

Informing COVID-19 recovery: Insights from NWEA’s MAP Growth assessment and policy recommendations

Context

As policymakers and state, district, and school leaders continue to plan for the next school year—and the years that follow—data will be critical in ensuring our nation advances the learning of all students and addresses the inequities that impact students of color and students living in poverty. Analyses of data from NWEA’s MAP® Growth™ assessment¹, administered in the fall, winter, and spring of the 2020–2021 school year, reveal the pandemic’s disproportionate impact on academic progress and achievement for our most underserved students. The overwhelming takeaway, however, is that educators, as well as state and district leaders, must make strategic, data-informed decisions about how to advance learning and support success, particularly for historically marginalized students.

Research findings

All students made gains in 2020–21 at a lower rate than a “typical” year.

In reading, students entered the 2020–21 school year at about the same level as a “typical” year. However, students experienced lower academic gains and ended the school year an average of 3–6 percentile points behind, compared to 2018–19.²

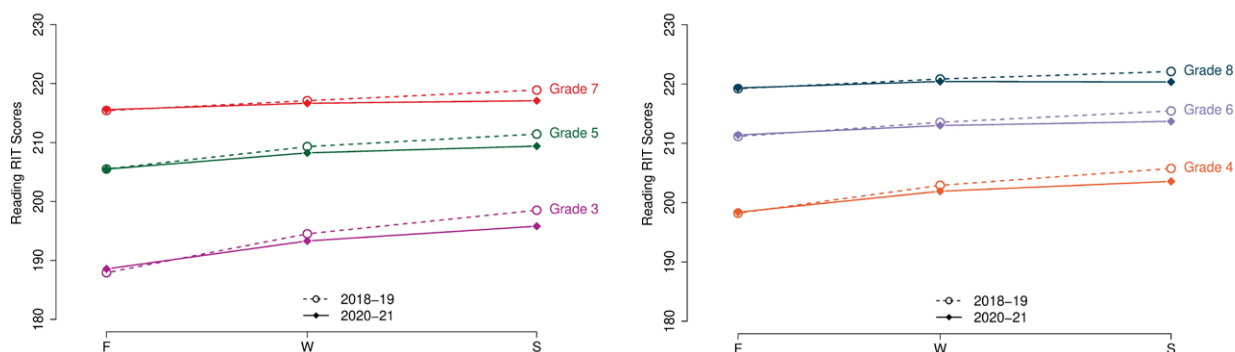


Figure 1. Average MAP Growth RIT scores for grades 3–8 in reading

Student achievement at the end of the 2020–21 school year was lower compared to pre-pandemic level.

On average, all grades experienced a lower achievement percentile rank in spring 2021 compared to spring 2019.³ In spring 2019, the median percentile score for third-graders was 55; it was 43 for third-graders in spring 2021. Achievement for third-graders in math was 12 percentile points lower at the end of spring 2021 than in a “typical” year.

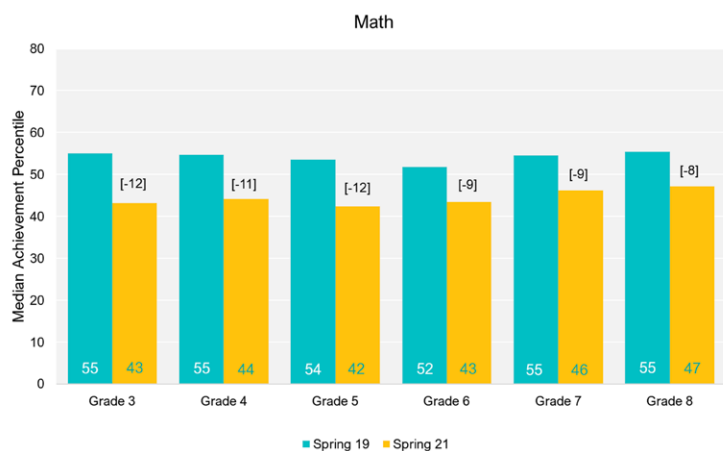


Figure 2. Spring 2019 and 2021 achievement comparisons by grade in math

¹ The analyses and data presented in this brief are highlights from work by NWEA researchers [Karyn Lewis](#), [Megan Kuhfeld](#), [Erik Ruzek](#), and [Andrew McEachin](#). To review the full results and for more detail on the data and analyses, please see the [research brief](#).

