

# The Sky Is Not Falling, But We Need to Take Action

## A Review of the Results of the 2018 NAEP 8th Grade Social Studies Assessments

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The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation’s Report Card, is the most comprehensive measure of student learning, and is widely considered the gold standard for empirically measuring trends in student achievement outcomes in the United States. The NAEP data for 2018, which were released on April 23, 2020, offer an assessment of the performance of a nationally representative group of 42,700 eighth-graders from about 780 schools in civics, geography,

and U.S. history in 2018. In earlier years, NAEP also reported results for civics, geography, and U.S. history in grades 4 and 12, as well as for economics in grade 12 (though NAEP does not plan to test this subject or geography in the future).

NAEP results garner significant attention when new scores are released. Educational policymakers frequently cite NAEP findings in their recommendations for K-12 educational reforms and national, state, and district funding allocations. The latest

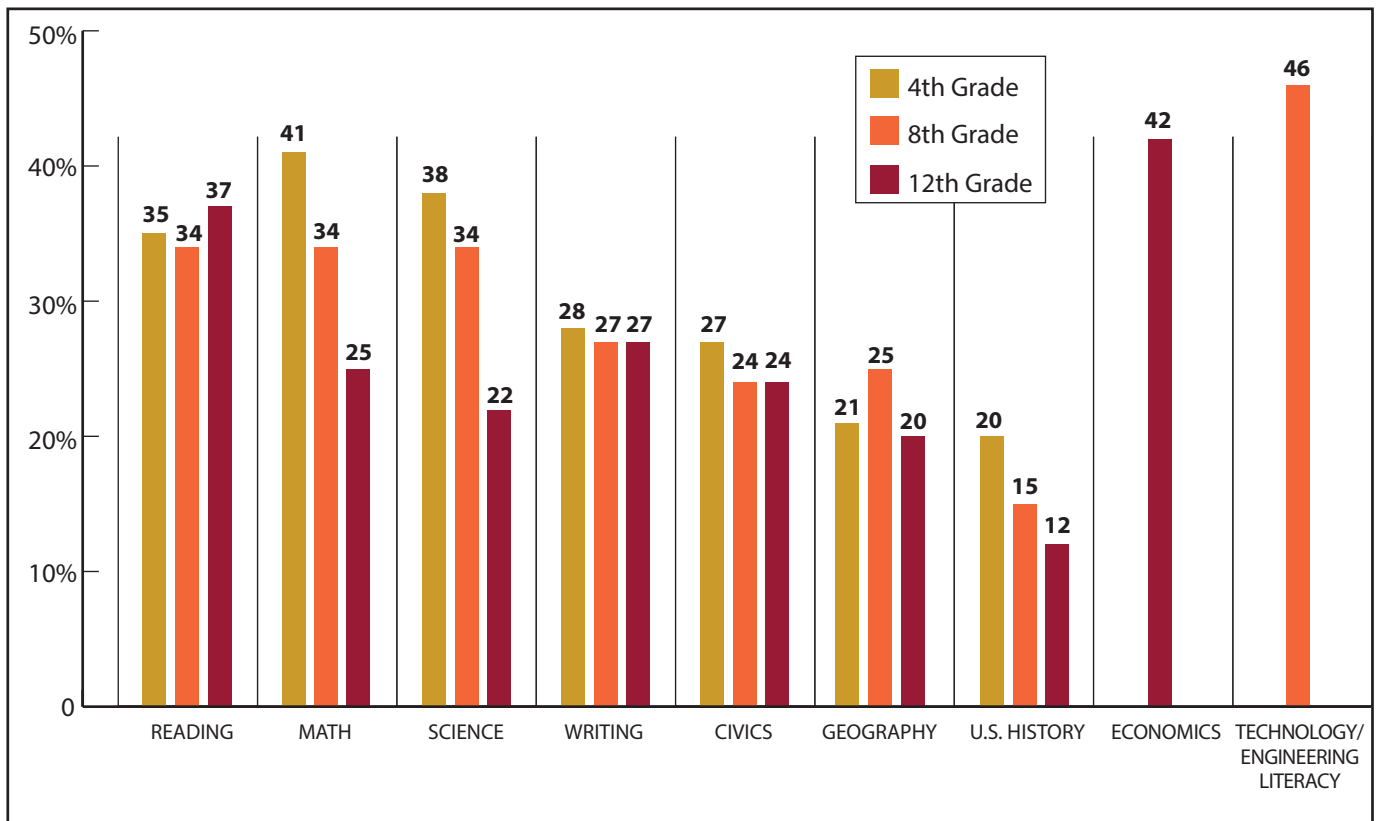


Figure 1. Percentage of Students at or above the Proficient Level by Content Area and Grade Band in Recent NAEP Assessments

The most recent NAEP national results by subject area are for the following grades and years: civics, geography, and U.S. history for grades 4 and 12 in 2010 and grade 8 in 2018; economics for grade 12 in 2012; math and reading for grades 4 and 8 in 2019 and for grade 12 in 2015; science for grades 4, 8, and 12 in 2015; writing for grade 4 in 2002 and grades 8 and 12 in 2011; technology and engineering literacy for grade 8 in 2018.

