BLUEGRASS INSTITUTE

# Evaluating Kentucky's Assessment Results:

## *Data, Omissions, and Governance*

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## Executive Summary

At its December 4, 2025 meeting, the Kentucky Board of Education received a "Data-at-a-Glance" briefing from the Kentucky Department of Education summarizing recent assessment and accountability results. This report reviews the information presented to the board and evaluates whether that briefing provided a complete and accurate picture of statewide student performance.

The presentation emphasized recent improvements on the Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA) and referenced selected results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). However, important contextual information was missing or inaccurately conveyed. In several instances, NAEP slides omitted required indicators for statistical significance, limiting the board's ability to determine whether apparent score changes reflected real differences in performance. In addition, disaggregated NAEP results—particularly by race—were not discussed despite their relevance to the accurate evaluation of statewide outcomes.

When NAEP data are correctly presented and examined over longer time periods that the board's briefing considered, Kentucky's student performance is generally lower than it was a decade ago. While some improvement has occurred, in some cases, since the lows following the COVID-19 disruptions, the NAEP results indicate that recovery remains incomplete across multiple grades and subjects. Subgroup analyses further show that trends for white and Black students—who together account for approximately 85 percent of Kentucky's student population—often differ from the overall narrative conveyed in the briefing.

In a most notable omission, the presentation did not include any discussion of Grade 11 ACT results. The ACT is a required component of Kentucky's assessment and accountability system and is administered to all public high school juniors. The 11th grade ACT data provide the Commonwealth's longest state-funded assessment trend line. These results were not presented to the board, nor were they included in related assessment and accountability materials from the KDE.

The omission of ACT data is significant because ACT trends notably diverge from recent KSA results, particularly at the high school level. ACT results in the Composite Score and

subject in the areas of English, reading, mathematics, and science have seriously declined since 2016–17, with renewed declines following a brief, but only partial, post-pandemic rebound. The absence of this information limited the board's ability to evaluate high school performance, post-pandemic recovery, and long-term trends using all required assessment data.

This paper also examines the implications of replacing the ACT with the SAT beginning in the 2025–26 school year. The transition severs Kentucky's longest-running state-funded assessment trend line. The change also raises governance and statutory questions regarding the state board's approval responsibility, the disregard of legislatively dictated subject-area requirements, and oversight responsibilities under Kentucky law.

Taken together, the findings in this report raise important concerns about assessment transparency, trend-line continuity, and the processes by which major assessment decisions are made and communicated. The report concludes with recommendations for legislative action aimed at restoring long-term comparability, ensuring statutory compliance, and strengthening oversight of Kentucky's assessment and accountability system.

## Table of Contents

## Background: December 4, 2025 Data-at-a-Glance Briefing

On December 4, 2025, the Kentucky Board of Education received a "Data-at-a-Glance" briefing from the Kentucky Department of Education summarizing recent assessment and accountability results. The briefing included results from the Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA) and selected results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).[1]

### What the KSA Results Showed

The Data-at-a-Glance presentation highlighted results from the Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA), which has been administered statewide since 2022. The KSA results were presented as evidence of recent improvement across grade levels and subjects.

According to the presentation, statewide KSA results showed a partial recovery in performance following the COVID-19 disruptions. The All Students group was reported to have improved across elementary, middle, and high school levels, with similar trends noted for several student subgroups.

In mathematics, the presentation reported increases in the percentage of students scoring at the Proficient or Distinguished levels at every grade span. Elementary mathematics proficiency was reported to have increased by one percentage point, middle school mathematics by two percentage points, and high school mathematics by five percentage points.

In reading, the presentation stated that performance improved across grade levels, contributing to what KDE described as upward trends in both reading and mathematics. The briefing noted that, across elementary, middle, and high school levels, KSA performance had reached its highest point in the past four years.

These conclusions were supported by summary KSA results released by KDE on November 19, 2025, which covered the four years of available KSA data. Figure 1 reproduces KDE's summary of these results.

[1]KDE's slide package is online at: https://portal.ksba.org/public/Meeting/Attachments/DisplayAttachment.aspx?AttachmentID=926596

## Figure 1[2]

## KSA Summary from KDE

**Percentage of Students Performing at Proficient/Distinguished Levels**

| Content Area and Year | Elementary | Middle | High |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reading 2022 | 45 | 44 | 44 |
| Reading 2023 | 47 | 45 | 44 |
| Reading 2024 | 47 | 45 | 45 |
| Reading 2025 | 49 | 47 | 46 |
| Mathematics 2022 | 38 | 37 | 36 |
| Mathematics 2023 | 42 | 37 | 33 |
| Mathematics 2024 | 42 | 39 | 35 |
| Mathematics 2025 | 43 | 41 | 40 |
| Science* 2022 | 29 | 22 | 14 |
| Science* 2023 | 35 | 23 | 10 |
| Science* 2024 | 34 | 22 | 6 |
| Science* 2025 | 37 | 29 | 21 |

To provide additional context for the KSA results, the Data-at-a-Glance presentation also included information from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Unlike the KSA, NAEP is administered by an independent national organization and allows for comparisons across states and over longer time periods. The following sections examine how NAEP results were presented to the board and how those results compare with the recent KSA trends. NAEP in math and reading is only administered every other year. The latest NAEP results reflect 2024 performance and do not provide information about 2025 outcomes.

[2]KDE, Advisory 25-294, November 19, 2025. Online at: https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/KYDE/bulletins/3fa7990

## Presentation on NAEP Grade 4 Reading

### What KDE Presented to the Board

KDE presented a slide (Figure 2a) showing all student scores for Kentucky and the national public school average on NAEP Grade 4 Reading over time.

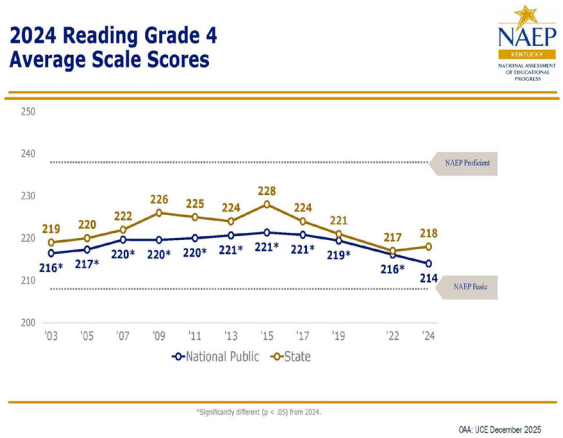
The slide included a footnote stating that asterisks identify scores statistically different from 2024.

*Statistical Significance:* A result is statistically significant when a score difference is unlikely to have occurred by chance. If a change is not statistically significant, the data do not support a conclusion that performance truly improved or declined.

KDE stated that Kentucky's Grade 4 Reading scores improved from 2022 to 2024.

The presentation emphasized recent-year comparisons. Earlier results were not discussed.

**Figure 2a: State Board Presentation**[3]




### What Was Missing from the Presentation

Several Kentucky scores from earlier years are statistically different from 2024 and should have been marked with asterisks.

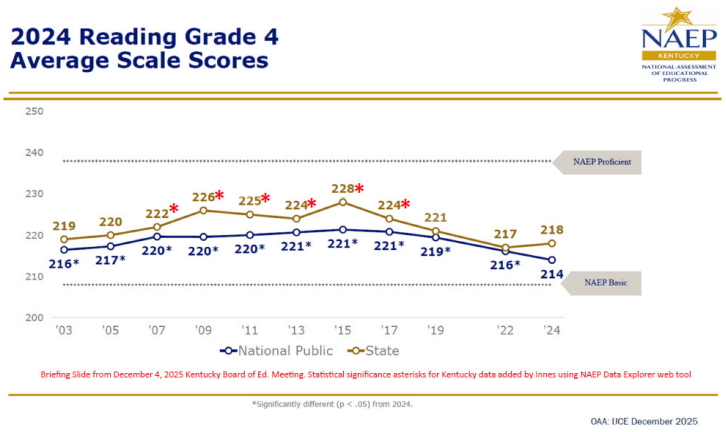
When the missing asterisks are added (Figure 2b), Kentucky's 2024 score is not statistically different from its 2022 score.

