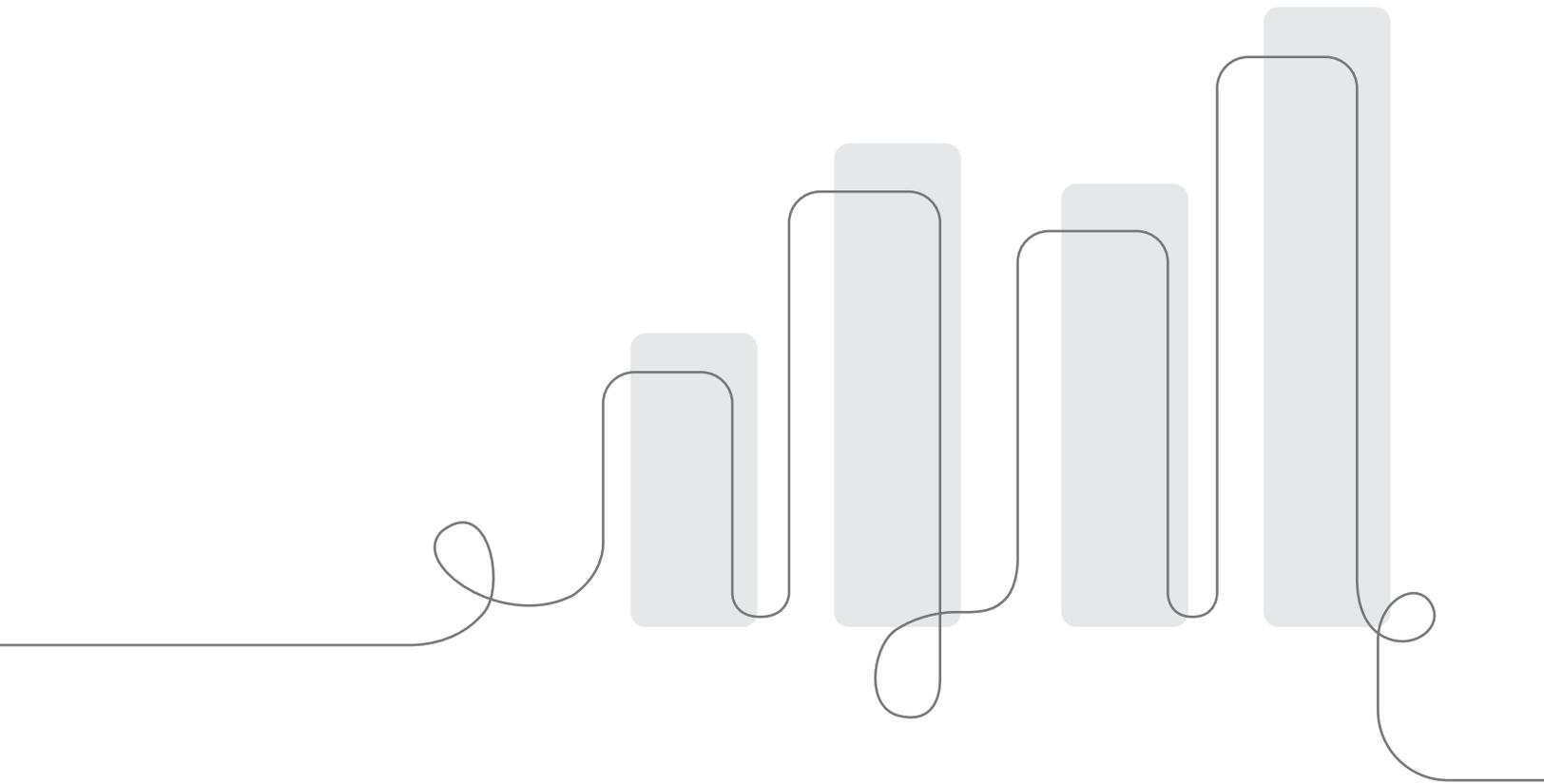


RESEARCH BRIEF

More students start the school year on track for learning to read, though momentum is slow.

October 2025



More students start the school year on track for learning to read, though momentum is slow.

The latest beginning-of-year data show that reading readiness among K–2 students continues to improve, though at a slower pace than in previous years. More students are on track to learn to read than at any time since the pandemic, and fewer are far behind, but students have not yet reached pre-pandemic levels of beginning-of-year readiness. And the overall trend is concerning, with fewer than half of K–2 students on track to learn to read at the start of this school year, pointing to an ongoing crisis in early literacy that was only exacerbated by the pandemic. We continue to recommend a laser focus on supporting students in achieving reading proficiency in grades K–3—through universal screening, evidence-based instruction, and robust support for early readers who are struggling—even as pandemic-related effects start to fade.

