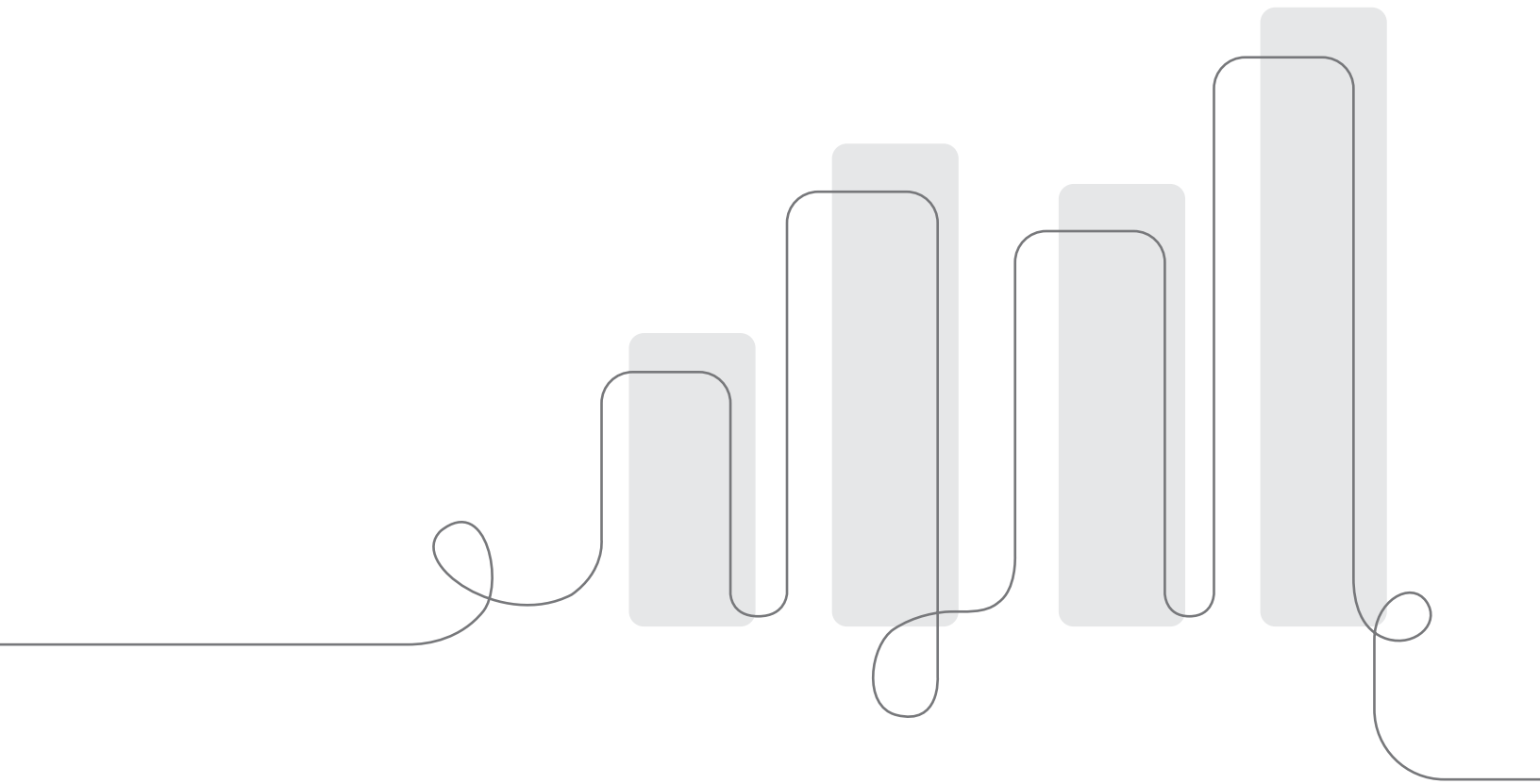


RESEARCH BRIEF

K–3 students show improvement in early literacy at the beginning of the school year, but readiness has yet to match pre-pandemic levels.

October 2023



In most grades and demographic categories, more students are on track for learning to read than two years ago (2021–22), but not as many as four years ago (2019–20), before the pandemic.

