

The New York Times
Reprints

This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers [here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears next to any article. Visit www.nytreprints.com for samples and additional information. [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)



September 29, 2011

Assessments of Schools Are Flawed, Report Says

By REBECCA VEVEA

In 20 years of near-constant reform efforts, Chicago's elementary school students have made few gains, high school students have advanced, and the achievement gap between poor and rich areas has widened, a major University of Chicago study found, contradicting impressions created by years of Chicago Public Schools testing data.

The report examined performance across three eras of reform over the last two decades — a span including the Argie Johnson, Paul Vallas and [Arne Duncan](#) regimes. Researchers for the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research found that most publicly available data measuring the success of public schools in Chicago did not provide an accurate picture of progress.

One of the most striking findings is that elementary school scores in general remained mostly stagnant, contrary to visible improvement on state exams reported by the Illinois State Board of Education. The consortium study used a complex statistical analysis of data from each state-administered test over the last 20 years, controlling for changes in the test's content and how it was scored, said Stuart Luppescu, a lead consortium researcher.

The report supports the argument made by state superintendents, educators and critics of high-stakes testing who say state exams and the requirements of the federal [No Child Left Behind Act](#) do not provide an accurate picture of how schools are doing.

"There are a lot of decisions being made based on that data," said Elaine Allensworth one of the report's lead researchers. "If we're going to be doing that, we've got to make sure we're looking at the tests in a fair way over time."

Last week, the Obama administration addressed those concerns by announcing it would allow states to seek waivers from No Child Left Behind rules. Schools that commit to certain reforms including tying teacher pay and performance could gain exemption from a program that seeks to have 100 percent of students meet basic requirements on math and reading scores — commonly called "cut scores" — by 2014.