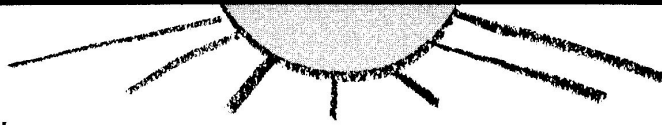


# THE Center for Education Reform



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*With the release today of the Nation's Report Card 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading 2000 Results the Center for Education Reform offers the following analysis by CER President Jeanne Allen. For additional comment, please call the Center.*

## **THE LEARNING GAP WIDENS**

The results of the Reading 2000 Report Card for 4<sup>th</sup> graders in the United States are yet another reason for dramatic reforms. Average test scores have remained flat, with one key difference – those who need the help the most have lost ground, while those who already achieve gained some ground.

### **Less Than a Third of Fourth Graders at Grade Level**

Between 1992 and 2000, the black/white gap among average score results has increased from 32 to 33, and the Hispanic/white gap has widened from 24 to 28 points, and the American Indian/white gap is dramatic with a differential growing from 18 to 30 points. Only among America's Asian population has the gap decreased: In fact, Asians/Pacific Islanders now score better than whites by six points.

Forty-seven percent of urban students are reading below Basic levels, as compared to children in suburban or large town settings (32%) or rural and small town settings (35%).

And in the two years that the government's assessment body the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) has tracked students in a low socio-economic status, average scores have dropped two points, and the number of students below "Basic" reading levels have increased.

### **Private vs. Public**

Scores among students at public schools have leveled off, while students at nonpublic schools are performing slightly better than their peers in 1992. Part of this may derive from the fact that non-public school students tend to have parents who are very engaged in their child's education, because those parents made a choice about where their child would attend school. This argues in favor of giving parents greater choices about their child's education: The more choices parents have, the more likely they are to assist in their child's education.

## The Reading Wars

Particularly disturbing in the NAEP report is a section that appears to question the use of phonics and having teachers assist students in breaking down words among fourth graders.

The report notes that students with teachers who help them break words into parts score significantly lower than students with teachers who hardly ever help them break words into parts. The NAEP analysts appear to conclude that it is *because* teachers help students break down words that they score low.

But the reality is that, in fourth grade, only students who *need* help figuring out such words are likely to be receiving it – and those students are likely to be low-performing students in the first place. Those who are already reading independently won't need the help.

To read the full report, *The Nation's Report Card 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading 2000*, go to:  
<http://www.nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pubs/main2000/2001499.asp>

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*The Center for Education Reform is a national, independent, non-profit advocacy organization providing support and guidance to individuals, community and civic groups, policymakers and others who are working to bring fundamental reforms to their schools. For further information, please call (202) 822-9000 or visit our website at <http://edreform.com>.*