

**From:** [Clare Crowson \(Clare@floridapromise.org\)](mailto:Clare@floridapromise.org) <[ClareAF@meridianstrategiesllc.com](mailto:ClareAF@meridianstrategiesllc.com)>

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**CC:**

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**Subject:** Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 11/2/11

## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 11/2/11

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## NATIONAL NEWS

### **New NAEP, Same Results: Math Up, Reading Mostly Flat**

Education Week

By: Erik W. Robelen

November 1, 2011

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/11/01/11naep.h31.html?tkn=zzwf%2bq9ibn3jrata9jfkqy4jhx4tsubez6nm&cmp=clp-edweek>

New national test data show that 4th and 8th graders have inched up in mathematics, but the results are more mixed in reading, with 4th grade scores flat compared with two years ago.

Overall, achieving proficiency in reading and math on the [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#), known as “the nation’s report card,” remains an elusive goal for the majority of American students. Only about one-third reached that level or higher in reading and 8th grade math, the 2011 data show. At grade 4 math, meanwhile, the figure was slightly higher, at 40 percent.

David P. Driscoll, the chairman of the [National Assessment Governing Board](#), which sets policy for NAEP, said in a statement that the nation has made major gains in math over the past two decades, but that in reading, the growth has been “quite small.” And he called the 4th grade reading scores “deeply disappointing,” noting that they have been flat since 2007.

“That rang an alarm bell with me,” Doris R. Hicks, also a member of NAGB and the principal of a charter school in New Orleans, said of the failure to see 4th grade reading improvements. “Even though it wasn’t a decline, I saw it as losing ground,” she said in a statement.

Since 1992, the average scale score in 4th grade reading has climbed just 4 points, to 221, on a 0-to-500 scale. At the 8th grade, the average score has risen 5 points.

By contrast, in math, 4th grade scores have climbed 21 points over the same time period, and 16 points for 8th graders. From 2009 to 2011, the figures at both grade levels climbed 1 point, as well as 8th grade reading.

Mr. Driscoll, a former commissioner of education in Massachusetts, highlighted “an interesting flip” over time in reading and math, noting that while in the early years the proportion of students achieving proficiency in math trailed reading, the situation is now reversed.

At the same time, he expressed concern that math improvement is not keeping pace with earlier gains.

“Over the past eight years, progress has slowed, particularly at grade 4 where it had been very rapid for more than a decade,” he said. “The percentage of students ‘below basic’ has been reduced substantially, but it remains far too high—particularly at 8th grade for blacks and Hispanics.”

#### *Stubborn Gaps*

The reading and math NAEP is administered every two years. In math, it tests students in five content areas: number properties and operations; measurement; geometry; data analysis, statistics, and probability; and algebra. The reading assessment targets three cognitive areas: locate and recall information, integrate and interpret, and critique and evaluate.

One area of long-standing concern is the large achievement gaps among racial and ethnic groups, especially when comparing African-American and Hispanic students with white students. Although all groups have made academic progress over the past two decades, the achievement gaps have proved difficult to close.

The 2011 reading and math results produced no statistically significant changes in the black-white achievement gap from 2009. The gap, for example, in 8th grade math was 31 points. In fact, the 2011 gap was not deemed statistically different from 1990,

the first year the national math test was administered. That said, the black-white gap has declined somewhat in other categories since 1990, including by 7 points for 4th grade math.

The gap between Hispanic and white students declined slightly between 2009 and 2011 in two categories. In 8th grade reading, the gap was reduced by 2 points, to 22. In 8th grade math, the gap was reduced by 3 points, to 23. But the 2011 figure was about the same as the gap recorded back in 1990.

To be sure, leaving aside achievement gaps, both Hispanic and black students have posted considerable academic gains over time, with especially strong strides in math.

In 1990, most black 4th graders, 83 percent, scored below basic in the subject. By 2011, that figure had plummeted to 34 percent. (The change since 2009 was not statistically significant.) Likewise, far fewer Hispanic 4th graders are performing below basic today, with the percentage declining from 67 percent in 1990 to 28 percent now.

