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**Reading Scores Decline on 2019 Nation’s Report Card**

***Fourth-graders’ mathematics scores increase; eighth-graders’ mathematics and reading scores decrease***

WASHINGTON (Oct. 30, 2019)—The average reading score for American fourth- and eighth-grade students decreased between 2017 and 2019, according to The Nation's Report Card, released today by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Changes in mathematics scores were mixed over the two-year period, with an increase at grade 4 and a decrease at grade 8.

The declines in reading at both grades were seen at all levels of achievement, whether students were high- or low-achieving, with the exception of the highest achieving fourth-graders (those at the 90th percentile of achievement). By contrast, score declines for lower performing students drove the overall score decrease in grade 8 mathematics.

“Over the past decade, there has been no progress in either mathematics or reading performance, and the lowest performing students are doing worse,” said Peggy G. Carr, NCES associate commissioner. “In fact, over the long term in reading, the lowest performing students—those readers who struggle the most—have made no progress from the first NAEP administration almost 30 years ago.”

Dr. Carr also noted that eighth-graders’ performance declined in both reading and mathematics. “Eighth grade is a transitional point in preparing students for success in high school, so it is critical that researchers further explore the declines we are seeing here, especially the larger, more widespread declines across states we are seeing in reading," she said.

**National Results**

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—also known as The Nation's Report Card—is the largest nationally representative​ and continuing assessment of what students in the United States know and can do in various subject areas and is frequently referred to as the “gold standard” of student assessments. NCES designs and administers all NAEP assessments. In 2019, NCES assessed approximately 293,700 students in reading and 296,900 students in mathematics.

The NAEP reading and mathematics scores are reported on a 500-point scale established in the early 1990s. The average reading score for fourth-graders decreased one point, to 220, between 2017 and 2019. Eighth graders’ reading scores decreased three points, to 263. Compared to a decade ago, the 2019 average reading scores at each grade were not significantly different, but they were higher when compared to the assessment in 1992.

In mathematics, the 2019 average score for fourth-graders, 241, was one point higher than in 2017. Eighth-graders scored one point lower, at 282. Over the past decade, average scores for mathematics at both grades did not change significantly. Mathematics scores were higher in 2019 than the first assessment in 1990.

“While mathematics scores typically have shown steady improvement over nearly 30 years of the NAEP program, we have seen little change in reading performance at both grades 4 and 8,” said James L. Woodworth, NCES commissioner. “It is especially discouraging to see declines for students at the lowest levels of achievement. Addressing these differences in growth needs to be a continued focus for research and policy.”

The Nation’s Report Card also presents data by different demographic groups, such as race/ethnicity, gender, school type, and region. White and Black fourth- and eighth-grade students scored lower in reading in 2019 compared to 2017. Hispanic and American Indian/Alaska Native eighth-grade students also scored lower in reading in 2019 than in 2017. In mathematics, fourth-grade Hispanic students scored higher in 2019 than in 2017, and eighth-grade American Indian/Alaska Native students scored lower. Boys’ scores increased in fourth-grade mathematics but decreased in reading at both grades.

Student performance on NAEP also is reported by the percentages of students reaching three achievement levels: *NAEP Basic, NAEP Proficient*,and*NAEP Advanced*. For fourth- and eighth-grade reading, the percentage of students scoring at the *NAEP Proficient* level declined between 2017 and 2019. There was no significant change during that time for mathematics.

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.

**State/Jurisdiction Results**

* In fourth-grade reading, 17 states had declines between 2017 and 2019, while one state improved.
* In eighth-grade reading, most states (31) also had decreases, while one state improved.
* In fourth-grade mathematics, three states declined, while nine states had increases in 2019 compared to 2017.
* In eighth-grade mathematics, six states saw declines, while three states showed improvement.
* Mississipi and Washington, DC were the only jurisdictions that improved in at least three of four grade/subject combinations.
* Kansas, New Hampshire, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming were the only states to decline in three of four grade/subject combinations.

|  | MATHEMATICS | MATHEMATICS | READING | READING |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **GRADE 4** | **GRADE 8** | **GRADE 4** | **GRADE 8** |
| ▲INCREASE | **▲9**  Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Mississippi, Nevada, Oregon, Tennessee, DoDEA | **▲3**  District of Columbia,  Louisiana, Mississippi | **▲1**  Mississippi | **▲1**  District of Columbia |
| ▼DECREASE | **▼3**  Vermont, West Virginia, Wyoming | **▼6**  Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Wyoming | **▼17**  Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Ohio, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia | **▼31**  Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wyoming |

**District Results**

NCES also reports student achievement for selected large urban school districts through the NAEP Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) program. Fourth- and eighth-graders in 27 urban districts participated in the mathematics and reading assessments in 2019.

A useful benchmark for comparing the progress of the urban districts participating in NAEP is the average score for the "Large City" group—the NAEP classification for cities with populations of 250,000 or more. Since the last assessment in 2017, the large city average score stayed the same for grade 4 reading and grade 8 mathematics, while scores increased for grade 4 mathematics and decreased for grade 8 reading, following the national pattern.

District findings included:

* Average scores for fourth-grade reading decreased in three of the districts: Jefferson County (Kentucky), Miami-Dade, and Milwaukee. No districts saw an increase.
* Average scores for eighth-grade reading decreased in 11 of the districts: Albuquerque, Austin, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Duval County (Florida), Fort Worth (Texas), Hillsborough County (Florida), Los Angeles, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia. The only increase was for the District of Columbia Public Schools.
* Average scores for fourth-grade mathematics decreased in only one district, Guilford County (North Carolina). Scores increased in five districts: Clark County (Nevada), Cleveland, Denver, Detroit, and District of Columbia Public Schools.
* Average scores for eighth-grade mathematics decreased in three of the districts: Dallas, Fort Worth (Texas), and Los Angeles. Scores increased in four districts: Denver, District of Columbia Public Schools, Guilford County (North Carolina), and Shelby County (Tennessee).
* Charlotte-Mecklenburg and San Diego were the only districts to perform higher than the Large City average in all grades/subjects.
* District of Columbia Public Schools was the only district to have score increases in three of four grade/subject combinations.

**About the Assessment**

NCES administered the 2019 mathematics and reading assessments to fourth- and eighth-graders in public and private schools in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Department of Defense schools, and in 27 urban districts. Results for states and districts are for public schools only. In 2019, approximately 293,700 students participated in the reading assessment and approximately 296,900 students participated in the mathematics assessment. Samples of schools and students are drawn from each state and from the District of Columbia and Department of Defense schools.

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.*