

# Student Growth in the Post-COVID Era

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Researchers and educators agree on the profound impact COVID-19 had on student performance immediately post-pandemic. Yet four years after the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing education recovery efforts, accurately assessing student academic performance post-pandemic remains challenging. Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief grant funding is set to expire soon, prompting decision makers to further examine the impacts of COVID-19-related learning disruptions and reevaluate nationwide efforts to address learning loss.

Curriculum Associates continues to research the complex impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on student academic growth. In this report, we explore post-COVID growth across three school years and by key student and school characteristics. Our research reveals disparate trends by student age during the pandemic, prior achievement, and school and community characteristics. **This research is some of the first to analyze impacts for the youngest learners—children three or four years old and not yet in formal schooling at the onset of the pandemic.**

## How does student growth post-pandemic differ from historical growth?

### What We Found

- Young students require more support to keep pace with historical growth trends.
- In both reading and mathematics, older cohorts (i.e., students in Grade 4 in 2021) demonstrate signs of recovery that in some cases align with their pre-pandemic growth trajectories.
- Students who were **well below grade level in both reading and mathematics at the beginning of the 2021–2022 school year are**

### Student Cohorts

- **not keeping pace with pre-pandemic growth** for students in this placement level.
- Some students who performed **at or near grade level are exceeding historical growth trends** for students in these placement levels.
- Students from schools in **lower-income or minoritized communities demonstrate continued disparities in academic growth** relative to pre-pandemic trends.

To accurately compare student academic growth to historical trends, Curriculum Associates leveraged **longitudinal and disaggregated data** to analyze *i-Ready Diagnostic* scores for both **reading and mathematics** for students who were ages 3–8 when COVID-19 first disrupted learning environments. The sample tracks the same groups of students over three years and provides further stratification by exploring results by student, school, and community characteristics.

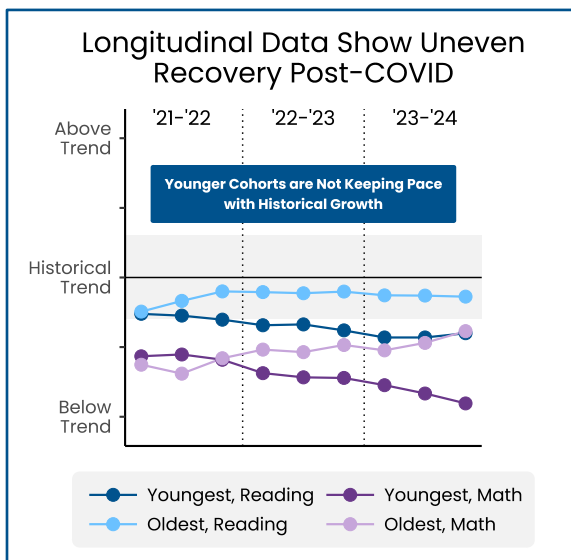
### Younger Cohorts (Grades K–1)

The pandemic had lasting effects, particularly on our youngest children, whose foundational learning opportunities were disrupted. Students who were in pre-K when the pandemic began—today’s second graders—show a significant departure from pre-pandemic growth trends in both reading and mathematics.

### Older Cohorts (Grades 2–4)

Students who were older during the pandemic are doing better than students who were in pre-K. In both reading and mathematics, older cohorts demonstrate signs of recovery with growth that mirrors historical trends. This recovery is more pronounced in reading, with mathematics performance still lagging.

