Bridging the Gap: Data Insights and Global Strategies for Accelerating Educational Recovery

October 8, 2024

Panelists

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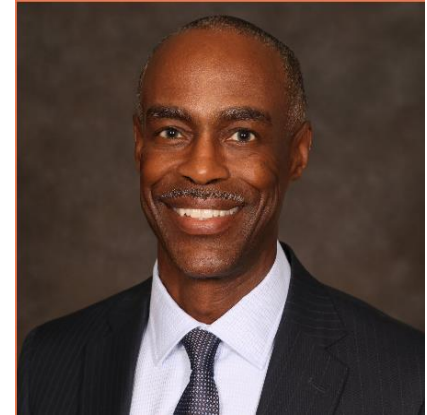# Commentators

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Chiefs for Change

Moderator

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Executive Director
Attendance Works

Curriculum Associates RESEARCH

Student Growth in
the Post-COVID Era

Reading and Mathematics
Ethan Young, Ph.D.
Kelsey Young, Ph.D.
Research Report: June 2024

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STATE OF
STUDENT
LEARNING
IN 2024

Reading and Mathematics
Annual Report: August 2024

COVID funds expiring prompts research to evaluate recovery efforts with varying results.

ANALYSIS

Pandemic Emergency May Be Officially Over, but Education's Long COVID Continues

NEWS

Despite Progress, Achievement Gaps Persist During Recovery from Pandemic

ATIONAL   FEDERAL POLICY AND REFORM   ASSESSMENT AND TESTING

Federal COVID relief dollars improved student test scores, two new studies find

EDUCATION

Test scores show American students slipping further behind despite recovery efforts

U.S. | U.S. EDUCATION NEWS

Here's What $200 Billion in Covid Money Did for Students

Federal Covid aid for schools improved test scores, but impact was modest and many students rema behind, new research finds

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT   Q&A

Learning Recovery Efforts Worked. New Data Show Why States Must Not Let Up

NEWS   THE BIG PICTURE

Studies: Pandemic Aid Lifted Scores, ~~But Not~~ Enough To Make Up for Lost ~~Learnin~~g

EXCLUSIVE   U.S. EDUCATION NEWS

When Covid Hit, They Were in Diapers. So Why Are Kindergarteners Struggling?

Add young children to the list of students who need help catching up after the pandemic, according to recent test scores
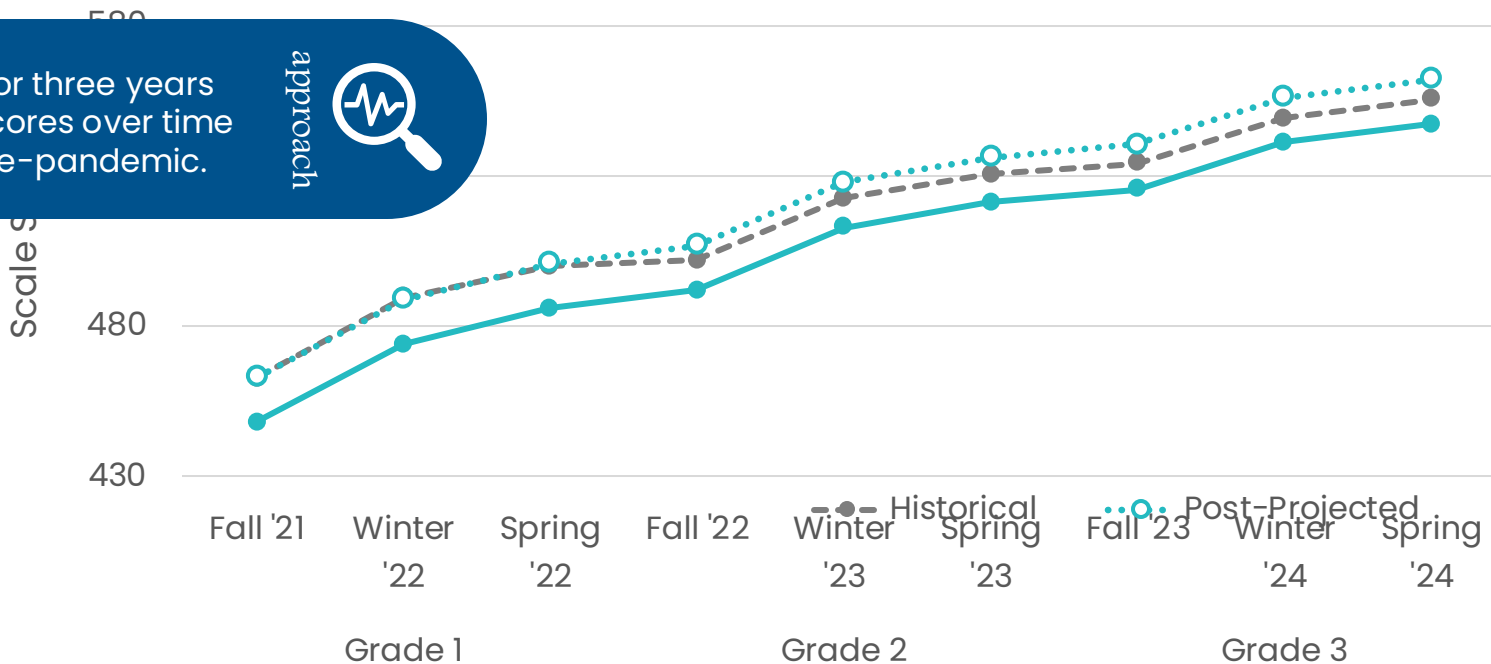
Grade 2–4 Cohort Reading Growth Over Three Years

approach

Follow cohorts for three years to look at test scores over time compared to pre-pandemic.

Scale Score

580

480

430

Fall '21　Winter '22　Spring '22　Fall '22　Winter '23　Spring '23　Fall '23　Winter '24　Spring '24

Grade 1　　　　　Grade 2　　　　　Grade 3

- ● - Historical　⋯○⋯ Post-Projected

overview

approach

results

discussion

Grade K

Grade 1

Grade 2

initial decreases were larger for younger (k–2) students

Grade 3

Grade 4

Overall, many cohorts are not demonstrating the growth needed to 'catch-up'.

