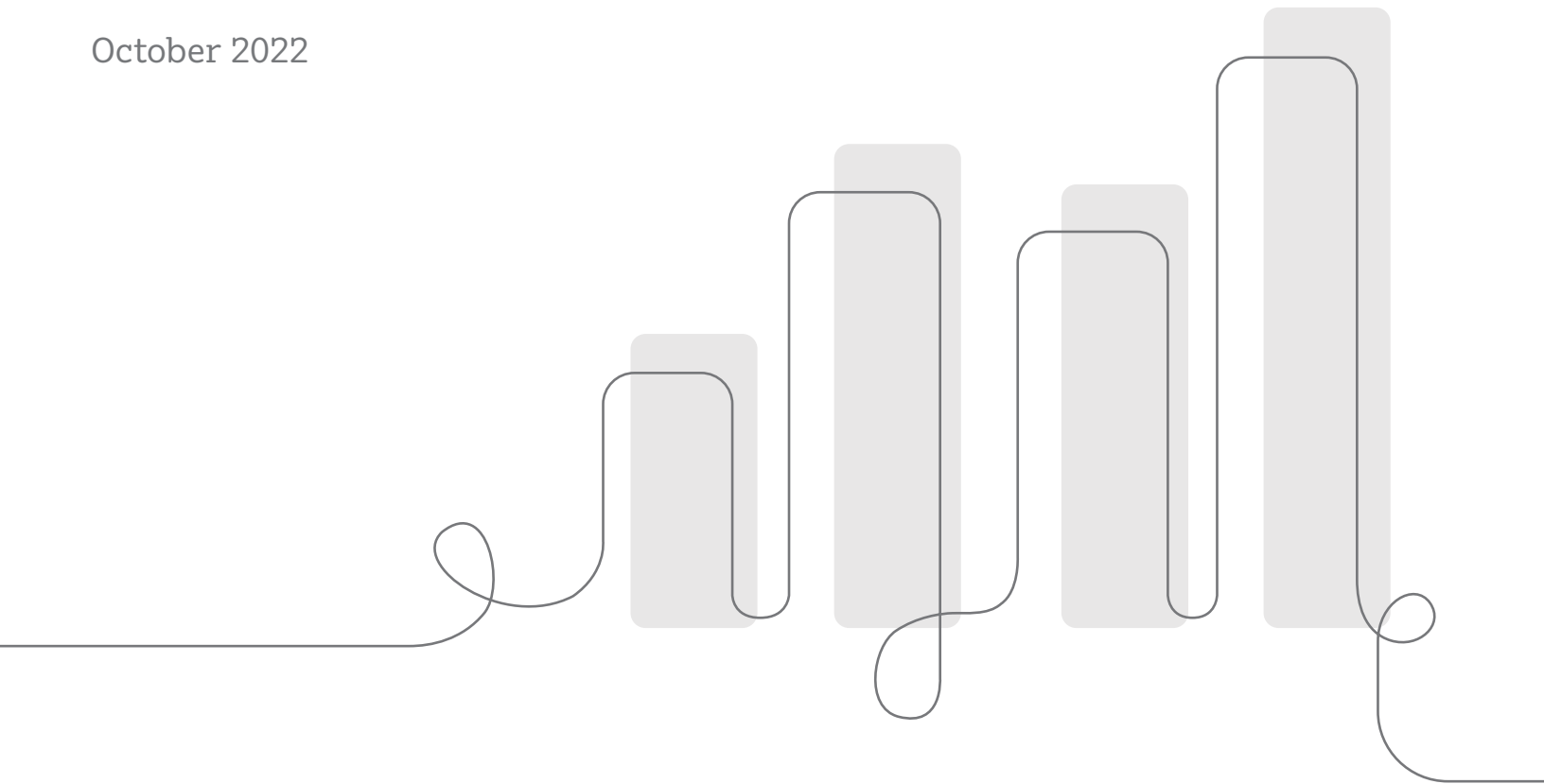


RESEARCH BRIEF

Data from the beginning of the school year show that the literacy crisis in America's schools may be worse than it was before COVID-19; but the greatest part of the crisis existed before the pandemic.

October 2022



Only 55 percent of the nation's grade 3 students are on track for learning to read, with 30 percent in need of intensive intervention. The youngest students remain the most at risk.

The latest beginning-of-school-year data show that only about half (55 percent) of America's grade 3 students are on track for learning to read, with nearly a third (30 percent) of grade 3 students in the highest risk category for not being able to do so. The data from earlier grades is more discouraging. Half of today's kindergarten students are starting school already in need of intensive intervention in early literacy skills.

Although some of these deficits may be attributed to lost instructional time from the COVID-19 pandemic, the problem was already evident in the data before the pandemic began three years ago.

The youngest students remain the most at risk. Compared to their counterparts from the fall of 2019 (before COVID-19), the largest declines are for students who are now starting grade 1. Only 47 percent of those students are on track for learning to read, compared to 55 percent of those starting grade 1 in the 2019-20 school year.

