

NM's 2022 national test scores are 'not acceptable'

BY [ESTEBAN CANDELARIA / JOURNAL STAFF WRITER](#)

PUBLISHED: MONDAY, OCTOBER 24TH, 2022



A history classroom at Wilson Middle School in 2021. (Roberto E. Rosales/Journal)

Copyright © 2022 Albuquerque Journal

Student performance on New Mexico's 2022 standardized tests earlier this year provides a stark reminder of the lingering effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, and of the status of the education system across the state.

But results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as the "Nation's Report Card," suggest that while New Mexico isn't alone, it has a long way to go.

In fourth and eighth grade reading and math, New Mexico students came in just about dead last in proficiency out of the over-50 states and jurisdictions that were sampled.

New Mexico fourth and eighth graders overall lost ground in both math and reading, setbacks that officials say were in large part due to the pandemic. That was also the case across the country, national education officials told reporters on Friday.

“This is what we expected,” state Education Secretary Kurt Steinhaus told the Journal, adding that the scores are “not acceptable” and “not OK.”

New Mexico fourth graders fell about 14 points behind national public school student averages overall. The same was true for eighth graders in math, but they only lagged about 11 points behind in reading.

In math, New Mexico fourth and eighth graders dropped about 10 points from state scores in 2019. They lost less ground in reading, where fourth graders dropped about five points and eighth graders dropped four.

That came out to reading and math proficiency rates of 21% and 19% among fourth graders, respectively, which was roughly three and 10 percentage points lower than in 2019.

A little more than 18% of eighth graders were proficient in reading and about 13% were proficient in math – a drop of five and eight percentage points, respectively.

Each of those percentages brought up the rear out of every state and jurisdiction, according to National Center for Education Statistics data.

The results came from a sample of about 4,300 students. Steinhaus said NAEP tests were conducted in 29% of elementary schools and 42% of middle schools. The highest possible score on the NAEP test is 500.

Most of the United States suffered similar setbacks. No state, for example, improved in fourth or eighth grade math, and only a few states improved in reading – and those that did, did so by a maximum of two points.

Nationally, this year’s results yielded the largest drop in mathematics in the history of NAEP, officials said.

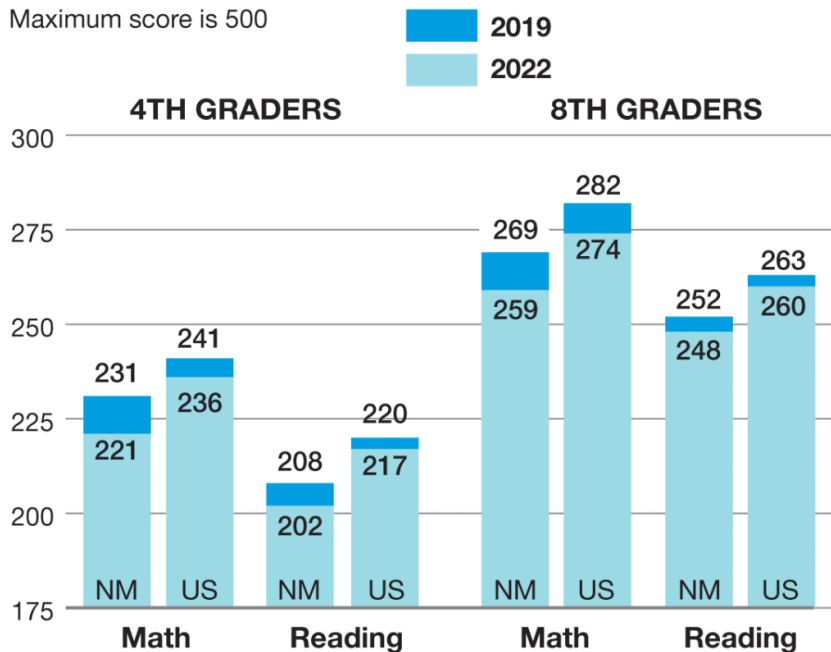
“The results in today’s Nation’s Report Card are appalling and unacceptable,” U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said during a Friday call with reporters. “But let’s also be very clear here – the data prior to the pandemic did not reflect an education system that was on the right track. The pandemic simply made it worse.”

National Center for Education Statistics Commissioner Peggy Carr noted that each state’s varying response to the pandemic, especially in terms of when students returned to in-person learning, was an influential – but not deciding – factor in test performance results.

“There’s nothing in this data that says we can draw a straight line between the time spent in remote learning ... and student achievement,” she said during the Friday call.

NM vs. US 4th and 8th grade math & reading scores

Maximum score is 500



Source: National Center for Education Statistics

JOURNAL

APS scores

Students at Albuquerque Public Schools, the largest district in the state, mostly held steady in their proficiency levels. While there were drops in both subjects for eighth graders, the NCES found they were “not significantly different” from 2019 scores.

