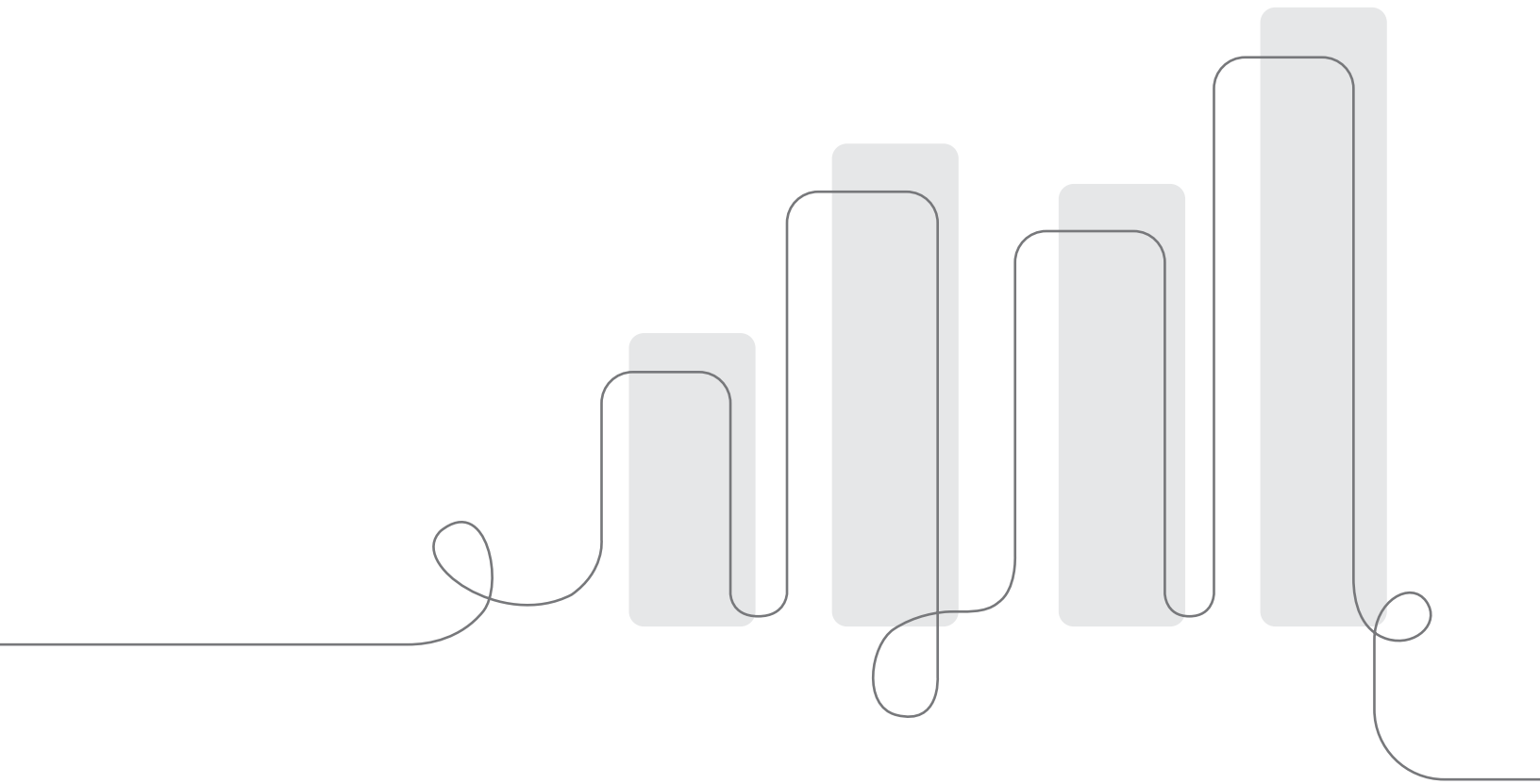# With end-of-year data showing continued academic recovery in early literacy, worries remain for third grade students.

July 2023

Amplify.

# Despite successes, third grade students exhibited the least improvement from two years ago and no improvement from the prior year's cohort.

The latest end-of-school-year data show that throughout the fall of 2022 and spring of 2023, schools across the country made meaningful progress reducing the number of students at risk for not learning to read. These successes are especially evident in the lower elementary grades (grades K–2). **The measurable disparities in achievement between Black and Hispanic students and their white and Asian peers have continued to narrow since the prior year.**

**Third grade students—who were in kindergarten when the pandemic began— exhibited the least improvement from two years ago and no improvement from the prior year's cohort.**

Over the past four years, elementary schools across the United States have been assessing students on early literacy skills with Amplify's mCLASS®. The data, collected by teachers interacting with students one on one, either live or over video, reveals instructional loss and the extent to which students have recovered from those losses.

> Third graders, the cohort of students most affected by lost instructional time during the pandemic, exhibited the least improvement in early literacy from two years ago and. no improvement from the prior year's cohort. The data demonstrates how literacy rates in the United States remain a crisis today, with too many students urgently needing support.

