

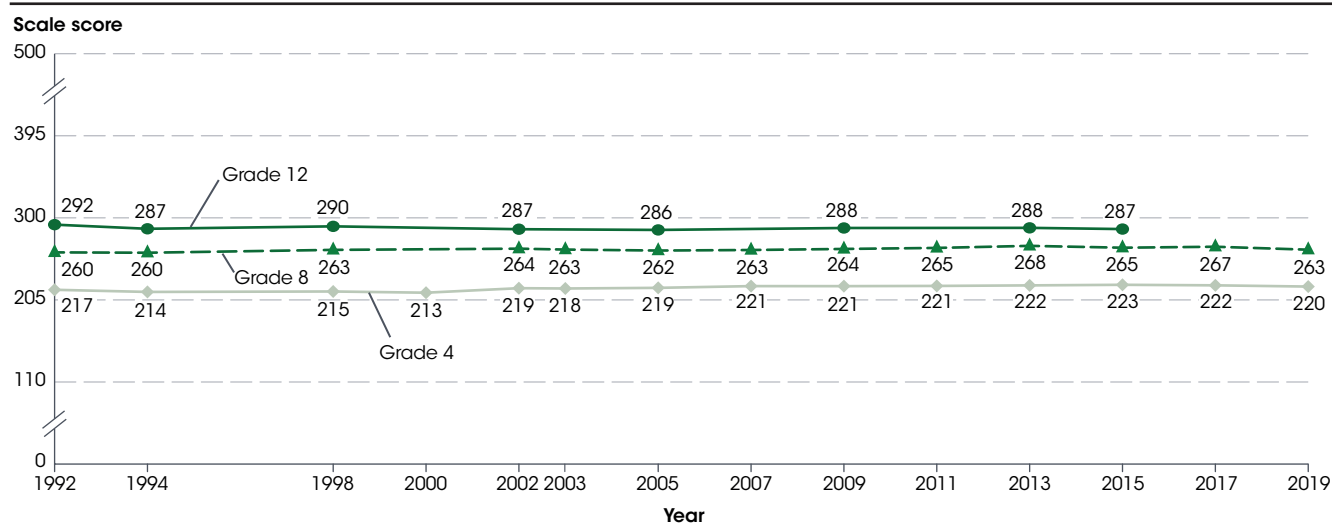
Reading Performance

At grade 4, the average reading score in 2019 (220) was lower than the score in 2017 (222), when the assessment was last administered, but it was higher than the score in 1992 (217). Similarly, at grade 8 the average reading score in 2019 (263) was lower than the score in 2017 (267), but it was higher than the score in 1992 (260). Similarly, at grade 8 the average reading score in 2019 (263) was lower than the score in 2017 (267), but it was higher than the score in 1992 (260).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assesses student performance in reading at grades 4, 8, and 12 in both public and private schools across the nation. NAEP reading scale scores range from 0 to 500 for all grade levels.¹ NAEP achievement levels define what students should know and be able to do: *NAEP Basic* indicates partial mastery of fundamental skills, *NAEP Proficient* indicates solid academic performance and demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, and *NAEP Advanced* indicates superior performance beyond proficient.² NAEP reading assessments have been administered periodically since 1992. Beginning in 2003, assessments have been administered every four years at

grade 12 and every two years at grades 4 and 8. The grade 4 and grade 8 assessments are also administered at the state and selected district levels.³ The most recent reading assessments were conducted in 2019 for grades 4, 8, and 12; however, data for grade 12 in 2019 were not available in time for publication. In this indicator, data for grade 12 comes from the 2015 assessment, the most recent NAEP assessment year with available data.⁴ Throughout this indicator, reading scores from the most recent assessment year with available data will be compared with scores from the immediate prior assessment year and the first assessment year.

Figure 1. Average National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scale scores of 4th-, 8th-, and 12th-grade students: Selected years, 1992–2019

