RESEARCH BRIEF

Reading scores rise overall; gender disparities present a complex picture.

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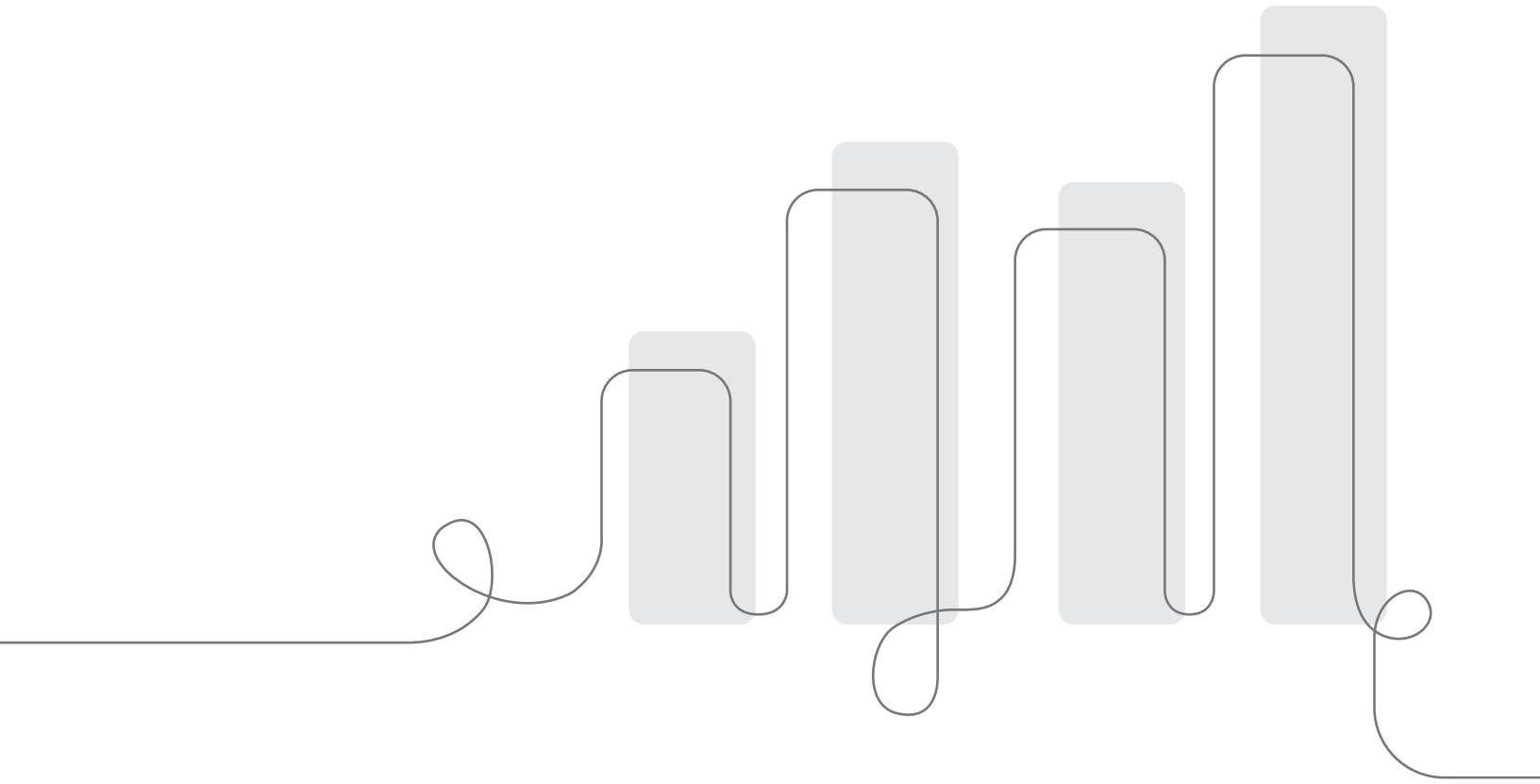


Amplify.

Reading scores rise overall; gender disparities present a complex picture.

The latest end-of-year data show improvement in early literacy across grades K–2. More young learners are on track to learn to read and fewer are far behind than during the pandemic, with 8% more second graders, 14% more first graders, and 21% more kindergarteners at or above benchmark compared to 2020–21.

Overall, more young learners are above benchmark, and fewer are behind:
68 percent of K–2 students are on track to learn to read. While progress was less dramatic than in recent years, students are more likely to end the year on track in the earliest grades (K–1):

- Kindergarten: 70% of students are at or above benchmark.
- 1st grade: 70% of students are at or above benchmark.
- 2nd grade: 65% of students are at or above benchmark.

