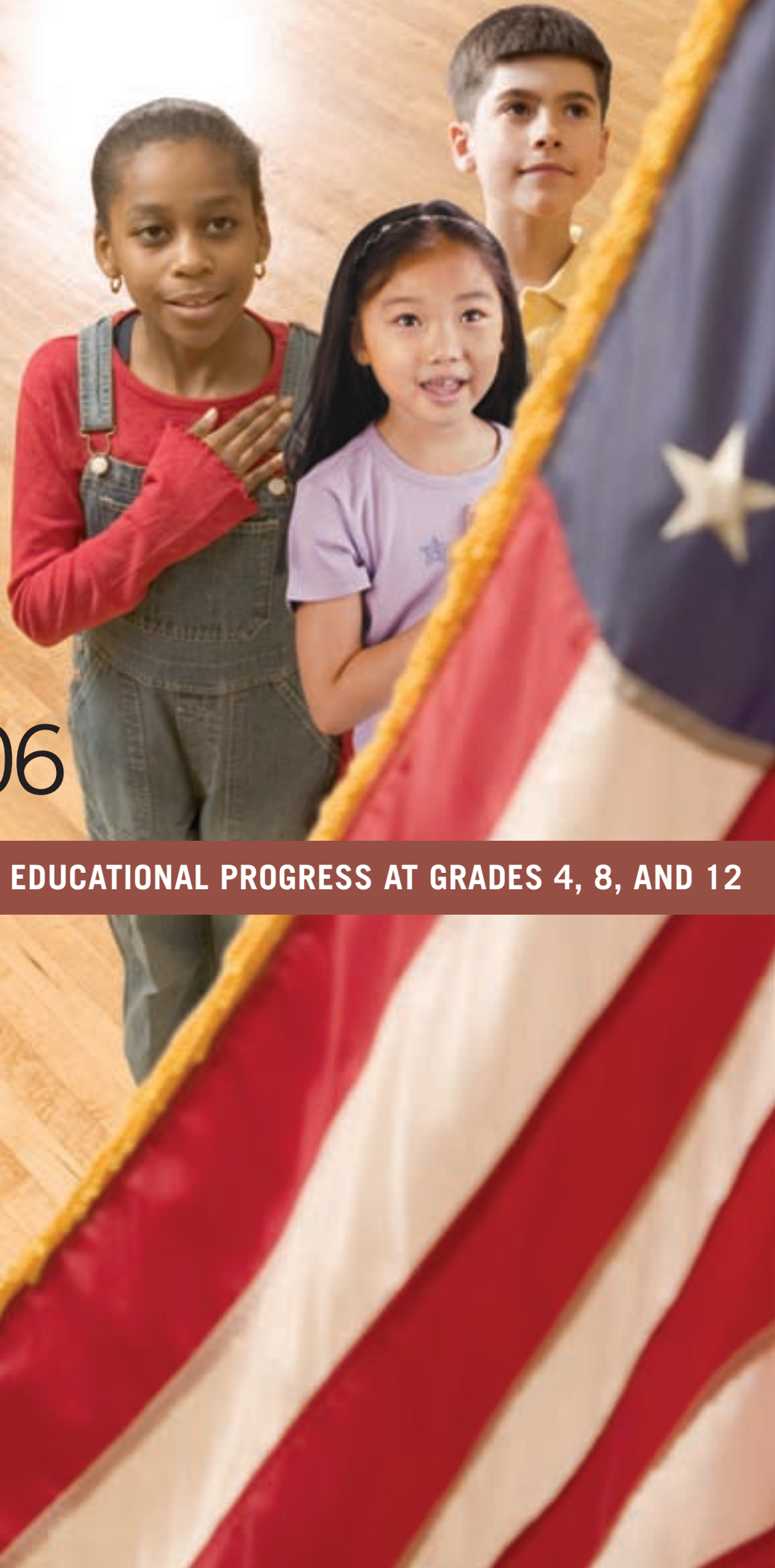


**ies** NATIONAL CENTER FOR  
EDUCATION STATISTICS  
Institute of Education Sciences

U.S. Department of Education  
NCES 2007-476

The   
Nation's  
Report Card  
**Civics 2006**

**NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS AT GRADES 4, 8, AND 12**





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# What is The Nation's Report Card™?

The Nation's Report Card™ informs the public about the academic achievement of elementary and secondary students in the United States. Report cards communicate the findings of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a continuing and nationally representative measure of achievement in various subjects over time.

For over three decades, NAEP assessments have been conducted periodically in reading, mathematics, science, writing, U.S. history, civics, geography, and other subjects. By making objective information available on student performance at the national, state, and local levels, NAEP is an integral part of our nation's evaluation of the condition and progress of education. Only information related to academic achievement and relevant variables is collected. The privacy of individual students is protected.

NAEP is a congressionally mandated project of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) within the Institute of Education Sciences of the U.S. Department of Education. The Commissioner of Education Statistics is responsible for carrying out the NAEP project. The National Assessment Governing Board oversees and sets policy for NAEP.