- At the beginning of the 2025–26 school year, 48% of K–2 students are on track to learn to read, a gain of seven percentage points from 2021–22.
- Compared to the beginning of the 2024–25 school year, increases in the percent of students who are on track to learn to read are modest, ranging from zero to two percentage points across grades K–2.

The data also show that students who begin the year on track for learning to read in the early grades are most likely to stay on track through the third grade. K–3 students who begin the year at risk for not learning to read are less likely to get on track by the end of third grade than students who start on track. However, those who catch up to grade level during the school year in grades K–2 often maintain that progress through the third grade, illustrating the critical importance of getting students on track in K–2 for later literacy success.

Longitudinal data reinforce this pattern:

- Roughly nine in 10 K–2 students who began the 2021–22 school year on track to learn to read stayed on track through the end of third grade in 2024–25.
- Roughly two in three K–2 students who began the 2021–22 school year far behind but caught up by the end of the year, regardless of which year, were still on track for learning to read at the end of third grade in 2024–25.

Insights

Percentage of students **on track** at the beginning of the year

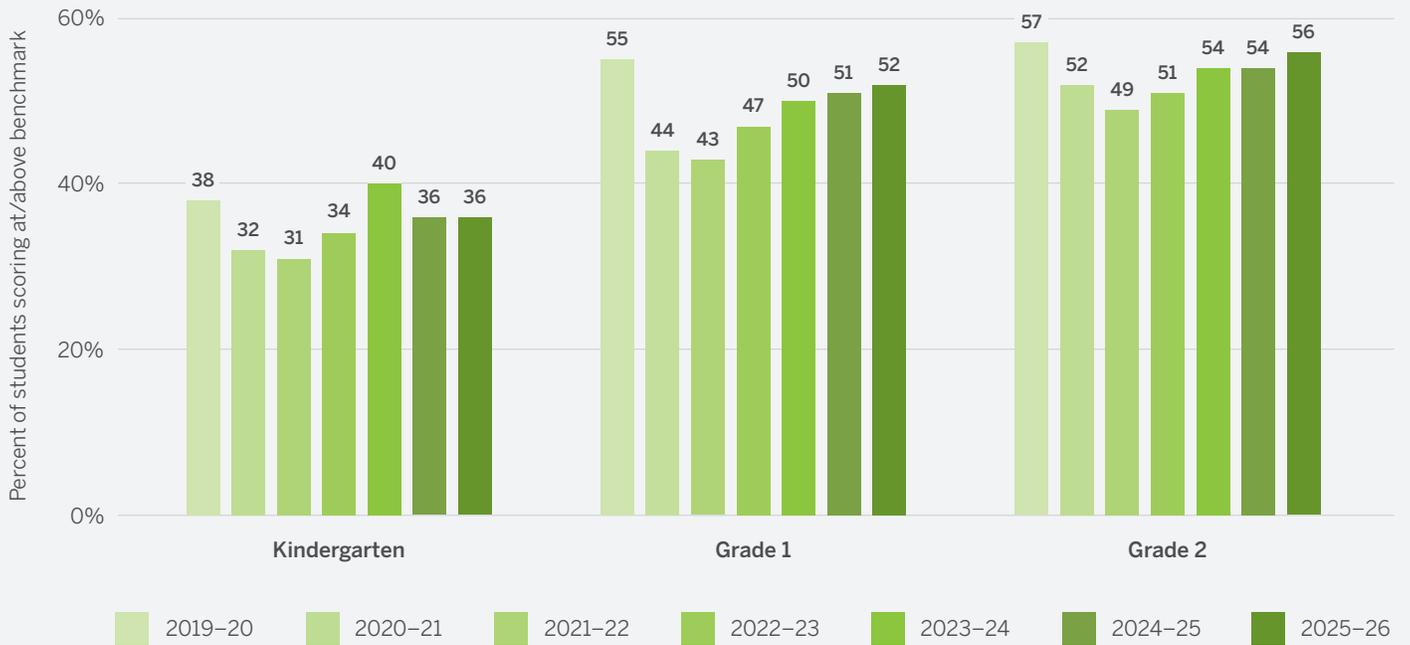
Overall, more K–2 students are on track to learn to read, and fewer are behind, than any time since 2021–22. The percentage of students ready for core instruction is at a high point since the pandemic.