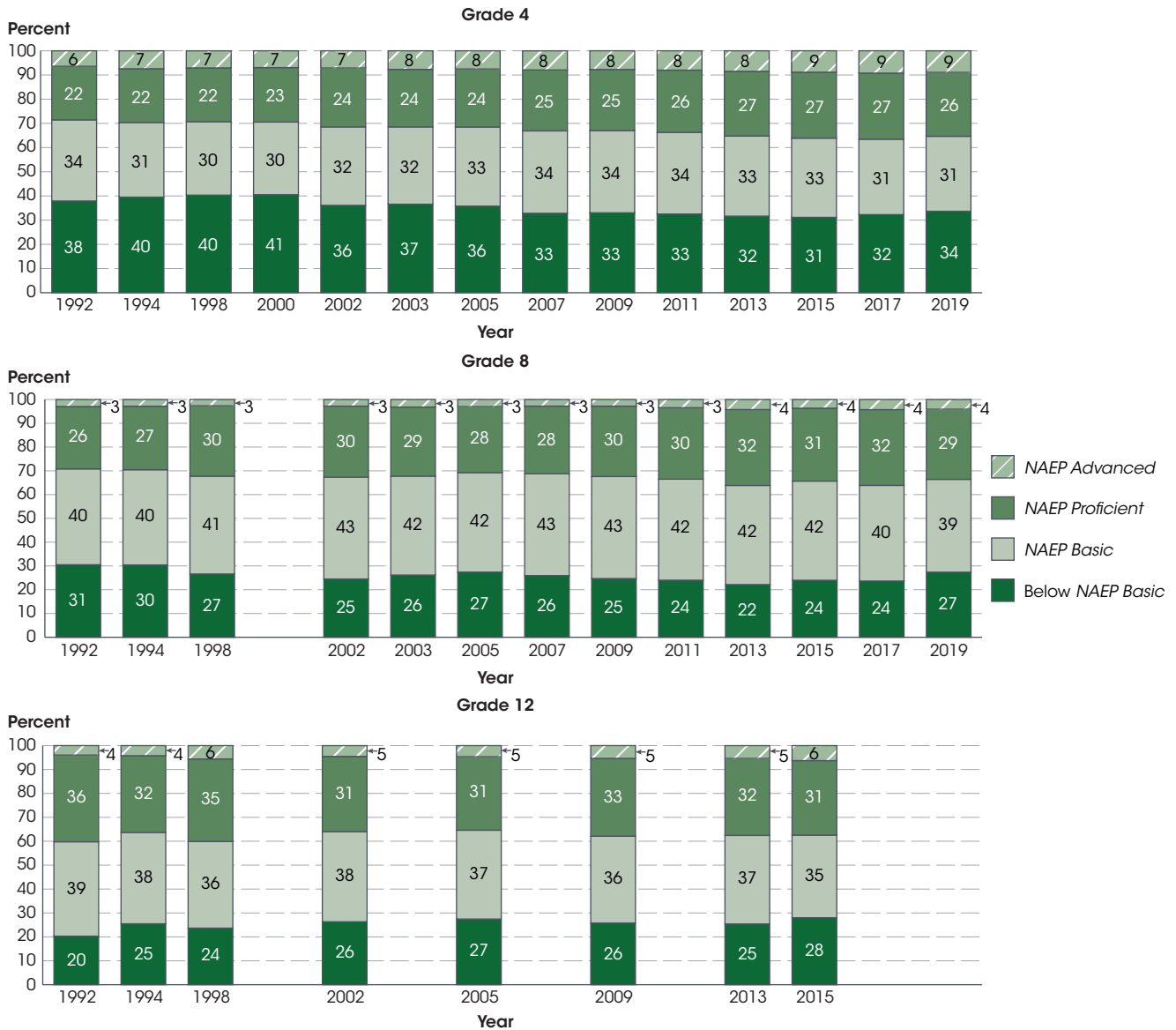


NOTE: Includes public, private, Bureau of Indian Education, and Department of Defense Education Activity schools. The reading scale scores range from 0 to 500. Although average scores are reported on a 0–500 scale at grades 4, 8, and 12, the scale scores were derived separately and therefore scores cannot be compared across grades. Assessment was not conducted for grade 8 in 2000 or for grade 12 in 2000, 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2017. Data for grade 12 in 2019 were not available in time for publication. Testing accommodations (e.g., extended time, small-group testing) for children with disabilities and English language learners were not permitted in 1992 and 1994. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), selected years, 1992–2019 Reading Assessments, NAEP Data Explorer. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, table 221.10.

The average reading score for 4th-grade students in 2019 (220) was lower than the score in 2017 (222), but it was higher than the score in 1992 (217). For 8th-grade students, the reading score in 2019 (263) was lower than

the score in 2017 (267), but it was higher than the score in 1992 (260). The reading score for 12th-grade students in 2015 (287) was not measurably different from the score in 2013, but it was lower than the score in 1992 (292).

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of 4th-, 8th-, and 12th-grade students, by National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading achievement level: Selected years, 1992–2019



NOTE: Includes public, private, Bureau of Indian Education, and Department of Defense Education Activity schools. Achievement levels define what students should know and be able to do: *NAEP Basic* indicates partial mastery of fundamental skills, *NAEP Proficient* indicates demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, and *NAEP Advanced* indicates superior performance beyond proficient. NAEP achievement levels are to be used on a trial basis and should be interpreted and used with caution. Assessment was not conducted for grade 8 in 2000 or for grade 12 in 2000, 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2017. Data for grade 12 in 2019 were not available in time for publication. Testing accommodations (e.g., extended time, small-group testing) for children with disabilities and English language learners were not permitted in 1992 and 1994. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), selected years, 1992–2019 Reading Assessments, NAEP Data Explorer. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, table 221.12.