Corrected data show no statistically significant change in Kentucky's Grade 4 Reading performance between 2022 and 2024.

Kentucky's 2024 Grade 4 Reading score (218) is lower than its score in 2015 (228).

A 10-point decline on the NAEP scale is commonly interpreted by NAEP researchers as roughly equivalent to one year of lost learning.[4]

**Figure 2b: Corrected Slide**




[3]KDE's slide package is online at: https://portal.ksba.org/public/Meeting/Attachments/DisplayAttachment.aspx?AttachmentID=926596

[4]For example, see: Loveless, Tom, "The NAEP proficiency myth," Brookings, June 13, 2016. Online at: https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-naep-proficiency-myth/

## Unanswered Questions: Race

Board member Randy Poe asked about NAEP results for student subgroups.

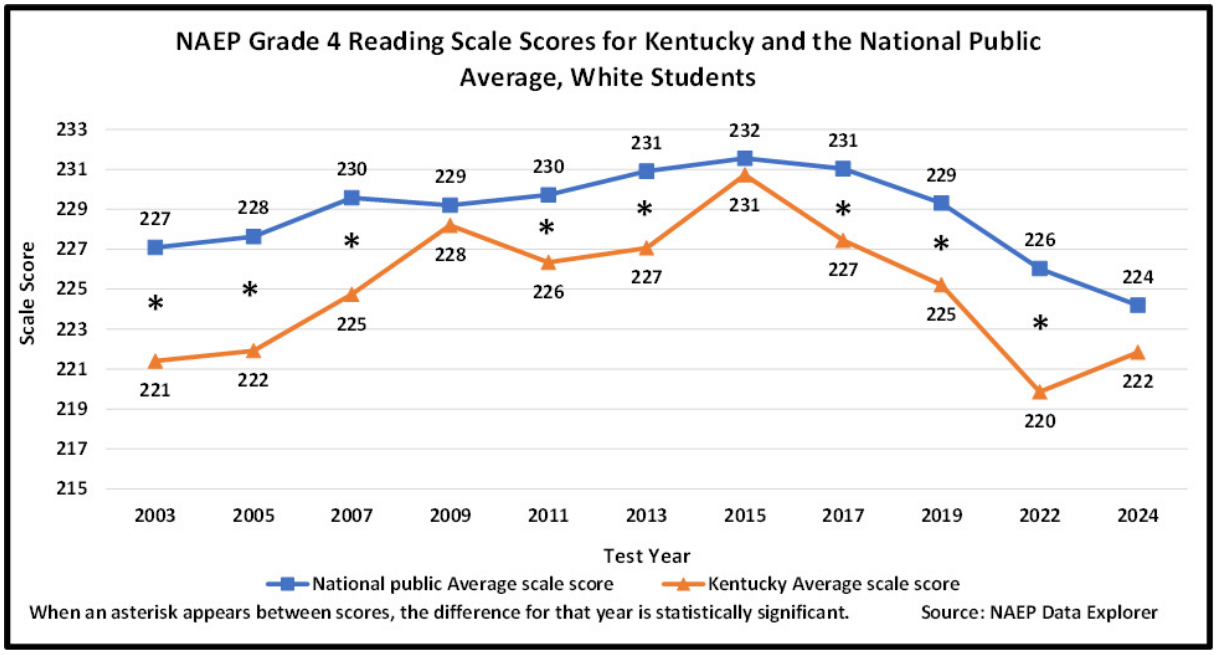
NAEP guidance cautions against comparing states or the nation using only overall average scores. The NAEP 2009 Science Report Card explains that subgroup analysis, including by race, is necessary to fully understand performance differences.[5]

When NAEP grade 4 reading scores are broken out by race, a different picture emerges.

Figure 2c shows results for white students in Kentucky compared to the national public school average for whites. In this figure, asterisks indicate statistically significant differences between Kentucky and national scores within the same year. The asterisks are shown vertically between the two scores.

For example, in 2003, Kentucky's grade 4 reading score for white students was 221. The national public school average was 227. This difference is statistically significant, so an asterisk appears between those two scores.

**Figure 2c**




Across all years shown since 2003, Kentucky's white students have never scored above the national public school average in grade 4 reading. In most years, Kentucky's scores were statistically significantly lower.

Figure 2c does not show statistical significance across years. However, NAEP's Data Explorer indicates that the change in Kentucky's white student scores from 2022 to 2024 was not statistically significant.

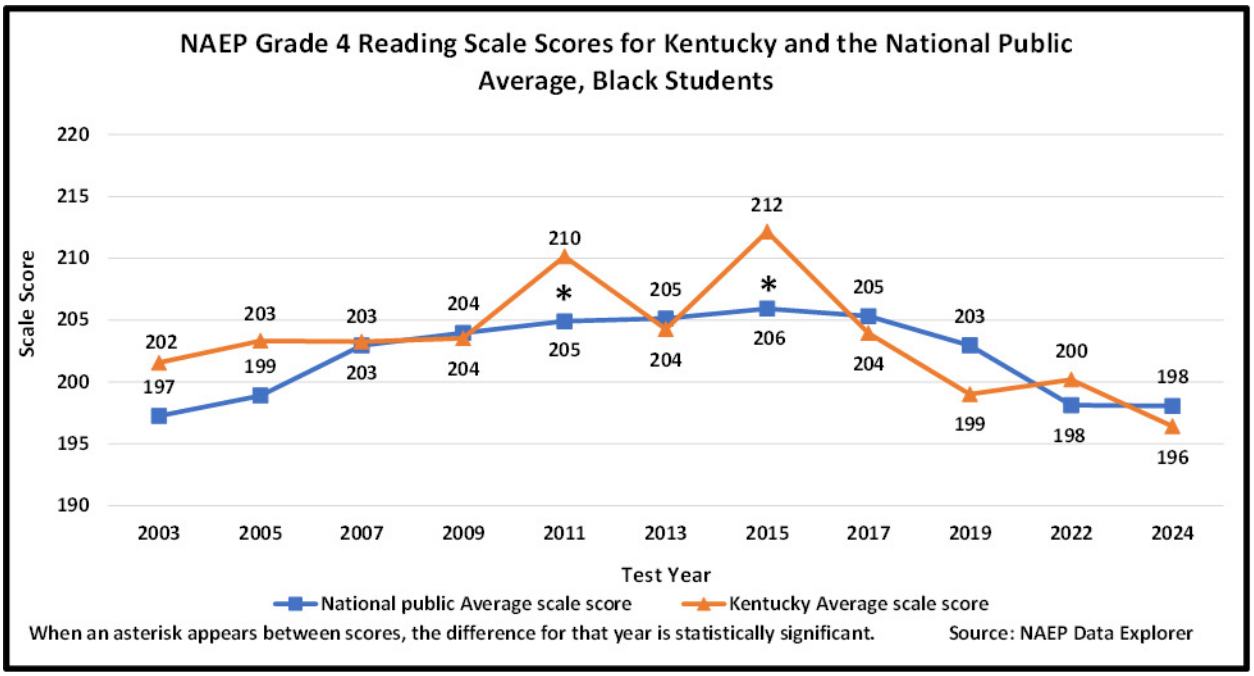
Figure 2d shows results for Black students. Kentucky's Black students scored 196 in grade

[5]National Center for Education Statistics (2011). The Nation's Report Card: Science 2009 (NCES 2011–451). P. 32. Online at: http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2009/2011451.pdf

4 reading in 2024. Referring back to Figure 2c, Kentucky's white students scored 222. This score gap represents a difference of roughly 2½ years of learning.

