



## **Florida Versus Kentucky: How school choice improves public school performance, too**

*A Brief Update Through 2022*

by Richard G. Innes

### **Summary**

Despite numerous assertions by opponents that school choice will destroy Kentucky's public school system, the Bluegrass Institute's May 2021 examination of how Florida's public schools fared during the major expansion of school choice options in that state provides solid evidence that choice doesn't harm public education. In fact, evidence from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows public schools in Florida prospered notably up to pre-COVID 2019 as choice options steadily increased in the Sunshine State. In our original ["Florida Versus Kentucky: How school choice improves public school performance, too" Policy Point](#), we saw how Florida generally came from performing below or roughly equal to Kentucky in the 1990s to outperforming the Bluegrass State in Grades 4 and 8 reading and math performance.

It's now been five years since the 2019 scores examined in our original report were released, and a lot has happened in education since. So, with Kentuckians soon to face a choice about whether they will modify the state's constitution to allow funding of more school choice options, an update to the original "Florida versus Kentucky" report seems warranted. The graphs that follow provide that updated picture.

Briefly, the findings in our original Florida versus Kentucky report remain much the same as we found in our original analysis. Florida has definitely moved ahead of Kentucky, and remains so as of the 2022 NAEP, regarding both White and Black students' scores.

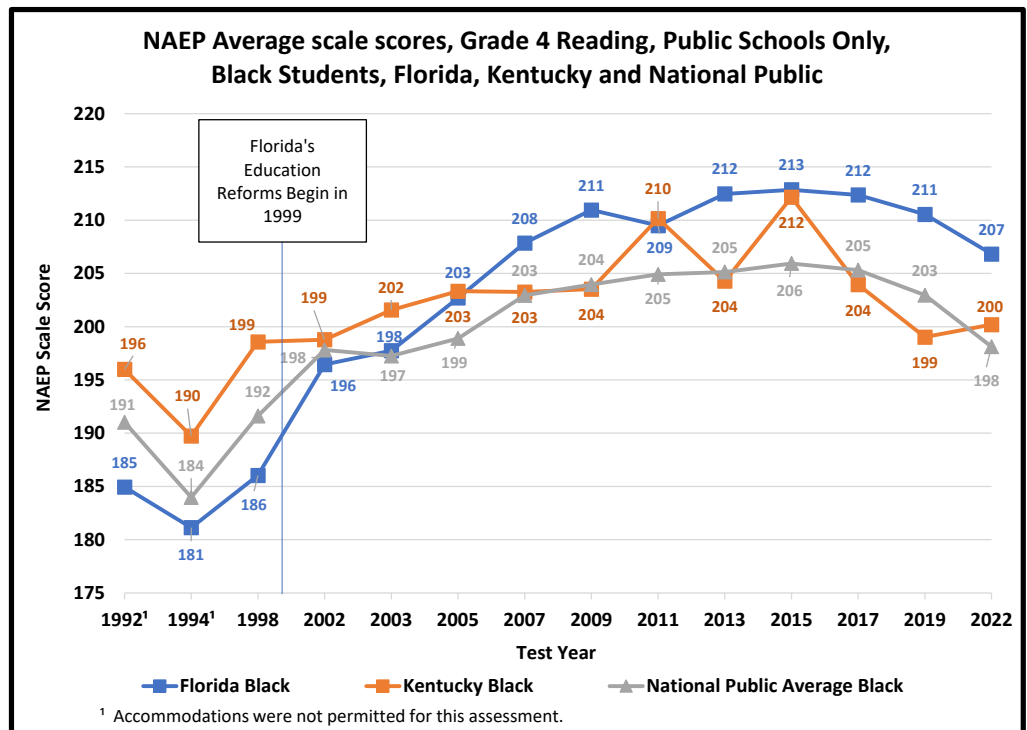
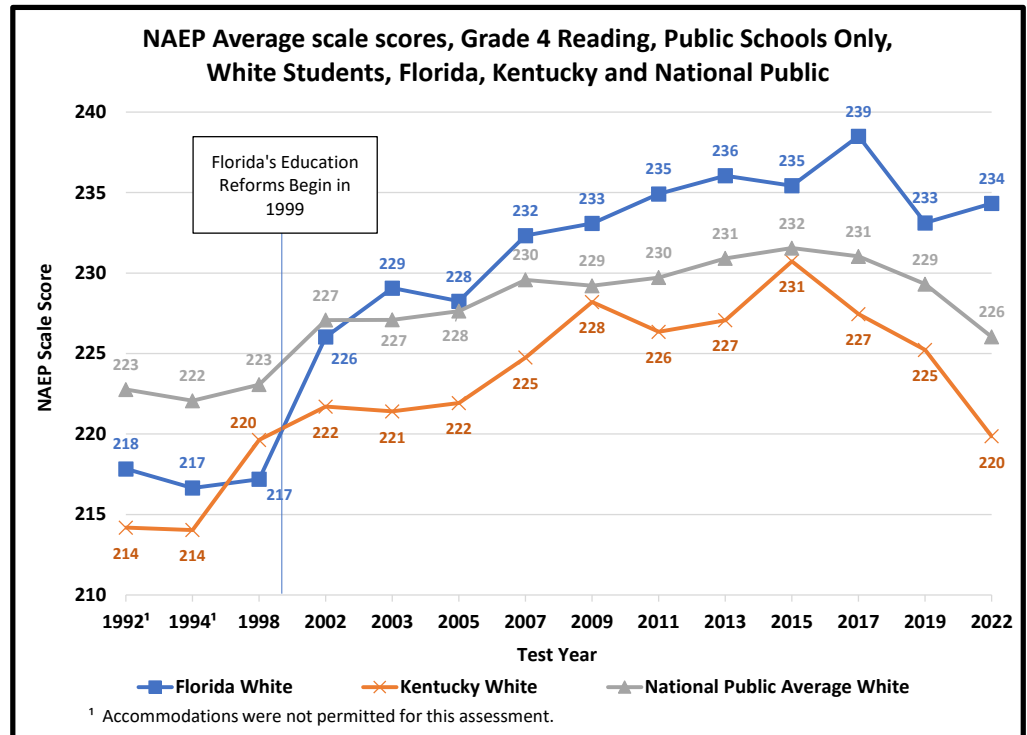
In fact, the impact of school choice for Black students who remain in public schools looks particularly positive. In 1990 NAEP Reading and Math results, Kentucky's Black students scored higher in fourth- and eighth-grade math and reading than Florida's students. By 2022, however, when Floridians had many school-choice options, Florida's Black students scored ahead of Kentucky's in all four of those exams. – *August 2024*