Year-over-year improvements have slowed:
Despite overall gains, year-over-year improvements in reading readiness have slowed. Since the 2023–24 school year, the percentage of students on track has improved by only 1–2 points in each grade:

- Kindergarten: +2 points from prior year.
- 1st grade: +2 points from prior year.
- 2nd grade: +1 point from prior year.

Gender disparities are complex:
End-of-year data suggest a nuanced picture of gender disparities in early reading.

- Across grades K–2, boys score the same or better than girls in reading readiness at the beginning of the year.
- However, regardless of their scores at the beginning of the year, girls show more improvement than boys *during* the school year, narrowing gaps and sometimes outperforming boys by end of year.

Insights

Percentage of students on track at the end of the year

Overall, more young learners are above benchmark, and fewer are behind. More K–2 students are on track at the end of 2024–25 than in prior years, and they are improving more *throughout* the school year than they have in prior years.

- Each grade has shown some improvement in each year since the low point in 2020–21.
- After some initial improvements, progress in recent years has slowed.
- Greater increases were seen in the earliest grades (K–1).

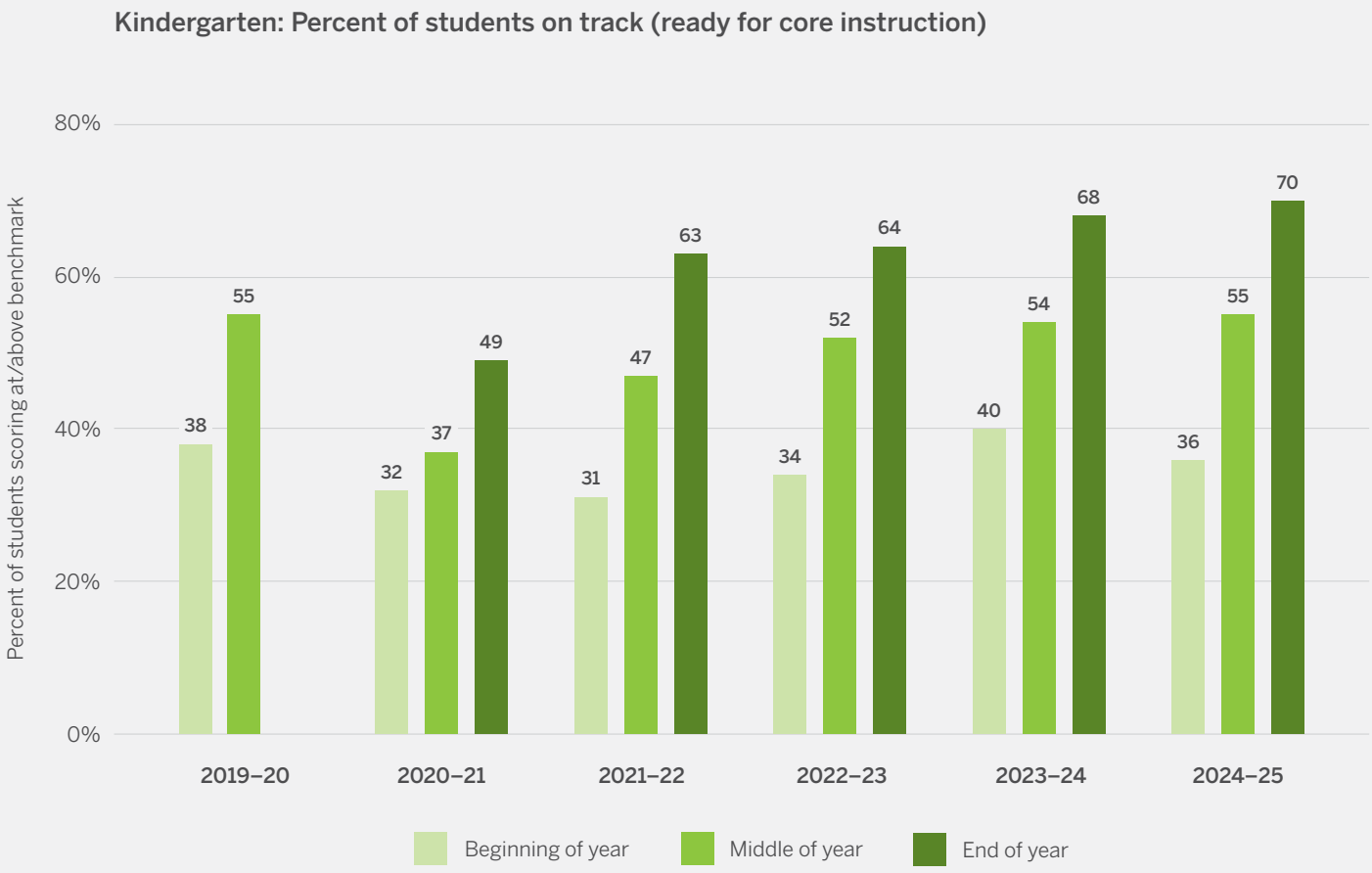
	Percent at/above benchmark						Change from	
Grade	**2019–20**	**2020–21**	**2021–22**	**2022–23**	**2023–24**	**2024–25**	**2020–21**	**2023–24**
Kindergarten	COVID	49%	63%	64%	68%	70%	+ 21 pts	+ 2 pts
Grade 1	COVID	56%	64%	67%	68%	70%	+ 14 pts	+ 2 pts
Grade 2	COVID	57%	60%	63%	64%	65%	+ 8 pts	+ 1 pt
Grades K–2	COVID	55%	62%	65%	67%	68%	+ 13 pts	+ 1 pt

