

TREND SNAPSHOTS

Math recovery continues, reading remains stalled in spring 2025

Karyn Lewis and Megan Kuhfeld



Key findings

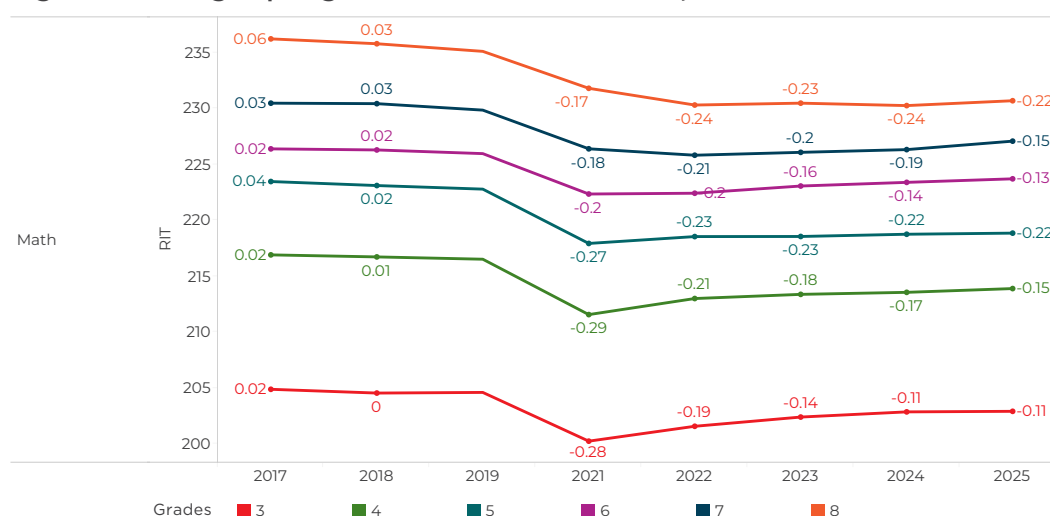
- Math achievement continues to show modest, incremental recovery, including among historically underserved groups.
- Reading achievement remains stalled with little rebounding to pre-COVID achievement levels.

By spring 2025, national MAP® Growth™ data show a widening divide in recovery patterns between subjects: math achievement has regained some ground, while reading has not budged. Math scores remain below prepandemic levels, but gaps have narrowed modestly since the low point. Reading, by contrast, has shown little to no movement. These trends are consistent with findings from NAEP and state summative tests ([Kuhfeld & Lewis, 2025](#)).

Math trends

Math achievement shows signs of steady recovery. In most grades, there is a pattern of incremental reductions in achievement gaps each year since spring 2021 (when gaps were generally at their largest), and that trend continues in 2025. Gaps have shrunk most in the elementary grades.

Figure 1. Average spring math achievement levels, 2017-2025.¹



Note. Numbers next to each point reflect the standardized difference in mean achievement compared to the pre-COVID reference year of 2019. Negative values indicate that achievement in that year was lower compared to spring 2019.

How to read Figures 1 and 3

Figure 1 and 3 in this trends snapshot come directly from the **Trends Over Time** tab of the MAP Growth National Dashboard. They display standardized differences in mean achievement compared to spring 2019 (the pre-COVID reference year). Negative values indicate scores below 2019 levels.

