



# Each and Every Child

Quick news for Parents, Educators and Students

An e-newsletter by the Iowa Department of Education

## A challenge, an opportunity

*Though Iowa's national rankings are low, state aligns education for strong future*

Iowa continues to rank at or near the bottom of the nation when it comes to basic reading proficiency among students on Individualized Education Programs (IEP).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows that fourth-grade students on IEPs lag behind their non-disabled peers in reading by 59 percentage points. Twenty percent of Iowa fourth grade students on IEPs performed at or above basic proficient levels in reading, compared to 79 percent of students who are not on IEPs.

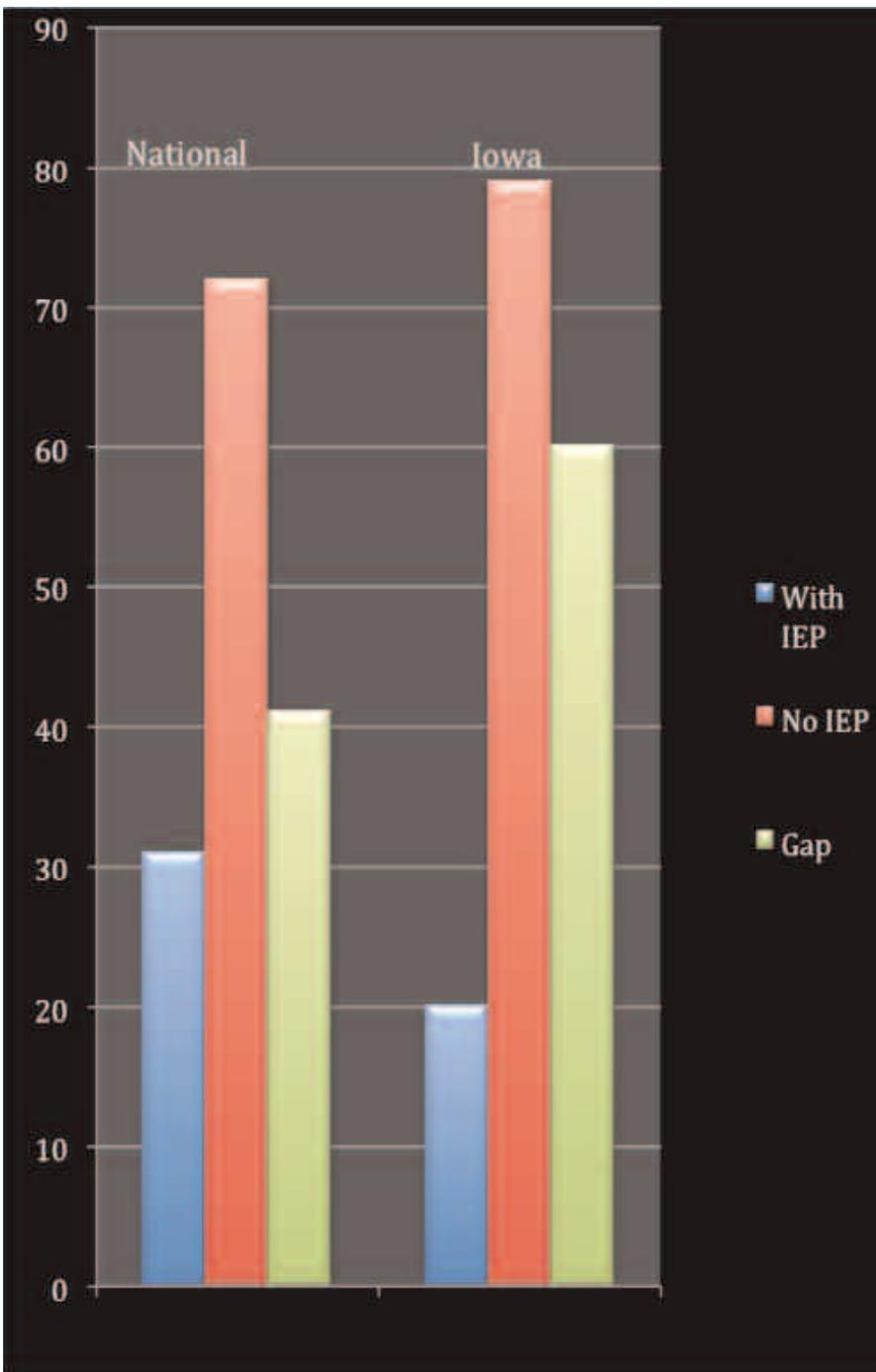
Known as the achievement gap, that 59 percent difference puts Iowa at the very bottom of the ranking of states with education gaps.

