MD	210	AR	211	CT	210	TX	209	SD	209	TX	209	TX	208	UT	206
22	VT	202	PA	207	UT	209	ID	211	KS	210	NE	209	IA	208	IN	209	UT	208	NC	206
23	PA	202	AR	207	NE	209	PA	211	UT	209	NC	208	OH	208	MO	208	IN	207	OR	205
24	NB	202	IA	207	RI	209	NY	211	NE	209	RI	208	WA	208	UT	208	AR	206	CT	205
25	OH	202	MO	207	OK	209	VA	210	WA	209	OK	208	CT	207	NE	208	WV	206	WI	205
26	CA	201	GA	207	GA	209	WA	210	VA	209	AR	207	OK	207	GA	207	OH	206	IN	205
27	AL	201	OR	207	AR	209	DE	210	MN	209	SD	207	GA	207	MD	207	OK	205	TX	205
28	AZ	201	WA	206	MS	208	OR	210	AR	209	VA	207	AR	207	PA	207	NE	205	FL	205
29	WI	201	NY	206	CO	208	IA	210	ID	208	MO	207	WV	206	CO	206	PA	205	VA	205
30	OK	201	KS	206	SD	208	LA	209	OH	208	UT	206	PA	206	WV	206	WI	204	AR	204
31	IL	201	TX	206	ND	208	CT	209	IA	208	WI	206	CO	206	MN	206	OR	204	OK	204
32	CT	201	MI	206	ME	207	IL	208	OK	208	IA	206	RI	205	AR	205	NJ	203	NJ	203
33	WA	201	RI	206	MN	207	TX	208	AL	207	CO	205	TN	205	WI	205	NC	202	MN	203
34	ND	200	VT	206	OR	207	AL	208	OR	207	CT	205	UT	205	NC	205	CT	202	SC	202
35	NC	200	HI	206	AL	207	CO	208	RI	206	MN	205	NC	205	MI	204	MI	201	MI	201
36	AR	200	CT	205	TN	206	KS	208	TX	206	MI	205	SC	204	IL	204	GA	201	RI	200
37	KS	200	IL	205	IL	206	TN	207	MI	206	WV	204	MI	204	AL	203	SC	200	GA	200
38	UT	199	CA	205	IA	206	MS	207	WI	205	WA	204	AL	204	HI	203	LA	200	MD	199
39	TN	199	MD	205	NV	206	MD	207	TN	205	OR	204	OR	204	NM	203	TN	200	PA	198
40	MI	198	MN	205	WA	205	WI	207	NV	203	TN	204	MN	203	RI	202	NM	199	TN	198
41	ME	198	WV	204	TX	205	SC	206	SD	203	IL	203	MS	203	TN	202	IL	198	IL	197
42	SD	197	SC	204	DC	204	NV	205	LA	203	SC	202	IL	202	SC	201	MD	198	HI	197
43	MO	197	WI	204	LA	204	MN	205	IL	202	LA	202	WI	202	CT	201	RI	197	MS	197
44	MD	197	DC	203	MI	203	SD	205	SC	202	NV	202	LA	201	MS	200	HI	197	NM	195
45	NM	195	DE	202	WI	203	MI	204	MS	201	MS	202	NV	200	OR	200	MS	196	LA	195
46	MN	194	TN	202	CA	203	AZ	203	HI	201	AZ	202	NM	199	LA	200	AL	196	AZ	194
47	WV	194	LA	202	HI	203	HI	203	AZ	201	HI	201	HI	198	AK	197	CA	193	AL	193
48	DC	194	AZ	202	AZ	203	NM	201	CA	200	NM	200	AZ	197	NV	197	AK	193	NV	192
49	VA	192	NM	201	SC	202	CA	201	NM	199	CA	198	CA	196	AZ	196	AZ	192	AK	192
50	DE	189	AL	199	NM	200	DC	200	DC	195	AK	191	AK	194	CA	195	NV	192	CA	191
51	AK	188	AK	189	AK	190	AK	197	AK	193	DC	191	DC	193	DC	188	DC	183	DC	182
		203		208		208		210		208		207		207		207		204		203

Although Alaskan low-income 4th graders still had the worst reading scores in the US in 2022, we were only one point behind the second worst state, compared to 10 points behind in 2019 and 2017.

In addition, with the implementation of the Alaska Reads Act, our early feedback from the beginning-of-year and mid-year measurements are very encouraging. I'm finally looking forward to the 2024 NAEP results with eager anticipation instead of dread. They should be released in early November.