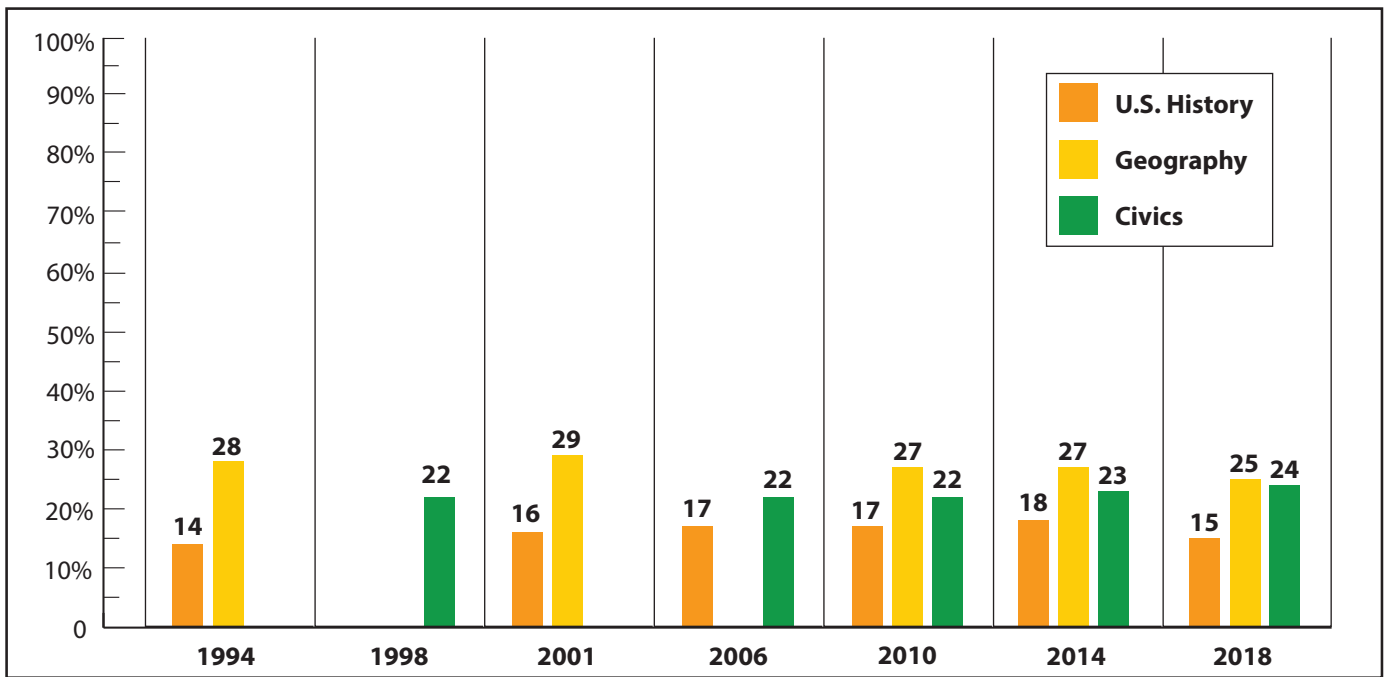


Figure 2. Percentage of Students at or above the NAEP Proficient Level by Year and Subject Area

scores offer an opportunity for social studies educators to advocate for the importance of social studies instruction. Although there are limits to what NAEP results indicate about student learning, NAEP reports provide valuable data on school and teacher characteristics, classroom instructional practices, and student content knowledge and/or skills. In this article, I will explore these data, which offer useful information about the educational experiences of students in U.S. schools.

### Results from the NAEP 2018 Civics, Geography, and U.S. History Assessments

According to the Nations Report Card,<sup>1</sup> NAEP scores across grade bands in recent tests suggest that students are less proficient in social studies knowledge and skills than in the other content areas, such as reading, math, and science, that have been evaluated by the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB). Figure 1 displays the percentage of students at or above the NAEP proficiency level in 4th, 8th, and 12th grades for each assessment.

The reasons for this difference are of the utmost concern for social studies advocates, and the NAEP results could be an influential tool for NCSS and social studies leaders to use to advocate for social studies. The relatively low performance in social studies seems to indicate differences in K-12 students' access and exposure to social studies content, compared with other subjects, in the form of coursework, instructional time, and learning opportunities.<sup>2</sup>

### Social Studies Has Flatlined and Needs Life-Support

According to the Nation's Report Card, key findings from the

2018 NAEP assessments suggest that: (1) overall scores are lower since the last test administration in 2014; (2) there have been decreases in scores for some racial/ethnic groups; and (3) there has been stagnant or declining proficiency in social studies. Across the social studies subject areas assessed in 2018, three-quarters of 8th graders did not achieve NAEP subject area proficiency (see Figure 2). Less than a quarter of students are at or above the NAEP Proficient Level for civics while only 15% of 8th grade students score at or above the NAEP Proficient Level in U.S. history.

The immediate reactions to the NAEP 2018 civics, geography, and U.S. history results were of dismay and blame. The National Assessment Governing Board's press release highlighted that "many students are struggling to understand and explain the importance of civic participation, how American government functions, the historical significance of events, and the need to grasp and apply core geographic concepts."<sup>3</sup> Education Secretary Betsy DeVos declared that the NAEP social studies scores were "stark and inexcusable," while identifying the root cause as the "antiquated approach to education" and arguing that the results are proof that "we need to fundamentally rethink education in America."<sup>4</sup> Headlines on the day the scores were released echoed the claim that eighth-grade students know little about civics, geography, and history, and that the majority of students are failing in comparison to prior generations. Two examples are: "8th Graders Don't Know Much About History, National Exam Shows,"<sup>5</sup> and "Eighth-Graders' U.S. History and Geography Scores Decline; Civics Scores Flat in New Nation's Report Cards."<sup>6</sup> Hardly any consideration was made of the national, state, and local policy practices that have minimal-

ized and constrained K-12 social studies for decades. Moreover, the rhetoric that was promulgated about “plummeting scores” or students “having no understanding of history, geography, or civics” frequently misrepresented the results. Let’s look more closely at the long-term performance of students on NAEP social studies assessments.

When comparing baseline years for the first year a test is administered (1994 for geography and U.S. history; 1998 for civics), as presented in Figure 2, the most recent NAEP results for eighth-grade civics, geography, and U.S. history results reveal minimal change over time in the percentages of students at or above the level of proficiency in NAEP scores. In 2018, U.S. history scores declined to a significant degree compared to 2014, but were not measurably different from 1994. NAEP geography scores in 2018, while not significantly different from 2014, were significantly different from 1994. There were no statistically significant differences in civics over time.

The flatlined scores over time offer evidence that the decades of policy and instructional neglect of social studies in elementary school and the low priority given to social studies in middle school have continued to hinder efforts to increase the percentages of students who perform at or above the NAEP Proficient Level in civics, geography, and U.S. history. Greater national attention toward instructional technology, Common Core and/or STEM has influenced educational budget decisions so that fewer professional learning resources and opportunities are available for social studies teachers as compared to English language arts (ELA), math, and science. Declines in testing, instructional time, course requirements, and resources have gradually eroded the importance of social studies in the United States. Making calls for legislative action to address instructional, curricular, and resource gaps in social studies might make inroads in getting social studies off life-support in K-12 schools. For example, the CivXNow Coalition, a project of iCivics, issued a statement on the Nation’s Report Card 2018 Civics scores lamenting “sobering” results.<sup>7</sup> In response, Louise Dube, executive director of the CivXNow Coalition, called for grassroots support to press Congress for \$40 million in emergency funding for civic education.<sup>8</sup>

## The Sky is Not Falling

The negative rhetoric of the media about NAEP results has frequently been used as a policy weapon by critics of the public educational system to try to undermine confidence in social studies education. The message and reaction are consistent: the sky is falling, or about to, because American public schools are not getting the job done in whatever subject happened to be measured by NAEP.

