

Embargoed For Release: 12:01 a.m. EDT May 3, 2023

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Eighth-Grade Scores Decline in Civics and U.S. History on the Nation's Report Card Scores Add to Stark Picture of Eighth-Grade Performance Across Subject Areas

Washington, D.C. — U.S. eighth graders saw score declines in civics and U.S. history on the latest Nation's Report Card (also called the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP), another reminder that the nation urgently needs to turn its attention to learning at the secondary level.

The average score on the 2022 civics assessment declined by 2 points since students last took the test in 2018, the first decline since the assessment began in 1998. Only 22 percent of eighth-graders scored at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level in civics.

The average score dropped 5 points on the NAEP U.S. history assessment between 2018 and 2022. The decrease continues a trend of declining scores that began in 2014. Just 13 percent of eighth-grade students scored at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level in U.S. history.

The score gaps between the nation's highest- and lowest-performing students increased in U.S. history between 2018 and 2022, a trend also seen in [math and reading in fourth grade](#).

"The wake-up calls keep coming. Education leaders and policymakers must create opportunities for students to gain the knowledge and skills they need to catch up and thrive. The students who took these tests are in high school today and will soon enter college and the workforce without the knowledge and skills they need to fully participate in civic life and our democracy. And let's not forget, these are the same students whose reading and math scores last fall raised alarm bells nationwide. We are failing our children if we do not act now," said **Beverly Perdue, National Assessment Governing Board chair and former North Carolina governor**.

The Governing Board sets policy and determines achievement levels for the Nation's Report Card, the only nationally representative assessment of student achievement in the U.S.

A Broader Picture of Eighth-Grade Learning

Today's news follows the October release of math and reading results for fourth- and eighth-grade students on the Nation's Report Card, which showed a widespread decline in achievement for eighth-grade students, especially in math.

Today, 26 percent of eighth-grade students are performing at or above the *NAEP Proficient* achievement level in math. In reading, 31 percent of eighth graders scored at or above the *NAEP Proficient* achievement level.

A smaller percentage of eighth grade students typically perform at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level in civics and U.S. history compared to other subjects tested, and that remains the case even amid major score declines in [math and reading in 2022](#).

"We have a lot of work to do to support our students. In the last year, we've seen score declines on NAEP in reading, math, civics, and U.S. history. The young people who took these tests represent the future of our country. We must maintain high expectations while closing learning gaps that pre-date but were exacerbated by the pandemic," said **Haley Barbour, former National Assessment Governing Board chair and former Mississippi governor**.

Importance of Civics and U.S. History

While *NAEP Proficient* remains the goal for students, nearly one-third of eighth graders are performing below *NAEP Basic* in civics, meaning they likely cannot describe the structure and function of government. In U.S. history, 40 percent of eighth graders performed below *NAEP Basic*, meaning they likely cannot identify simple historical concepts in primary or secondary sources.

In a survey accompanying the 2022 Nation's Report Card, more students reported low confidence in their civics knowledge and skills than in 2018. In addition, fewer students reported taking classes that mainly focus on U.S. history.

"I start every school year by sharing with students James Madison's challenge that 'a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.' In a democratic society, such knowledge must include a firm understanding of our nation's history and civic institutions. However, today's NAEP results show there is much work to be done in order to adequately prepare the next generation for active citizenship. That work must start with providing more courses and more time dedicated to U.S. history and how our government and society work," said **Patrick Kelly, National Assessment Governing Board member and AP U.S. Government and Politics teacher in South Carolina.**

For the full results of the Nation's Report card, visit the pages for [NAEP Civics](#) and [NAEP U.S. History](#). To read the National Center for Education Statistics press release on these results, visit <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/>.

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The National Assessment Governing Board is an independent, nonpartisan 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 the National Assessment of Educational Progress. For more information, visit www.nagb.gov.