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Nation's Report Card Shows Declines in 8th-Grade Science and 12th-Grade Math and Reading; Last in a Series of Post-Pandemic NAEP Data

(Sept. 9, 2025 — Washington, D.C.) The Nation's Report Card released today shows a 4-point drop for 8th graders in science and a 3-point decrease for 12th graders on both math and reading since 2019, echoing declines seen in other subjects and grades after the pandemic.

Students nationwide took the National Assessment of Educational Progress, also known as The Nation's Report Card or NAEP, in these grades and subjects from January to March 2024. The last time students took these assessments was in 2019, prior to COVID-19 and its disruption to education.

The lowest performers, students scoring at the 10th percentile, saw declines in 8th-grade science and 12th-grade math and reading, trends which pre-dated the pandemic, but worsened between 2019 and 2024.

A closer look at 8th grade NAEP science results

In 2024, 8th graders declined across all three science content areas assessed: Physical Science, Life Science, and Earth and Space Sciences.

Less than a third (31%) of 8th-grade students nationwide scored at or above *NAEP Proficient* on the science assessment. That's the benchmark the National Assessment Governing Board, which sets policy for NAEP, has set as the goal. More than a third (38%) of 8th-graders scored below *NAEP Basic* on science, the highest percentage of students since 2009. Eighth graders who score below *NAEP Basic* likely cannot recall that plants need sunlight to grow and reproduce.

In science, scores fell on average, but more sharply for lower-performing students. This has led to a large and growing achievement gap between the lowest- and highest-achieving students. It's a trend also seen on 8th-grade NAEP assessments in math, reading, and U.S. history.

In 2024, the gap on NAEP Science between male and female students re-emerged, with male students outscoring female students by 2 points. While present in previous NAEP administrations, this gap was not statistically significant in 2019.

Survey data showed a drop in student-reported participation in scientific inquiry-related activities at school, such as using evidence from an experiment to explain why something happened. In addition, a lower percentage of students (28%) reported having a high level of interest and enjoyment in science in 2024 compared to 2019 (38%).

Understanding 12th grade NAEP math and reading results

On the 12th-grade NAEP assessments, average math and reading scores dropped 3 points since 2019. In both subjects, scores declined across all percentiles except the 90th percentile, which includes the highest-performing students. The achievement gap between the highest- and lowest-performing students in 12th-grade math is wider than in all previous years. In reading, the gap between the highest and lowest performers is wider than in all previous years except 2019.

Just 22% of 12th graders scored at or above *NAEP Proficient* in math, down 2 percentage points from 2019. Meanwhile, 45% of 12th graders scored below *NAEP Basic* in math, the highest percentage ever to score below that achievement level. In reading, 35% of 12th graders scored at or above *NAEP Proficient*, down 2 percentage points from 2019. In 2024, the largest percentage ever—32%—scored below *NAEP Basic* in reading.

A broader picture of student learning

The full 2024 Nation's Report Card shows declines between 2019 and 2024 in 4th, 8th, and 12th grades in math and reading and 8th grade science. And, except in 12th grade reading, the gaps between the highest- and lowest-performing students have widened in 2024.

A third – 33% – of 12th graders were considered academically prepared for entry-level college math coursework in 2024, down from 37% in 2019. In reading, 35% of 12th grade students were considered academically prepared in 2024, down from 37% in 2019. Yet, surveys show an uptick in 12th graders who report being accepted to a four-year college, compared to 2019.

"Looking at these NAEP assessments, we see a clear story that tells us students need more support to thrive in school and succeed across core subjects and across grades," said former North Carolina Gov. Beverly Perdue, who chairs the National Assessment Governing Board. "If policymakers and education leaders fail to act now, students—and employers—will feel the impact of declining skills and knowledge gaps as the global workforce becomes more and more competitive. That bodes badly for them and badly for our country."

Added Martin R. West, Vice Chair of the Governing Board, "The Nation's Report Card represents the gold standard in assessment. Today's results, along with earlier NAEP releases, shine a light on a clear and concerning pattern — there are drops in achievement overall but these are largely driven by big declines among the lowest-performing students. It would be a mistake to dismiss or ignore this critical education data. Leaders should use it to guide their policies and practices, really focusing on struggling learners."

For the full results of The Nation's Report Card, visit www.nationsreportcard.gov.

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The **National Assessment Governing Board (Governing Board)** sets policy for The Nation's Report Card, also called the National Assessment of Educational Progress or NAEP. Created by Congress in 1988, the Governing Board is an independent, nonpartisan board whose 26 members include governors, state legislators, local and state school officials, educators, business representatives, and members of the general public. For more information about the Governing Board, visit www.nagb.gov.

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