



Universal School Choice and NAEP Scores (March 12, 2025)

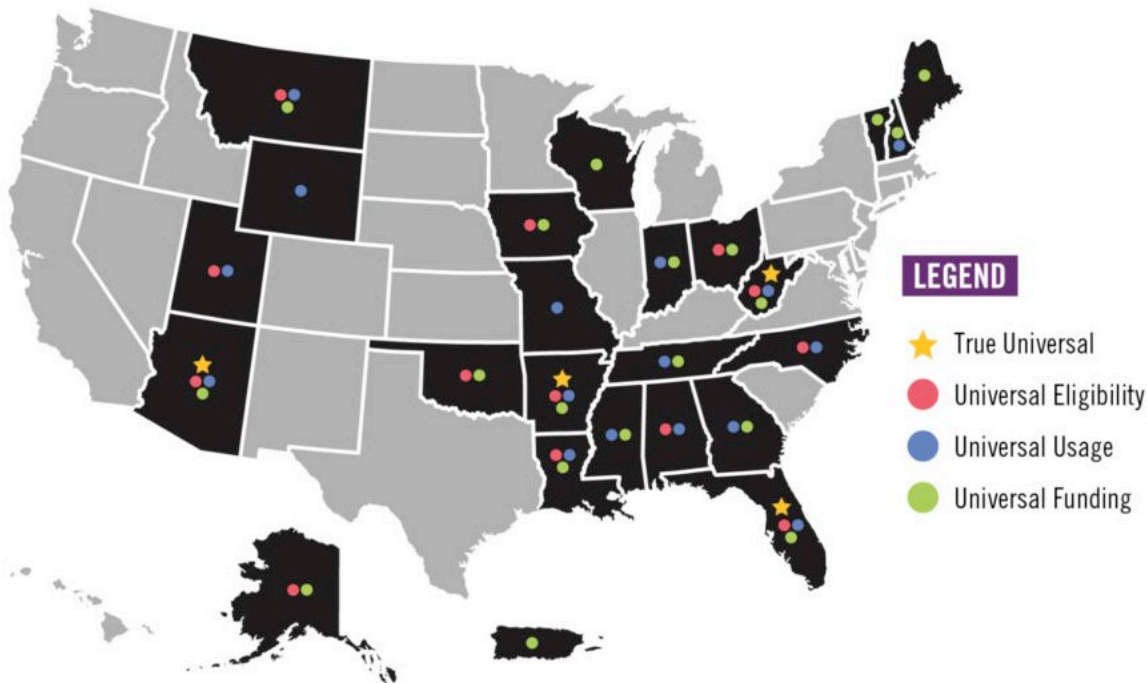
Executive Summary

Considered the “gold standard” in testing, the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) scores do not appear to coincide with a decline in results in post-universal choice expansion years. Specifically, NAEP scores in Arizona and Florida – two of the first universal expansion states – have seen mixed results since 2009. While there is little research connecting the expansion of private school choice laws to declining public school student test scores, lawmakers across the country have implemented various testing requirements to ensure that students enrolled in choice programs that receive taxpayer funds are held to the same assessment and testing standards as students in traditional public schools.

Findings and Analysis

Comparison of Public Schools' Test Score Results Pre- and Post-Implementation of “Universal” School Choice States

Universal Choice Programs: The following states offer some feature of universal choice, be it universal eligibility, usage, funding, or some combination of the three. Four states have programs that are fully universal, meaning they boast all three elements.



Note: States with multiple programs may enjoy multiple universal aspects spread across one or more programs.

Source: “School Choice in America Dashboard,” EdChoice, <https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice> (2026).

