



15 Months Behind in Reading Proficiency

January 10, 2023

POLICY BRIEF

ALASKA
POLICY FORUM

The latest nationwide test results show Alaskan fourth graders are more than a year behind the national average in reading proficiency. Students also lost half a year of mathematics learning since 2019.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was released in October 2022.¹ Key findings include:²

1. Alaska's fourth graders are 15 months of learning behind the national average in reading.
2. Alaska's fourth graders lost six months of learning in mathematics since 2019 and are a year behind the national average.
3. Three-quarters of Alaskan fourth graders are not proficient in reading.
4. Fourth-grade mathematics proficiency stands at 28%, a five-percentage-point drop since 2019, with a higher percentage of students demonstrating little mastery.
5. Alaska's charter school students are two full years ahead of their traditional counterparts in fourth-grade reading.

Reading

Alaska ranked 49th in fourth-grade reading nationally. Alaska is a year and three months of learning behind the 2022 national average and a year and six months behind the 2019 national average.

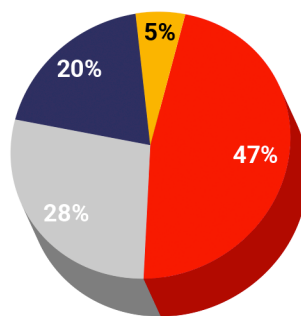
In fourth-grade reading, nearly 50% of Alaska students tested below "Basic" and are unable to perform "rudimentary reading tasks."³ 27% performed at

¹ "The Nation's Report Card." <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/>, accessed 12/22/2022.

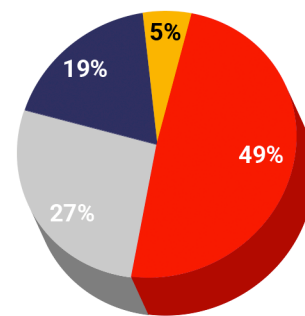
² Sarah Montalbano. "National Assessment Results: Alaska a Full Year Behind the National Average." Alaska Policy Forum. November 29, 2022. <https://alaskapolicyforum.org/2022/11/national-assessment-results-alaska-a-full-year-behind-the-national-average/>

³ "The NAEP Reading Achievement Levels by Grade." National Assessment of Educational Progress. https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading/achieve.aspx#2009_grade4, accessed 12/22/2022.

Alaska Fourth Grade Reading Proficiency



NAEP 2019



NAEP 2022

Basic. 67% of fourth graders nationwide weren't proficient in reading, while more than 75% of Alaskan students weren't proficient.

Mathematics

In fourth-grade math, Alaska ranked ahead of only two states. Students in the state lost more than half a year of learning attainment since 2019. Alaska is about a year behind the national average in math.

Only 25% of Alaska's fourth graders were proficient in math. 35% of students tested below Basic in 2022, compared to 27% in 2019. Nationally, only 25% of fourth graders tested below Basic.

Charter Schools

Alaska's charter schools averaged half a year above the national average and 1.5 years above non-charter schools. Only 30% of charter school students tested below Basic in reading, while almost 50% of non-charter students tested below Basic. The difference is starker for math: only 17% of charter school students tested below Basic, while 36% of non-charter students did.

Demographics

Alaska's demographic challenges are real, but our students absolutely have the potential to read better than they currently do. In fourth-grade reading, every one of Alaska's racial/ethnic groups except Hispanics performed worse than the national average. Low-income students in Alaska performed 15 points worse on fourth grade reading than the national average for low-income students, and on a state-by-state ranking, Alaska's low-income students performed the worst.

Conclusion

As students recover from pandemic school closures and involuntary online learning, the state should carefully execute early literacy policies, such as the Alaska Reads Act,⁴ that train teachers in evidence-based methods. Districts should also use one-time American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds to address learning loss.⁵

⁴ "Department Reading Program." Alaska Department of Education and Early Development. <https://education.alaska.gov/akreads/departments-reading-program>, accessed 12/22/2022.

⁵ Sarah Montalbano. "Cash for Alaska's School Districts: November Update." Alaska Policy Forum. December 8, 2022. <https://alaskapolicyforum.org/2022/12/cash-for-alaskas-school-districts-november-update/>

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