# Executive Summary

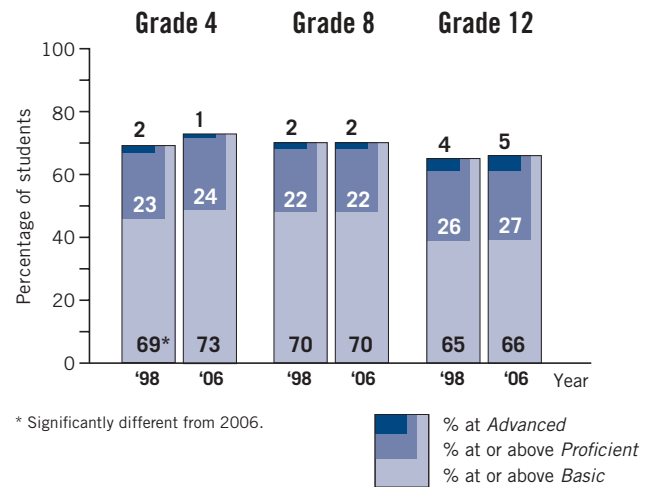
The 2006 NAEP civics assessment evaluated students' understanding of the democratic institutions and ideals necessary to become informed citizens in shaping America's future. Students demonstrated this knowledge in areas deemed important for citizenship in our constitutional democracy. A nationally representative sample of more than 25,000 students at grades 4, 8, and 12 was assessed in 2006. The results are compared with those of the 1998 civics assessment.

About two out of three American students at grades 4, 8, and 12 have at least a basic knowledge of civics according to the 2006 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Average scores improved from 1998 to 2006 only at grade 4. Most of this improvement was seen among lower-performing students.

Three of four students at grade 4, or 73 percent, scored at or above *Basic*, meaning they demonstrated at least a partial mastery of civics knowledge and skills fundamental for proficient work at their grade. About one in four students, or 24 percent, scored at or above

## What students know about civics

Fourth-graders	
75%	knew that only citizens can vote in the U.S.
41%	identified the level of government that signs peace treaties
14%	recognized that defendants have a right to a lawyer
Eighth-graders	
80%	identified a notice for jury duty
63%	determined an instance of abuse of power
28%	explained the historical purpose of the Declaration of Independence
Twelfth-graders	
72%	analyzed a historical text on the importance of education
50%	identified the outcome when state and national laws conflict
43%	described the meaning of federalism in the U.S.



the *Proficient* level, meaning they demonstrated at least competency over challenging subject matter. Many fourth-grade student groups had higher scores in 2006.

- ▶ White, Black, and Hispanic students improved.
- ▶ Both male and female students improved.
- ▶ Lower-performing students made gains.
- ▶ The performance gap narrowed for Hispanic students compared to White students.

Overall, eighth-graders' knowledge of civics has not changed since the 1998 assessment. Of eighth-graders, 22 percent scored at or above the *Proficient* level, and 70 percent scored at or above *Basic*. White and Hispanic students showed score gains.

Twelfth-graders, tomorrow's voters, performed at about the same level in 2006 as they did in 1998. No student group showed a statistically significant increase. Twenty-seven percent of twelfth-graders scored at or above the *Proficient* level, and 66 percent scored at or above *Basic*.





# An Introduction to the Civics Assessment

The U.S. civics assessment evaluates students' knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are critical to the responsibilities of citizenship in America's constitutional democracy. Civics instruction begins in grade school and continues into high school. Civics concepts, however, are primarily taught as part of social studies (for example, geography, economics, etc.), history, and government classes, rather than as a separate course such as reading or mathematics. NAEP assesses civics knowledge at grades 4, 8, and 12.

## The Civics Framework

The civics assessment is based on a blueprint called a "framework," which specifies what should be assessed. Under the direction of the National Assessment Governing Board, the framework was developed in a comprehensive and inclusive process.

The development committees included subject experts, college faculty, school administrators, policymakers, teachers, parents, and interested members of the public. A new NAEP civics framework was developed for the 1998 assessment, as were all of the assessment questions. The same framework guided the development of the 2006 assessment, which used many of the same questions.

**Three Components.** As noted in the framework, the goal of the NAEP civics assessment is to measure

how well American youth are being prepared to meet their citizenship responsibilities. The framework specifies three interrelated components which, taken together, assess this broad civic competency: knowledge, intellectual and participatory skills, and civic dispositions. Each civics assessment question or exercise has a knowledge and an intellectual skills component. A portion of the questions also measures participatory skills and/or civic dispositions.

**Civic Knowledge.** The framework poses the knowledge component as questions, reflecting the position that civic knowledge encompasses not just factual knowledge, but a broader and deeper understanding of the meaning of citizenship. The five civics content areas and the percentage of assessment time allotted to them at each grade are shown in table 1.

Table 1. **Percentage of assessment time in NAEP civics, by grade and content area: 2006**

Content area	Percentage of assessment time		
	Grade 4	Grade 8	Grade 12
I. What are civic life, politics, and government?	24	13	10
II. What are the foundations of the American political system?	20	27	20
III. How does the government established by the Constitution embody the purposes, values, and principles of American democracy?	13	24	25
IV. What is the relationship of the United States to other nations and to world affairs?	13	14	21
V. What are the roles of citizens in American democracy?	30	21	25

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2006 Civics Assessment.

**“Participatory skills enable citizens to monitor and influence public and civic life by working with others, clearly articulating ideas and interests, building coalitions, seeking consensus, negotiating compromise, and managing conflict.” ...Civics 2006 framework.**





**Civic Skills.** This component involves the use of knowledge to think and act effectively and in a reasoned manner in response to the challenges of civic life in a constitutional democracy. The framework distinguishes three types of intellectual skills:

- ▶ Identifying and describing,
- ▶ Explaining and analyzing, and
- ▶ Evaluating, taking, and defending a position.