Over the past three years, elementary schools across the United States have been assessing students on early literacy skills with Amplify's mCLASS®. The DIBELS® 8th Edition data, collected by teachers interacting with students one on one, either live or over video, enables comparisons in grades K–3 literacy proficiency from before the pandemic and in the years since.

American students continue to make progress recovering from the school disruptions caused by the pandemic. In some grades, they appear to have recovered to near pre-pandemic levels in early literacy. However, recovery to pre-pandemic levels is not a victory. Too few students can read at grade level. Too many students have fallen far behind and are at risk of failing to read proficiently by the end of third grade, an important indicator of future academic success.

About the data

The report highlights the effects of COVID-19 disruptions by comparing 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.

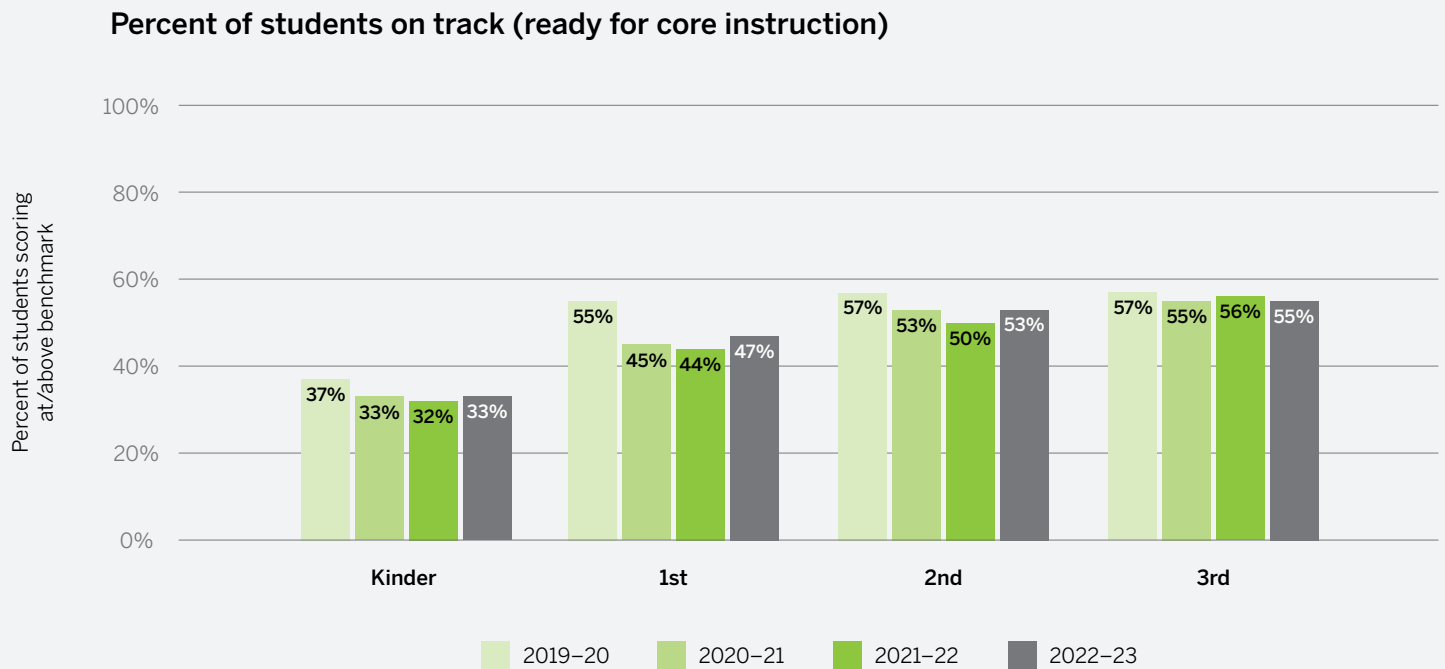
About Amplify

A pioneer in K–12 education since 2000, Amplify is leading the way in next-generation curriculum and assessment. Our core and supplemental programs in ELA, math, and science engage all students in rigorous learning and inspire them to think deeply, creatively, and for themselves. Our formative assessment products help teachers identify the targeted instruction students need to build a strong foundation in early reading and math. All of our programs and services provide educators with powerful tools that help them understand and respond to the needs of every student. Today, Amplify serves more than 10 million students in all 50 states. For more information, visit [amplify.com](https://www.amplify.com).

Insights

How many students are on track to learn to read?

The following table shows 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 beginning of the current school year (2022–23), as well as data from the beginning of the three previous school years (2019–20, 2020–21, 2021–22).