Despite these gains, the percentage of K–2 students on track for learning to read at the beginning of the 2025–26 school year has not yet surpassed the percentage of those on track in 2019–20. Growth has been incremental over the past several years, indicating that while early literacy recovery is ongoing, it is approaching a plateau.

Growth trends by grade:

- Kindergarten: 36% are on track for learning to read (+5 percentage points compared to 2021–22, but unchanged from the prior year).
- First grade: 52% are on track for learning to read (+9 percentage points compared to 2021–22, +1 percentage point from the prior year).
- Second grade: 56% are on track for learning to read (+7 percentage points compared to 2021–22, +2 percentage points from the prior year).

Percent of students on track (ready for core instruction)



Percentage of students far behind at the end of the year

Overall, fewer K–2 students began the 2025–26 school year far behind in learning to read than at any time since 2021–22. The percentage of students in need of intensive intervention continues to decline across grades K–2, with the largest long-term improvements in first and second grades.

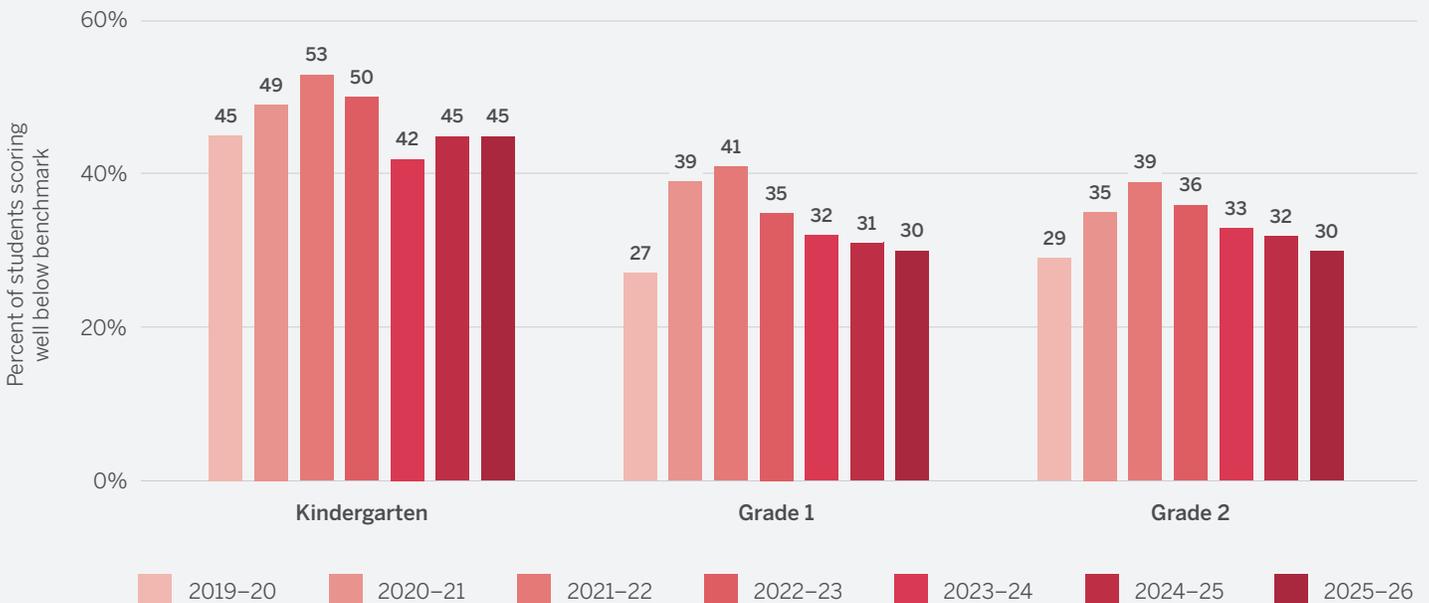
Despite these improvements, the percentage of students in K–2 who are at risk for not learning to read is greater than the percentage of students at risk in 2019–20 (prior to the pandemic):

- The percentage of students well below benchmark at the beginning of the school year has fallen across grades in recent years, with the greatest improvements in first and second grades.
- The percentage of first and second grade students who were far behind at the beginning of the 2025–26 fell by 11 and nine percentage points compared to the percentage of first and second grade students far behind in 2021–22.
- 45 percent of kindergarten students were far behind at the beginning of 2025–26, compared to 53% in 2021–22 (-8 percentage points).