As chair and longest serving member of the Tribal Compacting Committee, I'm looking forward to implementing the tribal compacting and the possibility of duplicating the great success we've had with tribal healthcare compacting.

Though I'm optimistic for our future -- over the last five years I have accumulated some concerns:

1 Why are so many families not choosing neighborhood schools? The easy thing to do is send your kid to the bus stop for local neighborhood school. But between correspondence schools, charter schools, alternative programs and private schools, 1 in 3 parents in Alaska are choosing a more difficult path.

2 Chronic Absenteeism—Even though 17% of our kids are in correspondence programs and are technically never absent from school, we lead the nation in chronic absenteeism. The chronic absentee rate in Anchorage, Kenai, and MatSu twice as high as Los Angeles. That is closely related to how we fund our schools. Alaska is unique in our technique funding based on a three-week enrollment period. [California and five other states, fund schools based on attendance average.](#)

3 Poorly allocated resources—

Between FY 2003 and FY 2023 statewide enrollment declined from [132,484 to 128,238](#), while state formula funding has increased from [\\$643m to \\$1.187b](#). That's an 84.6% increase in state spending since 2003, with 96.8% of the 2003 enrollment. That results in a 90.6% increase in state formula funding per student while inflation in Alaska was [60.2%](#). The actual percentage is much higher than 90.6% per student in neighborhood schools because of the quadrupling of students in very inexpensive correspondence programs. Currently correspondence programs cost the state \$5,364/year in formula funding. Compared over \$13,000 per student in state formula funding in neighborhood schools – after all the formula elements are applied. With combined state, local and highest- in-the-nation federal funding per student, Alaska currently invests over \$22,000 per student per year in neighborhood schools.

The increase in spending between 2003 and 2023 didn't have a positive effect on outcomes-- with the exception of the current slight positive trends in the last NAEP cycle, during that 20-year period [NAEP scores dropped across the board](#). NAEP 4th grade reading scores dropped nearly a grade level (10 points roughly one grade level difference): -8 NAEP points. 4th grade math dropped by -7 points 8th grade reading dropped by -3 points 8th grade math dropped by -9 points

Contrasting Alaska and Florida in resource allocation. A recent [Rutgers study](#) ranked Alaska as #2 in the US for fiscal effort for K12, with of 95 out of 100 -- The Rutgers listed Florida as the least adequately funded system and the with a fiscal effort score of 12 out of 100. And yet in 2022, Florida leads the nation in low-income 4th grade NAEP, reading and math test scores and is in the top 10 states in the US in five of the eight main NAEP measurements.

Though probably the best indication of the quality of an education system is the percentage of students who graduate with success in Advanced Placement testing, [In Florida, 29% of high school graduates passed at least one Advanced Placement \(AP\) course with a 3 or higher \(3rd highest in the nation\)](#), compared to 12% in Alaska (45th).

NAEP Test Results Alaska			Florida	Alaska
Grade	Subject	Status	U.S. Ranking	
4th	Reading	Free or Reduced Lunch	1st	51st
4th	Math	Free or Reduced Lunch	1st	48th
4th	Reading	Non-Free or Reduced Lunch	3rd	50th
4th	Math	Non-Free or Reduced Lunch	7th	49th
8th	Reading	Free or Reduced Lunch	5th	51st
8th	Math	Free or Reduced Lunch	16th	42nd
8th	Reading	Non-Free or Reduced Lunch	29th	42nd
8th	Math	Non-Free or Reduced Lunch	32nd	42nd

Rankings are all 50 states and DC

Some argue that Alaska and Florida are different. I agree:

Florida has the most *inadequately* funded K-12 system in the US -- Rutgers

Florida has a [higher poverty rate](#).

Florida has a higher cost of living according to [Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Price Parities](#)

Florida has [double percentage of students who speak English less than "very well"](#)

Florida has multiple charter school authorizers

Florida has 13% of students in charter schools -- 5% in Alaska.

Florida has 13% of students in private schools – 4% in Alaska.

Florida allows parents of low-income and disabled kids to choose private school and receive public funding

Miami-Dade 4th grade NAEP reading score are statically indistinguishable from upper/middle-income white 4th graders in Alaska, even though MDPS student body consists of 94% ethnic minorities, 60% free or reduced lunch and more than half of MDPS students don't speak English at home.

4. Escalation in building costs rob resources for classroom operations. During the last five years I've seen price escalation in state school building projects increase to the point that I voted against a capital projects priority list that included a school project for \$102M or more than \$2,600/sf. That's equal to \$3.5m for a 1300 sf kindergarten classroom – or what Winterberry Charters School spent to build an entire campus from an undeveloped site for 260 K-8 students.