In 2011 and 2015, Kentucky's Black students scored above the national public school average for Black students. This was not the case in 2024.

**Figure 2d**




When NAEP data are correctly presented, there is no statistically significant improvement in Grade 4 Reading from 2022 to 2024 for Kentucky overall, for white students, or for Black students.

## Presentation on NAEP Grade 4 Mathematics

### What KDE Presented to the Board

KDE presented a slide showing all student average scores for Kentucky and the national public school averages on NAEP Grade 4 Mathematics over time.

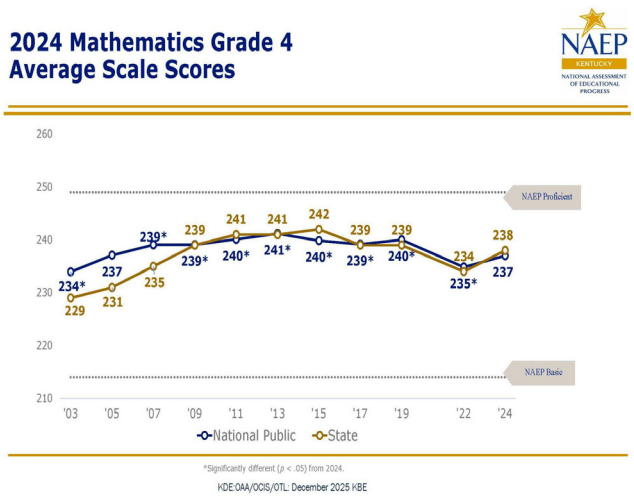
The slide (Figure 3a) included a footnote stating that asterisks identify scores statistically different from 2024.

KDE stated that Kentucky's Grade 4 Mathematics scores improved from 2022 to 2024.

The presentation emphasized recent-year comparisons.

Earlier results were not discussed.

**Figure 3a: State Board Presentation[6]**




### What Was Missing from the Presentation

Several Kentucky scores from earlier years are statistically different from 2024 and should have been marked with asterisks.

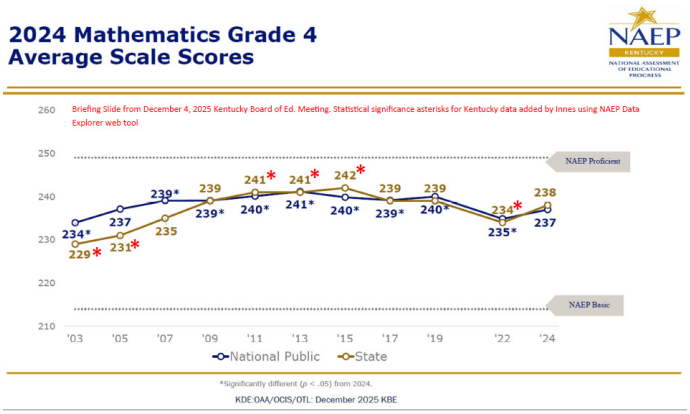
The increase from 2022 to 2024 for the all-students group is statistically significant.

The NAEP increase from 2022 to 2024 aligns with gains shown on the elementary KSA mathematics assessment over the same period.

Kentucky's Grade 4 Mathematics scores in 2011, 2013, and 2015 were higher than its 2024 score.

Longer-term results show performance remains below earlier peak years despite recent improvement.

**Figure 3b: Corrected Slide**




[6]KDE's slide package is online at: https://portal.ksba.org/public/Meeting/Attachments/DisplayAttachment.aspx?AttachmentID=926596

## Unanswered Questions: Race

Disaggregating NAEP Grade 4 Mathematics results by race changes the overall picture.

Figures 3c and 3d show results for white and Black students in Kentucky compared to the national public school average. As in Figures 2c and 2d, in these figures, asterisks indicate statistically significant differences between Kentucky and national scores within the same year. The asterisks appear vertically between the two scores.

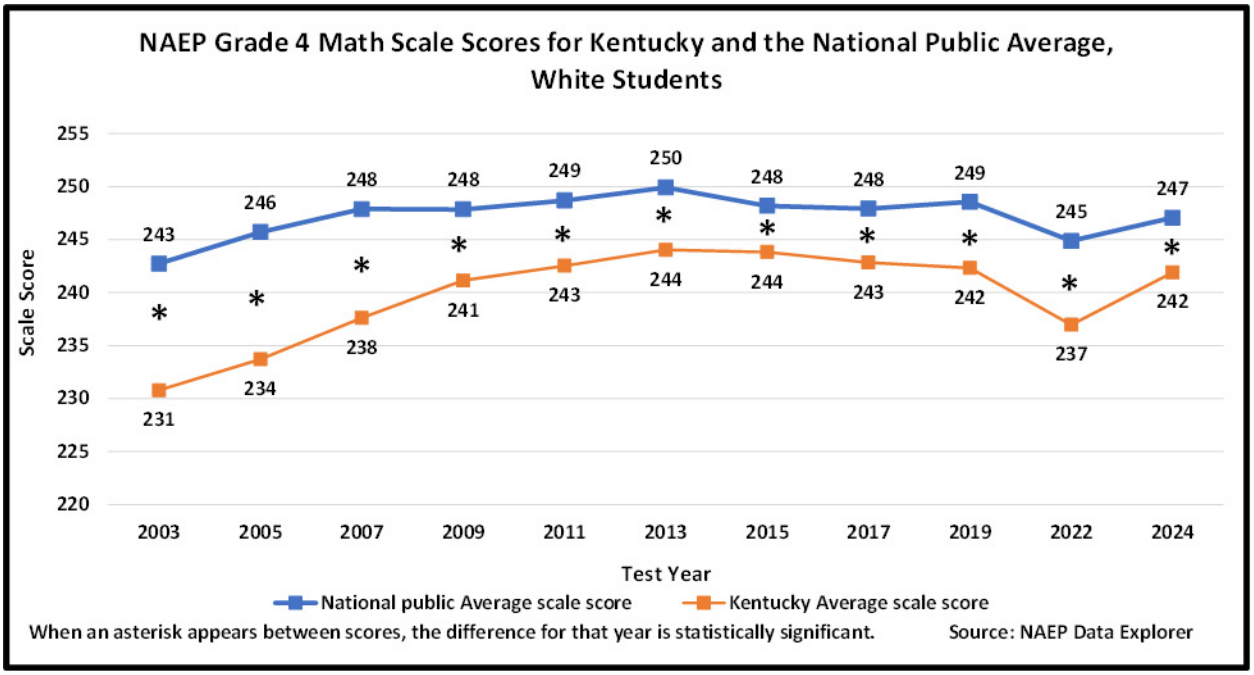
In every year shown, Kentucky's white students scored below the national public school average in Grade 4 Mathematics. These differences are statistically significant for all years dating back to 2003.

The comparison for Black students shows smaller differences relative to the national average. However, substantial white minus Black gaps remain within Kentucky.