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### Grade 4 NAEP Reading

As can be seen in the first graph to the right, the institution of choice with Florida's education reforms in 1999 is associated with notable improvement for White students in Florida's public schools compared to Whites in both Kentucky and in public schools across the nation. Also notable, Florida's White students started to recover from a performance drop in 2019 despite COVID's impacts. The same is not the case for either the nation or Kentucky. In 2022 White students in Florida outscored Kentucky's by 14 NAEP Scale Score points, nearly a year and a half of extra learning.

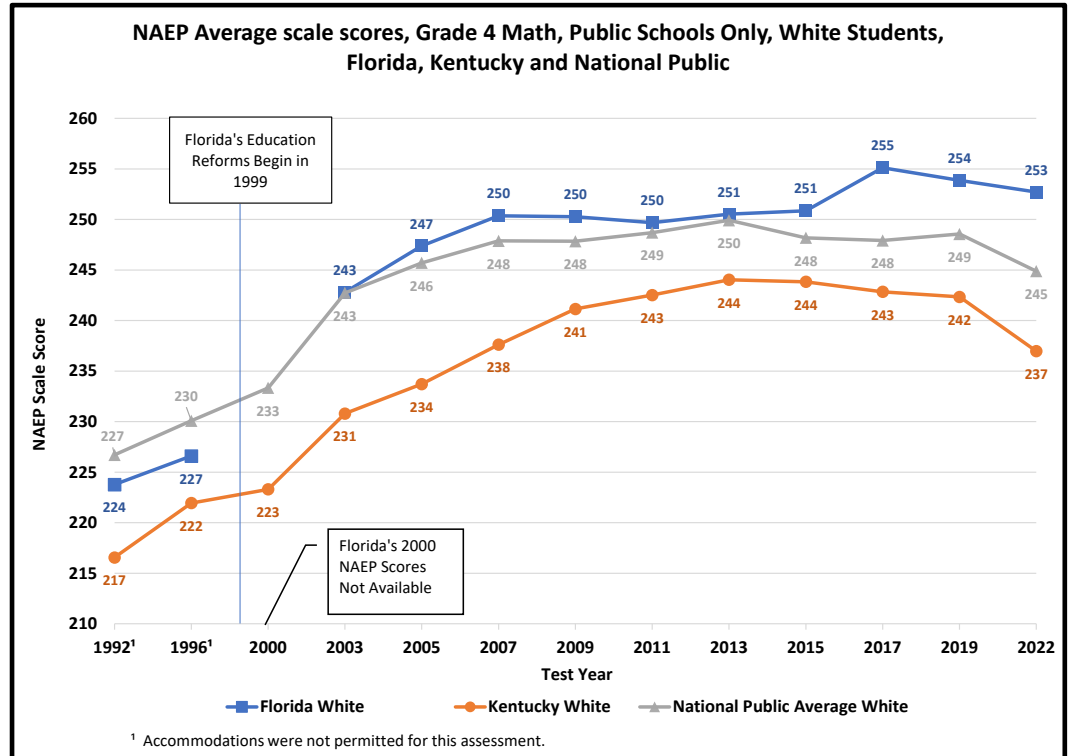
Florida's Black public school students also began to see improvements in relation to both Kentucky's – and the national Black public school – population after choice began to increase in Florida. As of 2022, Black students in Florida score seven points higher than Kentucky's on NAEP Grade 4 Reading. In 1992, Kentucky's Black students outscored Florida's by 11 NAEP Scale Score points. That's a very large flip-flop for Florida's Black students.



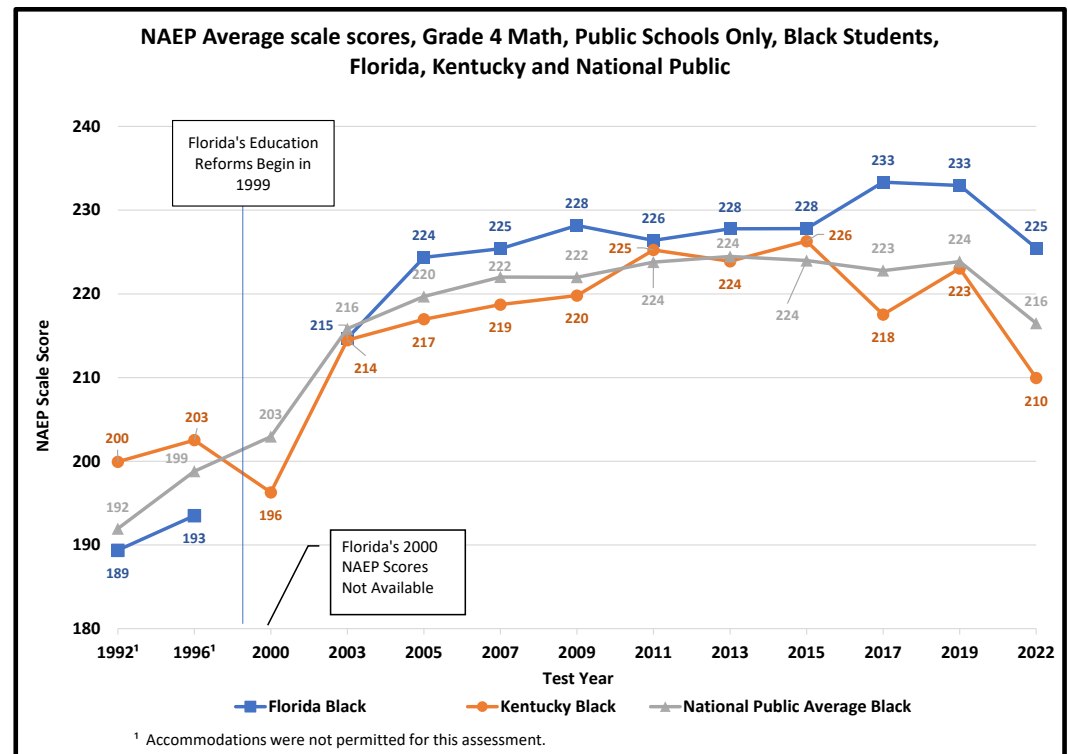
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### Grade 4 NAEP Math

In 1992, White students in Florida outscored Kentucky's White students by seven NAEP Scale Score points. By 2022, that margin had more than doubled to where Florida's White students outscored Kentucky's by 16 NAEP Scale Score points. That's roughly an extra 1.5 years of learning as of 2022. Note: Florida NAEP scores for 2000 are not available (Participation in NAEP Math was not universal until 2003).



