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NATION'S REPORT CARD

HAWAII SCORES AMONG THE LOWEST

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Nearly half of a randomly selected group of Hawaii public school fourth-graders tested below basic reading levels, according to a nationwide assessment.

Results from the spring 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress, which were released Wednesday, showed slight improvement in reading scores

for Hawaii's eighth-graders, but fourth-graders still missed the mark.

"Our eighth-graders went up wonderfully. In fact, Hawaii is the only state to show significant gains two years in a row," said Robert Hillier, National Assessment of Educational Progress state coordinator. "But the question is how are we addressing the reading needs of our special education students and other students who have reading problems."

Known as "The Nation's Report Card," the assessment tests a random sampling of the nation's fourth- and eighth-graders in varied content areas, including arts, civics, economics, science, writing and U.S. history every few years. Students are tested in reading and math every two years.

About 3,100 fourth-graders and 2,900 eighth-graders in Hawaii were selected for the reading assessment in spring 2009, said Arnold Goldstein, the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics assessment division program director.

According to Hawaii's official enrollment count for the 2008-09 school year, there were 12,408 fourth-graders and 11,172 eighth-graders in the public school system.

Developed by the National Center for Education Statistics, the assessment tests what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. The reading assessment measures the reading and comprehension skills of fourth- and eighth-graders by having them read grade-appropriate

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passages and answering questions based upon what they read.

The assessment is often used as an independent monitor of No Child Left Behind, Goldstein said. It does not, however, test the same benchmarks as the Hawaii State Assessment or result in penalties if schools fail to meet the standards.

Only 57 percent of Hawaii's tested fourth-graders were at or above basic reading levels, down from 59 percent in 2007, while 67 percent of Hawaii's eighth-graders were at or above basic levels, an increase from 62 percent in 2007.

Hawaii State Teachers Association President Will Okabe attributed the lower test scores to several things, including the state's multi-cultural student population, differing geographic areas and the test itself.

"Parents really need to take the initiative to sup-

At a glance

States with the highest percentage of fourth-grade students below basic reading levels

District of Columbia,	56 percent
Louisiana,	49 percent
New Mexico,	48 percent
California,	46 percent
Mississippi,	45 percent
Arizona,	44 percent
Hawaii,	43 percent
Nevada,	43 percent
Alaska,	41 percent

National average, 34 percent are below basic

States with the highest percentage of eighth-grade students below basic reading levels

District of Columbia,	49 percent
Mississippi,	38 percent
California,	36 percent
Louisiana,	36 percent
Nevada,	35 percent
New Mexico,	34 percent
Alabama,	34 percent
Hawaii,	33 percent
West Virginia,	33 percent

National average, 26 percent are below basic

Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress Web site

port their student's education by encouraging them to read at home, make reading something students do on a daily basis," he said. "Reading has to be a priority

While there were some "bright spots" among some of the subgroups tested, Hillier said he expects to see a lot of scrutiny and problem solving in determining the downward trend for the state's fourth-graders.

"The furlough (days do not) help the situation. We need to put our kids back in school. Students being at home will not help the situation," Okabe said.

Schools had not yet implemented teacher furlough days last spring when the test was administered. Okabe, however, said he was interested to see if less instructional days would negatively impact the results of the Hawaii State Assessment, which is scheduled to begin Monday.

Messages left with Gov. Linda Lingle's Chief of Media Relations Russell Pang and Board of Education Big Island representative Herbert Watanabe were not returned as of press time.

in their life. ... Teachers need to support that particular learning environment at the school. There has to be a partnership at home and at the schools."