

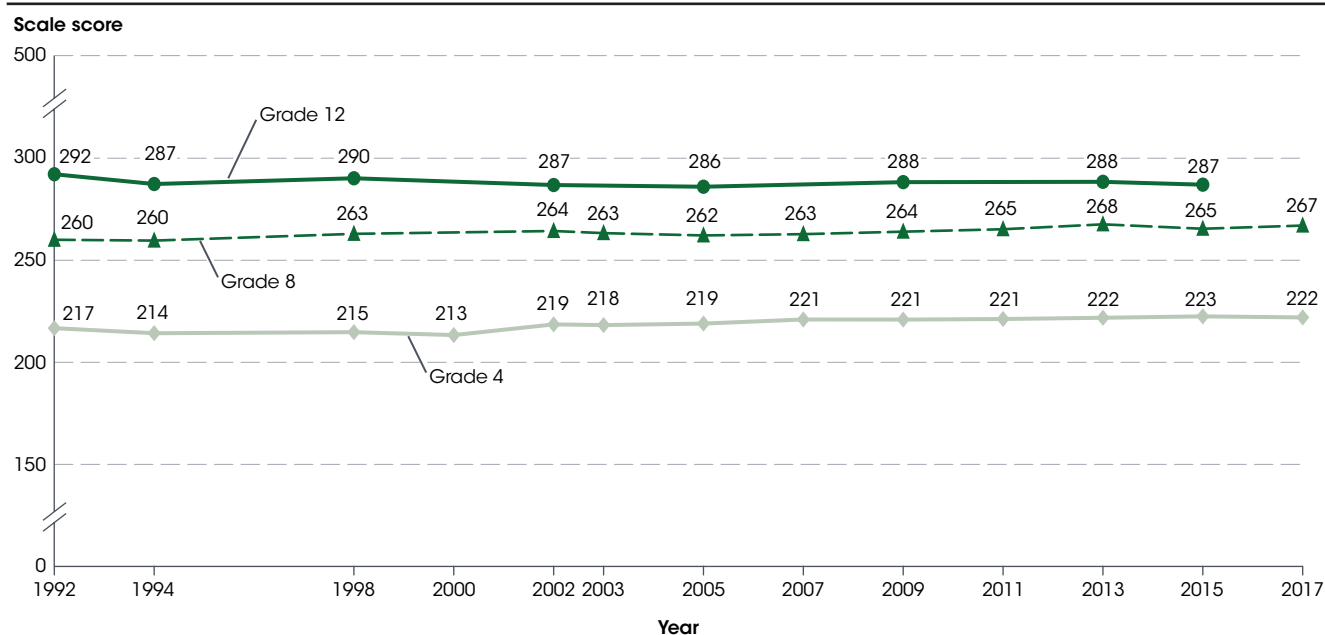
Reading Performance

The average 4th-grade reading score in 2017 (222) was higher than the average score in 1992 (217), but not measurably different from the average score in 2015, when the assessment was last administered. At the 8th-grade level, the average reading score in 2017 (267) was higher than the scores in both 1992 (260) and 2015 (265).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assesses student performance in reading at grades 4, 8, and 12 in both public and private schools across the nation. NAEP reading scale scores range from 0 to 500 for all grade levels. NAEP achievement levels define what students should know and be able to do: *Basic* indicates partial mastery of fundamental skills, *Proficient* indicates

demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, and *Advanced* indicates superior performance beyond proficient. NAEP reading assessments have been administered periodically since 1992, more frequently in grades 4 and 8 than in grade 12.¹ The most recent reading assessments were conducted in 2017 for grades 4 and 8 and in 2015 for grade 12.²

Figure 1. Average National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scale scores of 4th-, 8th-, and 12th-grade students: Selected years, 1992-2017



NOTE: Includes public and private schools. The reading scale scores range from 0 to 500. Assessment was not conducted for grade 8 in 2000 or for grade 12 in 2000, 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2017. Testing accommodations (e.g., extended time, small group testing) for children with disabilities and English language learners were not permitted in 1992 and 1994.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), selected years, 1992-2017 Reading Assessments, NAEP Data Explorer. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 221.10.