The changes in 8th grade math for African-American and Hispanic students have also been large, though not quite as dramatic. For blacks, the below-basic figure has declined from 78 percent in 1990 to 49 percent today. For Hispanics, it has dropped from 66 percent to 39 percent. (Unlike with black 8th graders, the change between 2009 and 2011 was statistically significant for Hispanic students, dropping from 43 percent to 39 percent.)

### *State Ups and Downs*

The new NAEP results also highlight changes in state by state performance. Hawaii was the only state to see improvements in both subjects at both grade levels. Meanwhile, Maryland's reading scores improved at both the 4th and 8th grades. In addition, the District of Columbia, New Mexico, and Rhode Island saw improved math scores at both grade levels.

On the flip side, 4th grade math achievement declined in New York, and Missouri's 8th graders fell in math. In reading, Missouri and South Dakota saw declines.

Mr. Driscoll said that over the past eight years, during which all states have been required to participate in the NAEP in reading and math, the largest overall gains occurred in Maryland, Massachusetts, and the District of Columbia, when looking at the increase in the percent reaching "proficient" in both subjects. And yet several other states "stood virtually still," including Iowa, New York, and West Virginia.

Nevada registered statistically significant gains in both 8th grade reading and math compared with 2009, in both cases climbing 4 points. The state also saw 2-point gains in 4th grade reading and math, but neither was deemed statistically significant.

Keith W. Rheault, Nevada's superintendent of public instruction, who was invited to comment on this year's results at a press conference scheduled for this morning, said in prepared remarks that he was pleased to see the gains in his state, especially amid challenging economic times.

"As you may know, during the current recession, Nevada has become number one in the nation in some pretty dismal statistics," including foreclosures, unemployment, and bankruptcy rates, he said. "All this has meant that property-tax collections are down, the state budget has been cut, the teaching force has been reduced, and spending on K-12 education has been cut by several hundred million dollars since 2008. However, in spite of all these problems, our state has continued to make gains on NAEP in both math and reading in most years."

He added: "The improvements have been steady, not spectacular, but over the past eight years, they have added up to quite a bit."

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## **STATE NEWS**

### **After decade of gains, Florida students stall on national reading, math tests**

St. Petersburg Times

By: Ron Matus

November 1, 2011

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/k12/after-a-decade-of-gains-florida-students-stall-on-national-reading-math/1199506>

*Some critics question Jeb Bush-era policies, while others blame cuts in funding for schools.*

Florida's decade-long climb out of the national cellar in education has hit a snag.

For the second testing cycle in a row, the state's scores on a closely watched national test mostly stalled in reading and math, according to results released Tuesday.

The data "shows performance has plateaued," former Gov. Jeb Bush, who heads two education foundations, said in a written statement.

"Really disappointing," said Kathleen Oropeza, co-founder of the Orlando-based parents group, Fund Education Now.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress, often called "the nation's report card," is given every two years to a representative sample of fourth- and eighth-graders in every state.

The latest results show Florida students at roughly the same place they were in 2009 in both grades and subjects. With the exception of eighth-grade reading, the 2009 results were roughly the same as the 2007 results.

A Florida Department of Education press release did not acknowledge the results of the past two NAEP cycles, instead noting Florida's previous gains and its "upward progress."

The state spent much of the past decade logging in some of the biggest advances in the nation.

The rise from the bottom tier of states drew a spotlight to the state's education reforms, particularly a suite of controversial changes that were slammed into place after Bush took office in 1999. A handful of states are now copying the "Florida model."

But the latest NAEP results will give critics fresh ammo.

To some, the latest results will be proof that Florida's gains were more flash than substance - less a result of school grades and vouchers than a focus on test taking and a 2003 law requiring struggling third-graders to be held back, which boosted fourth-grade scores.

To others, it will be proof that recent, historic cuts in state education spending have done damage. Since 2007, state funding for public education has dropped from \$7,126 to \$6,268 per student.

