

NATIONAL
History Day
WORKS

**National Program Evaluation
Executive Summary**

JANUARY 2011



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NATIONAL HISTORY DAY

TEACHES

critical thinking, writing and research skills, and
boosts performance across all subjects

Prepares

students for college, work and citizenship

Inspires

students to do more than they ever thought they could

INTRODUCTION

Why Does History Education Matter?

The debate about American education continues to focus on what is wrong with our schools—on poor student achievement and reports of ineffective teachers—but where in the discussion is the demand for evidence about programs that are working?

National History Day is one of these programs. It is fostering outstanding achievement for students in all subject areas, not just history. It is shaping students into well-rounded, collaborative, independently motivated leaders who are prepared to lead. And it is doing it now, in 50 states around the country and beyond.

In the ongoing rhetoric and quest for education reform, the focus on global competitiveness lies at the heart of the debate. But the crucial role of the social sciences in American education has been marginalized. Subjects like English, history, civics and the arts play a central part in developing a well-rounded understanding of our contemporary global community—and the study of these topics develops the imperative 21st century skills that lie at the heart of individual future success and an American workforce equipped to compete in the global marketplace.

Without history, without civics education, American students will not be prepared to build upon the foundations of the past to continue to strengthen the democracy and economy of the future. Without the college- and career-ready skills of collaboration, research, writing and entrepreneurial thinking that come from the study of history and civics, students will not be prepared to handle impending—and complicated—global challenges.

The need to demonstrate the evidence-based, wide-ranging effectiveness of innovative, successful modes of teaching history is at a pivotal point. According to the most recent federal study of American students' academic ability in history, the 2006 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the “nation’s report card,” approximately half—47 percent—of U.S. 12th graders are performing at a “basic” level in history. And a little more than one in 10 high school seniors—13 percent—perform at a “proficient” level in the subject matter.¹

Against this backdrop, the National History Day history education organization identified the need for an evaluation of the program to prove its effectiveness and validate what its leaders have known anecdotally for years: The historical-research training, skills and experience of the program transform young people into scholars. And further, the innovative instruction from National History Day is linked to academic success and skills development across ALL subjects, not just history. It is not a program only for students who are gifted academically, but for all students—and all teachers.

As we look toward the future, creating the educators and system that will carry the next generation further into the new millennium, we cannot afford to leave history education behind.

ABOUT NATIONAL HISTORY DAY

Founded in 1974 on the campus of Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, National History Day (NHD) is a nationwide curriculum program and competition with a community-based approach that includes students, teachers, parents, historical societies and museums. Housed at the University of Maryland, it is the only program of its kind that involves middle and high school students in an immersive, innovative learning program about U.S. and global history—and that works with state and federal education standards for history and language arts. Teachers incorporate the NHD curriculum into their classrooms or offer the program as an extracurricular activity.

Annually, more than 600,000 middle and high school students participate in NHD by creating presentations that bring primary-source research to life through table-top exhibits, documentaries, live performances, Web sites and research papers. Participating students and teachers represent all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, American Samoa, and Department of Defense and International Schools abroad. The program is supported locally with “affiliate coordinators” at the state level who represent local historical societies and museums—a true partnership between historians and historical societies, educators and students. Students work together with teachers and local historical societies and museums

¹ Lee, Jihyun and Andrew R. Weiss. The Nation’s Report Card: U.S. History 2006. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences.

on yearlong history projects, culminating in local and state contests—and a final national competition, the Kenneth E. Behring National History Day Contest, held each June in College Park, Md.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW & METHODOLOGY IN BRIEF

With funding from Kenneth E. Behring and the U.S. Department of Education, NHD commissioned an independent research organization, Rockman et al, to develop and implement a research plan to explore the impact of the program; additional research promotion funding was provided by an anonymous challenge grant, HISTORY™, David and Janis Larson Foundation, H.F. “Gerry” Lenfest, Albert H. Small, Southwest Airlines and National History Day Board of Trustees, Staff, Judges & Affiliate Coordinators.