Grade-level results for all students in a matched cohort of schools from 2020–21 through 2024–25.

Growth trends by grade: Kindergarten

More kindergarten students were on track—and had improved more *throughout* the year—at the end of the 2024–25 school year than in prior years.

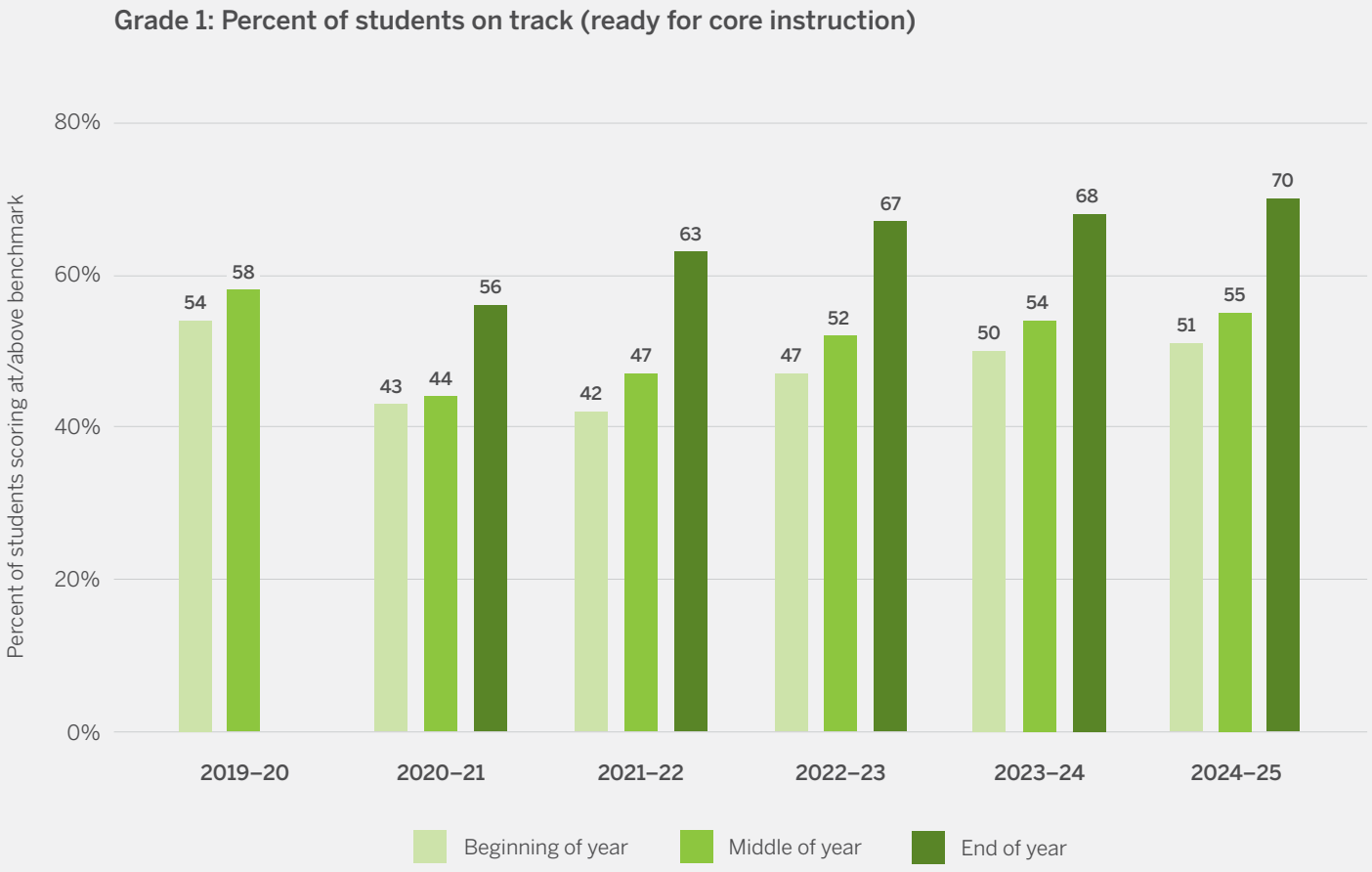
- 21 percent more kindergarten students were on track at the end of the year than in 2020–21.
- By the end of the 2024–25 school year, 70% of kindergarten students were on track to learn to read, compared to 36% at the beginning of the year—the greatest improvement since 2020–21.