— Grade K, Historical   ● Grade K, Post-COVID
— Grade 1, Historical   ● Grade 1, Post-COVID
— Grade 2, Historical   ● Grade 2, Post-COVID
— Grade 3, Historical   ● Grade 3, Post-COVID
— Grade 4, Historical   ● Grade 4, Post-COVID
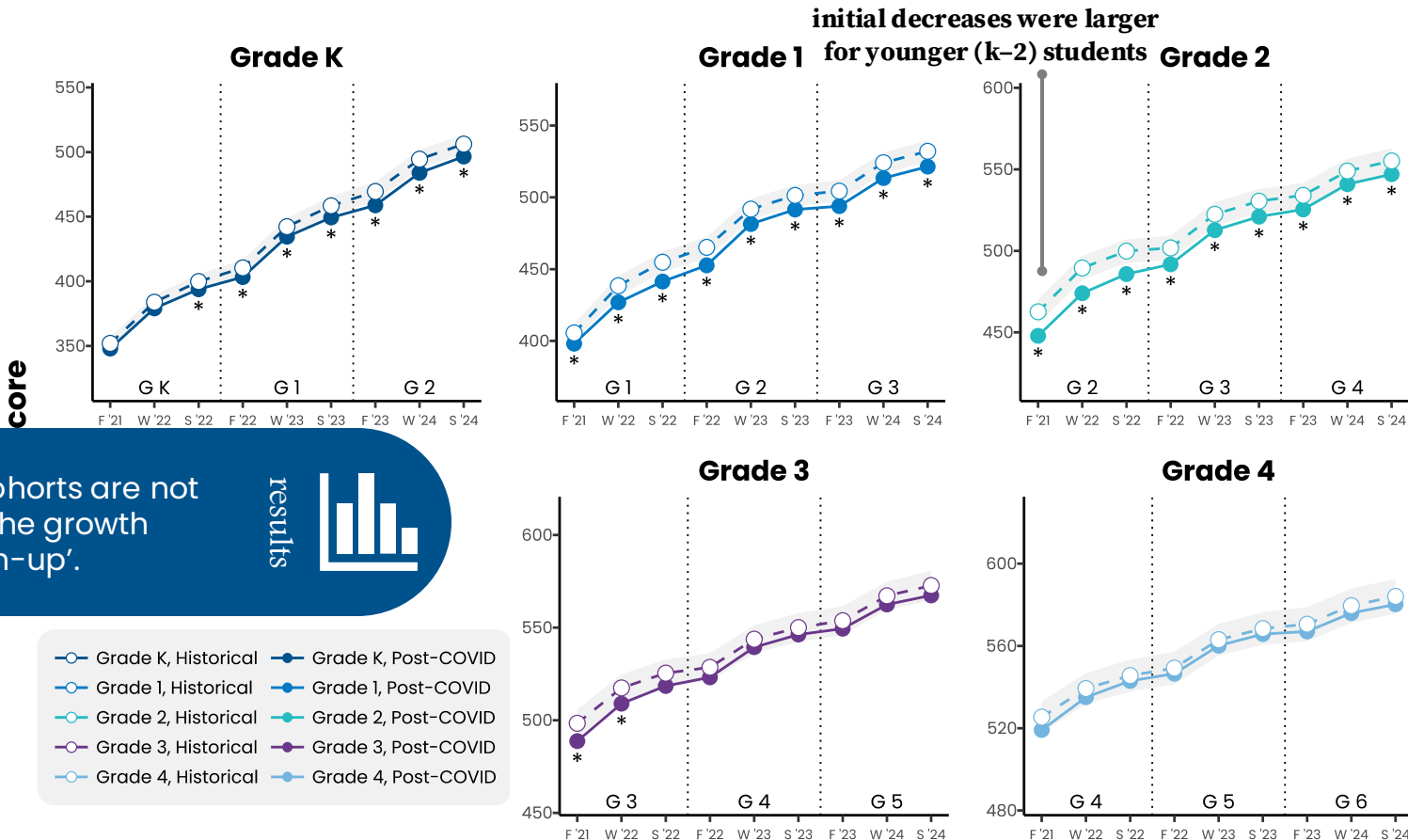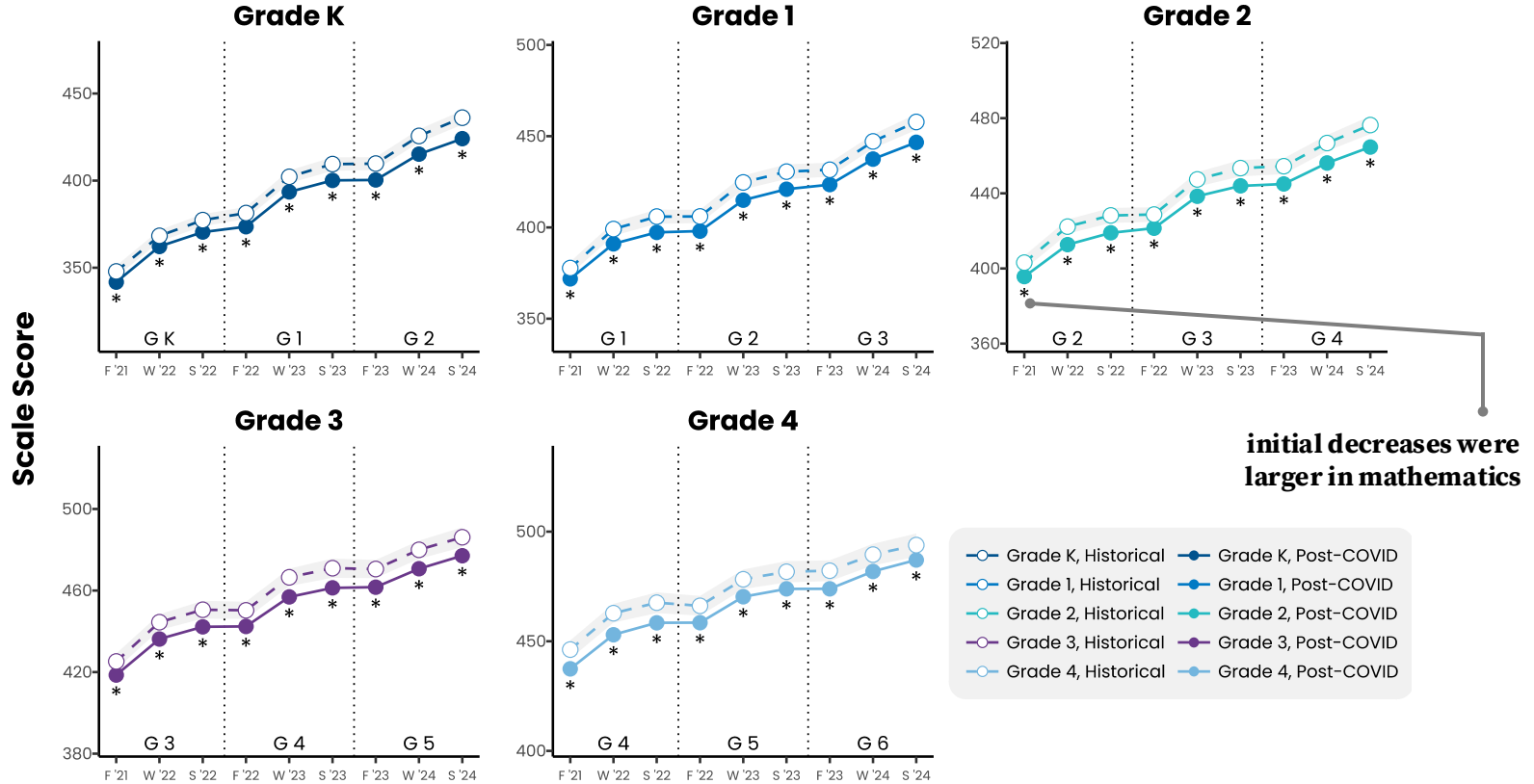
MATH RESULTS | DIFFERENCES IN HISTORICAL AND POST-COVID GROWTH BY COHORT

Scale Score

Grade K
Grade 1
Grade 2
Grade 3
Grade 4

initial decreases were larger in mathematics

Legend:
- Grade K, Historical / Grade K, Post-COVID
- Grade 1, Historical / Grade 1, Post-COVID
- Grade 2, Historical / Grade 2, Post-COVID
- Grade 3, Historical / Grade 3, Post-COVID
- Grade 4, Historical / Grade 4, Post-COVID