## About the data

The report compares mCLASS with DIBELS® 8th Edition benchmark data from the 2019–20, 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23 school years. From more than 2 million students assessed with mCLASS, approximately 300,000 students in a matched set of 1,400 schools in 43 states are represented. The schools in the source data are slightly more likely to be in large urban metropolitan areas than the nation overall.

## About mCLASS

The data was collected with mCLASS, Amplify's teacher-administered literacy assessment and intervention suite for grades K–6. mCLASS, powered by DIBELS 8th Edition, automates the data collection of Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), a widely-used series of short tests that assess K–8 literacy. Developed by the University of Oregon, DIBELS is an observational assessment collected by teachers interacting with students one-on-one, either live or over video. DIBELS is typically administered three times a year (beginning, middle, and end of year), and is used to identify reading difficulty, monitor progress, and inform instruction, especially for struggling readers.

## Explanation of assessment performance levels

| | DIBELS performance levels | Status | Instructional implications |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Above benchmark | On track | Ready for core instruction, likely to meet grade-level reading standards at end of year |
| | At benchmark | | |
| | Below benchmark | | Not far behind, require some strategic support, reasonably likely to meet end of year standards |
| | Well below benchmark | At risk | Far behind, require intensive intervention, unlikely to meet end of year standards |

## About Amplify

A pioneer in K–12 education since 2000, Amplify is leading the way in next-generation curriculum and assessment. Our captivating core and supplemental programs in literacy, math, and science engage all students in rigorous learning and inspire them to think deeply, creatively, and for themselves. Our formative assessment products turn data into practical instructional support to help all students build a strong foundation in early reading and math. All of our programs provide teachers with powerful tools that help them understand and respond to the needs of every student. Today, Amplify reaches more than 10 million students in all 50 states. To learn more, visit amplify.com.
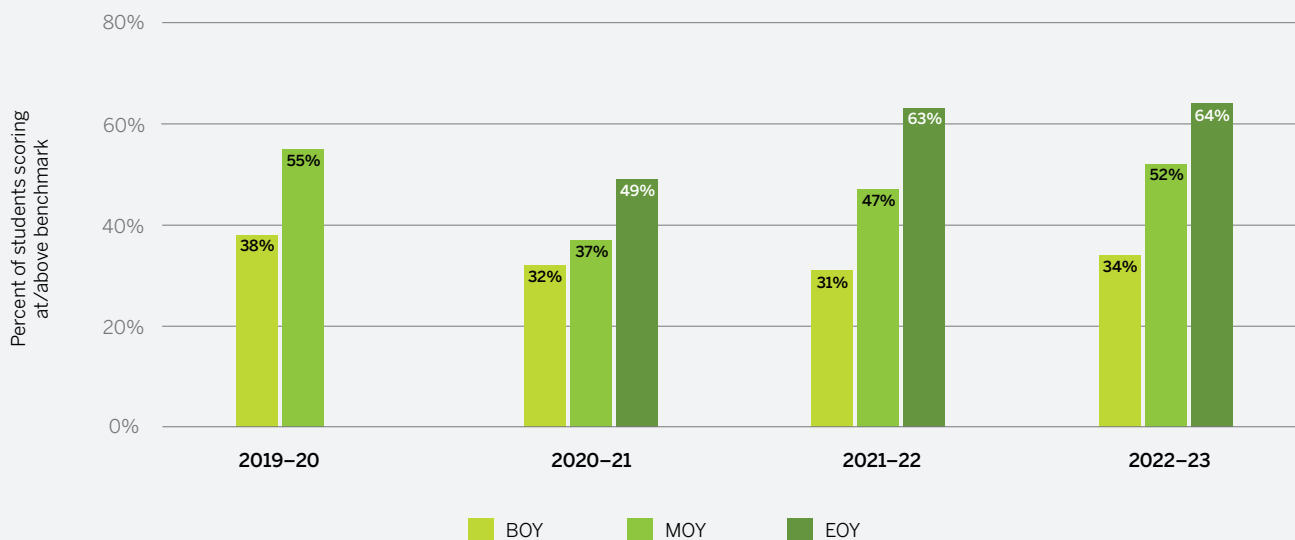
# Percentage of students on track at end of year

The following table shows grade-level results for all students in a matched cohort of schools from 2020–21 (the first year following the onset of the pandemic) and 2022–23. Underscoring just how great the impact of interrupted instruction from the pandemic was on the youngest learners, the percentage of students who end the year on track (ready for core instruction) has increased, by the end of 2022–23, in all of grades K–3 and by more than 10 points in the earliest grades (K–1). The lower improvements in grades 2–3 suggest some lingering impact on these cohorts, who saw their early years disrupted by the onset of the pandemic. **Third graders, the students with the most impacted instructional time, have not shown any improvement over the prior cohort (third graders from 2021–22).**

| Grade | Percentage at/above benchmark | | | | Change from | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Grade | 2019–20 | 2020–21 | 2021–22 | 2022–23 | 2020–21 | 2021–22 |
| Grade K | COVID | 49% | 63% | 64% | +15 pts | +1 pt |
| Grade 1 | COVID | 56% | 63% | 67% | + 11 pts | +4 pts |
| Grade 2 | COVID | 57% | 59% | 62% | +5 pts | +3 pts |
| Grade 3 | COVID | 54% | 57% | 57% | + 3 pts | 0 pts |

## Growth trends by grade

In kindergarten, not only are more students on track at the end of 2022–23 than in prior years, but the percentage has improved more within the school year than in prior years. In 2020–21, the percent of kindergarten students on track grew from 32% at the beginning of the year to 49% at the end of the year (+17 pts), whereas in 2022–23, the percentage grew from 34% at the beginning of the year to 64% at the end of the year (+30 pts).

