

National Assessment of Educational Progress
U.S. History 2010 Report Card

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June 14, 2011

Good morning. I am here today to release the results of the 2010 U.S. History assessment. This is our first U.S. History assessment since 2006. This assessment measures how well students know the specific facts of American history, how well they evaluate historical evidence, and how well they understand change and continuity over time.

The assessment was administered in early 2010. We have national results for grades 4, 8, and 12. More than 7,000 fourth-graders took the assessment, while the grade 8 and grade 12 samples were both larger—11,800 or more. Overall results are based on the performance of both public and private school students. At grades 4 and 12, participation rate standards for separate reporting results of private school students were not met, so we only have private school results at grade 8 for 2010.

Student performance is presented in two ways—average scale scores, with a single 0-500 scale for all three grades, and separate achievement levels for each grade. The NAEP achievement levels—*Basic*, *Proficient*, and *Advanced*—are set by the National Assessment Governing Board, which sets policy for NAEP. NAEP scale scores tell us what students know and can do, while the NAEP achievement levels provide standards for what students should know and be able to do.

For both scale scores and achievement-level performance, we will be making comparisons back to previous assessments in 1994, 2001, and 2006. When making these comparisons, we must remember that all NAEP results are based on samples. This means that there is a margin of error associated with every score and percentage. When discussing changes in student performance—either increases or decreases—we only discuss those that are statistically significant—those that are larger than the margin of error.

Overview

The U.S. History assessment identifies four major themes in American history. At each grade, a specified percentage of questions, also referred to as “items,” deals with each theme. We have enough items for each theme to allow us to measure student performance

on each theme separately. The first theme is Change and Continuity in American Democracy from colonial times to the present, focusing on Ideas, Institutions, Events, Key Figures, and Controversies. The second theme is Culture—the Gathering and Interactions of Peoples, Cultures, and Ideas in the United States. The third theme is Technology—Economic and Technological Changes and Their Relationship to Society, Ideas, and the Environment. The last theme is World Role—which focuses on the changing ideas, institutions, and ideologies that affect American foreign relations.

The questions on the NAEP assessment measure these four historical themes across eight time periods of U.S. history which are as follows:

1. Beginnings to 1607
2. Colonization, Settlement, and Communities (1607–1763)
3. The Revolution and the New Nation (1763–1815)
4. Expansion and Reform (1801–1861)
5. Crisis of the Union: Civil War and Reconstruction (1850–1877)
6. The Development of Modern America (1865–1920)
7. Modern America and the World Wars (1914–1945)
8. Contemporary America (1945 to present)

While these periods are largely chronological, there can be some overlap to allow for concentration on a single broad topic. For example, the fifth period, “Crisis of the Union,” devoted to the Civil War, overlaps the period before and after the war, allowing for questions that relate to the causes of the war, the war itself, and the Reconstruction that followed.

U.S. History Grade 4

Now we’ll look at the results of the 2010 assessment, beginning with grade 4. Grade 4 students have an average score of 214 on a 500-point scale in 2010, which was higher than their average score of 205 in 1994, but not significantly different from their score of 211 in 2006.

When we examine student performance by percentile, we see increases among lower-performing students (10th and 25th percentile) of 22 and 12 points since 1994, and increases of 6 and 4 points for students performing at the 50th and 75th percentiles. When we compare student performance to 2006, we see only one statistically significant increase for students at the 50th percentile.

In 2010, the percentage of fourth-grade students who performed below *Basic* was 36 percent, 47 percent performed at *Basic*, 15 percent at *Proficient*, and 2 percent at

Advanced. Note that the changes in achievement-level results over time also reflected the score increases for the lower-performing 4th graders. For example, the percentage of students performing below *Basic* fell from 36 percent in 1994 to 27 percent in 2010. Scores at the 75th percentile also reflected the increase in the percentage of students at *Proficient* during the same time period.

We also looked at the percentages of students at the three achievement levels by race/ethnicity. We see declines in the percentages of students scoring below *Basic*, for White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander students, comparing 2010 to 1994. Only White students showed an increase in the percentage at *Proficient*. Our sample for American Indian/Alaska Native students was not large enough to provide reliable results in either 1994 or 2001. However, when we compare 2006 to 2010, we see no significant changes in the percentages of these students at any of the achievement levels.