Student academic readiness continues to improve from its low point in 2021–22, after instructional disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. **The latest beginning-of-school-year data show more students across grades K–3 performing at levels that are on track for learning to read and ready for core instruction, continuing a rebound toward performance levels last seen before the pandemic.** In fact, kindergarten students performed slightly better at the beginning of 2023–24 than kindergarten students at the beginning of 2019–20.

Despite the increase in the percentage of students who are on track, only half of K–3 students are prepared to read at grade level. 30 to 40 percent of students in kindergarten through third grade are starting school in need of intensive intervention in early literacy skills. Students starting first, second, and third grade in 2023 remain worse off than their counterparts from 2019. While kindergarteners outperform their counterparts from the fall of 2019, they remain the lowest-performing grade, with only 40 percent on track and 42 percent at risk for not learning to read.

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.

Grades K–3 are critical years for literacy development. Educators need data from beginning-of-year assessments to create plans and allocate resources for students who are most at risk for not learning to read.

About the data

The report highlights the effects of COVID-19 disruptions by comparing Amplify mCLASS with DIBELS 8th Edition benchmark data from the 2019–20, 2020–21, 2021–22, 2022-23 and 2023–24 school years. From more than 2 million students assessed with mCLASS, approximately 200,000 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	At risk	Not far behind, require some strategic support, reasonably likely to meet end-of-year standards
Well below benchmark		

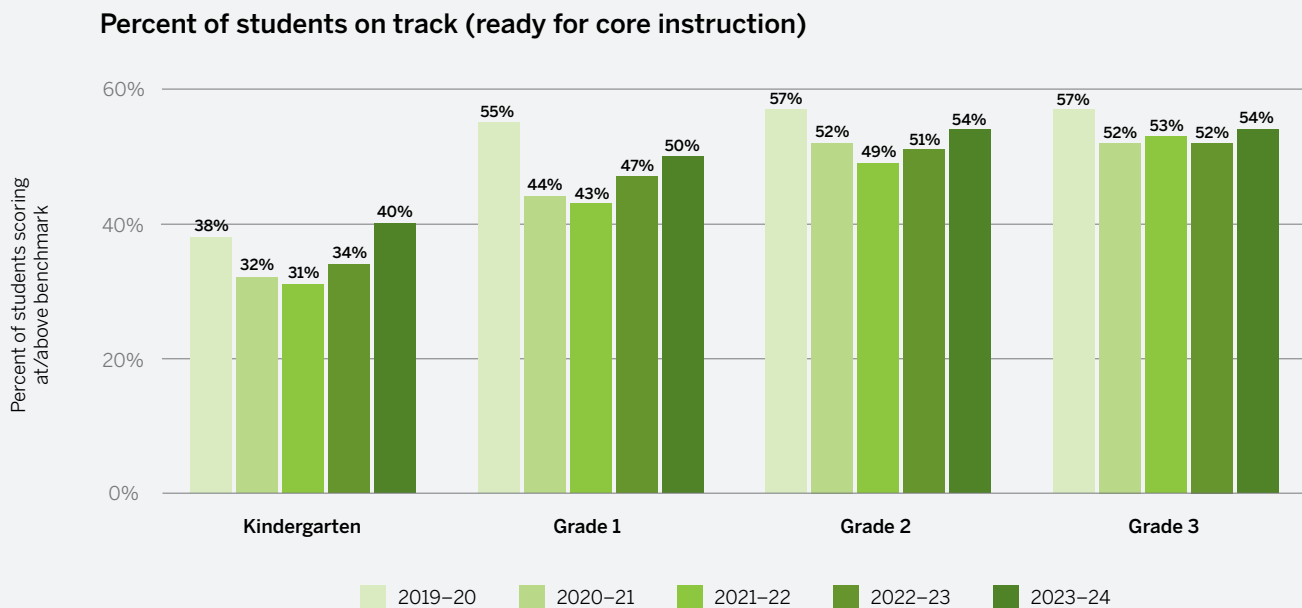
About Amplify

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 15 million students in all 50 states. To learn more, 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 (2023–24), as well as data from the beginning of the four previous school years (2019–20, 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23).

