

Michigan close to last place in latest NAEP results

Lawmakers should expand range of options for families

By Molly Macek | February 2025

Michigan's reading and math scores failed to return to pre-lockdown levels, according to the latest results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. With only six states trailing Michigan in fourth-grade grade reading, it's time for lawmakers to consider bold solutions to this growing education crisis.

Michigan ranked 44th among the states in fourth-grade reading on the 2024 NAEP, also known as The Nation's Report Card. Eighth graders didn't fare much better; they landed at 33rd on the reading test and 31st on the math test, right behind Missouri and Hawaii, respectively. And students got lower scores on these tests than they did on the previous NAEP, administered in 2022.

The fourth-grade math results were slightly better. These improved by three points, leaving them two points below the national average. This score placed Michigan at 34th in the nation.

Even so, Michigan did worse than it did before COVID-era lockdowns. In eighth-grade math, scores decreased by 10 points from 2019 to 2024. Fourth

graders scored 218 in reading before the COVID lockdowns, but only 209 in 2024 — five points below the national average.

The results for Detroit are even worse. As in previous years, Detroit joined 25 similar urban districts across the country to administer the NAEP in both math

and reading. Once again, Detroit trailed nearly every district in both subjects, with only Milwaukee doing as poorly in fourth-grade reading. On the fourth-grade reading test, students scored 40 points

lower than the national average. Detroit's reading and math scores dropped below their 2019 results for both fourth and eighth grade.

"Clearly, the declines we saw in fourth-grade reading were due to online pandemic literacy instruction," Nikolai Vitti, superintendent of the Detroit Public School Community District, told The Detroit News. Detroit shuttered its schools to in-person learning for more than a year during the pandemic.

Detroit and other districts can make up some of this lost time by ensuring students are in school and

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receiving the learning support they need. In a recent letter to lawmakers, State Superintendent Michael Rice stressed the need for more in-person instructional time.

Meaningful instructional time is vital to improving student performance. But policies that mandate 180 days of instruction will fail to improve student outcomes if the chronic absenteeism problem is not addressed. And paying kids to show up for school or attend after-school tutoring — an attendance initiative just implemented in the Detroit school district — is neither sustainable nor an efficient use of taxpayer dollars.

Policies that break from the status quo and increase access to educational opportunities could improve student outcomes. More and more families are taking advantage of hybrid learning models, Michigan's robust charter school network, and homeschooling opportunities afforded by state law. The state's Schools

of Choice program is popular, a testament to the growing demand for more innovative options that serve the diverse needs of the student population.

The latest reading and math results confirm the dire state of Michigan's education system. Lawmakers ought to consider policies that stimulate educational innovation and increase the learning options available to families.

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