Part of the problem arises from the focus on the small percentage of students in social studies subjects who are considered “proficient” rather than the much larger number of students who have a basic knowledge of the subjects tested. The interpretation is often made that not attaining proficiency is similar to

failing. It is important to recognize that the NAEP concept of proficiency is set considerably higher than grade level, as acknowledged on the NAEP site.<sup>9</sup> Proficient and advanced levels are equivalent to high and outstanding achievement in rigorous disciplinary content. According to NAEP, students reaching the Proficient Level have “demonstrated competency over challenging subject-matter knowledge, the application of such knowledge to real world situations, and analytical skills appropriate to the subject matter.”<sup>10</sup> As an example, students proficient in geography can do much more than point out basic locations on a map; they can understand, describe, and explain:

- Fundamental vocabulary, analytic concepts, physical and cultural features, and regional patterns;
- Locational questions requiring integration of two or more geographic sources;
- Case studies about how regions influence trade and migration patterns, and cultural and political interaction.

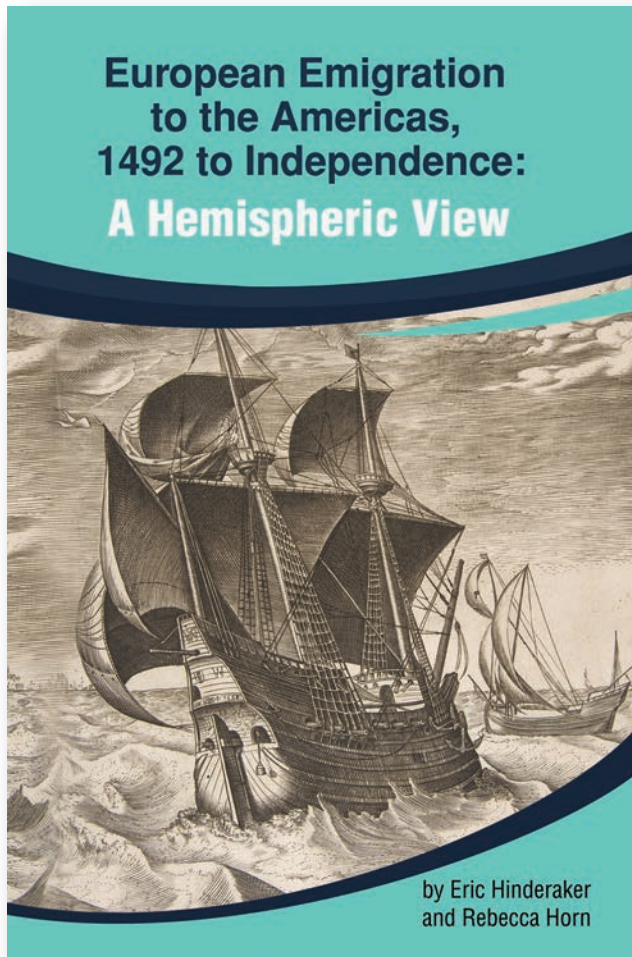
Emphasizing the percentages of students at or above proficiency overlooks the fact that students at the basic level have demonstrated some mastery and have prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for performance at the NAEP Proficient level. Basic scores are not necessarily predictors of a lack of college readiness, as some interpretations might suggest.<sup>11</sup>

A careful reading of the NAEP results can offer a more complex picture of students’ educational attainment. Trends indicate (see Figure 3 on page 254) that more students in 2018 scored at or above basic levels of proficiency than in baseline years (1994 and 1998) in civics and U.S. history. In 2018, 73% of students scored at or above the basic level in civics as compared to 74% in 2014; yet, the percentage of students with these prerequisite knowledge and skills was slightly above scores between 1998-2010. The national average scale score of eighth-grade students in civics was 153, which is 19 points higher than the basic level cut-off score of 134, above which students have what would be considered a basic understanding of civic life, politics, and government; the foundations of the American political system; the purposes, values and principles of American democracy; the relationships of the US to other nations; and the roles of citizens in American democracy. For U.S. history, 66% of students demonstrated a basic knowledge and skills in 2018 as compared to 71% in 2014 and 69% in 2010. Albeit slightly lower than all prior years and equal to 1994, 2018 geography scores indicate that 71% of students have basic geographic knowledge and can apply geographic thinking skills assessed on NAEP.

## Ten Policy-Actionable Findings from the NAEP 2018 Results for Civics, Geography, and U.S. History in Grade 8

As the largest nationally representative sample of U.S. student learning in social studies, NAEP is an extraordinarily useful (and underutilized) resource for exploring differences among

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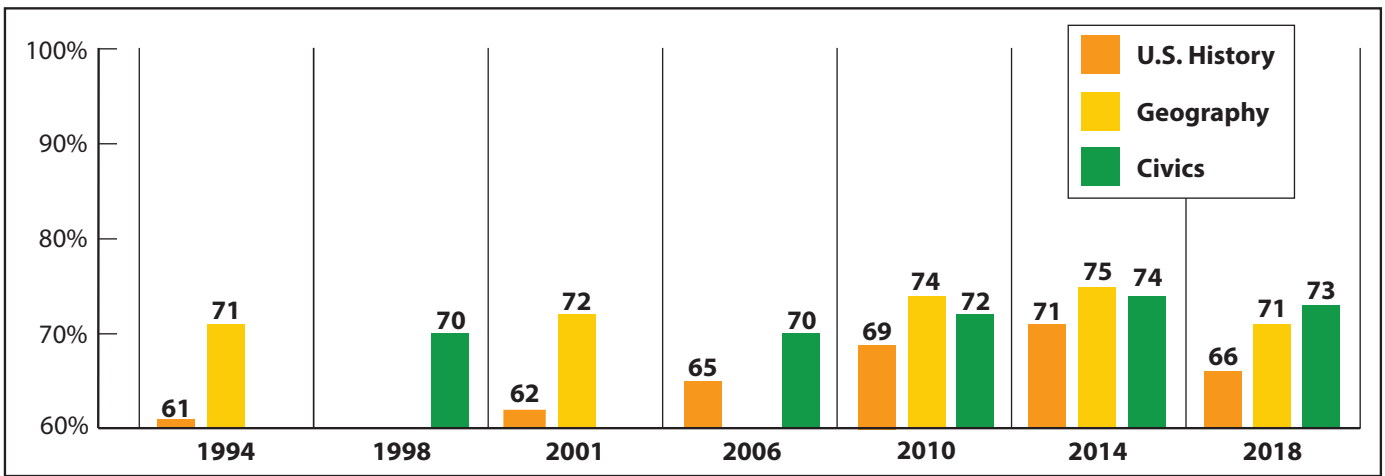


Figure 3. Percentage of Students at or above the NAEP Basic Level in Social Studies Subjects by Subject Area and Year.