Growth trends by grade: Grade 1

Our data points to similar growth trends among first graders, 70% of whom ended the 2024–25 year on track to learn to read.

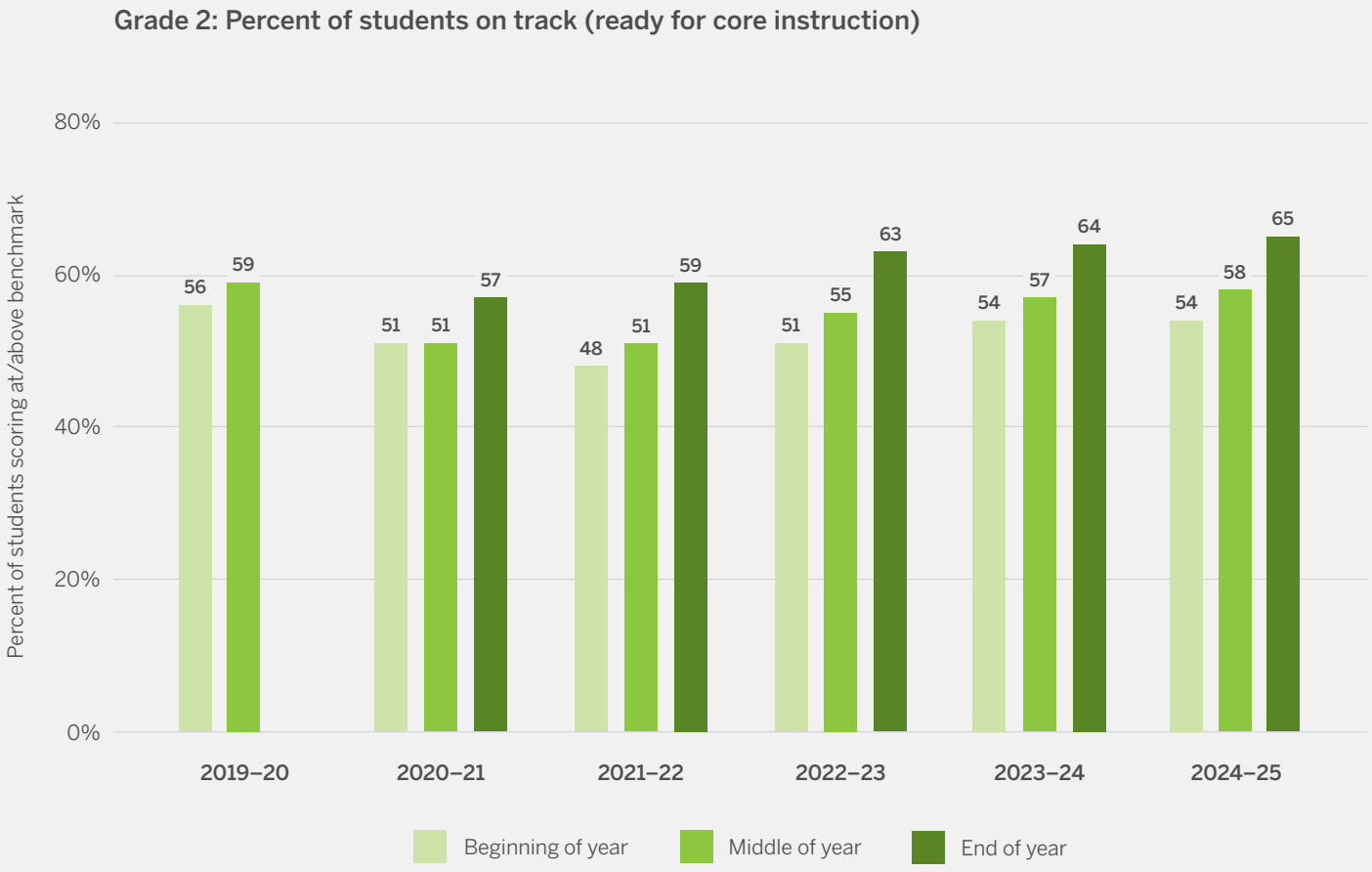
- More first grade students (51%) were at or above benchmark at the beginning of the year than in 2020–21 (43%).
- By the end of the 2024–25 school year, first graders had improved by 19 percentage points, with 70% ending the year on track, compared to 56% in 2021.



