

# Fresno Unified holds its own in national report card

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The nation's report card shows that scores for Fresno Unified have not moved much in the past two years, but the school district bucked a nationwide decrease in mathematics for fourth- and eighth-graders and a downturn in reading for eighth-graders.

"Fresno essentially held its own," said Michael Casserly, executive director of the [Council of Great City Schools](#), a coalition of the nation's largest public school systems, including Fresno.

California also showed little movement on math and reading scores on the [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#), known commonly as "the Nation's Report Card." The 2015 test results are being released by the National Assessment Governing Board and the National Center for Education Statistics on Wednesday.

But there was a bright spot for Fresno.

Superintendent Michael Hanson said a three-point gain in Fresno fourth-grade reading, while not statistically significant, shows "our investment in early learning programs and our early literacy programs are beginning to take hold."

Fresno fourth-graders scored 199 points in reading this year compared to 196 in 2013 and 197 in 2009. Eighth-graders scored 242 points in reading in 2015 compared to 245 in 2013 and 240 in 2009.

Fresno fourth-graders scored 218 points in math on the 2015 test compared to 220 points in 2013 and 219 points in 2009. Eighth-graders scored 257 points in math this year compared to 260 in 2013 and 258 in 2009. The changes were not statistically significant, the report card said.

Compared to all schools tested nationwide, Fresno Unified students fell below average. They scored at least 22 points lower than the national average in reading and math.

And Fresno lagged behind California as a whole. Eighth-graders scored 18 points below in math and 17 below in reading. Fresno fourth-graders scored 14 points below the statewide average in math and reading.

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In addition to being compared to schools in California and nationwide, Fresno is one of 21 urban districts that voluntarily participate in testing fourth- and eighth-graders in math and reading as part of the [Trial Urban District Assessment \(TUDA\)](#). The districts are in cities with at least 250,000 people. Assessments are given to samples of students in the districts. In Fresno, 4,000 fourth-graders and 4,000 eighth-graders were tested.

Among large districts, Fresno scored 17 points below the overall average for eighth-grade math. Fresno fourth-graders scored 16 points below in math. And fourth- and eighth-graders scored 15 points below the large-district average in reading.

But Hanson said Fresno grew significantly more than many of the urban schools. "We're not dead last. We're in a group of cities that has had longstanding problems and struggles. But we don't shy away from that because we know

we're on the right track for the work that we are doing from day in and day out.”

For example, on assessments in 2017 and beyond, Fresno should see the effects of adding a half-hour of instruction at 30 of 60 schools this year, Hanson said. “We know that’s going to have an impact on measures like this downstream.”

In Fresno, the 2015 report card shows that 14 percent of fourth-graders performed at or above the proficient level in math. In 2013, 15 percent were proficient and in 2009, 14 percent had proficiency. In 2015, only 12 percent of eighth-graders were at or above the proficient level in math, the same as were proficient in 2013. In 2009, 15 percent were proficient.

Reading scores for 2015 show 13 percent of fourth- and eighth-graders were proficient, which is the same as their proficiency in 2013. In 2009, 12 percent of the fourth- and eighth-graders were reading at a proficient level.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress is a more rigorous test than state tests, said Dave Calhoun, executive director for research evaluation and assessment at Fresno Unified. Fresno’s rates are fairly consistent with the proficiency rates for urban districts, he said.

The report card also shows gaps remain in Fresno between white students and their black and Hispanic counterparts. In reading, black fourth-graders had an average score 34 points lower than that for white students. Hispanic students scored 24 points lower than white students. In eighth grade, both black and Hispanic students scored 18 points lower in reading than white students.

Math scores also were lower for black and Hispanic students, with eighth-grade black students scoring 39 points lower than white students. Hispanic students scored 29 points lower than white students. In fourth grade, black students scored 22 points lower and Hispanic students scored 21 points lower than white students.

However, Calhoun said the district is seeing a positive trend. The increase in fourth-grade reading scores was led by Hispanic, Asian and English-learner students who showed increases of four or more points, he said.

Fresno has two unique factors that influence test scores, said Casserly, with the Council of Great City Schools. “You’ve got a very large population of English learners who often are very mobile. And you’ve got a very large population of English learners who are poor. The combination of those two factors make for challenges that the school district faces unlike any other major city in the country.”

Hanson added a third variable: poverty. He said 87 percent of the district’s students are poor.

In 2015, the report card shows Fresno students eligible for free/reduced price lunches (a measure of family income) scored as much as 45 points lower on the math and reading assessments than students who are not eligible.

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