**Kindergarten: Percent of students on track (ready for core instruction)**
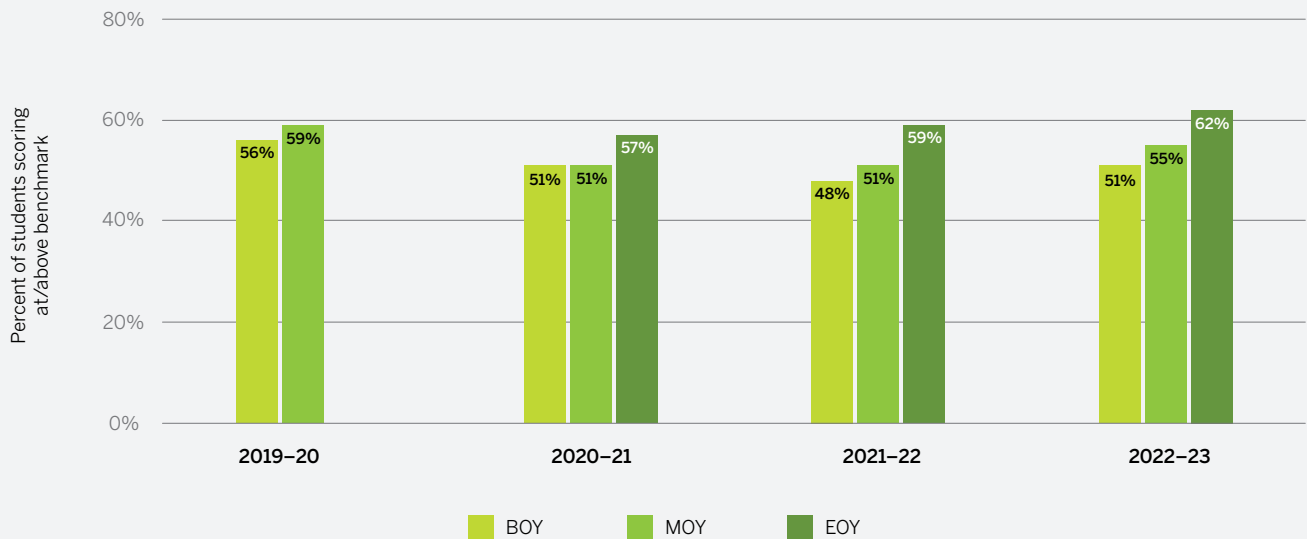
In first grade, the growth trends have been similar. In 2020–21, the percent of first grade students on track grew from 43% at the beginning of the year to 56% at the end of the year (+13 pts), whereas in 2022–23, the percentage grew from 47% at the beginning of the year to 67% at the end of the year (+20 pts).

