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**Mississippi Makes Progress Toward National Average
on Nation's Report in Reading and Math**

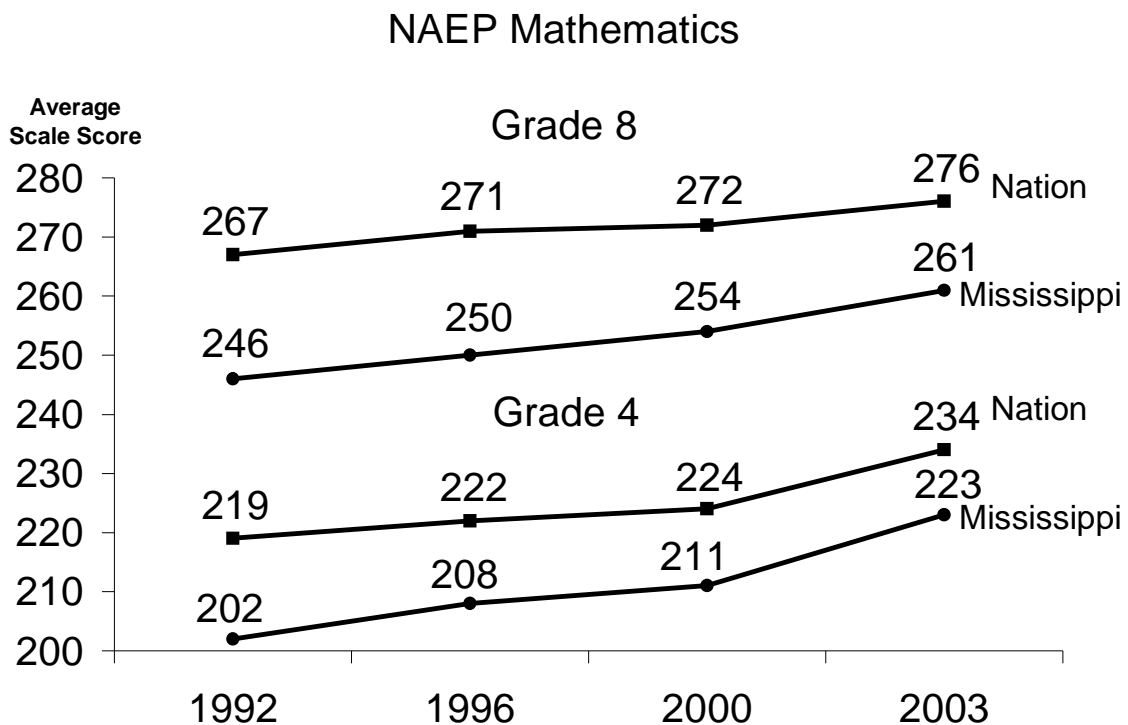
Mississippi's grade 4 and grade 8 students showed significant gains in math and improvement in Mississippi's reading on the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation's Report Card. Mississippi is closing the gap with the nation. Mississippi closed the gap with the nation from 1992 to 2003 in grade 4 math from 17 to 11 points, in grade 8 math from 21 to 15 points, in grade 4 reading from 16 to 11 points, and in grade 8 reading from 10 to 6 points between 1998 and 2003.

Governor Ronnie Musgrove said, "..."

"Educators around the state are to be commended for their efforts to improve student achievement," said State Superintendent Henry Johnson. "We are pleased to see the trends on our state assessments are substantiated by this independent national assessment. At the same time, we know that we have more work to do."

Mississippi's grade 4 mathematics average scale score for 2003 was 223 compared to the 234 for the nation. Trend data from 1992 to 2003 show that Mississippi made especially notable gains. In that span of time, Mississippi grade 4 students gained 21 scale score points, while the nation gained only 15. The greatest gain occurred in the percentage of Mississippi's grade 4 students scoring at Proficient or above. Only 6% scored in that category in 1992. That percentage almost tripled to 17% in 2003. Equally significant, the percentage of Mississippi students scoring below Basic decreased from 64% in 1992 to 38% in 2003.

