

The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2009

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as “The Nation’s Report Card,” is the only nationally representative continuing evaluation of what the nation’s schoolchildren know and can do. The 2009 Reading Assessment was administered to a cross section of students in grades 4 and 8 who responded to questions designed to measure their reading comprehension across two types of text: literary and informational. The framework for the assessment is developed by the National Assessment Governing Board, an independent group of public officials, policy experts, teachers, and others. The National Center for Education Statistics develops, administers, and analyzes the assessment.

The results of the assessment are based on representative samples of 178,800 fourth graders from 9,530 schools and 160,900 eighth graders from 7,030 schools. The trend in reading began in 1992. The results are reported as percentages of students performing at or above three achievement levels: **Basic** (partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills); **Proficient** (solid academic performance; competent in challenging subject matter); and **Advanced** (superior performance).

NAEP reading results for grades 4 and 8 are also reported as average scores on a 0–500 scale. Because NAEP scales are developed independently for each subject, scores cannot be compared across subjects. In addition to reporting an overall reading score for each grade, scale scores are reported at five

percentiles to show trends in results for students performing at lower (10th and 25th percentiles), middle (50th percentile), and higher (75th and 90th percentiles) levels.

The Reading Framework

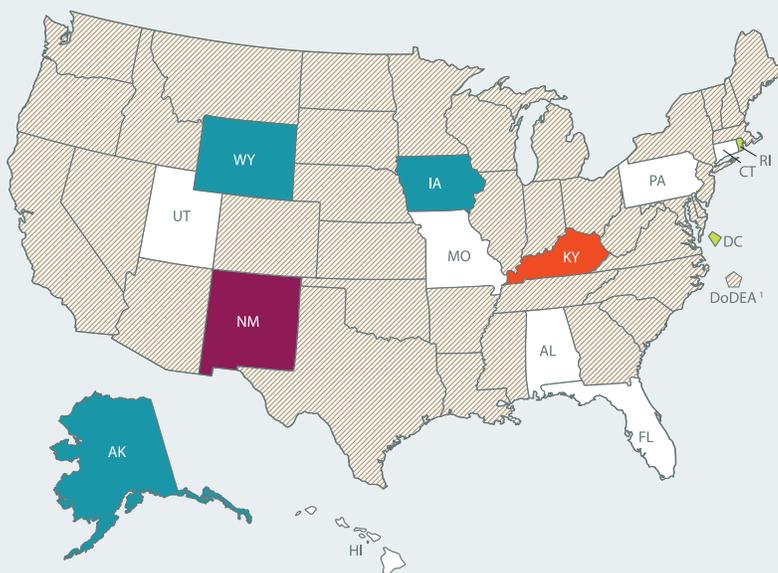
The Reading Framework, which describes the knowledge and skills to be assessed, is new for 2009 and includes a number of significant changes. Compared to the previous versions, this Framework puts a greater emphasis on high-quality literature and informational text, exposing students to more challenging test questions. It tests poetry in grade 4 for the first time. It asks students to do more than just locate and recall; to a greater degree than in the past, it asks students to draw conclusions and evaluate the quality of arguments. Finally, the Reading Framework assesses how well students understand word meanings in context.

The new framework has also led to changes in the descriptions of achievement levels; they now focus more on the broader range of skills measured by this latest assessment, especially the skills of evaluating, critiquing, integrating, and interpreting.

Highlights of the 2009 Results

The NAEP 2009 Reading Assessment shows that, for the nation overall, reading scores for fourth graders were flat since 2007. Scores for eighth graders increased. And there was little change over time in the score gaps between demographic groups.

Scores increase in three states/jurisdictions at grade 4 and nine states at grade 8



Compared to 2007, average reading scores for public school students in 2009

- increased at both grades** in Kentucky;
- increased at grade 4 only** in the District of Columbia and Rhode Island;
- decreased at grade 4 only** in Alaska, Iowa, and Wyoming;
- increased at grade 8 only** in Alabama, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Missouri, Pennsylvania, and Utah;
- decreased at grade 4 but increased at grade 8** in New Mexico; and
- showed no significant change at either grade** in 38 states and jurisdictions.

¹ Department of Defense Education Activity (overseas and domestic schools).

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2007 and 2009 Reading Assessments.

Fourth Grade:

Nationwide, there was no significant change in fourth grade performance in reading from 2007 to 2009. However, three states showed improved scores for that period, and four states showed declines.

About two-thirds (67 percent) of fourth graders performed at or above the *Basic* level in 2009, and one-third (33 percent) performed at or above *Proficient*. Both percentages were unchanged from 2007 but were higher than previous assessment years. Eight percent of fourth graders performed at the *Advanced* level, which was the same as in 2007 but higher than in 1992.

None of the five racial/ethnic groups reported showed a significant change in scores from 2007 to 2009. The 26-point score gap between white and black students was not significantly different from the gap in 2007, but it was narrower than in any previous assessment year.

Other gaps persist. Fourth grade students in private schools had reading scores that were 15 points higher than those of fourth graders in public schools. Fourth grade girls continued to outperform boys—by 7 points—but this gap for 2009 is not statistically different from that reported in 2007.

Eighth Grade:

The average reading scores for the nation's eighth graders rose from 2007 to 2009. Nine states also showed improvement, and no state showed a decline.

In 2009, about three-quarters (75 percent) of eighth graders performed at or above the *Basic* level, and one-third (32 percent)

performed at or above *Proficient*. Both percentages were higher in 2009 than in 2007 and 1992. Three percent of eighth graders performed at the *Advanced* level in 2009, the same as in 2007 and 1992.

Results showed gains since 2007 for students in the lower and middle-performing percentiles, as well as for students who are eligible for free school lunch.

Scores were higher for eighth graders in all racial/ethnic groups since 2007. Score gaps between racial/ethnic groups continue but they were not significantly different from those recorded in 2007 or 1992.

Public school eighth graders showed gains in their average score from 2007 to 2009, but the 19-point gap between public and private school students was not significantly different from the gap recorded in any of the previous assessments with reportable results for both groups.

The gender gap for eighth grade readers narrowed slightly compared to 1992; the average reading score for males was higher in 2009 than in both 2007 and 1992, while the average score for female students remained essentially the same. The nine-point gender gap in 2009 was not significantly different from the gap in 2007, but it was smaller than the gap in 1992.

The full Reading 2009 Report Card is available at <http://nationsreportcard.gov/>.

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 set policy for NAEP.