**NEWS RELEASE**

# Eighth-graders’ U.S. history and civics scores decline in new Nation’s Report Cards; first-ever score decline in civics

*Eighth-graders’ U.S. history score continues decline since 2014*

WASHINGTON (May 3, 2023)—The U.S. history and civics scores of eighth-graders decreased between 2018 and 2022, according to results from The Nation's Report Card released today by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

“A well-rounded education includes a thorough grounding in democratic principles, and these assessments challenge students to show their knowledge and skills as they prepare to become full participants in American democracy,” said NCES Commissioner Peggy G. Carr. “Self-government depends on each generation of students leaving school with a complete understanding of the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship. But far too many of our students are struggling to understand and explain the importance of civic participation, how American government functions, and the historical significance of events. These results are a national concern.”

In U.S. history, there were declines since 2018 across all performance levels except for the very top-performing students (students at the 90th percentile). In civics, scores declined for lower- and middle-performing students (students at the 10th, 25th, and 50th percentiles) and did not change for higher-performing students (students at the 75th and 90th percentiles).

“The percentages of students performing below the *NAEP Basic* level rose in both U.S. history and civics, and four in 10 eighth-graders performed below the *NAEP Basic* level in U.S. history,” said NCES Acting Associate Commissioner Dan McGrath. “Few eighth-graders are reaching higher levels of achievement. Only 13 percent of eighth-graders were at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level for U.S. history. That’s the lowest proportion of eighth-grade students reaching that level out of any subject assessed by the NAEP program. And only about a fifth of students were at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level in civics, which is the second-lowest proportion of students reaching that level in any subject.”

**U.S. History**

The NAEP U.S. history assessment measures students’ knowledge and understanding of U.S. history in all its complexity—its major themes, periods, events, people, ideas, and turning points. The assessment examines students’ understanding of historical chronology, differing perspectives across time, and their grasp of historical facts and contexts.

Eighth-graders’ U.S. history score declined five points on the 0-500 scale, from 263 in 2018 to 258 in 2022, continuing a downward trend that began in 2014. Scores were lower across all levels of performance except for the very top-performing students—those at the 90th percentile—whose score did not change significantly. The average U.S. history score in 2022 was not measurably different from the average score in 1994, the first assessment year.

For U.S. history, NCES also reports scores for themes that cover major branches of historical study. From 2018 to 2022, scores declined across all four themes of U.S. history assessed by NAEP. Those themes are: change and continuity in American democracy (Democracy, a 5-point decline); gathering and interactions of peoples, cultures, and ideas (Culture, a 5-point decline); economic and technological changes (Technology, a 5-point decline); and the changing role of America in the world (World Role, a 3-point decline).

In 2022, 13 percent of eighth-graders scored at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level in U.S. history, meaning that about 13 percent of eighth-graders were able to explain the significance of people, places, events, ideas, and documents in American history; could understand and explain the opportunities, perspectives, and challenges associated with a diverse cultural population; and could demonstrate knowledge of significant political ideas and institutions and cite evidence from historical sources to support conclusions. The percentage of eighth-graders at or above *NAEP Proficient* in 2022 was lower than in 2018, when 15 percent of eighth-graders were at or above *NAEP Proficient*, and not significantly different from 1994.

**Civics**

The NAEP civics assessment measures students’ knowledge of American government as well as their ability to participate in civic activities. Eighth-graders’ performance declined 2 points on the 0-300 scale, from 153 in 2018 to 150 in 2022. (Average scores are shown as rounded numbers. But unrounded numbers were used for calculating score differences and score changes, and for statistical comparison tests when scores were compared to each other.)

This was the first decline ever recorded by the civics assessment. The score in 2022 was not statistically significantly different from the score in 1998, the first civics assessment under the current framework.

In 2022, 22 percent of eighth-graders scored at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level in civics. Students performing at this level can understand and explain the purposes that governments serve; how and why legislative, executive, and judicial powers are separate, shared, and limited in American constitutional government; and the differences between government and civil society. In addition, students performing at this level can understand how the ideals expressed in the nation’s core documents may differ from reality, and the efforts that have been made to address these discrepancies.

The NAEP civics assessment encompasses three central, interrelated components: (1) knowledge and understanding of key aspects of the American political system and the principles of American democracy; (2) the intellectual and participatory skills needed to apply civic knowledge for effective citizenship; and (3) civic dispositions, such as understanding the rights individuals have and the responsibilities of individuals to their community.

