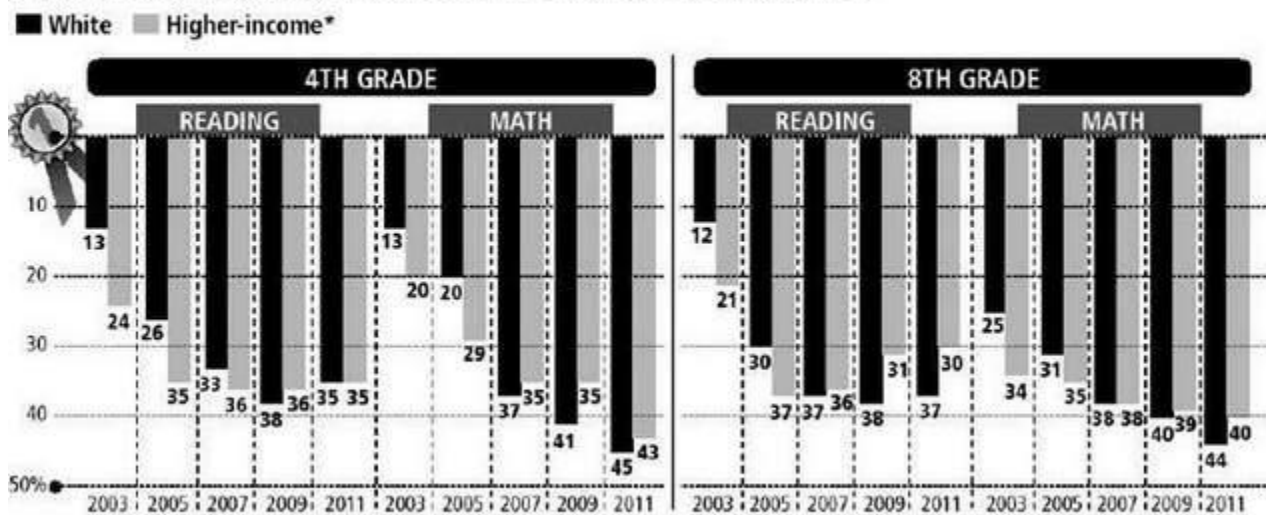


PROGRESS EXAM RANKING PLUMMETS

A report out today says the national ranking of Michigan's white and higher-income students — compared with their peers across the nation — has plummeted since 2003 on the National Assessment of Educational Progress exam. Here is where Michigan students ranked.



*Higher-income students are those who do not receive free or reduced-price lunch.

SOURCES: National Assessment of Educational Progress; Education Trust-Midwest

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White and higher-income students in Michigan have seen dramatic declines in their rankings on a tough national exam, a report released today shows. The plummeting rankings don't necessarily mean their scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress exam have dropped significantly -- but they're an indication that Michigan students aren't keeping pace with students in many other states that are posting improvements.

Overall performance on the NAEP has remained stagnant in Michigan.

"In the other states, student achievement is outpacing us," said Amber Arellano, executive director of the Education Trust-Midwest, a Royal Oak-based nonpartisan education policy and research organization. "We're remaining about the same."

The data is part of the Education Trust's annual report, which takes a deeper and more longitudinal look at test score data.

Fourth-grade white students, for instance, ranked 13th among the 50 states in 2003 in reading, but their ranking slipped to 35th by 2011. In math, fourth-grade white students ranked 13th in 2003 and dropped to 45th in 2011.

Higher-income students -- defined as those who don't receive free or reduced-price lunch -- saw similar declines, although they started out at lower ranks. Higher-income fourth-graders ranked 24th in reading in 2003, but slipped to 35th in 2011.

African-American and Latino students haven't seen the same kind of dramatic drop, but like the higher-income students, they started low. Black fourth-graders dropped from 38th in 2003 to 45th in 2011; Latino fourth-graders dropped from 22th to 26th.

Arellano said the states making greater gains have been working at school reform for years. That's why she's hopeful efforts in Michigan -- including beefing up the teacher evaluation process, raising

expectations for state exams and the creation of a statewide system for poor performing schools -- will pay off in Michigan.

"The effectiveness of all those things will really depend on how well we start to carry them out," she said. "It's really too early."

Robert Floden, co-director of the Education Policy Center at Michigan State University, said it's surprising to see the rankings decline so dramatically. He was cautious about drawing too many conclusions.

Floden said it might be more relevant to compare, for instance, scores of Michigan's white fourth-graders to the national average for white fourth-graders over time, rather than simply ranking them among other states.

"The more important question is -- how are we doing compared to the national trends?" Floden said.

Still, he and Judy Pritchett, chief academic officer with the Macomb Intermediate School District, said the recession may have played a role in the declining rankings.

"We know that between 2003 and 2011, the economic downturn affected all areas and demographics and the movement of students between districts and/or out of state could have an impact," Pritchett said.