



NEWS RELEASE

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New NAEP Report Compares Today's Student Performance With That of 40 Years Ago Long-term trend assessment shows improvement for black and Hispanic students since the 1970s

WASHINGTON—Today's 9- and 13-year-old students scored higher in reading and mathematics than their counterparts did 40 years ago according to *The Nation's Report Card: Trends in Academic Progress 2012*, a long-term trend assessment designed to track changes in the achievement of students ages 9, 13 and 17 since the 1970s. However, 17-year-olds did not show similar gains.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) long-term trend assessment is administered every four years and measures basic reading and mathematics skills to gauge how the performance of U.S. students has changed over time. Reading was first assessed in 1971, and mathematics in 1973. Results in 2012 from more than 50,000 public- and private-school students across the country are compared with assessments since the 1970s and offer an extended view of changes in achievement over the years.

Also known as The Nation's Report Card, NAEP main assessments monitor student achievement at grades 4, 8 and 12 and are given to a nationally representative sample of students in reading, mathematics and many other subjects. The long-term trend [differs](#) from the main NAEP assessments in both its questions and its measurement of achievement, aiming to capture changes over time in student progress. The long-term assessment results are reported in average scores (0 to 500), at percentiles (10th and 25th, or lower performing; 50th, or middle; and 75th and 90th, or higher performing), and performance levels of 150, 200, 250, 300 and 350.

Most notable in the long-term trend report is the improvement in scores among today's black and Hispanic students compared with black and Hispanic students who took the assessments years ago. In 2012, 9-year-old black students on average scored 36 points higher than their counterparts in the early 1970s in both reading and mathematics; 13-year-olds scored an average of 24 points higher in reading and 36 points higher in mathematics. Hispanic students at age 9 scored an average of 25 points higher in reading and 32 points higher in mathematics than their counterparts in the 1970s. At age 17, average scores for Hispanic students rose 21 points in reading and 17 points in mathematics. Score gaps between white students and other racial/ethnic groups persist, although those gaps are generally smaller than they were four decades ago.

In addition, the results show the gender gap is narrowing in each subject. At all ages, female students on average are scoring better in mathematics than they were 40 years ago. In reading, score gains from 1971 to 2012 for male students narrowed the gap at age 9. While female students continue to score higher than male students at that age, the increase in male students' average scores narrowed the gender gap by about 8 points, from a 13-point gap in 1971 to a 5-point gap in 2012.

"I am pleased to see some significant progress over the decades to narrow the achievement gaps. There are considerable bright spots, including remarkable improvement among black and Hispanic students and great strides for girls in mathematics," said David Driscoll, chair of the National Assessment Governing Board, which oversees the administration of NAEP assessments. "Assessing students at particular ages over the decades provides a unique perspective on learning and achievement and a way to take a step back to see overall achievement trends and just how far we've come."

Some of the biggest changes in achievement gaps between 1971 and 2012 include a 27-point narrowing between the average scores of black and white 17-year-old students in reading. Also in reading, the difference in average scores of black and white 9-year-old students went from 44 points to 23 points. In reading at age 13, the gap between average scores for black and white students narrowed from 39 points to 23 points. In mathematics, at age 13, the gap between the average scores for black and white students narrowed from 46 points in 1973 to 28 points in 2012.

Additional report findings:

- Scores for lower performing students are higher for all 3 age groups compared with those 40 years ago: In reading, lower performing 17-year-olds at the 10th and 25th percentiles made gains in mathematics at age 13; long-term gains made by lower performing students were larger than the gains made by higher performing students.
- At all ages, students who read for fun outside of class daily, or once or twice a week, on average scored higher than those who reported reading for fun a few times a year or less.
- Comparing the time spent reading for fun in 2012 and in 1984, the percentage of 9-year-old students in 2012 who read for fun is unchanged, but there is a decrease in reading for pleasure among those ages 13 and 17.
- Since 1986, the percentage of 13-year-old students taking algebra has doubled, and the percentage of 17-year-olds taking pre-calculus or calculus has more than tripled since 1978.
- Compared with the 1970s, a higher percentage of students at each age are in a grade below the one considered typical for their age.

The Nation's Report Card: Trends in Academic Progress 2012 is available at www.nationsreportcard.gov. Visit www.nagb.org/longtermtrend2012 for more information on recent results.

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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 Education Statistics is responsible by law for carrying out the NAEP project.

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.