Grade 2

Scale Score

Legend:
- Grade Level, Historical
- Grade Level, Post-COVID
- One Grade Below, Historical
- One Grade Below, Post-COVID
- Two or More Grades Below, Historical
- Two or More Grades Below, Post-COVID

decreases were larger for lower performing students

Grade 2

Scale Score

Legend:
- Historical
- More than 50% White, Post-COVID
- More than 50% Black, Post-COVID
- More than 50% Hispanic, Post-COVID
- No Majority, Post-COVID

disparities continue for historically underserved communities

G 2   G 3   G 4

F '21   W '22   S '22   F '22   W '23   S '23   F '23   W '24   S '24

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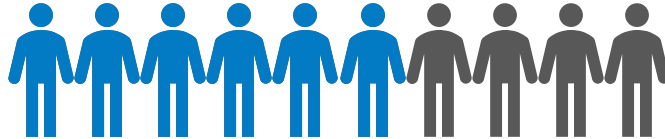Where do these different growth trajectories put students relative to grade level?

overview

approach

Compare proportions of students on/below grade level now and pre-pandemic.
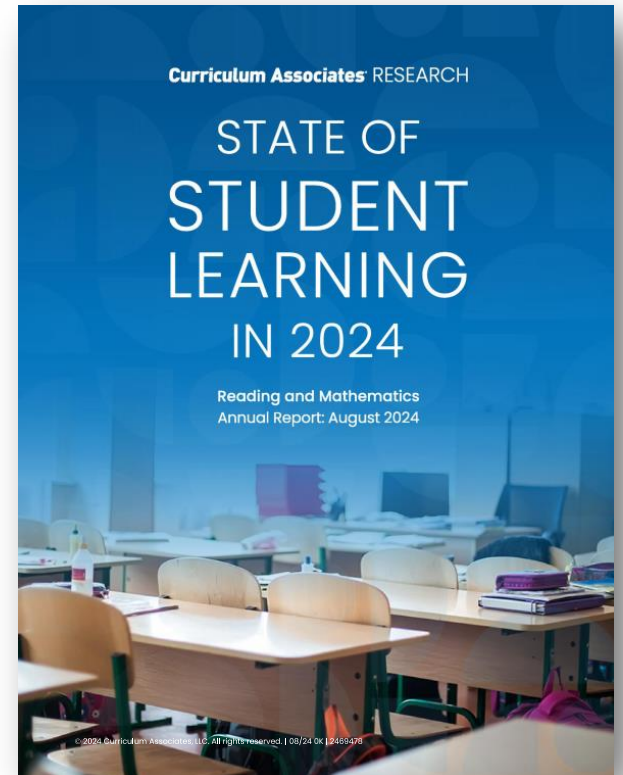
results

discussion

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STATE OF
STUDENT
LEARNING
IN 2024

Reading and Mathematics
Annual Report: August 2024

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READING RESULTS | ON GRADE LEVEL STUDENTS BY YEAR

overview

approach

results

discussion

Fewer students are reaching grade level by the end of the school year than pre-pandemic.

initial decreases were larger for younger (k–2) students

Percentage of Students

Grade	Historical (2019)	Spring 2022	Spring 2023	Spring 2024
Grade K	89%	81%	81%	82%
Grade 1	68%	58%	61%	61%
Grade 2	67%	56%	60%	60%
Grade 3	72%	64%	64%	64%
Grade 4	53%	51%	50%	49%
Grade 5	48%	47%	47%	47%
Grade 6	45%	46%	46%	46%
Grade 7	48%	49%	48%	48%
Grade 8	49%	50%	49%	49%

Legend:
- Historical (2019)
- Spring 2022
- Spring 2023
- Spring 2024

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MATHEMATICS RESULTS | ON GRADE STUDENTS LEVEL BY YEAR

overview
approach
results
discussion

initial decreases were larger in mathematics

Percentage of Students

	Grade K	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Historical (2019)	84%	65%	61%	65%	69%	62%	54%	45%	42%
Spring 2022	69%	52%	49%	52%	55%	51%	48%	41%	38%
Spring 2023	69%	53%	51%	52%	56%	52%	49%	41%	38%
Spring 2024	69%	51%	50%	52%	56%	51%	49%	41%	38%

Historical (2019)   Spring 2022   Spring 2023   Spring 2024
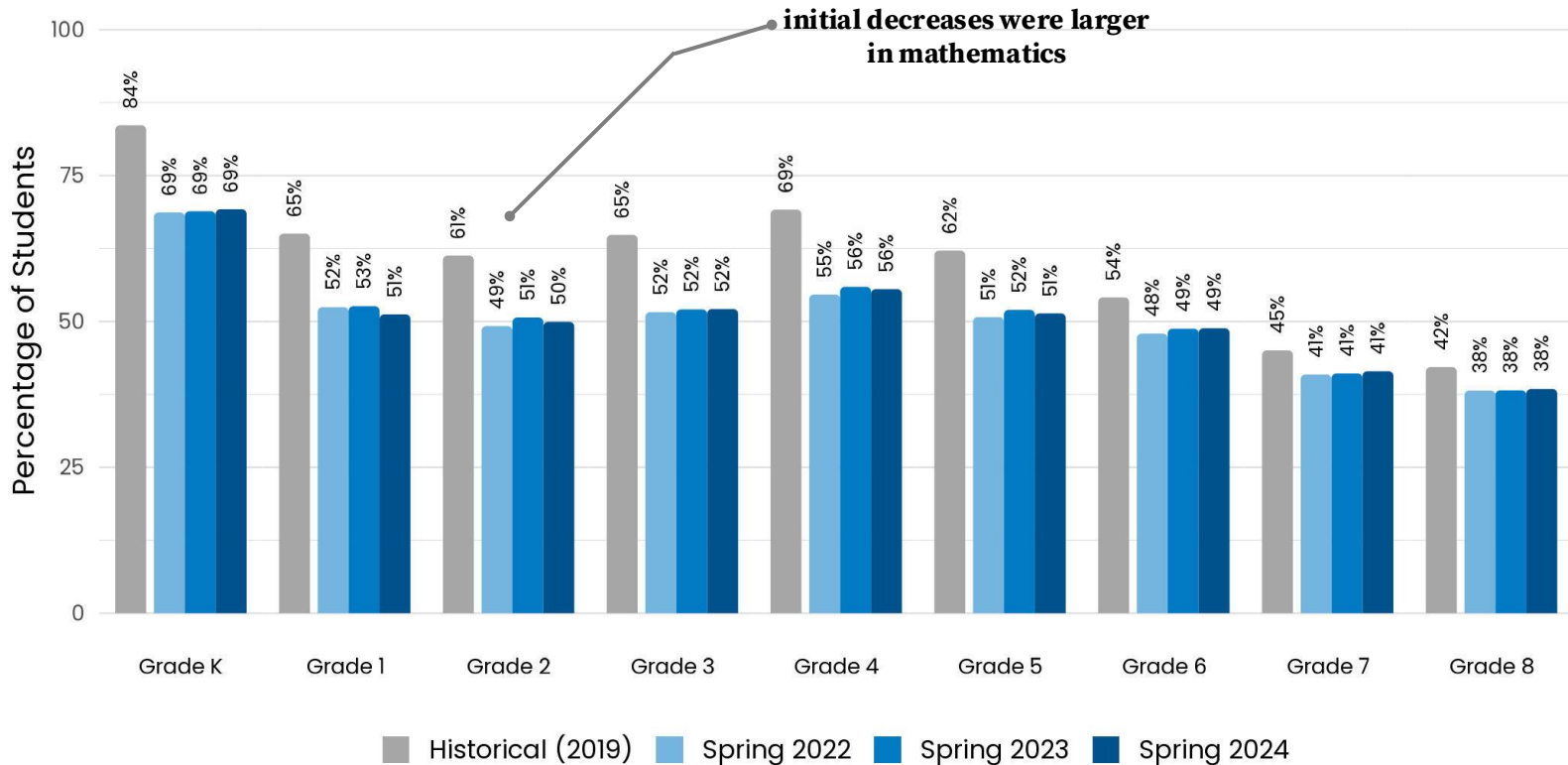
READING RESULTS | GRADE 3 ON GRADE LEVEL BY YEAR AND DEMOGRAPHICS