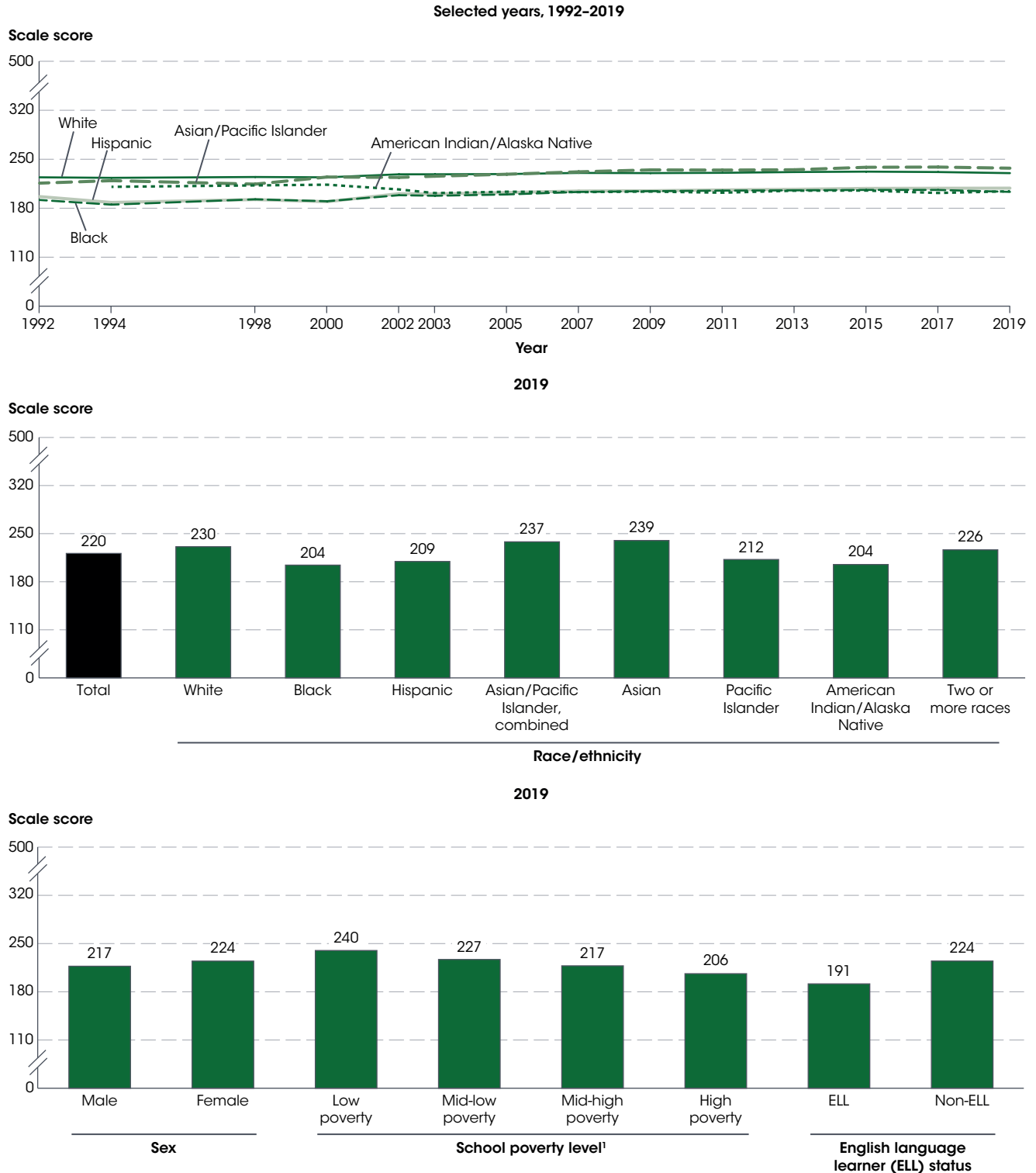
In 2019, some 66 percent of 4th-grade students performed at or above the *NAEP Basic* achievement level in reading, 35 percent performed at or above *NAEP Proficient*, and 9 percent performed at *NAEP Advanced*. The percentage of 4th-grade students who performed at or above *NAEP Basic* in 2019 was lower than the percentage in 2017 (68 percent), but it was higher than the percentage in 1992 (62 percent). In addition, the percentage of 4th-grade students who performed at or above *NAEP Proficient* in 2019 was lower than the percentage in 2017 (37 percent), but it was higher than the percentage in 1992 (29 percent). The percentage of 4th-grade students who performed at *NAEP Advanced* in 2019 was not measurably different from the percentage in 2017, but it was higher than the percentage in 1992 (6 percent).

In 2019, some 73 percent of 8th-grade students performed at or above the *NAEP Basic* achievement level in reading, 34 percent performed at or above *NAEP Proficient*, and 4 percent performed at *NAEP Advanced*. The percentage of 8th-grade students who performed at or above *NAEP Basic* in 2019 was lower than the percentage in 2017 (76 percent), but it was higher than the percentage in 1992

(69 percent). Similarly, a lower percentage of 8th-grade students performed at or above *NAEP Proficient* in 2019 than in 2017 (36 percent), but the percentage in 2019 was higher than the percentage in 1992 (29 percent). The percentage of 8th-grade students who performed at *NAEP Advanced* was higher in 2019 than in 1992 (3 percent), but the percentage in 2019 was not measurably different from the percentage in 2017.

In 2015, some 72 percent of 12th-grade students performed at or above the *NAEP Basic* achievement level in reading, 37 percent performed at or above *NAEP Proficient*, and 6 percent performed at *NAEP Advanced*. A lower percentage of 12th-grade students performed at or above *NAEP Basic* in 2015 than in 2013 (75 percent) and 1992 (80 percent). The percentage of 12th-graders who performed at or above *NAEP Proficient* in 2015 was not measurably different from the percentage in 2013, but it was lower than the percentage in 1992 (40 percent). A higher percentage of 12th-grade students performed at *NAEP Advanced* in 2015 than in 2013 (5 percent) and 1992 (4 percent).

Figure 3. Average National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scale scores of 4th-grade students, by selected characteristics: Selected years, 1992–2019



¹ High-poverty schools are defined as schools where 76 to 100 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL); mid-high poverty schools are schools where 51 to 75 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; mid-low poverty schools are schools where 26 to 50 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL, and low-poverty schools are schools where 25 percent or less of the students are eligible for FRPL. For more information on eligibility for FRPL and its relationship to poverty, see the NCES blog post "[Free or reduced-price lunch: A proxy for poverty?](#)" The nonresponse rate for FRPL was greater than 15 percent but not greater than 50 percent.

