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## **Education reporters fail to accurately interpret and report two NAEP scores: proficiency in a subject, and the Proficient achievement level.**

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The *Reading Framework for the 2022 and 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress* (National Assessment Governing Board, 2021), like the frameworks prepared for each of the NAEP subjects is intended for a general audience that includes education reporters and presents the conceptual base and content of the assessment.

In preparation for the use of NAEP in all states as required by the No Child Left Behind Act, the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) reviewed the reading frameworks for 1992 to 1998 to examine how the NAEP achievement levels (Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced) should be interpreted:

Achievement levels define performance, not students. Notice that there is no mention of “at grade level” performance in these achievement goals. In particular, it is important to understand clearly that the Proficient achievement level does not refer to “at grade” performance. Nor is performance at the Proficient level synonymous with “proficiency” in the subject. That is, students who may be considered proficient in a subject, given the common usage of the term, might not satisfy the requirements for performance at the NAEP achievement level. Further, Basic achievement is more than minimal competency. Basic achievement is less than mastery but more than the lowest level of performance on NAEP. Finally, even the best students you know may not meet the requirements for Advanced performance on NAEP (Loomis & Bourque, 2001).

Reporting “proficiency in the subject.” NAGB has set an aspirational achievement goal: America’s students should perform at the Proficient level or higher. NAGB’s overall focus on the Proficient level, i.e., mastering challenging subject matter, may not be a reasonable goal, ever. The average performance score on NAEP in most subjects falls within the Basic achievement level. Indeed, the most appropriate NAEP achievement level for reporting “proficiency in the subject” is the Basic achievement level, not the Proficient level.

Now for the current official NAGB language for fourth graders that define “proficient in reading” (aka the Basic achievement level) and the Proficient achievement level. (National Assessment Governing Board, 2021)

### **NAEP’s 2022 description of skills of fourth graders who are “proficient in reading”**

Fourth-grade students should be able to locate relevant information, make simple inferences, and use their understanding of the text to identify details that support a given interpretation or conclusion. Students should be able to interpret the meaning of a word as it is used in the text.

When reading literary texts such as fiction, poetry, and literary nonfiction, fourth-grade students should be able to make simple inferences about characters, events, plot, and setting. They should be able to identify a problem in a story and relevant information that supports an interpretation of a text.

When reading informational texts such as articles and excerpts from books, fourth-grade students should be able to identify the main purpose and an explicitly stated main idea, as well as gather information from various parts of a text to provide supporting information.

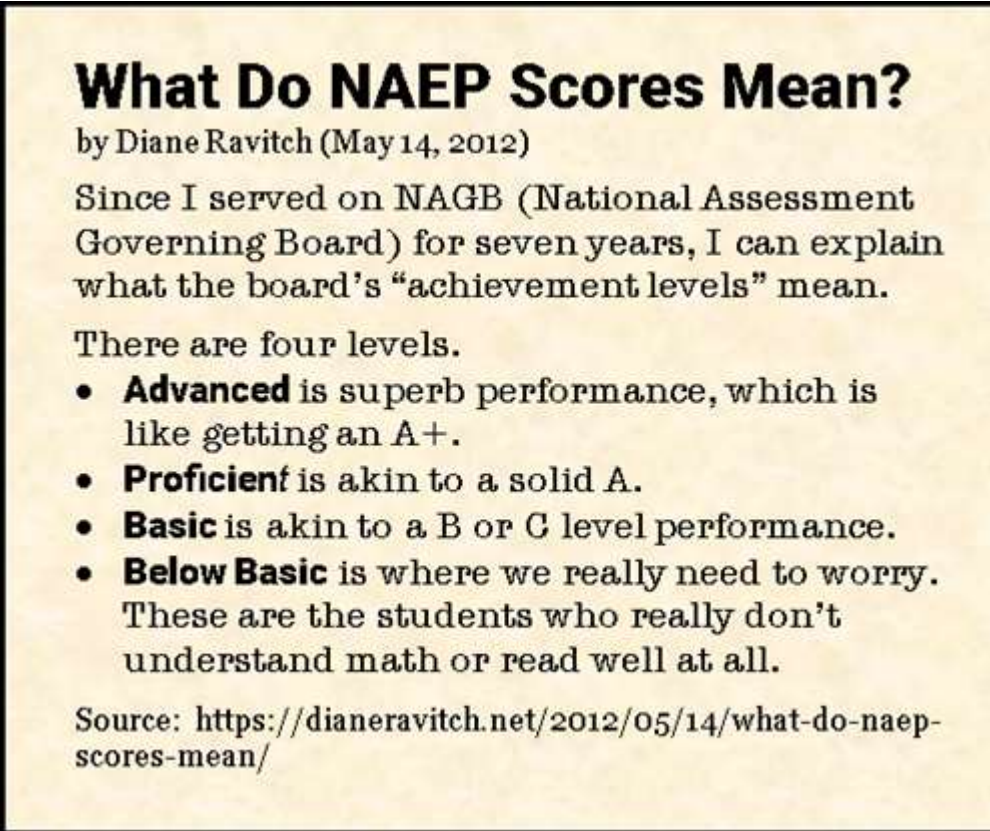
### **NAEP’s 2022 description of skills of fourth graders who perform at the “Proficient achievement level”**

