

Math scores slip, reading flat for nation's 12th-graders

April 27 2016, by By Jennifer C. Kerr

The nation's high school seniors are slipping in math and failing to make progress in reading, with just one-third of the 12th graders ready for the academic challenges of college.

Scores released Wednesday from the Nation's Report Card also show a widening gap between the highest- and lowest-performing students.

Only one-quarter of 12th-graders taking the test performed proficiently or better in math. In reading, 37 percent of the students were proficient or above—meaning they had a solid grasp or better of the subject material.

The average math score on the test last year was 152, down from 153 in 2013, the last time the test was given. It marks the first drop in math in a decade. For reading, scores were flat over the same period of time, and down five points from more than two decades ago when the test was first given to students in 1992.

Education Secretary John B. King, Jr., says schools have undergone "some of the most significant changes in decades" as teachers retool their classroom practices to adapt to new and higher standards.

"We know the results of those changes will not be seen overnight, so we need to be patient—but not passive—in continuing to pursue the goal of preparing all students for success after high school," King said.

Since 2009, more than 40 states have adopted the Common Core learning standards, which outline skills students should learn and know in math and reading by the end of each grade. They emphasize critical thinking, with less of a focus on memorization.

Peggy Carr, acting commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics, which administers the test, said the report suggests a pattern in reading scores that needs a closer look. "There is a gap, a widening of a gap of higher and lower ability students, and I think that's something we need to think about," said Carr.

Reading scores increased by two points for the highest-performing students, and were down six points for the lowest-performing seniors. Math scores saw no significant difference over two years for the highest group of test-takers, but declined for the group of students at the bottom.

Bill Bushaw, executive director of the National Assessment Governing Board, said the scores were disappointing.

"We're not making the academic progress that we need to so that there's greater preparedness for post-secondary, for work, for military participation. These numbers aren't going the way we want," Bushaw said.

The report estimates about 37 percent of students, for both reading and math, scored well enough to be considered likely to possess the knowledge and skills to be academically prepared for college-level work. That is not much different than how well-prepared seniors were in 2013.

Other findings:

—The average math score was 152, on a 300-point scale. The average reading score was 287 on a 500-point scale.

—No significant change was seen from 2013 in the average math score for any racial and ethnic groups. And it was the same for reading, with no real change seen from 2013 for any groups.

—In math, the average score for English language learners was higher last year, up six points from 2013.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress is considered a national yardstick by which to measure student achievement. The math test was given last year to about 13,200 twelfth-graders in public and private schools. About 18,700 students took the reading test.

More information: Nation's Report Card:
www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_g12_2015/

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