

Utah's Pandemic Learning Loss

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted nearly every aspect of life, and K-12 education was no exception. In spring 2020, nearly all schools nationwide shifted to remote learning and many schools continued with full closures or hybrid schedules through the 2020-2021 school year. Even though Utah schools reopened relatively quickly compared to other states, teachers, students, and caregivers faced challenges such as quarantines, social distancing requirements, increased stress, and mental health concerns. These factors affected both teachers' ability to teach and students' ability to learn. Consequently, students' educational outcomes declined both in Utah and nationwide.

Utah experiences relatively less learning loss

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Utah witnessed notable declines in 4th grade math and reading between 2019 and 2022. However, Utah stood out as the only state where 8th grade math did not see significant declines, and it was among the 17 states that avoided significant declines in 8th grade reading. No states experienced significant improvements in math or reading at either grade level over this period.

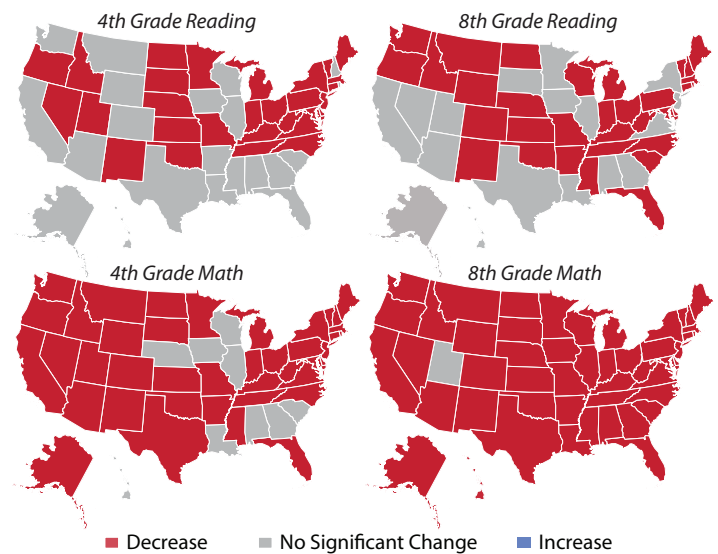
Statewide test results still trail pre-pandemic levels

Average statewide proficiency rates in English, math, and science for grades 3-10 fell from 2019 to 2021 (Figure 2). While the rates rose slightly from 2021 to 2022, they are still below 2019 (pre-pandemic) levels. The increase from 2021 to 2022 was also much smaller than the loss experienced from 2019 to 2021. Additionally, fewer students participated in testing in 2021 compared to 2019, with a substantial decline among students from historically underperforming groups. This could indicate that the 2021 decline in proficiency is an underestimate.¹

Learning loss varies across demographic groups

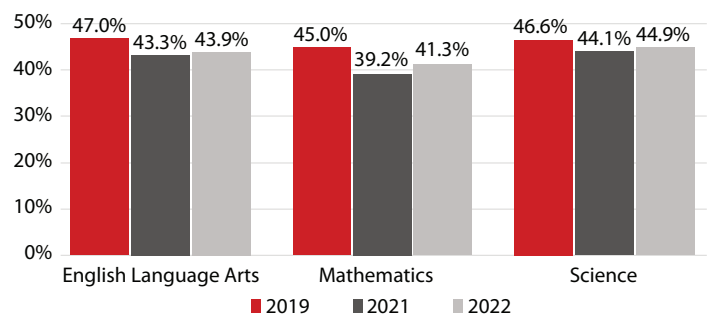
Students identifying as White, Asian, or multiple races experienced proficiency rate declines less than the state average in all three subject areas. Conversely, American Indian, Hispanic/Latino, and Pacific Islander students' proficiency rates dropped

Figure 1: Change in Average Scores between 2019 and 2022 for 4th- and 8th-grade Public School Students in NAEP Math and Reading by State



Source: The Nation's Report Card National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

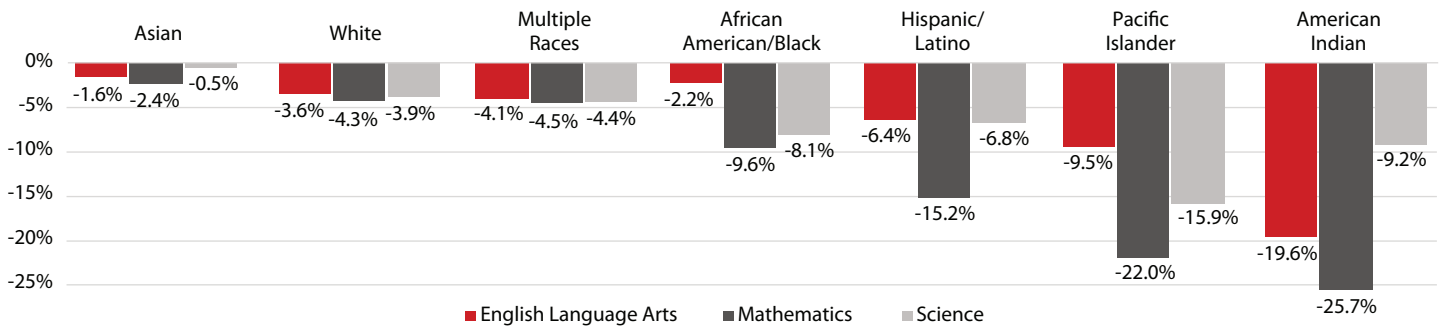
Figure 2: Utah Average Proficiency Rates, 2019, 2021, & 2022



