



Only 37% of High-school Seniors Ready for College

The latest edition of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the “Nation’s Report Card,” released on April 27, indicated that only 37 percent of American high-school seniors were academically prepared for college-level math and reading in 2015.

The NAEP report recorded a drop in reading scores from 288 in 2013 to 287 in 2015, and is down five points since 1992. The mathematics score fell to 152 last year from 153 in 2013, reported Reuters.



The percentage of students performing at or above proficiency dropped to 25 percent in math and to 37 percent in reading — a drop of one percent since 2013.

Conversely, the percentage who fell below the basic level of proficiency last year rose to 38 percent in mathematics and to 28 percent in reading, both increasing by three points.

Reuters reported that the math assessment measures students’ skills and ability to apply knowledge to problem solving. The reading comprehension portion of the test asks students to answer questions based on materials they have read.

An article about the findings in the *Wall Street Journal* cited Bill Bushaw, the executive director of the National Assessment Governing Board which oversees the test. Bushaw said that although the board was pleased that high-school graduation rates were rising, they were disappointed in the lack of progress in boosting students’ skills and knowledge.

“These numbers aren’t going the way we want,” he said. “We just have to redouble our efforts to prepare our students to close opportunity gaps.”

The *Journal* article noted that at the time of the assessment, 42 percent of the test-takers said they had been accepted into a four-year college. The obvious conclusion to be drawn from this is that colleges are accepting some entrants who are not qualified for college-level work.

The *Journal* also cited Peggy Carr, acting commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics, which conducts the test, who said officials could not tie the falling scores to any particular education policies, but that demographic shifts may play a role. Carr noted a widening disparity between students performing at the highest and lowest levels, however.

Carr said that in reading, “The students at the top of the distribution are going up and the students at the bottom of the distribution are going down. There is a widening of the gap between higher and lower-ability students.”

“In math, the decline is real,” she observed. “Students at the lower end are getting worse.”

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is a congressionally mandated project administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), within the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the U.S. Department of Education. Members of the National Assessment Governing



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Board are appointed by the secretary of education. This explains why the official statement released by Secretary of Education John B King, Jr. seemed to gloss over the significance of these results. King said, in part:

Over the past seven years, schools have undergone some of the most significant changes in decades — work that is being led by educators who are retooling 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 did not say whether he included the [widely criticized Common Core](#) program among his highly touted “significant changes,” but an [article posted by The New American on March 15](#) described King as President Obama’s “deeply unpopular pro-Common Core nominee for U.S. education secretary.”

The decline in U.S. educational standards has been noted for decades by writers specializing in the field of education. Perhaps the most prolific (and also the most critical) of these was the late Samuel L. Blumenfeld, who died last year at the age of 88 and who was still writing about education almost until his death.

Blumenfeld was the author of 10 books about education in America, including *N.E.A.: Trojan Horse in American Education*, *The Victims of Dick and Jane*, *Alpha-Phonics: A Primer For Beginning Readers*, *Homeschooling: A Parents Guide to Teaching Children*, *New Illiterates and How You Can Keep Your Child from Becoming One*, and *Is Public Education Necessary?*

He was a longtime contributor to *The New American*, as well as this magazine’s predecessor journal, *American Opinion*.

Blumenfeld devoted much of his career to investigating the decline in American literacy, the reasons for the high rate of learning disabilities, and the American educational establishment’s refusal to use phonics in reading instruction and memorization in mathematics instruction.

In 2012, *The New American* published online Blumenfeld’s four-part series of articles entitled [“Readingate: The 100-Year Coverup of Educational Malpractice.”](#)

An important component of Blumenfeld’s decades-long series of exposés critiquing the American education system was that he dared to go where many others did not. While his attack on obviously failed teaching methods — such as the “look-say” method of teaching reading — were legendary, he explored thoroughly the history of U.S. education and reached the conclusion that the failures were not accidental, but deliberately engineered. His contention is summed up in the following paragraph from the first of his “Readingate” articles:

The fact is that our literacy problem is the result of a deliberate attempt to dumb down the American people. It was hatched in 1898 — 114 years ago — by John Dewey, a 39-year-old socialist educator, who persuaded his fellow socialists that the only way to change America from an individualistic society to a collectivist one was to dumb-down the American people. The easiest way to do it was to change the way reading is taught in our schools. Their plan was to get rid of the traditional phonics method that produces high literacy and replace it with a whole-word method that teaches American children to read English as if it were Chinese. You can read Dewey’s plan in his article, *The Primary-School Fetish*, *Forum*, Vol. XXV, p. 314-28, 1898, and in *School and Society*, 1900.



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In the same article, Blumenfeld pointed to Rudolf Flesch's 1955 book [Why Johnny Can't Read](#) that explained to the parents of America why their children were having such a difficult time learning to read. In his work, Flesch wrote, "The teaching of reading — all over the United States, in all the schools, in all the textbooks — is totally wrong and flies in the face of all logic and common sense."

The latest results from the "Nation's Report Card" will undoubtedly produce much hand-wringing and calls to spend more money on "public" (which is really government) education. However, unless American educators return to the successful teaching methods abandoned decade ago, this will simply amount to throwing good money after bad.



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