Black students in Kentucky saw a flip-flop with their Grade 4 NAEP Math performance against Black students in Florida after the Sunshine State started to implement expanded school choice in 1999. In 1992, Grade 4 Blacks in Kentucky scored 11 NAEP Scale Score points higher than Florida's Black students on NAEP Math. By 2022, Florida's Black students were outscoring Kentucky's by 15 NAEP Scale Score points. Again, that adds up to about 1.5 years of extra education for Florida's Blacks.



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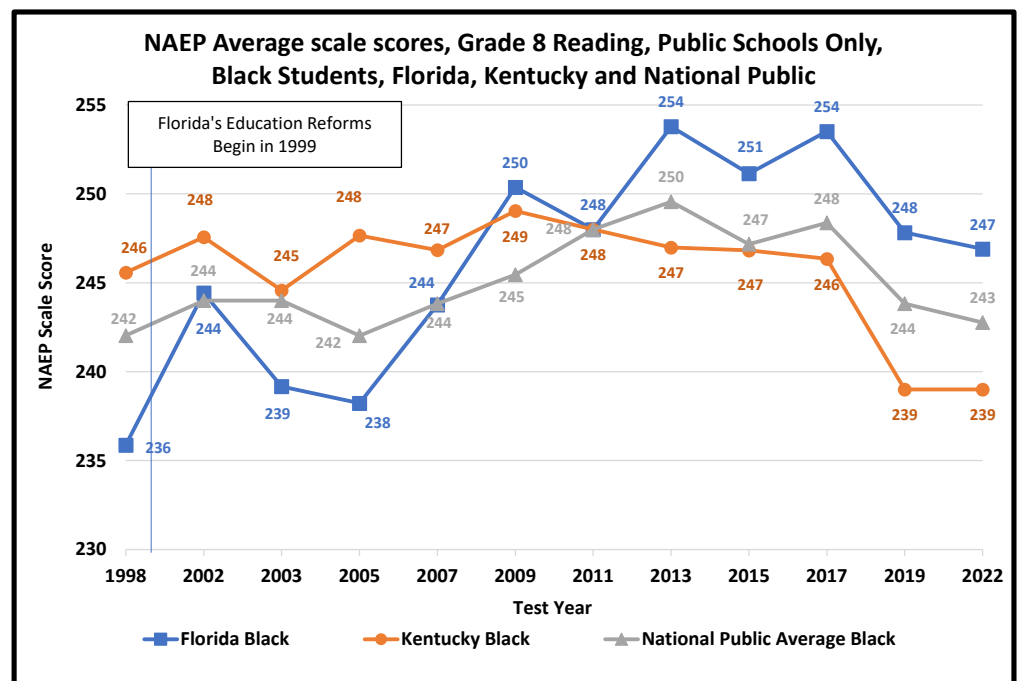
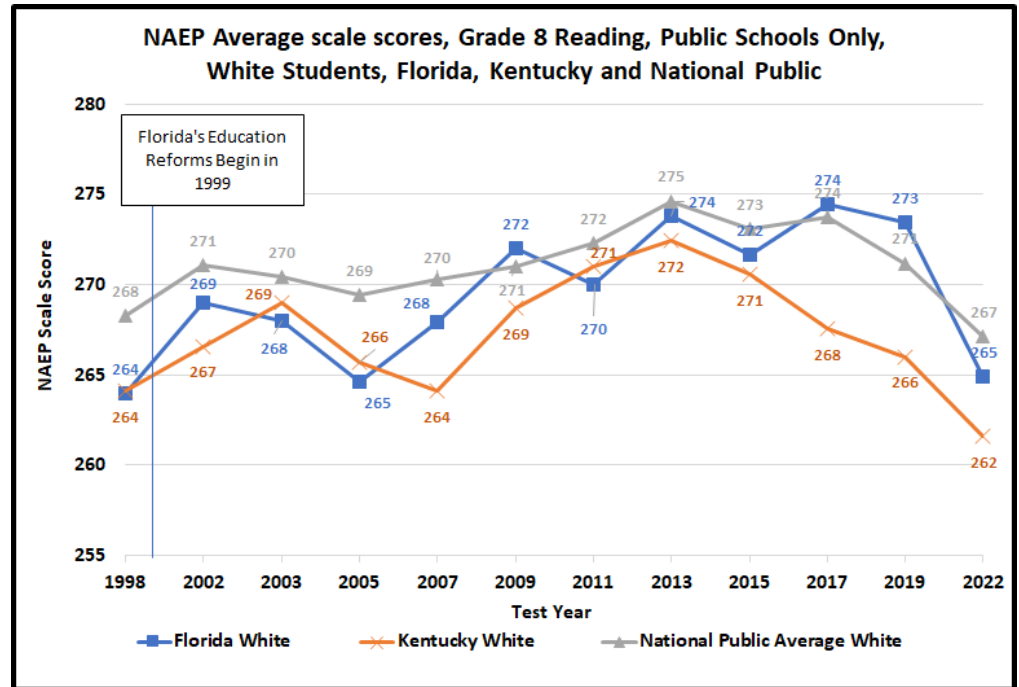
**For both White and Black students, the introduction of school choice in Florida has been accompanied by notable progress in NAEP Grade 4 Reading & Math compared to students of those races in school-choice-poor Kentucky and especially so for Black students.**