NOTE: Includes public, private, Bureau of Indian Education, and Department of Defense Education Activity schools. The reading scale scores range from 0 to 500. Scale scores for American Indian/Alaska Native students were suppressed in 1992 and 1998 because reporting standards were not met (too few cases for a reliable estimate). Testing accommodations (e.g., extended time, small-group testing) for children with disabilities and English language learners were not permitted in 1992 and 1994. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), selected years, 1992–2019 Reading Assessments, NAEP Data Explorer. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, tables 221.10 and 221.12.

At grade 4, the average 2019 reading scores for White (230) and Black (204) students were lower than the corresponding scores in 2017 (232 and 206, respectively), but the scores for both groups were higher in 2019 than in 1992 (224 and 192, respectively). In 2019, the reading scores for Hispanic (209) and Asian/Pacific Islander students (237) were not measurably different from the corresponding scores in 2017, but the scores for both groups were higher in 2019 than in 1992 (197 and 216, respectively). In 2019, the reading score for American Indian/Alaska Native 4th-graders (204) was not measurably different from the scores in 2017 and 1994 (1994 was the first year data were available for 4th-grade American Indian/Alaska Native students). In 2011, NAEP began reporting separate data for Asian students, Pacific Islander students, and students of Two or more races.⁵ The 2019 4th-grade reading scores for Asian students (239), Pacific Islander students (212), and students of Two or more races (226) were not measurably different from the corresponding scores in 2017 and 2011.

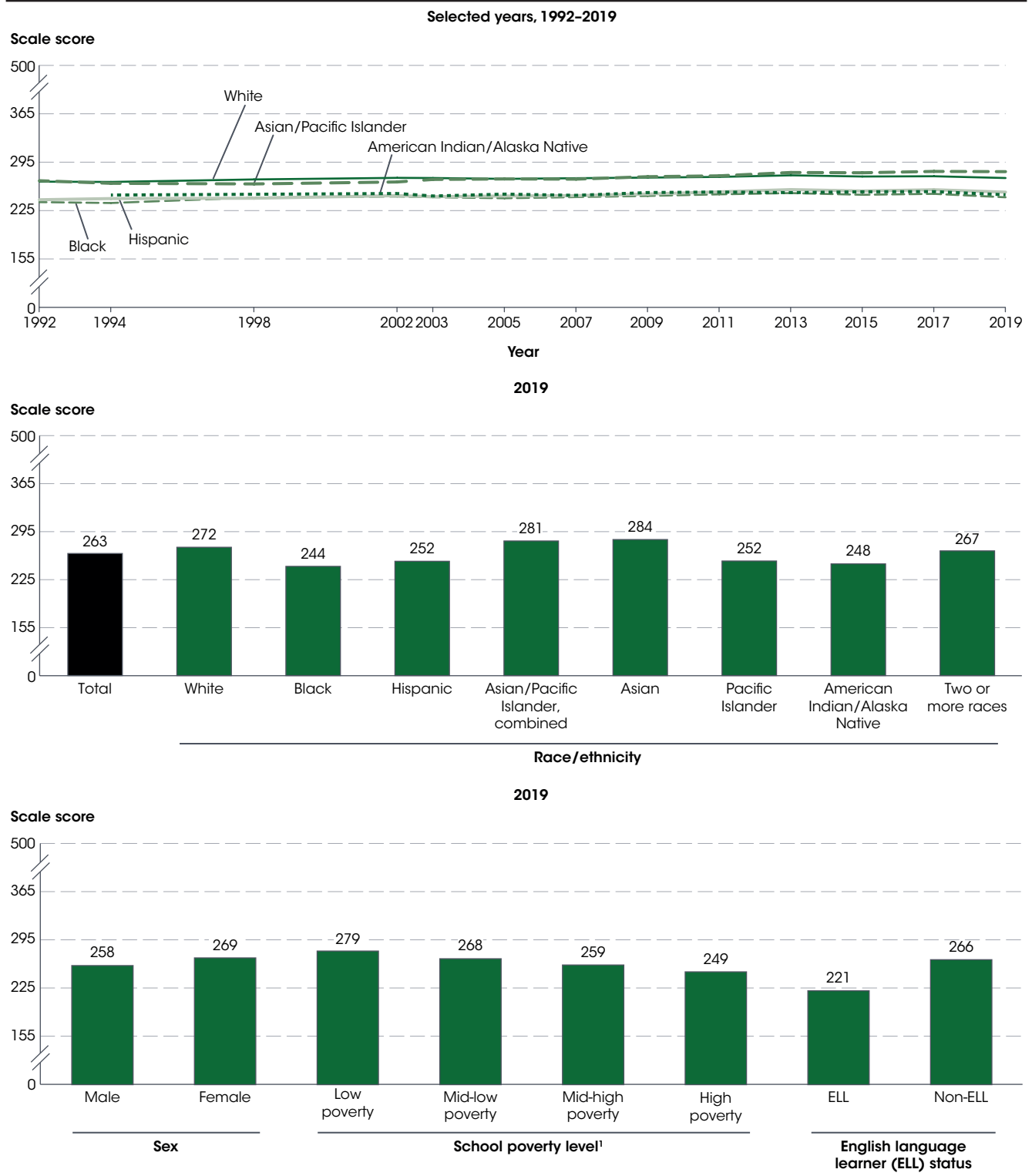
From 1992 through 2019, the average reading scores for White 4th-graders were higher than those of their Black and Hispanic peers. Although the White-Black achievement gap did not change measurably from 2017 to 2019, the achievement gap narrowed from 32 points in 1992 to 27 points in 2019. The White-Hispanic

achievement gap in 2019 (21 points) was smaller than the achievement gap in 2017 (23 points), but it was not measurably different from the achievement gap in 1992.

