

## What is The Nation's Report Card?

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THE NATION'S REPORT CARD, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas. Since 1969, assessments have been conducted periodically in reading, mathematics, science, writing, history/geography, and other fields. By making objective information on student performance available to policymakers at the national, state, and local levels, NAEP is an integral part of our nation's evaluation of the condition and progress of education. Only information related to academic achievement is collected under this program. NAEP guarantees the privacy of individual students and their families.

NAEP is a congressionally mandated project of the National Center for Education Statistics, the U.S. Department of Education. The Commissioner of Education Statistics is responsible, by law, for carrying out the NAEP project through competitive awards to qualified organizations. NAEP reports directly to the Commissioner, who is also responsible for providing continuing reviews, including validation studies and solicitation of public comment, on NAEP's conduct and usefulness.

In 1988, Congress established the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) to formulate policy guidelines for NAEP. The Board is responsible for selecting the subject areas to be assessed from among those included in the National Education Goals; for setting appropriate student performance levels; for developing assessment objectives and test specifications through a national consensus approach; for designing the assessment methodology; for developing guidelines for reporting and disseminating NAEP results; for developing standards and procedures for interstate, regional, and national comparisons; for determining the appropriateness of test items and ensuring they are free from bias; and for taking actions to improve the form and use of the National Assessment.

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# NAEP 1994 READING : A First Look

*Findings from the  
National Assessment of Educational Progress*

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# HIGHLIGHTS

The 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in reading continues a 25-year mandate to assess and report the educational progress of students at grades 4, 8, and 12. National results are provided that describe students' reading achievement at each grade and within various subgroups of the general population. In addition, results are reported for individual states that choose to participate. The 1994 NAEP Reading Assessment included a state-by-state component at Grade 4, as well as the national component at all three grades.

This report is a *first look* at the results of the 1994 reading assessment. It presents national and state-level findings of students' overall proficiency in reading. Furthermore, this report provides comparisons between students' reading performance in 1994 and the performance of their counterparts in 1992. Results are also reported according to the reading achievement levels established by the National Assessment Governing Board. The following highlights represent the major findings presented in this report:

- ▶ The most striking finding from the 1994 assessment is that the average reading proficiency of twelfth-grade students declined significantly from 1992 to 1994. This decline was observed across a broad range of subgroups. Significant changes in average proficiency were not observed for the nation at grades 4 or 8.
- ▶ The percentage of twelfth-grade students reaching the Proficient achievement level in reading declined since 1992. There also was a decrease from 1992 to 1994 in the percentage of twelfth graders at or above the Basic level.
- ▶ In 1994, 30 percent of fourth graders, 30 percent of eighth graders, and 36 percent of twelfth graders attained the Proficient level in reading. Across the three grades, three to seven percent reached the Advanced level.
- ▶ In 1994, twelfth graders in the Northeast, Central, and West regions displayed lower average reading proficiency than their counterparts in 1992.
- ▶ Across the nation, declines in average proficiency from 1992 to 1994 were observed for fourth-grade Hispanic students as well as for White, Black, and Hispanic students in grade 12.
- ▶ Across all three grades, female students continued to display higher reading achievement than male students. The national decline in twelfth-grade reading performance since 1992 was evident for both males and females.
- ▶ Consistent with previous reports, reading proficiency at all grades was higher on average for students whose parents had more education. Among twelfth graders, the decline in average reading proficiency since 1992 was evident at all levels of parental education.
- ▶ In 1994, fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-grade students attending nonpublic schools displayed higher average reading proficiency than their counterparts attending public schools. Both public school and nonpublic school twelfth graders demonstrated a decline in performance since 1992.
- ▶ The eight states with the highest average reading proficiency in 1994 for public school fourth graders included — Maine, North Dakota, Wisconsin, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Iowa, Connecticut, and Montana.
- ▶ Between 1992 and 1994, there were significant declines in average reading proficiency in eight jurisdictions — California, Delaware, Louisiana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Virginia.



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