**Grade 1: Percent of students on track (ready for core instruction)**
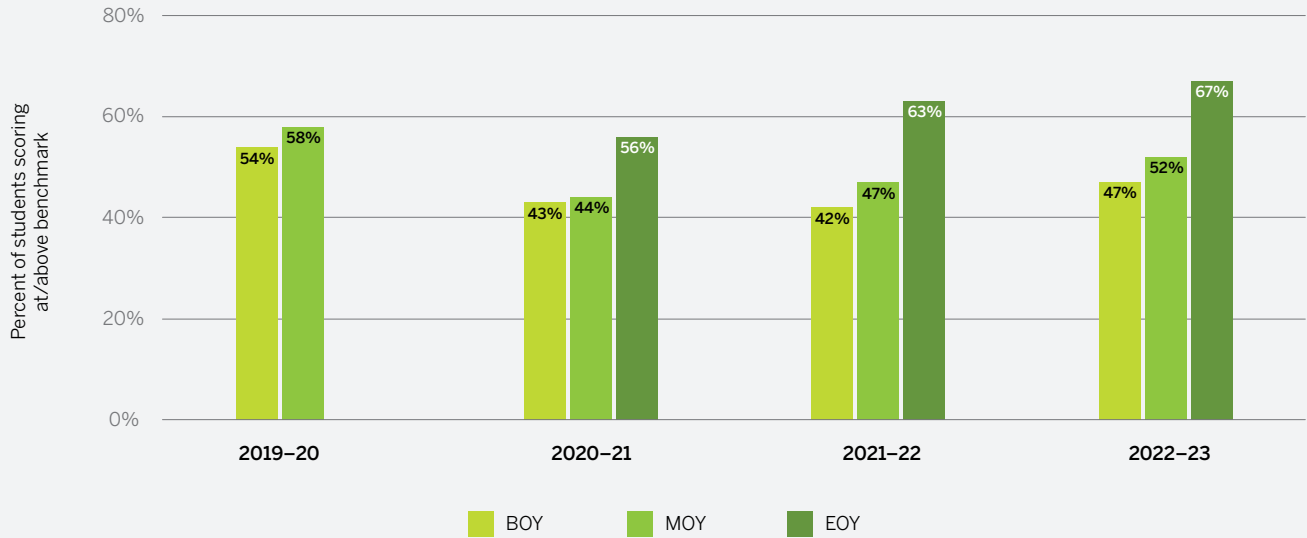


In second grade, the growth trends have been similar, but smaller than in kindergarten and first grade. In 2020–21, the percent of second grade students on track grew from 51% at the beginning of the year to 57% at the end of the year (+6 pts), whereas in 2022–23, the percentage grew from 51% at the beginning of the year to 62% at the end of the year (+11 pts).

**Grade 2: Percent of students on track (ready for core instruction)**

In third grade, the growth trends have been similar, but smaller than for other grades. In 2020–21, the percent of third grade students on track grew from 53% at the beginning of the year to 54% at the end of the year (+1 pt), whereas in 2022–23, the percentage grew from 53% at the beginning of the year to 57% at the end of the year (+4 pts). The percentages on track throughout the year in 2022–23 are better than in 2020–21, but are unchanged from those of the cohort from the year prior (2021–22).

**Grade 3: Percent of students on track (ready for core instruction)**
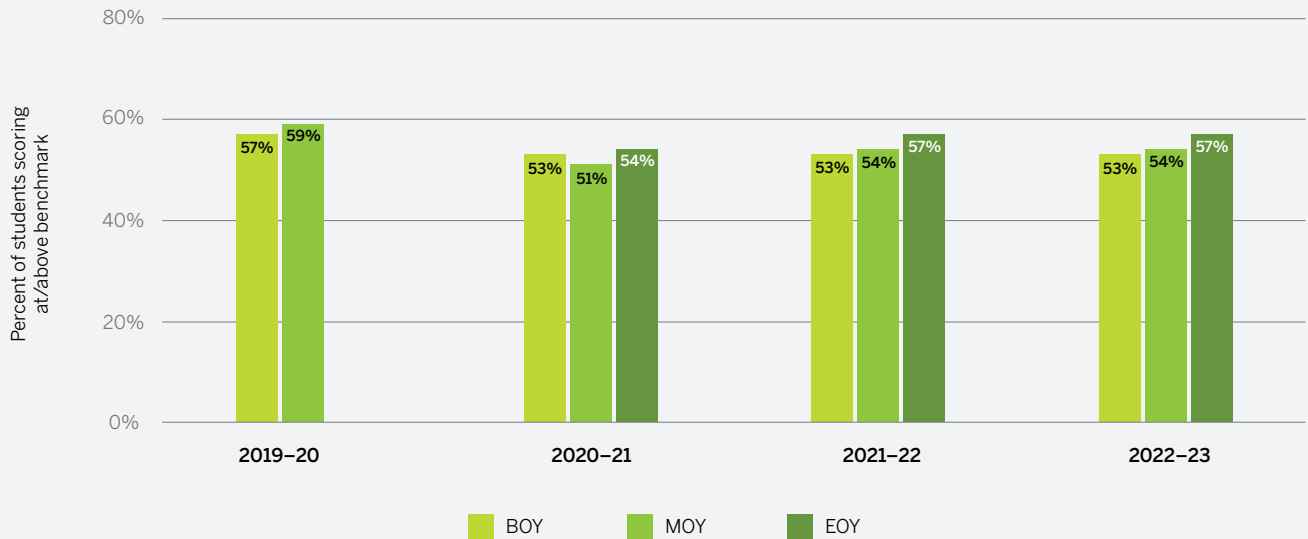
# Percentage of students far behind at end of year

The percentage of students who were at risk of reading difficulty at the end of the year has declined between 2020–21 (the first year following the onset of the pandemic) and 2022–23. The improvement has occurred in all of grades K–3, but is most notable in the earliest grades (K–1) where reductions in the percent of students at risk were greater than 10 points. The lower improvements in grades 2–3 suggest some lingering impact on these cohorts, who saw their early years disrupted by the onset of the pandemic. **Third graders, the students with the most impacted instructional time, have not shown any improvement over the prior cohort (third graders from 2021–22).**

| Grade | Percentage at/above benchmark | | | | Change from | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2019–20 | 2020–21 | 2021–22 | 2022–23 | 2020–21 | 2021–22 |
| Grade K | COVID | 38% | 25% | 22% | -16 pts | -3 pts |
| Grade 1 | COVID | 31% | 25% | 20% | -11 pts | -5 pts |
| Grade 2 | COVID | 29% | 28% | 25% | -4 pts | -3 pts |
| Grade 3 | COVID | 31% | 29% | 29% | -2 pts | 0 pts |

## Growth trends by grade

In kindergarten, not only are fewer students at risk at the end of 2022–23 than in prior years, but the percentage has declined (improved) more within the school year than in prior years. In 2020–21, the percent of kindergarten students at risk declined from 50% at the beginning of the year to 38% at the end of the year (-12 pts), whereas in 2022–23, the percentage dropped from 49% at the beginning of the year to 22% at the end of the year (-27 pts).