Students' participatory skills are assessed because, ultimately, civic knowledge and intellectual skills are most beneficial when applied to civic participation. Since NAEP cannot directly assess civic participation, the framework specifies that assessment questions be designed to measure whether students can identify participatory skills, recognize their purpose, explain how to use them, or specify how best to achieve desired results by using particular skills.

**Civic Dispositions.** As with civic skills, NAEP cannot assess students' civic dispositions directly. Therefore, certain assessment exercises were designed to measure students' knowledge and understanding of the importance of civic dispositions. The framework identifies five dispositions:

- ▶ Becoming an independent member of society;
- ▶ Assuming the personal, political, and economic responsibilities of a citizen;
- ▶ Respecting individual worth and human dignity;
- ▶ Participating in civic affairs in an informed, thoughtful, and effective manner; and
- ▶ Promoting the healthy functioning of American constitutional democracy.

More detailed information about the civics framework for 2006 can be found on the Governing Board website at [http://www.nagb.org/frameworks/civics\\_06.pdf](http://www.nagb.org/frameworks/civics_06.pdf).

## Assessment Design

Because of the breadth of content covered, each student took just a portion of the assessment, answering two 25-minute sections of test questions and a separate section of background questions. Students were asked multiple-choice and constructed-response questions. Results were combined to produce an average score for the nation overall and for various student groups (such as gender and race/ethnicity).



# Reporting NAEP Results

The students who are selected to take NAEP assessments represent hundreds of other students like themselves across the U.S. The NAEP data can only be obtained with the cooperation of schools, teachers, and students nationwide. By participating, they play an important role in improving education in the country.

Representative samples of schools and students participated in the 2006 NAEP civics assessment at each grade (table 2). The results provide estimates of performance of all students in the target grades. The national results reflect the combined performance of samples of students in public schools, private schools, Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, and Department of Defense schools. Unlike the mathematics, reading, writing, and science assessments in NAEP, the civics assessment was not designed to report results by individual states.

Table 2. **Number of participating schools and students in NAEP civics assessment, by grade: 2006**

Grade	Schools	Students
<b>Grade 4</b>	420	7,000
<b>Grade 8</b>	510	9,200
<b>Grade 12</b>	590	9,100

NOTE: The numbers of schools are rounded to the nearest ten, and the numbers of students are rounded to the nearest hundred.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2006 Civics Assessment.

## Scale Scores

NAEP civics results are reported on a 0–300 scale. Although the scale score ranges are identical across grades, the scale was derived independently for each grade. Therefore, scale scores cannot be compared across grades. In addition to reporting an overall composite score, results are reported at five percentiles (10th, 25th, 50th, 75th, and 90th), enabling the display of changes in performance between 1998 and 2006 for lower-, middle-, and higher-performing students.

## Achievement Levels

Achievement levels reflect what students should know and be able to do. The Governing Board sets specific achievement levels for each subject area and grade, based on recommendations from policymakers, educators, and members of the general public. To provide a context for interpreting student performance, NAEP results are reported as percentages of students performing at or above the *Basic* and *Proficient* levels and at the *Advanced* level.

As provided by law, NCES, upon review of congressionally mandated evaluations of NAEP, has determined that achievement levels are to be used on a trial basis and should be interpreted with caution. NAEP achievement levels have been widely used by national and state officials. For more information on the civics achievement levels, visit <http://www.nagb.org/pubs/civicsbook.pdf>.

## Item Maps

The test question or “item” maps are another way to interpret the scale scores and achievement-level results for each grade. As shown later in the Assessment Content section, the item maps are useful tools for showing student performance on questions at different levels on the scale.

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### NAEP achievement levels

**Basic** denotes partial mastery of the knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at a given grade.

**Proficient** represents solid academic performance. Students reaching this level have demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter.

**Advanced** signifies superior performance.

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## Accommodations in NAEP

Beginning with the new civics framework and the new trend line in 1998, testing accommodations (for example, extra time, one-on-one, or small group administration) were permitted. Accommodations were also offered in the 2006 assessment to those students for whom accommodations were permitted on their state assessments. Information on the percentages of students who received each accommodation type is available at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/civics/acctype.asp>. See the Technical Notes on page 32 for information on exclusion rates.

## Interpreting Results

NAEP uses widely accepted statistical standards in analyzing data. This report discusses only findings that are statistically significant at the .05 level with appropriate adjustments for multiple comparisons. In the tables and graphics, the symbol (\*) indicates that scores or percentages are significantly different from each other.

In addition to the overall results for the nation, student performance by different demographic characteristics is also presented (for example, by gender, race/ethnicity, income level, or student-reported highest level of parents' education). These results cannot be used to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between background characteristics and achievement. A complex mix of educational and socioeconomic factors may interact to affect student performance.

Score differences or gaps cited in this report are calculated based on differences between unrounded average scale scores. Therefore, the reader may find apparent discrepancies between a score difference cited in the text and a difference generated by comparing two rounded scores from tables or graphics.

Not all of the data for results discussed in the text are presented in corresponding tables or graphics, but they can be found on the NAEP website at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nde/>. For additional information, see the Technical Notes on page 32 or visit <http://nationsreportcard.gov>.







## Civics knowledge increasing for fourth-graders, but not for older students

Fourth-grade students scored higher in civics in 2006 than in 1998. Most of this improvement was seen among lower-performing students. Nearly three-fourths (73 percent) of America's fourth-graders performed at or above *Basic*—a larger percentage than in 1998. Nearly one in four (24 percent) scored at or above *Proficient*.

