



Expert Panel Discusses Solutions to Declining Scores on Nation’s Report Card

NEWS RELEASE

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Washington — Education leaders from across the country came together to discuss the path forward for U.S. students following the release of the Nation’s Report Card, which [showed steep declines in reading and math for fourth and eighth graders nationwide, in states, and among participating districts.](#)

Of particular concerns were sliding scores across the country in math. No states or districts posted gains, and eighth-grade students dropped by an unprecedented 8 points since 2019, the last time the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) was administered.

“It was systemic. It was comprehensive. It was double digits galore. It was everywhere. There are no positive stories around the math data, particularly for eighth grade where we saw all of the students declining at a higher rate,” said Peggy Carr, Commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics, which administers the Nation’s Report Card.

“There is no understating the urgency that must be felt by every policymaker, every political leader, every teacher, every mom and dad, and just go down the list,” said Beverly Perdue, former governor of North Carolina and chair of the National Assessment Governing Board, which sets policies for the Nation’s Report Card. ***“This is big stuff for America.”***

The panel of experts agreed math instruction should be a big focus of efforts to help students make up lost ground due to the pandemic’s devastating impact on U.S. schools. But there also was widespread agreement that no single solution would address the vast learning loss seen in the Nation’s Report Card.

“This is hard work. This is not a simple fix. This is not going back and doing the same thing we’ve done over and over and over again and expecting a different outcome. This is really reclaiming what we’re doing in the school day,” said Carey Wright, a Governing Board member and former Mississippi State Superintendent of Education

Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) was the only district among the 26 that participated in the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) to post score gains in eighth grade reading, and the district held steady in fourth-grade reading and eighth grade math — particularly notable in this challenging year.

LAUSD Superintendent Alberto Carvalho, also a Governing Board member, credited strong and sustained professional development for teachers, targeted tutoring for students, social and emotional learning interventions, and high-quality virtual learning experiences when schools were remote. ***“It’s a combined effect. It’s not just a single factor,”*** Carvalho said.

He urged education leaders and policymakers nationwide to learn from one another and from the data, rather than being defensive or pointing fingers. ***“What’s going on in your fourth-grade reading and math, or eighth-grade math and reading, that is vastly different from my district when our student populations are so similar? Therein lies the golden opportunity for America. Let’s look at the best practices that the data reveals and stop politicizing education.”***

Harvard education researcher Thomas Kane said research shows the learning losses the country is seeing will impact individual students’ futures as well as the well-being of their communities and the economy. He noted that if the 8-point decline in math were to become permanent for students, it could add up to a decline in future income worth almost a trillion dollars.

“We should start with the magnitude of losses in each district and in each state and put together a program of interventions that is enough to close these gaps. It’s not about having a few programs that are directionally correct but don’t add up to the magnitude of the loss that students have suffered,” Kane said.

Scott Marion, executive director of the Center for Assessment and a governing board member, cautioned U.S. schools need foundational changes. ***“If we are going to keep trying to pour these interventions into broken structures, they won’t last,”*** he said. ***“You have to build structures to sustain these interventions.”***

Virginia Secretary of Education Aimee Guidera said her state was rolling out new policies in response to the Nation’s Report Card and other data, which would bring more transparency and accountability to schools. ***“We are on the cusp of losing an entire generation of children, and we are taking this very seriously,”*** she said.

Roberto Rodriguez, assistant secretary for planning, evaluation, and policy development at the U.S. Department of Education said the federal government would be hosting convenings around the country to figure out how to address the broad declines. ***“The reality is we need to do much better as a country for all of our subgroups,”*** he said. ***“I think this is a clear call for us to double down on the instructional core.”***

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