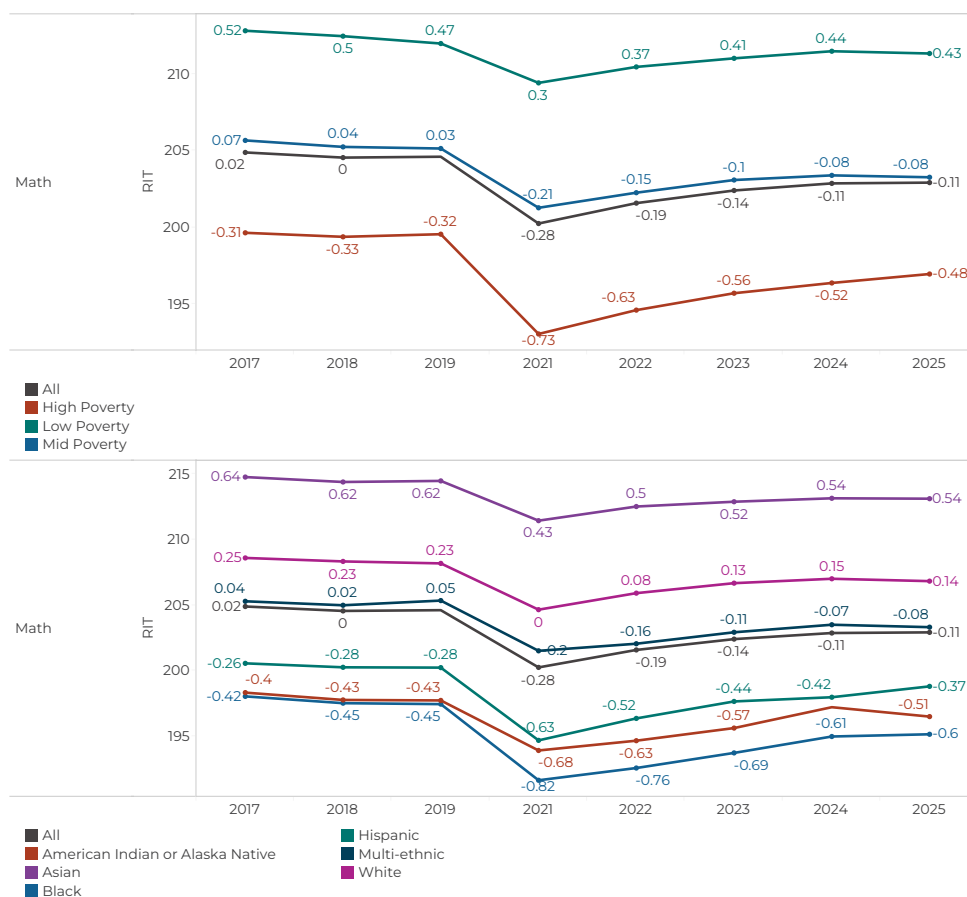
To put this in perspective, the [average intervention](#) raises student achievement by about 0.05 standard deviations. In most grades and subjects, the scale of unfinished recovery is three or more times that magnitude.

¹ All figures come from the **Trends Over Time** tab of the dashboard and are based on results from over 20 million K–8 students in 30,000 schools. See the [technical appendix](#) that accompanies the dashboard for more details.

Progress toward recovery in math extends across groups. While inequities remain, many historically underserved students have regained ground since 2021. Figure 2 illustrates trends over time in third-grade math achievement, disaggregated by school-poverty level (top panel) and race/ethnicity (bottom panel).²

The pattern of incremental reductions in the gaps in math is evident across groups. Among third-graders in high-poverty schools, the gap relative to the 2019 national average peaked at -0.73 SDs in spring 2021 but improved to -0.48 by spring 2025. Similar gains are evident for American Indian or Alaska Native, Hispanic, and Black students. For example, the gap for Hispanic third-graders narrowed from -0.63 in spring 2021 to -0.37 in spring 2025.

Figure 2. Average third-grade math achievement levels, 2017–2025, by school-poverty level (upper panel) and race (lower panel).



Note. Numbers next to each point reflect the standardized difference in mean achievement compared to overall national averages in spring 2019.

How to read Figure 2

Effect sizes in Figure 2 are expressed relative to the overall national average in 2019. Values in 2019 capture pre-existing inequities between groups. The change in effect sizes between 2021 and 2025 reflects progress toward recovery within each group.

