

NEWS RELEASE

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The Nation's Report Card Reveals Declining Scores for Students Entering and Exiting High School

Latest scores show post-pandemic challenges in mathematics, reading, and science

WASHINGTON (September 9, 2025)—Average scores declined from 2019 to 2024 for the nation's eighth-graders in science and twelfth-graders in mathematics and reading, according to the latest results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—also known as The Nation's Report Card. The 2024 results, released today by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), are the first post-pandemic NAEP scores for each assessment.

The 2024 scores can be examined alongside results from previous decades, revealing longer-term trends. Compared to the findings from the first year of each assessment's trendline:

- The grade 8 science score in 2024 was not measurably different than in 2009.
- The grade 12 mathematics score in 2024 was lower than in 2005.
- The grade 12 reading score in 2024 was lower than in 1992.

"These results are sobering," NCES Acting Commissioner Matthew Soldner said. "The drop in overall scores coincides with significant declines in achievement among our lowest-performing students, continuing a downward trend that began even before the COVID-19 pandemic. Among our nation's high school seniors, we're now seeing a larger percentage of students scoring below the *NAEP Basic* achievement level in mathematics and reading than in any previous assessment."

The latest NAEP results also provide new information about students' educational experiences. Of note, the 2024 results are the first national indicator of post-pandemic absenteeism rates among twelfth-graders. Nearly a third (31 percent) of twelfth-graders reported missing three or more days from school in the previous month in 2024, up from 26 percent in 2019. The findings reflect similar patterns seen in previously released NAEP results for fourth- and eighth-graders.

Grade 8 Science

The NAEP science assessment measures students' knowledge of three broad content areas—physical science, life science, and Earth and space sciences—and four science practices—identifying science principles, using science principles, using scientific inquiry, and using technological design—that describe how students use their science knowledge.

The 2024 results mark the first time that the average science score for eighth-graders fell since the current assessment began in 2009. Lower-, middle-, and higher-performing students saw score declines from 2019 to 2024. Scores for lower-performing students at the 10th percentile and 25th percentile were lower in 2024 than in all previous assessment years. As a result, the gap between the lowest- and highest-performing students was also larger in 2024 than in any previous assessment.

"Layered on top of the eighth-grade NAEP scores we released earlier this year for mathematics and reading, the new science data clearly underscore ongoing struggles for students who are embarking on their high school careers," remarked Soldner.

Achievement-Level Findings

- Thirty-one percent of eighth-graders performed at or above the *NAEP Proficient* achievement level in 2024, which was four percentage points lower than in 2019 but not significantly different

from 2009. At this level, eighth-graders in 2024 were likely able to describe the function of body systems (circulatory, respiratory, digestive).

- Thirty-eight percent of eighth-graders performed below the *NAEP Basic* achievement level, which was five percentage points higher than in 2019 but not significantly different from 2009. Eighth-graders performing at the *NAEP Basic* level in 2024 were likely able to correctly identify what process happens to most microorganisms on food after they enter the human body.

Additional Findings

- Scores declined between 2019 and 2024 in three of the four regions of the country—the Northeast, Midwest, and South. The score was not significantly different for students in the West.
- Scores declined between 2019 and 2024 for many student groups, including American Indian/Alaska Native, Hispanic, and White students. Scores also declined for both male and female students. While the science score gap between male and female students had closed in 2019, boys once again outscored girls in 2024.
- A smaller percentage of eighth-graders reported that they often or always participated in scientific inquiry-related classroom activities in 2024 (14 percent) than in 2019 (17 percent). Such activities include using evidence from experiments to explain why something happens or combining information from multiple sources for an assignment.

Grade 12 Mathematics

The NAEP mathematics assessment measures students' knowledge in four content areas—number properties and operations; measurement and geometry; data analysis, statistics, and probability; and algebra—as well as students' ability to solve problems in mathematical and real-world contexts.

In 2024, the average grade 12 mathematics score was the lowest it has been since the current assessment began in 2005. Scores declined between 2019 and 2024 for all but the highest-performing students at the 90th percentile. With declining scores for lower-performing students at the 10th and 25th percentiles, the achievement gap between the highest- and lowest-performing students continued to widen and was larger in 2024 than in all previous assessments.