The rate of inflation for K-12 capital projects is unsustainable as we transition to a post- hydrocarbon economy. In Anchorage, with over a billion dollars in deferred maintenance, the district used one-time Covid money to help double the size of an elementary school, while they already have room for more than 26,000 K-5 students with less than 15,000 students projected by 2028.

5. Poor Support for Charter Schools. Alaska has the best outcomes charter schools in the US according to a recent [Harvard University study](#) — despite having one of the most poorly supported charter school systems US according the rankings by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools --with a score of 83 out of possible 240. It's a great testament to the parents and staff who run these independent public charter schools for achieving such good results with such sub-standard support.

Among the defects in Alaska charter school statutes are unequal funding, poor/nonexistent facilities and transportation support and the lack of multiple charter authorities. Today, the highest performing school in the state is Eagle Academy Charter School. They still operate out of an undersized facility adapted from a building that was previously a roller rink and a used car lot.

Alaska is one of only five states that allows local districts sole authority over charter school renewals and authorizations. This gives districts a huge asymmetric power relationship over parents who are charter applicants.

MEASURING UP TO THE MODEL

TABLE 1: 2022 STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL LAW RANKINGS

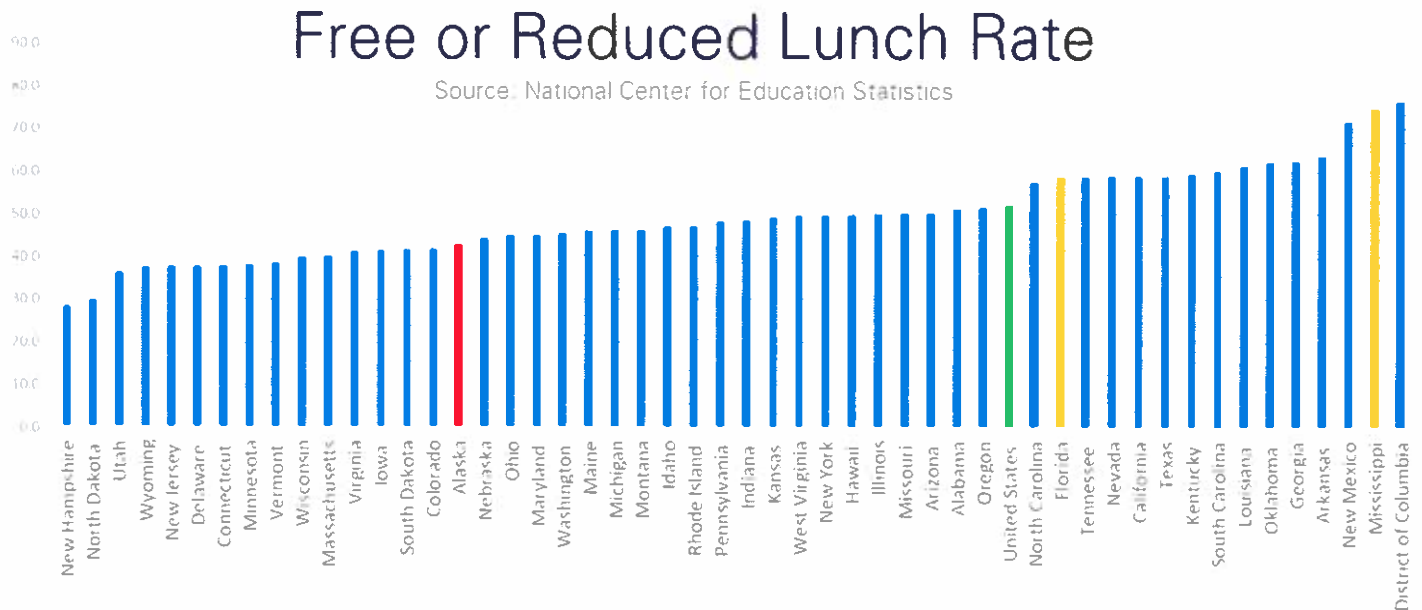
RANKING	STATE	SCORE	RANKING	STATE	SCORE
1	Indiana	181	24	California	154
2	Colorado	181	25	Utah	154
3	+2 Alabama	180 +3	26	+1 Tennessee	153
4	Minnesota	178	27	Missouri	153 +6
5	+2 Florida	175 +6	28	+4 West Virginia	152 +18
6	+3 Washington	173 +6	29	+3 New Mexico	152
7	+1 Mississippi	169	30	+2 Michigan	149 +2
8	Louisiana	168	31	+1 Hawaii	147 +4
9	+3 Nevada	168 +2	32	+3 Texas	145
10	+1 Maine	167	33	+2 Arkansas	141
11	+1 D.C.	166	34	+8 Wyoming	136 +49
12	+12 Ohio	165 +12	35	+1 New Jersey	135 +4
13	+1 Massachusetts	162	36	+3 Oregon	131
14	+1 Arizona	160	37	+3 Pennsylvania	131
15	+1 North Carolina	160	38	Illinois	127 +3
16	+1 Delaware	160	39	+3 Connecticut	126
17	+1 Georgia	158	40	+3 Rhode Island	126
18	+23 Iowa	157 +68	41	+2 Wisconsin	109
19	+3 Oklahoma	157 +4	42	+2 Virginia	94
20	+3 New Hampshire	157 +4	43	Alaska	83
21	+4 Idaho	157	44	Kansas	69
22	+4 New York	156	45	Maryland	61
23	+4 South Carolina	155			