disparities continue for historically underserved communities

Percentage of Students

100
75
50
25
0

More Than 50% Black
54%
47%
49%
50%

More Than 50% Hispanic
62%
52%
51%
51%

More Than 50% White
81%
74%
74%
73%

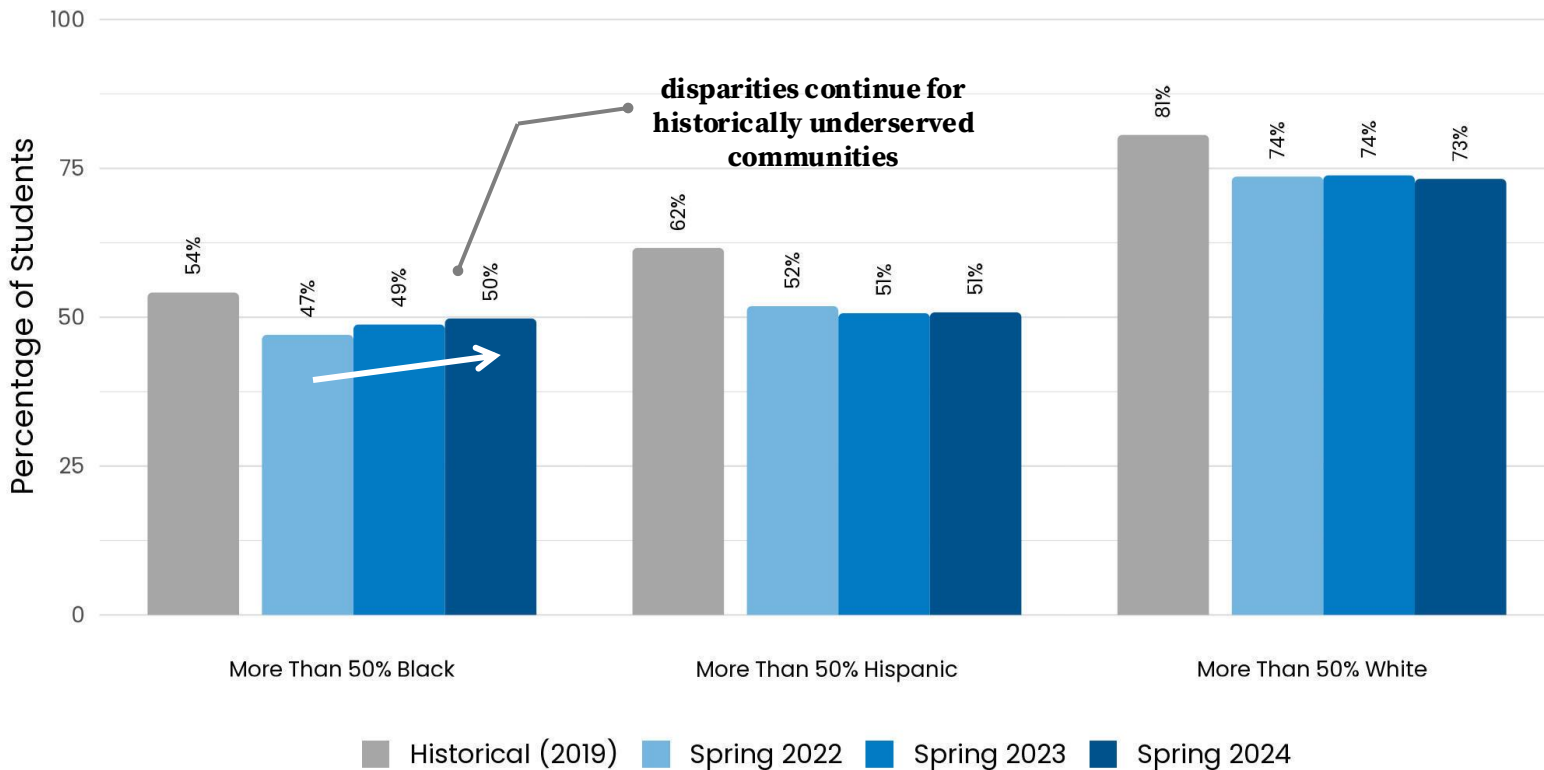Historical (2019)   Spring 2022   Spring 2023   Spring 2024
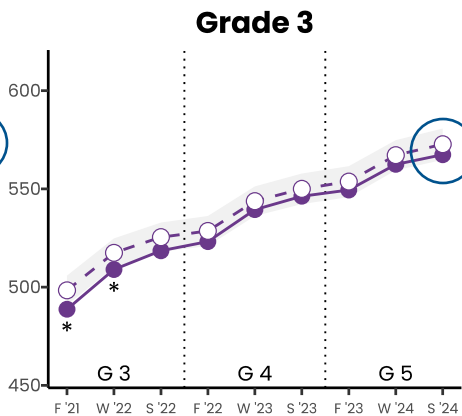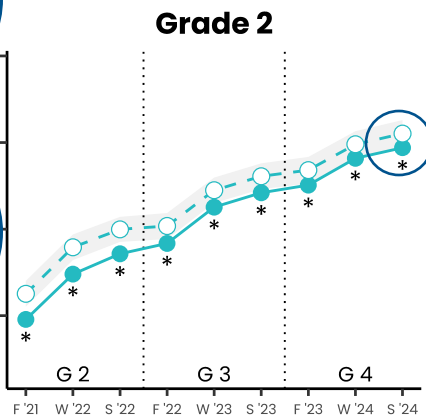
overview
approach
results
discussion

overview

approach

results

discussion

Grade 2

Grade 3

Grade 4

Grade 4

recovery or smaller declines in **older cohorts**

initial decreases were larger for younger (k–2) students
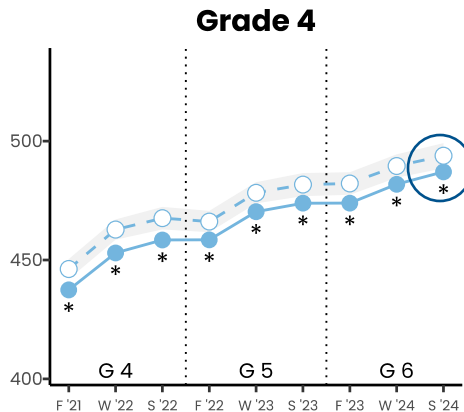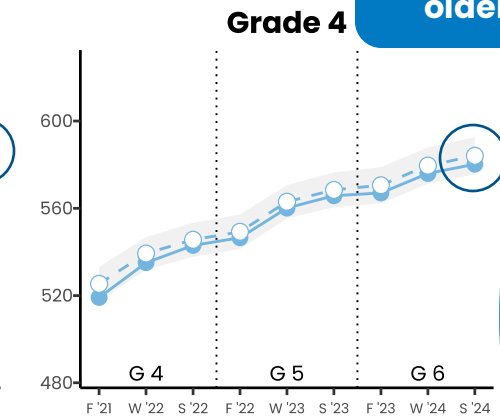
Results vary by student and school prompting a need for a nuanced approach to data and strategies.

overview

approach

results

discussion

Results vary by student and school prompting a need for a nuanced approach to data and strategies.

