

# 'The news is not good:' Reading, math scores in Ohio still worse than pre-pandemic

By Jessie Balmert  
Cincinnati Enquirer

Ohio students' reading and math scores still haven't recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic, according to new data released Wednesday by the National Center for Education Statistics.

"The news is not good," said Peggy Carr, commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics, of the national picture. "We are not seeing the progress that we need to regain the ground our students lost during the pandemic."

Nationwide, 41% of fourth-grade students and one-third of eighth-grade students don't read at a basic level as defined by the NCES – the worst scores in two decades. For fourth graders, that means being able to put events in order after reading a text. For eighth graders, that means understanding literacy concepts like character traits and the main idea of a story.

In Ohio, the results aren't much better. About 38% of fourth-grade students and 31% of eighth-grade students can't read at that basic level, according to the Nation's Report Card. That rate has been on the rise for decades, not just since the pandemic shuttered schools.

"This is a major concern, a concern that cannot be blamed solely on the pandemic," Carr said of the national trend. She cited several possible reasons for the decline, including chronic absenteeism and a decline in students reading for enjoyment.

The U.S. Department of Education's National Assessment of Educational Progress, often called the Nation's Report Card, has monitored students' progress on a variety of subjects since 1969. It is different than the report cards that the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce gives schools and districts annually.

Over the past two years, Gov. Mike DeWine has overhauled how Ohio teaches students to read, focusing on "the science of reading." That method focuses on phonics and teaching students to break words down into their phonemes or sounds.

The average reading score for Ohio fourth graders and eighth graders hasn't changed significantly since 2022, according to the new report card. It could be too soon to tell the impact of DeWine's efforts.

## **What does the Nation's Report Card say about Ohio students?**

The report card offered other insights about how Ohio students are doing compared to their peers elsewhere.

- Ohio's eighth grade students outperformed their peers nationally in mathematics and reading. But fourth grade scores for both subjects were on par with the national average.
- Ohio students' performance in mathematics and reading hasn't improved since 2022, but it hasn't gotten worse either.
- Race and economic stability impacted learning. Black fourth graders' average mathematics score was 36 points lower than their white peers in 2024, compared to a 29-point gap in 2000.