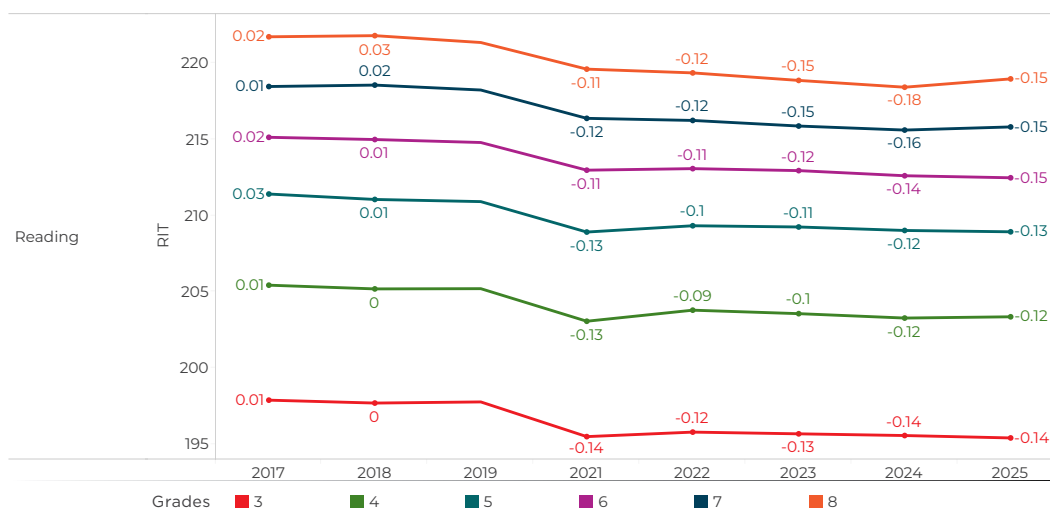
This figure shows grade 3 as an example; refer to the **Trends Over Time** tab in the dashboard to explore other grades and groups.

² We classified schools into poverty levels based on the percentage of students with free or reduced price lunch (FRPL) eligibility reported in the 2023–24 Common Core of Data (CCD). Low-poverty schools had less than or equal to 25% FRPL eligibility, mid-poverty schools had greater than 25% and less than or equal to 75% FRPL eligibility, and high-poverty schools had greater than 75% FRPL eligibility.

Reading trends

Reading scores remain essentially stuck at their pandemic lows with no meaningful recovery. Patterns are broadly consistent across student groups: no subgroup shows evidence of strong rebound in reading, and stagnation is evident regardless of race/ethnicity or school poverty level. Although initial losses were smaller than in math, recovery has stalled, and shortfalls in reading are now larger than or comparable to math in some grades.

Figure 3. Average spring reading achievement levels, 2017-2025.



Note. Numbers next to each point reflect the standardized difference in mean achievement compared to the pre-COVID reference year of 2019, with negative values indicating that achievement in that year was lower compared to spring 2019.

If there is a bright spot, it comes in eighth grade, where scores ticked up slightly in spring 2025 after continuing to decline as late as spring 2024. This uptick spans student groups but it is small relative to the depth of unfinished recovery, and reading performance remains well below 2019 levels. Readers can explore the **Trends Over Time** tab of the dashboard to see the full eighth-grade pattern.

Summary and significance

Encouragingly, math recovery is evident across grades and among historically underserved students, suggesting that pandemic-era investments may be paying off. Yet the lack of progress in reading means literacy could become the more persistent barrier to full recovery. The modest rebound in eighth grade is a hopeful sign, especially since gaps there had continued to widen into 2024, but it does not change the broader pattern of stalled reading recovery.

Together, these trends underscore the need for education leaders to sustain momentum in math while redoubling efforts in reading.

Looking ahead

District and state leaders may wish to ask:

- Are recovery efforts allocating sufficient focus to reading, given slower progress?
- What lessons from math recovery can be adapted to accelerate reading gains?
- How can systems sustain progress for underserved groups?
- With federal recovery funds expired, what role should states play in sustaining and scaling effective recovery efforts?

Trend Snapshots highlight key insights from the MAP Growth National Dashboard. They are designed to provide timely and accessible information that district and state leaders can use to interpret national patterns, frame their own local results in context, and guide recovery strategies.

Authors

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Dr. Megan Kuhfeld is director of growth modeling and data analytics at NWEA. Her research seeks to understand students' trajectories of academic and social-emotional learning (SEL) and the school and neighborhood influences that promote optimal growth. Dr. Kuhfeld completed a doctorate in quantitative methods in education and a master's degree in statistics from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).





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