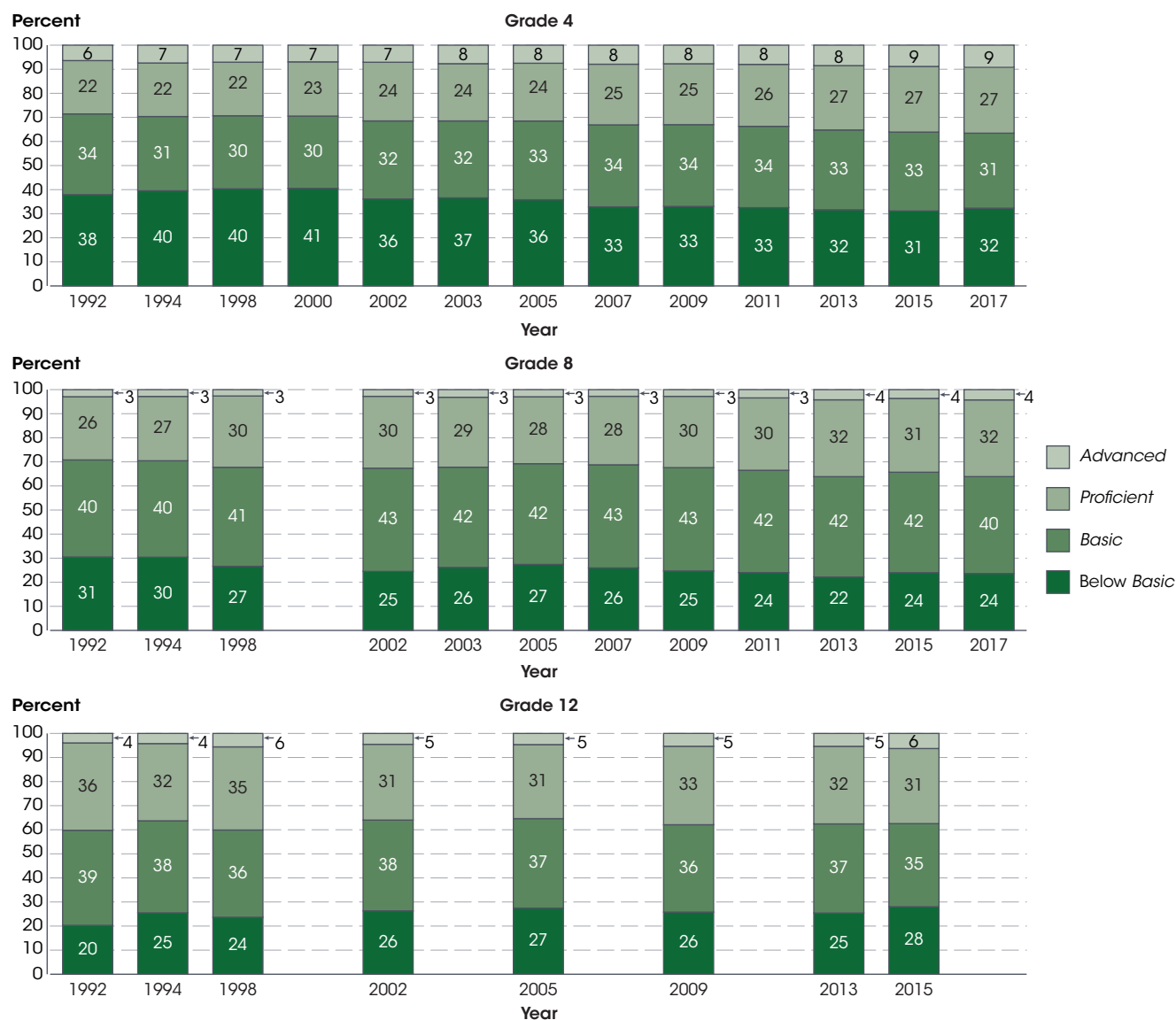
The average reading score for 4th-grade students in 2017 (222) was not measurably different from the score in 2015, but it was higher than the score in 1992 (217). For 8th-grade students, the average reading score in 2017 (267) was higher than the scores in both 2015 and 1992 (265

and 260, respectively). The average reading score for 12th-grade students in 2015 (287) was not measurably different from the score in 2013, but it was lower than the score in 1992 (292).

NAEP also reports scores at five selected percentiles to show the progress made by lower- (10th and 25th percentiles), middle- (50th percentile), and higher- (75th and 90th percentiles) performing students.³ At grade 4, the reading scores for students at the 10th and 25th percentiles in 2017 were lower than the corresponding scores in 2015. In comparison to 1992, however, reading scores were higher in 2017 for students at each selected percentile, with one exception: the score for lower-performing students at the 10th percentile was not significantly different from the score in 1992. At grade 8, students at the 50th, 75th, and 90th percentiles

scored higher in 2017 than in 2015. In comparison to 1992, however, the 8th-grade reading scores in 2017 were higher at all the selected percentiles. At grade 12, students at the 10th and 25th percentiles had lower scores in 2015 than in 2013. In addition, 12th-grade students at the 90th percentile scored higher in 2015 than in 2013. In comparison to 1992, only the highest-performing students (those at the 90th percentile) had a higher score in 2015. Lower- and middle-performing 12th-grade students at the 10th, 25th, and 50th percentiles had lower scores in 2017 than in 1992.