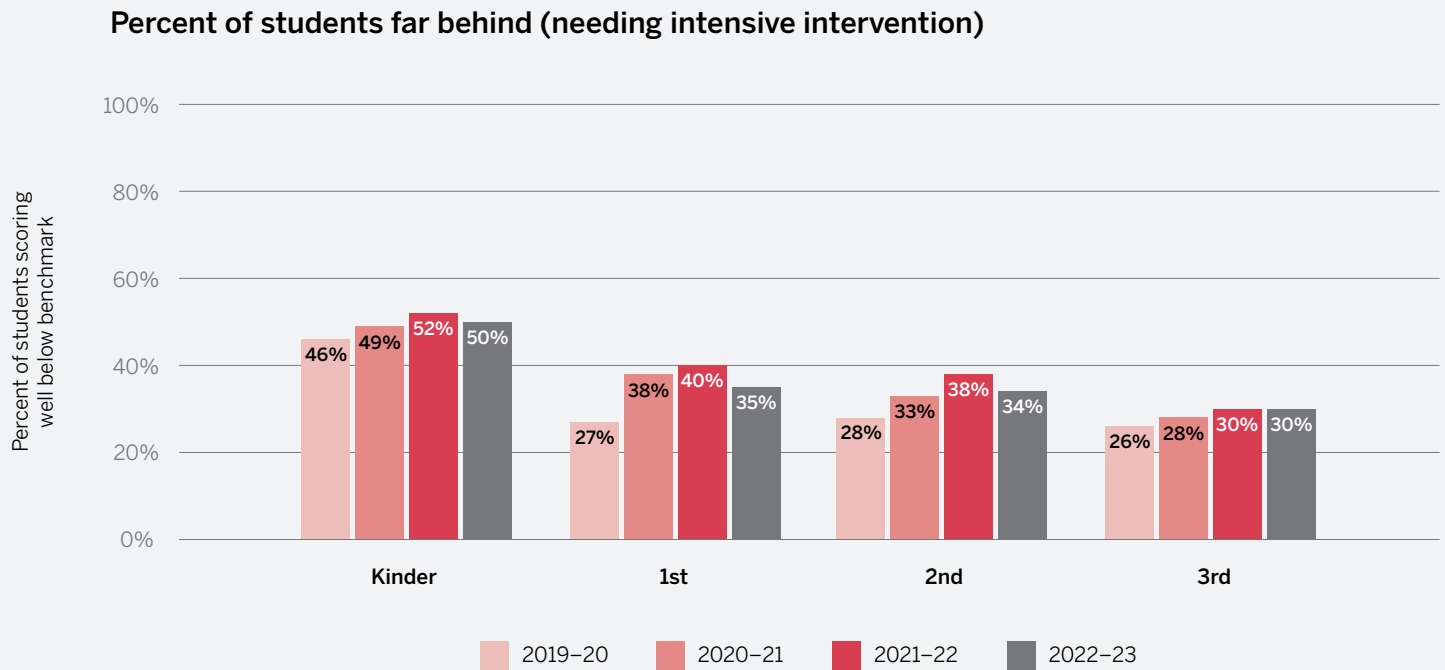


The data show that at beginning-of-year 2022–23, fewer students are on track for learning to read than three years ago, before the pandemic (beginning-of-year 2019–20); however, in most grades, the differences are relatively small, representing 2 percent to 4 percent of students. For students starting grade 1 this year, the difference is greater (8 percent of students).

The more discouraging news is much the same as it was at the start of school pre-pandemic. Only 55 percent of students now starting grade 3 are on track for learning to read. Only one-third (33 percent) are starting kindergarten on track for core instruction in early literacy.

How many students are still at greatest risk?

The following table shows the percentage of students in each grade who were assessed as being far behind (in need of intensive intervention) in early literacy skills. It includes the most recent data from the beginning of the current school year (2022–23), as well as data from the beginning of the three previous school years (2019–20, 2020–21, 2021–22).



The data show that at the beginning-of-year 2022–23, more students are far behind in learning to read than three years ago, before the pandemic (beginning-of-year 2019–20); however, in some grades (kindergarten and grade 3) these differences are relatively small, representing 4 percent of students. An exception is students starting grade 1, where the percentage of students in the highest risk category increased from 27 percent to 35 percent.

Here, too, the more discouraging news is much the same as it was at the start of school three years ago. Nearly one-third (30 percent) of students now starting grade 3 are far behind in learning to read. Half (50 percent) are starting kindergarten in need of intensive intervention in early literacy.

Recommendations

Beyond pandemic recovery

Literacy rates in the United States were a crisis before the COVID-19 pandemic, and they remain a crisis today. Many students in grades K–3 are still at risk of not learning to read and urgently need support. Educators can provide that support with data-driven insight into students' reading development and instructional practices that are based in the Science of Reading. 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.

The good news: Science-based reading instruction reduces the need for intervention and enables children to move forward as capable, confident learners. When students receive instruction based in the Science of Reading, outcomes improve. When that instruction takes place in the early grades, research shows that 95 percent of students can be taught to read at or approaching grade level.

Educators serving students in grades K–3 need continued support and professional development to help students who are most at risk. As the school year begins, 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.

Elements of a coherent approach

| Types of instruction | Scheduling/formatting options | Which students |
|--|---|--|
| Grade-level core instruction focused on both knowledge and skills. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• During school day (literacy block) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• All |
| Additional foundational skill instruction | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• During school day (in addition to literacy block)• Summer school | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students who are at risk |
| Intervention opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• During school day• Before and after school tutoring | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Those who continue to struggle even with additional foundational skill instruction |
| Science of Reading based personalized learning (online program) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• During school day (as part of additional foundational skills)• At home• Before and after school• Summer school | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• All |

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

Amplify.