Percentage of Students

Grade K

81%

75%

78%

80%

Historical (2019)   Spring 2022   Spring 2023   Spring 2024
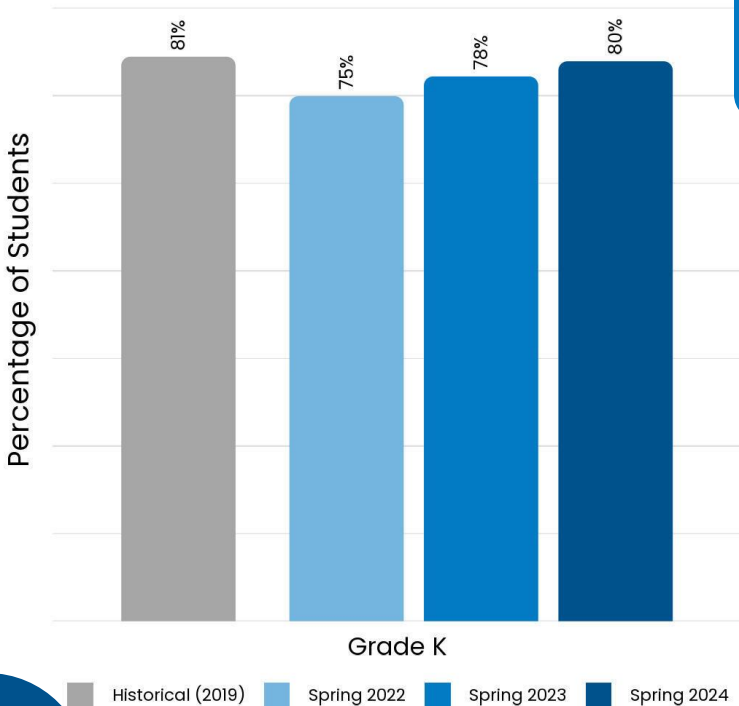
some recovery in **reading** including grade K phonics

initial decreases were larger in mathematics

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Grade 2

Scale Score

- Grade Level, Historical
- Grade Level, Post-COVID
- One Grade Below, Historical
- One Grade Below, Post-COVID
- Two or More Grades Below, Historical
- Two or More Grades Below, Post-COVID

G 2   G 3   G 4

F '21 W '22 S '22 F '22 W '23 S '23 F '23 W '24 S '24

decreases were larger for lower performing students

Results vary by student and school prompting a need for a nuanced approach to data and strategies.
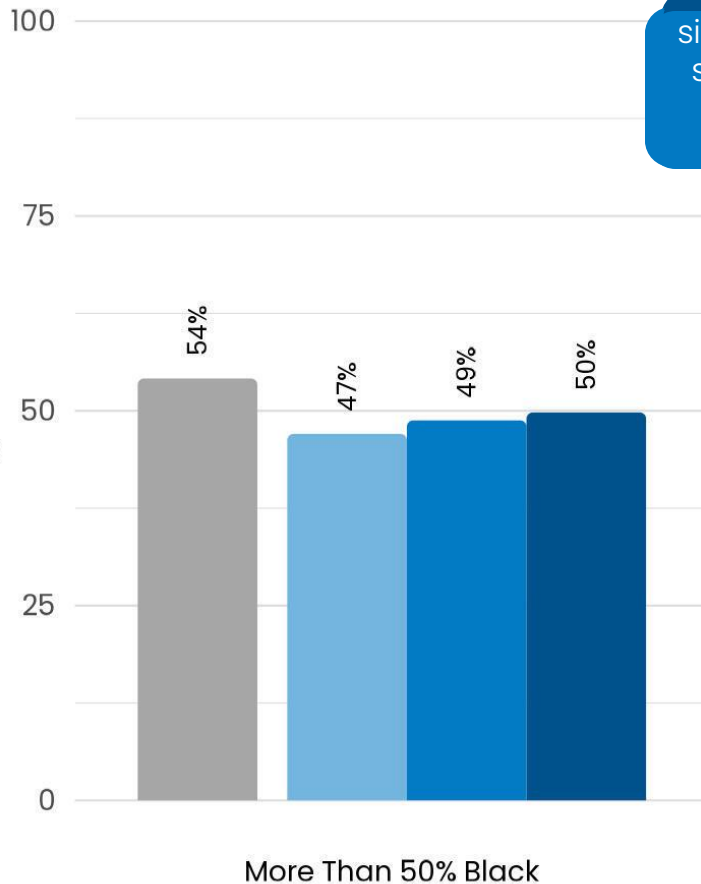
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overview

approach

results

discussion

Results vary by student and school prompting a need for a nuanced approach to data and strategies.

similar growth and small recovery in **majority Black** schools

disparities continue for historically underserved communities

Percentage of Students

100

75

50

25

0

54%

47%

49%

50%

More Than 50% Black

recovery or smaller declines in **older cohorts** → intervention efforts may **target 3rd grade** and up (state testing)
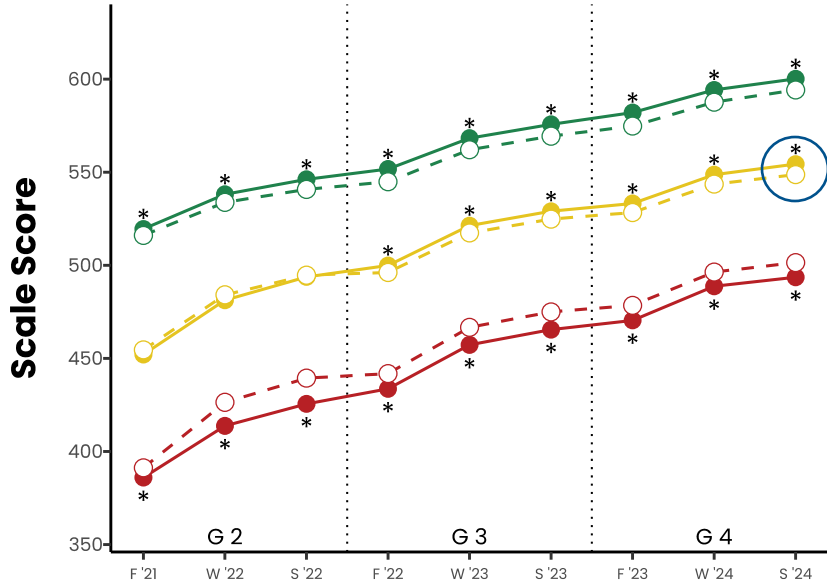
some recovery in **reading** including grade K phonics → **Science of Reading** efforts are widespread