**Kindergarten: Percent of students far behind (needing intensive intervention)**
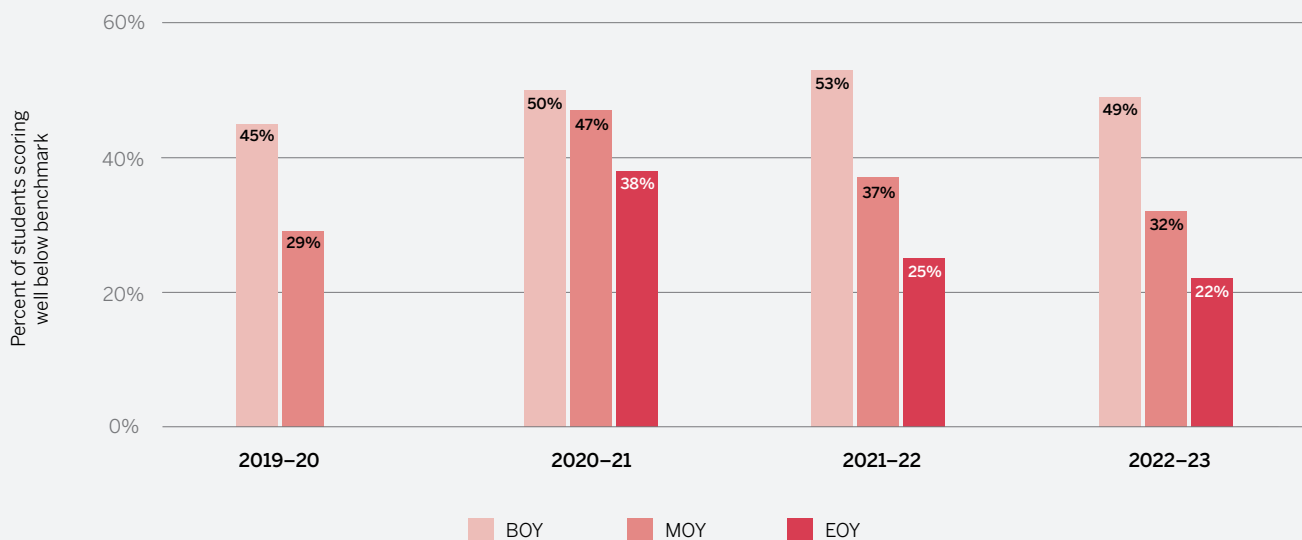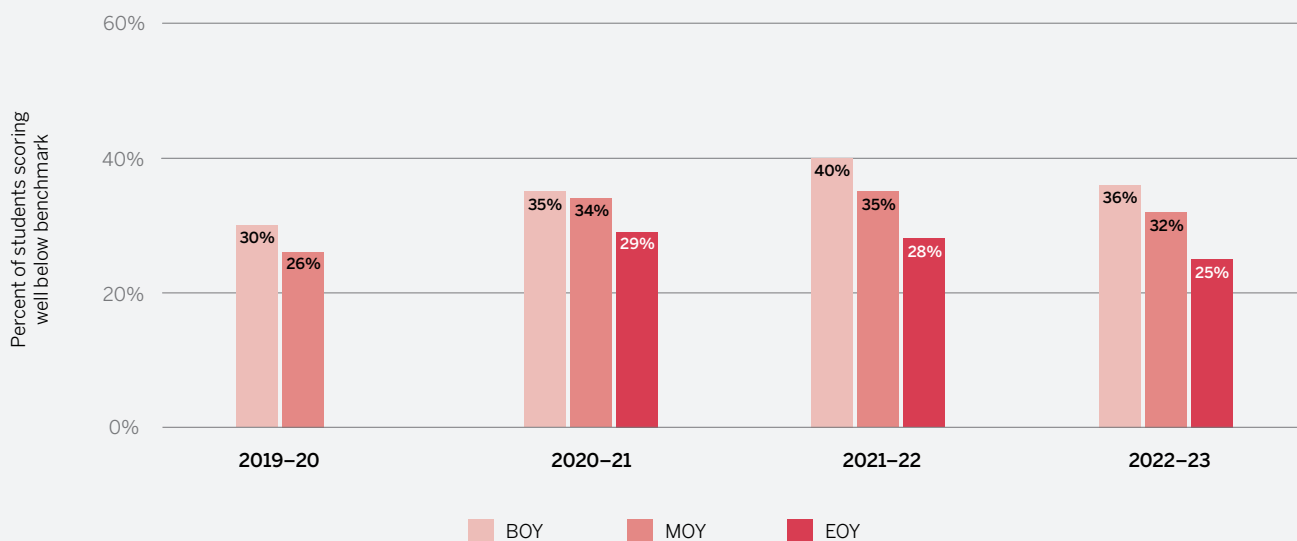
In first grade, the growth trends have been similar. In 2020–21, the percent of first grade students at risk declined from 40% at the beginning of the year to 31% at the end of the year (-9 pts), whereas in 2022–23, the percentage dropped from 36% at the beginning of the year to 20% at the end of the year (-16 pts).