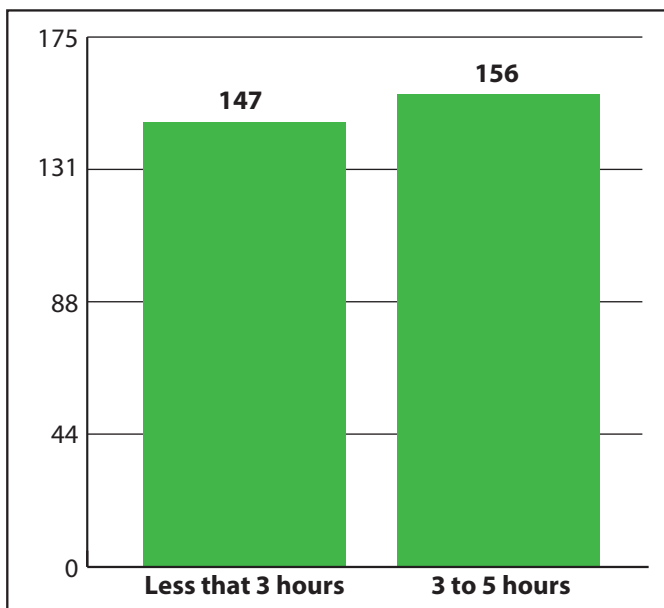


Figure 4. Average Scale Scores for Grade 8 Civics, by Time per Week of Social Studies Instruction

demographic groups and for examining how educational experiences relate to student learning outcomes.

The rich value of NAEP data lies beneath the surface-level reports found in most media portrayals. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) offers a data analysis tool, NAEP Data Explorer, that can be utilized by researchers and educators to identify demographic, curriculum and/or pedagogical variables that have some influence (both positive and negative) on student achievement in various subject areas in grades four, eight, and twelve.<sup>12</sup>

The data offer important information about the characteristics of learners, the common attributes of schools they attend, and the reported training and practice of the educators who teach these students. In support of the mission of NCSS to advocate and build capacity for high-quality social studies by providing leadership, services, and support to educators, I offer

ten policy-actionable findings related to observable differences within the NAEP performance scores for eighth-grade civics, geography, and U.S. history in 2018.<sup>13</sup>

*Finding 1. More Instructional Time in the Middle Grades Results in Higher Scores*

As reported in Figure 4, students in grade 8 whose social studies teachers report spending at least three to five hours per week on social studies instruction score significantly higher on NAEP civics than students whose teachers report spending less than 3 hours on social studies instruction. This finding supports the value of social studies instructional time in promoting student achievement.

*Finding 2. Middle School Social Studies Courses Prepare Students for High School, not NAEP*

Course work in middle school varies by subject area. Figure 5 displays the percentage of students who took a course mainly focused on either civics, geography, or U.S. history in 2018. These results suggest that most students in American middle schools take either a U.S. history or civics course in eighth grade. In comparison, only 20% of students report taking an eighth-grade class or course mainly focused on geography. These findings provide evidence of curricular priorities that mirror course requirements in high school (see Tables 1 and 2).

*Finding 3: Access to a Civics Course in Middle School Improves Civic Knowledge*

The NAEP civics data also show that, in addition to the percentage of students (51%) who took a class in civics, 32% of students reported taking a course that included some civics and/or U.S. government topics. When comparing the combined categories for civics (a class in civics or a class with civics topics integrated), these eighth-grade students (83%) scored significantly higher than students who did not take a class that taught civics or government. Curriculum access to an eighth-grade course that primarily focuses on civics was also associated with signifi-

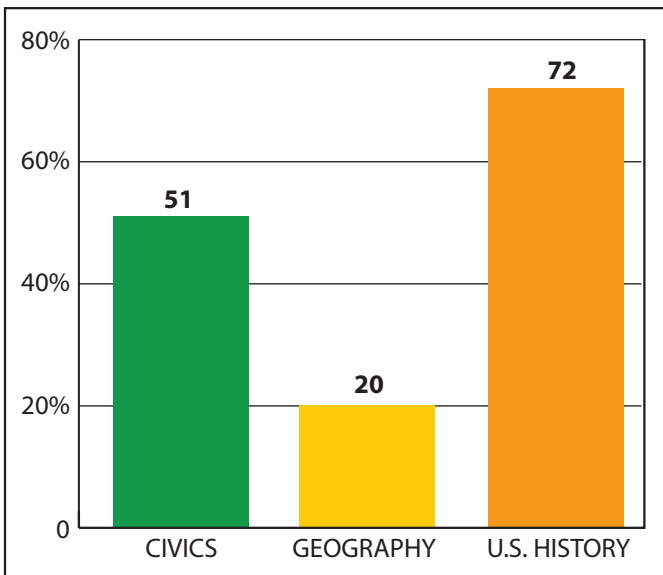


Figure 5. Percentage of Students in Grade 8 Who Took a Class Primarily Focused on Civics, Geography, or U.S. History

cantly higher NAEP civics scores. Given that few states have a civics course requirement in middle school, NAEP results offer the hope that an emphasis on civics requirements prior to high school could be beneficial in improving students' civic knowledge and skills. In light of evidence that those states which prioritize civics courses in high school have higher rates of youth civic engagement,<sup>14</sup> more coursework or a greater emphasis on civics in middle grades may also have the potential to increase civic participation and engagement. Moreover, this finding could be used to inform states' efforts to develop a seal of civic literacy, readiness, and/or engagement.

*Finding 4. Integrating Social Studies with Other Subjects Results in Lower Achievement*

Students in eighth grade whose teachers report that social studies is taught as a discrete subject (i.e., as a stand-alone course) score significantly higher on the NAEP assessments in U.S. history and geography than students whose teachers report that social studies is integrated with other subjects. Figure 6 on page 256, which is based on NAEP data for 2018, shows the average scores for U.S. history and geography across the three ways middle schools deliver social studies instruction.

As presented in Figure 7 on page 256, Grade 8 students in civics whose teachers report that social studies is taught as a discrete subject also score higher on the NAEP assessment than students whose teachers report that civics is integrated with other subjects, though this difference is not statistically significant.

The NAEP results offer the possibility that stand-alone social studies courses may contribute to increased content knowledge and skills for middle school students. Future research should attempt to isolate the effects of middle-grades organizational structures on social studies teaching and learning.

Table 1. High School Requirements for Civics & Government and U.S. History

	Civics & Government		U.S. History	
	Number of States	Percentage of States	Number of States	Percentage of States
Course is required in high school	36	72%	40	80%
Exam required to graduate	19	38%	15	30%
Course is at least 1 year	8	16%	28	56%

Table 2. High School Requirements for Geography

Geography Requirements in High School	Number of States	Percentage of States
Stand-alone geography course is required for graduation	3	6%
Stand-alone combined history/geography course is required for graduation	7	14%
Geography not required in high school	25	50%
Local school districts determine graduation requirements	15	30%

*Finding 5. Students Have Unequal Opportunities to Be Taught by a Content Specialist*

As part of the 2018 NAEP assessments, teachers of eighth-grade students were asked to report their role in teaching social studies. Results show that almost two-thirds (62%) of students in U.S. history classes were taught by teachers whose primary teaching responsibility was U.S. history. In comparison, less than a quarter (22%) of eighth-grade students in civics were taught by a teacher whose primary teaching responsibility was civics, and only 17% of students in geography had a teacher whose primary teaching responsibility was geography.