According to a national school choice advocacy and research organization, [EdChoice](https://www.edchoice.org), only four states – **Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, and West Virginia** – are deemed to have “true universal” private school choice programs. For ease of comparison, NAEP scores in these four states were compared before and after the



implementation of the universal policies (dating back to the 2009 administrations of the test).¹ For reference, while the following years are when these “universal” programs were first passed into law, it should be noted that these programs had a consistent build-up period of two or more years, meaning it is unlikely that an immediate impact on grades was felt. Further, correlation does not necessarily equal causation when it comes to comparing NAEP score trends and the expansion of private school choice programs:

- [Arizona Empowerment Scholarship Accounts \(2011\)](#)
- [Arkansas Children’s Educational Freedom Account Program \(2023\)](#)
- [Florida Family Empowerment Scholarship for Educational Options \(2019\)](#)
- [West Virginia Hope Scholarship Program \(2021\)](#)

Recent NAEP Testing Results Comparison - Arizona

Test Year	Grade 4 Math	Change from Prior Test	Grade 4 Reading	Change from Prior Test	Grade 8 Math	Change from Prior Test	Grade 8 Reading	Change from Prior Test
2024	232	±0	208	-7	270	-1	254	-5
2022	232	-6	215	-1	271	-9	259	±0
2019	238	+4	216	+1	280	-2	259	-4
2017	234	-4	215	±0	282	-1	263	±0
2015	238	-2	215	+2	283	+3	263	+3
2013	240	+5	213	+1	280	+1	260	±0
2011	235	+5	212	+2	279	+2	260	+2
2009	230	-	210	-	277	-	258	-

Source: “Arizona Performance Trends,” *The Nation’s Report Card* (2026).

Since 2009, 4th and 8th-grade math scores on the NAEP have increased by 2 and decreased by 7 points, respectively. Likewise, in Reading, the 4th and 8th-grade NAEP results declined by 2 and 4 points, respectively. Arizona enacted [Senate Bill 1553 \(2011\)](#) to establish the Arizona Empowerment Scholarship Accounts program, allowing for public funds to be utilized for students in low-performing public schools to attend private school options. A decade later, in 2022, lawmakers passed [House Bill 2853](#), which expanded the Arizona Empowerment Scholarship Accounts program to universal eligibility and funding. Notably, [Arizona Revised Statutes § 15-2402](#) does not require students enrolled in this universal school choice program to participate in standardized testing.

Recent NAEP Testing Results Comparison - Arkansas

Test Year	Grade 4 Math	Change from Prior Test	Grade 4 Reading	Change from Prior Test	Grade 8 Math	Change from Prior Test	Grade 8 Reading	Change from Prior Test
2024	230	+2	210	-2	266	-1	255	±0
2022	228	-5	212	-3	267	-7	255	-4
2019	233	-1	215	-1	274	±0	259	-1
2017	234	-1	216	-2	274	-1	260	+1
2015	235	-5	218	-1	275	-3	259	-3
2013	240	+2	219	+2	278	-1	262	+3
2011	238	±0	217	+1	279	+3	259	+1

¹ “School Choice in America Dashboard,” EdChoice, accessed 2026, <https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/dashboard>.



Test Year	Grade 4 Math	Change from Prior Test	Grade 4 Reading	Change from Prior Test	Grade 8 Math	Change from Prior Test	Grade 8 Reading	Change from Prior Test
2009	238	-	216	-	276	-	258	-

Source: "Arkansas Performance Trends," *The Nation's Report Card* (2026).

In Arkansas, since 2009, 4th and 8th-grade math scores on the NAEP have declined by 8 and 10 points, respectively. Similarly, the 4th and 8th-grade reading scores for the state fell by 6 and 3 points, respectively, from the 2009 to the 2024 NAEP test administration. Arkansas enacted [Senate Bill 294 \(2023\)](#) – better known as the LEARNS Act – as an omnibus education reform measure that also created a pathway for the state’s first universal education savings account program.

