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## Just the Facts: Test Scores by Gender and Other Characteristics

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Since 1969, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has periodically conducted assessments to provide a report card on what the nation's students know and can do in various subject areas, and how these achievement levels are changing over time.

As well as reporting achievement trends by subject by age and grade level, the NAEP also reports by different groupings of students, such as male compared to female, white compared to black, etc.

In 2000, NAEP published Trends in Academic Progress: Three Decades of Student Performance, a summary of the trends through 1999 in reading, mathematics, and science for students at ages 9, 13, and 17. Since reading is fundamental to all education and the reading skills of 17-year-olds represent the cumulative effect of 11 years of schooling, comparisons here will be limited to reading scores for 17-year-olds.

### Gender and Ethnic Group

Girls consistently outscore boys in reading, although the situation is reversed in mathematics and science.

Although the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) does not report the breakdown of students by sex by grade level, data from the 2001 Digest of Education Statistics shows female high school graduates have outnumbered males in all but four of the last 30 years. For example, 1.51 million girls, and only 1.25 million boys, completed high school in 2000.

Although white students still outscore black and Hispanic students in the NAEP long-term reading test, the latter groups' dramatic gains in the 1980s almost halved the gap. However, the 1990s saw no further narrowing of the gap.

### TV and Reading Materials

The NAEP reading scores suggest two things parents can do to help their children do better in school: Cut television viewing to less than two hours a day and have plenty of reading materials around the house. Students who watch less than two hours of television a day consistently score above the average in the long-term NAEP reading test, as do children who live in homes where newspapers, magazine, books, and an encyclopedia are available.

### Parent Education

The NAEP reading data also suggest that when parents earn their own high school diploma and pursue further education after high school, these accomplishments help their children outscore the average in the long-term NAEP reading test. However, parents' high school diplomas in 1999 apparently don't confer the same benefits to their offspring as high school diplomas did in 1971.

### Divorce

Children of divorced families not only had lower test scores than children from intact families, but this gap widened over time, according to a new national study from Ohio State University. Another study found that adults exposed to unilateral divorce as children are less well educated and have lower family incomes.

### For more information ...

The National Assessment of Educational Progress's report, Trends in Academic Progress: Three Decades of Student Performance, is available at the Web site of the National Center for Education Statistics at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main1999/2000469.pdf>. Detailed data are available for downloading at

<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/tables/data/ltt1999/NTR31012.CSV>.

Data on high school completion by sex is available in Table 185 of the 2001

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Digest of Education Statistics, available from the National Center for Education Statistics at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/digest2001/tables/PDF/table185.pdf>. The cited research on divorce and educational attainment is available from the National Bureau of Economic Research at <http://papers.nber.org/papers/W7968> and from Ohio State University at <http://www.acs.ohio-state.edu/researchnews/archive/childdiv.htm>.