"The NAEP scores concur with the re-



Barbara Guy

Proficiency rates in nation, Iowa



sults of the Iowa Assessments," said Iowa's Director of Special Education Barbara Guy. "These data, taken together, clearly identify that we are not yet reaching the results we would like."

Twenty other states have a higher percent of students on IEPs who are at or above basic reading proficiency and still

have gaps. Massachusetts, a leader in education reform in the country, bears that out. The state has an achievement gap of 45 percent. Yet the students as a whole perform better on the NAEP: 41 percent of students on IEPs are at basic levels of proficiency, and 86 percent of non-IEP students are proficient.

Acknowledging the flat rate of growth in reading proficiency of all Iowa students, Iowa's education system is

working hard in a number of areas. Consider:

- Implementation of the Iowa Core in schools statewide and adapting the state's system of assessments. The Iowa Core represents the state's standards and expectations for what students should know and be able to do in kindergarten through 12th grade.
- Iowa's education system is working together to put in place Response to Intervention, also known as Multi-tier Systems of Support (MTSS). It is a proven, evidence-based practice to help schools identify, and intervene with, all readers early on and to customize instruction to fit their needs. One of the first goals of MTSS in Iowa is to get all students reading proficiently by the end of third grade.
- As per the Legislature, districts are creating teacher leadership positions, in which seasoned classroom veterans work with other educators to ensure effective delivery of coursework. The effort better utilizes the expertise of top teachers to improve classroom instruction and to raise student achievement.

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# How did they do *that*?



Photo by Iowa Department of Education's Deborah Darge

**Northeast Elementary staff and Ankeny Community School District officials pose with their Breaking Barriers certificate following a ceremony before the State Board of Education. Northeast is the top performing school in Iowa for students on Individualized Education Programs. Schools across Iowa are scheduling visits with Northeast to learn their strategies.**

From the November/December story “A (big) cut above the rest,” there were more than a couple eyebrows raised at the high proficiency rates established among students with special needs at Ankeny’s Northeast Elementary School.

The story outlined what the school was doing to push students on Individualized Education Programs to achieve an average proficiency of 75.86 percent. That’s compared to a statewide average of 32.31 percent. Unlike the National Assessment of Educational Progress scores, the statewide average incorporates all grades and combines math and reading proficiencies.

Some readers were incredulous, while others were mystified.

“If Northeast Elementary is following state guidelines and staffing students out of special education when they are meeting peer expectations, which is below the proficiency range, then I believe their IEP student’s statistics would fall into place with the rest of the state,” wrote one special education teacher.

Wrote another, “When the students that I worked with were proficient they no longer received services through special education. If I had 72.41% students proficient in reading and 79.31% proficient in math, I’d be wondering why they were still in special education.”

Excellent questions. Does Northeast have overrepresentation of students on IEPs? The answer is a definitive no. In fact, Northeast has only 10 percent of its student population on IEPs. That compares to a statewide average of 12 percent of a student base on IEPs.

What’s going on? The measurement of student proficiency is a lagging indicator – that is, by the time an educator can see a student is proficient, some time has passed. Once a student is proficient in subject matter, he or she exits special education. That’s why Northeast’s numbers are so strong – and their percent of students on IEPs is low: They are continually exiting students from special education because of their high-quality instruction, push for inclusion and co-teaching.

## What it takes to be a high performer

While we celebrate high-performing schools, we should not ignore high-growth schools. They are the schools that are putting in place tools and attitudes that enable their students to learn broader and deeper than other schools. Their growth isn’t a one-year blip on the screen, but rather sustained. Based on their trajectories, they will eventually be high-performing schools, as well.

Are your school’s practices conducive to producing high-performing students who are on Individualized Education Programs?

A study conducted by the Iowa Department of Education in cooperation with Grant Wood Area Education Agency examined what five high-growth schools share in common, and contrast them to low-growth schools.

Find out what these schools are doing in February’s *Each and Every Child*.

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“While it’s essential to be part of the broader education reform, we know that is not sufficient for students with IEPs,” Guy said.

“We cannot expect our teachers to refocus classroom instruction and methods overnight without the proper tools. So in addition to our partnerships in implementing the Iowa Core and MTSS, we will continue to identify instructional strategies and other supports that are specific to students on IEPs.

“In order for us to improve, we need to know where we stand. And with the various facets of education reform, we will get the results we all want.”