At grade 4, the average reading score for male students in 2019 (217) was lower than the score in 2017 (219) but higher than the score in 1992 (213). The reading score for female students in 2019 (224) was not measurably different from the score in 2017, but it was higher than the score in 1992 (221). In each assessment year since 1992, female students have scored higher than male students at grade 4. The 2019 achievement gap between male and female 4th-grade students (7 points) was larger than the male-female achievement gap in 2017 (6 points), but it was not measurably different from the achievement gap in 1992.

NAEP scores can also be disaggregated by the poverty level of the school students attended and by students' English language learner (ELL) status. In 2019, the average reading score for 4th-grade students in high-poverty schools (206) was lower than the scores for 4th-grade students in mid-high poverty schools (217), mid-low poverty schools (227), and low-poverty schools (240).^{6,7} In 2019, the reading score for 4th-grade ELL students (191) was 33 points lower than the score for their non-ELL peers (224).

Figure 4. Average National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scale scores of 8th-grade students, by selected characteristics: Selected years, 1992–2019



¹ High-poverty schools are defined as schools where 76 to 100 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL); mid-high poverty schools are schools where 51 to 75 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; mid-low poverty schools are schools where 26 to 50 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; and low-poverty schools are schools where 25 percent or less of the students are eligible for FRPL. For more information on eligibility for FRPL and its relationship to poverty, see the NCES blog post “Free or reduced price lunch: A proxy for poverty?” The nonresponse rate for FRPL was greater than 15 percent but not greater than 50 percent.

NOTE: Includes public, private, Bureau of Indian Education, and Department of Defense Education Activity schools. The reading scale scores range from 0 to 500. Scale scores for American Indian/Alaska Native students were suppressed in 1992 and 1998 because reporting standards were not met (too few cases for a reliable estimate). Testing accommodations (e.g., extended time, small-group testing) for children with disabilities and English language learners were not permitted in 1992 and 1994. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), selected years, 1992–2019 Reading Assessments, NAEP Data Explorer. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, tables 221.10 and 221.12.

At grade 8, the average reading scores for White (272), Black (244), and Hispanic (252) students in 2019 were lower than the corresponding scores in 2017 (275, 249, and 255, respectively), but the score for each group was higher in 2019 than in 1992 (267, 237, and 241, respectively). In 2019, the reading score for 8th-grade Asian/Pacific Islander students (281) was not measurably different from the score in 2017, but it was higher than the score in 1992 (268). The reading score for 8th-grade American Indian/Alaska Native students (248) was lower than the score in 2017 (253), but it was not measurably different from the score in 1994 (1994 was the first year data were available for 8th-grade American Indian/Alaska Native students). In 2011, NAEP began reporting separate data for Asian students, Pacific Islander students, and students of Two or more races. At grade 8, the 2019 reading score for Asian students (284) was not measurably different from the score in 2017, but it was higher than the score in 2011 (277). The 2019 reading score for Pacific Islander 8th-graders (252) was not measurably different from the scores in 2017 and 2011. While the 2019 reading score for 8th-graders of Two or more races (267) was lower than the score in 2017 (272), it was not measurably different from the score in 2011.

