

The 2022–2023 school year: Where things stand on the path toward academic recovery

NWEA researchers studying the impact of the pandemic on student learning released [a new research brief](#) looking at student academic progress as of fall 2022. This fact sheet summarizes the findings.

Students continue to rebound from the pandemic. The gap between achievement in math and reading this fall relative to prepandemic levels continues to narrow from spring 2021, when pandemic-related achievement gaps¹ were at their widest.

NWEA researchers also examined test score patterns during summer 2022 relative to a pre-COVID summer break.

KEY FINDINGS

- Students continued to rebound in reading and math in fall 2022, but rebounding hasn't occurred evenly across school years and summers
- Students are rebounding faster in math than reading, though learning gaps were and continue to be larger in math
- Summer slide in 2022 wasn't as large as compared to prepandemic trends
- Student achievement remains lower than in a typical year, and a full recovery is likely still several years away

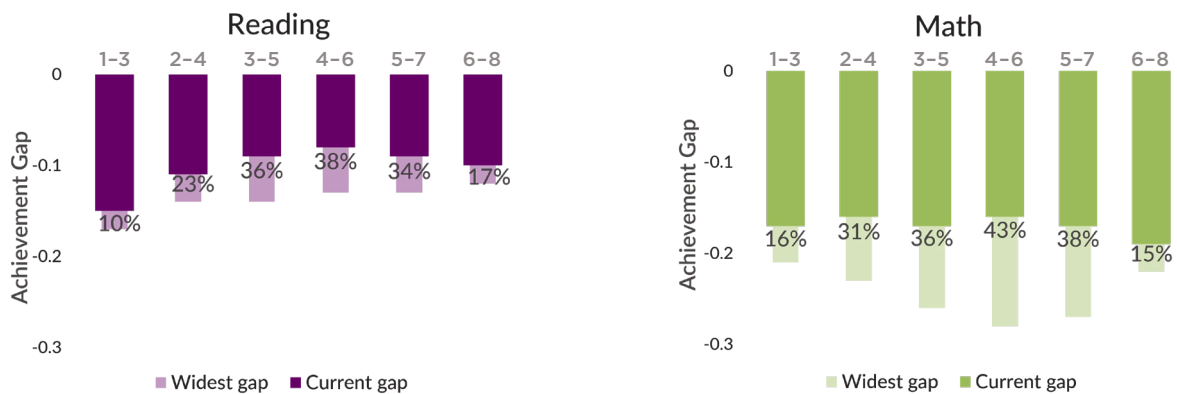
The data

This study continues NWEA research into how COVID-19 has affected student learning. It builds on [previous research](#) showing achievement levels dropping drastically over the 2020–21 school year, then beginning to rebound in the 2021–22 school year when achievement gains mirrored prepandemic trends.

This latest research looks at whether there are continued signs of improvement at the start of the 2022–2023 year and how learning patterns in the summer of 2022 might contribute to rebounding and recovery.

Researchers examined score data from 7 million students in grades 3–8 who took [MAP® Growth™](#) assessments in reading and math in approximately 25,000 public schools between 2020–21 and fall 2022 (“COVID sample”). They compared the data to a roughly comparable sample of students who tested between 2017–18 and fall 2019 (“pre-COVID sample”).

Figure 1. Cumulative reduction in achievement gaps in reading (left panel) and math (right panel) by cohort