"The NAEP scores stopped moving while we were having (budget cuts)," said Rep. Marty Kiar, D-Davie, an outspoken member of the House Education Committee. "I think there's a direct correlation there."

"Chronic de-funding ... is coming home to roost," said Oropeza, whose group charged the state in a pending lawsuit with failing to provide high-quality schools.

Sherman Dorn, a University of South Florida researcher who keeps close tabs on education changes in Florida, said there are multiple explanations for the stall. It could be budget cuts. It could be that students and families were hard hit by the recession. It could be that policy changes over the past decade only moved the needle so far.

"I have no clue what the right (explanation) would be," he said.

State Board of Education chair Kathleen Shanahan of Tampa said she had not looked at the latest NAEP data enough to draw conclusions. She defended Bush-era policy changes, but didn't discount the impact of declining funding.

She pointed specifically to a drop in the number of reading coaches, which were a Bush priority. "The budget cuts have had an impact," she said.

Nationally, both fourth- and eighth-graders were up in math, but barely. Reading results were mixed: fourth graders stayed in place; eighth graders made slight gains.

U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan said in a written statement the scores were cause for "concern as much as optimism."

"It's clear," he said, "that achievement is not accelerating fast enough for our nation's children to compete in the knowledge economy of the 21st Century."

*Ron Matus can be reached at [matus@sptimes.com](mailto:matus@sptimes.com) or (727) 893-8873.*

A snapshot of Florida's NAEP scores

The NAEP is scored on a scale of 0 to 500, with results broken down into four categories: below basic, basic, proficient and advanced.

Here's how Florida ranked among states in terms of points, and what percentage of its students scored at basic or above:

Fourth-grade reading: No. 10 (tied with three other states), 71 percent scoring at basic or above. National average: 66 percent. Top state: Massachusetts, 83 percent.

Eighth-grade reading: No. 34 (tied with one other state), 73 percent scoring at basic or above. National average: 75 percent. Top state: Montana, 86 percent.

Fourth-grade math: No. 27 (tied with four other states), 84 percent scoring at basic or above. National average: 82 percent. Top state: Massachusetts, 93 percent.

Eighth-grade math: No. 40 (tied with three other states), 68 percent scored at basic or above. National average: 72 percent. Top state: Massachusetts, 86 percent.

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## Florida's NAEP scores fall short of Race to the Top goals

By: Leslie Postal  
Orlando Sentinel

November 1, 2011

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/features/education/os-florida-naep-scores-20111101.0.3405698.story>

### *Still ahead of nation in 4<sup>th</sup>-grade reading*

Florida made no gains on the latest round of national math and reading tests and, therefore, little progress toward its goal of being among top state performers by 2015, according to exam scores released this morning.

On the National Assessment of Educational Progress tests in math and reading given earlier this year, Florida's fourth and eighth graders — the two groups tested — showed no significant change from two years ago.

Fourth graders were still ahead of the national average in reading and at the mean in math. Eighth graders scored at about the national average in reading and below it in math.

On both NAEP tests and in both grades, however, Florida was well below top-performing states. Hitting that mark is one of the state's goals set out in its federal Race to the Top application. Florida won \$700 million last year in that competition.

In fourth-grade reading, for example, Florida has made strong gains in the past two decades. But with 35 percent of the state's students at "proficient" on that test, it is far behind Massachusetts, where 51 percent of fourth graders showed "proficiency over challenging material."

Still, state officials said they were pleased that scores since 2003 showed Florida's "upward progress" and that Hispanic students here outpaced their counterparts across the country.

The Florida Department of Education also noted that scores for black students, children from low-income families and youngsters with disabilities — all of whom traditionally struggle on standardized tests — jumped more points in Florida than they did nationally. Reading scores for the state's black fourth graders, for example, improved 11 points since 2003 compared to an eight-point increase for black children nationally.

"I want to commend our students, teachers, and school districts for their tremendous efforts as these results help us further adapt classroom instruction to accommodate the needs of our students," said Education Commissioner Gerard Robinson, in an emailed statement.