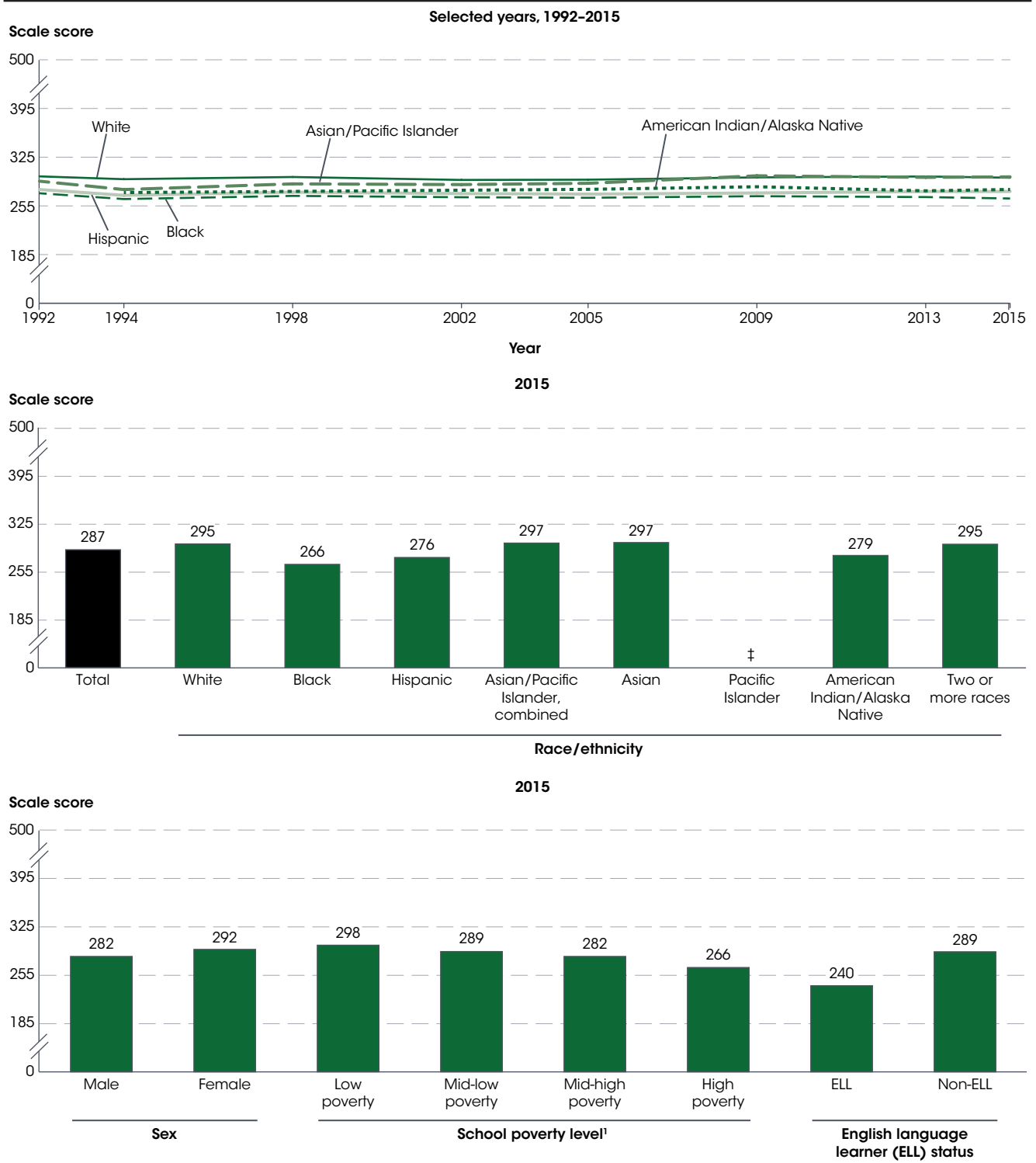
From 1992 through 2019, the average reading score for White 8th-graders was higher than the scores of their

Black and Hispanic peers. The White-Black achievement gap in 2019 (28 points) was larger than the White-Black achievement gap in 2017 (25 points), but it was not measurably different from the achievement gap in 1992. Although the White-Hispanic achievement gap at grade 8 did not change measurably from 2017 to 2019, the White-Hispanic achievement gap narrowed from 26 points in 1992 to 20 points in 2019.

At grade 8, the average reading scores in 2019 for both male (258) and female students (269) were lower than the corresponding scores in 2017 (262 and 272, respectively), but they were higher than the scores in 1992 (254 and 267, respectively). In each year since 1992, female students have scored higher than male students at grade 8. The 2019 achievement gap between male and female 8th-grade students (11 points) was not measurably different from the male-female achievement gaps in 2017 and 1992.

In 2019, the average reading score for 8th-grade students in high-poverty schools (249) was lower than the scores for 8th-grade students in mid-high poverty schools (259), mid-low poverty schools (268), and low-poverty schools (279).⁸ The 2019 reading score for 8th-grade ELL students (221) was 45 points lower than the score for their non-ELL peers (266).

Figure 5. Average National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scale scores of 12th-grade students, by selected characteristics: Selected years, 1992–2015



‡ Reporting standards not met. There were too few cases for a reliable estimate.

¹ High-poverty schools are defined as schools where 76 to 100 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL); mid-high poverty schools are schools where 51 to 75 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; mid-low poverty schools are schools where 26 to 50 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; and low-poverty schools are schools where 25 percent or less of the students are eligible for FRPL. For more information on eligibility for FRPL and its relationship to poverty, see the NCEES blog post "[Free or reduced-price lunch: A proxy for poverty?](#)"

NOTE: Includes public, private, Bureau of Indian Education, and Department of Defense Education Activity schools. The reading scale scores range from 0 to 500. Assessment was not conducted for grade 12 in 2017, and data for the 2019 assessment were not available in time for publication. Scale scores for American Indian/Alaska Native students were suppressed in 1992, 1998, and 2002 because reporting standards were not met (too few cases for a reliable estimate). Testing accommodations (e.g., extended time, small-group testing) for children with disabilities and English language learners were not permitted in 1992 and 1994. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), selected years, 1992–2015 Reading Assessments, NAEP Data Explorer. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, tables 221.10 and 221.12.