However, civics scores have remained essentially unchanged since 1998 for eighth- and twelfth-graders. In 2006, performance that is considered to be at or above the *Proficient* level was demonstrated by 22 percent of eighth-graders and by 27 percent of twelfth-graders.

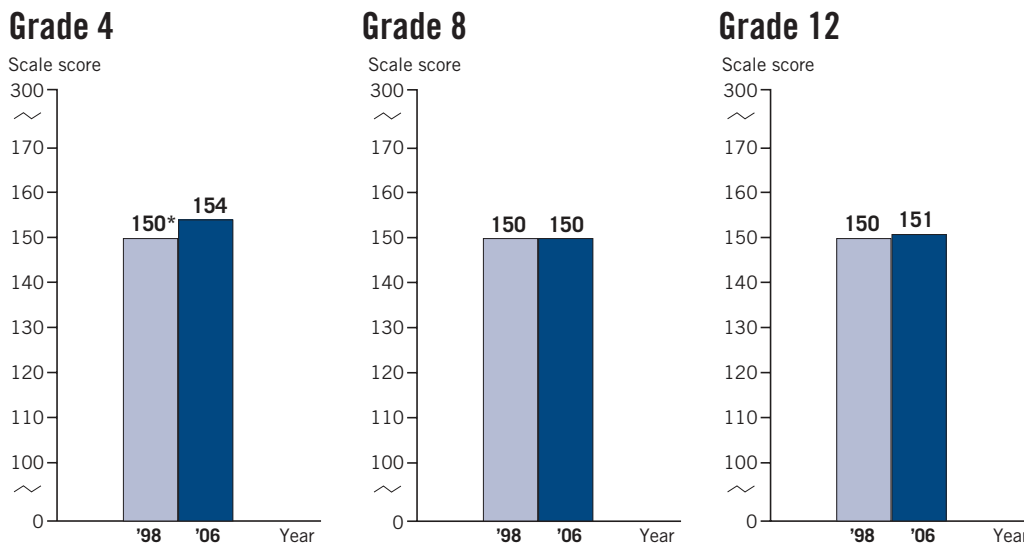


# Knowledge of civics increases for only younger students

While a greater understanding of civics was demonstrated by fourth-graders in 2006 than in 1998, little or no change was seen among students at grades 8 and 12. As shown in figure 1, the average score for fourth-graders in 2006 was higher than in 1998, while the average scores at grades 8 and 12 were not significantly different. The scores of both male and female students increased at grade 4, but not at grades 8 and 12. Apparent differences between scores of male and female students were not statistically significant at any grade in 2006 (results not shown).



Figure 1. Average scores in NAEP civics, by grade: 1998 and 2006



\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from 2006.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 and 2006 Civics Assessments.

## What Students Know

### Fourth-graders

- 75 percent knew that only citizens can vote in the U.S.
- 47 percent identified the role of the Supreme Court
- 18 percent evaluated how certain actions can affect the community

### Eighth-graders

- 80 percent identified a notice for jury duty
- 49 percent linked religious freedom to the Bill of Rights
- 15 percent interpreted a phrase from the Gettysburg Address

### Twelfth-graders

- 72 percent could analyze a historical text on the importance of education
- 50 percent identified the President's role in foreign policy
- 5 percent explained checks on the President's power

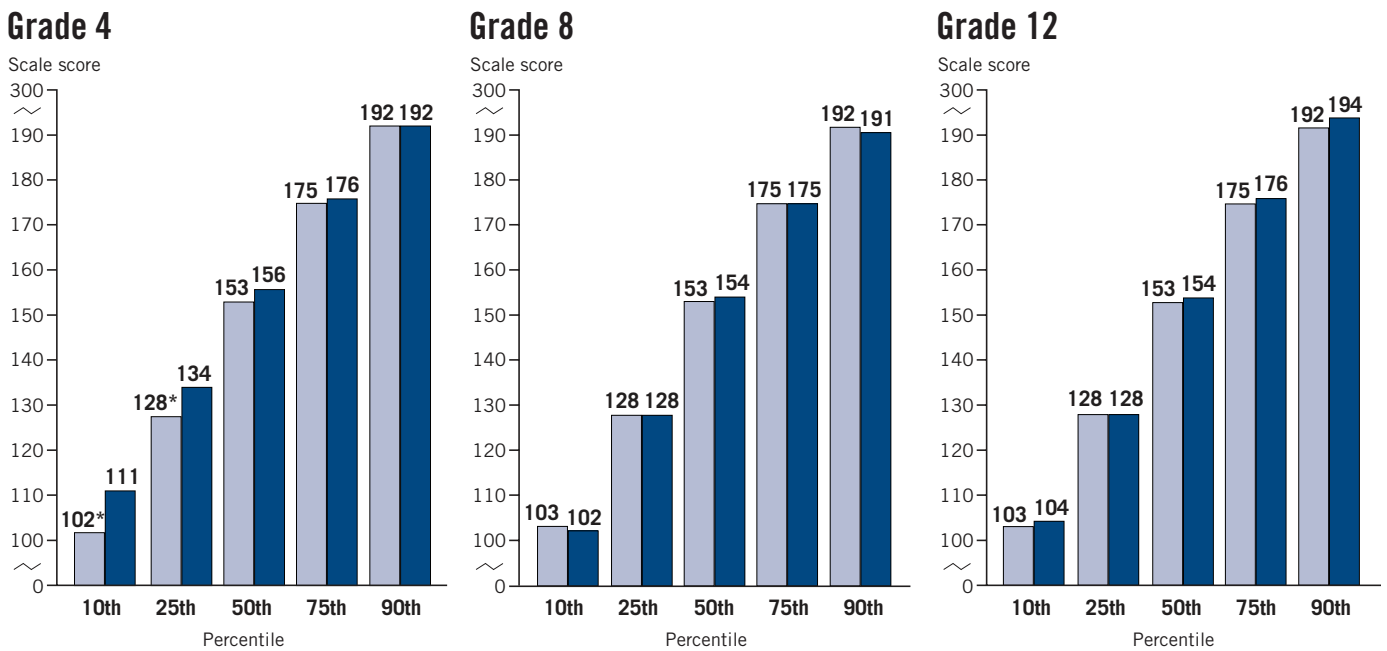
See the NAEP Questions Tool for more information at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/itmrls/>.