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of 4th-, 8th-, and 12th-grade students, by National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading achievement level: Selected years, 1992–2017



NOTE: Includes public and private schools. Achievement levels define what students should know and be able to do: *Basic* indicates partial mastery of fundamental skills, *Proficient* indicates demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, and *Advanced* indicates superior performance beyond proficient. Assessment was not conducted for grade 8 in 2000 or for grade 12 in 2000, 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2017. Testing accommodations (e.g., extended time, small group testing) for children with disabilities and English language learners were not permitted in 1992 and 1994. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded estimates. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

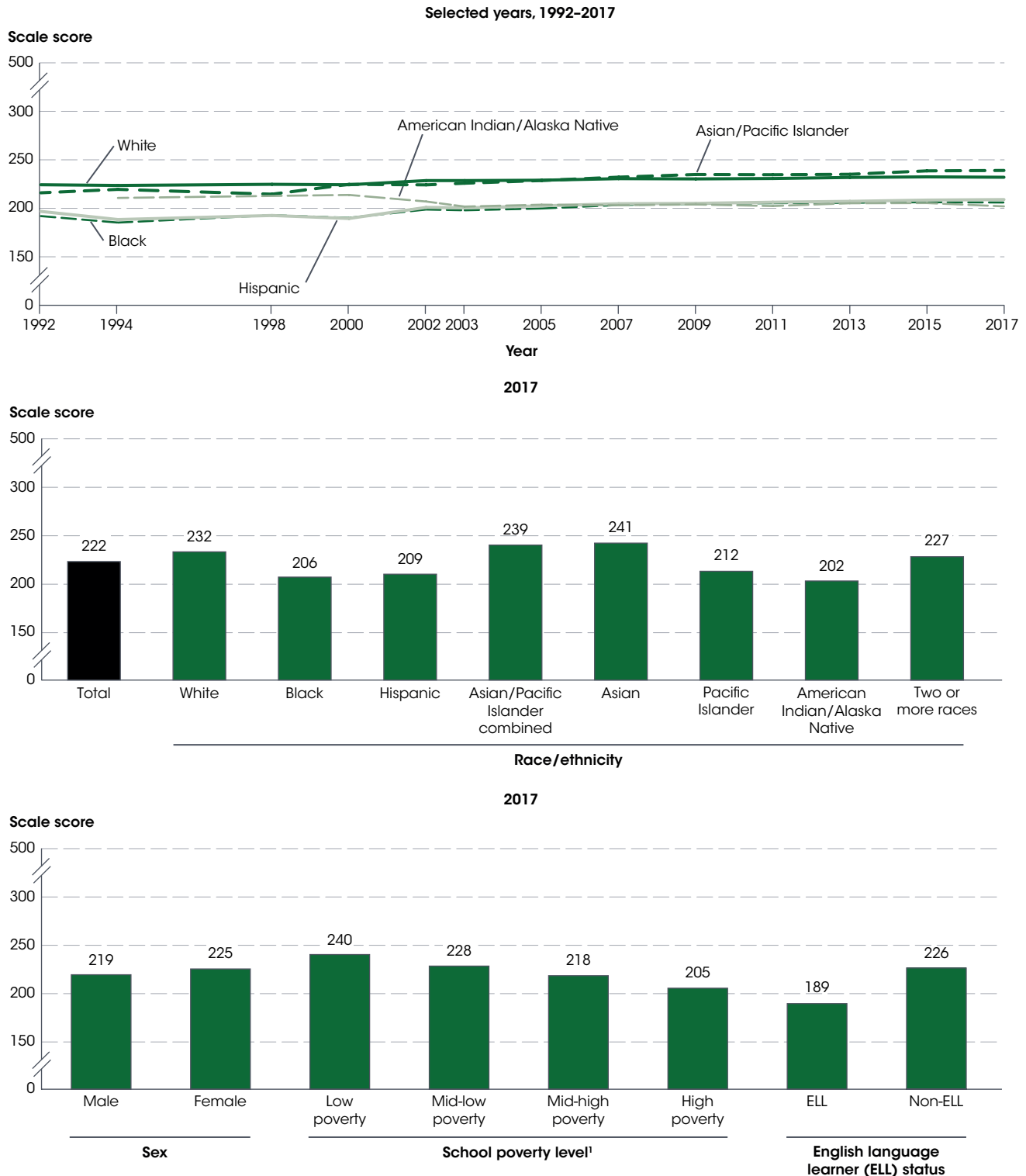
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), selected years, 1992–2017 Reading Assessments, NAEP Data Explorer. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 221.12.

In 2017, some 68 percent of 4th-grade students performed at or above the *Basic* achievement level in reading, 37 percent performed at or above the *Proficient* level, and 9 percent performed at the *Advanced* level. The percentage of 4th-grade students who performed at or above *Basic* in 2017 was not measurably different from the percentage in 2015, but it was higher than the percentage in 1992 (62 percent). In addition, the percentage of 4th-grade students who performed at or above *Proficient* in 2017 was not measurably different from the percentage in 2015, but it was higher than the percentage in 1992 (29 percent). Similarly, the percentage of 4th-grade students who performed at the *Advanced* achievement level in 2017 was not measurably different from the percentage in 2015, but it was higher than the percentage in 1992 (6 percent).

In 2017, some 76 percent of 8th-grade students performed at or above *Basic* in reading, 36 percent performed at or above *Proficient*, and 4 percent performed at the *Advanced* level. The percentage of 8th-grade students who performed at or above *Basic* in 2017 was not measurably different from the percentage in 2015, but it was higher than the percentage in 1992 (69 percent). A higher percentage of

8th-grade students performed at or above *Proficient* in 2017 than in both 2015 and 1992 (34 and 29 percent, respectively). The percentage of 8th-grade students who performed at the *Advanced* level was higher in 2017 than in 1992 (3 percent). In addition, a higher percentage of 8th-grade students performed at the *Advanced* level in 2017 than in 2015, although in both years the percentage rounded to 4 percent (3.6 percent in 2015 and 4.3 percent in 2017).

