



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Wednesday, April 29, 2015  
CONTACT: Brad Luna, [LUNA+EISENLA media](http://LUNA+EISENLA.com)  
[brad@lunaeisenlamedia.com](mailto:brad@lunaeisenlamedia.com) | 202-812-8140 (mobile)

## **23% of 8th-Graders “Proficient” in Civics According to Nation’s Report Card Released Today**

***Today’s Release Shows Inequality in Civics Education,  
Serious Gaps by Racial and Economic Backgrounds  
Reflecting Unequal Education***

**Medford/Somerville, MA** – Today, the Federal Government released the *Nation’s Report Card: 2014 U.S. in Civics*. Experts on civic education from the [Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement \(CIRCLE\)](http://CenterforInformationandResearchonCivicLearning&Engagement.org) based at Tufts University’s Tisch College – the preeminent, non-partisan research center on youth engagement – have been involved in both designing and analyzing the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Civics Assessment and can provide informed commentary.

**“The quality and equality of civic education is a reflection of our investment in a healthy democracy,”** said Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, director of CIRCLE. **“The National Assessment of Education Progress, or the Nation’s Report Card, as it’s also known, is a difficult and complex test that successfully measures some key areas of civic learning and how well civics is taught. However, as the new Nation’s Report Card: 2014 shows, we are far from achieving an acceptable quality or equality of civics education.”**

The 2014 NAEP Civics, released today, finds that 23% of America’s 8th graders are “proficient.” Although higher scores would certainly be desirable, many adults might be surprised by how difficult the NAEP Civics questions are. For instance, in 2014, 8th graders were asked to identify a power of the modern President not described in the Constitution and to understand that growth in the elderly population would affect Social Security spending.

NAEP assessments in all other subjects yield roughly comparable proficiency levels to those found in civics. For instance, on the 2013 Mathematics NAEP,

27% of 8th graders scored proficient and 9% scored advanced.

More significant than the overall proficiency levels are gaps by student groups. For instance, only 9% of African American students reached at least the “proficient” level in the 2014 NAEP Civics, compared to 40% of Asian/Pacific Islander students. Students from urban areas, students whose parents didn’t attend college, students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, and students with disabilities all scored lower than average.

**“The NAEP Civics measures education for citizenship, which is an essential purpose of schools,”** said Peter Levine, Associate Dean for Research at Tufts University’s Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service and a member of the NAEP Civics Committee. **“In 2014, due to budget cuts, the NAEP Civics was fielded only at the 8th grade level. It is important for the NAEP Civics to be administered regularly and at the 4th grade, 8th grade, and 12th grade levels so that we can assess our progress in educating America’s kids for citizenship.”**

Previous research by CIRCLE has shown that what students *know* about civics is related to how much and how well they are *taught* civics. The gaps in NAEP scores reflect inequality in civic education.

Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg closely studied previous NAEP Civics results for a fact sheet entitled, [“Do Discussion, Debate, and Simulations Boost NAEP Civics Performance?”](#) In that work, Kawashima-Ginsberg explored the relationship between three promising teaching practices and NAEP scores for various demographic groups.

Dr. Peter Levine, Associate Dean for Research at Tisch College, has written a fact sheet entitled, [“What the NAEP Civics Assessment Measures and How Students Perform.”](#) The fact sheet looks closely at what the NAEP Civics test measures, the skills and values that it doesn’t capture, and in general how to interpret the results. Levine was a member of the committee that helped design the 2014 civics test.

###

*CIRCLE ([www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org)) is a nonpartisan, independent, academic research center that studies young people in politics and presents detailed data on young voters in all 50 states. CIRCLE is part of the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University.*

*The Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service (<http://activecitizen.tufts.edu/>) is a national leader whose model and research*

*are setting the standard for higher education's role in civic engagement education. Serving every school of Tufts University, Tisch College creates an enduring culture that prepares students to be lifelong active citizens.*

*Tufts University (<http://www.tufts.edu/>), located on three Massachusetts campuses in Boston, Medford/Somerville and Grafton, and in Talloires, France, is recognized as one of the premier research universities in the United States. Tufts enjoys a global reputation for academic excellence and for the preparation of students as leaders in a wide range of professions. A growing number of innovative teaching and research initiatives span all Tufts campuses, and collaboration among the faculty and students in the undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs across the university's schools is widely encouraged.*