



COVID-19 EARLY LITERACY LOSS

Strategies for States

May 2020

BACKGROUND

In 2019, [35% of fourth-grade students in the U.S. performed at or above NAEP proficient in reading](#)—accounting for just one of every three students. Students of color and those living in poverty or rural areas had an even lower probability of achieving proficiency. And this is before a projected COVID-19 learning loss.

Just a few months ago, states were facing the challenge of teaching all students to read by the end of third grade. Now, they must also consider the impact of COVID-19 on fourth-grade reading readiness. Transitioning from *learning to read* to *reading to learn* in third grade is a significant milestone, and this unprecedented nationwide disruption to student learning will likely have long-term implications.

MISSING STATE END-OF-YEAR ASSESSMENT DATA

Because of COVID-19, the U.S. Department of Education approved [state assessment waivers](#) for all 50 states and D.C. for the 2019-2020 school year. These annual assessments serve several purposes, one of which is to gauge how much students learned during the year and whether they are ready for the next level of learning.

[Approximately 16 states](#) rely on students' performance data from these assessments to determine whether students advance to fourth grade. Now that end-of-year assessment data will be missing. That loss coupled with [summer learning loss](#) will force teachers this fall to brace for larger gaps among grade-level reading readiness than ever before. Unfortunately, not all states have enough options in their playbooks to respond adequately.

CHANGING THE “PLAY” IN THE FOURTH QUARTER

The 2019-2020 school year began with business as usual. Most students attended traditional brick and mortar schools, congregated with friends during class changes and attended sporting events to cheer on their school's teams. The “fourth quarter” quickly shifted to remote learning at varying degrees of implementation and success.

In [Arizona and Mississippi](#), for example, many third-grade students who were already meeting promotion requirements prior to the COVID-19 pandemic will likely be promoted to fourth grade. Unfortunately, some **students who were not meeting those requirements may also be promoted**. These decisions will be made by building-level principals in conjunction with teachers and, in some cases, parents.

Meanwhile, [North Carolina](#) elementary and middle school students will not receive traditional grades at all. Instead, to address known inequities across districts, current teachers will provide and pass along academic and social/emotional strengths and weakness in a transition folder to the teacher(s) at the next grade level.

Disparities among availability of resources have been amplified during the pandemic. In [Chicago](#), districts that had already invested in technology for each student and where students were already familiar with online learning platforms encouraged their teachers to introduce new material. Some students are also able to receive one-on-one assistance from their teachers via “virtual office hours.”

However, other students across the country who have been thrust into the world of remote learning have run into major challenges—including lack of access to technology devices, internet or the capacity by students and/or teachers to navigate the world of online learning. Those students are relying on learning-at-home packets that cover, at most, material which has already been taught and serve as an attempt to curtail significant learning loss.



STRATEGIES TO ESTABLISH A NEW NORMAL

In many states, district and school leaders are hard at work developing plans to make up for lost time, keenly aware that beginning-of-year knowledge gaps may be larger than ever. So, how can teachers and students be supported when they return to school in the fall? States and districts can consider implementing the following strategies and using these resources to establish a new normal in education.

Summer Strategies

- [Partner with local television stations](#) to support at-home learning by airing additional instructional programs for students and professional development segments for teachers that may be delivered by local master teachers and/or instructional coaches.
- Review current instructional materials for alignment to state standards and for meeting the criteria for [high-quality instructional materials](#).
- Host [summer reading camps](#) for third-grade students who were previously identified as having reading difficulties.
- Host a summer boost program to target rising second and third graders who have been identified as having reading deficiencies via a screener and/or diagnostic assessment.
- Provide professional development in the [science of reading](#) to K-4 teachers.
- Provide training focused on [distance/remote learning and instruction](#) to teachers, students and families.
- Partner with parents by providing [read-at-home resources](#) and specific recommendations for which strategies can best support their child.

Fall Strategies

- Focus on [early identification of reading deficiencies](#) by administering a screener to determine which students are at risk of reading failure.
- For students at risk, administer a diagnostic assessment to identify the lowest deficit skill, develop Individual Reading Plans and provide targeted interventions.
- Consider [“looping”](#) students’ third-grade teachers with them to fourth grade.
- Utilize instructional coaches to provide job-embedded professional development, modeling and co-teaching in K-4 classrooms.
- Integrate technology into class assignments more intentionally, allowing students to submit assignments via online platforms such as Google Classroom or Canvas.
- Ensure your school’s schedule allows for [intervention or enrichment time](#) for students before, during or after school.
- Provide outreach to parents to promote the importance and impact of school attendance on reading proficiency through a dedicated [chronic absenteeism campaign](#).