NOTE: THE TOTAL POINTS POSSIBLE IS 240

6. Gender Gap. Although Alaska has some of the lowest achievement gaps in the US between white and Black student and white and Hispanic students but we have the highest gender achievement gap in the US.

No excuses for low performance:

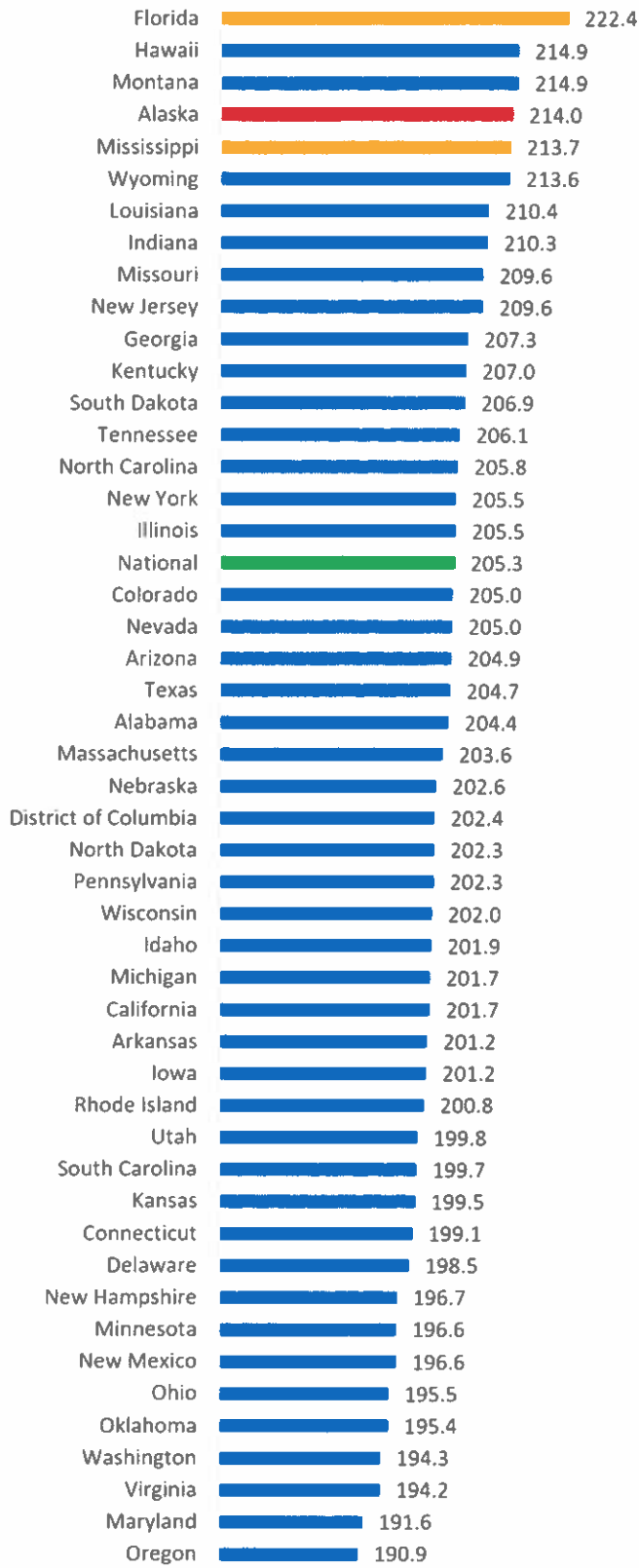
Poverty is not the problem -- Alaska is 38th in Free or Reduced Lunch rate, despite having a qualification income threshold 25% higher than every state in the Lower-48. Anchorage 9th lowest poverty rate among 100 largest cities — Miami 16th highest poverty rate.



