



Fewer than half of American eighth graders knew the purpose of the Bill of Rights on the most recent national civics examination, and only one in 10 demonstrated acceptable knowledge of the checks and balances among the legislative, executive and judicial branches, according to test results released on Wednesday

high school seniors who took the test, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, were unable to demonstrate skills like identifying the effect of United States foreign policy on other nations or naming a power granted to Congress by the Constitution.

"Today's NAEP results confirm that we have a crisis on our hands when it comes to civics education," said Sandra Day O'Connor, the former Supreme Court justice, who last year founded [icivics.org](http://icivics.org), a nonprofit group that teaches students civics through Web-based games and other tools.

The Department of Education administered the test, known as the nation's report card, to 27,000 4th-, 8th- and 12th-grade students last year. Questions covered themes like how government is financed, what rights are protected by the Constitution and how laws are passed.

Average fourth-grade scores on the test's 300-point scale rose slightly since the exam was last administered, in 2006, to 157 from 154. Average eighth-grade scores were virtually unchanged at 151. The scores of high school seniors — students who are either eligible to vote or about to be — dropped to 148 from 151. Those scores mean that about a quarter of 4th- and 12th-grade students, and about one-fifth of 8th graders, ranked at the proficient or advanced levels.

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