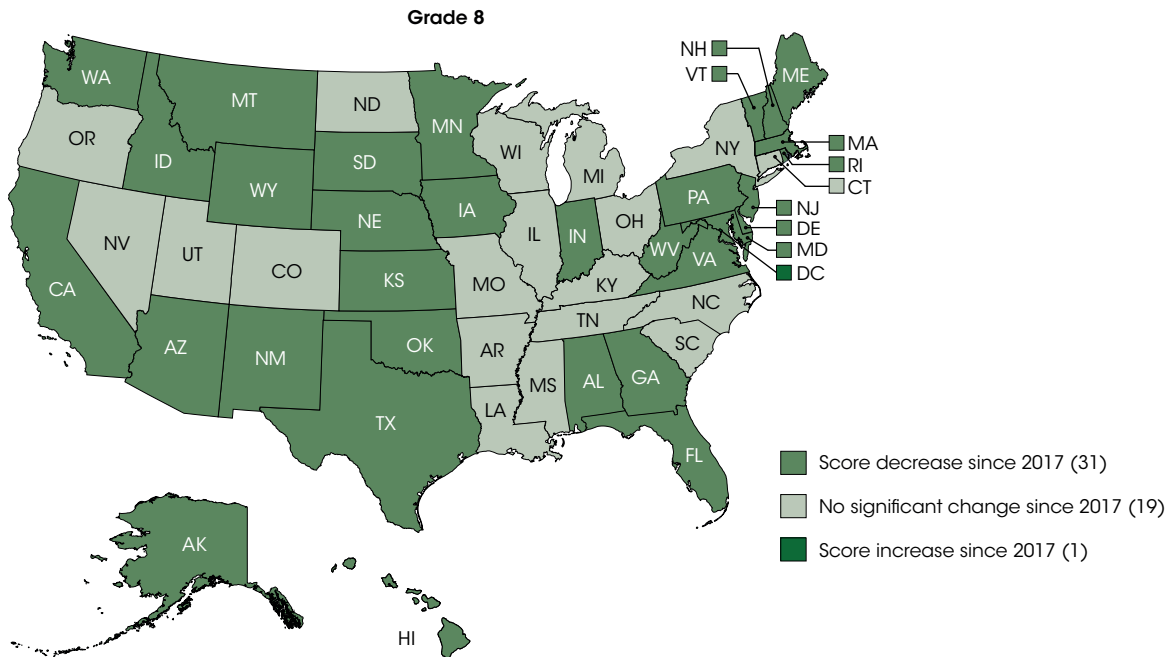
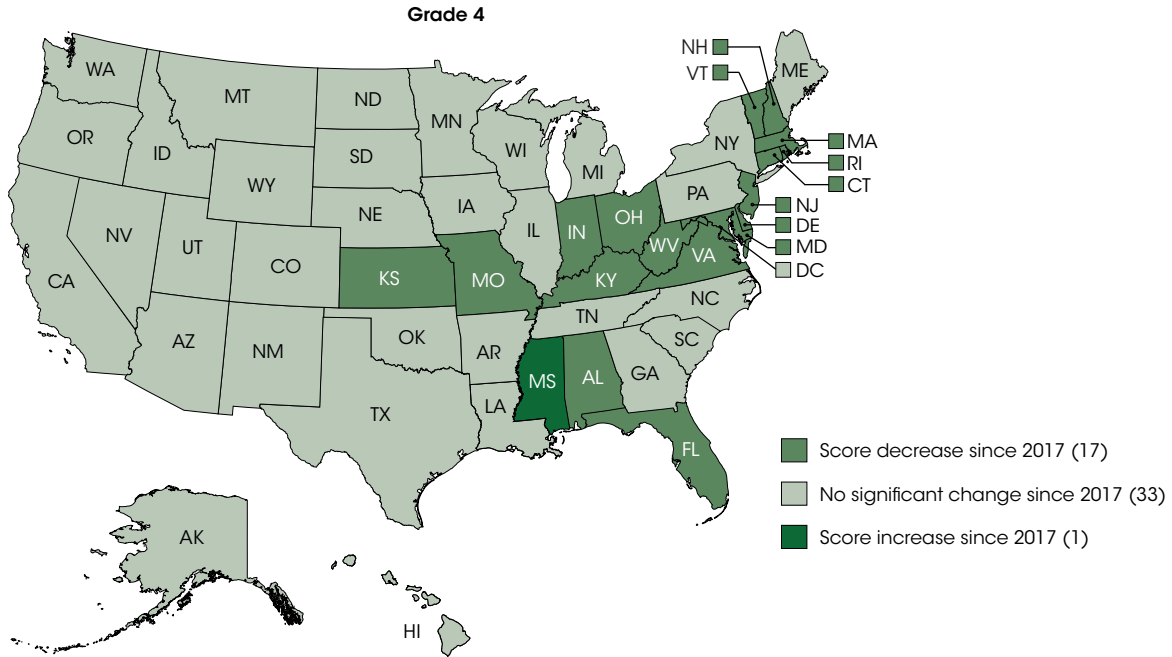
At grade 12, the average reading scores in 2015 for White (295), Hispanic (276), and Asian/Pacific Islander students (297) were not measurably different from the scores in 2013 and 1992. For Black students, the 2015 reading score (266) was lower than the 1992 score (273), but it was not measurably different from the 2013 score. The reading score for American Indian/Alaska Native students in 2015 (279) was not measurably different from the scores in 2013 and 1994 (1994 was the first year data were available for 12th-grade American Indian/Alaska Native students). In 2013, NAEP began reporting separate data at the 12th-grade level for Asian students, Pacific Islander students, and students of Two or more races. The 2015 reading scores for Asian students (297) and students of Two or more races (295) were not measurably different from the scores in 2013. The reading score for Pacific Islander students was 289 in 2013, but it was suppressed in 2015 because reporting standards were not met. The White-Black achievement gap for 12th-grade students was larger in 2015 (30 points) than in 1992 (24 points), while

the White-Hispanic achievement gap in 2015 (20 points) was not measurably different from the achievement gap in any previous assessment year.