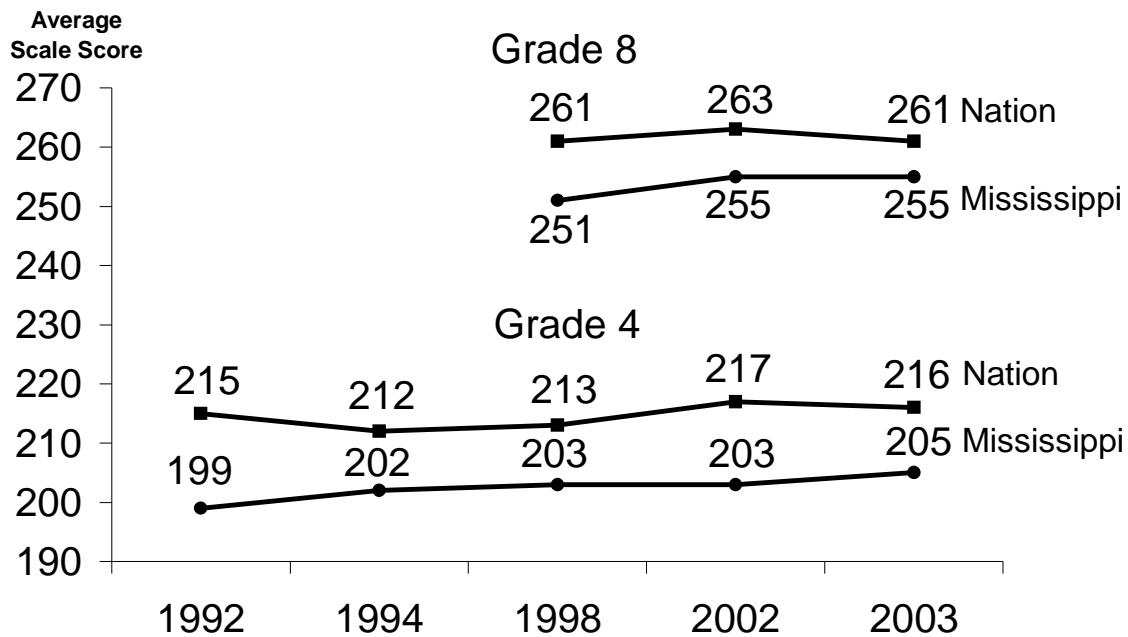
Mississippi's grade 8 mathematics average scale score for 2003 was 261 compared to the nation's 276. In 1992 the national average was 21 points higher than Mississippi's, but 2003 results show the gap shrinking to 15 points. Mississippi's grade 8 students gained 15 scale score points from 1992-2003, while the nation gained only 9. Also, from 1992 to 2003, Mississippi doubled the percentage of students scoring at or above Proficient from 6% to 12% and decreased the percentage below Basic by 14 percentage points.



Mississippi's gains in reading were not as significant as in math, but Mississippi is closing the gap with the nation in reading. Mississippi's 2003 average scale score for grade 4 reading was 205, while the nation's was 216. That gap of 11 scale score points is an improvement from the 1992 gap of 16 scale score points. The percentage of Mississippi students at Proficient or above increased from 14% in 1992 to 18% in 2003. Mississippi also reduced the percentage of students below Basic from 59% in 1992 to 51% in 2003, a reduction of 8 percentage points.

For grade 8 students, the 2003 NAEP reading results for Mississippi show improvement from the first test administration in 1998. Mississippi's 2003 average scale score was 255 compared to a 261 for the nation. Mississippi's grade 8 students improved 4 scale score points from the 1998 results, while there was no improvement in the national scale score average of 261 from 1998 to 2003. The percentage of Mississippi's grade 8 students at Proficient or above increased from 19% in 1998 to 21% in 2003. There was a decrease in grade 8 Mississippi students below Basic; in 1998 38% of the state's students fell into that category, but in 2003 that percentage was 35%.

NAEP Reading



The 2003 NAEP grade 4 and grade 8 math and reading assessments were the first of the biennial NAEP assessments mandated by *No Child Left Behind* to be used as “external” indicators of state results. A parallel between NAEP trends and Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT) trends is the desired outcome, and 2003 results show that parallel trend. (MCT results were released in July 2003.) The first administration in Mississippi of the grade 4 and grade 8 NAEP math assessment occurred in 1992. The first grade 4 NAEP reading assessment was also administered that year, while the first grade 8 NAEP reading assessment in Mississippi did not occur until 1998.

The next mandated NAEP assessment of reading and math will be administered during the 2004-2005 school year.