

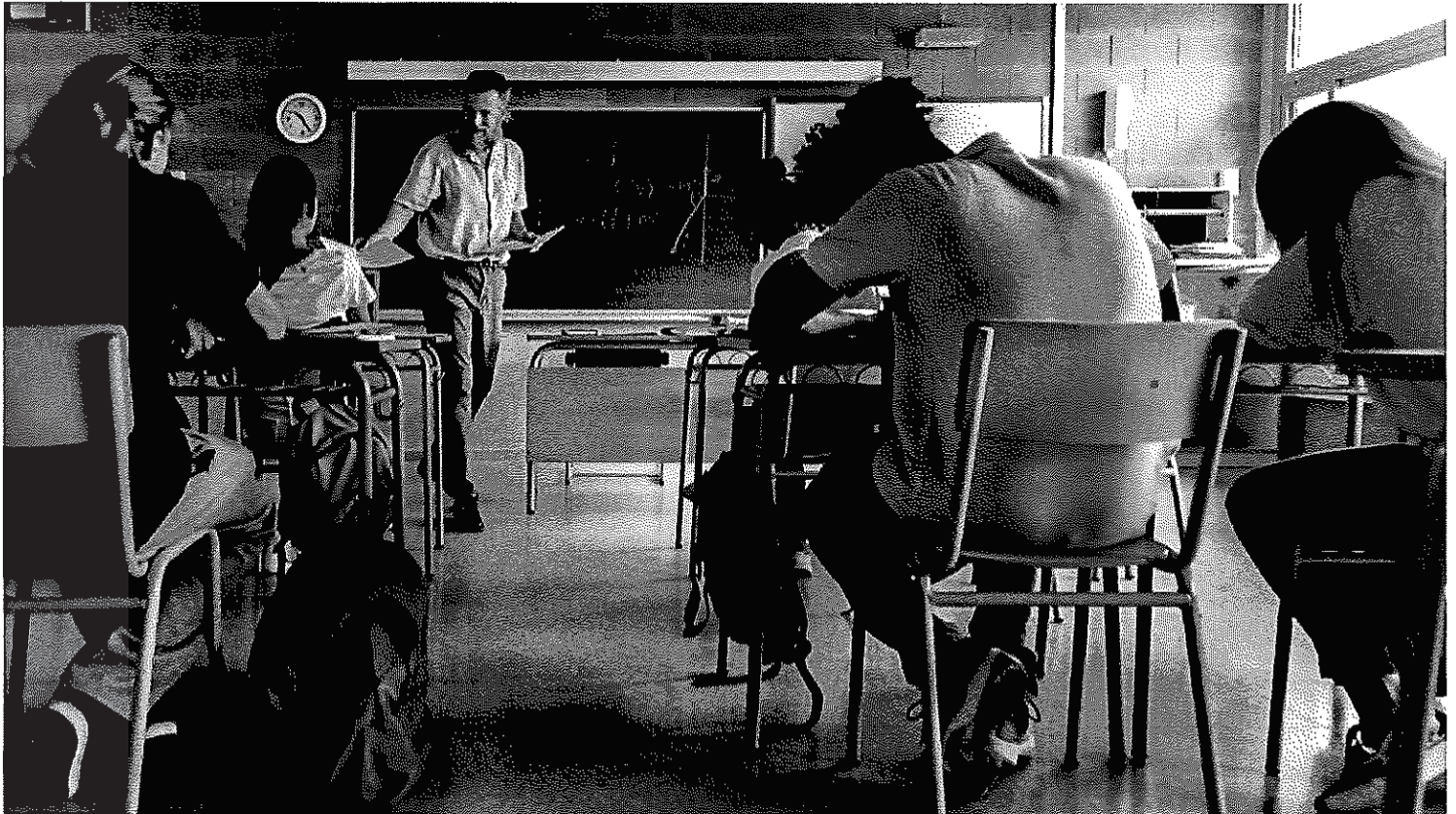
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Nation's report card: Alarming, appalling losses in reading, math scores; FL kids not proficient

Disappointing test scores in 4th and 8th grades could cast clouds over Monday's debate between DeSantis and Crist

BY: DANIELLE J. BROWN - OCTOBER 24, 2022 6:21 PM



📷 Classroom. Credit: Getty Images

A large majority of Florida eighth graders do not read proficiently and struggle with 8th grade-level math skills, according to a nationwide assessment of students in 2022 – an uncomfortable reality for teens unprepared for a rigorous high school schedule.

A large portion of Florida's fourth graders also struggled with math and reading skills – though they performed higher than the national average. Still, they were unable to reach

proficiency in those key subjects, according to 2022 data released Monday on the cusp of midterm elections.

Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis and Democrat Charlie Crist will be debating Monday evening, and the sliding test scores could cast clouds on the education picture in Florida.

The results are a part of the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress, also referred to as NAEP scores or the Nation's Report Card, which assesses subjects such as math and reading across the country using a sampling in specific grades.