Fourth-grade students performing at the Proficient level should be able to integrate and interpret texts and apply their understanding of the text to draw conclusions and make evaluations.

When reading literary texts such as fiction, poetry, and literary nonfiction, fourth-grade students performing at the Proficient level should be able to identify implicit main ideas and recognize relevant information that supports them. Students should be able to judge elements of an author’s craft and provide some support for their judgment. They should be able to analyze character roles, actions, feelings, and motives.

When reading informational texts such as articles and excerpts from books, fourth-grade students performing at the Proficient level should be able to locate relevant information, integrate information across texts, and evaluate the way an author presents information. Student performance at this level should demonstrate an understanding of the purpose for text features and an ability to integrate information from headings, text boxes, graphics, and their captions. They should be able to explain a simple cause-and-effect relationship and draw conclusions.

Now for some unofficial language from a former NAGB member's blog that provides us with a common sense and understandable description of the two results that are typically misreported for the NAEP achievement levels (Ravitch, 2012).



**What Do NAEP Scores Mean?**  
by Diane Ravitch (May 14, 2012)

Since I served on NAGB (National Assessment Governing Board) for seven years, I can explain what the board's "achievement levels" mean.

There are four levels.

- **Advanced** is superb performance, which is like getting an A+.
- **Proficient** is akin to a solid A.
- **Basic** is akin to a B or C level performance.
- **Below Basic** is where we really need to worry. These are the students who really don't understand math or read well at all.

Source: <https://dianeravitch.net/2012/05/14/what-do-naep-scores-mean/>

This meme is a highly condensed version of Ravitch's blog that has been posted on a variety of websites. It was made without her permission or approval, so it is imperative that the reader visit her blog to see what was left out. The blog is noteworthy because it was written by a former NAGB member, and it validated a paper's use of classroom grades to interpret NAEP's achievement level results that was published five years earlier by a NAEP State Coordinator (Stoneberg, 2007).

Applying a classroom grade that has the same value as NAGB's goal for American students – perform at or above the NAEP Proficient achievement level – would mean that NAGB expects all America's students to achieve nothing less than an A or A+. "The national Assessment Governing Board is not authorized to establish any overarching national goals for education. It does have authority to define levels of achievement that will serve as 'appropriate achievement goals' on National Assessment exams . . ." (Bourque, 2009, p. 9)

Very important final note: When a state has 45% of its students scoring at the NAEP Proficient level in reading, it means that 45% of the students performed at a high level (A). It does not mean that 55% of the students read below grade level or can't read at all.

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