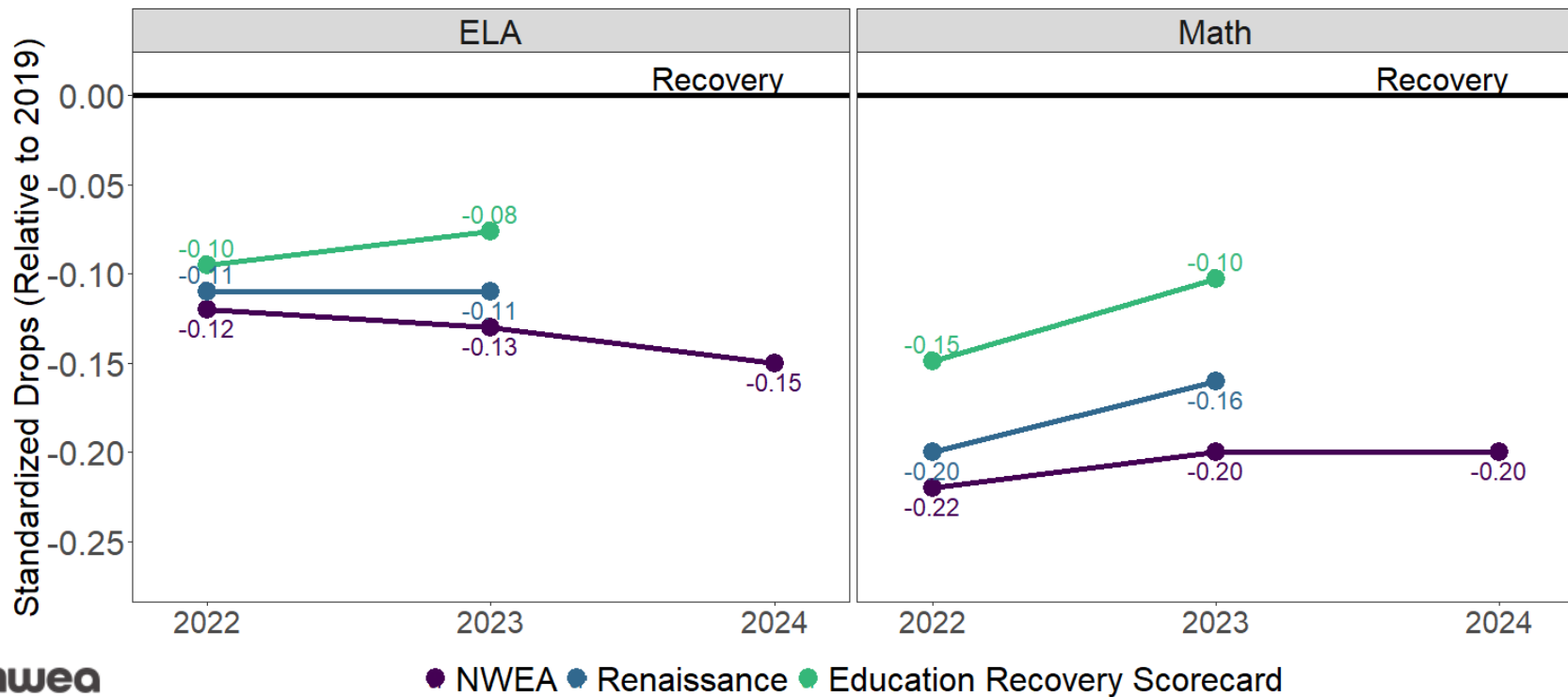**one below** recovery and comparable growth → supplemental instruction approaches may work for students **close to grade level** (i.e., Tier II designation)

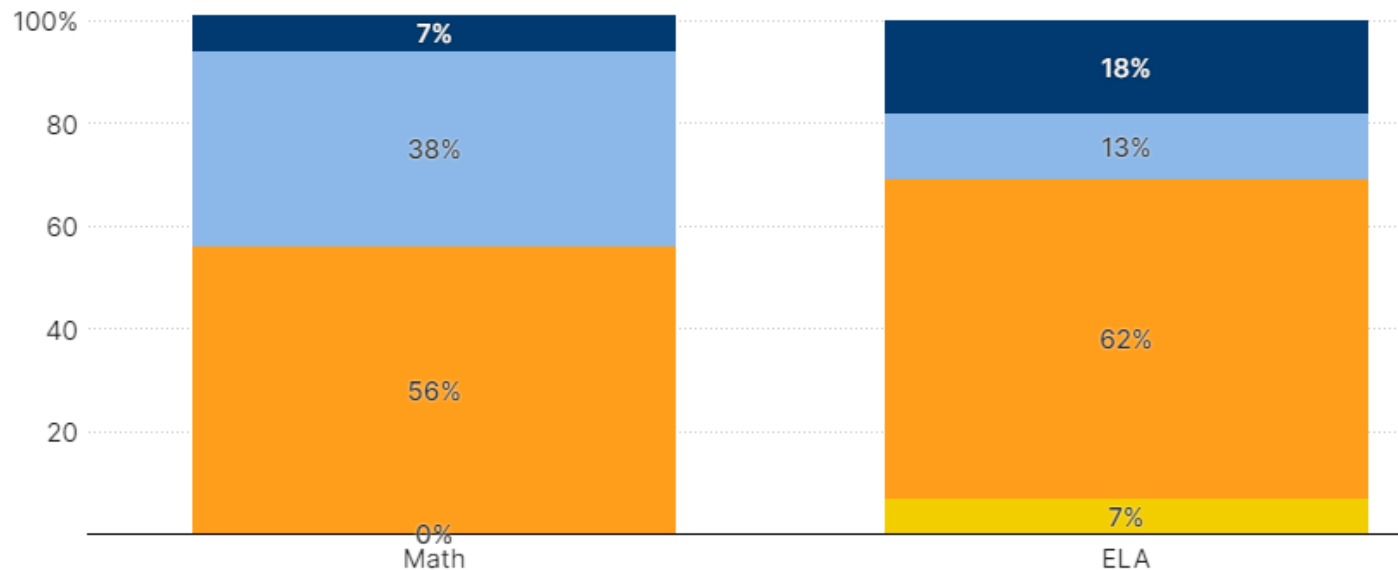similar growth and small recovery in **majority Black** schools → recovery efforts may work comparably for all but **not enough to remedy existing disparities**