In 2015, some 72 percent of 12th-grade students performed at or above *Basic* in reading, 37 percent performed at or above *Proficient*, and 6 percent performed at the *Advanced* level. A lower percentage of 12th-grade students performed at or above *Basic* in 2015 than in 2013 (75 percent) and 1992 (80 percent). The percentage of 12th-graders who performed at or above *Proficient* in 2015 (37 percent) was not measurably different from the percentage in 2013, but it was lower than the percentage in 1992 (40 percent). A higher percentage of 12th-grade students performed at the *Advanced* level in 2015 (6 percent) than in 2013 and 1992 (5 and 4 percent, respectively).

Figure 3. Average National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scale scores of 4th-grade students, by selected characteristics: Selected years, 1992–2017

¹ High-poverty schools are defined as schools where 76 to 100 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL). Mid-high poverty schools are those schools where 51 to 75 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL, and mid-low poverty schools are those schools where 26 to 50 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL. Low-poverty schools are defined as schools where 25 percent or less of the students are eligible for FRPL. For more information on eligibility for FRPL and its relationship to poverty, see NCES blog post "[Free or reduced price lunch: A proxy for poverty?](#)"

NOTE: Includes public and private schools. The reading scale scores range from 0 to 500. Scale scores for American Indian/Alaska Native students were suppressed in 1992 and 1998 because reporting standards were not met (too few cases for a reliable estimate). Testing accommodations (e.g., extended time, small group testing) for children with disabilities and English language learners were not permitted in 1992 and 1994. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), selected years, 1992–2017 Reading Assessments, NAEP Data Explorer. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, tables 221.10 and 221.12.

At grade 4, the average 2017 reading scores for White (232), Black (206), Hispanic (209), and Asian/Pacific Islander students (239) were not measurably different from the corresponding scores in 2015, but the average reading score for each group was higher in 2017 than in 1992 (224, 192, 197, and 216, respectively). In 2017, the average score for American Indian/Alaska Native 4th-graders (202) was not measurably different from the scores in 2015 and 1994 (1994 was the first year data were available for 4th-grade American Indian/Alaska Native students). In 2011, NAEP began reporting separate data for Asian students, Pacific Islander students, and students of Two or more races.⁴ The 2017 average 4th-grade reading scores for Pacific Islander students (212) and students of Two or more races (227) were not measurably different from their respective scores in 2015 and 2011. The 2017 average reading score for Asian students (241) was not measurably different from the score in 2015, but it was higher than the score in 2011 (236).

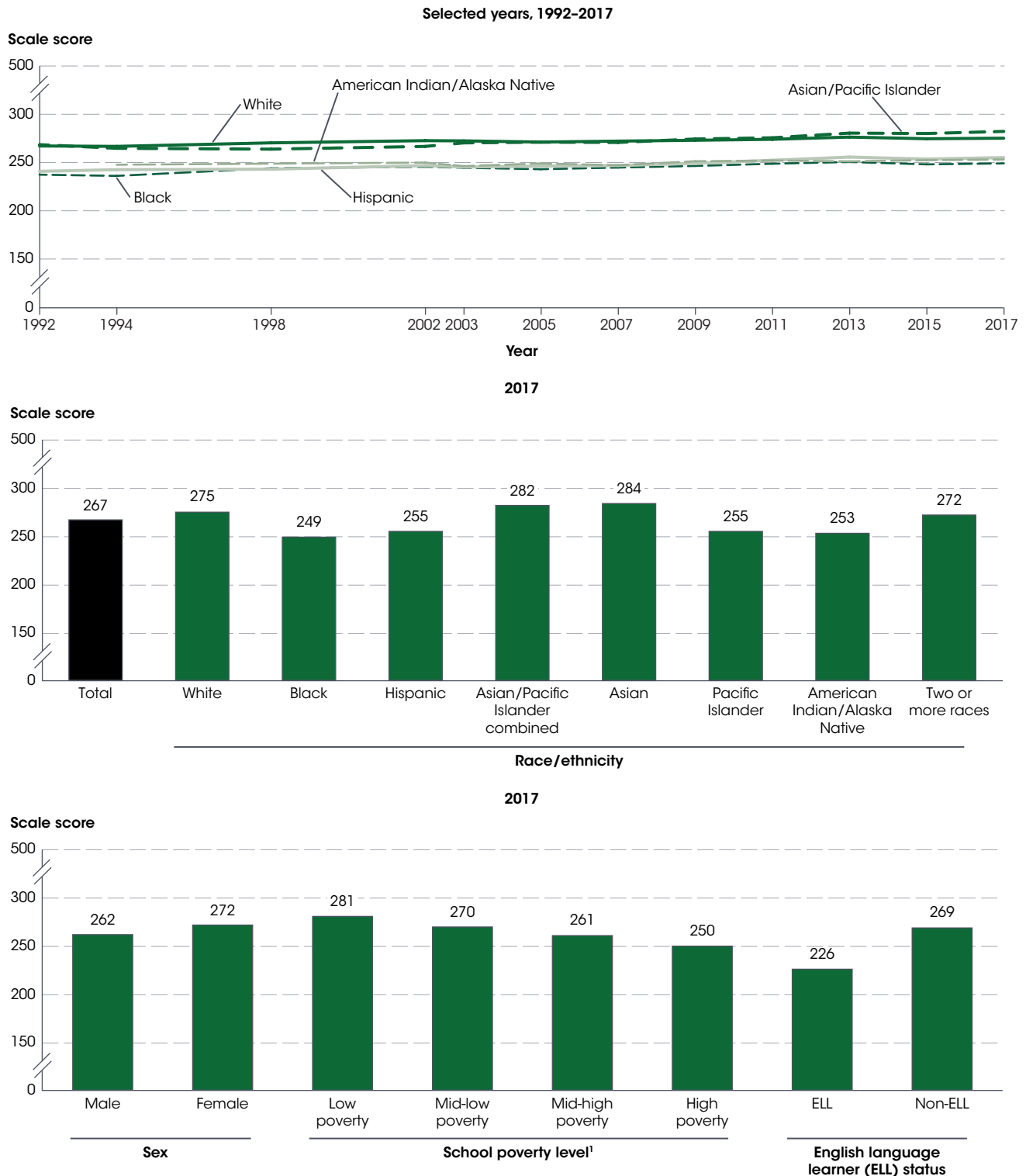
From 1992 through 2017, the average reading score for White 4th-graders was higher than those of their Black and Hispanic peers. Although the White-Black and White-Hispanic achievement gaps did not change measurably from 2015 to 2017, the White-Black gap narrowed from 32 points in 1992 to 26 points in 2017.

