



NEWS RELEASE

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2009 Nation's Report Card for Reading Shows Gains in 8th-Grade Scores as 4th-Grade Scores Hold Steady

WASHINGTON (March 24, 2010) – Since 2007, the nation's 8th-graders have made some improvements in reading comprehension while the overall results for 4th-graders were unchanged, according to results from the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as The Nation's Report Card.

The 2009 NAEP Reading Report Card—the only nationally representative and continuing measure of student achievement—shows the average reading score for the nation's 8th-graders rose from 2007 to 2009, as nine states posted increases and no state showed a decline. Overall, 4th-graders held steady from 2007 to 2009, as three states showed score increases, while four reported declines.

Results are based on representative samples of 178,800 4th-graders from 9,530 schools and 160,900 8th-graders from 7,030 schools from across all states, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense schools. The results are reported as average scores on a 0 to 500 scale and as the percentages of students performing at or above three achievement levels—*Basic* (partial mastery of knowledge and skills), *Proficient* (solid academic performance), and *Advanced* (superior performance).

The 2009 NAEP Reading assessment, administered by the U.S. Department of Education last year, shows 75 percent of 8th-graders performed at or above the *Basic* level, and 32 percent performed at or above *Proficient*. Both percentages were higher than in 2007 and 1992, the year the reading trend for this assessment began. Additionally, 3 percent performed at the *Advanced* level in 2009, the same as in 2007 and 1992. Meanwhile, the percentages of grade 4 students performing at or above each of three achievement levels were the same in 2009 as in 2007 and higher than in 1992, with 67 percent at or above the *Basic* level, 33 percent at or above *Proficient*, and 8 percent at *Advanced*.

For grade 8, percentile scores were higher in 2009 than in both 2007 and 1992 for lower-performing students (those at the 10th and 25th percentiles) and middle-performing students (those at the 50th percentile). For grade 4, the scores in 2009 for students at the 10th, 25th, 50th, and 75th percentiles were not significantly different from 2007 but were higher than in 1992.

"While 4th-graders haven't shown continued progress in reading from 2007, it is encouraging to see 8th-graders making gains," said David P. Driscoll, Chair of the National Assessment Governing Board, which sets policy for NAEP. "And it should be noted that 8th-grade students performing in the lower percentiles had higher scores, which suggests that many students who need the most help are making progress."

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The score gaps among racial/ethnic groups on NAEP reading continued for both grades 4 and 8. Scores were higher for 8th-graders in all racial-ethnic groups, but the gaps between White students and Black or Hispanic students were not significantly different from those in 2007 or 1992. In the 4th grade, there were no significant changes in scores across racial categories between 2007 and 2009; however, the White – Black score gap was smaller in 2009 than in 1992.

Score gaps also persist among other student demographic groups—between female and male students, public and private school students, and students who receive free and reduced-price school lunch and those who do not. In the 4th grade, for example, the average score of students in public schools was 15 points lower than the average score of students in private schools; this score gap was not significantly different from the gaps in 2007 or 1992. However, in the 8th grade, the female – male score gap was smaller in 2009 than in 1992.

The average national score for 8th-graders rose by one point from 2007, and higher scores were seen in nine states: Alabama, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Kentucky, Missouri, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, and Utah. In grade 4, average scores rose in three jurisdictions—Kentucky, Rhode Island, and the District of Columbia—while the average scores fell in four states—Alaska, Iowa, New Mexico, and Wyoming.

The 2009 Reading Assessment is based on a new framework developed by the Governing Board, an independent, bipartisan group of public officials, policy experts, teachers, and others. The new framework includes several changes aimed at improving the way NAEP measures reading comprehension. The assessment not only tests how well students locate and recall information, but also how well they integrate ideas.

Informed by the latest scientific research and extensive input from educational experts and others, the new framework provides a more well-defined measure of reading comprehension. The framework requires using more high-quality literature and a broader range of text types to challenge students; including poetry in grades 4, 8, and 12; and assessing vocabulary in a new way that shows students understand the meaning of words as used in the passage.

More so than in the past, the assessment asks students to draw conclusions and evaluate the quality of arguments. The new framework also has led to changes in the descriptions of achievement levels to reflect the reading processes used by students when interpreting, critiquing, or evaluating text. Nonetheless, NAEP still measures reading comprehension so the trend line can be maintained.

“We deliberately set out to establish standards that are fair but challenging,” said Driscoll, who formerly served as Commissioner of Education in Massachusetts. “In fact, we have seen improvement in student performance since the NAEP reading trend line began in 1992. Future assessments will tell whether the progress noted from earlier years in reading comprehension will continue.”

The Nation’s Report Card: Reading 2009 and additional data collected from the 2009 reading assessment are available online at <http://nationsreportcard.gov>.

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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.