



The Daily Dish

Why Is Nobody Talking About This?

DOUGLAS HOLTZ-EAKIN | SEPTEMBER 16, 2024

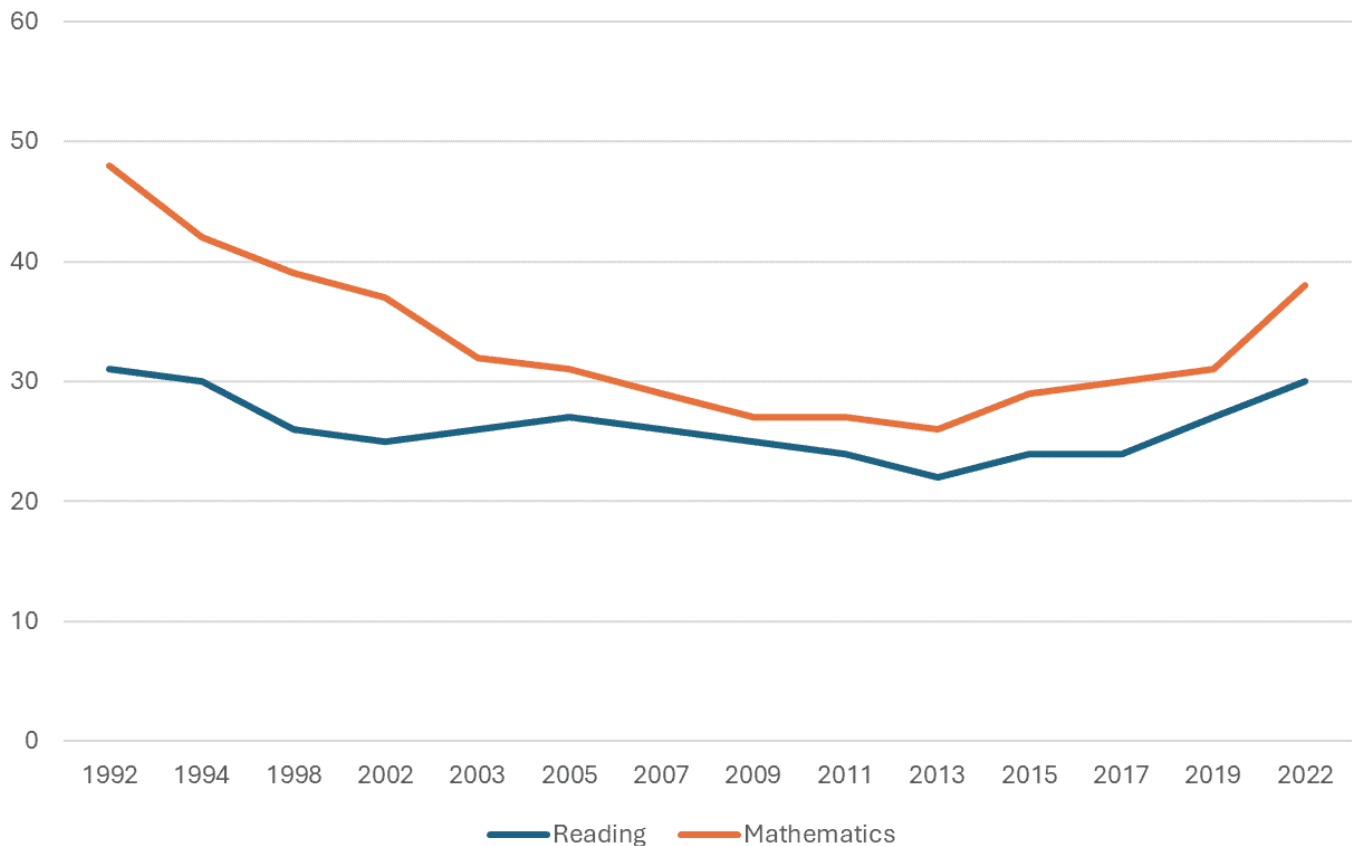
The presidential race has featured a debate over pet safety and immigrant dietary choices. It has dueling “don’t tax tips” plans. It has empty pledges to weaponize the Federal Trade Commission to rein in grocers run amok, as well as to end the weaponization of the entire federal government against the people. I mean, these people can *talk*.

Why, then, can’t they note the fact that America’s children are not learning and tell us what they plan to do about it?

(To be fair, the Harris [website](#), which finally added a policy section, does say: “She will strengthen public education and training as a pathway to the middle class.” Whew! Thanks for spelling that out!)

The chart below shows data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress ([NAEP](#)). The graph displays the fraction of 8th graders who fall below basic skills in reading (blue) and mathematics (orange). It tells a dismal tale, and the same basic picture appears for 4th graders as well.

NAEP Scores Fraction Below Basic Skills



There are two striking features of the data. First, these lines are way too high up. These are the least proficient students, and they are not a tiny minority, like 1, 2, or 5 percent. The lines have never been below 20 percent and currently reside at 30 percent or higher. This is a big problem. The second feature is the recent deterioration in performance. But it is not “worse since 2020.” The performance has declined since 2013. It is a decade-long failure.

Failure to teach basic skills guarantees that these students will not be effective workers in the future labor market. Their opportunity to succeed has already been greatly diminished, and the necessity for a larger safety net will be a burden on everyone. It is criminal that this is not part of the presidential debate.