

# THE EXCELLENCE GAP IS GROWING

## What is the excellence gap?

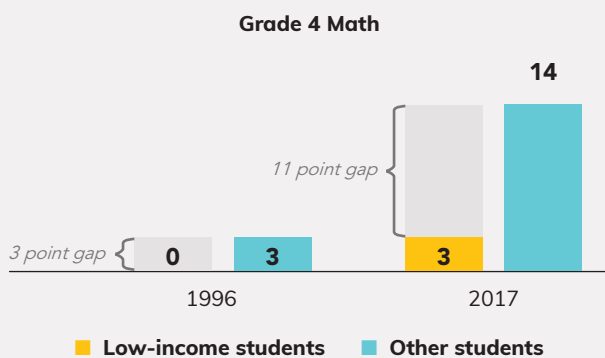
The excellence gap is the discrepancy between the percentage of **lower-income versus higher-income students who reach advanced levels of academic performance**, due to unequal access to resources, quality instruction, and educational opportunities.

## How is the excellence gap changing?

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is a nationally representative assessment that measures U.S. K-12 students' knowledge in various subject areas. In reading and in mathematics, across grades 4, 8, and 12, **NAEP data show that lower-income students are less likely than their peers to attain an advanced level of achievement.**

Furthermore, an analysis of NAEP data since the mid-1990s reveals that **the excellence gap is growing:**

**Figure 1: Growth in Excellence Gaps**  
*Percent of Students Scoring "Advanced"*



This growth is driven primarily by **increases in advanced performance among more affluent students.** Higher-income students have made substantial gains at top levels of academic performance, whereas advanced performance of students from lower-income families has grown at a much slower rate.

**Figure 2: Excellence Gaps Have Widened in the Past Two Decades**

Growth in Grade 4 Reading Excellence Gap:

50%

Growth in Grade 8 Reading Excellence Gap:

100%

Growth in Grade 4 Math Excellence Gap:

267%

Growth in Grade 8 Math Excellence Gap:

333%

## What does this mean?

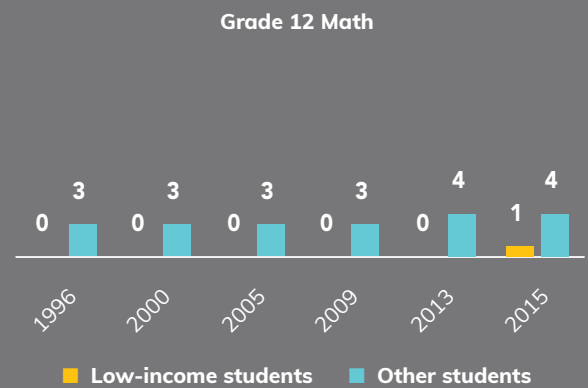
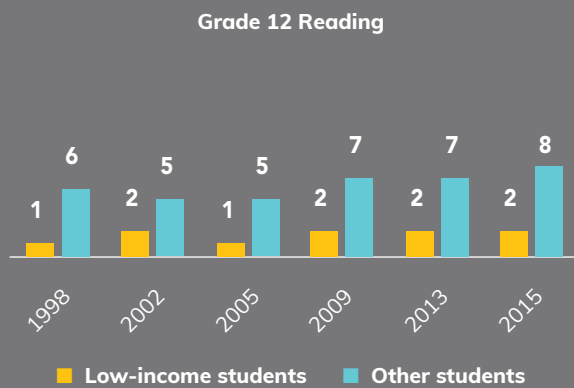
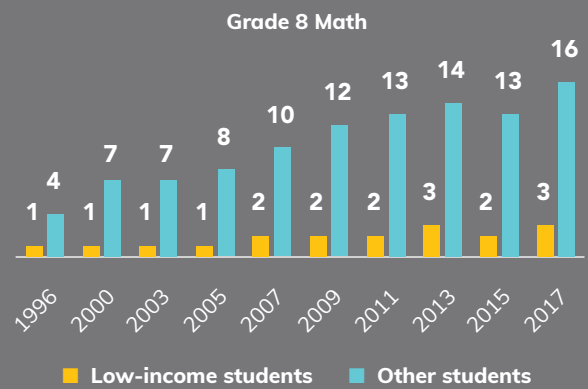
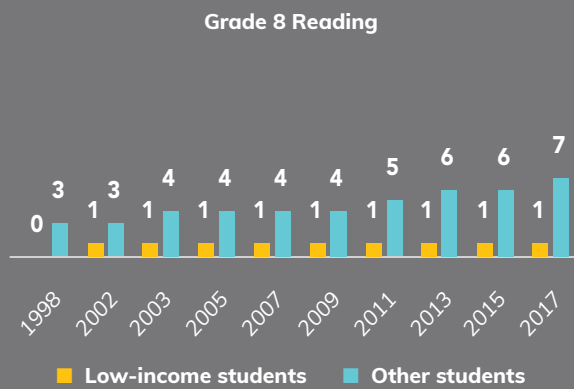
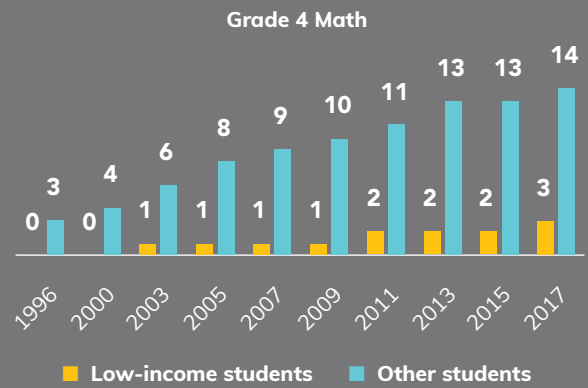
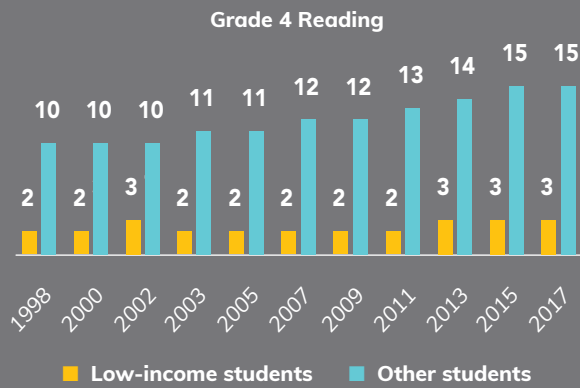
This excellence gap, which begins in elementary and middle school, has far-reaching consequences.

There are **over 25 million K-12 children** who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch — 1 million of whom rank in the top 25% academically — and these children are increasingly **unlikely to reach their full potential.**

High-achieving students from lower-income backgrounds are less likely than their higher-income peers to participate in advanced courses, attend college, and attend more selective postsecondary institutions.

For more information on the excellence gap, go to [www.jkcf.org/excellencegap](http://www.jkcf.org/excellencegap).

**Figure 3: Percentage of Students Scoring at the “Advanced” Level on National Assessment of Educational Progress**



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The NAEP exam was administered in varying grades and subjects each year, thus the years presented are different for each grade and subject presented.