



NEWS RELEASE

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Four Urban Districts Score Higher in NAEP Science Than Large Cities Nationally; Eight Districts Score Lower
Seventeen Districts Take Part in 2009 Nation's Report Card Measuring Scientific Knowledge and Skills at Grades 4 and 8

(BOSTON) – Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—also known as The Nation's Report Card—show that most of the 17 urban school districts that participated in the 2009 science assessment scored lower than the national average for public school students. However, when compared to their respective peers attending public schools in large cities, scores for both fourth- and eighth-graders were higher in four districts and lower in eight districts.

The 2009 NAEP Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) in science was administered by the National Center for Education Statistics, and tested representative samples of between 900 and 2,200 fourth-graders and eighth-graders in each of the following 17 districts that volunteered to participate:

Atlanta Public Schools	Houston Independent School District
Austin Independent School District	Jefferson County Public Schools (Louisville, Ky.)
Baltimore City Public Schools	Los Angeles Unified School District
Boston Public Schools	Miami-Dade County Public Schools
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	Milwaukee Public Schools
Chicago Public Schools	New York City Department of Education
Cleveland Metropolitan School District	Philadelphia, School District of
Detroit Public Schools	San Diego Unified School District
Fresno Unified School District	

Assessment questions measured students' knowledge and skills in physical science, life science, and Earth and space sciences. The results are reported as average scores on a 0–300 scale and as percentages of students performing at or above three achievement levels: *Basic*, *Proficient* and *Advanced*. Results from each district are compared to results for public school students in the nation and to the results for students in large cities (cities with populations of 250,000 or more that may or may not include a TUDA district). Demographic distinctions are particularly pronounced in TUDA districts and other large cities that feature high proportions of students from minority ethnic groups, English language learners and students eligible for the National School Lunch Program.

Average scores in most of the 17 urban districts that participated in the 2009 assessment were lower than the national average of 149. However, there were a few exceptions. At grade 4, the average scores in Austin, Charlotte and Jefferson County were not significantly different from the nation, while the scores in the remaining 14 districts were lower. At grade 8, only Austin had an average score that was not significantly different from the national average, while scores in the remaining 16 districts were lower.

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David Driscoll, chairman of the National Assessment Governing Board, which sets policy for NAEP, called the overall results disappointing, especially considering the scientific underpinnings of so many growing employment fields. “It is simply unacceptable that we are not comprehensively educating many schoolchildren in urban districts on the basics of science, let alone to the highest levels needed for our nation to be competitive,” Driscoll said.

When compared to the average score for fourth-graders in large cities, scores were higher in Austin, Boston, Charlotte, Jefferson County, Miami-Dade and San Diego; not significantly different in Atlanta, Houston and New York City; and lower in the remaining eight districts. At grade 8, scores in Austin, Charlotte, Houston, Jefferson County and Miami-Dade were higher than the score for large cities; the score in San Diego was not significantly different; and scores for the remaining 11 districts were lower.

Although no TUDA district had a higher percentage of students performing at or above the *Basic* level in comparison to the percentage for the nation, six districts at grade 4 and five districts at grade 8 had a higher percentage at or above *Basic* than the percentage in large cities. In Austin, the percentages of eighth-graders performing at or above *Proficient* and at *Advanced* were higher than the percentages for large cities and the nation.

There was also some good news related to the performance of some of the racial/ethnic groups in several districts. Among the 14 districts that scored lower than the nation overall at grade 4, scores for at least one racial/ethnic group in Atlanta, Boston, Houston, Miami-Dade and San Diego were higher than the score for their peers nationally. Of the 16 districts that scored lower than the nation at grade 8, Charlotte, Houston and Miami-Dade all had at least one racial/ethnic group with higher average scores.

Still, the report reveals significant achievement gaps among racial/ethnic groups. For the 16 districts with samples of White and Black students large enough to report results at grade 4, score gaps between the two groups ranged from 26 points in Philadelphia to 56 points in Atlanta. Among the 14 districts with large enough samples at grade 8, the White–Black gap ranged from 27 points in Philadelphia to 43 points in Houston.

The NAEP science framework, which describes the knowledge and skills that should be assessed, was recently updated to incorporate new advances in science, research on science learning and components from international science assessments. Because of the changes to the assessment, the results from 2009 cannot be compared to those from previous assessment years. However, they provide a current snapshot of what the nation’s fourth- and eighth-graders know and can do in science that will serve as the basis for comparisons on future science assessments.

The Governing Board applauded the TUDA districts for volunteering to participate. “These school districts should be commended for their commitment to seek data that can be used to improve science achievement,” said Driscoll. In 2011, the Dallas (Texas) Independent School District, Hillsborough County (Fla.) Public Schools, and Albuquerque (N.M.) Public Schools will join the TUDA program, along with the District of Columbia, which will bring the program’s total participation to 21 districts. The District of Columbia participated in the 2009 reading and mathematics urban district assessments but could not participate in the urban science assessment because samples for reading and math assessments included nearly all of the district’s fourth- and eighth-graders.

The *Nation’s Report Card: Science 2009, Trial Urban District Assessment, Grades 4 and 8* is available at www.nationsreportcard.gov. Additional results and information are available on the Web at <http://nagb.org/science2009/tuda/>.

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The National Assessment Governing Board is an independent, bipartisan board whose members include governors, state legislators, local and state school officials, educators, business representatives, and members of the general public. Congress created the 26-member Governing Board in 1988 to oversee and set policy for NAEP.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the only nationally representative, continuing evaluation of the condition of education in the United States. It has served as a national yardstick of student achievement since 1969. Through The Nation’s Report Card, NAEP informs the public about what America’s students know and can do in various subject areas, and compares achievement between states, large urban districts, and various student demographic groups.