



Frequently Asked Questions

What is the National Assessment of Educational Progress?

Commonly referred to as the Nation's Report Card, the [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#) (NAEP) is the only continuing, national measure of the academic achievement of America's public and private schools. For 40 years student performance has been measured in the following subjects: reading, math, writing, science, and geography.

What is the NAEP Arts Assessment?

The [National Assessment of Educational Progress in the Arts](#) demonstrates that creativity—the skill in such demand in our fast-paced information age—is learned and can be assessed.

The 2008 NAEP Arts Assessment, also known as Nation's Arts Report Card, is the fifth NAEP assessment in the arts. The next NAEP arts assessment is scheduled to take place in 2016.

The assessment is based on the 1996 NAEP Arts Education Assessment Framework, which was the result of a national consensus effort under the auspices of the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB). The framework is a broadly accepted outline of what hundreds of arts educators, arts curriculum experts, policymakers, business representatives, and members of the general public thought the arts assessment should test.

How was the 2008 information collected?

A nationally representative sample of over 7,900 eighth-grade students from public and non-public schools participated in the NAEP Arts Assessment in 2008 in music and the visual arts. An individual student was assessed in only one art form.

What was assessed?

Students were assessed on their ability to respond to works of music and to create and respond to the visual arts. Dance and theatre were not assessed.

The responding process in music and visual arts was assessed with multiple-choice and constructed-response questions that required students to produce answers of a few words or sentences.

In music, students were asked to analyze and describe aspects of music they heard, critique instrumental and vocal performances, and demonstrate their knowledge of standard musical notation and music's role in society.

For visual arts, students were asked to create a self-portrait that would express something important about their personalities, which was scored for identifying detail, compositional elements, and use of materials. Students responded to multiple-choice questions regarding the technical similarity between two self-portraits, aesthetic properties, and characteristics of artistic media.

Why weren't students assessed in all three competencies—creating, performing, and responding—in music and visual arts?

The U.S. Department of Education's report on developing arts assessment strategies points out, "At its best, the teaching of the arts emphasizes creating and performing arts as well as studying existing works of art. If this is the way the arts ought to be taught, this is the way the arts should be assessed with tasks that ask students to respond to, create, and perform works of art." (<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pubs/strategies/>)

Unfortunately, budget constraints prohibited assessment in all three areas of competency.

Why weren't dance and theatre assessed?

The small number of U.S. schools with programs in theatre and dance resulted in too few data points for an assessment in those disciplines. The National Assessment Governing Board also cites budget constraints as a barrier to assessments in dance and theatre.

What were the key findings and how did students do?

The results reveal barriers to student achievement in the arts, with significant racial/ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic gaps. For further details please refer to the Arts Education Partnership [Summary Results](#) document.

In response to the results, the [Secretary of Education](#) and senior officials at the [National Endowment for the Arts](#) and the [National Assessment Governing Board](#) all called for substantially increasing access to arts learning and significantly improving the quality of national data collection on the status of arts education in the nation's schools.

Is trend data available comparing the 1997 and 2008 results?

Only the 2008 multiple-choice questions can be compared to the 1997 results. Changes in scoring procedures prevent comparing constructed-response questions. Changes in the arts materials available for use and the degradation of 1997 samples of art works prevent comparisons with 2008 student responses to the creating questions.

What does the NAEP tell us about the status of arts education in our nation's schools?

While the NAEP gives us some valuable information about what students know and are able to do in the arts, we lack complete national data about the status and conditions of arts education instruction in our nation's schools.

The NAEP measures student knowledge and skills in the arts, but it does not provide a complete picture of the availability and quality of arts education currently delivered in our nation's schools. Unfortunately, complete recent data has not been collected about the status of arts education in our nation's public and private schools.

Are plans in place to measure how much arts education is available to students in this country?

The U.S. Department of Education's [Fast Response Survey System](#) (FRSS), which measures how much arts education is being delivered in schools, is currently underway. Preliminary findings will be available in 2011, and the full report will be complete in 2012. The last FRSS in the arts was conducted in the 1999-2000 school year.

Absent complete data, what do we know about the status of arts education in our schools?

A 2007 study from the Center on Education Policy has found that, since the enactment of the No Child Left Behind act, 30% of districts with at least one school identified as needing improvement— those with the students most responsive to the benefits of the arts—have decreased instruction time for art

and music. The arts are uniquely able to boost learning and achievement for young children, students from economically disadvantaged circumstances, and students needing remedial instruction.

A March 2009 study conducted by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) titled, [Access to Arts Education: Inclusion of Additional Questions in Education's Planned Research Would Help Explain Why Instruction Time Has Decreased for Some Students](#), points to the need for additional research by the U.S. Department of Education to determine the impact of NCLB on access to arts learning. It also finds that minority and low-income students are experiencing decreases in access to arts education, and that the status of state budgets significantly impacts the availability of arts education in schools.

In addition to more frequent and comprehensive FRSS and NAEP arts reports, the U.S. Department of Education's research efforts must be strengthened by systematically including the arts in studies conducted on the condition of education, practices that improve academic achievement, and the effectiveness of Federal and other education programs.

What plans are in place for the next NAEP Arts Assessment? What are the changes that arts education advocates recommend in the administration of the next arts NAEP in 2016?

The next NAEP Arts Assessment is scheduled to take place in 2016. To provide a complete picture of arts learning in the U.S., future National Assessments of Educational Progress in the Arts should be more comprehensive in scope and depth, and be conducted more frequently.

The NAEP Arts Assessment provides critical information about the arts skills and knowledge of our nation's students. Future National Assessments of Educational Progress in the arts should include comprehensive information about the status and condition of music, visual arts, dance, and theatre education.

The 1997 NAEP Arts Assessment was the most comprehensive arts assessment of its kind, going beyond "fill-in-the-bubble" and pencil and paper tasks to include portfolio and performance-based assessments. In fact, the 1997 NAEP Arts Assessment was the most comprehensive assessment and report of learning *in any subject area*, and became a model for future NAEP assessments and reports in a range of other core subjects of learning. The 2008 Arts Assessment only measured students' ability to respond to music and to create and respond to the visual arts. Future NAEPs in the arts should measure students' ability to create, perform, and respond to dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts.

The NAEP Arts Assessment was administered only to 8th grade students. For a comprehensive understanding of student learning in the arts, future assessments should be administered in grades 4, 8, and 12.

The most recent NAEP Arts Assessment prior to the 2008 report was conducted in 1997, leaving an 11-year gap in information about student knowledge in this core academic subject area. The NAEP should be administered at least once every five years.