



NEWS RELEASE

Embargoed for Release: 12:01 a.m. EDT, April 23, 2020

CONTACT: Stephaan Harris, (202) 357-7504, Stephaan.Harris@ed.gov

Grade 8 Students' NAEP Scores Decline in Geography and U.S. History; Results in Civics Unchanged Since 2014

National assessments for 2018 show comparisons with 2014

WASHINGTON — Scores for eighth-grade students across the nation declined in geography and U.S. history and were unchanged in civics compared to results in 2014, according to the most recent National Assessments of Educational Progress (NAEP) in those subjects.

The average score for students on the 2018 U.S. history assessment dropped 4 points since 2014, while the average score for geography dropped 3 points. Compared to the first assessment year in civics, the average score was higher in 2018 than in 1998, and for U.S. history, the average score was higher than in 1994.

“We are disappointed to see the declines in U.S. history and geography and the lack of progress in all three assessments,” said Gov. Haley Barbour, chair of the National Assessment Governing Board, which sets policy for NAEP. “These subjects are essential components of the well-rounded education that we want for our students and to understand and effectively participate in our republic.”

Results for NAEP are reported in several ways, including as percentages of students performing at or above three NAEP achievement levels (*NAEP Basic*, *NAEP Proficient*, and *NAEP Advanced*). Students performing at or above *NAEP Proficient* demonstrate solid academic performance and competency over challenging subject matter. On the U.S. history assessment, 15 percent of students performed at or above *NAEP Proficient* in 2018. Of the students who took the 2018 civics assessment, 24 percent scored at or above *NAEP Proficient*; for geography, it was 25 percent.

In addition, NAEP reports scores by lower- (10th and 25th percentiles), middle- (50th percentile), and higher-performing students (75th and 90th percentiles). Compared to results in 2014, there was no change across the five selected percentiles in civics in 2018. However, scores decreased in U.S. history for all but students at the highest-scoring percentile and decreased in geography for lower-performing students.

“While any decline on a NAEP assessment is troubling, we’re particularly concerned about seeing decreases among students in the lowest-performing groups,” said Lesley Muldoon, the executive director of the National Assessment Governing Board. “This pattern echoes the mathematics and reading results for 2019 and should motivate us all to address the factors behind these declines for struggling students.”

NAEP also collects data on factors inside and outside the classroom that relate to student learning. During the school year, lower-performing students participated less frequently in some history-related practices (such as examining the causes of important events or analyzing the relationship between two historical events) than higher-performing students in 2018. About half

of eighth-graders reported taking a class in eighth grade that focused mainly on civics and/or the U.S. government; those students scored higher (157) than students who reported not taking such a class (150).

Progress Over Time

A brighter picture emerges over the long term, since each assessment was first administered.

Compared to the first NAEP Civics administration in 1998, the score gap in 2018 between White and Hispanic students narrowed by 10 points. In addition, the score gap between those identified as English language learners and those not identified as English language learners narrowed by 12 points.

In geography, compared to the first assessment year in 1994, score differences have narrowed between White and Black students and White and Hispanic students. The score gaps in 2018 also have narrowed between students whose parents did not finish high school and those whose parents had higher education levels compared to 1994.

Compared to the first U.S. history assessment in 1994, average scores in 2018 have increased for White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander students. The White-Black and White-Hispanic score differences on U.S. history have remained about the same since 1994.

This table shows the knowledge and skills students at the *NAEP Proficient* level have achieved:

Civics	<p>Students can understand and explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Differences between government and civil society, and American ideals and reality ▪ Separation of powers among branches of government ▪ How citizens can influence government ▪ Events that have international consequences
Geography	<p>Students can understand, describe, and explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fundamental vocabulary, analytical concepts, physical and cultural features, and regional patterns ▪ Locational questions requiring integration of two or more geographic sources ▪ Case studies about how regions influence trade and migration patterns, and cultural and political interaction
U.S. History	<p>Students can explain, recognize, and understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The significance and connection of people, places, events, ideas, and documents ▪ Opportunities, perspectives, and challenges of a diverse cultural population ▪ Historical themes while citing evidence from primary and secondary sources to support conclusions

Also known as The Nation’s Report Card, NAEP is the country’s only ongoing, nationally representative assessment of education. It provides objective, independent data about the progress of American education in a variety of subjects and grade levels as well as insights into the contexts in which students learn and educators work.

The digitally based assessments were administered from January to March 2018 to a nationally representative sample of eighth-graders from about 780 schools.

“In a moment when our society is discussing what government should and can do amid the COVID-19 pandemic, we clearly see the value of a strong civics education,” said Patrick Kelly, a U.S. government and politics teacher based in Columbia, S.C., and Governing Board member. “Understanding COVID-19 within the context of past pandemics like the Spanish Flu speaks to the importance of U.S. history, while learning how and where the virus has spread globally reflects the importance of the study of geography. The circumstances and impact of this pandemic reinforce the critical importance of these subjects to our students’ education.”

#

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.