Research Design

During the 2009-2010 school year, researchers from Rockman et al examined students’ skills and knowledge across a range of measures: The research examined students’ academic performance on state standardized tests, not only in history or social studies, but also in other subjects where students’ skills might transfer. The study also included performance assessments, to see whether students could apply the research, writing and critical thinking skills developed through NHD participation—skills that track closely with the 21st century skills identified by educators and business leaders as the skills students need to enter college and the workplace fully prepared. Surveys asked students to rate their confidence in these skills and their interest in past and current events.

To conduct the research, Rockman recruited “study sites” from around the country; criteria included geographic representation, diversity in the student population and inclusion of under-represented minorities, and sufficient history with NHD to allow researchers to look at student performance over time. The four final sites included:

- Aldine Unified School District (Houston, Texas)
- Paterson School District (Paterson, New Jersey)
- Chesterfield County Schools (Cheraw and Chesterfield, South Carolina)
- A large urban/suburban district in Colorado²

In each site, researchers also recruited comparison classes, in the same subject and with similar demographics and academic level, to see how students who participated in National History Day compared with peers who did not participate in the program. The instruments and data collection for the study (described in detail in the full report) were designed to explore key questions about the impact of NHD participation. These key questions also frame the report:

² The school district requested that study reports not identify it by name.

- What skills do students gain from NHD participation, and, compared with their peers, how successfully can they apply them?
- Does NHD have a positive effect on students' performance on high-stakes tests — not just in social studies but also in other academic subjects?
- How do NHD students' interests in history, and their perspective on past and current events, compare with their peers'?
- Does NHD have a positive impact on all students, and does impact build over time?

Demographics

The final sample for the primary data (surveys and performance assessments) included 48 middle school students in Texas and Colorado (neither South Carolina nor New Jersey included middle schools), and 410 high school students from all four states, for a total student sample of 458 students, 274 of whom were NHD students, and 184 comparison-group students.

Compared with U.S. public school enrollment figures, representation of Black and Hispanic students was somewhat higher in the study sample than in the population as a whole — confirming that NHD achieved a study goal of oversampling under-represented populations — and the representation of white students, somewhat lower. The numbers of males and females were roughly equal.

More students — approximately 1,500 — were included in the analysis of secondary data, or student scores on state standardized tests. For the analyses of each test in each state, researchers created samples matched by gender, ethnicity and prior performance.

Data Analysis

For most survey and performance assessment items, researchers analyzed basic frequencies and descriptives, and ran cross-tabs to examine differences based on students' years of participation in NHD, gender, race or ethnicity, and site. Both the pre- and post-student surveys included identical sets of scaled items about students' 1) interest in historical periods, themes or issues; 2) confidence in research, writing and presentation skills; and 3) engagement in current events and issues. Researchers then compared pre-survey and post-survey responses from all NHD students (N=272) with those from all non-NHD students (N=183), looking at means for both groups, and conducting t-tests to examine between-group differences and calculate statistical significance.

Researchers also created composite interest, engagement and confidence mean scores for both sets of students, looking at differences between groups on both the pre- and post-surveys as well as pre- to post-changes, and running tests for significance. Using these three composite scores, they also looked at differences by state and by gender. The post-survey also included an item for NHD students about the perceived impact of NHD participation. Using regression analysis, researchers looked at the relationship between NHD students' perceptions of impact and their self-reported levels of interest, engagement and confidence.

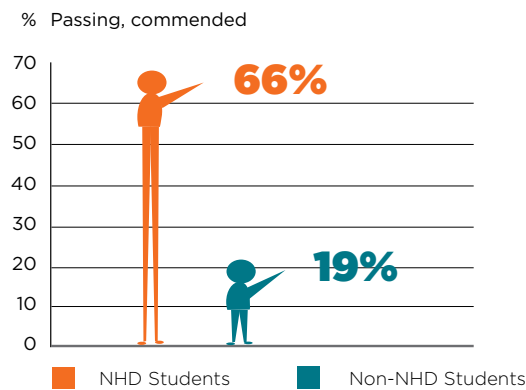
For the writing assessments, the research team developed a scoring rubric based on the NAEP persuasive essay rubric and the 6+1 Writing Traits rubric (see full report for details). Scorers were trained using the rubric and benchmark essays. Three researchers scored a sample of essays from each site, with site identifiers removed. At intervals during the scoring process, a second reader scored randomly sampled essays to ensure consistency and inter-rater reliability.