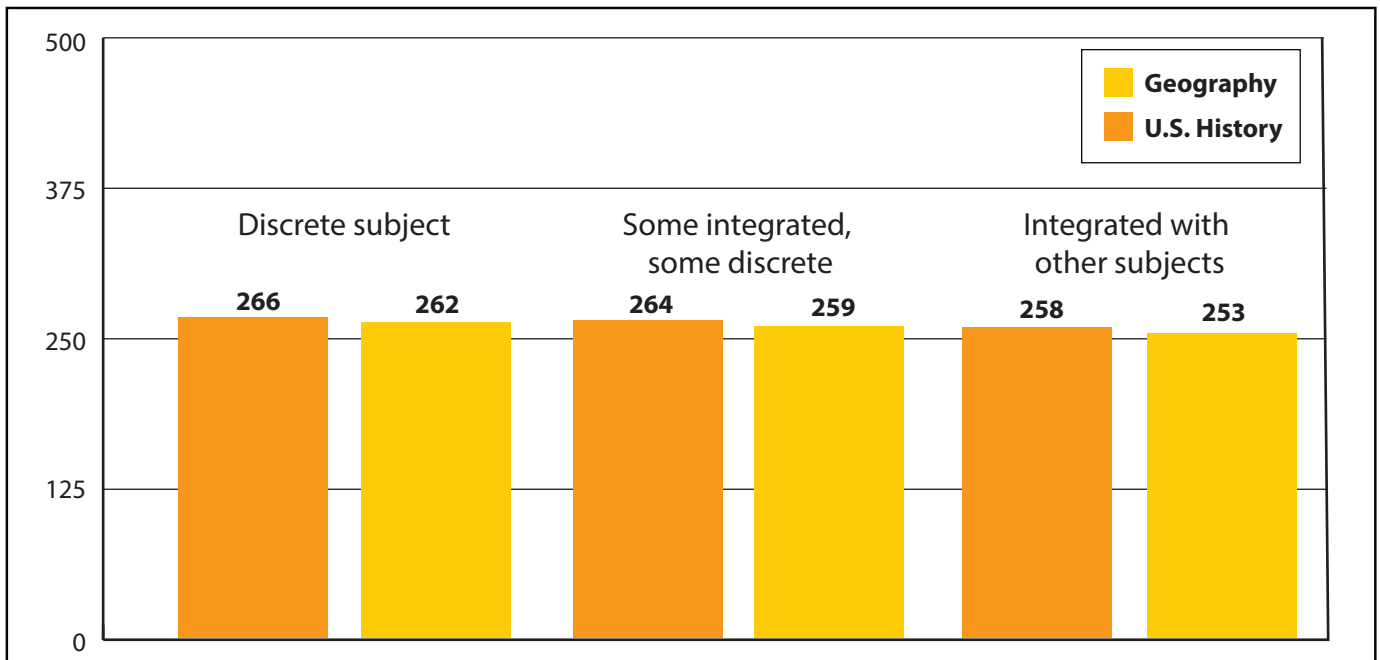


Figure 6. The Organization of 8th Grade U.S. History and Geography, 2018

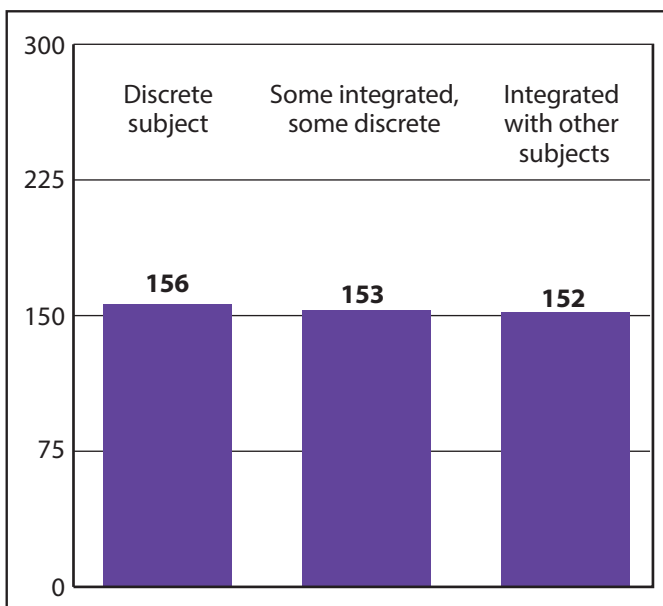


Figure 7. The Organization of Eighth Grade Civics, 2018

Access to teachers who specialized in the subject they taught varied by race. As presented in Table 3, in U.S. history, the percentage of Black students who had access to a teacher whose primary responsibility was teaching U.S. history was significantly lower than the percentage for White, Asian, and American Indian/Alaska Native students. Moreover, access to a teacher whose primary focus was the social studies subject students were assessed in was associated with significantly different NAEP scores in all subject areas. These findings suggest that in eighth grade, not only are Black and multi-racial students less likely to have access to a teacher who specializes in the subject being taught, but lack of access results in unequal opportunities

for success in civics, geography, and U.S. history.

*Finding 6. Race Matters in Middle School Social Studies Achievement*

The NAEP 2018 geography and U.S. history scores reveal racial differences in achievement that indicate an opportunity gap for students of color. Comparisons by race and ethnicity of the percentages of eighth-grade students at or above the NAEP Proficient Level across social studies assessments are presented in Figures 8, 9, and 10.

While more Asian and Asian/Pacific Islander students reached proficient achievement levels than White students, Black students represented the lowest percentages of students meeting the NAEP Proficient Level. When comparing Black and White student achievement, the percentage of Black students at this level was 21 percentage points lower than the percentage of Whites in civics, 29 percentage points lower in geography, and 16 percentage points lower in U.S. history. The findings offer evidence of racial differences in students' opportunities to learn social studies and may reveal evidence of systemic racism in and across schools which results in starkly different educational, curricular, instructional, and assessment experiences.<sup>15</sup> The development of social studies professional learning and instructional practices in support of racial literacy and anti-racism might address these observed differences among racial groups.<sup>16</sup>

*Finding 7. Racial Achievement Gaps Can be Narrowed*

NAEP civics and geography findings indicate promising outcomes for some racial groups. The civic knowledge gap between White and Hispanic students narrowed by ten points for average

Table 3. **Race/Ethnicity and Teacher's Specialization in 8th Grade U.S. History**

Racial Group	Percentage of 8th grade students whose teacher's primary teaching responsibility was U.S. History
White	64%
Black	52%
Hispanic	62%
Asian/Pacific Islander	68%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	77%
Two or More Races	55%

scores since 1998. Similarly, the White-Hispanic score gap in geography decreased by seven points from 1994 to 2018. The White-Black gap narrowed in geography in comparison to 1994 by six points, albeit the gap was slightly smaller (by one point) in 2014. The changes from the baseline tests of the 1990s were statistically significant, meaning that the narrowing achievement gaps were not random and were likely caused by something other than chance. Although some progress has been made, advocacy efforts are needed to narrow opportunity gaps in social studies for Black, Hispanic, and Native American middle school students.

