

# Report: Nation's schools improve, but have long way to go

By Nick Anderson, Washington Post

The nation's high school seniors are performing slightly better in math and reading than they did in the middle of the last decade, new test results show, but a large majority continue to fall short of the federal standard for proficiency.

Results from the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress, made public Thursday morning, documented a modest rise in achievement for 12th-graders since 2005. Reading scores rose two points on a 500-point scale, and math scores rose three points on a 300-point scale.

But analysts said the federal test results offer plenty of reason for concern. The scores mean that 38 percent of seniors demonstrated proficiency in reading and 26 percent reached that level in math. In addition, reading scores remain lower than they were in 1992. And the report found essentially no progress in closing achievement gaps that separate white students from black and Hispanic peers.

Those results suggest that public schools must make quantum leaps to approach President Obama's goal of college and career readiness for all graduates. The District of Columbia and dozens of states (including Maryland but not Virginia) have adopted this year new national standards for what students should learn in math and English language arts from kindergarten onward. Those standards, generally accepted to be tougher than the array of benchmarks states had previously held, also point toward the president's goal.

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