

No. 94
April 10, 1996

AMERICA'S REPORT CARD ON READING: A LESSON FOR CONGRESS AND THE TAXPAYERS

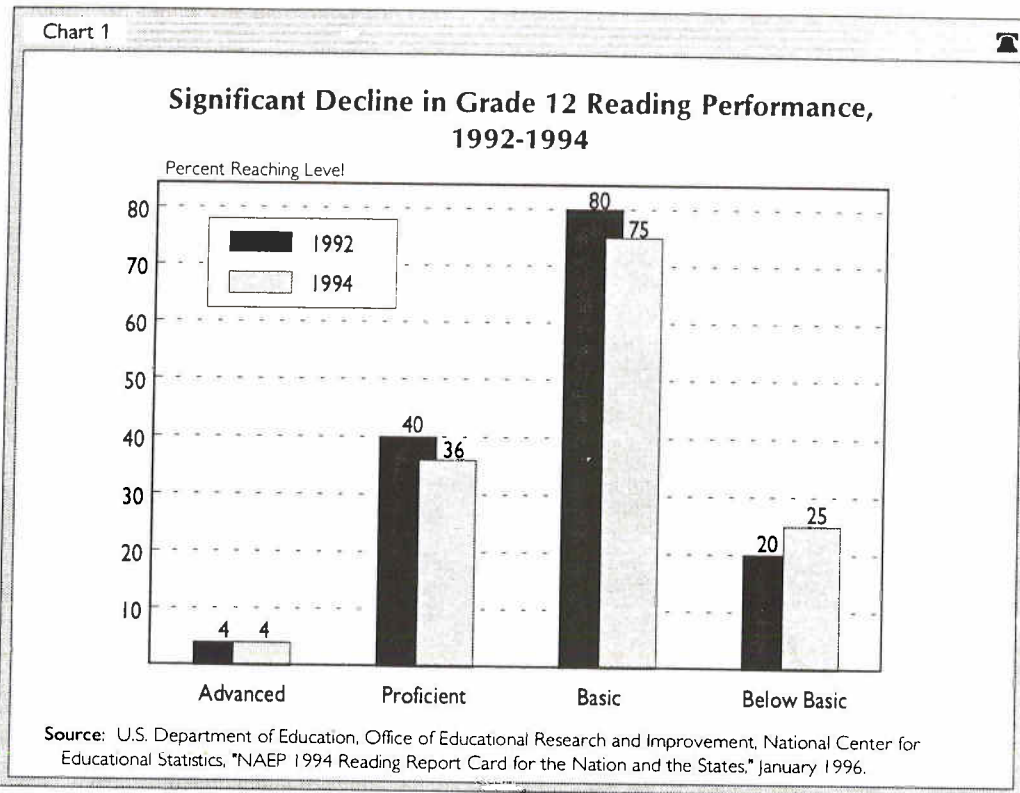
James F. Hirni
Research Assistant

America's students still are not performing at a satisfactory level, and Americans are not getting a solid return on the investment of their tax dollars in the nation's schools, according to the latest assessment of achievement. After 15 years and \$328 billion in federal spending, the U.S. Department of Education is contributing little, if anything at all, to student success in reading.¹

The recently released findings from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) final 1994 Reading Report Card for the Nation and the States show most of America's students are not meeting a proficient achievement level in reading.² The 1994 NAEP reading examination is the nation's report card in reading. The 1994 test was administered to nearly 140,000 students in public and private schools nationwide.