Growth trends by grade: Grade 2

Second graders also made gains in reading proficiency, but the gains were smaller than those made by their younger classmates.

- By the end of the 2024–25 school year, 65% of second graders were on track to learn to read, up from 54% at the beginning of the year, an 11 point increase.
- By comparison, only 51% of second graders in 2020–21 began the year at or above reading level, with 57% ending the year on track.



Percentage of students behind at the end of the year

Compared to the 2020–21 school year, fewer K–2 students are at risk of falling behind in reading.

- Declines slowed across all grades in recent years, but the greatest improvements were in kindergarten and first grade.
- The number of kindergarten and first grade students at risk of ending the 2024–25 school year below benchmark fell by more than 10% compared to 2020–21.

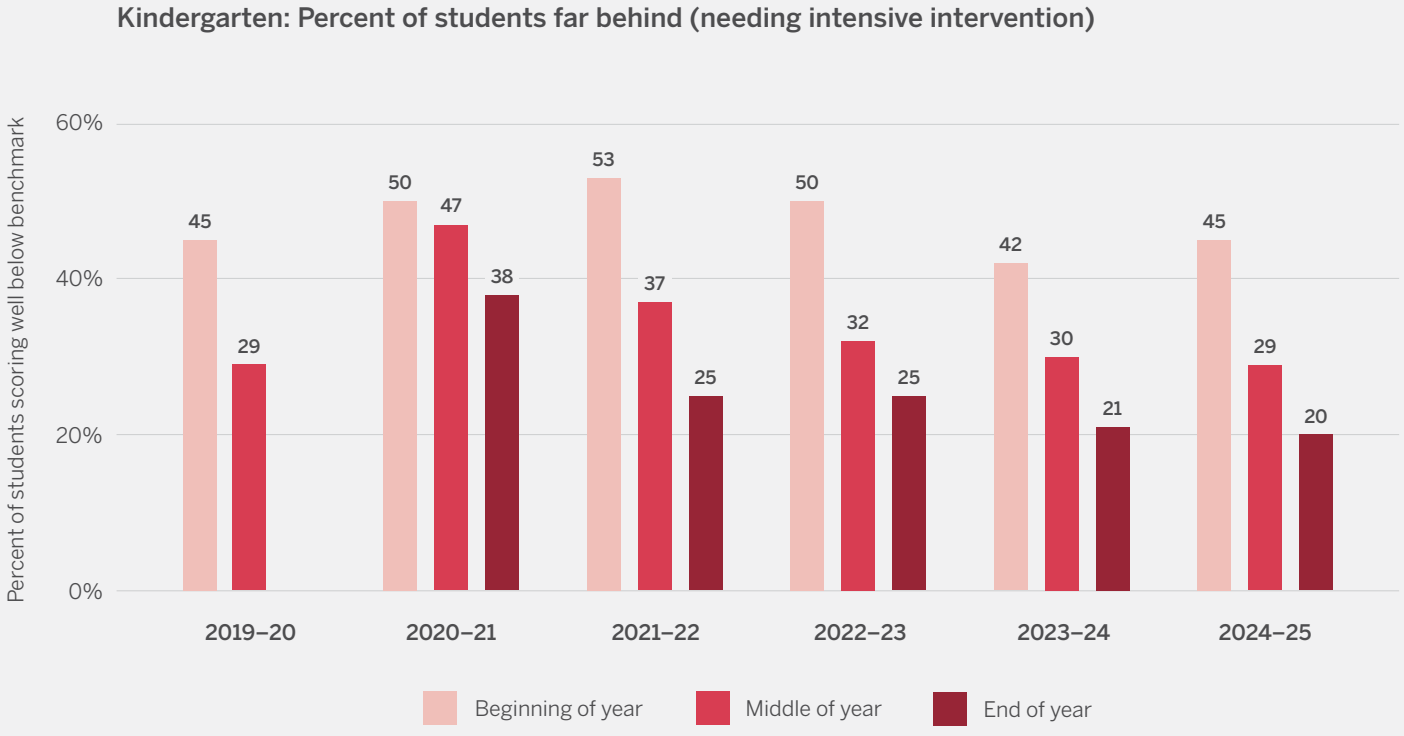
	Percent well below benchmark						Change from	
Grade	**2019–20**	**2020–21**	**2021–22**	**2022–23**	**2023–24**	**2024–25**	**2020–21**	**2023–24**
Kindergarten	COVID	38%	25%	25%	21%	20%	-18 pts	-1 pt
Grade 1	COVID	31%	24%	20%	20%	19%	-12 pts	-1 pt
Grade 2	COVID	29%	28%	25%	24%	23%	-6 pts	-1 pt
Grades K–2	COVID	33%	25%	24%	22%	21%	-12 pts	-1 pt

Grade-level results for all students in a matched cohort of schools from 2020–21 through 2024–25.