Since 1994, the gaps in scores for White students as compared to Black students, and for White students compared to Hispanic students, have narrowed at grade 4. The scores for White students in U.S. history increased from 214 in 1994 to 224 in 2010. Scores for Black students have increased as well, from 176 in 1994 to 198 in 2010. The effect of this increase was to narrow the gap from 38 points to 26. A 23 point increase from 1994 to 2010 for Hispanic students was larger than the 9 point increase for White students during this same time period and this reduces the gap to 26 points.

In 2010, male fourth-graders scored 215 on the U.S. history assessment while female fourth-graders scored 213. The 2-point difference was not statistically significant. When we examine scores by the four individual history themes, however, male students did score higher than female students by a statistically significant margin in two themes—Change and Continuity in American Democracy and World Role. In the Culture and Technology themes, the differences in scores were not statistically significant.

NAEP reports results according to student eligibility for the National School Lunch Program. This gives us three groups, ranked according to family income level: those students eligible for free lunches, those eligible for reduced price lunches, and those whose family income is too high to make them eligible for this program. Because of changes in the availability of data, we can only make comparisons back to 2006. Scores varied according to student family income level, with lower-income students having lower scores. Grade 4 students who were eligible for free lunch, and those who were not eligible, show increases from 2006 to 2010.

Next we will discuss a sample question for Grade 4. In one question, students were shown a drawing, which dates from 1849, of a Sioux Indian camp. Students were asked to describe three ways the Sioux used natural resources to meet their needs, based on the picture.

An answer which received a “Complete” rating identified things in the drawing that the Sioux used, such as wood for fire, animal skins for housing, and wood for making barrels. Twenty-three percent of students received a “Complete” rating on this question, while 36 percent received a “Partial,” meaning that they failed to supply all three parts of a complete response.

U.S. History Grade 8

Turning to results for grade 8, average scores were higher than they had been in any previous assessment, rising from 259 in 1994 to 266 in 2010. Comparing 1994 to 2010, we see increases at all five percentile levels. Comparing 2006 to 2010, we see increases for lower- and middle-performing students (10th, 25th and 50th percentiles). This improvement is also reflected in the declining percentages of students scoring below *Basic* and the increased percentages of students at *Basic* and *Proficient*.

The average score for White students in 2010 was higher than in 1994 but not significantly different from 2006. For both Black and Hispanic students, scores in 2010 were higher than in any previous assessment. When we analyze the White-Black score gap at grade 8, we see that the 23-point gap in 2010 was narrower than in either 1994 or 2006. Scores for White students rose by 8 points since 1994, while scores for Black students rose by 13 points. The White-Hispanic score gap was 21 points in 2010. It is not significantly different from the gap in 1994, but it is narrower than the gap in 2006.

We also looked at eighth-grade score gaps over time between White and Asian/Pacific Islander students and White and American Indian/Alaska Native students. The score difference between White and Asian/Pacific Islander students has never been more than 5 points and none of the score gaps are statistically significant. The 14-point score gap between White and American Indian/Alaska Native students in 2010 was not statistically significant. However, the earlier score gaps were statistically significant. In addition, the score increase from 1994 to 2010 for American Indian/Alaska Native students was significant as well.

In 1994, both male and female students scored 259, and there was no gender gap. However, since that time the increase in scores for male students has been larger than the increase for female students, and the 2010 gap of 4 points in favor of male students is statistically significant. Male eighth-graders have higher scores than female students in three U.S. history themes: Change and Continuity in American Democracy, Technology, and World Role.

One of the questions on the grade 8 assessment asked students to identify the method chosen by the 1787 Constitutional Convention to settle the issue of whether slaves would be counted as part of a state’s population. Fifty-nine percent correctly chose the answer stating that each slave was counted as three-fifths of a person.

U.S. History—Grade 12

Now we'll discuss the results for grade 12. The average score for twelfth-graders in 2010 is higher than in 1994 but not significantly different from 2006. When we examine scores by percentile, we see no statistically significant differences at all. There were also no statistically significant changes for the percentages of grade 12 students at the NAEP achievement levels, for any year.

Examining the White-Black score gap in 2010, we see no changes in the size of the gap, compared to previous assessments. The average score for White students did increase from 1994, but not from 2006. There were no changes in average scores for Black students. The White-Hispanic score gap also did not change significantly. Scores for Hispanic students were higher in 2010 than in 1994.

Scores for both White and Asian/Pacific Islander students at grade 12 increased in 2010, compared to 1994. The 3-point score gap for White and Asian/Pacific Islander students was not statistically significant in 2010. Only the 9-point gap between these two groups in 1994 was significant. In 2001 the gap in scores for White and American Indian/Alaska Native students was not significant, but the gap was significant in the other three assessment years. The size of the gap in 2010 was not significantly different from the gap in 1994 or 2006.