The 2015 average reading scores for male (282) and female (292) 12th-grade students were not measurably different from the scores in 2013, but they were lower than the scores in 1992 (287 and 297, respectively). The achievement gap between male and female 12th-grade students in 2015 (10 points) was not measurably different from the male-female achievement gaps in 2013 and 1992.

In 2015, the reading score for 12th-grade students in high-poverty schools (266) was lower than the scores for 12th-grade students in mid-high poverty schools (282), mid-low poverty schools (289), and low-poverty schools (298). In addition, the average reading score for 12th-grade ELL students (240) was 49 points lower than the score for their non-ELL peers (289).

Figure 6. Change in average National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scale scores of 4th- and 8th-grade public school students, by state: 2017 to 2019



NOTE: The reading scale scores range from 0 to 500.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2017 and 2019 Reading Assessments, The Nation's Report Card (<https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/>). See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, tables 221.40 and 221.60.

NAEP results also permit state-level comparisons of the reading achievement of 4th- and 8th-grade students in public schools.⁹ The national average reading score for 4th-grade public school students decreased from 221 in 2017 to 219 in 2019, and scores across states ranged from 204 to 231. In 16 states, reading scores for 4th-grade public school students were higher than the national average score for public school students, and in 23 states, public school students had scores that were not measurably

different from the national average score. Reading scores in the District of Columbia and the remaining 11 states were lower than the national average score for 4th-grade students in public schools. Reading scores were lower in 2019 than in 2017 in 17 states and higher in 2019 than in 2017 in one state (Mississippi). The reading scores in the remaining 32 states and the District of Columbia showed no measurable change from 2017 to 2019.

At grade 8, the national average reading score for public school students in 2019 was 262, and scores across states ranged from 250 to 273. In 17 states, reading scores for public school students in 2019 were higher than the national average score for 8th-grade students in public schools, and in 19 states, public school students had scores that were not measurably different from the national average score. Reading scores in the District of Columbia

and the remaining 14 states were lower than the national average score for 8th-grade students in public schools. Reading scores were also lower in 2019 than in 2017 in 31 states; however, the score was higher in 2019 than in 2017 in the District of Columbia. In the remaining 19 states, the reading score for 8th-grade students in public schools showed no measurable change from 2017 to 2019.

Endnotes:

¹ Although average scores are reported on a 0–500 scale at grades 4, 8, and 12, the scale scores were derived separately and therefore scores cannot be compared across grades. For more information on NAEP including the history of the assessment, sampling procedures, and the transition from paper-based assessments to digitally based assessments, please see <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>.

² NAEP achievement-level setting is based on the judgments of a broadly representative panel of teachers, education specialists, and members of the general public. The authorizing legislation for NAEP requires that the achievement levels be used on a trial basis until the Commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) determines that the achievement levels are reasonable, valid, and informative to the public (20 USC § 9622(e)(2)(C)). The NCES Commissioner's determination is to be based on a congressionally mandated, rigorous, and independent evaluation. The latest evaluation of the achievement levels was conducted by a committee convened by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine in 2016. The evaluation concluded that further evidence should be gathered to determine whether the achievement levels are reasonable, valid, and informative. Accordingly, the NCES Commissioner determined that the trial status of the achievement levels should be maintained at this time. Read more about the [NAEP reading achievement levels by grade](#).

³ This indicator presents data from the Main NAEP reading assessment, which is not comparable to the Long-Term Trend NAEP reading assessment. The Main NAEP reading assessment

was first administered in 1992 and assesses student performance at grades 4, 8, and 12, while the Long-Term Trend NAEP reading assessment was first administered in 1971 and assesses student performance at ages 9, 13, and 17. In addition, the two assessments differ in the content assessed, how often the assessment is administered, and how the results are reported.

⁴ NAEP reading scores for 4th-grade students in 2019 had a mean of 220 and a standard deviation (SD) of 39. NAEP reading scores for 8th-grade students in 2019 had a mean of 263 and an SD of 38. NAEP reading scores for 12th-grade students in 2015 had a mean of 287 and an SD of 41 (retrieved December 10, 2019, from the [Main NAEP Data Explorer](#)).

⁵ While NAEP reported some data on students of Two or more races for earlier years, the reporting standards changed in 2011.

⁶ High-poverty schools are defined as schools where 76 to 100 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL); mid-high poverty schools are schools where 51 to 75 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; mid-low poverty schools are schools where 26 to 50 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; and low-poverty schools are schools where 25 percent or less of the students are eligible for FRPL.

⁷ Nonresponse for this variable was greater than 15 percent but not greater than 50 percent.

⁸ Nonresponse for this variable was greater than 15 percent but not greater than 50 percent.

⁹ NAEP results serve as a common metric for all states and are not comparable to results from assessments administered by state education agencies.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, tables 221.10, 221.12, 221.40, 221.60, and 221.75

Related indicators and resources: [Absenteeism and Achievement \[Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups\]](#); [International Comparisons: Reading Literacy at Grade 4](#); [International Comparisons: Reading, Mathematics, and Science Literacy of 15-Year-Old Students](#); [Mathematics Performance: Reading Achievement \[Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups\]](#); [Reading and Mathematics Score Trends \[web-only\]](#); [Science Performance](#); [Technology and Engineering Literacy \[web-only\]](#)

Glossary: Achievement gap; Achievement levels, NAEP; English language learner (ELL); Public school or institution; Racial/ethnic group