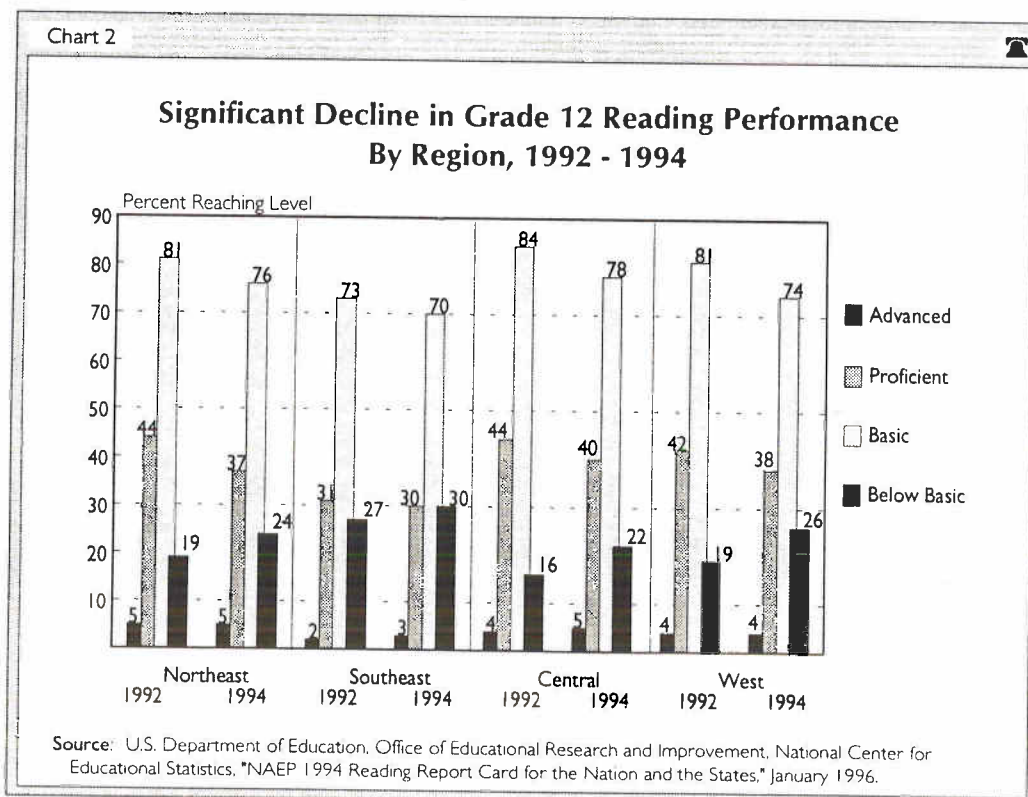
The NAEP report reveals student reading and comprehension achievement levels in grades 4, 8, and 12 between 1992 and 1994, as well as achievement levels within various subgroups of the student population. The report uses three achievement levels to rank the results: basic, proficient, and advanced.³

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- 1 Office of Management and Budget, *The 1997 Budget of the United States Government*, Historical Tables, pp. 67-69.
 - 2 NAEP, The National Assessment of Education Progress, is a congressionally mandated program of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a branch of the U.S. Department of Education. It has been in operation for over a quarter of a century as a barometer of student performance in mathematics, reading, writing, and other academic subjects. Unfortunately, all states did not participate in the assessments.
 - 3 Requirements for the three levels of reading differ for each grade level. For example, the basic reading level for fourth graders requires that the student demonstrate an understanding of the overall meaning of what he or she has read, while the basic reading level for eighth graders requires the student to demonstrate a literal understanding and to make some interpretations. For twelfth grade students, the basic reading level requires the student to demonstrate an overall understanding of the text and to make some interpretations.



While 4th and 8th grade students showed slight declines in performance, there was a significant decline in the reading performance of students in grade 12 (see Chart 1). Between 1992 and 1994, notes the report:

- X There was a significant **decline** in the proportion of twelfth graders *at or above* the proficient level;
- X There was also a significant **decline** in the proportion of twelfth graders *at or above* the basic level; and