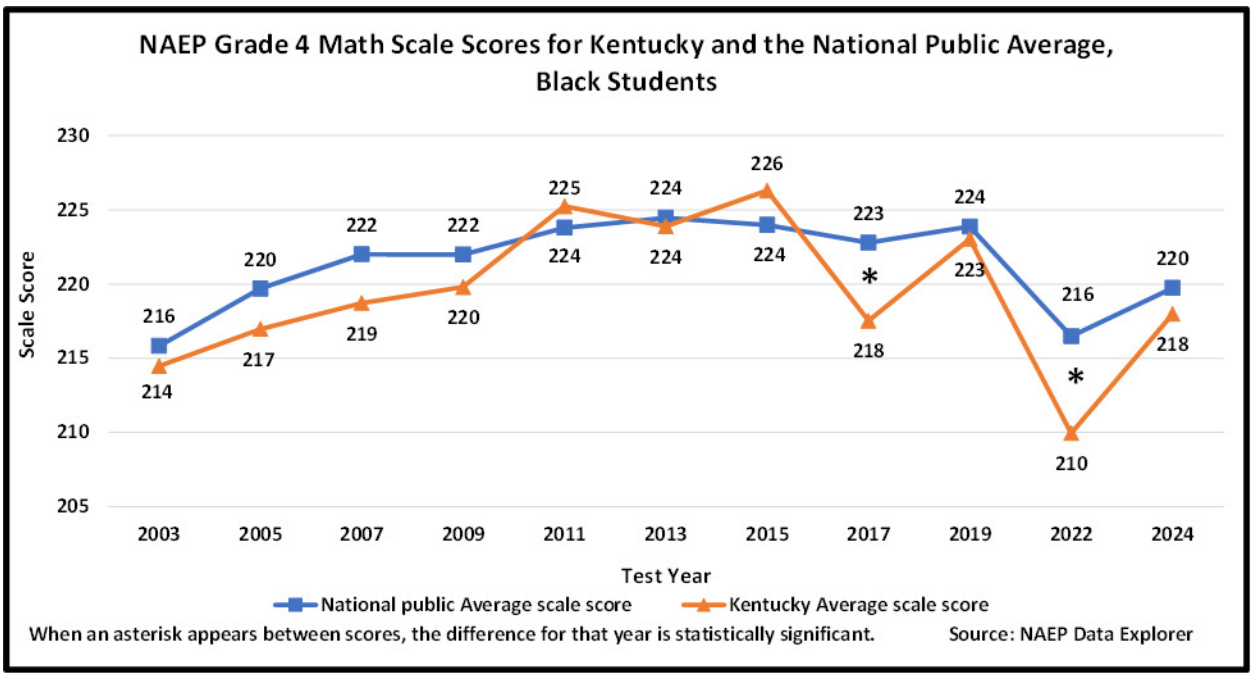
For example, in 2024, Kentucky's white students scored 242 in Grade 4 Mathematics. Kentucky's Black students scored 218. This 24-point difference is commonly interpreted by those who analyze the NAEP as representing more than two years of learning.

These subgroup results were not addressed in the board presentation.

### Figure 3c



## Figure 3d


NAEP Grade 4 Math Scale Scores for Kentucky and the National Public Average, Black Students
Scale Score
230
225
220
215
210
205
216
220
222
222
224
224
223
224
216
220
214
217
219
220
225
224
226
218
223
210
218
*
*
2003
2005
2007
2009
2011
2013
2015
2017
2019
2022
2024
Test Year
National public Average scale score
Kentucky Average scale score
When an asterisk appears between scores, the difference for that year is statistically significant.
Source: NAEP Data Explorer

## Presentation on NAEP Grade 8 Reading

### What KDE Presented to the Board

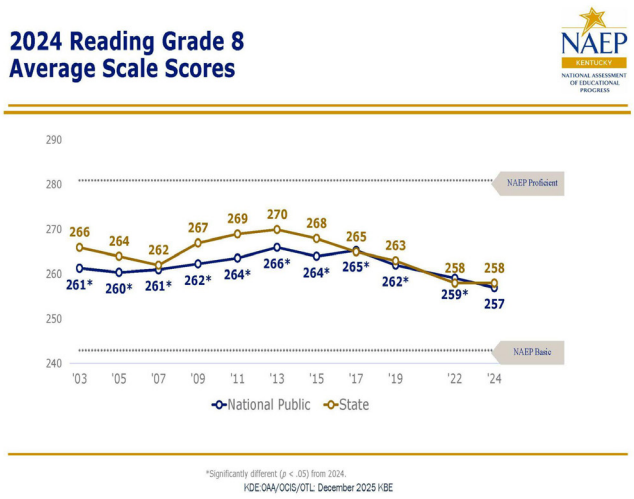
KDE presented a slide showing all student average scores for Kentucky and national NAEP Grade 8 Reading over time.

The slide (Figure 4a) included a footnote stating that asterisks indicate scores statistically different from 2024.

The presentation again emphasized recent-year comparisons.

Earlier results were not discussed.

**Figure 4a: State Board Presentation[7]**




### What Was Missing from the Presentation

Several Kentucky scores from earlier years are statistically different from 2024 and should have been marked with asterisks.

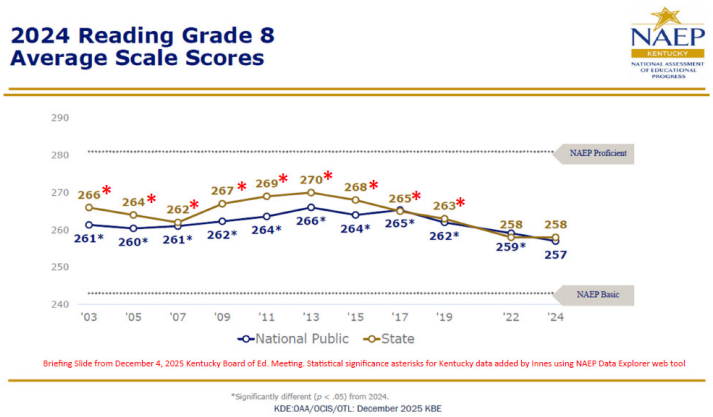
Kentucky's NAEP Grade 8 Reading scores were flat between 2022 and 2024, with no statistically significant change; contrary to the KSA reading assessment increase from 2022 to 2024 shown in Figure 1.

Kentucky's NAEP Grade 8 Reading score declined by 12 points between 2013 and 2024.

A 12-point decline on the NAEP scale is commonly interpreted as representing more than one year of lost learning.

This longer-term decline since 2013 was not addressed in the board briefing.

**Figure 4b: Corrected Slide**




[7]KDE's slide package is online at: https://portal.ksba.org/public/Meeting/Attachments/DisplayAttachment.aspx?AttachmentID=926596

## Unanswered Questions: Race

Disaggregating NAEP Grade 8 Reading results by race changes the overall picture.

Figures 4c and 4d show results for white and Black students in Kentucky compared to the national public school average. In these figures, asterisks indicate statistically significant differences between Kentucky and national scores within the same year.

Figure 4c shows results for white students. In 2024, Kentucky's white students scored statistically significantly lower than the national public school average in Grade 8 Reading. This has been the case in most years shown, with exceptions in 2003 and 2011.