Overall, male students scored 4 points higher than female students at grade 12 in 2010. They also scored higher on two of the four U.S. history themes—Change and Continuity in American Democracy and World Role. Male students at grades 4 and 8 also had higher scores for these two themes.

A question on the grade 12 assessment asked students to identify the country that supplied troops that opposed U.S. and South Korean forces in the Korean War, other than North Korea itself. Twenty-two percent of students correctly identified China as the source of those troops.

In 2010, 24 percent of grade 12 students reported taking an Advanced Placement or AP U.S. history course. The average score for these students was 304, while the average score for those who reported they did not take an AP U.S. history course was 284.

While 24 percent of grade 12 students said they took an AP U.S. history course in 2010, a year earlier NAEP's 2009 High School Transcript Study found that 13 percent did so, based on a review of a nationally representative sample of actual high school transcripts. Some grade 12 students may have meant that they were taking an advanced history course which they saw as the equivalent of an AP course.

In addition to the results of the 2010 U.S. history assessment, the report also contains highlights for grade 12 students with some data from the 2009 High School Transcript

Study, which presents information for those students who graduated from high school in 2009. The percentages of high school graduates who had access to U.S. history Advanced Placement courses—those who attended schools where they could have taken such courses—rose from 51 percent in 1990 to 80 percent in 2009. The increase occurred for the four reported racial/ethnic groups (White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander) as well.

We also looked at the percentages of graduates who had access to AP U.S. history courses in 1990 and 2009, as determined by their attendance at low, medium, or high minority schools. “Low minority schools” were schools whose student body included less than 10 percent Black and Hispanic students, while “medium minority schools” had student bodies that were 10 to 49 percent Black and Hispanic, and “high minority schools” were 50 percent or more. Access increased for graduates attending all three types of schools in 2009, but in 2009 only 66 percent of those attending low minority schools had access to AP U.S. history courses, compared to 88 and 90 percent, respectively, for those attending medium and high minority schools. Many low minority schools are located in rural areas.

The percentage of graduates attending schools where AP U.S. history courses are offered were also classified according to school location—whether urban, suburban, or rural. There were statistically significant increases for the percentages of graduates with access to AP US history who attend suburban and rural schools from 2000 to 2009. However, the percentage for rural schools still remains lower than the percentages for the two other locations.

The percentages of all graduates who actually took an AP history course increased from 6 percent in 1990 to 13 percent in 2009. The increase was statistically significant, as was the increase for all major racial/ethnic groups, except for Black graduates. In 2009, almost one-third of Asian/Pacific Islander graduates had taken an AP U.S. history course.

When we look at the percentages of high school graduates who actually took an AP U.S. history course according to whether they attended a low, medium, or high minority school, we find increases for graduates attending all three types of schools from 1990 to 2009. By 2009, the percentage was lower for graduates attending low minority schools than for graduates attending either medium or high minority schools.

If we consider the percentages of high school graduates who took an AP U.S. history course according to whether they attended an urban, suburban, or rural school, we again see increases regardless of location, comparing 2000 with 2009. However, the percentage in 2009 was lower for graduates in rural schools.

Summary

In conclusion, let's review student performance for all three grades:

- For grade 4, there was an increase in 2010 as compared to 1994. Low-performing students at the 10th and 25th percentiles had score increases of 22 and 12 points over this time period, and scores also increased for students at the 50th and 75th percentiles.
- For grade 8, scores in 2010 were higher than in any previous assessment. In 2010, students at all five percentile levels had higher scores than in 1994.
- At grade 12, overall scores were higher in 2010 than in 1994. However, there were no statistically significant increases for students at any of the five percentile levels.

And here are some highlights from the changes in scores for the individual racial/ethnic groups for all three grades:

- At grade 4, scores were higher in 2010 than in 1994 for all groups except American Indian/Alaska Native students, for whom our sample in 1994 was not large enough to provide reliable results. There were no significant changes in scores since 2006.
- At grade 8, scores were higher in 2010 than in 1994 for all five groups, and there were also increases since 2006 for Black and Hispanic students.
- At Grade 12, scores were higher in 2010 than in 1994 for White, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander students. There were no score increases for any of the racial/ethnic groups since 2006.

All of this information and much more can be found in the 2010 U.S. History Report Card. In addition, the initial release website will give you extensive information on the performance of students in each state, access to released assessment questions through NAEP's Questions Center, and the NAEP Data Explorer, our online data-analysis tool.