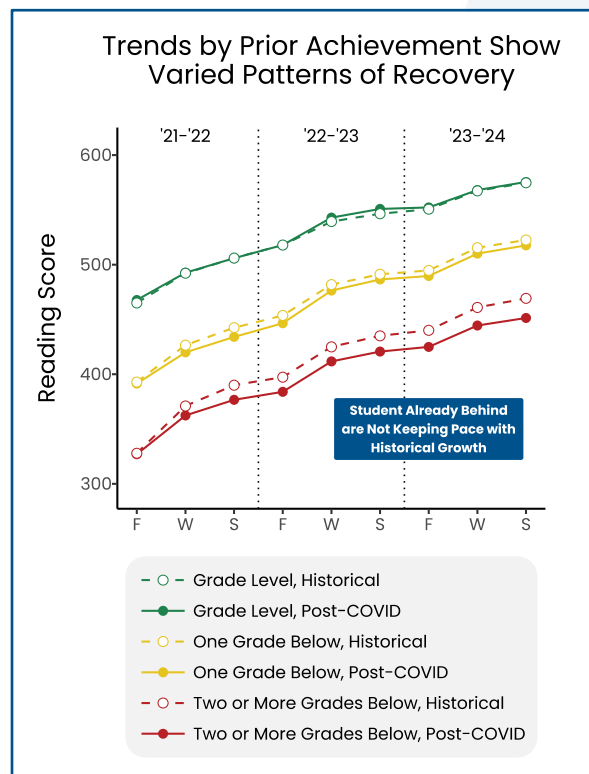
## Student Prior Achievement



Across most cohorts, students who began the 2021–2022 school year on grade level showed largely no impact from the pandemic. In younger cohorts, grade-level students remain on par with historical patterns. Conversely, students well below grade level (in both reading and mathematics and across most cohorts) are not keeping pace with pre-pandemic trends of academic growth. While this gap is widening for younger cohorts, older cohorts demonstrate some recovery.

Notably, in some cohorts, students who were at or near grade level are now surpassing historical growth trends.

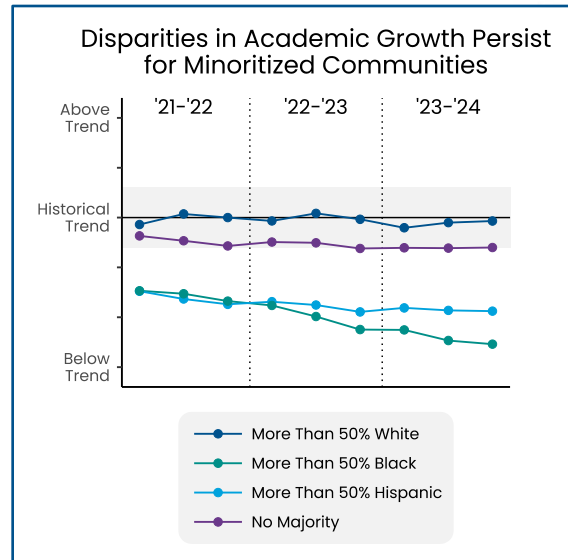
Note: Data from Reading, Grade 1 Cohort. See the Technical Report for full data.



## School and Community Characteristics

Our research examined community income, school demographics, and school locale, identifying continued disparities in academic growth among minoritized communities.

**While the disparities are not new, in some cases, gaps in academic growth between communities are larger.**



Note: Data from Reading, Grade 1 Cohort. See the Technical Report for full data.

## Where do we go from here?

### Implementation Matters

These data are a clear call for educators, district leaders, and other stakeholders to assess which interventions are effective for whom, and how we can work together to change the course of learning for students who need support now.

**This research is not an evaluation of specific instructional programs or interventions.**

Instead, it provides a temperature check of student academic growth post-pandemic, offering initial parsing of where recovery may be occurring.

An important next step is to expand this work and shed further light on which students and what schools are responding best to recovery efforts.

For districts, this may mean taking a more nuanced approach to their data to evaluate if intervention efforts have been meaningful.

Though interventions may lack impact for a variety of reasons, it is important to consider the fit between the intervention strategy and the communities served, whether schools have the infrastructure to support its implementation, or whether the required dosage is feasible.

Given the unique strategies utilized, barriers experienced by schools, and growth trends demonstrated, it is necessary for districts and researchers alike to heavily weigh implementation considerations when designing, choosing, and evaluating the impact of specific interventions.

### About Curriculum Associates

Founded in 1969, Curriculum Associates, LLC designs research-based print and online instructional materials, screens and assessments, and data management tools. The company's products and outstanding customer service provide teachers and administrators with the resources necessary for teaching diverse student populations and fostering learning for all students.

For the full technical report, visit [CurriculumAssociates.com/StudentGrowthTechnicalReport](https://CurriculumAssociates.com/StudentGrowthTechnicalReport).