The White-Hispanic gap in 2017 (23 points) was not measurably different from the White-Hispanic gap in 1992.

At grade 4, the average reading scores for male (219) and female (225) students in 2017 were not measurably different from those in 2015 but were higher than those in 1992 (213 and 221, respectively). In each year since 1992, female students have scored higher than male students at grade 4. The 2017 achievement gap between male and female 4th-grade students (6 points) was not measurably different from the male-female gaps in 2015 and 1992.

NAEP also disaggregates scores by students' English language learner (ELL) status and by the poverty level of the school they attended. In 2017, the average reading score for 4th-grade ELL students (189) was 37 points lower than the average score for their non-ELL peers (226).⁵ In 2017, the average reading score for 4th-grade students in high-poverty schools (205) was lower than the average scores for 4th-grade students in mid-high poverty schools (218), mid-low poverty schools (228), and low-poverty schools (240). At grade 4, the 2017 achievement gap between students at high-poverty and low-poverty schools (35 points) was not measurably different from the corresponding achievement gaps in 2005 and 2015.

Figure 4. Average National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scale scores of 8th-grade students, by selected characteristics: Selected years, 1992–2017



¹ High-poverty schools are defined as schools where 76 to 100 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL). Mid-high poverty schools are those schools where 51 to 75 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL, and mid-low poverty schools are those schools where 26 to 50 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL. Low-poverty schools are defined as schools where 25 percent or less of the students are eligible for FRPL. For more information on eligibility for FRPL and its relationship to poverty, see NCEES blog post "[Free or reduced price lunch: A proxy for poverty?](#)"

NOTE: Includes public and private schools. The reading scale scores range from 0 to 500. Scale scores for American Indian/Alaska Native students were suppressed in 1992 and 1998 because reporting standards were not met (too few cases for a reliable estimate). Testing accommodations (e.g., extended time, small group testing) for children with disabilities and English language learners were not permitted in 1992 and 1994. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), selected years, 1992–2017 Reading Assessments, NAEP Data Explorer. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, tables 221.10 and 221.12.

At grade 8, the average reading scores for White (275), Black (249), Hispanic (255), and Asian/Pacific Islander (282) students in 2017 were not measurably different from the corresponding scores in 2015, but the average score for each group was higher in 2017 than in 1992 (267, 237, 241, and 268, respectively). In 2017, the average score for 8th-grade American Indian/Alaska Native students (253) was not measurably different from the scores in 2015 and 1994 (1994 was the first year data were available for 8th-grade American Indian/Alaska Native students). In 2011, NAEP began reporting separate data for Asian students, Pacific Islander students, and students of Two or more races. At grade 8, the 2017 average reading scores for Pacific Islander students (255) and students of Two or more races (272) were not measurably different from the scores in 2015 and 2011. However, while the 2017 average reading score for Asian 8th-graders (284) was not measurably different from the score in 2015, it was higher than the score in 2011 (277).