*Finding 8. Greater Self-Confidence Can Bridge the Gender Gap*  
Male and female eighth-graders showed score decreases in geography and U.S. history since 2014 but no significant score changes in civics. (See Table 4 on page 258) On the 8th grade NAEP exams, comparisons of the 2018 results to the previous administration in 2014 and the baseline years show that female students consistently score higher on NAEP civics than their male classmates, but have average scale scores lower than males in both geography and U.S. history. The average point difference remained consistent for geography between 2014 and 2018, suggesting that no progress has been made in reducing the male-female achievement difference in geography. The gender score difference in U.S. history widened by four points since 1994 and was significantly different from the baseline year, when the male and female score averages were equal. This finding indicates an ongoing gender gap in U.S. history and offers evidence of a need for supporting curricular promotion and intersectional valuing of women.<sup>17</sup>

Whereas gender remains of concern in social studies learning, the self-confidence of learners was associated with differences in achievement scores for both male and female students. As reported in Figure 11, which compares the eighth-grade 2018

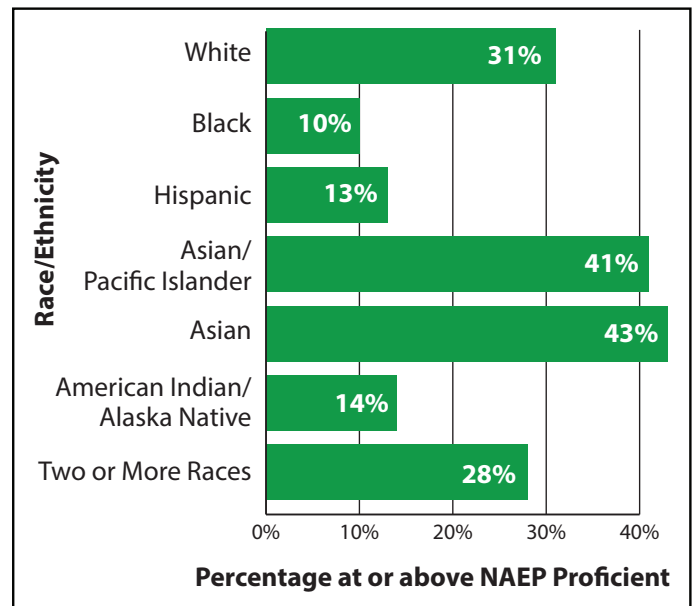


Figure 8. Percentage of Students at or above the NAEP Proficient Level in Grade 8 Civics by Race/Ethnicity in 2018

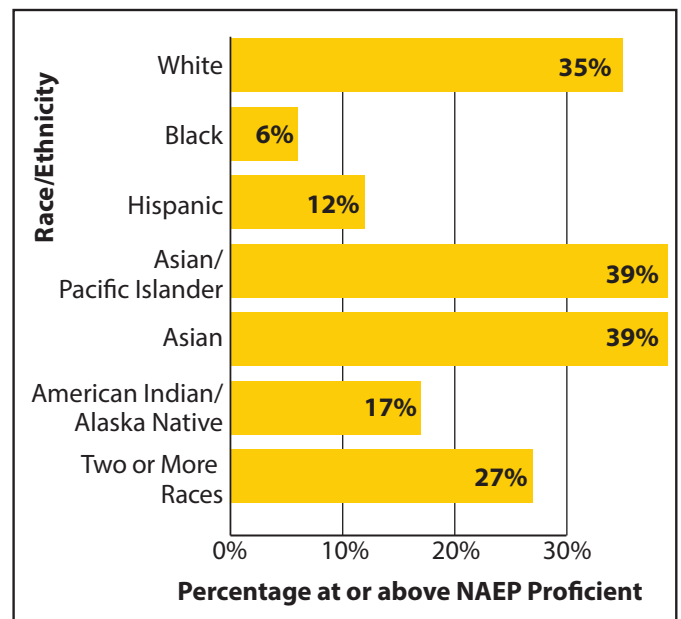


Figure 9. Percentage of Students at or above the NAEP Proficient Level in Grade 8 Geography by Race/Ethnicity in 2018

NAEP civics results within each gender, highly confident females significantly outperform moderately confident females and moderately confident males on the NAEP civics assessment. Advocacy for building the confidence of students in their knowledge and skills in social studies in middle school may reduce gender gaps and improve student achievement.

*Finding 9: Socio-Economic Status Predicts NAEP Scores*  
Income achievement gaps on NAEP social studies assessments have always been very wide.<sup>18</sup> The results from NAEP eighth-grade assessments in 2018 are no different. Students living in poverty do not score as well as their wealthier peers on the civics,



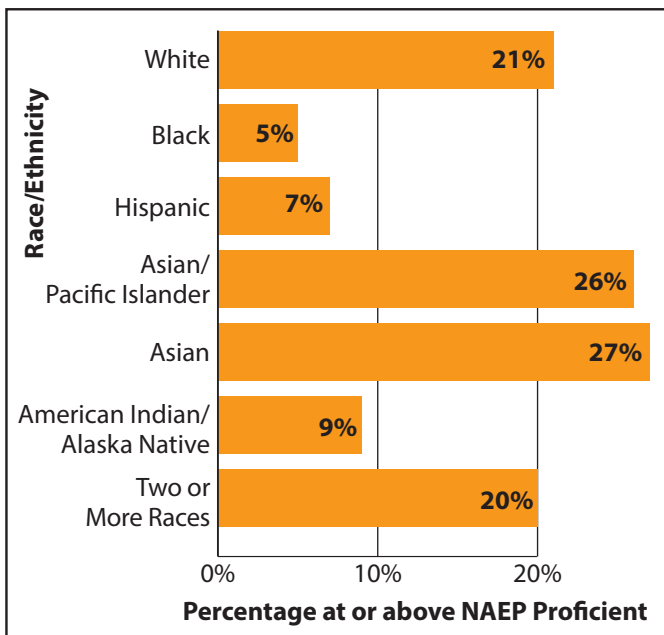


Figure 10. Percentage of Students at or above the NAEP Proficient Level in Grade 8 History by Race/Ethnicity in 2018

geography, and U.S. history assessments. Let's consider U.S. history data as an example. On average, students identified as low wealth (eligible for free/reduced lunch) perform significantly lower than wealthier peers. Their average scale score is 140, compared with 164 for students from more affluent families. This is further evidence of opportunity gaps in social studies learning.<sup>19</sup> Where a student attends schools has been found to be a significant predictor of student success on NAEP. More needs to be done in middle school social studies to improve the educative experiences of students living in poverty. NCSS advocacy efforts should include equity literacy as well as equitable access to curriculum and instruction for developing the capacities, intellect, and dispositions of social studies.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Finding 10. Some Modes of Instruction are More Effective than Others*

