

Tennessee student achievement in a national context

How do students from Tennessee's public schools stack up against their peers in other states?

The answer is not very good.

One means of making such a comparison is the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, n.d.), also known as "the Nation's Report Card." It is the only nationally representative and ongoing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas. Tests are conducted periodically in reading, math, science, writing, U.S. history, civics, geography, and the arts. The results are based on public school students only. The main NAEP assessment is usually administered at grades 4 and 8 at the state level.

Here are some numbers to put the situation in context (Grissmer & Flanagan, 2006):

- ▶ Between 1990 and 2003, Tennessee almost always ranked in the bottom 20% of states on both 4th and 8th grade reading and math scores.
- ▶ On the 2003 tests, North Carolina, Virginia and Kentucky had higher scores than Tennessee. Tennessee scored higher than Alabama.
- ▶ Arkansas, Georgia, South Carolina and West Virginia typically had scores similar to those of Tennessee.
- ▶ Tennessee has seen below average gains in test scores between 1990 and 2003.
- ▶ Tennessee students score relatively higher on the science test than they do on the math and reading tests.
- ▶ Tennessee ranked 41st out of 48 states in the 2003 NAEP reading assessment for 8th graders, with an average score more than 5 percentage points below the national average.
- ▶ Tennessee fares better in science than in math, ranking 26th out of the 37 states that conduct the NAEP science exam at the 8th grade level.
- ▶ Tennessee 8th graders scored less than 4 percentage points below the national average.
- ▶ While female students complete more challenging curricula and earn higher GPAs, they do not perform as well on NAEP as males with the same academic records (Shettle, et al., 2007).