# Scores up among lower-performing fourth-graders, no significant progress for others

Although the average fourth-grade score was higher in 2006 than in 1998, most of the improvement occurred among the lower-performing students. Figure 2 shows that fourth-grade scores at the 10th and 25th percentiles improved, but there was no significant change in higher percentile scores. The figure also shows that there was no significant change at grades 8 and 12 for lower-, middle-, or higher-performing students.



Figure 2. Percentile scores in NAEP civics, by grade: 1998 and 2006



\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from 2006.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 and 2006 Civics Assessments.



# Greater percentage of younger students demonstrates *Basic*-level knowledge of civics, no change for older students

Another example of increased performance among lower-performing fourth-graders is seen in achievement-level results. Performance at the *Basic* level represents partial mastery of fundamental skills and knowledge in civics. In 2006, seventy-three percent of fourth-graders performed at or above *Basic*—a higher percentage than in 1998 (figure 3). Twenty-four percent of students at grade 4 performed at or above *Proficient*, which was not significantly different from the percentage in 1998.

At grades 8 and 12, the percentages at or above *Basic* and *Proficient* in 2006 were not significantly different compared to the percentages in the same grades in 1998. Twenty-two percent of students at grade 8 performed at or above *Proficient* in 2006, and 27 percent of twelfth-graders performed at or above *Proficient*.

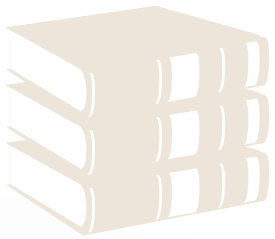
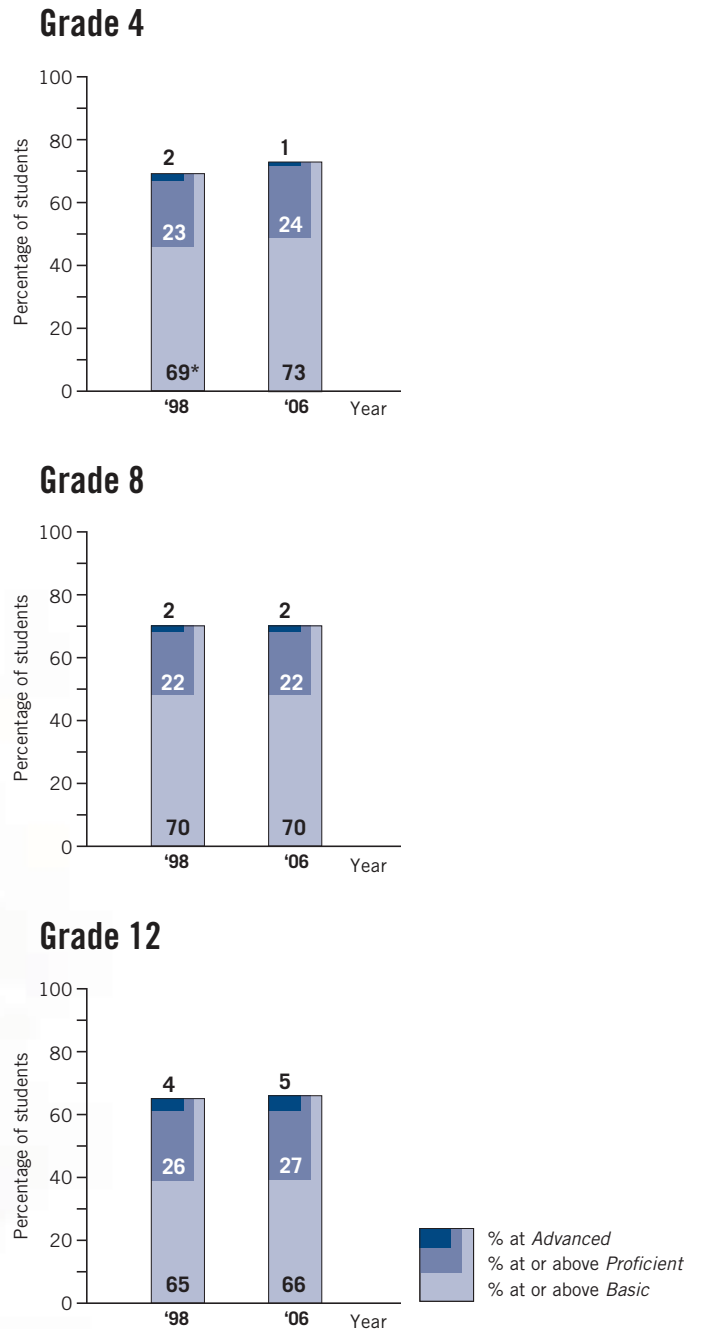


Figure 3. Achievement-level performance in NAEP civics, by grade: 1998 and 2006



\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from 2006.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 and 2006 Civics Assessments.





