



# 2016 Nation's Arts Report Card: Frequently Asked Questions

## What is the Nation's Report Card?

Commonly referred to as the Nation's Report Card, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the country's largest nationally representative measure of student achievement in America's schools over time. The Nation's Report Card compares performance among states, urban districts, public and private schools and student demographic groups and has covered mathematics, reading, writing, science, geography, U.S. history, civics, economics, technology and engineering literacy, and the arts. NAEP was created by Congress and is funded through the U.S. Department of Education. It has been conducted since 1969.

## What is the National Assessment of Educational Progress in the Arts?

The National Assessment of Educational Progress in the Arts demonstrates that creativity—the skill in high demand in our fast-paced information age—is learned and can be assessed. The 2016 NAEP Arts Assessment is the fifth NAEP assessment in the arts. In addition to measuring students' knowledge and skills in visual arts and music, the NAEP Arts Assessment also highlights how the availability of resources and opportunities in arts education may relate to student achievement.

The assessment is based on the [NAEP Arts Education Assessment Framework](#), which describes the assessment content and method of evaluating student responses. 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 think the arts assessment should test. The inclusion of the arts in the 2016 NAEP marked the fifth national assessment of both music and visual arts disciplines. The NAEP first assessed music in 1972 and visual arts in 1975. The 1997 NAEP assessment included theatre and dance, although dance performance was not reported due to statistical constraints.

## How was the 2016 information collected and what was assessed?

A nationally representative sample of approximately 8,800 eighth-grade students from public and non-public schools participated in the 2016 NAEP Arts Assessment in music and the visual arts.

An individual student was assessed in only one art form, spending either approximately 90 minutes on the music assessment or approximately 120 minutes on the visual arts assessment. Students were assessed on their ability to respond to works of music and to create and respond to the visual arts.

Students were assessed with multiple-choice and constructed-response questions requiring them to produce answers of a few words or sentences or to create their own work of art. 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 analyze and describe works of art and design, including visual organization. In one task, students created a self-portrait that expressed something important about their personalities, which was scored for identifying detail, compositional elements and use of materials. In evaluating other works of art, students responded to multiple-choice questions regarding the technical similarities, 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. The 1997 NAEP Arts Assessment, the most comprehensive arts assessment of its kind, went beyond the fill-in-the-bubble pencil and paper tasks to include portfolio and performance-based assessments in dance, music, theatre and the visual arts. Due to sampling requirements and limited resources, the 2008 and 2016 Arts Assessments only measured students' ability to respond to music and to create and respond to the visual arts.

### **Why weren't dance and theatre assessed?**

According to the National Assessment Governing Board, due to budget constraints and the limited number of schools offering programs in dance and theatre at the eighth-grade level, those disciplines were not included in the 2008 or 2016 assessments, though they were part of the 1997 assessment.

### **What were the key findings and how did students do?**

A summary of the results is available [here](#).

### **Is trend data available comparing the 1997, 2008 and 2016 results?**

Only the 2016 and 2008 multiple-choice questions can be compared to the 1997 results. Changes in scoring procedures from 1997 to 2008 prevent comparing constructed-response questions. Changes in the arts materials available for use and the degradation of some of the 1997 training materials used to ensure consistent scoring across years prevent comparisons with 2008 student responses to the creating questions. However, trend data is available comparing 2008 and 2016 results.

### **What does the Nation's Arts Report Card tell us about the status of arts education in our nation's schools?**

While the Nation's Arts Report Card provides some valuable information about what students know and can do in the arts, we lack comprehensive recent national data about the status and conditions of arts education instruction in our nation's schools.

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NAEP measures student knowledge and skills in the arts and includes some information about access to music and visual arts in and out of school, but it does not provide a complete picture of the availability and quality of arts education currently delivered in our nation's schools.

### **What do we know about access to arts education in our nation's schools?**

The U.S. Department of Education and its Institute of Education Sciences (IES) conducted a Fast Response Survey System (FRSS), which measured student access to arts education and the resources available for such instruction in the 2009-10 school year. The report, *Arts Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools: 1999-2000 and 2009-10*, showed that schools with a higher concentration of students in poverty were less likely to offer arts education, which prompted the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to declare the status of arts education "an equity issue and a civil rights issue." A toolkit that further examines arts access in U.S. schools, as measured in this FRSS, can be found [online](#).

In addition to more frequent and comprehensive administrations of the arts-specific FRSS and NAEP, the U.S. Department of Education's research efforts could be strengthened by systematically including the arts in studies conducted on the condition of education, such as the School and Staffing Survey.

Several states produce information regarding access to arts education. The Arts Education Partnership's [ArtScan](#) includes an overview of [available reports at the state level](#).

### **What plans are in place for the next NAEP Arts Assessment?**

The next NAEP Arts Assessment has not yet been scheduled. To provide a complete picture of arts learning in the U.S., future considerations for updates to the NAEP Arts Assessment could address scope and depth and be conducted more frequently.

Future NAEP Arts Assessments could add measurements of students' ability in creating, performing/presenting/producing, responding, and connecting in dance, media arts, music, theatre and the visual arts, and could align with the updated 2014 National Arts Standards.

Only eighth-grade students participated in the 2016 NAEP Arts Assessment. For a comprehensive understanding of student learning in the arts, future assessments could be administered in fourth, eighth and 12th grade. Prior to the 2016 report, the most recent NAEP Arts Assessment was conducted in 2008, which created an eight-year gap in the information about student knowledge in this core academic subject area. Considerations for continuous improvement of the NAEP could include the increased frequency of administration of the assessment to at least once every five years.

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