Risk trends by grade: Kindergarten

Compared to prior years, fewer kindergarten students were far behind by the end of 2024–25—and they improved more within the year—but progress has slowed.

- During the school year disrupted by the pandemic (2020–21), the percentage of kindergarten students who needed intensive intervention decreased from 50% at the beginning of the year to 38% at the end of the year.
- In 2024–25, 45% of kindergarten students began the year far behind, with 20% needing intense intervention at the end, an improvement from four years ago, but only a slight improvement (one percentage point) from last year.

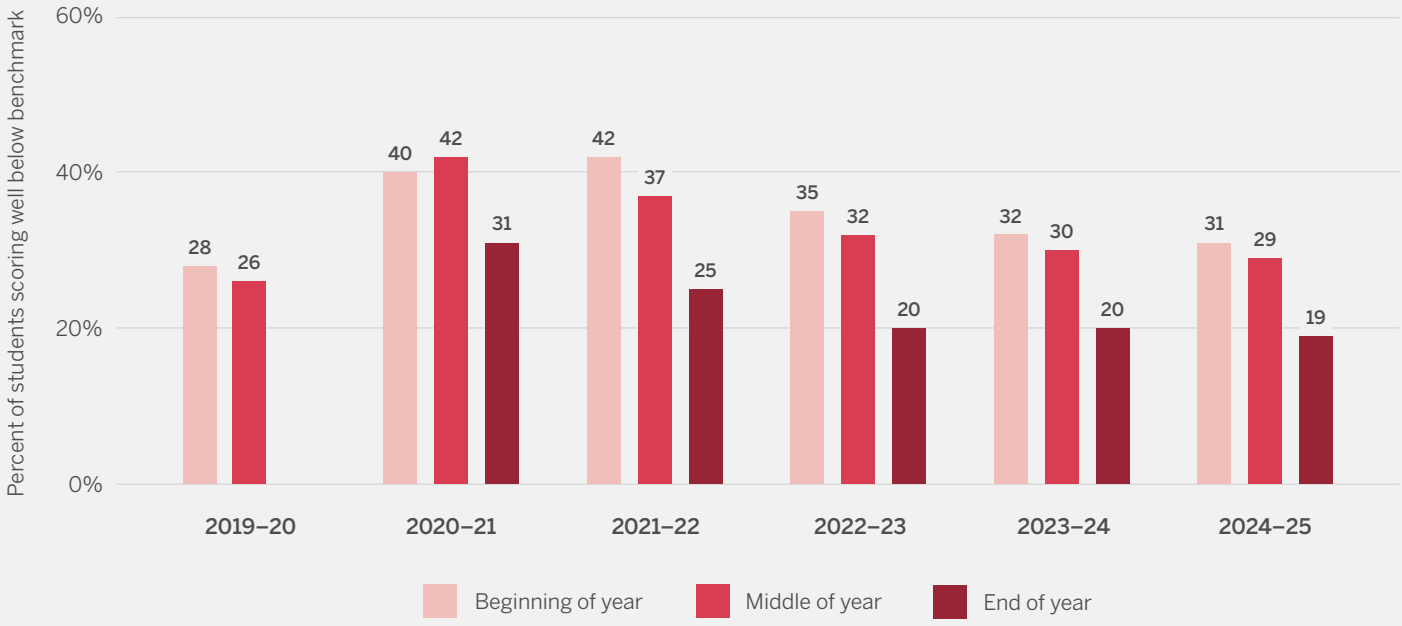


Risk trends by grade: Grade 1

Trends among first graders at risk for not learning to read were similar: Overall, the number of students at risk declined compared to prior years, but year-over-year progress is incremental.

- The number of students far behind at the beginning of the school year decreased from 40% in 2020–21 to 31% in 2024–25, and those far behind at the end of the year decreased from 31% to 19%.
- Between 2023–24 and 2024–25, however, the number of students needing intensive intervention at beginning and end of year both declined by only a single percentage point.