Risk trends by grade:

- Kindergarten: 45% are at risk for not learning to read (-8 percentage points compared to 2021–22, unchanged from the prior year).
- First grade: 30% are at risk for not learning to read (-11 percentage points compared to 2021–22, -1 percentage point from the prior year).
- Second grade: 30% are at risk for not learning to read (-9 percentage points compared to 2021–22, -2 percentage points from the prior year).

Percent of students far behind (needing intensive intervention)



Beginning-of-year reading readiness and third grade reading outcomes

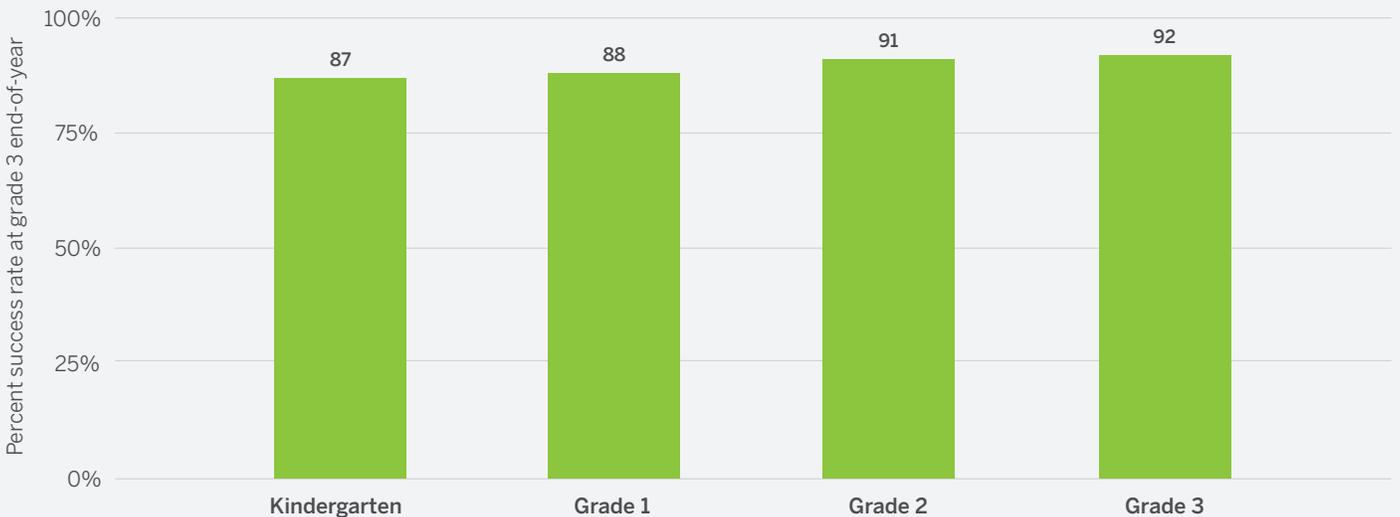
Data from a matched year-over-year cohort of students nationwide who entered kindergarten in 2021–22 and completed third grade in 2024–25 show that students who began kindergarten, first grade, second grade, or third grade on track to learn to read were likely to stay on track in their current grade and through the end of third grade, a pivotal year when young readers transition from decoding to greater fluency and comprehension.

Students who began those years far behind in reading were less likely to finish third grade on track, unless they caught up by the end of the year. Students who began kindergarten, first grade, or second grade far behind for learning to read, but were on track by the end of the year, had dramatically better reading outcomes by the end of third grade, regardless of the grade in which the gains occurred.

Students in K–3 who were on track for learning to read (at or above benchmark) were likely to complete third grade on track as well:

- Kindergarten: 87% who started the 2021–22 year on track for learning to read completed third grade on track.
- First grade: 88% who started the 2022–23 year on track for learning to read completed third grade on track.
- Second grade: 91% who started the 2023–24 year on track for learning to read completed third grade on track.
- Third grade: 92% who started the 2024–25 year on track for learning to read completed third grade on track.

Starting year on track: Likelihood of grade 3 success



Students in K–3 who were at risk for not learning to read were less likely to catch up and get on track by the end of third grade, with the likelihood decreasing by each grade level, illustrating the importance of intervening as early as possible:

- Kindergarten: 49% who started the 2021–22 year far behind for learning to read completed third grade on track.
- First grade: 29% who started the 2022–23 year far behind for learning to read completed third grade on track.
- Second grade: 18% who started the 2023–24 year far behind for learning to read completed third grade on track.
- Third grade: 5% who started the 2024–25 year far behind for learning to read completed third grade on track.