**Grade 1: Percent of students far behind (needing intensive intervention)**
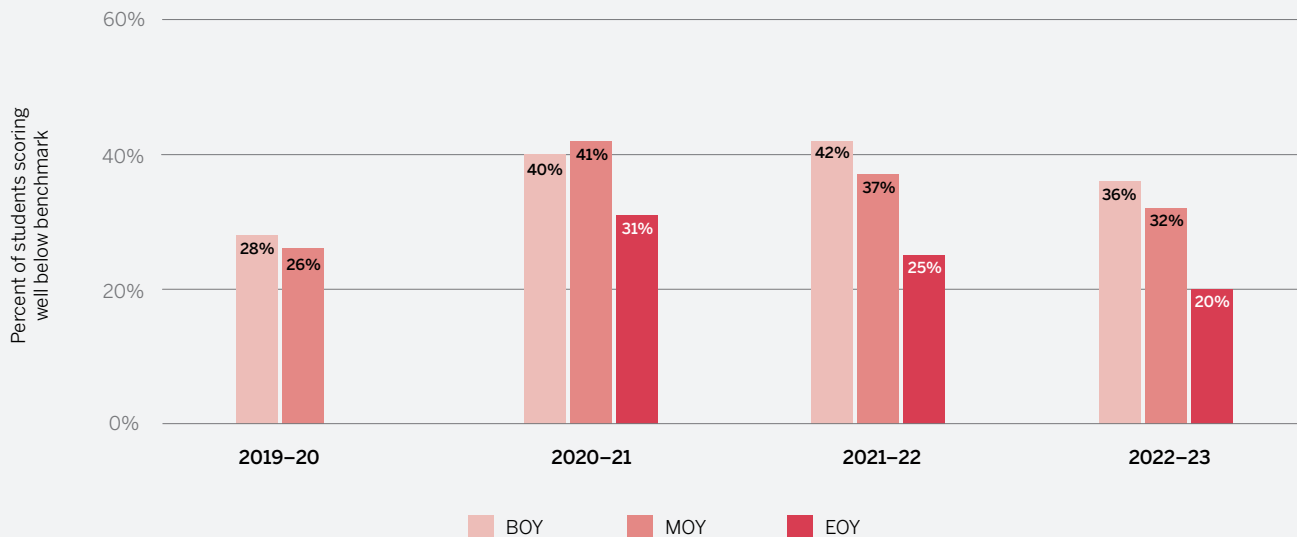


In second grade, growth trends have been similar, but smaller than in kindergarten and first grade. In 2020–21, the percent of second grade students at risk declined from 35% at the beginning of the year to 29% at the end of the year (-6 pts), whereas in 2022–23, the percentage dropped from 36% at the beginning of the year to 25% at the end of the year (-11 pts).
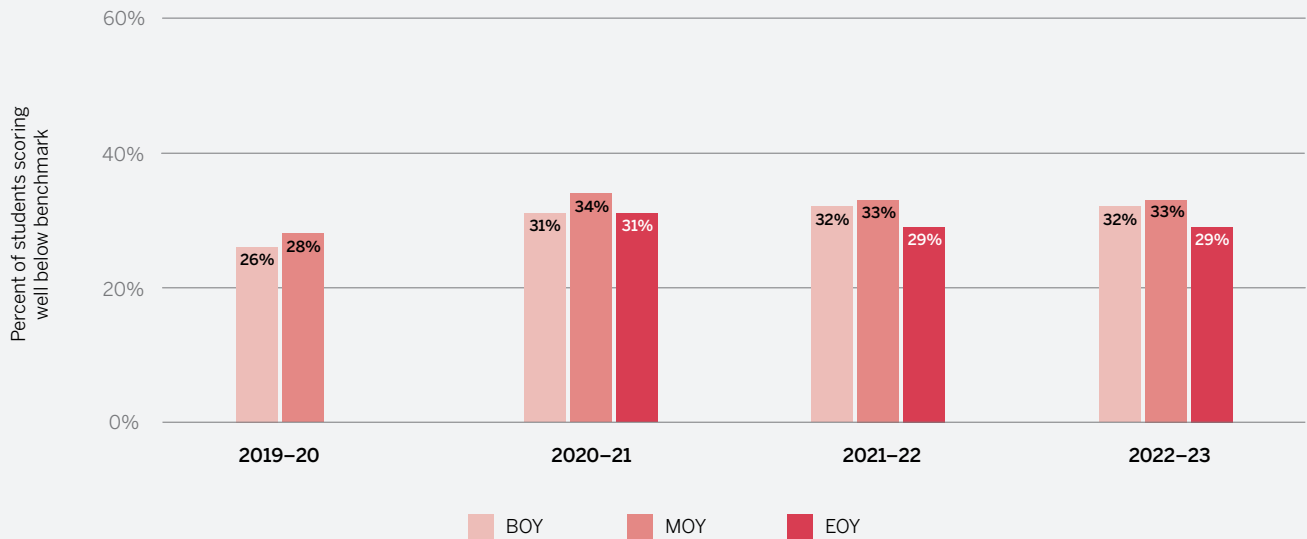
**Grade 2: Percent of students far behind (needing intensive intervention)**

