A Closer Look at NAEP

The **National Assessment of Educational Progress** (NAEP)—The Nation's Report Card—is the country's most respected continuing, independent, and nationally representative measure of student achievement in about a dozen subjects by nation, selected subjects by state, and selected large urban districts. NAEP is a congressionally authorized project of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) within the U.S. Department of Education. The NCES Commissioner carries out the NAEP project. The National Assessment Governing Board oversees and sets policy for NAEP.

Who We Measure

NAEP Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) program tests 4th and 8th graders in more than 20 large school districts.

What We Measure

Subject	National results only	National and state results	Urban district results	Grade 4	Grade 8	Grade 12 (National)
Arts	✓				✓	
Civics	✓				✓	
Economics	✓					✓
Foreign Language	✓					✓
Geography	✓				✓	
Mathematics		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reading		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Science		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Technology and Engineering Literacy	✓				✓	
U.S. History	✓				✓	
Writing		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

How We Measure

NAEP results are based on responses to multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Results are reported for students overall and for selected demographic groups such as race/ethnicity, gender, disability, English language learner status, and eligibility for the National School Lunch Program.

Achievement Levels: Findings are presented as percentages of students performing at three achievement levels:

Basic—Partial mastery of knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at that grade and subject

Proficient—Competency over challenging subject matter, including subject-matter knowledge, application of such knowledge to real-world situations, and analytical skills

Advanced—Superior performance

Scale Scores: Findings are also presented as average scores on a scale, which is developed based on a set of statistical procedures that summarizes student performance. Each subject has its own unique scale.

Item Maps: A visual representation of examples of questions students would likely answer correctly if they scored at a certain level, i.e., the types of items that indicate a *Proficient* or *Basic* level of knowledge.

Sampling: NAEP uses a sampling procedure to ensure students randomly selected to participate represent geographical, racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity across the nation. For each NAEP subject, there is an extensive pool of questions to determine students' knowledge and skills. Each student only takes a small portion of the assessment, for about an hour. This design allows NAEP to test a broad range of content and reduce the burden on students and schools.

Contextual Variables: NAEP collects information from students, teachers, and schools on factors related to student achievement. Contextual variables include classroom practices, school resources, and other factors. These responses are presented in relation to NAEP results to illuminate findings and extend the discussion, not to suggest any explanations or causes for scores.

Digital-Based Assessments: By 2017, all NAEP assessments are planned to be given on digital platforms—no more paper and pencil for any subject or grade.

Myths and Facts

It is helpful to know what NAEP can and cannot do. Below are some common misconceptions.

Myth: Results can be compared across grades and subjects.

Fact: Because each subject and grade has its own scale and measures specific sets of skills, performance for one grade and/or subject cannot be compared to other grades and subjects. Additionally, students are tested for NAEP in one subject only.

Myth: NAEP is directly linked to Common Core and state tests.

Fact: NAEP is an independent measure developed apart from state and local assessments and separate from the state-adopted assessments.

Myth: The NAEP Proficient level is like being on grade level.

Fact: Proficient on NAEP means competency over challenging subject matter. This is not the same as being "on grade level," which refers to performance on local curriculum and standards. NAEP is a general assessment of knowledge and skills in a particular subject.

Myth: Point gains and drops are equivalent to a grade-level's worth of knowledge.

Fact: NAEP scores cannot be calculated to figure out "grade level," which depends on performance on local curriculum and tests. Thus, no increase or decrease in points on the NAEP scale may be equated to a jump in grade level.

Myth: NAEP Performance is equivalent to a letter grade.

Fact: NAEP cannot be compared to grades given by teachers to students. Advanced is not an A, Proficient is not a B, and so on.

Myth: All score changes from year to year always mean improvement or decline in performance.

Fact: In each NAEP report, score changes that indicate a true movement in performance for a grade in a particular subject are deemed "statistically significant." You can have a score increase of 3 points for 4th graders in mathematics from 2013 to 2015, for example, and it may not mean the group as a whole truly showed improvement in skills and knowledge if the results did not show statistical significance.

Myth: I can figure out how a school or student did.

Fact: NAEP does not produce results for an individual student or school, and student privacy is always protected. Results can be reported out only by nation, state, and TUDA district.

Myth: NAEP tests everyone in a school.

Fact: A school selected to participate typically sees a small number of its students take NAEP (up to a few dozen for each subject and grade). Overall, NAEP tests a representative sample, so not every student in a school or school in a district participates, unlike with state tests.

Resources

The Nation's Report Card Site: Check here to see upcoming, current, and past report findings.
http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/

Data Explorer: Analyze NAEP data and create your own tables and graphics.
http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/

Questions Tool: Search, sort, and print sample questions. You can also test yourself using actual questions students answered and check out detailed item maps to see what students at each achievement level are likely to know and can do.
http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/itmrlsx/

State Comparisons: Compare state performance by various demographic groups.
http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/statecomparisons/

State Profiles: See NAEP performance results and student demographics for each state.
http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states/

District Profiles: Compare results of urban districts assessed by NAEP with each other and public school students in large cities.
http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/districts/

Schedule of Assessments: Get updated on which subjects and grades are being tested and when. NAEP is usually given from January to March in a given year.
http://www.nagb.org/naep/assessment-schedule.html

To contact the National Assessment Governing Board, call 202-357-6938 or visit www.nagb.org.