Note: Includes grades 3-10. The RISE test measures grades 3-8 for math and English language arts and grades 4-8 for science. The Utah Aspire Plus test measures grades 9-10. Source: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute analysis of Utah State Board of Education data

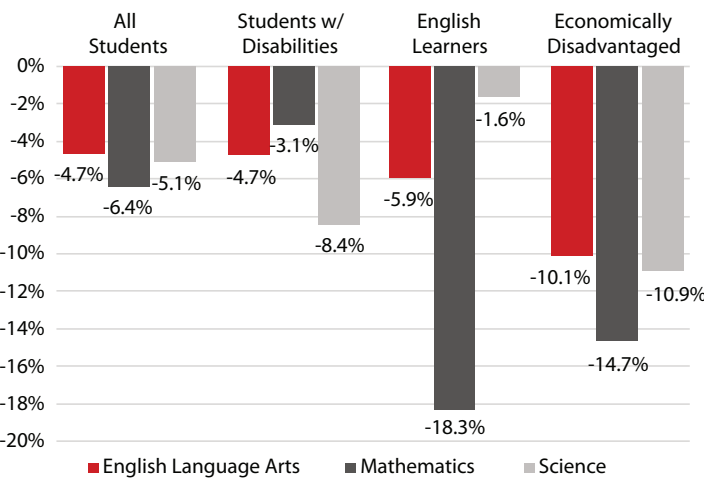
more than the state average across all subjects (Figure 3, the state average is included in Figure 4). Moreover, economically disadvantaged students' proficiency rates fell 2-3 times more than the state average across all three subject areas (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Change in Average Proficiency Rates for Utah Students from 2019 to 2022 by Race/Ethnicity



Note: Includes grades 3-8. The RISE test measures grades 3-8 for math and English language arts and grades 4-8 for science.
Source: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute analysis of Utah State Board of Education data

Figure 4: Change in Average Proficiency Rates for Utah Students from 2019 to 2022 by Group



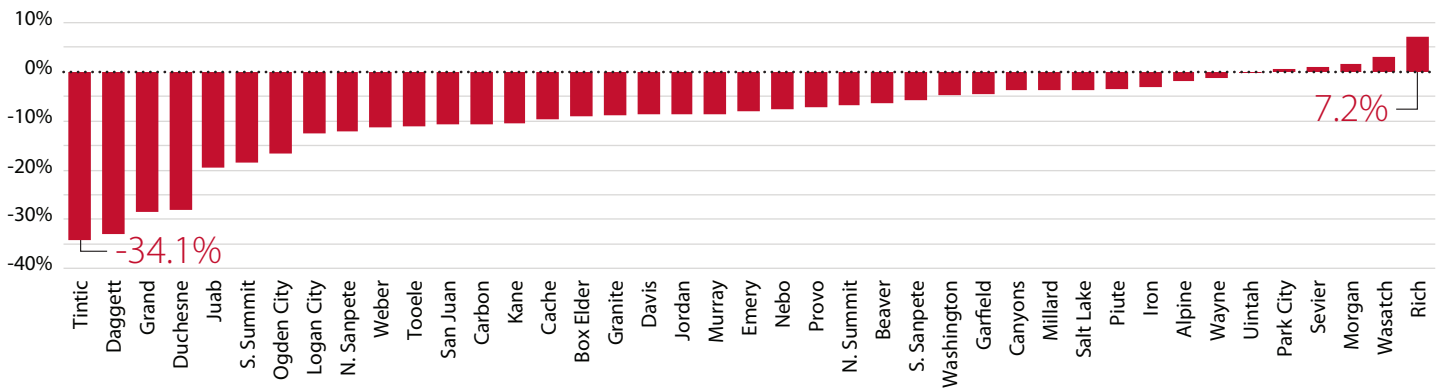
Note: Includes grades 3-8. The RISE test measures grades 3-8 for math and English language arts and grades 4-8 for science.
Source: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute analysis of Utah State Board of Education data

Learning loss differs among schools and school districts

The average change in English language arts proficiency rates for grades 3-10 from 2019 to 2022 range from a 34.1% decline in Tintic School District in western Juab County to a 7.2% increase in Rich School District (Figure 5). Overall, 35 school districts experienced declines in proficiency rates during this period, while five school districts (Morgan, Park City, Rich, Sevier, and Wasatch) showed improvement, and one district, Uintah, remained unchanged. Similar differences can be seen in mathematics and science results. More variation exists when disaggregating data at the school level.

The data provided present a snapshot of the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on K-12 learning loss in Utah and across the U.S. As Utah continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, school and community leaders can utilize these and more detailed and disaggregated data to better understand learning loss and improve student outcomes moving forward.

Figure 5: Change in English Language Arts Proficiency Rates from 2019 to 2022



Note: Includes grades 3-10. The RISE test measures grades 3-8 for math and English language arts and grades 4-8 for science. The Utah Aspire Plus test measures grades 9-10.
Source: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute analysis of Utah State Board of Education data

Endnotes

1. Utah State Board of Education and the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment, Inc. (2021). Exploring the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Student Achievement in Utah. Executive Report. Available from <https://www.schools.utah.gov/file/b3c018ec-ccbb-4565-8199-248646c79524>.