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HIGHLIGHTS

The 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in geography continues a 25-year mandate to assess and report the educational progress of America's students. National results are provided that describe students' geography achievement at grades 4, 8, and 12 and within various subgroups of the general student population.

This report is a *first look* at the results of the NAEP 1994 geography assessment. It presents national findings of students' overall performance on the NAEP geography scale, and summary data for the major demographic subpopulations in the nation. Results are reported on a 500-point NAEP scale, used to show comparisons and trends over time, and according to the achievement levels, which are in a developmental stage, established by the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB).

What's New About This Assessment?

- ▶ The 1994 geography assessment is the first full-scale assessment of geography conducted by NAEP. The test framework, adopted by NAGB after a national consensus process, provides for an assessment of knowledge, understanding, and applications in the major content areas of geography education.
- ▶ This assessment requires students not only to demonstrate factual knowledge but also to think critically about geographic issues, such as the physical and human processes that shape patterns of settlement and trade. About 60 percent of assessment time was devoted to questions requiring short or extended written answers, and the remainder to multiple-choice questions (see Appendix B). Some questions require a student to draw inferences from the information provided. A wide variety of maps and graphs are used to measure the ability of students to interpret and analyze geographic materials.

How Did We Do as a Nation?

- ▶ The pattern of average scores by grade — fourth grade, 206; eighth grade, 260; and twelfth grade, 285 — is typical of other subjects assessed by NAEP.
- ▶ As is typically the case in subjects assessed by NAEP, student performance varied by region. Among high school seniors, for example, students in the Southeast had lower average scores than did those in the other regions.

The results are reported according to the achievement levels established by the National Assessment Governing Board. For each grade there are three performance standards: *Basic* - partial mastery; *Proficient* - solid academic performance that demonstrates competency in challenging subject matter; and *Advanced* - superior performance.

- ▶ 22 percent of fourth graders, 28 percent of eighth graders, and 27 percent of twelfth graders reached the *Proficient* level.
- ▶ Across the three grades, about 70 percent of students attained at least the *Basic* level.
- ▶ Two to four percent reached the *Advanced* level.

How Did the Various Subgroups of Students Differ?

Although subsequent reports will provide a context for understanding subgroup differences, several differences are noted in this report:

Based on average scores:

- ▶ Consistent with findings in other subject areas assessed by NAEP, performance in geography at all grades was higher for students whose parents had more education.
- ▶ At all three grades, White and Asian students had significantly higher scores than did Black and Hispanic students.
- ▶ Fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-grade students attending nonpublic schools displayed higher performance in geography than their counterparts attending public schools.
- ▶ At grades 4, 8, and 12, males tended to have higher scores than females.

The differences in percentages of students reaching the Proficient level among various subgroups of students (by race/ethnicity, parents' education, type of school, and gender) were generally similar to those observed with the average scores.

