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Education Advocates React to Newly Released NAEP Scores

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The latest 8th grade U.S. history, civics, and geography results from the [National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\)](#), released Wednesday, April 29, showed no significant change from the last assessment in 2010.

For 2014, the NAEP scores show only 18 percent of students scored proficient in U.S. history, 23 percent in civics, and 27 percent in geography.

Neal McCluskey, associate director of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom describes the NAEP scores released today as "bleak."

"The scores weren't particularly surprising," said McCluskey. "We've known for quite some time that American students have pretty poor historical, geographical, and civic knowledge, and nothing has happened since 2010 that should have radically changed that. Indeed, the focus on mathematics and reading, to the possible detriment of history and civics, may have been amplified a bit with the move to Common Core standards, though since the advent of NCLB math and reading have been essentially the first and last words in school 'success.'"

School Choice as a Solution

Kara Kerwin, president of the Center for Education Reform says parents need additional educational options for their children if scores such as these are ever to improve.

"It's appalling that not even 30 percent of our nation's 8th graders are proficient in subjects like civics and history that are so fundamental to our nation's founding and democracy," said Kerwin. "If we don't act now and take bold steps to empower parents and accelerate the pace at which they have access to opportunities that dramatically change their children's learning outcomes, we will not be able to move our nation forward."

Underachievement in the Middle Class

Koret Senior Fellow and Senior Director of Education Studies at the Pacific Research Institute Lance Izumi, says the unimpressive NAEP scores are an indication many parents believe their children are attending better schools than they are in reality.

"One of the key points to understand is that the low scores on the history, geography and civics NAEP exams are not due only to the performance of low-income students," said Izumi. "Non-low-income students, many of whom are from middle-class and more affluent backgrounds, underperformed on each of the NAEP exams. In fact, as a group, non-low-income students scored well below the proficient benchmark on the history, geography and civics NAEP. The underachievement of these middle-class students indicates that many schools in affluent areas are not as good as parents think they are, and that middle-class parents need to push for reforms like school choice that will help them and their children."

Expanding Choice

Susan Meyers, a spokeswoman for the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, agrees with Izumi. Meyers says school choice will be necessary in order to see positive gains in measurements such as NAEP scores.

"Students can't function in today's world with such inadequate skills," said Meyers. "Until we have significant school choice in every community and schools feel the pressure to compete for students, they will continue with the same, tired and failed policies that are not educating our children. This is why parents want and deserve the freedom to choose a school that works for their child. They don't have time to wait."

Unsurprising and Disappointing

Matt Frendeway, national communications director for the American Federation for Children, says the NAEP scores are not at all surprising.

"National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores were released today, and like every year, serve as a national reminder that our nation's public education system is largely failing our students," said Frendeway. "The best way to challenge the status quo and help students is by offering parents access to choice and redefining public education by funding students, especially low-income students, and allowing parents to choose the best school for their son or daughter."

Executive Director Roger L. Beckett of Ashbrook Center, an independent center at Ashland University, says students are missing important lessons regarding the American government and Constitution.

"The recent NAEP scores in history and civics further demonstrate America's crisis in history and civics education," said Beckett. "The test scores remain abysmal. America is an experiment in constitutional self-government. If we are not preparing future generations with an understanding of our past as well as an understanding of how American government works, we

risk seeing this great experiment fail. Today's tests show yet again how badly we need a revival of history and civics education in our schools.”

McCluskey of the Cato Institute says he is not convinced the disappointing NAEP scores will change anything.

“These scores are neither surprising, nor will they likely have much lasting impact on the public consciousness,” said McCluskey. “History, civics and geography just don’t seem to matter that much in the current, top-down education system.”