"We remain committed to the work that lies ahead to ensure students are fully prepared for their educational journey and for the demanding economy that awaits them," he said.

The national test, often called the nation's report card, is given to a sampling of students in each state, so there are no scores for individual districts or schools.

Nationally, math scores increased this year to the highest level ever in both grades since 1992. Math achievement has showed "major gains" in the last 20 years, said David Driscoll, chairman of the National Assessment Governing Board, in a prepared statement.

But that progress has slowed in recent years, he said, and too many students, particularly black and Hispanic youngsters, still have trouble with basic arithmetic. In Florida, 30 percent of black fourth-graders, for example, were "below basic" on the math test, the lowest level.

Across the country, reading scores over the last two decades showed gains that were "quite small," Driscoll said, and those scores have been flat for the past four years.

Driscoll, a former Massachusetts education commissioner, said the country "must now find a way to regain the momentum in math and accelerate student progress in both subjects."

The improved math classes are "undoubtedly" tied to improved math instruction in schools, as math skills are learned almost exclusively in class, he said.

But reading success reflects both class work —in language arts courses but other classes, too — and time kids spend reading on their own, so it is harder to tie scores solely to what happens in school.

Fourth graders who reported they read a lot for fun did much better than those who rarely read, NAEP data shows.

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## **Study: Pre-K Crucial to Best 3rd Grade Reading Outcomes**

Education Week

By: Catherine Gewertz

November 1, 2011

In the face of state cutbacks to early-childhood programs, school districts might find themselves wondering whether to invest their own scarce funds in preschool or in full-day kindergarten. A study out today has a clear message: If you want to maximize the chances of strong 3rd grade reading results, preschool programs in combination with full-day kindergarten is the way to go. But if that's not possible, it's better to go with pre-K and half-day kindergarten than relying solely on all-day kindergarten.

The report, "[Starting Out Right: Pre-K and Kindergarten.](#)" uses a federal database that followed more than 21,000 students from kindergarten through 8th grade. The students' progress was gauged by the National Center for Education Statistics with specially designed tests.

The reading tests given to the children defined five levels of achievement. Researchers from the [National School Boards Association](#) analyzed the relationships between the type of pre-K and kindergarten programs the children attended and their performance on the test. They found consistently that children who attended preschool and half-day kindergarten had substantially greater chances of doing better on the reading test than those who had attended only full-day kindergarten. The benefits were particularly strong for Hispanic and low-income students and those learning English.

For instance, at level 4 on the test, which assessed children's ability to extrapolate from what they read, those who had attended preschool and half-day kindergarten were 18 percent more likely to show proficiency in that skill than those who had attended only full-day kindergarten. That number rose to 20 percent for low-income students, 24 percent more likely for Hispanic students, and 25 percent for English-learners.

The report's author, Jim Hull, writes that his findings confirm the already-established benefits of combining preschool and kindergarten. While he suggests that they could help district policymakers decide how to invest their resources, he cautions against cutting back full-day kindergarten to half-day. "The emphasis," he writes in the report, "should be on adding prekindergarten to existing kindergarten programs."

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## Former Gov. Jeb Bush, Sen. Burr address education forum at NC State

North Carolina News 14

By: Amy Thorpe

November 1, 2011

[http://triad.news14.com/content/top\\_stories/648931/former-gov-jeb-bush-sen-burr-address-education-forum-at-nc-state](http://triad.news14.com/content/top_stories/648931/former-gov-jeb-bush-sen-burr-address-education-forum-at-nc-state)

RALEIGH – Hundreds came together at North Carolina State University Tuesday to discuss ways to move North Carolina education forward. Some of our state's top policy makers and education leaders came to the forum hosted by SAS.

Among some of North Carolina's education and political heavy hitters was Brian Gaudio. He's an NC State junior who wanted to hear more on the future of education in our state.

"I've been doing some research on youth and the role of design in the education of youth," Gaudio said.