Stagnation in ELA, modest recovery in math

Some states have recovered, but most have made minimal to small progress

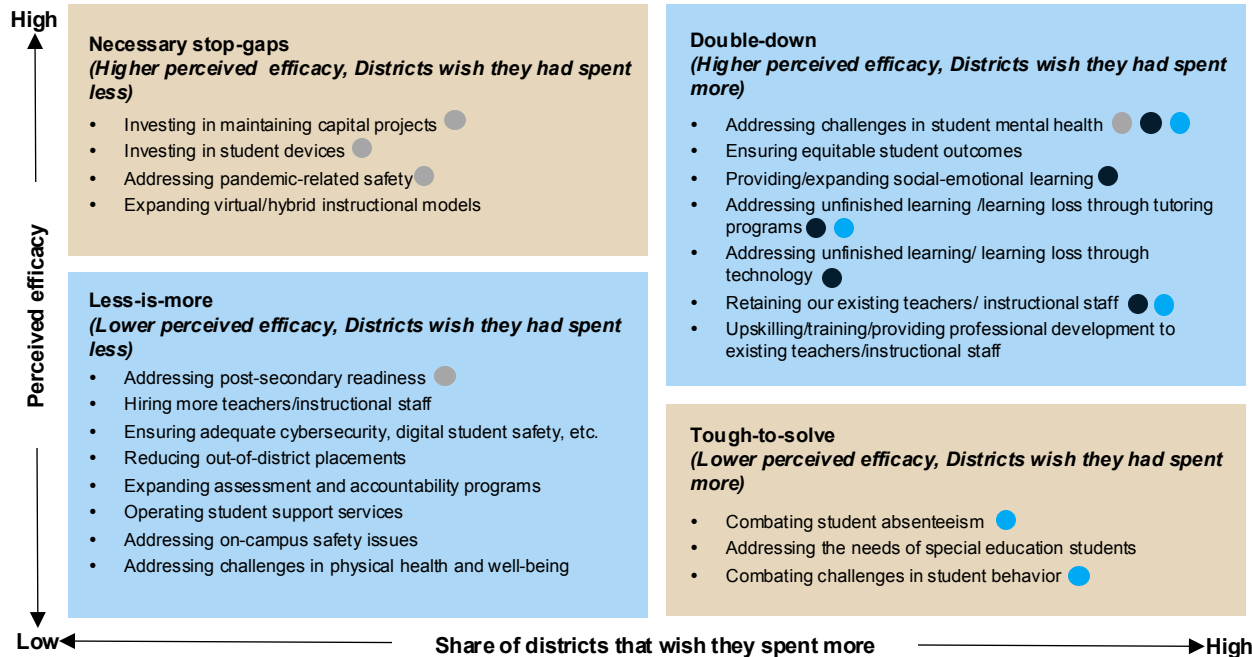|			
Continued decline	Minimal change	Making progress	Recovered or exceeding

nwea

Uneven recovery progress

• Some promising evidence of above-average recovery rates for **Black students**

• **Hispanic students** and **economically disadvantaged students** are recovering at lower rates

• Current 9th graders are a **full school year behind** pre-pandemic levels according to the NWEA data

nwea

District leaders mostly believed that ESSER funding was effective, but wish they had allocated funds differently

Evaluation of ESSER funding allocation based on perceived efficacy[1] and spending sentiment[2]

Ordered from highest to lowest priority during the pandemic period

Top 5 priority by survey
- ⬤ 2022 survey priority
- ⬤ 2023 survey priority
- ⬤ 2024 survey priority

Perceived efficacy — High / Low

Necessary stop-gaps
(Higher perceived efficacy, Districts wish they had spent less)
- Investing in maintaining capital projects ⬤
- Investing in student devices ⬤
- Addressing pandemic-related safety ⬤
- Expanding virtual/hybrid instructional models

Less-is-more
(Lower perceived efficacy, Districts wish they had spent less)
- Addressing post-secondary readiness ⬤
- Hiring more teachers/instructional staff
- Ensuring adequate cybersecurity, digital student safety, etc.
- Reducing out-of-district placements
- Expanding assessment and accountability programs
- Operating student support services
- Addressing on-campus safety issues
- Addressing challenges in physical health and well-being

Double-down
(Higher perceived efficacy, Districts wish they had spent more)
- Addressing challenges in student mental health ⬤ ⬤ ⬤
- Ensuring equitable student outcomes
- Providing/expanding social-emotional learning ⬤
- Addressing unfinished learning /learning loss through tutoring programs ⬤
- Addressing unfinished learning/ learning loss through technology ⬤
- Retaining our existing teachers/ instructional staff ⬤ ⬤
- Upskilling/training/providing professional development to existing teachers/instructional staff

Tough-to-solve
(Lower perceived efficacy, Districts wish they had spent more)
- Combating student absenteeism ⬤
- Addressing the needs of special education students
- Combating challenges in student behavior ⬤

Share of districts that wish they spent more — Low / High

Key insights

- **59% of districts** perceive investments in student mental health were effective, but wish they could have allocated the same or more **(92% of districts)**
- Interventions in combatting absenteeism, challenging behavior, and reducing out-of-district placements were perceived as less effective **(29%, 37%, and 37% of districts, respectively),** but districts wish they had allocated more dollars **(87%, 88%, and 82% of districts, respectively)**

1. Reflecting on the past years of ESSER funding, how effective or impactful do you think the ESSER funding has been for your district in achieving the following strategic goals? 2. Looking back, if you could reallocate your stimulus funding, which priorities would you have spent more ESSER funding on and which priorities would you have spent less ESSER funding on?

Source: McKinsey ESSER Survey 2024, McKinsey ESSER Survey 2023, McKinsey ESSER Survey 2022

District go-forward spending priorities differ by student demographics

Key priorities expected over the next 3 years by % students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch (FRPL), % of respondents ranking as top 7 priority[1]

Top priority for more districts ▬▬▬ Top priority for fewer districts

District by income type (share of students qualifying for FRPL) [2]

		All districts	Low income	Mid-income	High income
Highest Priority	Combating challenges in student behavior	55%	+2%	+3%	-3%
	Retaining our existing instructional staff	53%	+ 2%	0%	-1%
	Combating student absenteeism	52%	+ 7%	+1%	-5%
	Addressing challenges in student mental health	51%	-9%	-1%	+6%
	Addressing learning loss through tutoring programs	45%	+ 4%	+3%	-5%
	Addressing the needs of special education students	45%	-6%	+2%	+3%
	Investing in social-emotional learning	41%	-1%	-10%	+6%
	Ensuring equitable student outcomes	39%	0%	-3%	+1%
	Providing professional development to existing instructional staff	39%	+ 2%	0%	-1%
	Addressing post-secondary readiness	38%	+1%	-8%	+4%
	Addressing learning loss through technology	33%	+3%	+5%	-5%
	Hiring more instructional staff	33%	-4%	+5%	0%
	Addressing student on-campus safety issues	30%	+3%	+5%	-5%
	Investing in maintaining capital projects	28%	-5%	-3%	+5%
	Ensuring adequate cybersecurity, digital student safety, etc.	18%	-3%	+1%	+1%
	Expanding virtual / hybrid instructional models	18%	+3%	+4%	-4%
	Expanding assessment and accountability programs	18%	-3%	-5%	+5%
	Addressing challenges in physical health and well-being	16%	+3%	-3%	0%
	Operating student support services	16%	0%	-2%	+1%
	Investing in student devices	16%	-2%	+3%	-1%
	Addressing pandemic-related safety	13%	+4%	+3%	-4%
Lowest Priority	Reducing out-of-district placements	2%	-2%	-1%	+1%

1. Considering your overall budget, what do you anticipate will be key priorities for your district over the next 3 years?
2. Low income = Districts where >60% of students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch (FRPL); Mid-income = Districts where 41%-60%; High income = Districts where <40%. "No Data" respondents when asked about FRPL skews the "All Students" view (values excluded from analysis)

Source: McKinsey ESSER Survey 2024 (n=487)