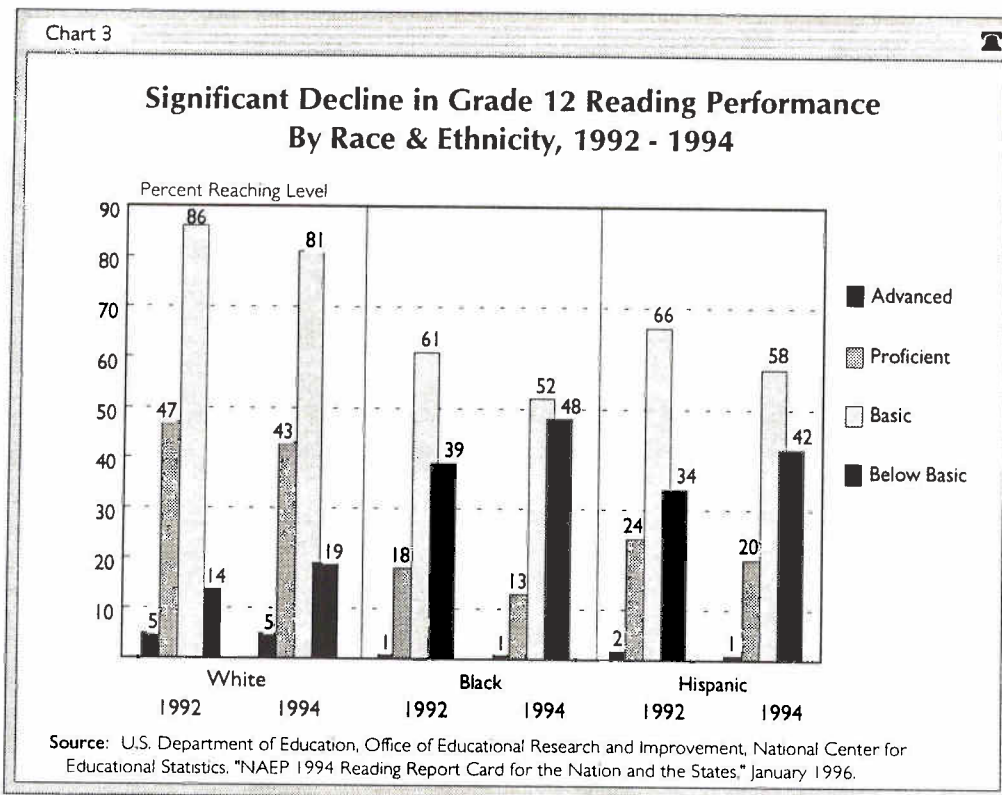


- X There was a significant **increase** in the percentage of twelfth graders performing *below* the basic level.

Regionally, the results were equally discouraging. According to the report:

- X Every region (Northeast, Southeast, Central, and West) had significant **declines** in the number of twelfth grade students achieving *at or above* the proficient level; and
- X Every region had an **increase** in the number of twelfth grade students achieving *below* the basic level.

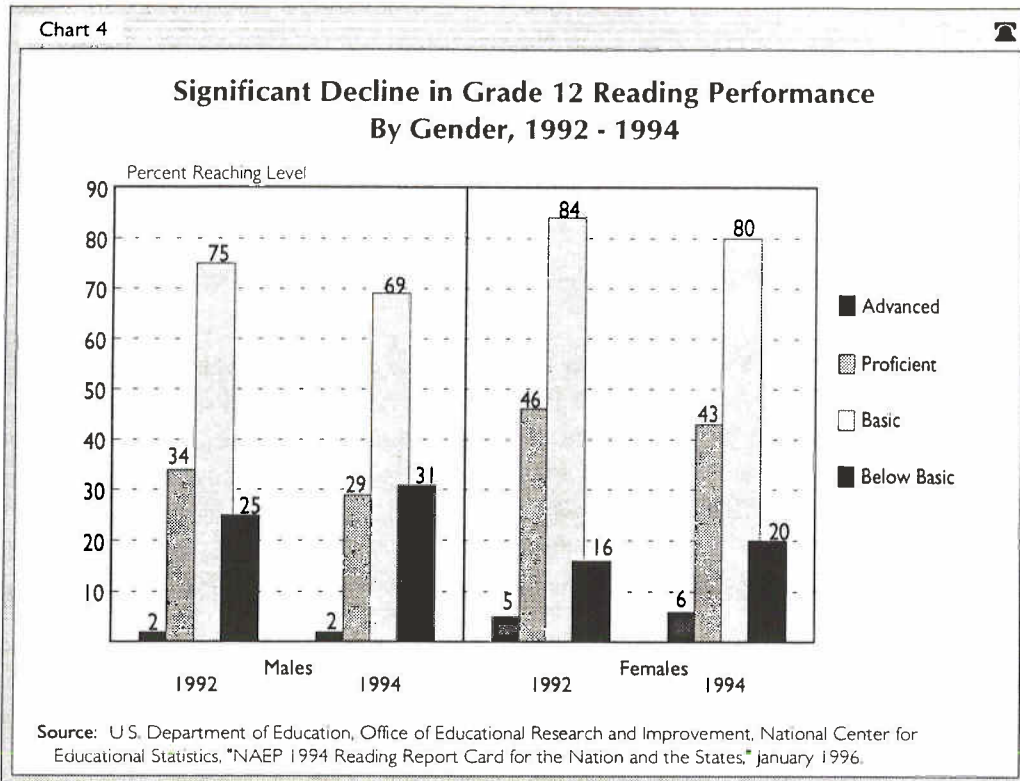
The 1994 NAEP final report also accounted for the reading performance of six population subgroups: white, black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander and American Indian.⁴ Consistent with previous NAEP reports, there were large differences in performance by race and ethnic subgroups (see Chart 3). In nearly every ethnic and racial subgroup there were significant declines in reading performance. While there were significant decreases in the reading performance levels for white, black and Hispanic twelfth grade students, white students had the largest decreases. Fewer white twelfth graders in 1994 achieved at least *the basic level of reading performance* than achieved that level in 1992.