NAEP data include many instructional decision-making variables that measure the frequency of the modes of instruction and classroom activities used to teach social studies. For example, in a study which used item response theory (IRT) to examine NAEP U.S. history 12th grade test questions and student performance, researchers found that students who learned U.S. history from teachers who frequently emphasize a variety of engaging, text-dependent modes of instruction had a greater likelihood of correctly answering questions regardless of item-type (multiple choice or extended response), race, social capital (SES), or a host of several other ecological variables.<sup>21</sup>

Exploring the relationship between student achievement on NAEP and modes of instruction and/or classroom activities could be useful in informing pedagogical and curricular decisions. Let's consider reading and two types of texts (primary sources and textbooks) frequently used in the social studies.

Table 4: Male and Female 8th Grade Average NAEP Scale Scores by Year and Subject Area

NAEP Assessment	Year	Males	Females	Average Point Difference
Civics (0-300 scale)	1998*	148	152	4
	2014	154	154	0
	2018	151	154	3
Geography (0-500 scale)	1994*	262	258	4
	2014*	263	260	3
	2018*	260	257	3
U.S. History (0-500 scale)	1994*	259	259	0
	2014*	270	265	5
	2018*	265	261	4

\*Significant differences in average scale score for gender,  $p < .05$

Although results were similar in civics and geography, I share NAEP descriptive data on U.S. history as an example (see Figures 12 and 13). In general, reading either primary sources or textbooks in U.S. history is associated with higher NAEP scores; however, the data offer an indication of the optimal frequency of use of these resources. Reading a textbook promotes knowledge (as measured by NAEP), but reading it every day might not be as beneficial as reading it once or twice a week. On the other hand, the more frequent use of primary sources in social studies seems to produce greater knowledge of U.S. history content.

#### Final Thoughts

From a policy standpoint, NAEP scores are viewed as the most comprehensive measure of what students know and can do at critical junctures in their K-12 school experience. However, it is also important to put NAEP scores in perspective. The Nation's Report Card covers a small subset of the work educators are asked to do. The NAEP assessments measure specific content and skills, but NAEP is not a test of all content and skills necessary for social studies, such as the historic legacy of slavery and racism, or current issues such as the constitutionality of executive changes to national elections, environmental racism, service learning, and/or civic action. Furthermore, NAEP is not a measure of quality of instruction. It is, however, a data tool that reveals gaps and variances in performance outcomes that can inform discussions, deliberations, advocacy, and actions concerning critical issues in the field of social studies education. Beyond the media hype about reproachable test scores, analyses of NAEP civics, geography, and U.S. history eighth-grade results in 2018 can be meaningful influences on policy considerations for social studies educators, administrators, and leaders. For members of professional associations such as NCSS, NAEP results can be valuable advocacy talking points as we

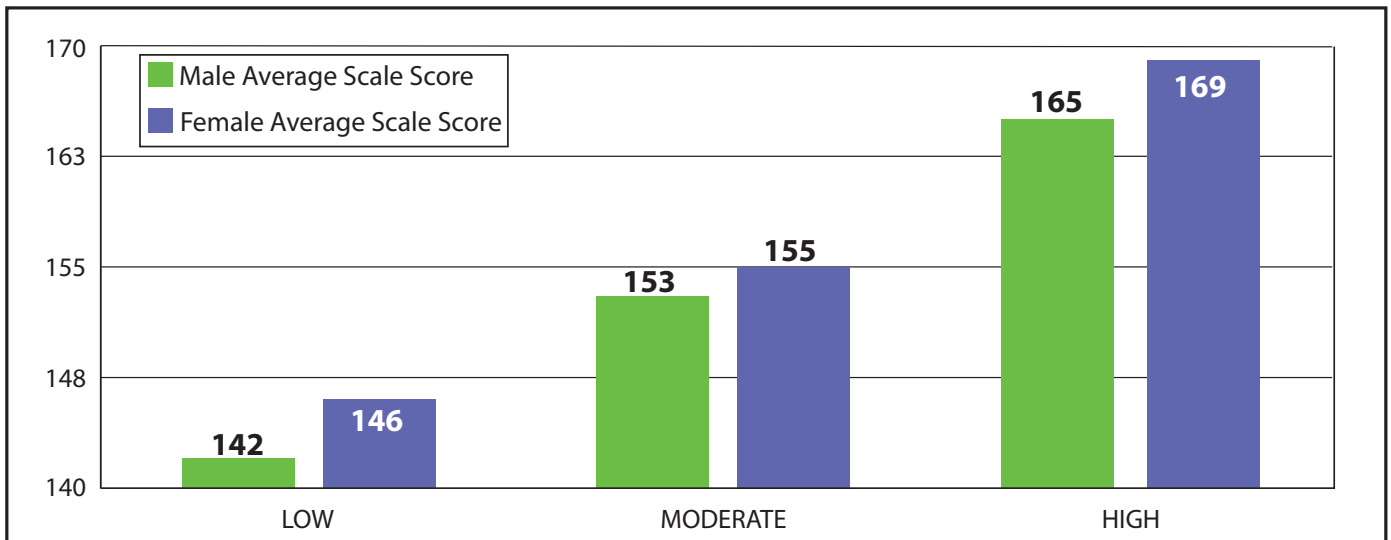


Figure 11. Comparisons of Average Scale Scores for 8th Grade NAEP Civics in 2018 by Gender and Confidence in Civics Knowledge and Skills