The forum brought together more than 300 educators and politicians to open up dialogue about new ways to increase student achievement.

"It's really great to see professors partnered with policy makers to really continue the critical discussion," said Gaudio.

The theme was "Building a Culture of Innovation through Education" with the idea that policy makers and educators can develop innovative ideas that will help take North Carolina education to the next level in the 21st Century.

"Today's generation learns differently because they now communicate differently. Our challenge is to take someone my age who still has a passion for teaching and change and alter the way they teach," said Sen. Richard Burr from the podium.

Burr told the crowd only 71 percent of high school graduates in the U.S. graduate on time.

"Now is the time. Lay the gauntlet down! The epidemic stops here," Burr said.

Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush outlined how he raised achievement in his state through raising expectations for students. He says he modeled the plan for Florida partly from Governor Jim Hunt's actions here in our state. Bush says North Carolina and the rest of the nation need reform now more than ever.

"We're very complacent about where we are today in education. In my opinion, we need to make this a national priority if we're going to be competitive in the world," said Bush.

It's something Gaudio says he'll remember as he plans his future to help improve learning for students to come.

"It would be great to move on in a form of education," said Gaudio.

University leaders also spoke including NC State Chancellor Randy Woodson and UNC Chapel Hill Chancellor Holden Thorp.

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# Wisconsin Bill Would Tie Test Scores to Teacher Discipline

Associated Press

By: Staff

November 1, 2011

[http://www.nbc15.com/news/headlines/Bill\\_Would\\_Tie\\_Test\\_Scores\\_To\\_Teacher\\_Discipline\\_132986758.html](http://www.nbc15.com/news/headlines/Bill_Would_Tie_Test_Scores_To_Teacher_Discipline_132986758.html)

*Student test scores could be used as a reason to fire a teacher under a bill before the Wisconsin state Assembly.*

MADISON, Wis. (AP) -- Student test scores could be used as a reason to fire a teacher under a bill before the Wisconsin state Assembly.

Under current law, standardized test data can be one of several factors used to evaluate a teacher's performance, but it can't be used to discipline them.

The bill before the Assembly on Tuesday would allow the scores to be used as one of multiple reasons to discipline or fire a teacher. Test scores alone could not be used to discipline a teacher.

The measure passed the Republican-controlled Senate last week on a partisan vote.

Once it passes the Assembly, it heads to Republican Gov. Scott Walker for his consideration.

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## Suit filed to make Los Angeles teacher evaluations include student data

Los Angeles Times

By: Staff

November 1, 2011

<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2011/11/suit-filed-to-make-la-teacher-evaluations-include-student-data.html>

Advocates went forward Tuesday with a lawsuit alleging that the Los Angeles Unified School District has failed to comply with state laws requiring that teachers and principals should be evaluated, in part, on student academic progress.

The suit, filed by the Barnes & Thornburg law firm in conjunction with the Sacramento-based advocacy group EdVoice, asserts that L.A. Unified must comply immediately with the Stull Act, which established guidelines for assessing teachers and principals after its passage in 1971.

"The district has never obeyed the Stull Act's mandate," the suit states, while blaming both the school system and unions representing teachers and administrators. (In the litigation, both types of employees are referred to as "certificated" because they hold teaching credentials). "In collusion with the district's governing boards and superintendents," the suit alleges, "these associations have made it impossible for the district to lawfully evaluate certificated personnel and identify and require specific corrective action to retrain, transfer, suspend, or dismiss unsatisfactory certificated personnel based, in part, on evidence which demonstrates whether or not students are learning."

For their part, union leaders have joined most experts and officials in criticizing the evaluation process as providing inadequate support for teachers. But the unions have not agreed to the district's plan for a new system that incorporates students' standardized test scores. The unions and some experts have criticized standardized test results as unreliable and too narrowly focused for use in personnel decisions.

The parties suing the district include unnamed parents and students and Alice Callaghan, a charter-school operator and longtime community activist. The parties being sued are L.A. Unified, school board members, the unions representing teachers and administrators, and the California Public Employment Relations Board, which has jurisdiction over the collective bargaining process.