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### Grade 8 NAEP Reading

COVID seems to have hit Florida rather hard in NAEP Grade 8 Reading, but its White students still outperformed Kentucky's in 2022 by 3 NAEP Scale Score Points. Before COVID, Florida's White students scored seven NAEP Scale Score points ahead of Kentucky's. In 1998, the first year NAEP tested states in Grade 8 Reading, both states were tied for White students' scores.

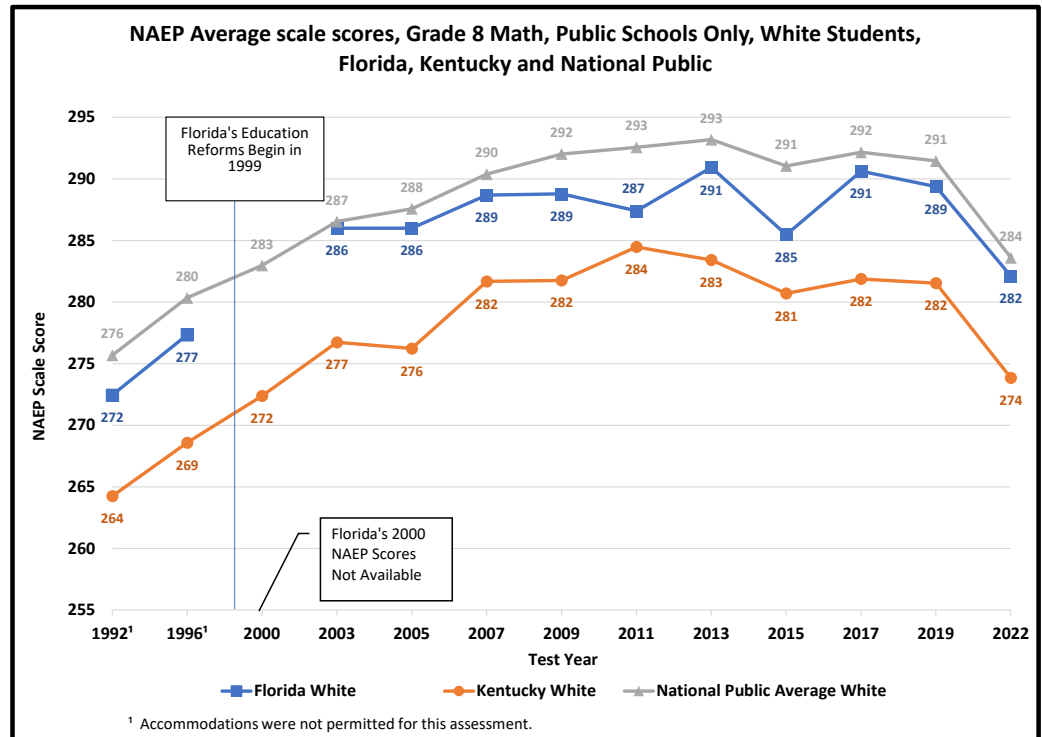
The Grade 8 reading picture is much more dramatic for Black students in both states. In 1998, Kentucky's Black students scored 10 NAEP Scale Score points ahead of Florida's Black students. That's roughly an extra year of learning. By 2022 the situation notably reversed; now Black students in Florida's public schools outperform Kentucky's public school Black students by 8 NAEP Scale Score points a notable improvement for the Sunshine State. Also, Florida improved its score from 1998 to 2022. Kentucky's score for Black students' reading actually declined during the same interval.



