



NEWS RELEASE

FOR RELEASE:
CONTACT:

Friday, February 15, 2019
Patrick Riccards (@Eduflack)
riccards@woodrow.org | (703) 298-8283

When It Comes to American History Knowledge, Woodrow Wilson Foundation Finds Only One State Can Pass U.S. Citizenship Exam

Results of New 50-State Survey Finds Only Four in 10 Can Demonstrate Basic History Understanding, Vermont Only State in Which a Majority Passed

PRINCETON, N.J. — Feb. 15, 2019 – As the nation celebrates Presidents’ Day and a number of states advance legislation to increase American history requirements for high school graduation, a new survey of 41,000 Americans conducted by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation demonstrates why a greater emphasis on American history learning is essential to the nation. The Foundation found that in the highest-performing state, only 53 percent of the people were able to earn a passing grade for U.S. history. **People in every other state failed; in the lowest-performing state, only 27 percent were able to pass.**

Among all 50 states and the District of Columbia, Vermonters were the sole group able to pass the multiple-choice test. Even more disturbing, only 27 percent of those under the age of 45 nationally were able to demonstrate a basic understanding of American history. Nationally, only four in 10 Americans passed the exam.

“Unfortunately, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation has validated what studies have shown for a century: Americans don’t possess the history knowledge they need to be informed and engaged citizens,” WW Foundation President Arthur Levine said.

The survey found only 15 percent of American adults could correctly note the year the U.S. Constitution was written and only 25 percent knew how many amendments there are to the U.S. Constitution. Further, 25 percent did not know that freedom of speech was guaranteed under the First Amendment, and 57 percent did not know that Woodrow Wilson was the commander in chief during World War I.

“American history education is not working, as students are asked to memorize dates, events and leaders, which the poll results shows are not retained in adulthood,” Levine said. “Based on our research, this is not an issue of whether high school history teachers are adequately prepared or whether kids study American history in school. The answer to both questions is yes. This is an issue of how we teach American history. Now it is too often made boring and robbed of its capacity to make sense of a chaotic present and inchoate future. Instead, knowledge of American history must serve as an anchor in a time when change assails us, a laboratory for studying the changes that are occurring

and a vehicle for establishing a common bond when social divisions are deep. This requires a fundamental change in how American history is taught and learned to make it relevant to our students lives, captivating and inclusive to all Americans.”

How the States Fared

The top four states following Vermont are Wyoming, South Dakota, Montana and Virginia.

The five lowest-performing states are Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky and Louisiana.

Complete state-by-state results can be found at the end of this release.

Lincoln Park Strategies conducted the poll for the Foundation. It involved 41,000 interviews among adults nationwide. The margin of error is approximately ± 1.0 percent.

Launch of Woodrow Wilson American History Initiative

These 50-state results, along with the national survey conducted in the fall by the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, demonstrate that a waning knowledge of American history may be one of the greatest educational challenges facing the U.S. As a result, the Foundation is launching a major national initiative to transform how American history is learned today, providing high school students with an interactive digital platform intended to make American history more interesting and appreciated by all learners, particularly those who do not see the importance history plays in the now and tomorrow.

Relying on the latest developments in cognitive learning, the Woodrow Wilson American History Initiative will offer experiential learning opportunities such as digital games, videos and graphic novels. Building on the Woodrow Wilson Foundation’s successful HistoryQuest Fellowship professional development program for social studies and civics teachers, the Initiative will also provide resources and learning opportunities for K–12 history teachers to improve their instructional practice.

###

About the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation

Founded in 1945, the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation identifies and develops the nation’s best minds to meet its most critical challenges. The Foundation supports its Fellows as the next generation of leaders shaping American society. www.woodrow.org

State-by-State Grades

Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation

State	A (90-100)	B (80-89)	C (70-79)	D (60-69)	F (59 or less)
Vermont	4%	13%	23%	13%	47%
Wyoming	7%	13%	15%	15%	51%
South Dakota	1%	15%	17%	15%	52%
Montana	3%	13%	15%	16%	53%
Virginia	5%	11%	14%	16%	54%
Nebraska	5%	10%	11%	20%	55%
Delaware	6%	9%	17%	14%	55%
Minnesota	2%	8%	17%	18%	55%
North Dakota	1%	8%	15%	21%	55%
Utah	5%	10%	17%	13%	55%
Maine	2%	10%	18%	14%	56%
Kansas	2%	11%	12%	18%	56%
Iowa	4%	12%	13%	14%	57%
New Hampshire	5%	8%	13%	17%	57%
Illinois	3%	9%	16%	15%	57%
Arizona	2%	8%	17%	16%	58%
Connecticut	3%	11%	14%	15%	58%
D.C.	7%	12%	15%	9%	58%
Massachusetts	3%	10%	14%	14%	58%
Rhode Island	4%	10%	13%	16%	58%
Wisconsin	3%	10%	14%	15%	58%
New Jersey	3%	11%	14%	14%	58%
Maryland	4%	10%	13%	14%	59%
Ohio	4%	9%	14%	15%	59%
Idaho	2%	9%	17%	14%	59%
Nevada	2%	11%	12%	16%	59%
Colorado	2%	10%	14%	15%	59%
Oregon	3%	11%	13%	14%	60%
Pennsylvania	4%	9%	12%	15%	60%
Washington	3%	9%	15%	13%	60%
California	4%	8%	13%	15%	60%
New York	4%	11%	11%	13%	60%
Hawaii	3%	7%	14%	16%	60%
Missouri	3%	8%	14%	15%	61%
North Carolina	4%	8%	13%	14%	61%
Florida	2%	7%	14%	15%	62%
Tennessee	3%	10%	12%	13%	62%
New Mexico	1%	12%	11%	14%	63%
Oklahoma	4%	7%	13%	14%	63%
Texas	3%	7%	12%	15%	63%
Indiana	3%	8%	12%	14%	64%
Michigan	2%	7%	14%	13%	64%
Alaska	3%	7%	10%	15%	65%

South Carolina	3%	7%	10%	14%	66%
West Virginia	5%	5%	5%	19%	66%
Georgia	3%	8%	11%	12%	67%
Mississippi	2%	7%	10%	13%	69%
Alabama	2%	7%	10%	12%	69%
Arkansas	3%	5%	10%	12%	70%
Kentucky	1%	6%	11%	11%	71%
Louisiana	4%	6%	9%	9%	73%