### Figure 4c

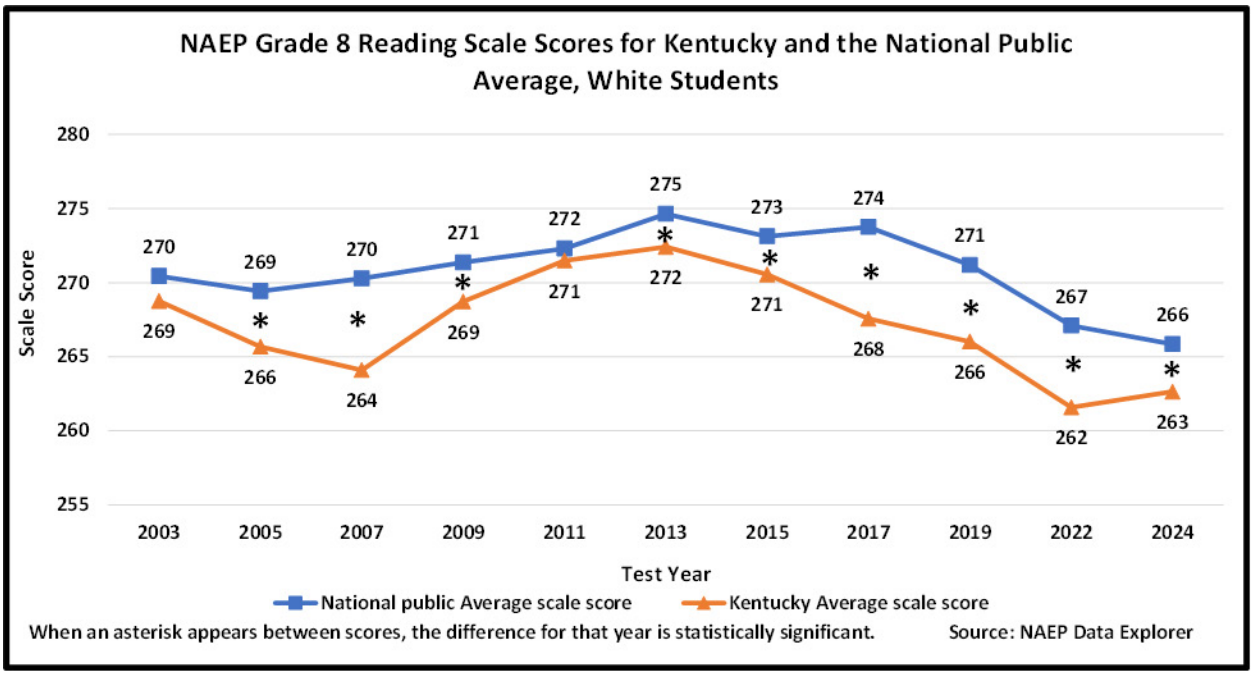
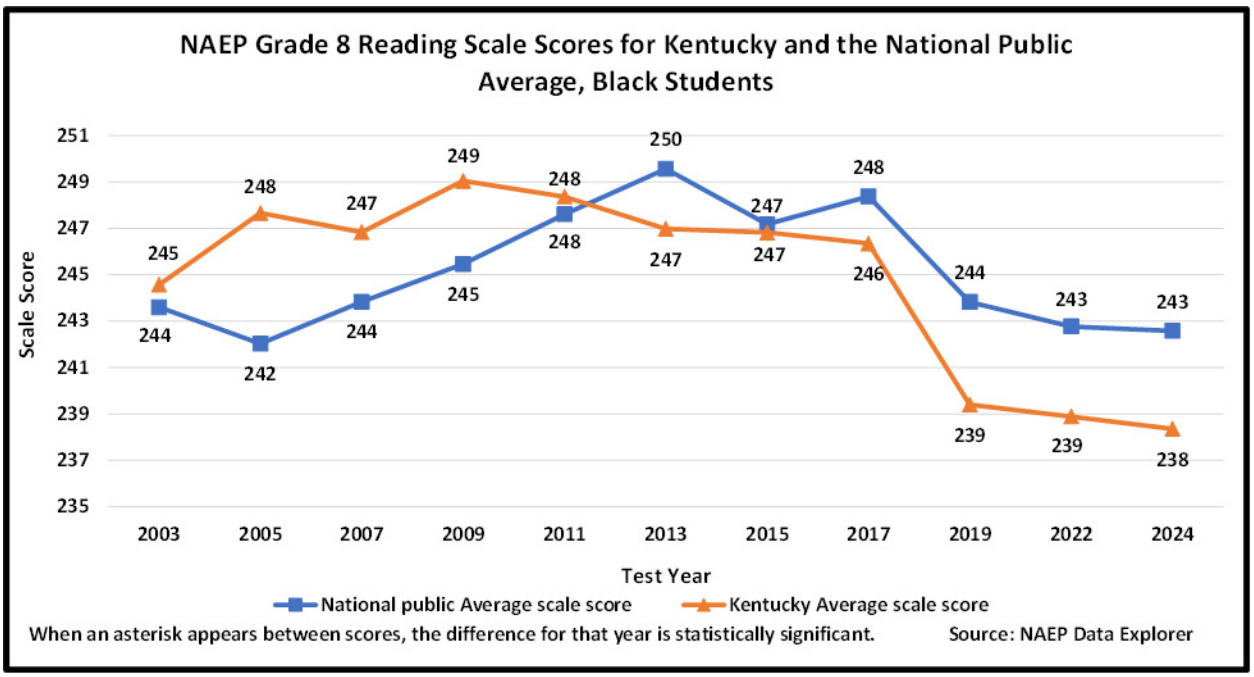



Figure 4d shows results for Black students. Kentucky's Black students scored below the national public school average in recent years. However, none of the year-by-year differences are statistically significant, hence the absence of asterisks.

The absence of statistical significance reflects smaller sample sizes for Black students in Kentucky, which increase sampling error and requires larger score differences to reach statistical significance.

Taken together, these subgroup results present a different picture of Grade 8 Reading performance than the one discussed in the board presentation.

## Figure 4d


NAEP Grade 8 Reading Scale Scores for Kentucky and the National Public Average, Black Students
Scale Score
251
249
247
245
243
241
239
237
235
2003
2005
2007
2009
2011
2013
2015
2017
2019
2022
2024
244
242
244
245
248
250
247
248
244
243
243
245
248
247
249
248
247
247
246
239
239
238
Test Year
National public Average scale score
Kentucky Average scale score
When an asterisk appears between scores, the difference for that year is statistically significant.
Source: NAEP Data Explorer

## Presentation on NAEP Grade 8 Mathematics

### What KDE Presented to the Board

KDE presented a slide showing Kentucky's and the national public school average NAEP Grade 8 Mathematics scores over time.

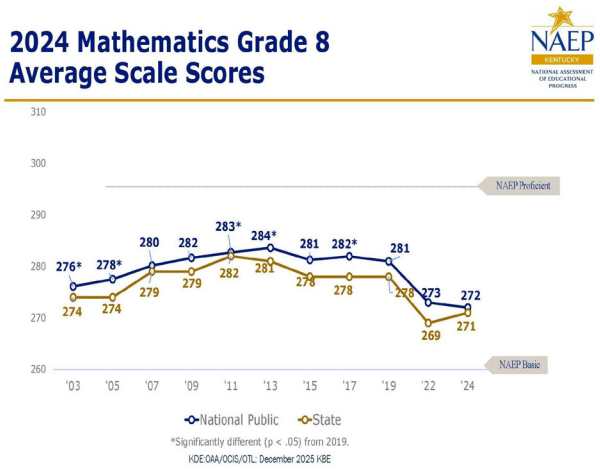
The slide (Figure 5a) included a footnote stating that asterisks indicate scores statistically different from 2019 (as a reminder the previous slides referenced 2024).

The presentation emphasized recent-year comparisons.

KDE noted a 2-point increase from 2022 to 2024.

Earlier results were not discussed.

**Figure 5a: State Board Presentation[8]**




### What Was Missing from the Presentation

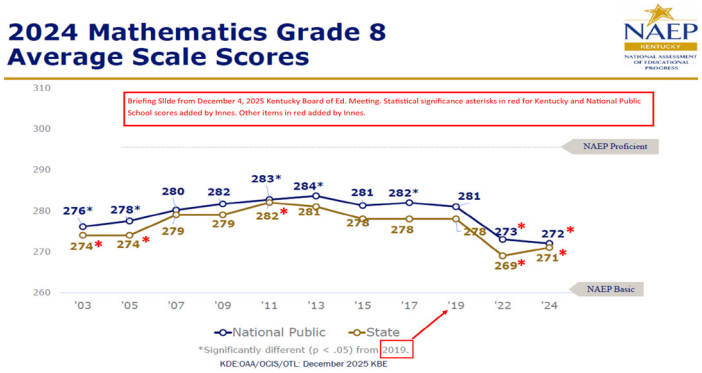
For unknown reasons, this slide says it used 2019 as the reference year for statistical significance, rather than 2024 as in the prior NAEP slides. However, the national public school asterisks are not correct for reference to 2019. When 2019 is the reference year, both 2022 and 2024 national public school scores also need asterisks.