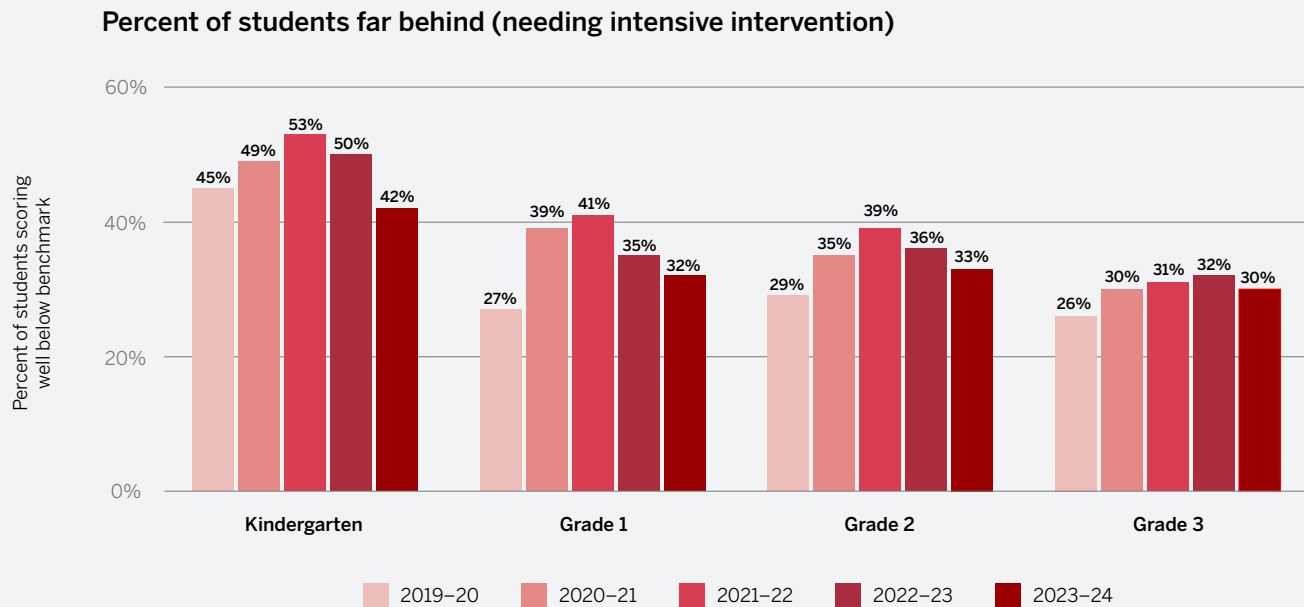


The data show that there are now (2023–24) more students on track for learning to read at the beginning of the school year than there were two years ago (2021–22), the first year after the onset of the pandemic, when the majority of schools across the United States returned to in-person instruction. In kindergarten, more students are arriving at school ready for core instruction than before the pandemic (2019–20), but in other grades, readiness rates have yet to bounce back to pre-pandemic levels.

Students in all grades began the school year more likely to be on track than the prior year. In kindergarten, the percentage of students on track for learning to read at the beginning of the year fell from 38 percent in 2019–20 to its lowest point of 31 percent in 2021–22 before starting to rebound, and in 2023–24, climbed to 40 percent, the only grade to have surpassed that pre-pandemic level. In grade 1, it fell from 55 percent in 2019–20 to 50 percent in 2023–24; in grade 2, it fell from 57 percent to 54 percent; in grade 3, it fell from 57 percent to 54 percent. In grades K–2, the signs of recent progress have continued, with an increase of 5 to 9 percentage points of students on track since the beginning of 2021–22. But in grade 3, the percentage of students on track has more modestly improved, by 1 percentage point since 2021–22.

How many students are at risk for not learning to read?

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. They include the most recent data from the beginning of the current school year (2023–24), as well as data from the beginning of the four previous school years (2019–20, 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23).



The data show that at the beginning of the 2023–24 school year, fewer students are far behind in learning to read than there were at the lowest point of the pandemic slide (beginning of 2021–22). In kindergarten, the percent of students arriving at school in need of intensive intervention has actually fallen below the rate before the pandemic (2019–20), but in other grades, levels of students at risk have yet to bounce back to pre-pandemic levels.