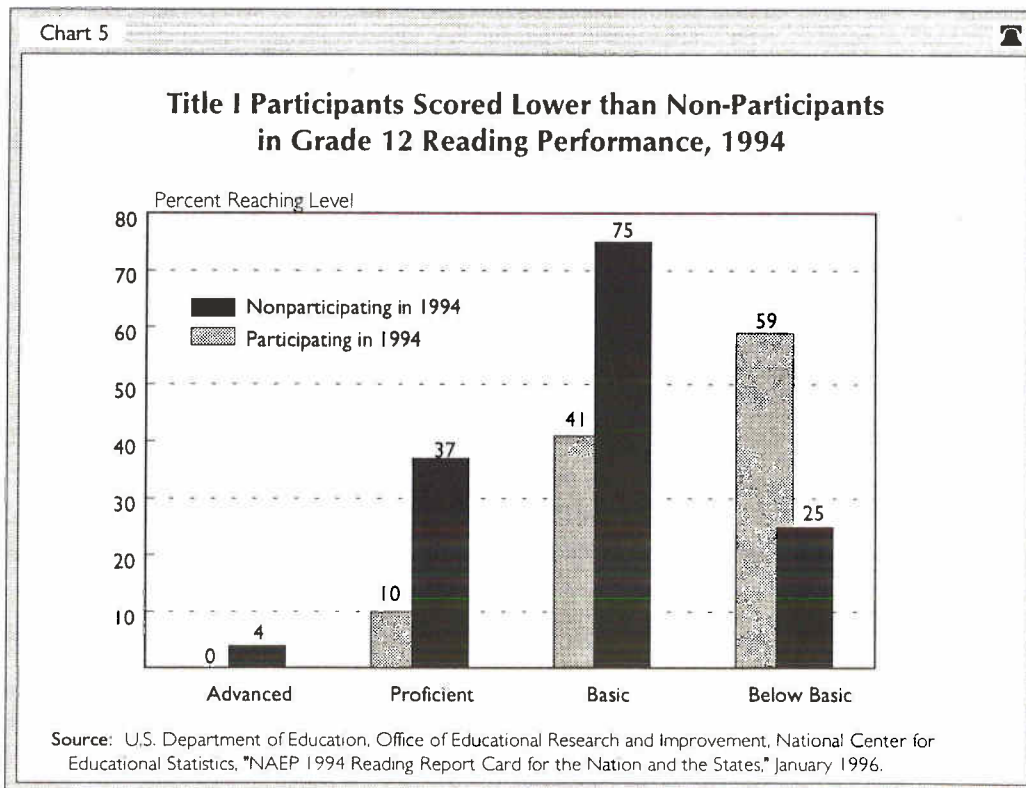
Breaking down student performance by gender, the 1994 NAEP results show that female students generally outperformed male students in all three grade levels (see Chart 4). According to the report:

Between 1992 and 1994, there was a significant **decrease** in the percentage of twelfth grade males *at or above* both the proficient and basic levels. There was also a significant **decrease** in the percentage of twelfth grade females *at or above* the basic level. There was also a significant **increase** in the number of male and female twelfth graders who performed at or below the basic level.

4 There were no 1992 results for the Asian, Pacific Islander or American Indian subgroups and were therefore excluded from this comparative analysis.



Perhaps the most discouraging results are the differences in the performance levels between poor students participating in the Title I program, the Federal Education for the Disadvantaged program “(formerly called Chapter One),” and non-Title I participating students (see Chart 5).⁵ Although there were no corresponding data on Title I participation for 1992, the 1994 results show that the



5 The Federal Title I program provides funding for local education agencies and schools in areas with high rates of poverty in order to provide additional educational assistance to low-achieving students.

low-income students enrolled in the Title I program are being left behind the rest of America's students. According to the report:

Across all three grade levels, of those students participating in the Title I program, there were significantly **fewer** students performing *at or above each of the reading achievement levels*.

Of all students performing *at the below basic level*, Title I students are performing below the basic level at a larger proportion than non-Title I students. The percentages of Title I students who performed *below basic* ranged from 59 percent at twelfth grade to 80 percent at fourth grade.

President Clinton's Secretary of Education, Richard W. Riley, argues that congressional efforts to dismantle the existing federal bureaucracy and channel funds back to the states, localities, teachers and parents would set back efforts to improve education.⁶ The results of the 1994 NAEP reading examination are yet another indicator that the current approach to education is not working. More money, more bureaucracy, more regulation, and more federal intrusion clearly are not improving America's academic performance.

⁶ Richard W. Riley, "We do More With Less," *The Washington Post*, July 3, 1995.