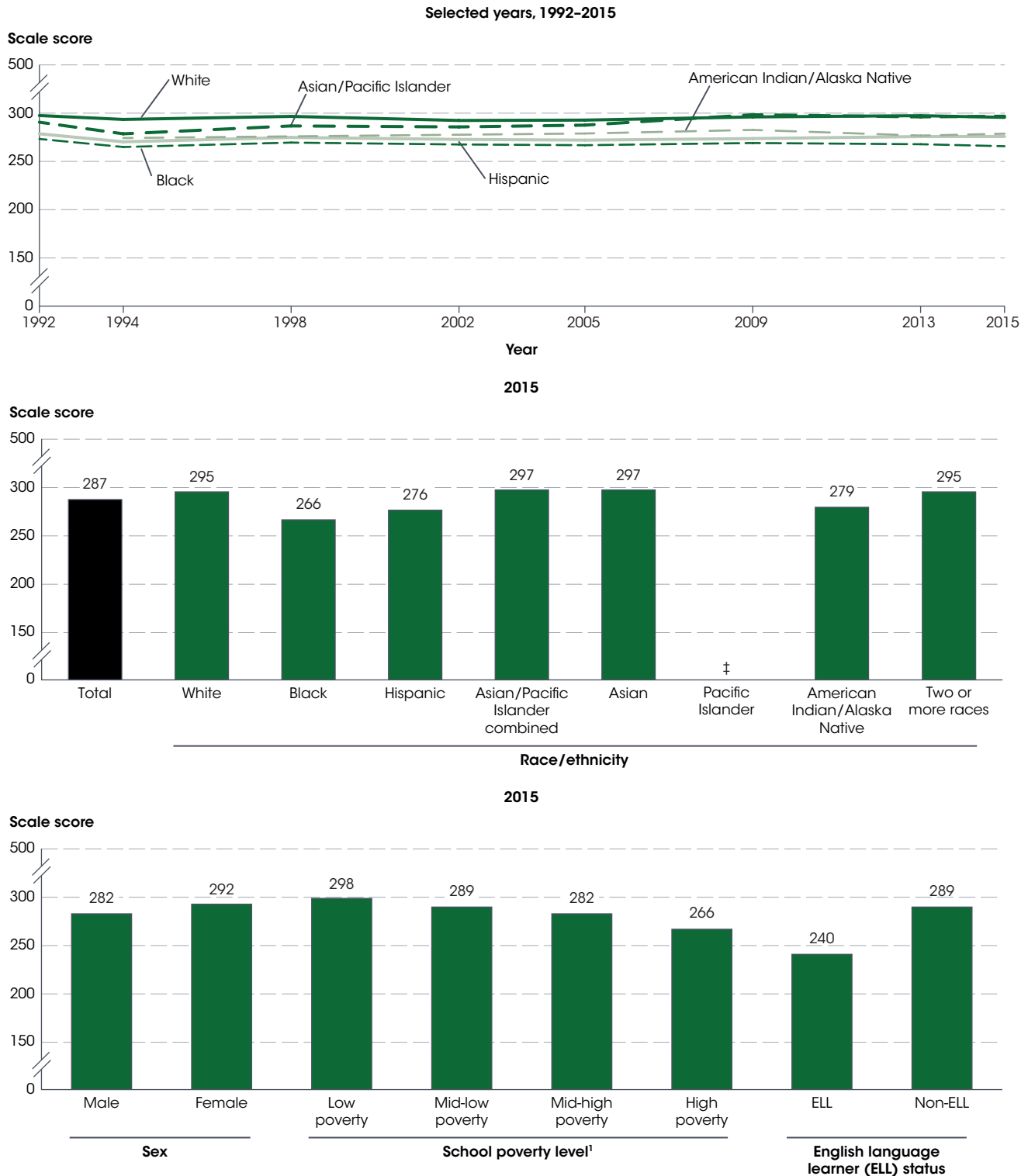
From 1992 through 2017, the average reading score for White 8th-graders was higher than the scores of their Black and Hispanic peers. Although the White-Black and White-Hispanic achievement gaps at grade 8 did not change measurably from 2015 to 2017, the White-Hispanic gap narrowed from 26 points in 1992

to 19 points in 2017. The White-Black gap in 2017 (25 points) was not measurably different from the White-Black gap in 1992.

At grade 8, the average reading scores in 2017 for both male (262) and female students (272) were not measurably different from the corresponding scores in 2015 but were higher than the scores in 1992 (254 and 267, respectively). In each year since 1992, female students have scored higher than male students at grade 8. The 2017 achievement gap between male and female 8th-grade students (10 points) was not measurably different from the male-female achievement gaps in 2015 and 1992.

In 2017, the average reading score for 8th-grade ELL students (226) was 43 points lower than the average score for their non-ELL peers (269). The average 2017 reading score for 8th-grade students in high-poverty schools (250) was lower than the average scores for 8th-grade students in mid-high poverty schools (261), mid-low poverty schools (270), and low-poverty schools (281). At grade 8, the 2017 achievement gap between students at high-poverty and low-poverty schools (31 points) was not measurably different from the corresponding achievement gap in 2015, but was smaller than the gap in 2005 (34 points).

Figure 5. Average National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scale scores of 12th-grade students, by selected characteristics: Selected years, 1992–2015



†Reporting standards not met. There were too few cases for a reliable estimate.

