



**Embargoed: Hold for Release Until
Thursday, November 7, 2013, at 10 a.m. EST**

**STATEMENT ON *THE NATION'S REPORT CARD:*
*2013 Mathematics and Reading, Grades 4 and 8***

**WILLIAM D. WAIDELICH
Executive Director, Association for Middle Level Education**

It is my honor and pleasure to make a statement for these important and significant results in middle-level education. As the executive director of the Association for Middle Level Education, I have talked to hundreds of middle-level educators and leaders who have shared their experiences. These stories have included many successful practices and policies that are the keys to educating adolescents. The results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2013 assessments in mathematics and reading at grades 4 and 8 complement those successful practices and policies that these educators and leaders have implemented over the years.

It is now November, and teachers and students have been back in school for a few months. Educators will have delivered a successful back-to-school night, have been engaged in effective team meetings, and have forged strong relationships with their students. Teachers and administrators have settled down from the high of the first days of the new school year and they are covering the curriculum by moving through each day's planned activities, but are their students learning?

A fellow educator and colleague of mine, Lowell Hedges, taught me how to create a challenging curriculum and how to translate a curriculum guide into a lesson plan that resulted in student learning. He helped me develop techniques that converted a curriculum document that seemed static and sterile to problem-solving lesson plans that engaged my students and contributed to their success. As I developed my lessons, Dr. Hedges helped me recognize that covering the content and learning the content were not synonymous. For teaching to be effective, learning must take place. Having students grapple with and master advanced concepts and skills requires teachers to stretch themselves, moving well beyond "covering material."

Today's results suggest that educators are doing more than covering the curriculum. The results show that math scores were higher in 2013 than in all previous assessment years at grades 4 and 8, and that reading scores were higher in 2013 in comparison with all previous assessments at

grade 8 and all but the 2011 assessment at grade 4. In addition, the number of students performing at or above the *Proficient* level continues to increase.

I encourage you to study the information on The Nation's Report Card website. The results suggest that quality schools build the knowledge and skills young people need to succeed in a global knowledge-based world. There is improvement in nearly every student group:

- White, black, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander students as well as male and female students all scored higher in mathematics and reading in 2013 compared with scores from the early 1990s at grades 4 and 8.
- Changes in mathematics and reading scores at five selected percentiles (10th, 25th, 50th, 75th, and 90th) show the progress being made by lower-, middle-, and higher-performing students.
- White-black and white-Hispanic score gaps in mathematics and reading did not change significantly from 2011 to 2013, but there was some narrowing of racial/ethnic score gaps compared with the first assessment year (1990 in math and 1992 in reading).

Given the developmental diversity present in every classroom, gearing the curriculum to each student's level of understanding is a complex task. In addition to varied learning styles and different rates of development, students' cultural backgrounds and prior experiences must be taken into account—along with the impact of inclusion. These results suggest that more educators are adapting their curriculum to challenge students and are providing continuous progress for each and every student. This requires significant planning, flexibility, and collaboration among all teachers, counselors, school social workers, parents, and the students themselves.

I have recommendations for some of the most critical stakeholders who influence our children and therefore the results of these assessments.

- To educators: How are you gearing your curriculum to each student's level of understanding? I challenge you like Dr. Hedges challenged me. Be the best teacher you can be by making changes to your curriculum so that it challenges and provides continuous progress for all students.
- To parents: In grades 4 and 8, parental involvement is as important as ever. Do your children share the results of their major learning activities with you? Do you ask questions of your child's teacher to help understand the relationship between school and program options? Your involvement is critical to your child's success.
- To community members: Schools cannot educate children alone. The involvement of family and other adults in the community is linked with higher levels of student achievement. You can be a major educational resource by providing varied learning experiences and resource people for ongoing classroom studies.

- To students: Congratulations on showing improvement on the NAEP mathematics and reading assessments. Your extra effort will certainly result in more and better opportunities for you now and in the future. Keep up the good work.

All stakeholders must recognize that middle-level education serves a distinct developmental period, one in which youth mature and undergo major changes in every aspect of their being. Because the values, attitudes, interests, and habits of mind that adolescents formulate have lifelong implications, providing an appropriate educational program for this age group is an especially challenging, yet critically important task.

Education drives America's ability to lead in creativity and innovation, skills needed in a rapidly changing world. Improving education requires a practical set of iterative steps toward an ultimate goal. These results suggest that America's educators and leaders are taking the right steps by strengthening our schools to ensure our children's future success and our country's prosperity.