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

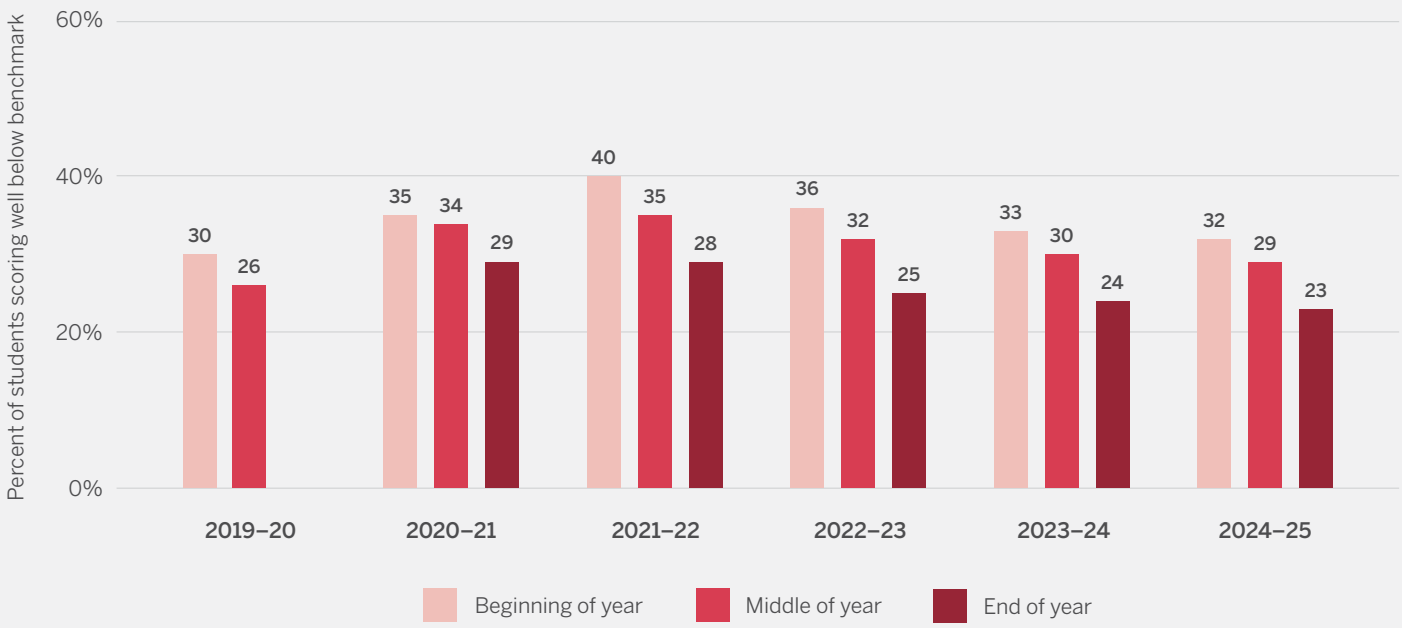


Risk trends by grade: Grade 2

The number of students needing intensive intervention dropped between 2020–21 and 2024–25, but not as much as in the lower grades.

- In 2020–21, the percent of second grade students at risk for not learning to read decreased from 35% at the beginning of the year to 29% at the end of the year.
- In 2024–25, the percentage decreased from 32% at the beginning of the year to 23% at the end of the year.
- As with the first grade cohort, the number of students needing intensive intervention at the beginning and end of year declined only by a single percentage point between 2023–24 and 2024–25.

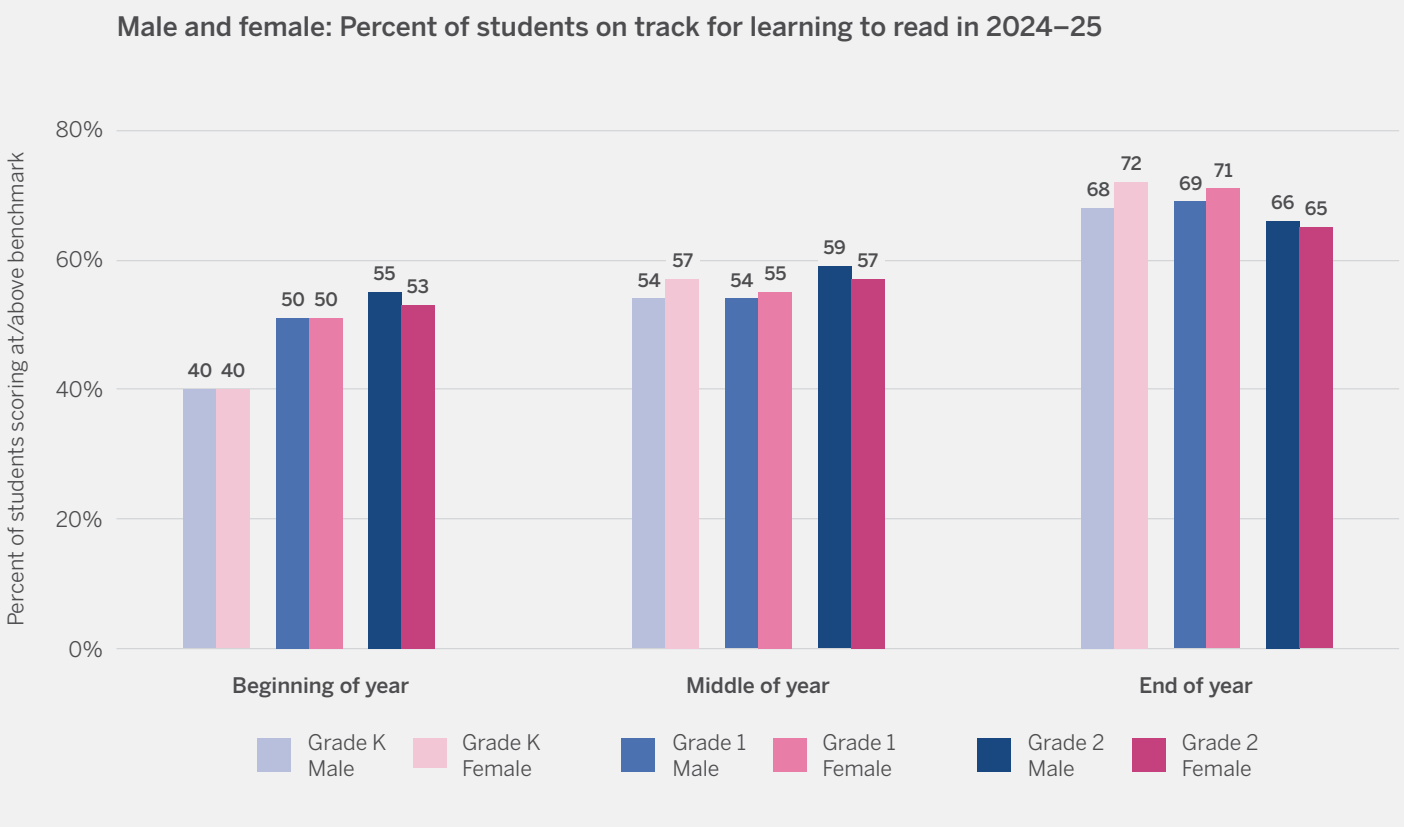
Grade 2: Percent of students far behind (needing intensive intervention)