¹ High-poverty schools are defined as schools where 76 to 100 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL). Mid-high poverty schools are those schools where 51 to 75 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL, and mid-low poverty schools are those schools where 26 to 50 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL. Low-poverty schools are defined as schools where 25 percent or less of the students are eligible for FRPL. For more information on eligibility for FRPL and its relationship to poverty, see NCES blog post "[Free or reduced price lunch: A proxy for poverty?](#)"

NOTE: Includes public and private schools. The reading scale scores range from 0 to 500. Assessment was not conducted for grade 12 in 2017. Scale scores for American Indian/Alaska Native students were suppressed in 1992, 1998, and 2002 because reporting standards were not met (too few cases for a reliable estimate). Testing accommodations (e.g., extended time, small group testing) for children with disabilities and English language learners were not permitted in 1992 and 1994. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), selected years, 1992–2015 Reading Assessments, NAEP Data Explorer. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, tables 221.10 and 221.12.

At grade 12, the average 2015 reading scores for White (295), Hispanic (276), and Asian/Pacific Islander students (297) were not measurably different from the scores in 2013 and 1992. For Black students, the 2015 average score (266) was lower than the 1992 score (273) but not measurably different from the 2013 score. The average score for American Indian/Alaska Native students in 2015 (279) was not measurably different from the scores in 2013 and 1994 (1994 was the first year data were available for 12th-grade American Indian/Alaska Native students). In 2013, NAEP began reporting separate data at the 12th-grade level for Asian students, Pacific Islander students, and students of Two or more races. The 2015 average scores for Asian students (297) and students of Two or more races (295) were not measurably different from the scores in 2013. The average score for Pacific Islanders was 289 in 2013, but was suppressed in 2015 because reporting standards were not met. The White-Black achievement gap for 12th-grade students was wider in 2015 (30 points) than in 1992 (24 points), while the White-Hispanic gap in 2015 (20 points) was not measurably different from the gap in any previous assessment year.

The 2015 average reading scores for male (282) and female (292) 12th-grade students were not measurably different from the scores in 2013 but were lower than the scores in 1992 (287 for males and 297 for females). The achievement gap between male and female students at grade 12 in 2015 (10 points) was not measurably different from the male-female achievement gaps in 2013 and 1992.

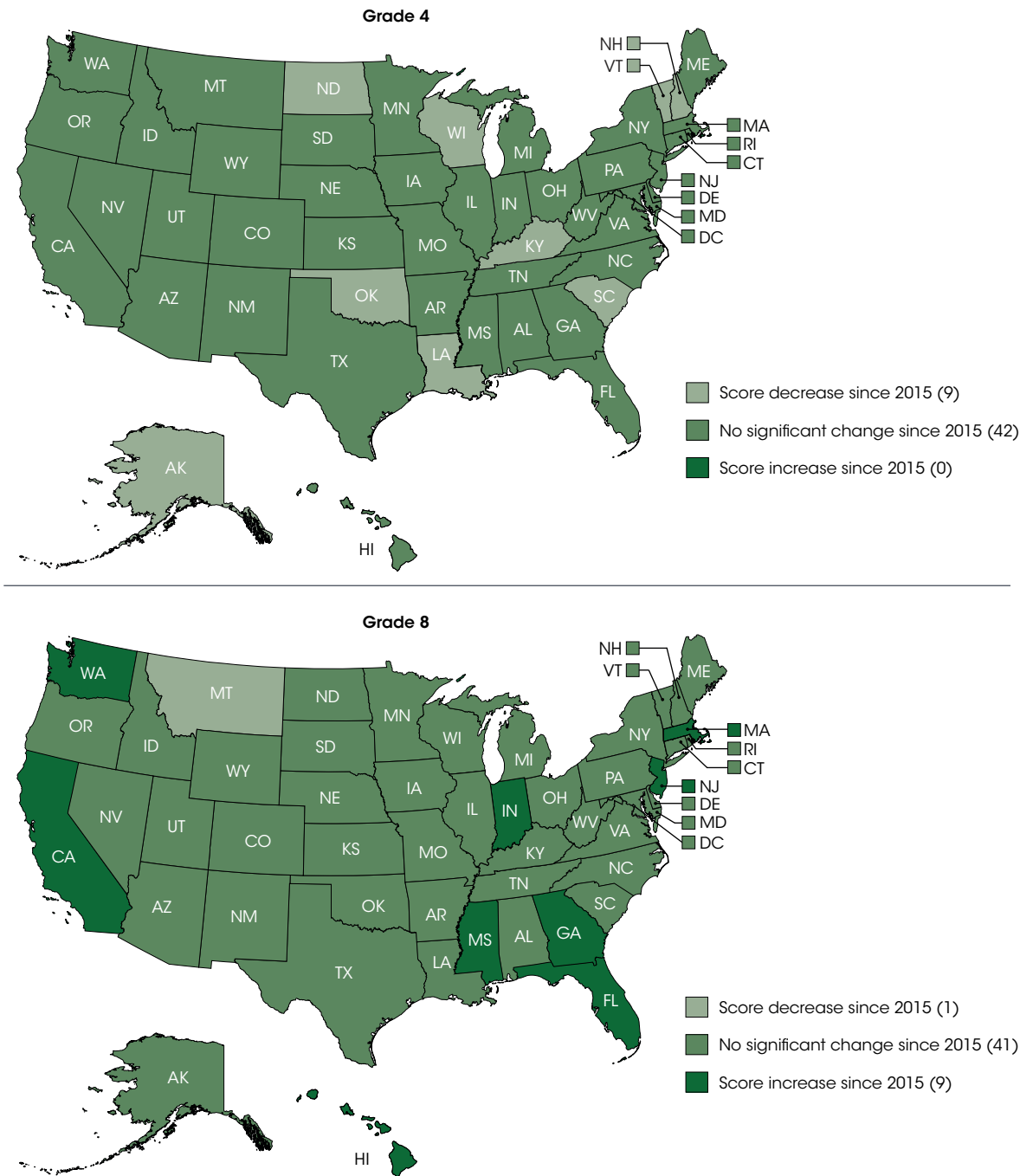
In 2015, the average reading score for 12th-grade ELL students (240) was 49 points lower than the score for their non-ELL peers (289). In addition, the average reading