In addition, several Kentucky scores both before and after 2019 are also statistically significantly different from that year but were not marked with asterisks.

When the missing asterisks are included (Figure 5b), Kentucky's 2024 Grade 8 Mathematics score is statistically significantly lower than its 2019 score. The decline from 2019 to 2024 represents more than half a year of lost learning on the NAEP scale.

Not shown on Figure 5b, Kentucky's 2-point change from 2022 to 2024 is not statistically significant, indicating performance remained flat over that period.

**Figure 5b: Corrected Slide**




[8]KDE's slide package is online at: https://portal.ksba.org/public/Meeting/Attachments/DisplayAttachment.aspx?AttachmentID=926596

## Unanswered Questions: Race

Disaggregating NAEP Grade 8 Mathematics results by race changes the overall picture.

Figure 5c shows results for white students in Kentucky compared to the national public school average. White students make up approximately 75% of Kentucky's NAEP Grade 8 Mathematics test takers. In every year shown since 2003, Kentucky's white students scored below the national public school average. These differences are statistically significant in all years shown.

### Figure 5c

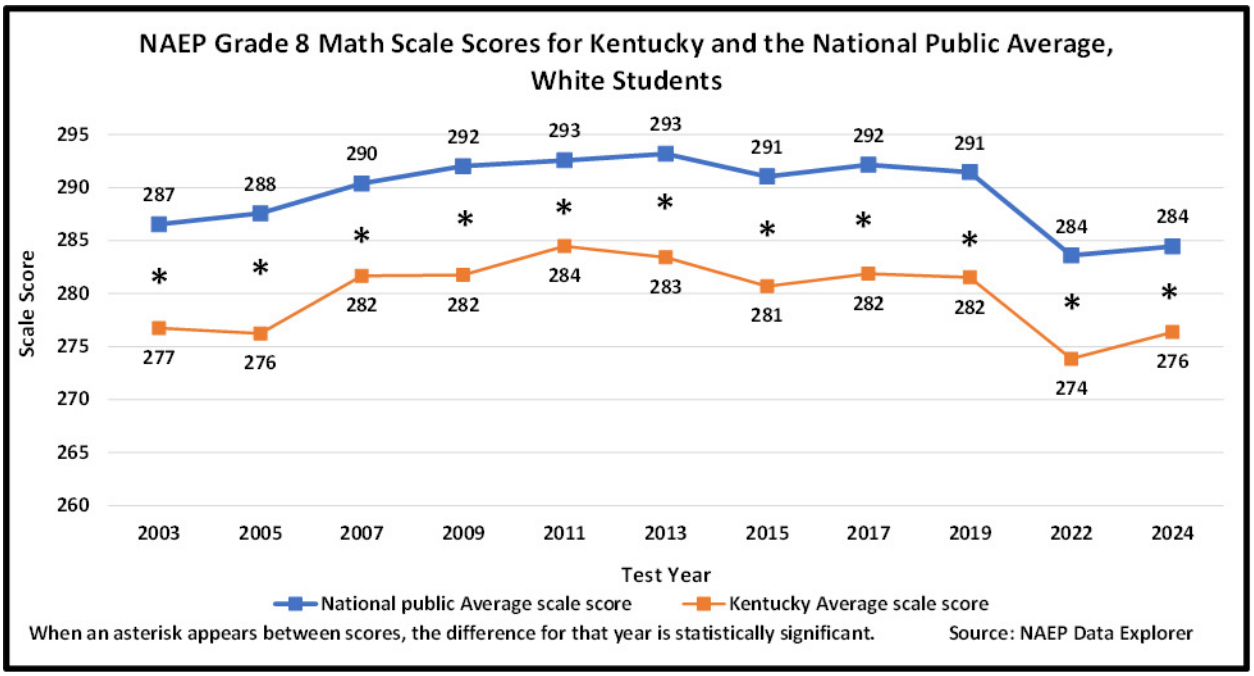
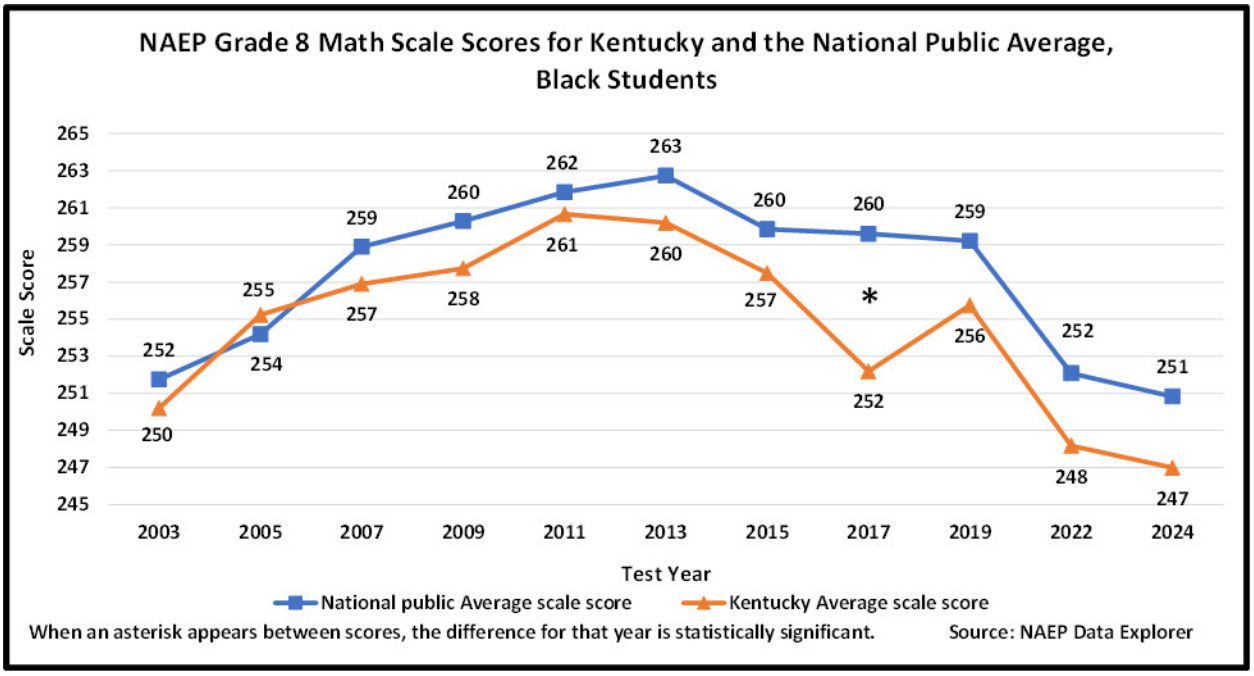



Figure 5d shows results for Black students. In recent years, Kentucky's Black students scored close to the national public school average. None of the recent year-by-year differences are statistically significant.

The absence of statistical significance reflects smaller sample sizes for Black students in Kentucky, which increase sampling error and require larger score differences to reach statistical significance.

Figure 5d




Across most years since 2007, Kentucky's Black students scored below the national public school average, in 2017 by a statistically significant amount. These subgroup results were not addressed in the board presentation.

## Summary of NAEP Findings

Looking across the NAEP results presented to the board, Kentucky's earlier performance in several subjects and grades was notably higher than in recent years. In some cases, prior NAEP scores were equivalent to a year or more of additional learning compared to current results.

Kentucky's students are performing at lower levels today than they were roughly a decade ago. While some improvement has occurred since the COVID-19 disruptions, the data indicate that recovery remains incomplete and that returning to pre-pandemic—and especially pre-2015—performance levels will take additional time.

Disaggregated NAEP results further clarify this picture. White and Black students together account for approximately 85% of Kentucky's student population. Trends for these groups therefore largely determine actual overall statewide outcomes. When examined separately, subgroup results often differ from the overall narrative presented in the briefing.