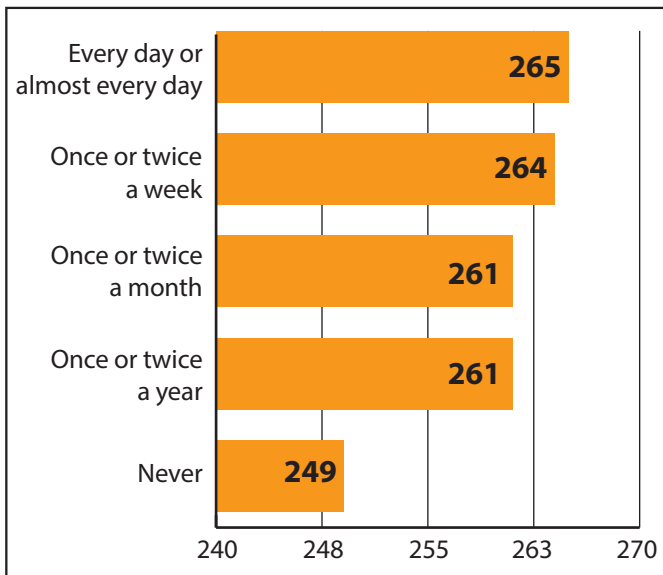


Figure 12. Average NAEP U.S. History Scale Scores in 2018 for Students in Grade 8 Who Used Primary Sources for Social Studies

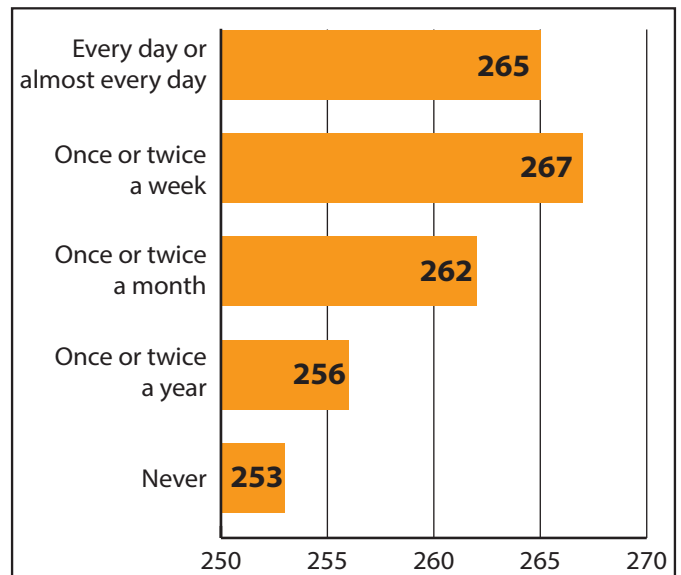


Figure 13. Average NAEP U.S. History Scale Scores in 2018 for Students in Grade 8 Who Read Material from a U.S. History Textbook

seek to bend the ear of policy-makers in support of a democratic education in a pluralistic society; an equitable opportunity to learn social studies for all students; racial, gender, and socio-economic equality in education; and civic preparation and empowerment for all youth. 🌍

**Notes**

1. The Nation's Report Card is accessible at <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/>.
2. Ten states in the USA do not even require a civics course in high school. See the report by S. Shapiro and C. Brown, "The State of Civics Education," for the Center for American Progress, which is accessible at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2018/02/21/446857/state-civics-education/>. In Rhode Island, parents and students filed a class-action lawsuit, *Cook v Raimondo*, for the right to learn civics (see <http://www.cookvraimondo.info/>)
3. See <https://apnews.com/PR%20Newswire/9fb92ec22322ae11f64f25ab33d61109>
4. See <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/statement-secretary-devos-2019-naep-results>

5. See *Education Week*, April 23, 2020, at <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/04/23/8th-graders-scores-drop-in-history-geography.html>.
6. See *Yahoo Finance* at <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/eighth-graders-u-history-geography-040100626.html?guccounter=1>.
7. See <https://myemail.constantcontact.com/What-do-the-NAEP-Civics-results-really-mean-.html?soid=1122914878571&aid=64UiNpRzYBo>
8. See <https://myemail.constantcontact.com/The-greatest-living-lesson-in-civics-of-our-lifetimes.html?soid=1122914878571&aid=56koW6rlgM4>
9. See <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/guides/>
10. See [https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/guides/scores\\_achv.aspx](https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/guides/scores_achv.aspx)
11. See Sarah D. Sparks, "Can NAEP Predict College Readiness?" in *Education Week*, September 11, 2012 at <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/09/12/03nagb.h32.html>
12. For the NAEP Data Explorer, see <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/landing>
13. To examine differences in student scale scores (plausible values) for the 2018 NAEP civics, geography, and U.S. history assessments, I used descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, tests of significance (e.g., t-tests and correlations), and gap analyses and regression analyses available in the NAEP Data Explorer. While these

findings have merit in advocacy efforts, there are many more analyses that can be made with the numerous student-, classroom-, and school-level variables. Likewise, more robust statistical tests, such as item response theory or multi-level modeling, are recommended to develop a more comprehensive understanding of NAEP data for each content area when controlling for demographic or school differences. Due to pagination limitations, results of statistical tests are only reported as significant ( $p < .05$ ) or not significant ( $p > .05$ ).

14. See Shapiro and Brown, note 2.
15. See T.L. Heafner and P.G. Fitchett, "An Opportunity to Learn U.S. History: What NAEP Data Suggest Regarding the Opportunity Gap," *The High School Journal* 98, no. 3 (2015), 226–249.
16. See L. King and G.S. Kasun, "Food for Thought: A Framework for Social Justice in Social Studies Education," *Focus on Middle Schools* 25, no. 3 (2013), 1–4; L. King, A.E. Vickery, and G. Caffrey, "A Pathway to Racial Literacy: Using the Let's Act Framework to Teach Controversial Issues," *Social Education* 82, no. 6 (2018), 316–322.
17. See NCSS's position statement, *Supporting Curricular Promotion and Intersectional Valuing of Women in History and Current Events* at <https://www.socialstudies.org/position-statements/supporting-curricular-promotion-and-intersectional-valuing-women-history-and>.

18. See the *Brown Center Report on American Education* by M. Hansen, E.M. Levesque, J. Valant, and D. Quintero in 2018 at <https://www.brookings.edu/research/2018-brown-center-report-on-american-education-prologue/>.
19. See P. G. Fitchett, T. L., Heafner, and R. Lambert. "An Analysis of Predictors of History Content Knowledge: Implications for Policy and Practice." *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 25, no. 65 (2017), 1–29.
20. P. Gorski, *Reaching and Teaching Students in Poverty: Strategies for Erasing the Opportunity Gap* (2013). New York, NY: Teachers College.; M. A. Rebell, *Flunking Democracy: Schools, Courts, and Civic Participation* (2018). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
21. T. L. Heafner and P. G. Fitchett, "Incorporating Item Response Theory (IRT) to Predict U.S. History Content Knowledge," *Journal of Social Education Research* (2017), accessible at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jssr.2017.01.001>.

**TINA L. HEAFNER** is Past President of the National Council for the Social Studies.

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