



NEWS RELEASE

Embargoed: Hold for release until Wednesday, May 4, 2011, at 11 a.m. (EDT)

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Fourth Graders Post Gains in Civics Knowledge and Skills Since 1998 While Twelfth Graders Lose Ground From 2006 *Nation's Report Card Shows Hispanic Students Improving*

Washington, D.C.—Achievement by U.S. fourth graders in civics has increased while twelfth graders' performance has declined, according to the *Civics 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress at Grades 4, 8, and 12*—known as The Nation's Report Card.

The 2010 report showed that fourth graders posted the highest civics score since 1998, with the percentages of students at or above the *Basic* and *Proficient* achievement levels higher than in 2006 and 1998. However, high school seniors scored lower in 2010 than in 2006, and had a lower percentage at or above *Proficient* compared to 2006. There was no significant change in the overall score for eighth graders compared to 2006 and 1998.

Twelfth-grade girls scored lower in 2010 compared to the civics assessments in 2006 and 1998. Hispanic students made gains with average scores increasing from 1998 to 2010 in all grades.

The NAEP civics assessment measures the knowledge and skills critical to the responsibilities of citizenship in America's constitutional democracy. Comparing the results from the 2010 civics assessment to results from 1998 and 2006 shows how students' knowledge and skills have progressed over time.

“We are encouraged by the gains in civics achievement being made by our nation's Hispanic students, who are an increasingly important voice in our democracy,” said David P. Driscoll, chair of the National Assessment Governing Board, which sets policy for NAEP. “But clearly we need to reverse the trend for our twelfth graders—particularly the drop in scores for twelfth-grade girls—so they too understand important concepts that contribute to a full civic life.”

The 2010 NAEP civics assessment was administered by the National Center for Education Statistics to nationally representative samples of public and private school students, which included about 7,100 fourth graders, 9,600 eighth graders, and 9,900 twelfth graders. The results are reported as average scores on a 0 to 300 scale and as percentages of students scoring at or above three achievement levels: *Basic*, *Proficient*, and *Advanced*. *Basic* denotes partial mastery of the knowledge and skills fundamental for proficient work. *Proficient* represents solid academic performance and competency over challenging subject matter. *Advanced* represents superior performance. The scores cannot be compared across grade levels.

The civics assessment contained a mixture of multiple-choice and constructed-response questions for each grade level. The assessment questions addressed three interrelated components: civic knowledge, intellectual and participatory skills, and civic dispositions. The civic knowledge questions assessed students' understanding of civic life, politics, and government; the foundations of the American political system; how the constitutional government employs principles of democracy; the relationship of the U.S. to other nations; and the role of citizens in American democracy.

At grade 4, students who scored at or above the *Basic* level (77 percent) were likely to identify a method used to select public office holders, students scoring at *Proficient* (27 percent) could identify a purpose of the U.S. Constitution, and students at *Advanced* (2 percent) could explain two ways a country could deal with a shared problem.

At grade 8, the 72 percent of students who performed at or above the *Basic* level were likely to identify a right protected by the First Amendment, the 22 percent who performed at or above the *Proficient* level could recognize a role performed by the Supreme Court, and the 1 percent who scored at the *Advanced* level could name two actions that citizens could take to encourage Congress to pass a law.

At grade 12, the 64 percent of students who performed at or above the *Basic* level were likely to interpret a political cartoon, the 24 percent scoring at or above *Proficient* could define “melting pot” and argue whether or not the phrase applied to the U.S., and the 4 percent scoring at *Advanced* could compare U.S. citizenship requirements to those of other countries.

Some detailed findings:

- **Twelfth-Grade Score Declines.** The average score of twelfth graders in 2010 declined 3 points from 2006 and was not significantly different from 1998. The percentage of students at or above *Proficient* in 2010 was lower than in 2006 but not significantly different from 1998.
- **Scores for Female Students Increase at Grade 4 and Decrease at Grade 12.** The average civics score for twelfth-grade girls decreased by 3 points from 2006 to 2010, while average scores for twelfth-grade boys did not change significantly from previous years. However, the average score for fourth-grade girls increased by 5 points over 2006, while scores for fourth-grade boys did not significantly change over the same period. There was no significant change in the average scores of eighth-grade girls and boys.
- **Scores Increase for Hispanic Students and Gap Closes.** Average civics scores for Hispanic students were higher than in 1998 for all three grades and higher in 2010 than in 2006 at grade 8. The average score for Hispanic eighth graders in 2010 was 5 points higher than in 2006 and 10 points higher than in 1998. Although the gap between the scores of White and Hispanic eighth-graders was 23 points in 2010, it was narrower than the gaps in 2006 and 1998. In twelfth grade, the 19-point gap between the scores of White and Hispanic students in 2010 was smaller than the gaps in 2006 and 1998. At grade 4, the White-Hispanic gap of 27 points narrowed compared to 1998, but had no significant change compared to 2006.
- **White-Black Achievement Gaps Persist.** White fourth graders, for instance, scored 24 points higher on average than Black fourth graders in 2010. The gap at this grade level narrowed compared to 1998, but was not statistically different compared to 2006. On average, White eighth graders scored 25 points higher than Black students in 2010, with no significant changes in gaps compared to 2006 and 1998. In the twelfth grade, the 29-point gap between White and Black students was not statistically different from the gaps in 2006 or 1998.

The Nation's Report Card: Civics 2010, Grades 4, 8, and 12 is available at www.nationsreportcard.gov. Additional information is available at www.nagb.org/civics.

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The National Assessment of Educational Progress is the only nationally representative, continuing evaluation of the condition of education in the United States. It has served as a national yardstick of student achievement since 1969. Through the Nation's Report Card, NAEP informs the public about what American students know and can do in various subject areas and compares achievement between states, large urban districts, and various student demographic groups.

The National Assessment Governing Board is an independent, bipartisan 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 oversee and set policy for NAEP.