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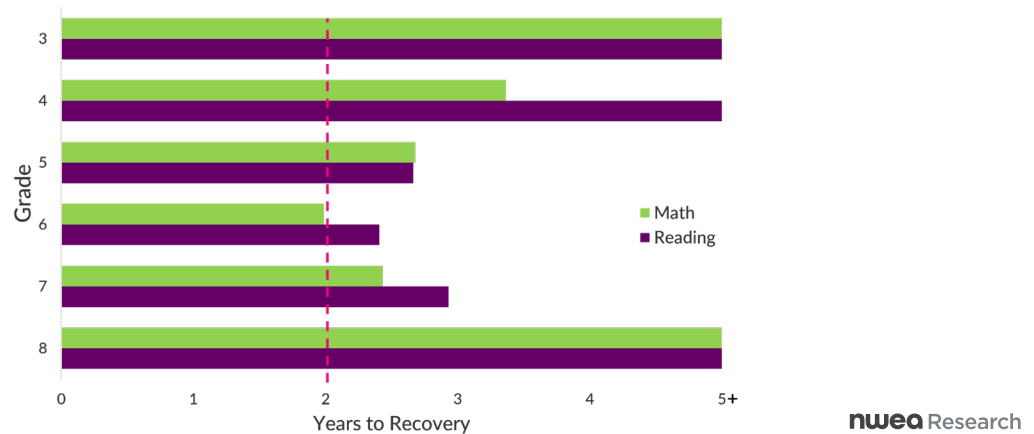
Note. The achievement gaps reported in this figure are the standardized difference between the pre-COVID and COVID samples in fall 2022 (“current gap”) relative to the largest observed gap across timepoints (“widest gap”) for a cohort. The percentages reflect the change in gaps proportional to the size of the widest gap.

¹ NWEA researchers use the term “achievement gap” to indicate the difference between COVID and pre-COVID samples of students.

Patterns of rebounding

Math and reading achievement levels remain significantly lower in fall 2022 compared to prepandemic levels but are improving compared to earlier in the pandemic (Figure 1). Most students, however, are years away from a full recovery (Figure 2).

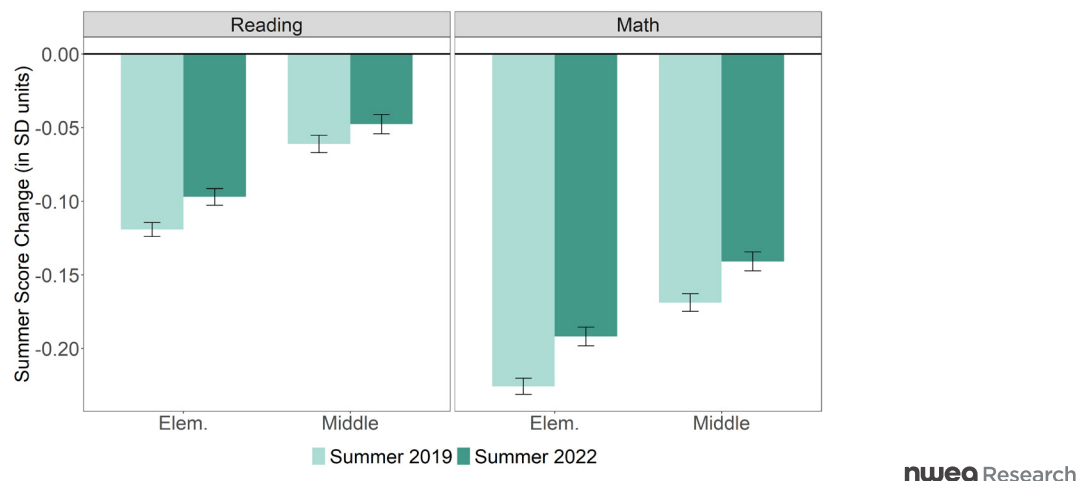
Figure 2. Estimated years to reach full recovery by subject and grade



Note. Grade refers to the grade students are in during the 2022-23 school year. The vertical red bar represents the federal spending deadline for ESSER funds (September 2024).

NWEA researchers found reading and math scores declined during summer 2022, which is a typical pattern, but those declines were smaller than usual (Figure 3). The latest research also mirrored past findings showing that summer slide tends to be steeper in math than reading and in younger students compared to older students.

Figure 3. Test score declines during the summer in 2019 and 2022 for reading (left panel) and math (right panel)



Note. Summer drops are reported as the total score change across the summer in the unit of the standard deviation of the prior spring score. The elementary school results include students in grades 3-5 in fall and the middle school results contain students in grades 6-8 in fall.

To learn more about this research, you can find the full research brief [here](#).

To learn more about the work of NWEA policy, please visit nwea.org/policy-and-advocacy/



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