KEY FINDINGS

NHD students outperform their non-NHD peers on state standardized tests in multiple subjects, including reading, science and math, as well as social studies.

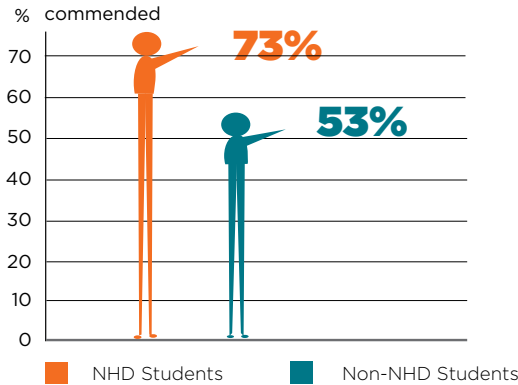
For example, in Texas, NHD students outperformed their non-NHD peers on TAKS tests in reading, science, math, and social studies. During four years of performance (2006-2010), NHD students scored more than twice as well on TAKS tests as non-NHD students. An average of nearly two thirds of NHD students had commended performance each year, compared to an average of 19 percent of non-NHD students (see Chart A).

Chart A: TAKS Test Performance—Texas



In 2008–2009, 87 percent of the NHD students achieved commended performance on the social studies assessment, compared with 37 percent of the comparison-group students; in 2009–2010, 73 percent of the NHD students received the highest rating, vs. 53 percent of the comparison-group students (see Chart B).

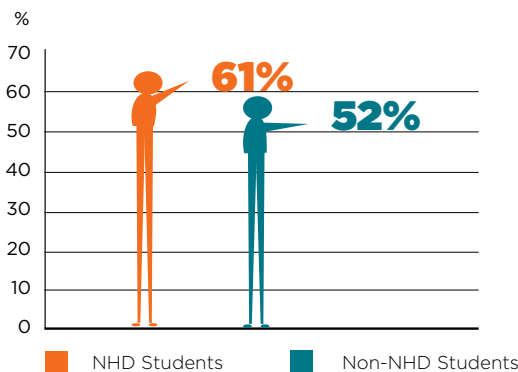
Chart B: TAKS Commended Performance Rates, Social Studies—Texas



NHD students in South Carolina outperformed their non-NHD peers on English and history assessments.

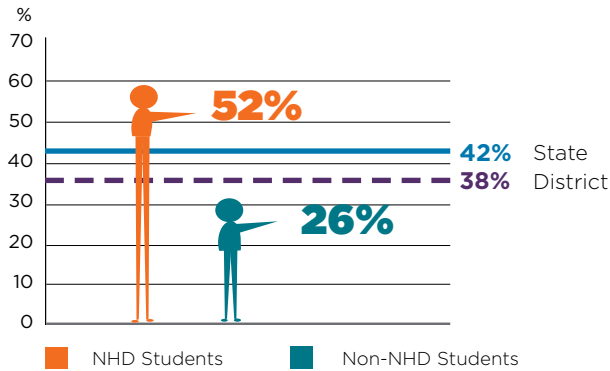
In the South Carolina school where students continued NHD participation from 8th grade to 9th grade and beyond, NHD high school students led their school district with a 61 percent passing rate in English 1—9 percentage points above a comparison site (see Chart C).

Chart C: Passing Rates for English I—South Carolina



On the 2008-2009 South Carolina U.S. History and the Constitution end-of-course test, the NHD high school led the district with a 52 percent passing rate—26 percentage points above the other (non-NHD) high school in the district, 14 points above the district rate, and 9 points above the state rate (see Chart D).