The national outlook shows declines in reading and math scores among a sampling of the nation's 4th and 8th graders, highlighting the longstanding impacts of learning during the COVID pandemic.

Former Gov. Jeb Bush, who chairs the non-profit ExcelinEd, responded to the "alarming" national results, according to a Monday press release.

"Every child has the God-given ability to reach their full potential, and today's NAEP scores tell us the system failed our nation's children," Bush said.

"I'm optimistic we can overcome this educational crisis by leaning into this challenge. This is a national priority and a human necessity to ensure all students are provided the skills and knowledge to live a life of purpose."

Meanwhile, U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona called the national results "appalling, unacceptable, and a reminder of the impact that this pandemic has had on our learners," in a written statement Monday.

"The data also represent a call to action for the important work we must do now for our students—especially those who have suffered the most during the pandemic," Cardona added.

The DeSantis administration was quick to paint a brighter picture of the NAEP results on Monday, focusing on 4th grade reading and writing scores among subgroups of students such as students with disabilities, Black and Hispanic students, and children in school lunch programs.

He also propped up his controversial quick reopening of in-person learning. (DeSantis had initially closed schools earlier in the pandemic.)

"We also knew that younger and at-risk students would be the most impacted if schools were closed, and the results speak for themselves," DeSantis said in a written statement.

His Democratic opponent Charlie Crist, who was a former Republican Education Commissioner, has so far not formally commented on the results of the NAEP scores for Florida, but it's possible that the issue may be addressed as a question in Monday's televised debate between the two candidates.

Here's what these results say overall.

8th graders

The NAEP national results were collected from January through March, among some 224,000 4th grade students from approximately 5,700 schools and 222,000 8th grade students from approximately 5,100 schools.

For 8th graders across the country, the average math score was 274, eight points lower than 2019. As for reading, 8th graders showed an average score of 260, which was 3 points lower than 2019.

The achievement levels for the 2022 8th grade math scores are basic (262), proficient (299) and advanced (333).

As for Florida, the average score among sampled eighth graders was 271, down 8 points from 2019, which did not meet the level of proficiency.

Just 17 percent of 8th graders were proficient in math in Florida and 6 percent were considered advanced in the subject in 2022.

“Eighth grade is a pivotal moment in students’ mathematics education, as they develop key mathematics skills for further learning and potential careers in mathematics and science,” said Daniel J. McGrath, an education official with the National Center for Education Statistics, in a written statement. “If left unaddressed, this could alter the trajectories and life opportunities of a whole cohort of young people, potentially reducing their abilities to pursue rewarding and productive careers in mathematics, science, and technology.”

When it comes to reading, 70 percent of 8th graders tested were not proficient in reading, according to the 2022 results.

In 2019, the percent of students who were not considered proficient in reading was 66 percent.

The thresholds for 8th grade reading scores are: basic (243), proficient (281) and advanced (323). The average scale score for Florida in 2022 was 260, down from 263 in 2019.

Just 26 percent of Florida 8th graders were considered at least proficient in reading, and a mere 3 percent were considered advanced.

4th graders

A hefty handful of Florida fourth graders also struggled to reach proficiency in 2022 in reading. However, the average score – 225 – remained the same between 2019 and 2022, and Florida’s 225 is a higher score than the national average of 216.

Still, Florida’s fourth graders average score of 225 is not considered proficient.

For 4th grade, a score of at least 208 through 237 means the student has a basic reading achievement level. Students earning a score of 238 through 267 means the student is

'proficient' at reading, and students who earn a score of 268 or higher mean they are "advanced."

For 4th grade math, the threshold for basic math skills was 214; proficient was 249, and advanced was 282.

The average scale score for Florida's 4th grade math students in 2022 was 241, down from 246 in 2019. However, that's higher than the national average of 235 among 4th graders nationally.

For 2022, about 33 percent of students were considered proficient in 4th grade mathematics and 8 percent were advanced.

The Monday press release from the Governor's office said that because the state performed higher than the national average in some areas that the results "demonstrate once again that keeping kids in school throughout 2020 and 2021 has put Florida students well ahead of their peers."

But Peggy Carr, commissioner for the National Center for Education Statistics, says it's not that clear.

"The declines, particularly in math, were comprehensive. Widespread. They were everywhere," Carr said in a virtual press conference Tuesday that went over the results of the 2022 NAEP scores.

"There's nothing in this data that allows us to draw a straight line from remote learning, in and of itself, to student performance. It's complicated," Carr said.

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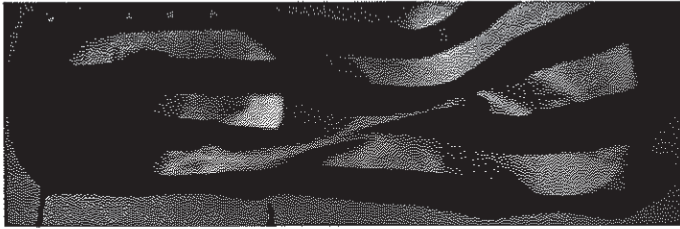


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