## Many student groups make gains at grade 4

At grade 4, the following groups scored higher in 2006 compared to 1998: male and female students; and White, Black, and Hispanic students.

At grade 8, White and Hispanic students had higher scores in 2006 than in 1998.

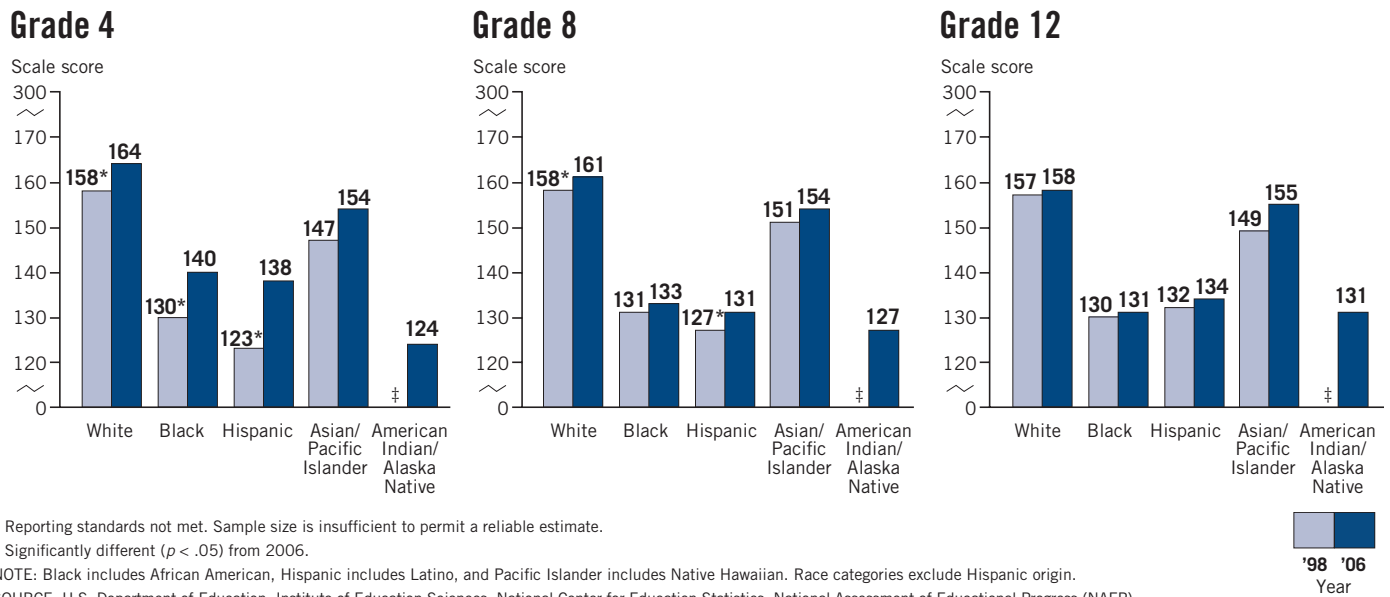


# White and Hispanic students make gains at both grades 4 and 8

Score gains were made by White, Black, and Hispanic fourth-graders in 2006 compared with 1998 (figure 4). The gains were 15 points for Hispanic, 10 points for Black, and 6 points for White fourth-graders.

At grade 8, both White and Hispanic students scored higher in 2006 than in 1998. The apparent score gains for all other groups at grades 8 and 12 were not statistically significant.

Figure 4. Average scores in NAEP civics, by grade and race/ethnicity: 1998 and 2006