In interviews, leaders identified multiple challenges to implementation-at-scale

| Implementation "failure modes"	Example challenges raised in interviews
Conflicting directions *We don't know where we are going* — **61%**	• Education not seen as a priority – inability to raise donor or domestic funds needed to deliver; budgets burdened with entrenched initiatives • Lack of clarity around the 'purpose of education' between grassroots and those in power • Goals are too many, too far out in the future, vague, and unmeasurable • Lack of coherence across the individual elements of reform; systems pulled in many directions, and nothing ends up moving forwards
Leadership discontinuity *We change directions with every new leader* — **33%**	• Reform is an 8-to-12-year journey, but rapid electoral cycles do not create sufficient runway to accomplish true change • Minister of Education role often short-lived • Whipsaw effect as policies change with each leader; leaving teachers and principals disillusioned and resistant to change • Short-term donor programs undermine continuity of reforms
Organ rejection of reform *We were never consulted* — **31%**	• Top down, system-level policies fail to consider and adapt to local specificities and the realities of the classroom • Insufficient communication of reform priorities and rationale • Important stakeholders including teachers, principals and families push back against reforms, either through outright or passive resistance • Mistrust towards the private sector hampers private sector engagement and innovation
Insufficient coordination and pace *We aren't moving fast enough* — **42%**	• No roadmap to implement; budgets not allocated to strategies; unclear accountability for inputs and outcomes • Too many small-scale pilots resourced in a way that are not scaleable • Poorly aligned expectations of what can be achieved in what timeframe; lack of initial progress undermines confidence in the plan, leading to churn
Limited implementation capacity — **46%** *We don't have the right people*	• Lack of people leadership, program management and analytical capacity within government; limited budget to hire seasoned leaders • Policy adoption drops off at each level from the state to the district to the school to the classroom • Donor technical assistance over-dependent on international consultants who leave, rather than local players
Flying blind — **26%** *We don't know if it's working*	• System leaders (national, middle layer, and school) have no visibility into progress in the classroom • Lack of conversations around dashboards and data to change go-forward strategy and activities • Lack of transparency for parents and students into school performance and options
Standing still — **29%** *We are stuck in the past*	• No adaptation to changes in the external environment – in the labor market, economy, cultural and political environment, etc. • Multiple pilots and innovations across the system (100 flowers are blooming) but no-one knows which are having a positive impact on student outcomes

Academic Recovery Interventions in 2022-23
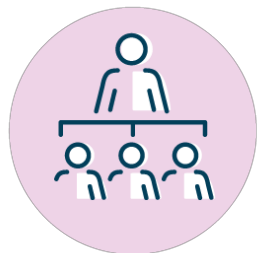
Tutoring

Afterschool Programs
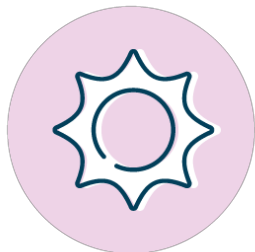
Summer Programs
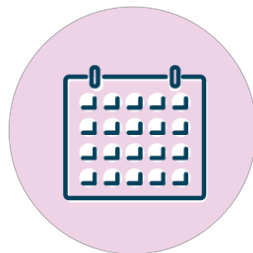
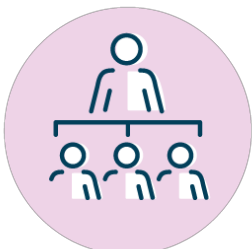**Extended school years**

Expert Teachers

Digital Learning

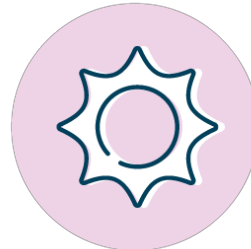# Academic Recovery Interventions in 2022-23

Tutoring

Positive effects for a limited set of highly-targeted programs

Afterschool Programs

Null effects

Summer Programs

Small positive effects in math only

Extended school years

Null effects

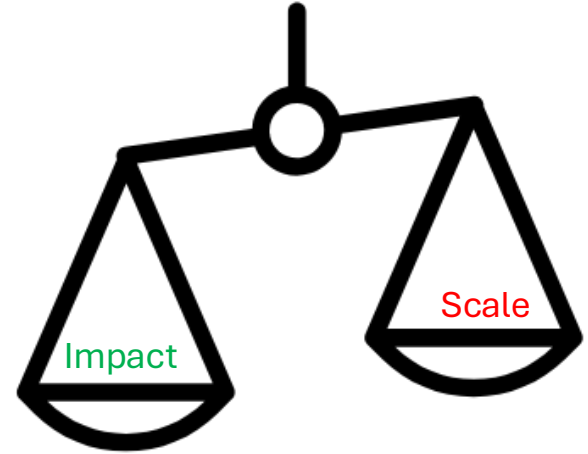**Expert Teachers**

Positive effects for both subjects

Digital Learning

Null effects

Academic Recovery Interventions in 2022-23

- Clear tradeoff between *scale* and *impact*
  - Most recovery interventions did not impact student test scores in reading or math.

  - Except for programs with high dosage and fewer participants (1-2% of students).

Sustained improvers use a set of reinforcing strategies to create a virtuous cycle for long-term, outsized gains in student learning

What works

Anchor in the evidence

- **Ground system strategy in better classroom instruction**, aligning the system around learning outcomes at the instructional core
- Recognize the context – **start the journey from where you are**, moving from poor-to-fair-to-good-to-great performance

Reinforcing improvement strategies for success

7 how levers

Build a durable coalition for change

1. **Set fewer priorities to get more done,** with coherent, sustained, evidence-based goals
2. **Cultivate leadership beyond the single leader,** and institutions beyond the ministry
3. **Engage educators and families authentically** with two-way communication

Create delivery capacity to scale

4. **Create coordination and cadence for change,** turning strategies into plans, budgets, and timelines
5. **Build implementation structures and skills** across the center and middle layer

Drive and adapt with data

6. **Measure student outcomes and make them transparent;** use this to create momentum, and to tailor and adapt policies and approach
7. **Roll out what works, but create space for innovation,** measuring to build evidence for 'what works'

Systems that have overcome implementation challenges at scale seem to do a few things effectively – seven 'how' levers

Build a durable coalition for change   *Create delivery capacity to scale*   *Drive and adapt with data*

Conflicting directions	Leadership discontinuity	Stakeholders sidelined	Strategy stuck on a shelf	Limited capacity	Flying blind	Standing still

Clear consistent evidence-based priorities

Engaged, empowered, and embedded leadership

Changing hearts, minds, and behaviors

A plan and a performance infrastructure

Capacity and expertise to implement

Data-driven decisions at every level

Continuous innovation

Upcoming GLR Learning Tuesdays Webinars:

GLR LEARNING TUESDAYS KINDERGARTEN MATTERS
Play-Based Learning in the Kindergarten Classroom and Beyond
Tuesday, October 15, 3–4:30 p.m. ET/12−1:30 p.m. PT

GLR LEARNING TUESDAYS PARTNER WEBINAR
Building Stronger Teacher Pipelines through University-District Partnerships
Tuesday, October 22, 3–4:30 p.m. ET/12−1:30 p.m. PT

GLR LEARNING TUESDAYS LEARNING LOSS RECOVERY CHALLENGE
SEL Goes to the Olympics -- AND to Classrooms and Schools!
Tuesday, October 29, 3–4:30 p.m. ET/12−1:30 p.m. PT

Join us!

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