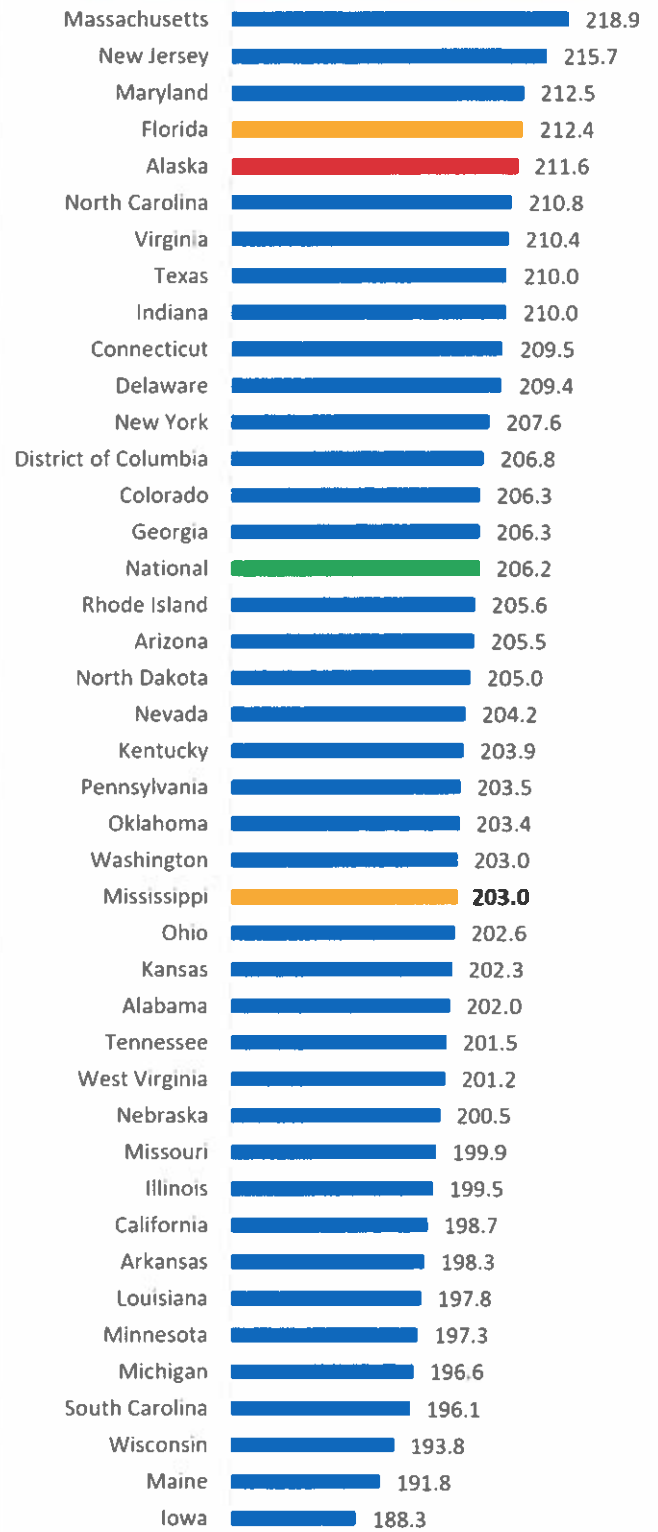
World Languages are not the problem — Only 2.5% of Alaskan students speak English less than very well — lowest rate on the west coast and well below the US average of 4.5%. [Alaska ranked 28th in the US, between Kansas and Wisconsin in the percentage of kids who speak English less than “very well”.](#)

Diversity is a strength -- not the problem. — It’s patently offensive to insinuate brown kids are the cause of our low scores. In actuality, [Black and Hispanic students in Alaska are the only ethnicities who achieve far above the average for the same demographic](#) in the lower-48 in NAEP testing. [Anchorage, the 71st largest US city, was 117th most ethnically diverse and 194th most language diverse in the US, in 2023 Wallet Hub survey.](#)

2022 NAEP 4th Grade Reading Hispanic



*2017 NAEP 4th Grade Reading Black



* 2017 was the last year Alaska had a large enough percentage sample size of Black students to post NAEP results.

