



The Daily Dish

Flunking Grades

DOUGLAS HOLTZ-EAKIN | JUNE 22, 2023

U.S. 13-year-olds recorded their worst [National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\)](#) scores in decades for math and reading. The math performance was the lowest since 1990, while reading was last this low in 2004. (See tables, below.)

NAEP reports scores at five selected percentiles: 10th, 25th, 50th, 75th, and 90th. The 2023 reading scores fell at all percentile levels compared to 2020. The declines were larger at the lowest two percentiles, although the differences were not statistically significant. In contrast, the math scores were significantly worse for lower-percentile students. “The declines ranged from 6 to 8 points for middle- and higher-performing students to 12 to 14 points for lower-performing students, with larger declines for lower performers in comparison to their higher-performing peers.”

These results are depressing, if unsurprising. They have the same character as the special [2022 survey of long-term trends](#). NAEP scores were trending downward prior to the COVID-19 pandemic; scores have declined precipitously in recent years and declined the most for lower-performing students. This round of NAEP scores carry the same policy message as well. There needs to be a major intervention to assist lower-performing students and also a sustained commitment to improve K-12 education systems overall. In the absence of such actions, education losses at the K-12 level over the past decades will in the long run translate to losses in labor skills, economic growth, and general prosperity.

READING

Year	Average score
2023	256
2020	260
2012	263
2008	260
2004	257
2004	259
1999	259
1996	258
1994	258
1992	260
1990	257
1988	257
1984	257
1980	258
1975	256
1971	255

MATHEMATICS

Year	Average score
2023	271
2020	280
2012	285
2008	281
2004	279
2004	281
1999	276
1996	274
1994	274
1992	273
1990	270
1986	269
1982	269
1978	264
1973	266