In third grade, the growth trends have been similar, but smaller still than for other grades. In 2020–21, the percent of third grade students at risk stayed flat at 31% from the beginning to the end of the year (0 pts), whereas in 2022–23, the percentage dropped from 32% at the beginning of the year to 29% at the end of the year (-3 pts). The percentages on track throughout the year in 2022-23 are better than in 2020–21, but are unchanged from those of the cohort from the year prior (2021–22).

**Grade 3: Percent of students far behind (needing intensive intervention)**



Percent of students scoring well below benchmark

| | 2019–20 | 2020–21 | 2021–22 | 2022–23 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| BOY | 26% | 31% | 32% | 32% |
| MOY | 28% | 34% | 33% | 33% |
| EOY | | 31% | 29% | 29% |

# Has the pandemic disproportionately impacted the number of Black and Hispanic students who are on track to learn to read?

The following four tables disaggregate student data by race/ethnicity. They show the percentage of students in each grade who were assessed as being on track (ready for core instruction) in early literacy skills. They include the most recent data from the end of the current school year (2022–23), as well as the change from last year (2021–22) and the year following the onset of the pandemic (2020–21).

**Percent of students on track: Performance trends by student subgroup**

| Kindergarten Subgroup | EOY 2022–23 | Change from 2021–22 | Change from 2020–21 |
|---|---|---|---|
| All students | 66% | +3 pts | +10 pts |
| Asian | 81% | +1 pt | +7 pts |
| Black | 62% | +5 pts | +19 pts |
| Hispanic | 59% | +4 pts | +15 pts |
| White | 75% | +2 pts | +7 pts |

| Grade 2 Subgroup | EOY 2022–23 | Change from 2021–22 | Change from 2020–21 |
|---|---|---|---|
| All students | 61% | +2 pts | +3 pts |
| Asian | 82% | +1 pt | +2 pts |
| Black | 51% | +5 pts | +6 pts |
| Hispanic | 54% | +4 pts | +3 pts |
| White | 69% | +2 pts | +3 pts |

| Grade 1 Subgroup | EOY 2022–23 | Change from 2021–22 | Change from 2020–21 |
|---|---|---|---|
| All students | 64% | +3 pts | +7 pts |
| Asian | 84% | 0 pts | +4 pts |
| Black | 58% | +6 pts | +13 pts |
| Hispanic | 58% | +4 pts | +9 pts |
| White | 72% | +2 pts | +7 pts |

| Grade 3 Subgroup | EOY 2022–23 | Change from 2021–22 | Change from 2020–21 |
|---|---|---|---|
| All students | 57% | 0 pts | -3 pts |
| Asian | 77% | -2 pts | -2 pts |
| Black | 44% | +1 pt | +2 pts |
| Hispanic | 51% | +1 pt | +1 pt |
| White | 65% | +1 pt | -3 pts |

**The data show that for most grades and demographic categories this year (year-end 2022–23), fewer students are far behind (needing intensive intervention) in learning to read than the year following the onset of the pandemic (year-end 2020–21).** The good news is that the measurable disparities in achievement between Black and Hispanic students and their Asian and white peers have narrowed in grades K–2. The exception is grade 3, where the percentages of Asian, Black, and white students who are far behind have remained about the same as a year ago.

**In kindergarten, grade 1, and grade 2, the measurable disparities in achievement nationally between Black and Hispanic students and their white counterparts remain significant but have decreased from the prior year and the year following the onset of the pandemic.**

For instance, according to the most recent data (year-end 2022-23), 28% of Black and Hispanic grade 1 students are far behind, compared to 15% of white and 9% of Asian grade 1 students. Compared with the year following the onset of the pandemic (year-end 2020–21), there was a decrease of 14 percentage points for Black students, 10 percentage points for Hispanic students, 7 percentage points for white students, and 4 percentage points for Asian students.

Similarly, according to the most recent data (year-end 2022-23), 34% of Black and 32% of Hispanic grade 2 students are far behind, compared to 18% of white and 10% of Asian grade 2 students. Compared with the year following the onset of the pandemic (year-end 2020–21), there was a decrease of 5 percentage points for Black students, 2 percentage points for Hispanic students, 3 percentage points for white students, and 2 percentage points for Asian students.

# Has the pandemic disproportionately impacted the number of Black and Hispanic students who are at greatest risk for not learning to read?

