

# Improvement in Science, Not Reading and Writing

New York Times

Washington

American students have gained almost a full grade level in science proficiency since the 1983 report "A Nation at Risk" described a crisis in American schools. But there have been no gains in reading and writing skills and overall achievement levels are far below national goals, the Department of Education said yesterday.

A long-standing gap in the achievement levels of white and minority students is continuing, too, according to a department report on trends in education. The slow but steady progress made by minority students in the early 1980s has stalled, officials said.

"I am afraid that too many of our minority youth — young people who have the potential to learn — are using ignorance as a symbol of their own despair," Education Secretary Richard Riley said.

Department officials attempted to paint the report as a first glimmer of hope in what has been a persistently bleak educational landscape. But the National Assessment of Educational Progress findings, done every two years, showed American students fortunate to just match the academic achievements of their parents, much less surpass them.

Among the findings:

- One-third of 17-year-olds said they are not required to do daily homework in all subjects.

- There has been an overall in-

crease in the amount of time spent watching television and a decrease in the reading materials kept at home over the past decade.

- Students 9 and 13 years old are reading more, but their proficiency level has declined.

- Fewer than 10 percent of 17-year-olds can do "rigorous" academic work in basic subjects.

- Only 2 percent of 11th-graders write well enough to meet na-

tional goals.

Education Department officials said the poor showing is the fault of a culture that still does not put a high priority on education. Despite reams of rhetoric and impassioned political speeches urging educational improvements, Riley said, few school districts have been given larger budgets.

School systems in the Southeast, a region that historically lagged behind national norms but

started to address deep-seated academic failings in the 1970s and 1980s, have shown the most improvement.

The report, which measured results in 1992, showed some minority students simply opting out of academics altogether. Riley spoke of a "drifting, angry" dropout population. In many areas, he said, "It is the kid who is working hard and excelling in school who is not part of the crowd."

Source From: August 17, 1994 San Francisco Chronicle

DH19940043E1