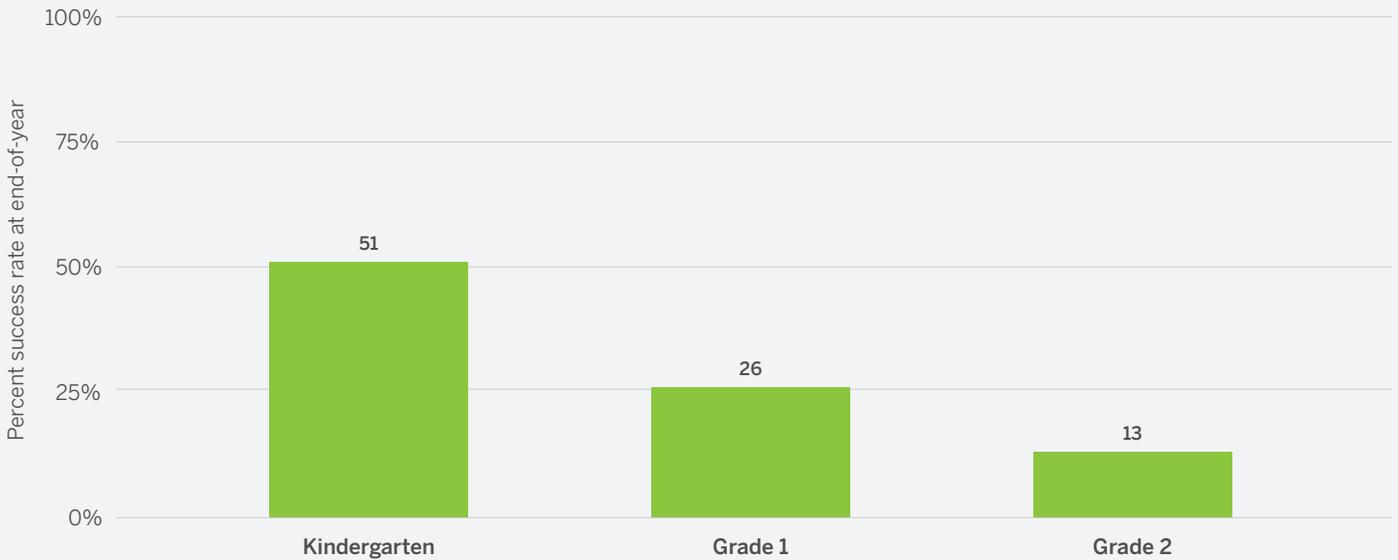
Starting year far behind: Likelihood of grade 3 success



Students in the earliest grades were more likely to catch up in early reading (progress from far behind to on track) during the school year. Among K–2 students who began the year far behind in learning to read and caught up by the end of the school year, students in the earlier grades demonstrated greater gains.

- Kindergarten: 51% who started school far behind for learning to read were on track by the end of the year.
- First grade: 26% who started school far behind for learning to read were on track by the end of the year.
- Second grade: 13% who started school far behind for learning to read caught up by the end of the year.