The following four tables disaggregate student data by race/ethnicity. They include the most recent data from the end of the current school year (2022–23), as well as the change from last year (2021–22) and the year following the onset of the pandemic (2020–21).

**Percent of students far behind: Performance trends by student subgroup**

| Kindergarten Subgroup | EOY 2022–23 | Change from 2021–22 | Change from 2020–21 |
|---|---|---|---|
| All students | 21% | -3 pts | -9 pts |
| Asian | 11% | -1 pt | -5 pts |
| Black | 25% | -5 pts | -18 pts |
| Hispanic | 28% | -3 pts | -15 pts |
| White | 15% | -1 pt | -4 pts |

| Grade 2 Subgroup | EOY 2022–23 | Change from 2021–22 | Change from 2020–21 |
|---|---|---|---|
| All students | 26% | -2 pts | -1 pt |
| Asian | 10% | -1 pt | -2 pts |
| Black | 34% | -5 pts | -5 pts |
| Hispanic | 32% | -3 pts | -2 pts |
| White | 18% | -2 pts | -3 pts |

| Grade 1 Subgroup | EOY 2022–23 | Change from 2021–22 | Change from 2020–21 |
|---|---|---|---|
| All students | 23% | -3 pts | -7 pts |
| Asian | 9% | -1 pt | -4 pts |
| Black | 28% | -6 pts | -14 pts |
| Hispanic | 28% | -5 pts | -10 pts |
| White | 15% | -2 pts | -7 pts |

| Grade 3 Subgroup | EOY 2022–23 | Change from 2021–22 | Change from 2020–21 |
|---|---|---|---|
| All students | 28% | 0 pts | +1 pt |
| Asian | 13% | +1 pt | +1 pt |
| Black | 39% | -1 pt | -3 pts |
| Hispanic | 34% | 0 pts | 0 pts |
| White | 21% | 0 pts | +1 pt |

**The data show that for most grades and demographic categories this year (year-end 2022–23), fewer students are far behind (needing intensive intervention) in learning to read than the year following the onset of the pandemic (year-end 2020–21).** The good news is that the measurable disparities in achievement between Black and Hispanic students and their Asian and white peers have narrowed in grades K–2. The exception is grade 3, where the percentages of Asian, Black, and white students who are far behind have remained about the same as a year ago.

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# Recommendations

## Addressing risks for third grade students

The latest data show that third graders, the cohort of students with the most impacted instructional time from the pandemic, exhibited the least improvement in early literacy from two years ago and no improvement from the prior year's cohort. Susan Lambert, chief academic officer of elementary humanities at Amplify, says the data demonstrates how literacy rates in the United States remain a crisis today, with too many students urgently needing support. "We need to help this generation of young students get on track in reading," Lambert says. "The struggles of students who fall behind will not go away on their own. The older these students become, the longer it will take them to catch up."

Reading proficiency for students in grades K–3 is important, but it is especially critical for students in grade 3. In third grade, literacy instruction shifts from learning the alphabetic code of reading (phonics) to learning the meaning parts of more complex words (morphology). If students are not secure and fluent with word-level reading, it will be more difficult for them to extract meaning from texts across subject areas. Third grade is the year when students shift from learning to read to reading to learn with independence.

Learning to read by the end of third grade is an important indicator of future academic success. In fact, kids who don't read proficiently by the end of third grade are at higher risk for dropping out of high school, among other risks cited by the Annie E. Casey Foundation report *Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*.

Educators serving students in grade 3 need data-driven insights into students' reading development and instructional practices that are based in the Science of Reading. They also need support helping students in grades 4–6 who have fallen behind and require more targeted instruction and intervention to catch up. **To help educators where they need it most, it is important that schools and districts invest in a reliable universal screener, high-quality core curriculum, evidence-based interventions, and professional development.** Amplify recommends districts make integrated plans to ensure that schools:

- Administer benchmark assessments three times per year to monitor levels of risk for reading difficulties.

- Allocate resources to support students who are at risk, spending additional time in literacy instruction beyond grade-level instruction.

- Regularly monitor progress for students who are at risk, making adjustments as needed.

- Ensure all students receive grade-level instruction that is evidence-based, and support instructional staff in gaining knowledge about the Science of Reading.

- Instill a love of reading and books during all school-based programs, with the support of caregivers and the community.

# Recommendations (cont.)

## Elements of a coherent approach

| Types of instruction | Scheduling/formatting options | Which students |
|---|---|---|
| Grade-level core instruction focused on both knowledge and skills. | • During school day (literacy block) | • All |
| Additional foundational skill instruction | • During school day (in addition to literacy block)<br>• Summer school | • Students who are at risk |
| Intervention opportunities | • During school day<br>• Before and after school tutoring | • Those who continue to struggle even with additional foundational skill instruction |
| Science of Reading-based personalized learning (online program) | • During school day (as part of additional foundational skills)<br>• At home<br>• Before and after school<br>• Summer school | • All |

For more information on mCLASS,
visit **amplify.com/mclass**.

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