**KEY FINDINGS**

**2022 U.S. History Results**

* Eighth-graders’ average U.S. history score in 2022 (258) was five points lower compared to 2018 (263), and was not statistically significantly different from eighth-graders’ average U.S. history score in 1994 (259), the first assessment year for U.S. history. The average U.S. history score has declined between 2014 and 2022.
* The overall decline in eighth-graders’ average U.S. history score in 2022 was mirrored by declines for students at almost all performance levels. Scores declined for students at the 10th, 25th, 50th, and 75th percentiles between 2018 and 2022. The score for students at the 90th percentile in 2022 was not significantly different compared to 2018.
* Thirteen percent of eighth-graders performed at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level in U.S. history in 2022. This was lower than in 2018 (when 15 percent of eighth-graders were at or above *NAEP Proficient*) and not significantly different than in 1994.
* Forty percent of eighth-graders performed below the *NAEP Basic* level in U.S. history in 2022, which was higher compared to 2018 (34 percent) and not measurably different from 1994 (39 percent).
* From 2018 to 2022, average scores for Black, Hispanic, and White students declined. The score for Black students declined from 246 to 242; the score for Hispanic students declined from 253 to 247; and the score for White students declined from 272 to 268.
* Scores were lower across all four U.S. history themes: Democracy, Culture, Technology, and World Role. The average score in the Democracy theme declined from 265 in 2018 to 260 in 2022; the average score in Culture declined from 263 in 2018 to 258 in 2022; the average score in Technology declined from 256 in 2018 to 251 in 2022; and the average score in World Role declined from 266 in 2018 to 263 in 2022.
* Fewer students reported taking classes mainly focused on U.S. history. Sixty-eight percent of eighth-graders reported taking an eighth-grade class mainly focused on U.S. history in 2022. This was four points lower than in 2018, when 72 percent of students reported taking a class mainly focused on U.S. history.

**2022 Civics Results**

* Eighth-graders’ average civics score in 2022 (150) was two points lower compared to 2018 (153), and was not statistically significantly different from eighth-graders’ average civics score in 1998 (150), the first assessment year for civics using the current framework.
* Between 2018 and 2022, scores declined for both lower-performing students (students at the 10th and 25th percentiles) and middle-performing students (students at the 50th percentile). Average scores did not change significantly for higher-performing students (those at the 75th and 90th percentiles). Scores for lower-, middle-, and higher-performing students were not measurably different in 2022 compared to 1998.
* Compared to 2018, there was no significant change in the average score for students in any racial/ethnic group.
* Twenty-two percent of eighth-graders performed at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level in civics in 2022, which was not significantly different compared to either 2018 (24 percent) or 1998 (22 percent).
* Thirty-one percent of eighth-graders performed below the *NAEP Basic* level in civics in 2022, which was higher compared to 2018 (27 percent) and not measurably different from 1998 (30 percent).

**How Results Are Reported**

Student performance on the NAEP assessments is reported in two ways: scale scores and NAEP achievement levels.

Scale scores represent the average performance of students who took the U.S. history and civics assessments. Scores are reported at the national level and for groups of students based on race/ethnicity, gender, eligibility for the National School Lunch Program, and other demographic characteristics.

Student performance on NAEP is also reported by the percentages of students reaching 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. The *NAEP Proficient* achievement level does not represent grade-level proficiency as determined by other assessment standards.

The NAEP achievement levels are set by the National Assessment Governing Board, which sets policy for the NAEP program. The NAEP achievement levels are used on a trial basis and, therefore, should be interpreted with care to ensure a proper understanding of performance.

**About the Assessment**

In 2022, NCES assessed approximately 7,800 eighth-graders from 410 schools in civics, and 8,000 eighth-graders from 410 schools in U.S. history. Scale scores are reported on a 300-point scale for civics and a 500-point scale for U.S history.

Visit <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/> to view the report.

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*The National Center for Education Statistics, a principal agency of the U.S. Federal Statistical System, is the statistical center of the U.S. Department of Education and the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education in the U.S. and other nations. NCES fulfills a congressional mandate to collect, collate, analyze, and report complete statistics on the condition of American education; conduct and publish reports; and review and report on education activities internationally.*

*The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is a congressionally authorized project sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. The National Center for Education Statistics, within the Institute of Education Sciences, administers NAEP. The commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics is responsible by law for carrying out the NAEP project. Policy for the NAEP program is set by the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), an independent, bipartisan board whose members include governors, state legislators, local and state school officials, educators, business representatives and members of the general public. Since 1990, NAGB has been developing achievement levels, which are being used on a trial basis.*