The additional NAEP analysis provided here present a broader and more nuanced picture of student performance than was conveyed by only the recent-year comparisons presented to the board with much missing statistical significance information.

## Material Omissions from the Presentation Concerning the Full Kentucky Assessment Picture: ACT

The Data-at-a-Glance presentation did not include any discussion of Kentucky's Grade 11 ACT results. The ACT is a required component of Kentucky's assessment system under state law.

| What Was Presented | What Was Not Presented |
|---|---|
| The presentation reviewed KSA and NAEP results across grade levels.<br><br>High school performance was discussed using KSA results. | No ACT results were presented, despite the ACT being a required component of Kentucky's assessment system.<br><br>Kentucky's ACT Composite score has declined steadily since the 2016–17 school year (Figure 6).<br><br>As of 2025, Kentucky's ACT Composite score is lower than when statewide ACT testing began in 2007–08.<br><br>ACT subject scores in English, reading, mathematics, and science have all declined since 2016–17 (Figure 7).<br><br>ACT trends diverge from recent high school KSA results.<br><br>ACT data reflect all Kentucky public school juniors and are not subject to sampling error. |

### Unanswered Questions: ACT

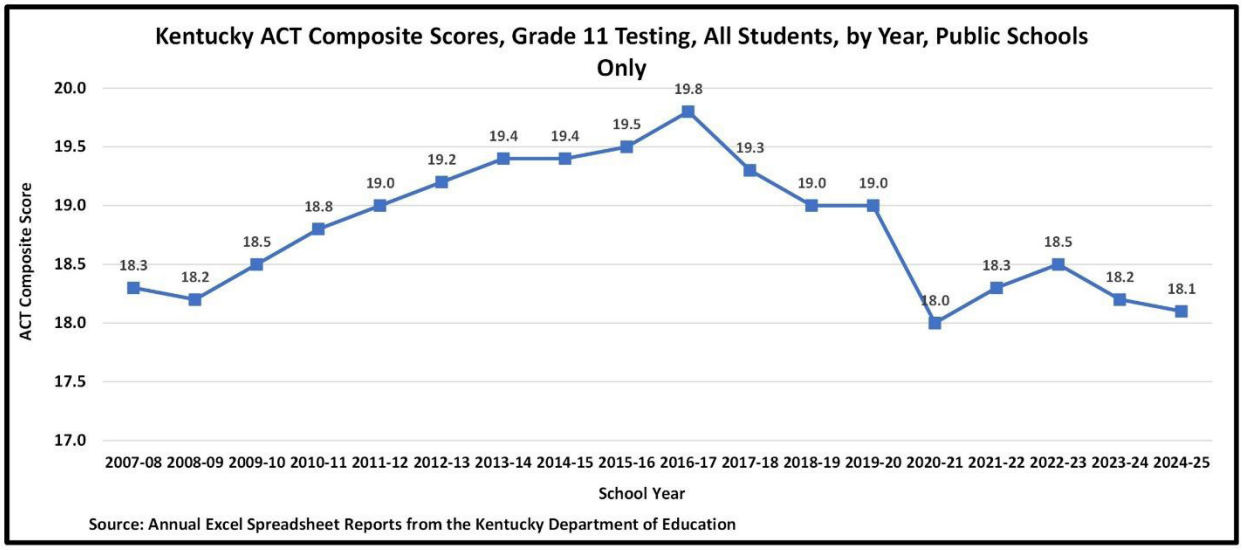
One board member requested ACT information during the meeting. No ACT data were provided in response.

In an additional, and concerning development, discussion about the ACT results was also omitted from the department's Advisory 25-294, which publicly announced the 2024–25 assessment and accountability results and provided a news lead to the media.[9] As a result, neither the board nor the public received ACT performance information through the department's primary assessment communications. The ACT data had to be extracted from the Kentucky School Report Cards database, something often challenging to both parents and the general public, if not also for most media members.

[9]KDE, Advisory 25-294, November 19, 2025. Online at: https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/KYDE/bulletins/3fa7990

The ACT has been administered statewide since 2007–08, creating an 18-year trend line for high school performance. During that period, Kentucky's ACT Composite score generally rose in the early years until 2016-17. A very notable decline then began, reaching its lowest ever point in 2020-21. A small, only partial recovery began after 2020-21, but this reversed after 2022-23 (Figure 6). As of the latest results, Kentucky's Grade 11 ACT Composite Score is lower than it was when the program began in 2007-08 and is only a scant 0.1 point higher than the worst-ever, COVID period results.

**Figure 6[10]**



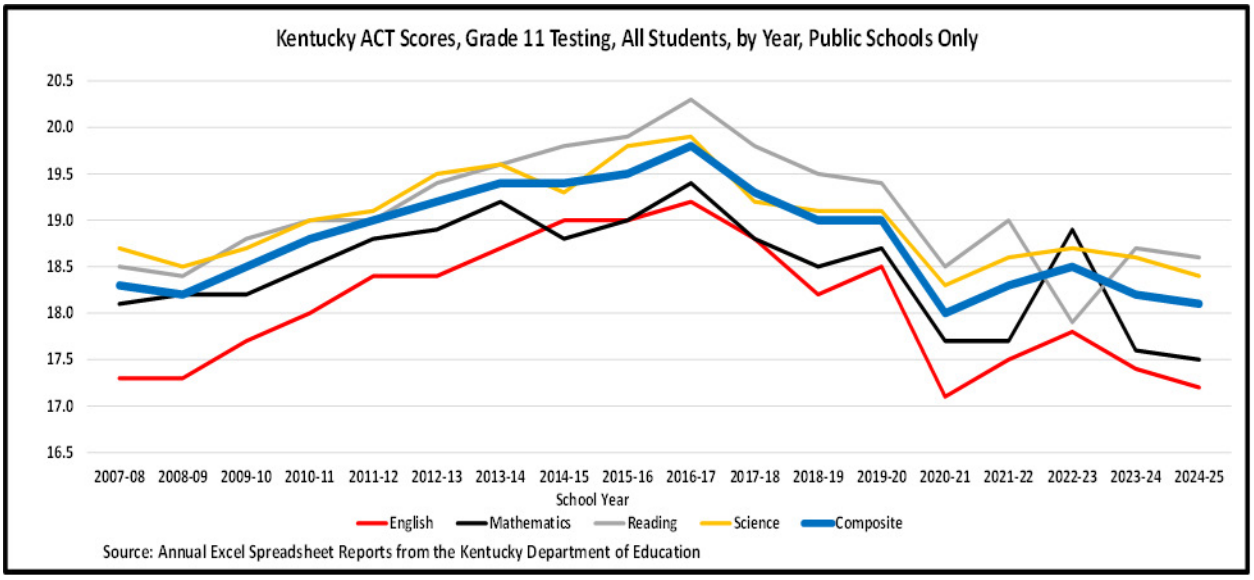

ACT individual subject scores in English, reading, mathematics, and science have also declined (Figure 7). These trends differ from recent high school KSA results found in Figure 1.

The presentation did not address how high school performance should be evaluated in light of declining ACT outcomes. It did not explain how ACT results align with, or diverge from, KSA trends.

The board did not receive information on how a forthcoming transition from the ACT to the SAT will affect long-term accountability, trend continuity, or compliance with statutory requirements. These issues remain unresolved.

[10]Grade 11 ACT scores for 2007-08 to 2023-24 from Kentucky Department of Education spreadsheet, online here: https://www.education.ky.gov/Open-House/data/OAA%20Data%20Files/ACT_Average_20232024.XLSx
Scores for 2024-25 from Kentucky Department of Education's 2024-25 Kentucky School Report Cards, Kentucky button, Academic Performance link, college admissions exam, The ACT tab. Access the report card here: https://reportcard.kyschools.us/

**Figure 7**[11]




The omission of ACT results limited the board's ability to evaluate high school performance using all required assessment data.