However, fourth grade math proficiency, at about 24%, was around six percentage points lower than it was in 2019.

Overall APS student scores also dropped across the board from their pre-pandemic levels, though not as much as statewide numbers did. The largest declines came in math, where both fourth and eighth graders lost roughly seven points each.

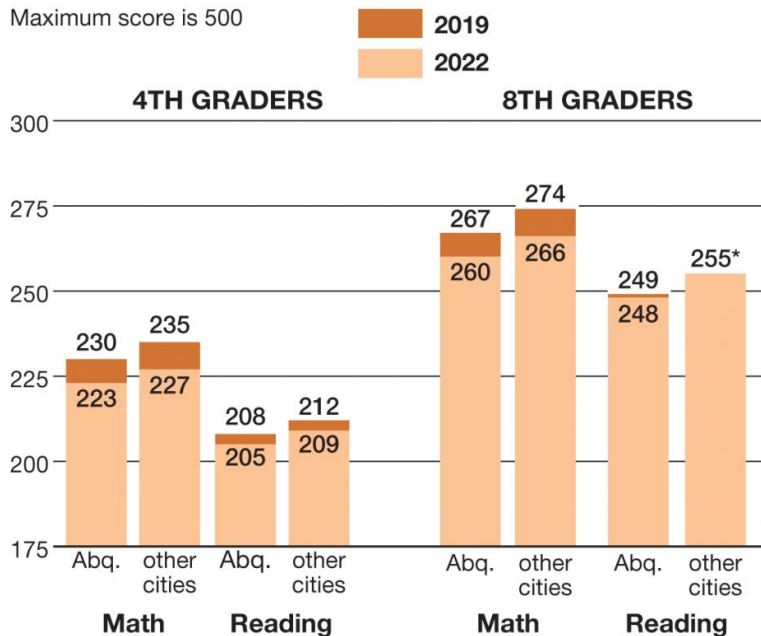
APS students suffered from the pandemic, Superintendent Scott Elder said. Still, he noted that Albuquerque was in a “much better place” than a lot of other places in New Mexico when it comes to accessibility to things like the internet.

And while APS students were still behind other large cities in both grades and subject areas, those gaps didn’t widen as some thought they would, he pointed out.

“You don’t look at the scores and think ‘OK, great,’” he told the Journal. “We lost a little bit, but we didn’t lose as much as I think people were afraid (we would).”

“We see a significant decline in the math, but that’s similar to what we see nationally,” he added.

ABQ vs. other large cities 4th and 8th grade math & reading scores



*Same score for both years

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

JOURNAL

Underserved students

Across the board, student groups identified in New Mexico’s landmark Yazzie-Martinez consolidated lawsuit lagged behind their national and statewide peers. They also almost all had lower scores this year than in 2019 – with a few exceptions.

In 2018, a judge found in that lawsuit that those students – including those who are Indigenous, economically disadvantaged, English learners and students with disabilities – had been denied a uniform, sufficient public education system.

“The students who were in families impacted by poverty had a greater negative impact because of the pandemic,” Steinhaus said, noting that Yazzie-Martinez students represent over 70% of New Mexico students. “So the pandemic impacted us harder than a lot of other states.”

Math scores for New Mexico students identified in the lawsuit this year were worse for both grades than they were before the pandemic – as was fourth grade reading. APS Yazzie-Martinez students also almost universally lost ground in their scores in both subjects.

For the most part, students identified in New Mexico's lawsuit also fared worse around the country this year than in 2019.

But one bright spot among New Mexico's data was that eighth graders in those student groups almost universally improved their reading scores from 2019, even if only by a point. Nationally, that was also true for eighth grade English learners, and eighth graders with disabilities' scores didn't change.

APS fourth graders with disabilities improved in math and reading, and eighth grade students with disabilities and English learners improved in reading.

Gaps between APS Yazzie-Martinez student test scores and those collected from those student groups in large cities around the country also didn't tend to widen dramatically over the pandemic, and in many cases improved.

Some solutions

Teachers this year said they felt more overworked, according to surveys given to them in conjunction with the test, and some said they felt less confident that they would be able to help their students close pandemic-related gaps.

"Clearly, our teachers need our help," Carr said.

To address that problem, Steinhaus said the state is continuing an ongoing effort to bolster its mental health support for teachers and students alike.

New Mexico is also rolling out more tutoring for students and families, particularly those in schools with high populations of economically-disadvantaged families.

In January, Steinhaus added, the state Public Education Department aims to roll out more high-dosage tutoring – focused, small-group tutoring three times a week – which will also emphasize math.

"We've got to continue improving literacy. But this year, our primary focus is going to be on mathematics," he said.