In all grades, fewer students began the school year at risk, compared to the year before. The percent of students who may need intensive intervention based on beginning-of-year performance levels has declined from the prior year, most notably in kindergarten. In kindergarten, the percentage of students at greatest risk for not learning to read rose from 45 percent in 2019–20 to 53 percent in 2021–22, before decreasing to 42 percent in 2023–24, which is lower than before the pandemic. In grade 1, it increased from 27 percent in 2019–20 to 41 percent in 2021–22, before rebounding somewhat to 32 percent in 2023–24. In grade 2, it increased from 29 percent to 39 percent in 2021–22 before improving to 33 percent; in grade 3, it increased from 26 percent to 32 percent in 2022–23 before improving slightly to 30 percent. In grades K–2, the signs of progress have continued, with a decrease of 6 to 11 percentage points of students who are far behind now than there were in 2021–22. But in grade 3, the percentage of students far behind has more modestly improved by 1 percentage point since 2021–22.

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 beginning of the current school year (2023–24), as well as the change from two years ago (2021–22) and the year preceding the pandemic (2019–20).

Percent of students on track for learning to read: Performance trends by student subgroup

Kindergarten Subgroup	BOY 2023–24	Change from 2021–22	Change from 2019–20
All students	40%	+9 pts	+2 pts
Asian	67%	+5 pts	+4 pts
Black	42%	+12 pts	+2 pts
Hispanic	36%	+13 pts	+5 pts
White	44%	+4 pts	-3 pts

Grade 2 Subgroup	BOY 2023–24	Change from 2021–22	Change from 2019–20
All students	54%	+5 pts	-3 pts
Asian	82%	+1 pt	-1 pt
Black	43%	0 pts	-3 pts
Hispanic	51%	+1 pt	-2 pts
White	61%	+2 pts	-4 pts

Grade 1 Subgroup	BOY 2023–24	Change from 2021–22	Change from 2019–20
All students	50%	+7 pts	-5 pts
Asian	79%	0 pts	-2 pts
Black	43%	+11 pts	-3 pts
Hispanic	45%	+10 pts	-4 pts
White	57%	+2 pts	-5 pts

Grade 3 Subgroup	BOY 2023–24	Change from 2021–22	Change from 2019–20
All students	54%	+1 pt	-3 pts
Asian	69%	-14 pts	-5 pts
Black	44%	0 pts	-4 pts
Hispanic	50%	+1 pt	-2 pts
White	59%	+2 pts	-5 pts

The data show that in most grades and demographic categories (2023–24), more students are on track for learning to read than there were two years ago (2021–22), but not as many as there were four years ago (2019–20), before the pandemic. The good news is that measurable disparities in achievement between Black and Hispanic students and their Asian and white peers have narrowed in grades K–2.

In kindergarten and grade 1, measurable disparities in achievement nationally between Black and Hispanic students and their white counterparts remain significant, but have narrowed since the worst of the pandemic.

Among kindergarteners, the most recent data (2023–24) shows 42 percent of Black and 36 percent of Hispanic students are on track, compared to 44 percent of white and 67 percent of Asian students. Compared with the low point of the pandemic (2021–22), there was an increase of 12 percentage points for Black and 13 percentage points for Hispanic students, and smaller increases of 4 percentage points for white and 5 percentage points for Asian students. Further, the percentage of Black and Hispanic students on track in 2023–24 has surpassed pre-pandemic levels, as has that of Asian students, while white students remain 3 percentage points below the percent on track in 2019–20, thereby narrowing the measurable disparities in achievement between them.

In first grade, the most recent data (2023–24) shows 43 percent of Black and 45 percent of Hispanic students are on track, compared to 57 percent of white and 79 percent of Asian students. Compared with the low point of the pandemic (2021–22), there was an increase of 11 percentage points for Black and 10 percentage points for Hispanic students, and a smaller increase of 2 percentage points for white and no increase for Asian students. While the percent of students on track remains below pre-pandemic levels, the decrease of 3 percentage points for Black and 4 percentage points for Hispanic students is smaller than the 5 percentage points for white students, while Asian students have the smallest decline remaining of all at 2 percentage points.

In second and third grade, the most recent data (2023–24) shows significant measurable disparities between Black and Hispanic students and their white counterparts and not much improvement since the low point of the pandemic for any of the subgroups.

The largest difference between Black and white students in 2023–24 in the percent of students on track at the beginning of the year is 18 percentage points (in grade 2), followed by 15 percentage points (in grade 3) and 14 percentage points (in grade 1). The largest difference between Hispanic and white students is 12 percentage points (in grade 1), followed by 10 percentage points (in grade 2) and 9 percentage points (in grade 3).

Has the pandemic disproportionately impacted the number of Black and Hispanic students who are at risk for not learning 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 beginning of the current school year (2023–24), as well as the change from two years ago (2021–22) and the year preceding the pandemic (2019–20).