L.A. County Superior Court Judge James Chalfant denied a request to bar immediately any new collective bargaining agreements that do not comply with the Stull Act. He also declined to order the district to comply with the Stull Act. Instead, the issue will proceed to a trial on the merits.

The lawsuit cites remarks of L.A. schools Supt. John Deasy, made in other forums, to buttress its claims.

"I would argue that nobody has told me that the current system of evaluation ... helps anybody," Deasy is quoted as saying. "It is fundamentally useless. It does not actually help you get better at [your] work and it doesn't tell you how well you're doing."

Deasy has said the district intends to comply with the Stull Act, but the lawsuit also criticizes his voluntary evaluation program, which takes student test scores into account.

"A pilot may have been appropriate 39 or even 35 years ago, but not after decades of dereliction of duty and child neglect," the suit states. "Moreover, only approximately 3% of the certificated personnel are participating in the pilot program. Thus, it does not address the other 97% currently not in the pilot program."

The suit also compares employee ratings to student academic achievement: "At the high school level, 89% of the teachers were rated as 'highly qualified,' but 63% of the children tested were not proficient in English Language Arts, and 84% of the children tested were not proficient in Math."

Critics of such comparisons have said it's simplistic to link student performance directly with the work of teachers without allowing for other factors that affect student learning.

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## Florida legislators skeptical of spending more for reading coaches

Florida Times-Union

By: Matt Dixon

November 1, 2011

<http://jacksonville.com/news/metro/2011-11-01/story/florida-legislators-skeptical-spending-more-reading-coaches#ixzz1cYHlq6vW>

*Florida legislators skeptical of spending more for reading coaches*

TALLAHASSEE - A panel of lawmakers met a request for an additional \$40 million for 600 reading coaches with skepticism Tuesday, saying the state has already sunk a billion-plus dollars into the program with lackluster results.

Florida Education Commissioner Gerard Robinson wants the additional cash to help offset a loss in federal dollars that was used for reading coaches. It would be used in school districts' lowest performing schools.

Earlier this month, the funding request was slammed by state Sen. Stephen Wise, R-Jacksonville, when Robinson pitched his proposal to the Budget Subcommittee on preK-12 Appropriations.

Wise said despite spending \$1.4 billion over the past 10 years, the state still sees a 60 percent failure rate in reading at the 10th-grade level.

"We are doing the same old, same old and getting the same results," Wise said.

On the House side, a subcommittee that helps write the K-12 education budget wanted some evidence the program works.

"What data do we have, what studies do we have, to show what we are actually purchasing for this extra \$40 million? What result can we expect to achieve?" asked Rep. Janet Adkins, R-Fernandina Beach.

Public Schools Chancellor Pam Stewart said that results aren't necessarily cut and dry.

"Our statistics professors would tell us it's very important to not draw conclusions from data, however, there seems to be a correlation to the increase in reading achievement as we were receiving those federal dollars, and a flattening when we no longer had those," she said.

Committee Chairwoman Marti Coley, R-Marianna, said that surprised her.

"I've actually from time to time been lobbied by specific districts that reading coaches were not effective, and I guess the data would show differently," she said.

The additional funding would be built into the state's public education funding formula and shared by school districts across the state. Specific language in the budget would dictate that school districts can only use the funding in their lowest performing schools.

Stewart said much of a coach's effectiveness depends on how they are used.

"If they are used to provide substantial professional development and actually coach teachers to include reading in whatever subject it might be, I think you will see a dramatic increase in reading gains," she said.

Robinson highlighted the need to count every penny, telling committee members that new revenue estimates show that the preK-12 system would face up to an additional \$240 million shortfall compared to last year's budget.

For public education, the biggest portion of its shortfall will come from the lost \$545 million in federal stimulus funding. Other contributing factors are decreased local property tax contributions and non-reoccurring money from state trust funds that was built into last year's budget.

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