## Assessment Continuity and Trend Line Integrity

Effective assessment depends on stable, long-term trend lines. Without them, it is difficult to evaluate progress, identify declines, or distinguish real improvement from short-term fluctuations.

Kentucky's Grade 11 ACT assessment provided the Commonwealth's longest, continuous state-funded academic trend line. Statewide ACT testing began in the 2007–08 school year and continued through the 2024–25 school year, spanning 18 years of data.

No other Kentucky assessment has operated continuously for a comparable period.

- The Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS) was administered from 1992 to 1998.[12]
- The Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) ran from 1999 to 2011.[13]
- The Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (KPREP) was used for accountability from 2012 to 2019, with disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic.[14]
- The current Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA) has been in place only since 2022.[15]

[11]See Note 5 for sources.
[12]Pearson Publishing, "Kentucky Summative Assessments, 2022–2023 Technical Manual," Page 1. Online at: https://www.education.ky.gov/AA/Reports/Documents/2022-2023_Kentucky_Summative_Assessments_(KSA)_Technical_Manual.pdf.pdf
[13]Ibid, Pgs 1.
[14]Ibid, Pg. 2.
[15]Ibid, Pg. 3.

Because KSA began in 2022 and is not comparable to KPREP,[16] current state assessment trend analysis is limited with the primary state-funded assessment program. It must be noted that proposals to modify the KSA are also under consideration at this time, which could further limit the availability of long-term, consistent assessment data.

External assessments such as NAEP and the ACT are developed, administered, and scored by independent organizations outside of state control. Kentucky does not influence their scoring or reporting standards. As a result, these assessments provide valuable external benchmarks for evaluating statewide performance.

Historically, trends on Kentucky's state assessments have often diverged from results observed on NAEP and the ACT. Long-term external assessments therefore play a critical role in evaluating the credibility and consistency of reported gains.

The transition away from the ACT eliminates the longest-running, state-funded trend line at a time when policymakers are seeking to understand long-term academic performance and post-pandemic recovery. It's a bad move.

The loss of assessment continuity raises governance and oversight questions regarding how major assessment decisions are made and communicated.

## Governance and Oversight Issues: College Entrance Assessment

Kentucky Revised Statute 158.6453 stipulates that the college entrance examination is a required component of the state's assessment and accountability system.[17] The statute specifically assigns ultimate responsibility for this program to the Kentucky Board of Education, not the Kentucky Department of Education.

For 18 years, Kentucky administered the ACT to all public high school juniors. This created the longest continuous statewide assessment trend line in the Commonwealth's history, running from the 2007–08 school year through the 2024–25 school year.

In June 2025, KDE entered into a contract with the College Board to replace the ACT with the SAT beginning in the 2025–26 school year.[18] Based on available information, the role of the state board in approving or directing this change is unclear.

The transition from the ACT to the SAT raises several governance and oversight considerations.

First, the change severs an 18-year assessment trend line at a time when policymakers are seeking to evaluate long-term academic performance and post-pandemic recovery. NAEP does not assess high school students at the state level, leaving no external benchmark to compare high school outcomes once the ACT is discontinued.

[16]Clark, Jess, "New test scores show some improvement in Kentucky schools," Louisville Public Media, November 1, 2023, at: https://www.lpm.org/news/2023-11-01/new-test-scores-show-some-improvement-in-kentucky-schools.

[17]See Kentucky Revised Statute 158.6453. Online at: https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/law/statutes/statute.aspx?id=56685

[18]Commonwealth of Kentucky, Master Agreement Number MA758 2500001044, Record Date: June 13, 2025.

Second, state law specifies that English, reading, mathematics, and science must be assessed as part of the accountability system. The SAT assesses reading, writing, and mathematics but does not include science or specific English assessments. How the SAT could possibly satisfy the statute's subject-area requirements has not been explained in publicly available materials.

Third, the ACT is administered to all Kentucky public school juniors, eliminating sampling error. This makes ACT results uniquely valuable for statewide accountability and trend analysis. The implications of replacing a universal assessment with a different instrument were not discussed with the board.

Finally, ACT results were not presented to the board during the Data-at-a-Glance briefing and were not included in related assessment and accountability materials. This limited the board's ability to evaluate high school performance using all required assessment data.

Taken together, these issues raise questions about the board's oversight role in assessment policy decisions, the process by which major assessment changes are approved, and the board's access to complete information necessary to fulfill its statutory responsibilities.

## Recommendations for Legislative Action

Based on the findings in this report, the following actions are recommended to restore assessment transparency, statutory compliance, and long-term accountability in Kentucky's education system.

1. **Restore the ACT as Kentucky's statewide college-readiness examination.**
   Reinstate the ACT as the required Grade 11 assessment to preserve Kentucky's only continuous, universal, externally administered high school performance trend line, at least through completion of post-COVID recovery analysis.

2. **Reaffirm and enforce statutory subject-area requirements for the college entrance examination.**
   Clarify and enforce the requirement in KRS 158.6453 that the statewide college entrance examination assess English, reading, mathematics, and science as distinct subject areas. Require a formal, written determination—subject to public release—explaining how any selected assessment satisfies these statutory requirements.

3. **Require formal Kentucky Board of Education approval for major assessment changes.**
   Mandate an open, public vote of the Kentucky Board of Education for any contract or decision that replaces or substantially alters a required statewide assessment, consistent with the governance structure established under the Kentucky Education Reform Act.

4. **Clarify roles and contracting authority for statewide assessments.**
   Specify in statute or regulation whether the board or the department has authority to approve and execute contracts for required statewide assessments, and require documentation of determinations made under such authority for all future assessment contracts.

5. **Require complete and accurate assessment reporting to the board.**
   Require that all board briefings and official assessment communications include every required component of the statewide assessment system, including the college entrance examination, and that statistical significance and subgroup results be clearly presented where applicable.

6. **Protect long-term assessment trend lines.**
   Enact assessment-stability provisions that limit frequent replacement of statewide assessments and require continuity plans when changes occur, including how trend lines will be preserved or responsibly bridged.

7. **Maintain independent external benchmarks for accountability.**
   Require Kentucky to retain at least one externally developed and independently scored statewide assessment at the high school level to provide a reliable check on state-developed measures and guard against score inflation.

8. **Strengthen legislative oversight of assessment policy.**
   Require regular reporting to the General Assembly on assessment changes, trend-line continuity, and alignment with statutory requirements to ensure policymakers receive timely, complete information.

9. **Establish an independent assessment and accountability authority.**
   Transfer responsibility for statewide assessment and accountability to an entity independent of the Kentucky Department of Education and the Kentucky Board of Education. Separating system administration from performance measurement would eliminate inherent conflicts of interest, protect the integrity of assessment results, and strengthen public trust in reported outcomes.

## Conclusion

The December 2025 Data-at-a-Glance briefing presented to the Kentucky Board of Education provided an incomplete and, in some cases, misleading picture of statewide student performance. While recent Kentucky Summative Assessment results were emphasized, important contextual information from NAEP and required ACT data was either inaccurately presented or omitted entirely.

Taken together, the findings in this report highlight recurring challenges in Kentucky's assessment system: limited trend-line continuity, inconsistent presentation of external benchmarks, and unclear governance and approval processes for major assessment changes. These issues complicate efforts to evaluate long-term performance, measure post-pandemic recovery, and maintain public confidence in reported outcomes.

Kentucky law assigns the General Assembly ultimate responsibility for ensuring an efficient and accountable system of education. The recommendations outlined in this report are intended to support that responsibility by strengthening assessment transparency, restoring long-term comparability, and clarifying oversight roles.

Ensuring that policymakers, educators, and the public have access to complete, accurate, and comparable assessment data is essential to informed decision-making and effective educational improvement.

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