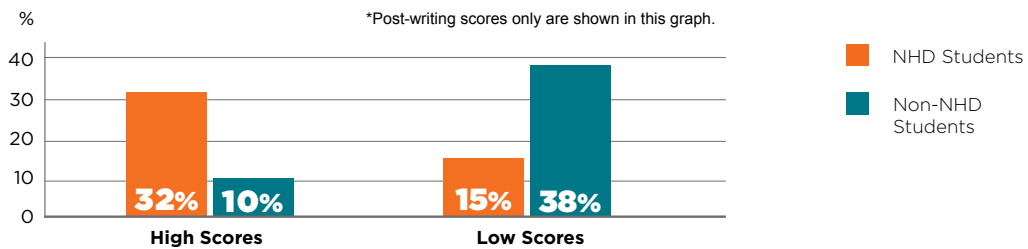
Chart D: U.S. History & the Constitution End-of-Course Exam, Passing Rates—South Carolina



NHD students are better writers—they write with a purpose and real voice, and they marshal solid evidence to support their points of view. NHD students had more exemplary writing scores and fewer low scores than comparison students.

Overall, NHD students outscored comparison-group students on both pre- and post-writing assessments, receiving more exemplary scores (5s or 6s) on a 6-point scale (see Chart E).

Chart E: Writing Scores*



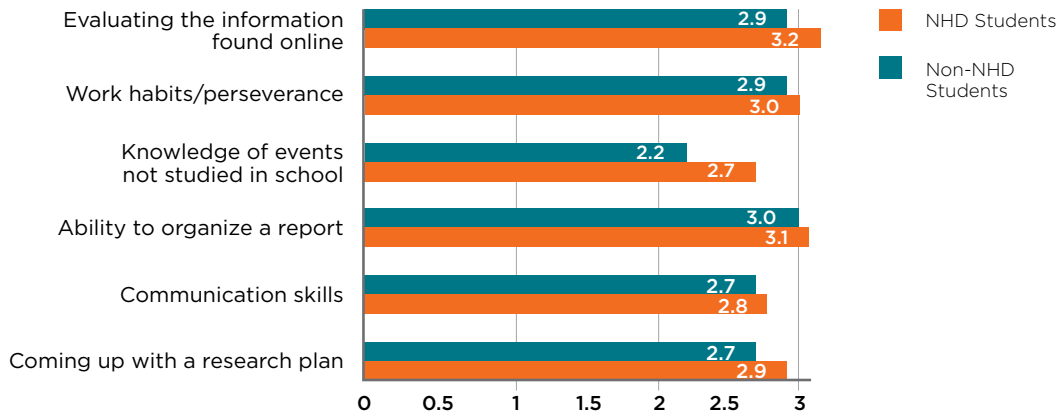
NHD has a positive impact among students whose interests in academic subjects may wane in high school.

- Among Black and Hispanic students, NHD students outperform non-NHD students, posting higher performance assessment scores and levels of interest and skills.
- Compared with non-NHD boys and with all girls, boys participating in NHD reported significantly higher levels of interest in history, civic engagement, and confidence in research skills, on both pre- and post-surveys.

NHD students learn 21st century college- and career-ready skills. They learn to collaborate with team members, talk to experts, manage their time and persevere.

When asked about their confidence in a variety of career- and college-ready skills, NHD students have an edge over their peers. NHD students consistently express more confidence than students who do not participate in NHD, in research skills, public speaking, the ability to organize a report, knowledge of current events, work habits, evaluating sources, and writing skills (see Chart F).

Chart F: Confidence Ratings on College- and Career-Ready Skills
Out of a 4-point scale



NHD students are critical thinkers who can digest, analyze and synthesize information.

- Performance assessments show that NHD students were 18 percentage points better overall than their peers at interpreting historical information — an average of 79 percent correct vs. 61 percent correct.

For More Information

The full report—including detailed methodology and research instruments—can be found on the National History Day website: www.nhd.org/nhdworks, or follow the organization on Facebook (www.Facebook.com/NationalHistoryDay), Twitter ([@nationalhistory](https://twitter.com/nationalhistory)), and YouTube (www.YouTube.com/NationalHistory).

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