

## **Diane Ravitch's April 19 blog—Secretary Cardona, NAEP Proficient is Not Grade Level!**

The attached [blog](#) is worthy of reading and further distribution.

It is fashionable to denigrate public education. However, when the Secretary of Education makes public education look bad, it is indefensible.

### **Secretary Cardona, NAEP Proficient is Not Grade Level!**

For the past dozen years, since the attack on public schools went into high gear, the same lie has been trotted out again and again to defame public schools. The slanderers say that 2/3 of American students are reading “below grade level.”

At Congressional hearings on the education budget on Tuesday April 18, the same ridiculous claim was made by U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona. He [said that only 33% are reading at proficiency. He said this is “appalling and not acceptable for the United States. 33% of our students are reading on Grade level.”](#) (At about 45:00).

This is nonsense. It's frankly appalling to hear Secretary Cardona repeating the lie spread by rightwing public school haters. He really should be briefed by officials from the National Assessment Governing Board before he testifies again.

On the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) tests, “**proficient**” **does not represent grade level**. Proficient is a high bar. Although the federal testing agency does not equate its achievement levels to letter grades, I would estimate (based on my seven years of experience as a member of the NAEP Governing Board) that “proficient” is about the same as an A or an A-. Do we really expect that every student merits an A? I don't think so.

[The website of the National Center on Education Statistics states clearly:](#)

#### ***Achievement Levels***

*NAEP student achievement levels are performance standards that describe what students should know and be able to do. Results are reported as percentages of students performing at or above three NAEP achievement levels (NAEP Basic, NAEP Proficient, and NAEP Advanced). Students performing at or above the NAEP Proficient level on NAEP assessments demonstrate solid academic performance and competency over challenging subject matter. **It should be noted that the NAEP Proficient achievement level does not represent grade level proficiency as determined by other assessment standards (e.g., state or district assessments).***

Could it be any plainer? Students who score at or above NAEP Proficient “demonstrate solid academic performance and competency over challenging subject matter.” Furthermore, the NAEP Proficient level “does not represent grade level proficiency.”

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Would someone please tell Secretary Cardona? When he repeats the lies of the rightwing propagandists, he maligns every teacher and student in the nation.

Someone should also inform Secretary Cardona that the NAEP achievement levels are set by panels of educators and non-educators; as such, they are subjective judgments. [They have been used on a trial basis for 30 years without getting definitive clearance by testing experts commissioned by Congress to review their validity.](#) “The latest evaluation of the NAEP achievement levels was conducted by a committee convened by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine in 2016. The evaluation concluded that further evidence should be gathered to determine whether the NAEP achievement levels are reasonable, valid, and informative. Accordingly, the NCES commissioner determined that the trial status of the NAEP achievement levels should be maintained at this time.”

Please, Secretary Cardona, stop saying that “only 33% of American students can read proficiently” and that “only 33% are reading at grade level.”

It’s not true.

When asked about vouchers, Secretary Cardona said he opposes them because they take money away from public schools. That’s true, but far from the whole truth. 75-80% of vouchers subsidize students who already attend private schools. They are a transfer from the public to the affluent. Kids who leave public schools to use vouchers lose academic ground, and most return to their public school within two-three years in need of help catching up. Vouchers fund religious schools that may discriminate against students, families, and staff who do not share their religion or who are gay or who have disabilities. They choose the students they want.

Furthermore, religious schools indoctrinate. Some religious schools teach fake science and history. Religious schools force taxpayers to pay for religious views they do not share.

There are many reasons to oppose vouchers but Secretary Cardona seems unaware of them. I recommend that he invite veteran voucher researcher Joshua Cowen of Michigan State University to brief him on why vouchers for religious and private schools are a pernicious and ineffective policy.