Note: for simplicity of presentation, numbers and calculations presented in figures in this brief are rounded. Because of this, some numbers differ slightly from those presented in the research.

² For greater readability, the grade levels have been divided between two figures.

³ Achievement percentiles are based on NWEA’s 2020 MAP Growth norms, which are a nationally representative set of norms based on data from 2015–16 to 2017–18. An achievement percentile provides some indication for how a student’s score in a particular grade and subject area compares to other same-grade students across the country.

Historically marginalized and economically disadvantaged students were disproportionately impacted.

Students in schools with a high percentage of students experiencing poverty (right panel) had a greater decline in median achievement percentile points, on average nearly double that of low-poverty schools, from 2019 to 2021.

Fourth-graders in high-poverty schools experienced a median percentile score that was 14 percentile points lower in spring 2021 compared to a “typical” year. Their peers in low-poverty schools experienced a decline of 6 percentile points as compared to a “typical” year.

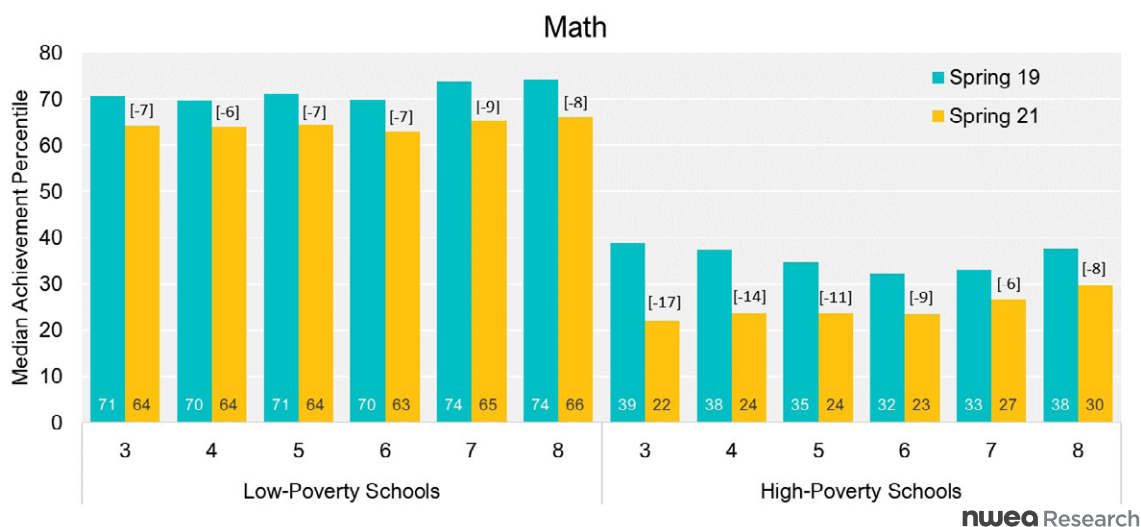


Figure 3. Spring 2019 and 2021 achievement comparisons in math by school socioeconomic status and grade

Policy recommendations to support recovery

As students return to in-person learning this fall, education leaders must continue to attend to the health and well-being of students and families while renewing efforts to expand access to excellent educational opportunities. The following recommendations for federal, state, and district leaders include strategies to help support learning recovery for all students, especially those most impacted by the pandemic, and lay a stronger foundation for student success.

- **Re-engage** for all students, with a focus on historically underserved students.
- Continue to support **access to remote learning technology** for students and families.
- Attend to **physical, social, and mental health needs** of students and families.
- **Measure student progress, rethink assessment systems, and use data** to support recovery.
- **Support and train** teachers and leaders.
- Move from restarting to **reimagining accountability** and school improvement.

For additional information on these recommendations and links to resources, please visit [NWEA.org/policy-advocacy](https://www.nwea.org/policy-advocacy)



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