Gender disparities in the data

Research [1, 2] suggests that gender disparities in early literacy may be growing, but mCLASS data present a nuanced picture. For students who are on track to learn to read:

- The data show that boys begin the year in each grade with the same or better early reading scores than girls.
- Girls outperform boys during the school year in each grade, finishing the year ahead of boys in grades K–1 and narrowing the gap in grade 2.



1 García, E. *Inequalities at the Starting Gate: Cognitive and Noncognitive Skills Gaps between 2010–2011 Kindergarten Classmates.* Economic Policy Institute, 2015 https://www.epi.org/publication/inequalities-at-the-starting-gate-cognitive-and-noncognitive-gaps-in-the-2010-2011-kindergarten-class/

2 *National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) School Readiness 2022 Data Brief.* Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, October 2023 https://mchb.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/mchb/data-research/2023-nsch-hrtl-brief-oct-2023.pdf

Gender disparities in the data (continued)

Among students who are at risk for not learning to read, the data on gender disparities suggest a similar story.

- Across K–2, girls score the same or better than boys.
- Directionally, the same trend emerges as with students who are on track: During the year, girls show more improvement than boys. As a result, by the end of the year, fewer girls are at risk for not learning to read than boys.

Male and female: Percent of students at risk for not learning to read in 2024–25

Recommendations

The latest end-of-year data show that student performance in early reading is at the highest levels since the lows from the pandemic five years ago. More students are on track for learning to read and fewer are far behind in grades K–2. Despite these successes, broad literacy trends across the United States remain a concern, as year-over-year progress across all early grades has slowed.

As schools and districts align on priorities ahead of the new school year, they must take into account students who are learning to read. Grades K–2 remain critical years for literacy development. To support early readers, educators need data-driven insights into student reading development and instructional practices that are based in the Science of Reading. **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 that districts make integrated plans to ensure that schools:

- Administer benchmark assessments three times per year to monitor levels of risk for reading difficulties.
- Analyze student data and make informed instructional decisions to support students who are at risk during grade-level instruction.
- Allocate resources to support students who are at risk, spending additional time in literacy instruction beyond grade-level instruction that addresses root causes.
- Regularly monitor progress for students, 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 language development and foundational skills.	• During school day (literacy block)	All
Additional foundational skill instruction	• During the school day (in addition to literacy block) • Summer school	Students who are at risk
Intervention opportunities	• During the school day • 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 the school day (as part of additional foundational skills) • At home • Before and after school • Summer school	All

About the data

The report highlights reading scores by comparing Amplify mCLASS with DIBELS® 8th Edition benchmark data from the 2019–20, 2020–21, 2021–22, 2022–23, 2023–24 and 2024–25 school years. From more than 3 million students assessed with mCLASS, approximately 250,000 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, but perform comparably to the much larger mCLASS national population.

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 15 million students in all 50 states. To learn more, visit **amplify.com**.

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

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