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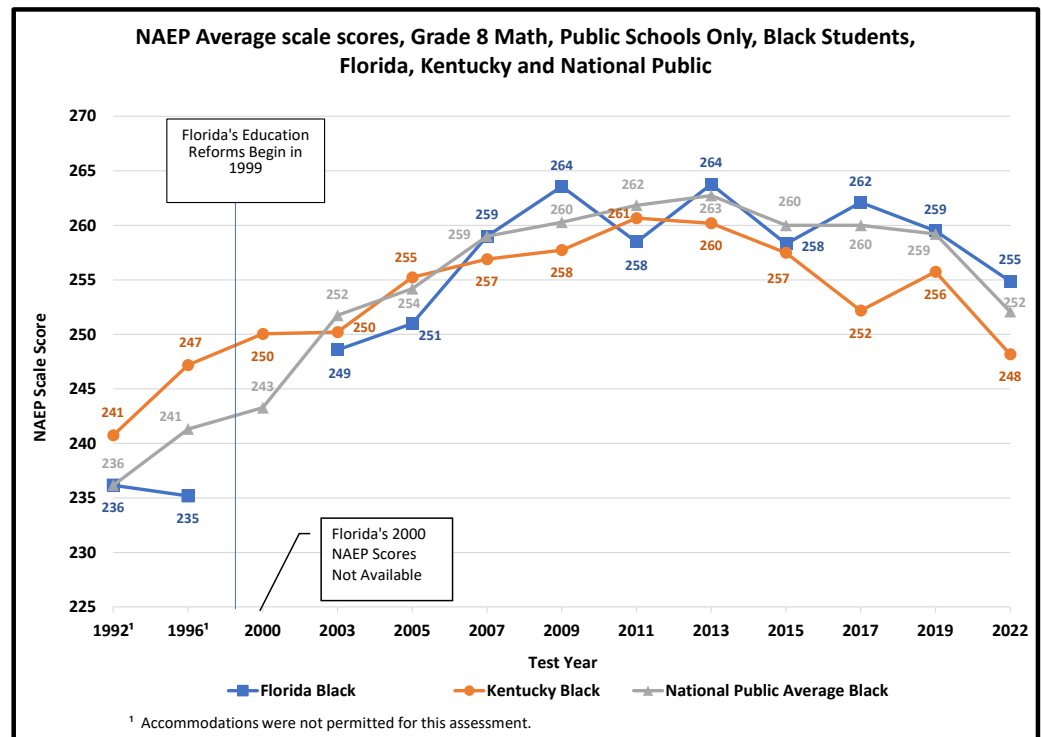
### Grade 8 NAEP Math

Florida's White students have always outpaced Kentucky's in Grade 8 NAEP Math. Still, there is no evidence here that Florida's public schools were somehow hurt by the introduction of more school choice beginning in 1999.



Unlike the situation for White students, Black Grade 8 math students in Florida's public school system have benefited in comparison to Kentucky's since school choice came along.

Back in 1992, Kentucky's Black students outscored Florida's in NAEP Grade 8 Math by 5 NAEP Scale Score points. In 2022, that picture also flip-flopped and now Florida's Black students outscore Kentucky's by 7 NAEP Scale Score points. So, Florida's Black score gain from 1992 to 2022 of 19 NAEP Scale Score points equates to about two additional years of learning. Kentucky's Black students' less notable gain of just seven points signals much less than a year of added learning.



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