

Reading, math scores up for 4th and 8th graders, federal report shows

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The nation's fourth and eighth graders scored higher in reading and mathematics than they did during their last national assessment, according to the federal government's latest annual statistical report on the well-being of the nation's children. Not all the report's findings were positive; there also were increases in the adolescent birth rate and the proportion of infants born at low birthweight.

These and other findings are described in *America's Children in Brief: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2008*. The report is compiled by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, a working group of Federal agencies that collect, analyze, and report data on issues related to children and families, with partners in private research organizations. It serves as a report card on the status of the nation's children and youth, presenting statistics compiled by a number of federal agencies in one convenient reference.

"In 2007, scores of fourth and eighth graders were higher in mathematics than in all previous assessments and higher in reading than in 2005," said Valena Plisko, associate commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics, a part of the U.S. Department of Education.

This year's report also saw an increase in low birthweight infants (less than 5 pounds 8 ounces). Low birthweight infants are at increased risk for infant death and such lifelong disabilities as blindness, deafness and cerebral palsy.

"This trend reflects an increase in the number of infants born prematurely, the largest category of low birthweight infants," said Duane Alexander, M.D., director of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development at the National Institutes of Health. Although not all the reasons for the increase are known, infertility therapies, delayed childbearing and an increase in multiple births may be contributing factors.

The birth rate among adolescent girls ages 15 to 17 also increased, from 21 live births for every 1,000 girls in 2005, to 22 per 1,000 in 2006. This was the first increase in the past 15 years.

"It is critical that we continue monitoring this trend carefully," said Edward J. Sondik, PhD, director of the National Center for Health Statistics in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Compared with other teens their age, teen mothers are less likely to finish high school or to graduate from college. Infants born to teen mothers are more likely to be of low birthweight."

Among the favorable changes in the report were a decline in childhood deaths from injuries and a decrease in the percentage of eighth graders who smoked daily.

These and other findings on the nation's children and youth are described in the report's content areas:

Demographic Background

http://extranet.nichd.nih.gov/childstats/childstats_release_070308.cfm#DemographicBackground

Family and Social Environment

http://extranet.nichd.nih.gov/childstats/childstats_release_070308.cfm#FamilyandSocialEnvironment

Economic Circumstances

http://extranet.nichd.nih.gov/childstats/childstats_release_070308.cfm#FamilyandSocialEnvironment

Health Care

http://extranet.nichd.nih.gov/childstats/childstats_release_070308.cfm#HealthCare

Physical Environment and Safety

http://extranet.nichd.nih.gov/childstats/childstats_release_070308.cfm#PhysicalEnvironmentandSafety

Education

http://extranet.nichd.nih.gov/childstats/childstats_release_070308.cfm#Education

Health

http://extranet.nichd.nih.gov/childstats/childstats_release_070308.cfm#Health

Source: NIH/National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

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