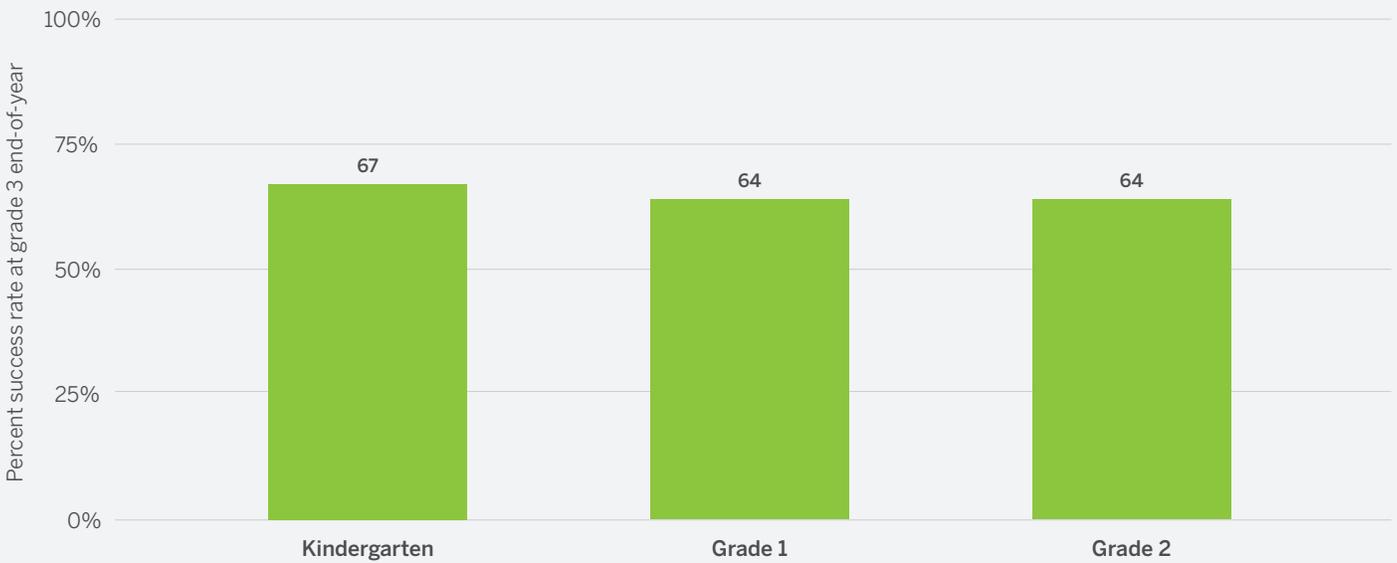
Likelihood of catching up during the school year



Students who began K–2 far behind in learning to read but caught up by the end of K–2 were more likely to stay on track through the third grade. Roughly two in every three students who began the year at risk for not learning to read, but ended the school year on track, were likely to maintain those gains at the end of third grade, regardless of the grade during which they caught up:

- Kindergarten: 67% who started the school year far behind in learning to read, but ended on track, remained on track by the end of third grade.
- First grade: 64% who started the year far behind in learning to read, but ended on track, remained on track by the end of third grade.
- Second grade: 64% who started the year far behind in learning to read, but ended on track, remained on track by the end of third grade.

Likelihood of grade 3 success for students who caught up during the school year



Recommendations

This year's beginning-of-year data show that while early literacy across grades K–2 has improved, progress has stalled in recent years. The data also highlight how critical it is to intervene as early as possible to get students on track, as the likelihood of students achieving reading proficiency by third grade increases the earlier it happens. "Once students are secure with foundational reading skills, they are far better equipped to understand and learn from increasingly complex texts across all subjects," says Susan Lambert, chief academic officer of elementary humanities at Amplify. "And it's important that all students are secure with foundational reading skills early in their schooling."

Grades K–2 are critical years for developing foundational literacy skills such as phonemic awareness, automaticity, and fluency, because foundational skills help students become more confident as they engage with more texts. As students read more, they broaden their knowledge, vocabulary, and understanding of complex sentence structures, all skills that are necessary for deeper comprehension. Students who are proficient in foundational literacy skills are more likely to transition successfully to applying them when reading a wider range of text and acquiring new knowledge across all content areas.

Amplify recommends that schools administer a universal screener three times a year to follow student progress in early reading skills. Once benchmark assessments have been administered at the start of the school year, schools can use the data to:

- Ensure that all students receive quality instruction grounded in evidence-based practices such as the Science of Reading.
- Identify students who need additional support.
- Develop plans for addressing student needs and allocate resources to implement those plans.
- Regularly monitor progress for students and make adjustments as needed.

About the data

The report highlights the positive effects of providing early literacy support by comparing Amplify mCLASS with DIBELS® 8th Edition benchmark data from the 2019–20, 2020–21, 2021–22, 2022–23, 2023–24, 2024–25, and 2025–26 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.

For the cohort progression analysis, data are drawn from a matched set of 150,000 students assessed in kindergarten in 2021–22, first grade in 2022–23, second grade in 2023–24, and third grade in 2024–25. Success is defined as completing third grade on track (scoring at/above benchmark on the mCLASS DIBELS® 8th Edition assessment).

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 delivers next-generation curriculum and assessment on an intuitive, integrated platform that includes thousands of free lessons. Our high-quality programs in ELA, math, and science engage students in rigorous learning that inspires them to think deeply, creatively, and independently. Our formative assessment tools help teachers identify the instruction each student needs to build a strong foundation in reading and math. Across all programs and services, we equip educators with powerful tools to understand and respond to the needs of every learner. Today, Amplify serves more than 18 million students and teachers across all 50 states and in 6 continents worldwide. For more information, visit [Amplify.com](https://www.amplify.com).

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