



NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL CHOICE SOLUTIONS

September 25, 2023

School closures during the COVID-19 pandemic had devastating effects on the educational progress of American schoolchildren, revealed deep inadequacies of the public-school monopoly, and left families feeling powerless about setting the direction of their children's education. Thankfully, North Carolina's Opportunity Scholarship program, which provides private school vouchers to children of low-income households, launched in 2014. On September 22nd, a new budget passed to triple its funding and offer universal school choice to every child in North Carolina. Families can use these funds to cover the cost of private school tuition, transportation, and other supplies. In addition to this program, North Carolina also offers a program called Education Student Accounts (ESA+). This program is available to students with disabilities and provides between \$9,000 and \$17,000 depending on needs. Qualifying families can choose from either homeschooling, private schooling, or public schooling co-enrollment.

National test results for 2022 show that school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic had a harmful effect on American schoolchildren. For the first time in the history of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), scores in reading and math fell by the largest margin in more than 30 years and students in North Carolina were no exception. *See Chart on page 2.*

In 2022, according to the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) in North Carolina:

The **reading level of 4th grade students** who performed at or above the NAEP Proficient in was only **32%**.

Black 4th grade students had an average reading score that was **30 points** lower than that for White students.



Hispanic 4th grade students had an average reading score that was **23 points** lower than that for White students.

Low-income 4th grade students had an average reading score that was **25 points** lower than that for students from middle and high income families.

These test scores can have powerful consequences for a generation of children. Reversing these achievement losses will need aggressive action over the next several years. Parents need the ability to leave their government-mandated schools if necessary to help ensure their children have better academic opportunities. School choice is also shown to improve public schools by increasing accountability, fostering competitiveness, and boosting student outcomes. When parents can choose which option best fits their child's needs, whether that means opting to switch or not, students reap the benefits.

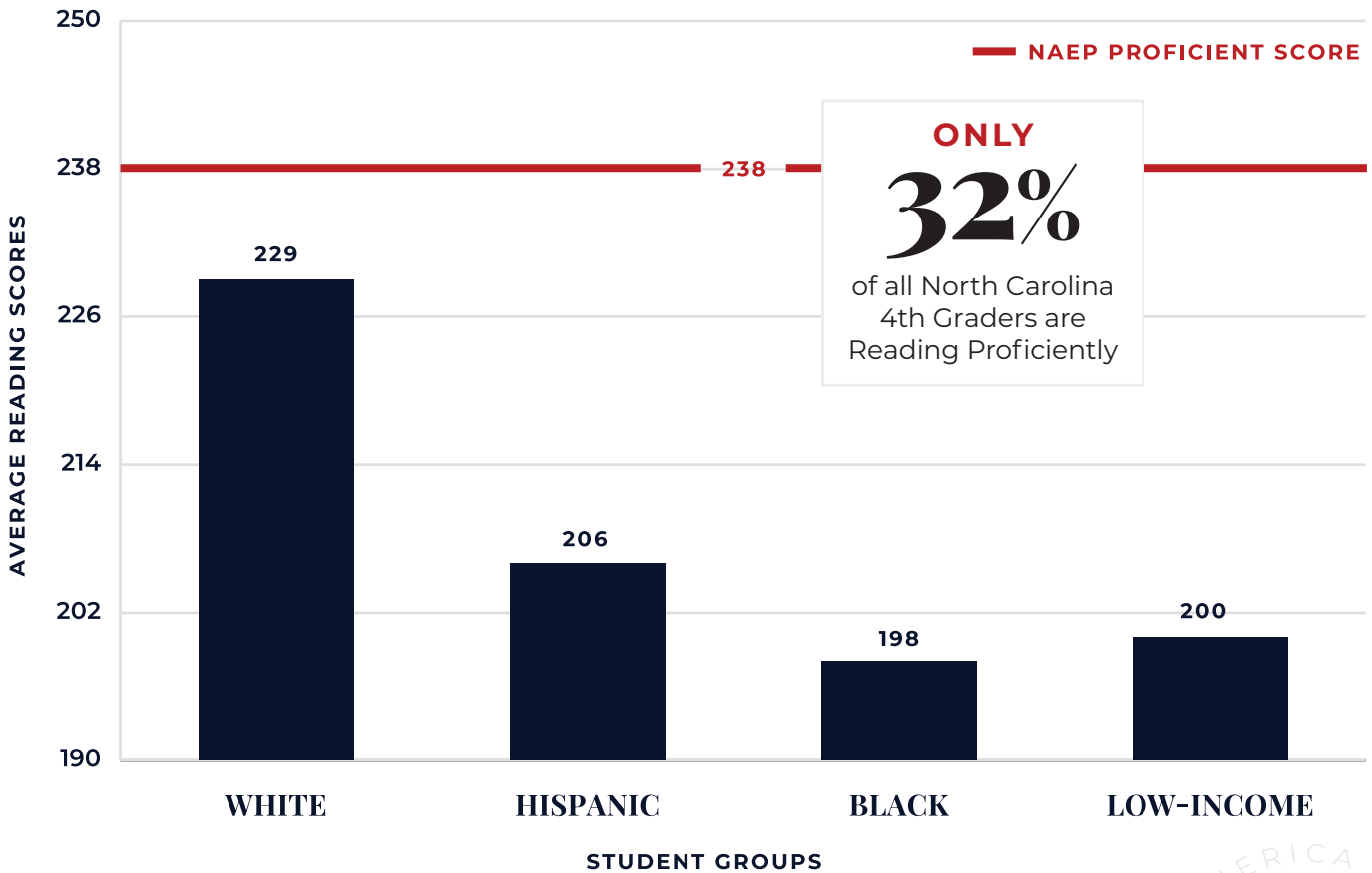
Unfortunately, Governor Roy Cooper has not been supportive of school choice, even threatening to declare a state of emergency during the year legislative session. Luckily, the legislature has protected school choice despite the governor’s opposition to the policy. It is key to the educational future of young North Carolina children, including many who currently score “below basic” in reading, to provide educational options.

As the AFPI Center for Education Opportunity, Chairman Scott Turner repeatedly states, “No one knows the needs and interests of a child more than their parent or guardian.”

“ At AFPI, we believe that the purpose of education is to prepare Americans for the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. ”

School choice is representative of two core American values—freedom and opportunity. At AFPI, we believe that the purpose of education is to prepare Americans for the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. As public support for school choice continues to grow, students across the nation will have access to schooling that meets individualized needs, and educational outcomes will improve. Most importantly, parents will be empowered to have a stronger voice in the conversation about their child’s schooling. While the Biden administration and Gov. Cooper try to stall progress on school choice policies, the Center for Education Opportunity remains highly committed to the mission.

North Carolina 4th Grade Reading Scores



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2022 Reading Assessments.