Students who participate in the ESA program to attend a non-public school must annually take a test that is either the same as the test administered to their grade-level peers in other public schools or an alternative nationally recognized and state board-approved exam. However, students with cognitive disabilities and an approved IEP are not required to take any test but may submit a portfolio or other approved measure of performance and academic progress.²

Recent NAEP Testing Results Comparison - Florida

Test Year	Grade 4 Math	Change from Prior Test	Grade 4 Reading	Change from Prior Test	Grade 8 Math	Change from Prior Test	Grade 8 Reading	Change from Prior Test
2024	243	+2	218	-7	267	-4	253	-7
2022	241	-5	225	±0	271	-8	260	-3
2019	246	±0	225	-3	279	±0	263	-4
2017	246	+3	228	+1	279	+4	267	+4
2015	243	+1	227	±0	275	-6	263	-3
2013	242	+2	227	+2	281	+3	266	+4
2011	240	-2	225	-1	278	-1	262	-2
2009	242	-	226	-	279	-	264	-

Source: "Florida Performance Trends," *The Nation's Report Card* (2026).

Since 2009, 4th and 8th-grade math scores on the NAEP exam increased by 1 point but declined by 12 points, respectively, in the decade and a half since the 2009 test’s administration. For the Reading score, the decline was even more precipitous, dropping 8 and 11 points, respectively, between 2009 and 2024.

Florida’s Family Empowerment Education Scholarship Program – an ESA-type program – was first established via [Senate Bill 7070 \(2019\)](#). However, a later amendment – [House Bill 1 \(2023\)](#) – removed the prior eligibility requirements, opening the choice program to all resident students eligible to enroll in a K-12 public school in the state.

Parents must then ensure that their children either take a nationally recognized or norm-referenced assessment offered by the participating private school or take the standard state public school exam. If the latter option is chosen, the parents are then responsible for all costs associated with transporting the student to the testing site

² Ark. Code Ann. § 6-18-2509, <https://portal.arkansas.gov/service/arkansas-code-search-laws-and-statutes>.



for the applicable school district. Students with physician-approved and/or IEP team noted cognitive disabilities are exempt from this testing requirement.³

Recent NAEP Testing Results Comparison – West Virginia

Test Year	Grade 4 Math	Change from Prior Test	Grade 4 Reading	Change from Prior Test	Grade 8 Math	Change from Prior Test	Grade 8 Reading	Change from Prior Test
2024	232	+6	206	+1	261	+1	247	-2
2022	226	-5	205	-8	260	-12	249	-7
2019	231	-5	213	-4	272	-1	256	-3
2017	236	+1	217	+1	273	+2	259	-1
2015	235	-2	216	+1	271	-3	260	+3
2013	237	+2	215	+1	274	+1	257	+1
2011	235	+2	214	-1	273	+3	256	+1
2009	233	-	215	-	270	-	255	-

Source: "Arizona Performance Trends," *The Nation's Report Card (2026)*.

Since 2009, 4th and 8th-grade math scores on the NAEP have dropped by 1 and 9 points, respectively. Further, reading scores have dropped by 9 and 8 points during the same time period. The West Virginia Hope Scholarship Program offers K-12 students an alternative to attending public school full-time by providing a scholarship that may be used for tuition, homeschool materials, and/or other qualifying expenses. The more than 14,000 students participating in the ESA for the 2025-2026 school year received an average of \$5,267.⁴

Students awarded the Hope Scholarship who do not attend an alternative public or private school, but are enrolled in an individual instructional program or homeschool program, must meet certain testing requirements. Specifically, they must take an annual norm-referenced standardized test in reading, language arts, and math as well as science and social studies. The results and proof of satisfactory achievement must be submitted to the local school superintendent.⁵

³ Fla. Stat. § 1002.394(10)(a)(7), https://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=1000-1099/1002/Sections/1002.394.html.

⁴ "Hope Scholarship West Virginia," West Virginia State Treasurer, <https://hopescholarshippwv.gov>.

⁵ W. Va. Code § 18-31-1, et seq., <https://code.wvlegislature.gov/18-31-1>.