

Eighth-grader's test scores in history, civics drop

More kids lack basic understanding

BY CHEYANNE MUMPHREY [ASSOCIATED PRESS](#), May 4, 2023

Test scores in history and civics have declined slightly for eighth graders in the U.S., according to results that show an increasing number of children lack a basic understanding of either subject.

The scores were released Wednesday by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The same assessment reported in October that every single state had seen a decline in math or reading scores amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The latest scores, officials said, reflect more of the impact of the disruptions from the virus that shuttered schools across the country.

At a time of some pessimism about the state of the U.S. democracy, the test results suggest many young people are struggling to understand how government works and the importance of civic participation.

Nearly one-third of eighth grade students cannot describe the structure or function of government, according to the results.

Many U.S. schools aren't doing enough to reverse the trend, history and civics educators say.

About 68% of eighth graders said they are taking classes mainly focused on U.S. history. That's compared with 72% of students in 2018. And only about half of eighth graders report taking a class mainly focused on civics and or government, which remains mostly unchanged compared to 2018, according to the report.

"We're not putting a value there, and we're not saying this is something that they really need to be active, informed and engaged in as they grow," said Kerry Sautner, chief learning officer at the National Constitution Center, a nonprofit organization in Pennsylvania.

The CivXNow Coalition, a civics education advocacy group, reported last year that 38 states require a stand-alone civics course to graduate from high school and only seven states require civics in middle school.

Patrick Kelly, who teaches government classes in South Carolina, said he has seen a growing emphasis on ensuring students are doing well in reading and math, and rightfully so.

"But every minute that you redirect to one place, it's got to come from somewhere else. And so if literacy interventions don't have a connection to social studies, then we lose ground in social studies instruction," Mr. Kelly said.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress — known as the “nation’s report card” — tested about 7,800 students across the country in civics, and 8,000 students in U.S. history between January and March 2022. The test had last been given in 2018.

On a point scale of 0 to 500, the average U.S. history score dropped 5 points to 258, continuing a downward trend that began in 2014. Just 13% of eighth graders scored at or above the proficient level. The latest average score was 1 point lower than the results of the first U.S. history assessment in 1994.

In civics, the average score dropped 2 points to 150 between 2018 and 2022. Just 22% of eighth graders scored at or above the proficient level. The results, which are on a point scale of 0 to 300, are the first drop since 1998. The average score at its highest was 154 in 2014.