Percent of students at risk for not learning to read: Performance trends by student subgroup

Kindergarten Subgroup	BOY 2023–24	Change from 2021–22	Change from 2019–20
All students	42%	-11 pts	-3 pts
Asian	19%	-4 pts	-4 pts
Black	40%	-13 pts	-3 pts
Hispanic	47%	-17 pts	-6 pts
White	37%	-5 pts	+2 pts

Grade 2 Subgroup	BOY 2023–24	Change from 2021–22	Change from 2019–20
All students	33%	-6 pts	+4 pts
Asian	11%	-1 pt	+2 pts
Black	43%	-9 pts	+4 pts
Hispanic	36%	-8 pts	+4 pts
White	26%	-4 pts	+4 pts

Grade 1 Subgroup	BOY 2023–24	Change from 2021–22	Change from 2019–20
All students	32%	-9 pts	+5 pts
Asian	11%	-1 pt	+1 pt
Black	39%	-15 pts	+5 pts
Hispanic	36%	-15 pts	+3 pts
White	25%	-4 pts	+4 pts

Grade 3 Subgroup	BOY 2023–24	Change from 2021–22	Change from 2019–20
All students	30%	-1 pt	+4 pts
Asian	19%	+9 pts	+5 pts
Black	41%	+1 pt	+8 pts
Hispanic	35%	0 pts	+4 pts
White	25%	-2 pts	+5 pts

The data show that in most grades and demographic categories, there are now (beginning of year 2023–24) fewer students at risk (needing intensive intervention) in learning to read than there were two years ago (beginning of year 2021–22), but still more than there were four years ago (beginning-of-year 2019–20). 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.

In kindergarten, grade 1, and grade 2, the measurable disparities in achievement nationally between Black and Hispanic students and their white counterparts have decreased from the prior year, and in some cases, are now smaller than they were before the pandemic.

Among kindergarteners, the most recent data (2023–24) shows 40 percent of Black and 47 percent of Hispanic students are far behind, compared to 37 percent of white and 19 percent of Asian students. Compared with the low point of the pandemic (2021–22), there was a decrease of 13 percentage points for Black and 17 percentage points for Hispanic students, and smaller decreases of 5 percentage points for white and 4 percentage points for Asian students. As with the percent of students on track, fewer kindergarten students are now at risk than prior to the pandemic (2019–20) for all subgroups but white students, who remain 2 percentage points more at risk.

In first grade, the most recent data (2023–24) shows 39 percent of Black and 36 percent of Hispanic students are at risk for not learning to read, compared to 25 percent of white and 11 percent of Asian students. Compared with the low point of the pandemic (2021–22), there was a decrease of 15 percentage points for Black and Hispanic students, and smaller decreases of 4 percentage points for white students and 1 percentage point for Asian students. While all students are still performing worse than before the pandemic, Hispanic students have experienced greater improvement since the year prior to the pandemic (2019–20) than white students, whereas Black students have seen slightly smaller declines than white students.

In second grade, the most recent data (2023–24) shows 43 percent of Black and 36 percent of Hispanic students are at risk for not learning to read, compared to 26 percent of white and 11 percent of Asian students. Compared with the low point of the pandemic (2021–22), there was a decrease of 9 percentage points for Black students and 8 percentage points for Hispanic students, and smaller decreases of 4 percentage points for white students and 1 percentage point for Asian students. All students are still performing worse than before the pandemic, and the disparities between Black and Hispanic students and their white counterparts remain unchanged.

In third grade, the most recent data (2023–24) shows significant measurable disparities between Black and Hispanic students and their white counterparts and not much improvement since the low point of the pandemic for any of the subgroups.

The largest difference between Black and white students in 2023–24 in the percent of students far behind at the beginning of the year is 17 percentage points (in grade 2), followed by 16 percentage points (in grade 3), 14 percentage points (in grade 1) and 3 percentage points (grade K). The largest difference between Hispanic and white students is 11 percentage points (in grade 1), followed by 10 percentage points (in grades K, 2 and 3).

Recommendations

Despite progress, many students in grades K–3 are still at risk of not learning to read and urgently need support. The good news is that science-based reading instruction reduces the need for intervention and enables children to move forward as capable, confident learners.

Educators serving students in grades K–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 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.** 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,
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