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TOP STORIES

2008 Test Scores Of 17-Year-Olds Same As In 1971

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The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a study of the performance of American students, showed in its 2008 report, slight increases among younger students, but no significant change among 17-year-old students.

The report measures test scores of students in reading and mathematics and showed scores largely increased since 2004 for the three age levels that were tested. In reading, average scores for 9-year-olds were 12 points higher than the same tests in 1971. For 13-year-olds, the average was four points higher than 1971. There was no significant difference between the scores of 17-year-olds in 2008 and those in 1971.

In mathematics, average scores since 2004 increased for younger students, remained mostly the same for 17-year-olds. Compared with 1973, average scores for 9-year-olds rose 24 points, and 13-year-olds achieved a 15-point increase since 1973. The mathematics scores for 17-year-olds were not significantly different from the 1973 scores.

All the scores were counted on a 500-point scale and the results were released yesterday.

“The results at ages 9 and 13 are encouraging, but the lack of improvement by high school students provides little comfort,” said Darvin M. Winick, chairman of the National Assessment Governing Board, which oversees and sets policy for NAEP. “Clearly, we need to do more to ensure that students are continuing to learn throughout elementary, middle and high school and are prepared for higher education and the workforce.”

Neal P. McCluskey, associate director at the Cato Institute’s Center for Educational Freedom, warned that the slight increases in scores between 2004 and 2008 are not the harbingers of success that some might be tempted to think they are.

“Unfortunately, many people are likely to grab onto the little gains on the latest NAEP and declare gigantic, top-down reforms like the completely irrational No Child Left Behind Act a triumph,” said Mr. McCluskey. “Were a notion like that to become accepted wisdom, it would turn this report into an utter disaster. For one thing, given all the factors that affect student achievement, it is impossible to give credit to any single reform.

“Much more importantly, if these scores suggest anything, it is that all our grand five- and 10-year reform plans have been almost complete failures, like we’ve been buying more and more bushels of oranges for decades and getting just a thimbleful of extra juice. Quite simply, we’ve been lavishing huge amounts of money on a government monopoly inherently incapable of meaningful improvement.”

The study also found that although gaps in reading scores between white and black students have narrowed since 1971, the differences in racial scores did not change between 2004 and 2008. Furthermore, black students have enjoyed larger increases in test scores than white students since 1971.

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