Achievement-Level Findings

- Twenty-two percent of twelfth-graders performed at or above the *NAEP Proficient* achievement level in 2024, which was two percentage points lower than in 2019 but not significantly different from the percentage in 2005. Twelfth-graders performing at the *NAEP Proficient* level in mathematics in 2024 were likely able to find the perimeter and the area of a figure that results from cutting four corners from a square.
- Forty-five percent of twelfth-graders performed below the *NAEP Basic* achievement level, which was five percentage points higher than in both 2019 and 2005. Twelfth-graders performing at the *NAEP Basic* level in mathematics in 2024 were likely able to determine probabilities of simple events from 2-way tables and verbal descriptions.

Additional Findings

- Scores declined between 2019 and 2024 for students in the South and West regions of the country. Scores were not significantly different for students in the Northeast or Midwest.
- Compared to 2019, scores were lower in 2024 for many student groups, including Black, Hispanic, and White students, as well as male and female students.
- Thirty-six percent of twelfth-graders in 2024 reported having a high level of confidence in their mathematics knowledge and skills—down from 38 percent in 2019. Students were asked about their confidence in performing eight mathematics-related tasks, such as explaining to a classmate how they solved a mathematics problem, using correct mathematical words and symbols when showing their work, and determining a 20 percent tip of a 67-dollar restaurant bill.
- An estimated 33 percent of twelfth-graders were academically prepared for college in mathematics in 2024, down from 37 percent in 2019. Learn more about the [preparedness research](#) conducted by the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB).

Grade 12 Reading

The NAEP reading assessment uses literary and informational texts to measure students' reading comprehension skills, particularly as they relate to students' abilities to locate and recall information, integrate and interpret what they have read, and critique and evaluate the text.

The average grade 12 reading score was lower in 2024 than in all previous assessments. Similar to the findings for grade 12 mathematics, only scores for the highest-performing students at the 90th percentile did not decline from 2019 to 2024, and scores for lower-performing students at the 10th and 25th percentiles continued declines that began before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Achievement-Level Findings

- Thirty-five percent of twelfth-graders performed at or above the *NAEP Proficient* achievement level in 2024, which was two percentage points lower than in 2019 and five percentage points lower than in 1992. Twelfth-graders performing at the *NAEP Proficient* level in reading in 2024 were likely able to connect key details within and across texts and use those details to draw complex inferences about the author's purpose, tone, word choice, and related ideas.
- Thirty-two percent of twelfth-graders performed below the *NAEP Basic* achievement level, which was two percentage points higher than in 2019 and 12 percentage points higher than in 1992. Twelfth-graders performing at the *NAEP Basic* level in reading in 2024 were likely able to locate and identify relevant details in the text in order to support literal comprehension.

Additional Findings

- Scores declined between 2019 and 2024 for students in the Midwest and South regions of the country. Scores were not significantly different for students in the Northeast or West.
- Compared to 2019, scores were lower in 2024 for many student groups, including White students and female students.
- Twenty-six percent of twelfth-graders reported a high level of interest and enjoyment in reading in 2024—up from 25 percent in 2019. In contrast, 45 percent of students reported a low level of interest and enjoyment in reading in 2024—down from 49 percent in 2019.
- An estimated 35 percent of twelfth-graders were academically prepared for college in reading in 2024, down from 37 percent in 2019. Learn more about the [preparedness research](#) conducted by the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB).

About the Assessment

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 U.S. public and private schools know and are able to do in various subjects.

From January to March 2024, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) assessed approximately 23,000 eighth-graders in science, 19,300 twelfth-graders in mathematics, and 24,300 twelfth-graders in reading. Scores for grade 8 science and grade 12 mathematics and reading are reported at the national level and for groups of students based on their race/ethnicity, sex, socioeconomic status, the type of school they attend, and other demographic characteristics. Participating students, their teachers (in grade 8 only), and school leaders also answered survey questions about students' opportunities to learn inside and outside of school.

The NAEP achievement levels are performance standards established by the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) to describe what students should know and be able to do in various subjects and grades. Students performing at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level are able to demonstrate competency over challenging subject matter. The *NAEP Basic* achievement level signifies partial mastery of the knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work.

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

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The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 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. NAEP has been reporting information about what students across the country know and can do in major school subjects since 1969. NCES, within the Institute of Education Sciences, administers NAEP. The NCES commissioner is responsible by law for carrying out the NAEP project. Policy for the NAEP program is set by the National Assessment Governing Board, an independent, bipartisan board whose members include governors, state legislators, local and state school officials, educators, business representatives, and members of the general public.