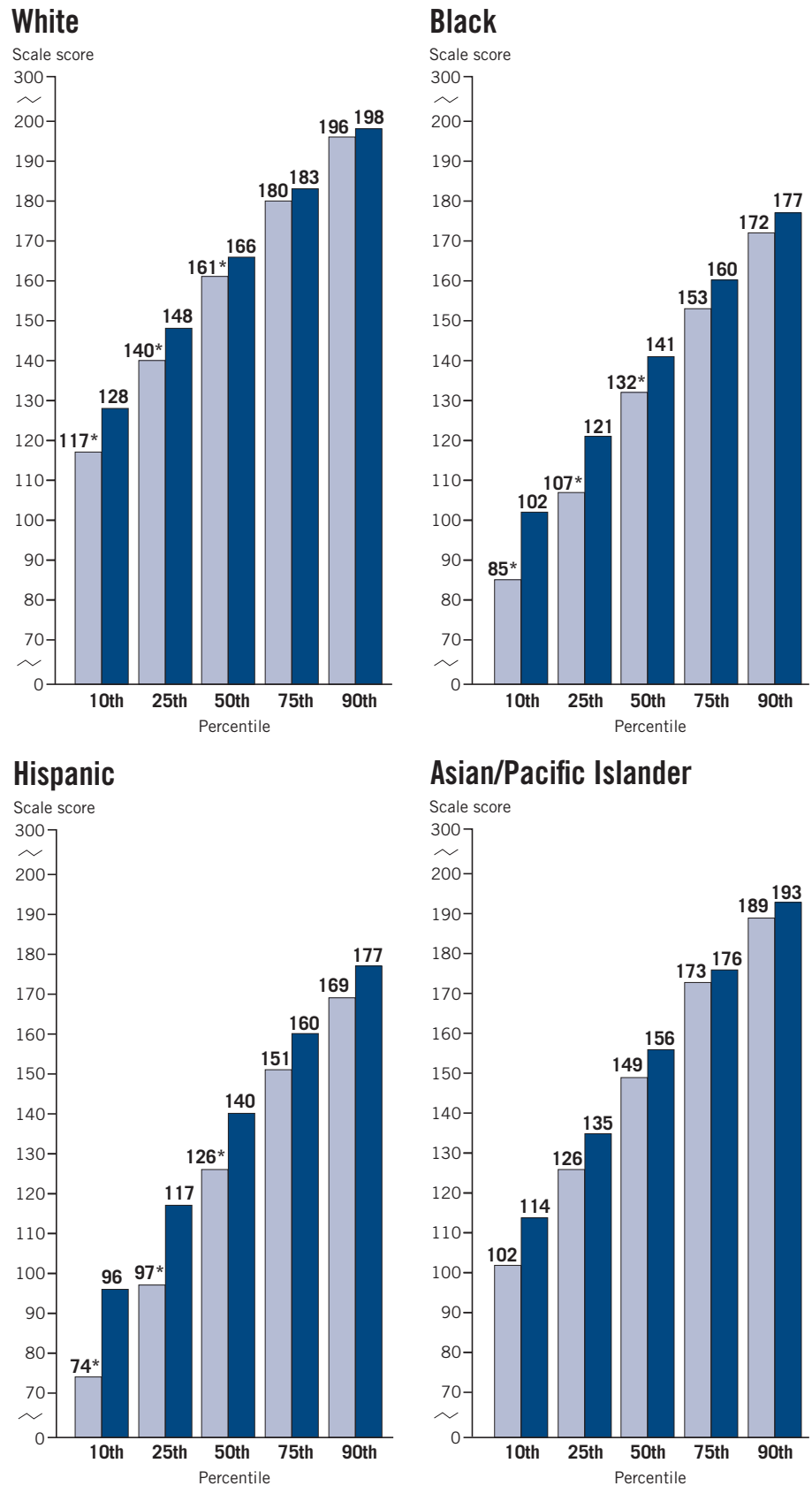


# Lower-performing White, Black, and Hispanic students show gains

The improvement for lower-performing fourth-graders that was previously shown for all students together can be seen for racial/ethnic groups in figure 5. Scores for White, Black, and Hispanic fourth-graders increased at the 10th, 25th, and 50th percentiles. Apparent score changes at the 75th and 90th percentiles were not significant.

While not shown in this report, in general, scores for students at grades 8 and 12 showed no improvement across the five percentiles. Complete data for percentiles for the racial/ethnic groups are available at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nde>.

Figure 5. Percentile scores in NAEP civics at grade 4, by race/ethnicity: 1998 and 2006



\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from 2006.  
 NOTE: Black includes African American, Hispanic includes Latino, and Pacific Islander includes Native Hawaiian. Race categories exclude Hispanic origin.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 and 2006 Civics Assessments.

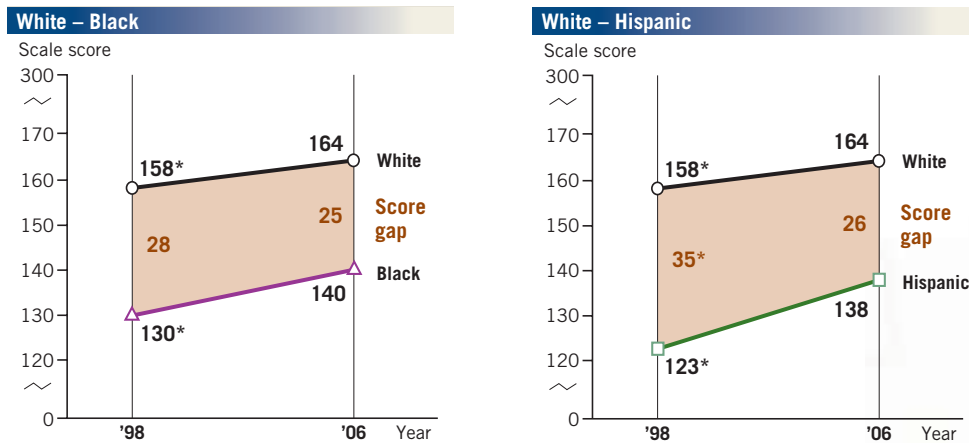


# Gap narrows between White and Hispanic younger students

The 26-point gap in average scores between White and Hispanic fourth-graders in 2006 was narrower than the 35-point gap in 1998 (figure 6). The 25-point gap in average scores between White and Black fourth-graders in 2006 was not significantly different from the 28-point gap in 1998.

The score gaps between White and Black students and between White and Hispanic students at grades 8 and 12 were not significantly different when comparing 2006 with 1998 (table 3).

Figure 6. **White – Black and White – Hispanic average scores and score gaps in NAEP civics at grade 4: 1998 and 2006**



\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from 2006.

NOTE: Black includes African American, and Hispanic includes Latino. Race categories exclude Hispanic origin. Score gaps are calculated based on differences between unrounded average scores.

Table 3. **Average scores and score gaps in NAEP civics, by grade and race/ethnicity: 1998 and 2006**

Grade	Scale score		Score gap with White students	
	1998	2006	1998	2006
<b>Grade 8</b>				
White	158*	161	†	†
Black	131	133	26	28
Hispanic	127*	131	31	29
<b>Grade 12</b>				
White	157	158	†	†
Black	130	131	27	28
Hispanic	132	134	25	24

† Not applicable.

\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from 2006.