score for 12th-grade students in high-poverty schools (266) was lower than the average scores for 12th-grade students in mid-high poverty schools (282), mid-low poverty schools (289), and low-poverty schools (298). At grade 12, the 2015 achievement gap between students at high-poverty and low-poverty schools (32 points) was not measurably different from the corresponding achievement gap in 2005 and 2013.

NAEP results also permit state-level comparisons of the reading achievement of 4th- and 8th-grade students in public schools.⁶ In 2017, the national average score for public school students at grade 4 was 221, and scores across states ranged from 207 to 236. In 19 states, average scores for 4th-grade students in public schools were higher than the national average score for 4th-grade students in public schools. Average scores for 4th-grade public school students in 16 states were not measurably different from the national average for public school students. Average scores in the District of Columbia and the remaining 15 states were lower than the national average for public school students.

At grade 8, the national average reading score for public school students in 2017 was 265, and scores across states ranged from 247 to 278. In 18 states, average scores for public school students in 2017 were higher than the national average for 8th-grade students in public schools, and in 15 states public school students had average scores that were not measurably different from the national average. Average scores in the District of Columbia and the remaining 17 states were lower than the national average for 8th-grade students in public schools.

Figure 6. Change in average National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scale scores of 4th- and 8th-grade public school students, by state: 2015 to 2017



NOTE: The reading scale scores range from 0 to 500.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 and 2017 Reading Assessments, Nations Report Card (<http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/>). See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, tables 221.40 and 221.60.

While there was no measurable change from 2015 to 2017 in the average reading score for 4th-grade public school students nationally, average scores were lower in 2017 than in 2015 in nine states. The average scores in the remaining 41 states and the District of Columbia showed no measurable change from 2015 to 2017. At the 8th-grade level, the national average reading score for public

school students was higher in 2017 than in 2015. It was also higher in 2017 than in 2015 in nine states, although it was lower in 2017 than in 2015 in one state (Montana). In the remaining 40 states and the District of Columbia, the average score for 8th-grade students in public schools showed no measurable change from 2015 to 2017.

Endnotes:

¹ This indicator presents data from the Main NAEP reading assessment, which is not directly comparable to the Long-Term Trend NAEP reading assessment. The Main NAEP reading assessment was first administered in 1992 and assesses student performance at grades 4, 8, and 12, while the Long-Term Trend NAEP reading assessment was first administered in 1971 and assesses student performance at ages 9, 13, and 17. In addition, the two assessments differ in the content assessed, how often the assessment is administered, and how the results are reported.

² NAEP reading scores for 4th-grade students in 2017 had a mean of 222 and a standard deviation (SD) of 38. NAEP reading scores for 8th-grade students in 2017 had a mean of 267 and an SD of 36. NAEP reading scores for 12th-grade students in 2015 had a mean of 287 and an SD of 41 (retrieved March 13, 2018, from the Main NAEP Data Explorer, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>).

³ For more information on NAEP scores by percentile, see the [Nation's Report Card](#) website.

⁴ While NAEP reported some data on students of Two or more races for earlier years, the reporting standards changed in 2011.

⁵ High-poverty schools are defined as schools where 76 to 100 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL). Mid-high poverty schools are those schools where 51 to 75 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL, and mid-low poverty schools are those schools where 26 to 50 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL. Low-poverty schools are defined as schools where 25 percent or less of the students are eligible for FRPL. Data disaggregated by school poverty level are presented for 2005 and later years because prior year data are not comparable.

⁶ NAEP results serve as a common metric for all states and are not comparable to results from assessments administered by state education agencies.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, tables 221.10, 221.12, 221.40, and 221.60

Related indicators and resources: [Absenteeism and Achievement](#) [*Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*]; [International Comparisons: Reading Literacy at Grade 4](#); [International Comparisons: Science, Reading, and Mathematics Literacy of 15-Year-Old Students](#); [Mathematics Performance](#); [Reading Achievement](#) [*Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*]; [Reading and Mathematics Score Trends](#); [Science Performance](#); [Technology and Engineering Literacy](#)

Glossary: Achievement gap; Achievement levels, NAEP; English language learner (ELL); Public school or institution; Racial/ethnic group