

# Uh Oh: U.S. Student Test Scores Drop

For the first time in 25 years, U.S. student scores on the national standardized test have dropped.

[As USA Today reports](#), “The latest results of the biennial tests, given to thousands of students and nicknamed ‘The Nation’s Report Card,’ show a first-ever drop in math scores for the randomly selected students in both fourth- and eighth-grade students who took them earlier this year.” 8<sup>th</sup> grade student scores in reading also dropped.

The official name for the test is the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Here is a chart recording the drop in 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math in NAEP-score-speak:



Most of the time, the public only sees these numbers, which don’t mean all that much to them, and don’t even mean much to most education experts. What it translates to in terms of proficiency, however, is somewhat distressing:



The standard narrative is that these low proficiency scores means the NAEP is unreasonably difficult. A counter-narrative, however, is that the NAEP (unlike most state tests) is really what a standardized test should be – an exam designed to measure student abilities that isn’t prepared for. As the USA Today article explains,

*“They can’t be prepped for or gamed and the scores, reported anonymously, have no stakes attached. They’re not part of students’ school records. Students don’t even know they’ve been chosen to take them until shortly before they’re called*

*out of class to sit for the exams.”?*

U.S. education secretary Arne Duncan said that the drop in student scores “isn’t great but also doesn’t come as a big surprise.” Meanwhile, President Obama continues to call for a reduced emphasis on standardized tests as a way to measure students’ abilities.