U.S. students lack basic geography knowledge

By Valerie Strauss, Washington Post

Newly released geography scores from the 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress show that fewer than one-third of the nation's fourth, eighth and 12th graders were proficient in the subject.

On the following seemingly easy question, only 33 percent of eighth-grade students who took the test got the correct answer:

Which of the following is an accurate statement about the American Southwest?

a) Alternating areas of dense shrubbery and sand dunes often make travel difficult.

b) Arid conditions make access to water an important public issue.

c) Generally fair weather means that most people rely on solar energy in their homes and businesses.

d) Easy access to Mexico has led to a strong manufacturing sector.

The correct answer is B.

And 33 percent of eighth graders indicated they had no understanding of the relationship between tectonic plates and earthquakes.

NAEP, administered to nationally representative samples of students by the National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education, is sometimes referred to as

the nation’s report card because it is the only K-12 assessment system given across the country. The 2010 assessment in geography was given to 7,000 fourth graders, 9,500 eighth graders and 10,000 twelfth graders.

Recently released scores on NAEP tests in civics and U.S. history, together with the geography results, generally show disappointing performance in the social sciences, particularly in the 12th grade.

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