NOTE: Black includes African American, and Hispanic includes Latino. Race categories exclude Hispanic origin. Score gaps are calculated based on differences between unrounded average scores.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 and 2006 Civics Assessments.

# Knowledge of civics differs by income levels

Fourth-graders from families in two lower-income levels (eligible for free lunch or eligible for reduced-price school lunch) had lower civics scores in 2006 than students from higher-income families, as well as students for whom information was not available (figure 7).

At grade 8, the pattern is similar. The average scores for students from both lower-income levels were lower than that of students from higher-income families. The score gaps between the lowest income level (eligible for

free lunch) and the highest level (not eligible) were 28 points<sup>1</sup> at grade 4 and 30 points at grade 8. At both grades, students eligible for reduced-price lunch had higher scores than those eligible for the free lunch. Information on income status was not available for about 7 percent of the students at each grade (table 4). This group also had higher scores than the eligible student groups at both grades.

<sup>1</sup> The score point gap is based on the difference between unrounded scores.

Figure 7. **Average scores in NAEP civics, by grade and eligibility for National School Lunch Program: 2006**

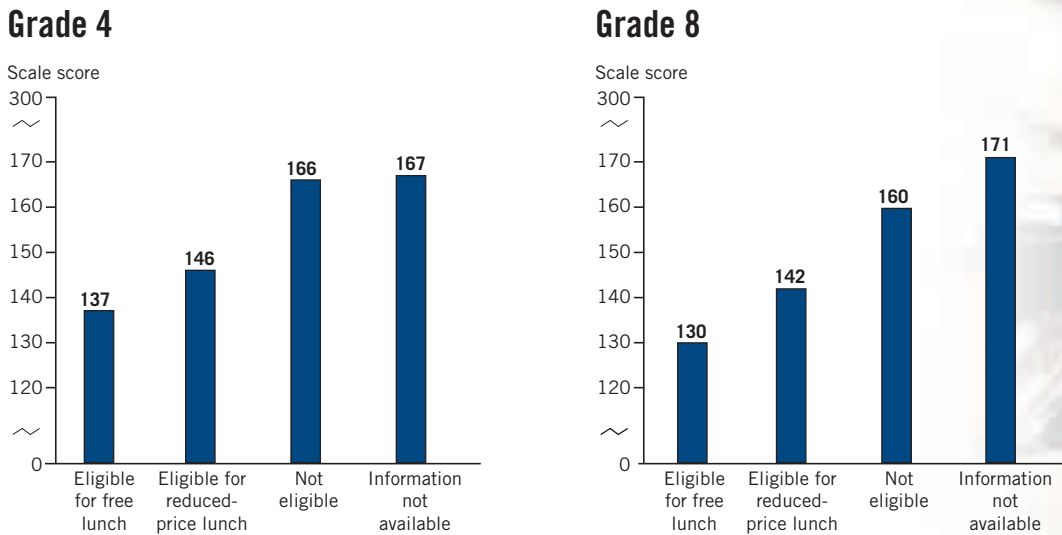


Table 4 shows the percentages of fourth- and eighth-graders in the population by eligibility status for the National School Lunch Program in 2006. Percentages are also given for the students for whom information was not available.

Table 4. **Percentage of students in NAEP civics, by grade and eligibility for National School Lunch Program: 2006**

Eligibility status	Grade 4	Grade 8
Eligible for free lunch	36	31
Eligible for reduced-price lunch	7	7
Not eligible	49	55
Information not available	7	7

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2006 Civics Assessment.

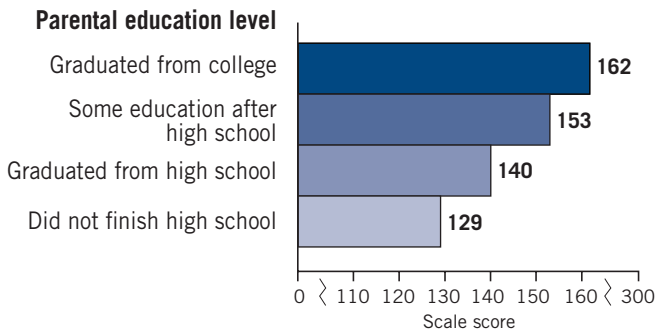
# More parental education associated with higher scores

Looking just at the data for 2006, there was a positive association between student-reported parental education and student performance. The average civics scores for the student-reported parental education levels shown in figure 8 indicate that the higher the reported level of parental education, the higher the student's average civics score.

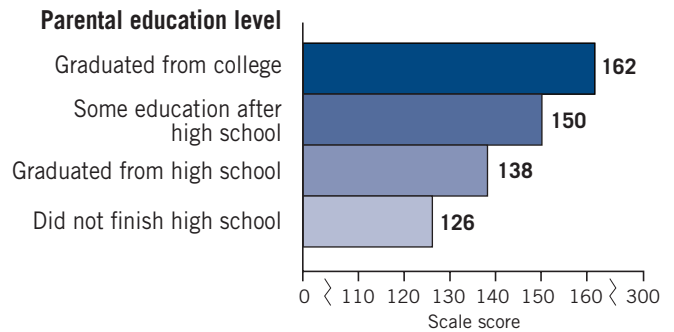
Students at grades 8 and 12 were asked to indicate the highest level of their parents' education. The highest level of education reported for either parent was used in the analysis of this question. The text of the question on parental education differed between 2006 and 1998. Therefore, a comparison across years is not available.

Figure 8. Average scores in NAEP civics, by grade and student-reported highest level of parental education: 2006

## Grade 8



## Grade 12



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2006 Civics Assessment.

