

Student Well-Being and Academic Growth: A Dual-Lens Framework for School Improvement



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Heads Survey Review

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WHO COMPLETED THE SURVEY

- ▶ Survey Period: December 18, 2025 – January 16, 2026
- ▶ Representative Sample of Schools
- ▶ Geographic Distribution: 75% suburban, 20% urban, 5% rural
- ▶ School Types: 65% PK-12, 35% other configurations



ENROLLMENT, FINANCE, AND FACULTY

- ▶ The top priorities are enrollment management (65%), financial sustainability (55%), and faculty recruitment and retention (45%)
- ▶ **Small schools** (<300 students): 100% prioritize both enrollment AND financial sustainability
- ▶ **Medium schools** (300-700): More balanced across priorities, with 67% on enrollment
- ▶ **Large schools** (700+): 78% prioritize faculty recruitment—they have the scale but face talent wars



MEASURING GROWTH, MISSING THE TOOLS

- ▶ 70% measure academic growth (developmental progress over time)
- ▶ 60% measure proficiency (performance against standards)
- ▶ 90% of leaders believe well-being “substantially affects” academic performance
- ▶ 35% measure student social-emotional well-being systematically
- ▶ 25% measure sense of fairness and belonging



POST-COVID RESILIENCE REVEALS CORE ADVANTAGES

Recovery Factor	Percent of Schools	Interpretation
Smaller class sizes	72%	Structural advantage
Continuity of in-person learning	67%	Operational flexibility
Strong school culture	61%	Relational capital
Faculty adaptability	50%	Professional capacity
Curriculum flexibility	44%	Institutional agility



UNIVERSAL BELIEF IN BELONGING

- ▶ 90% strongly believe well-being affects academic performance
- ▶ 60% report "solid progress with gaps" on belonging culture
- ▶ 20% report "strong foundation"
- ▶ 10% report "uneven" progress
- ▶ 25% systematically measure sense of belonging

A pair of dark-rimmed glasses is centered in the frame, resting on a wooden surface. The lenses reflect a lush forest scene with tall trees and a mossy ground. The background is a soft-focus bokeh of green and yellow light. A semi-transparent dark brown banner is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the title and subtitle text.

Student Well-Being and Academic Growth

A Dual-Lens Framework for School Improvement



THE STUDENT ACADEMIC LENS



National Academic Trends

- The National Assessment of Student Progress, commonly known as the Nation's Report Card, was authorized by Congress in 1969
- Tests representative samples of students in reading, math, and other subjects (grades 4, 8, 12)
- No individual student or school scores, only group-level results
- ~150,000 students and 3,300 schools per grade in each state assessment
- Independent benchmark for comparing proficiency across states and over time

The Most Recent NAEP Scores in Math and Reading for 4th and 8th Grade Students

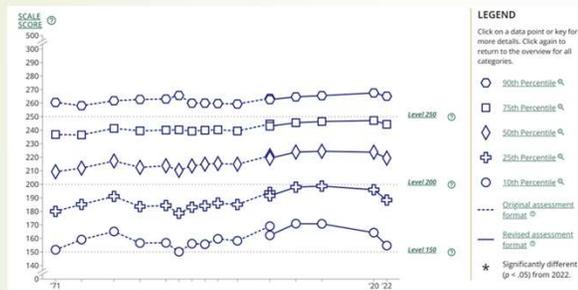


Figure 1. Trend in NAEP long-term trend *reading* scores at five selected percentiles for 9-year-old students

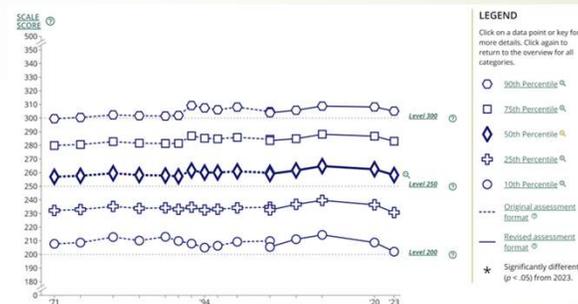


Figure 2. Trend in NAEP long-term trend *reading* scores at five selected percentiles for 13-year-old students

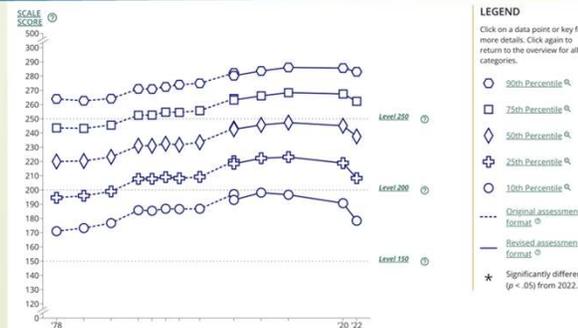


Figure 3. Trend in NAEP long-term trend *mathematics* scores at five selected percentiles for 9-year-old students

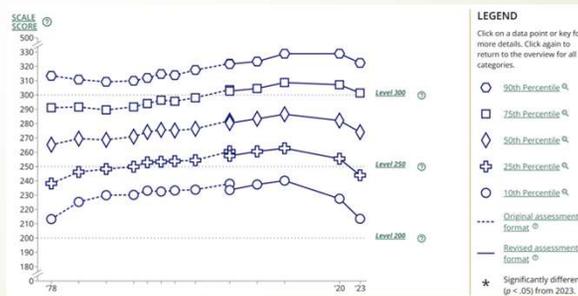


Figure 4. Trend in NAEP long-term trend *mathematics* scores at five selected percentiles for 13-year-old students

Trend 1: The Divergent Recovery Pattern

Lower percentiles (10th, 25th) experienced a more complete reversal of historical gains.

Upper percentiles (75th, 90th) retained substantially more of their historical progress. While they also declined during the pandemic period, they remained well above their baseline levels from the 1970s.

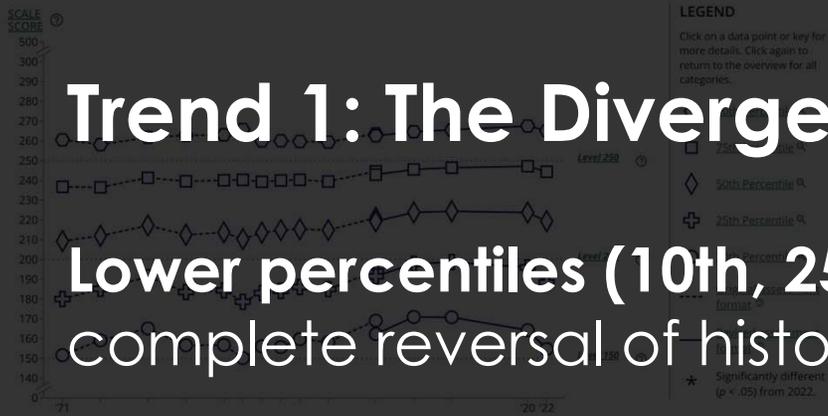


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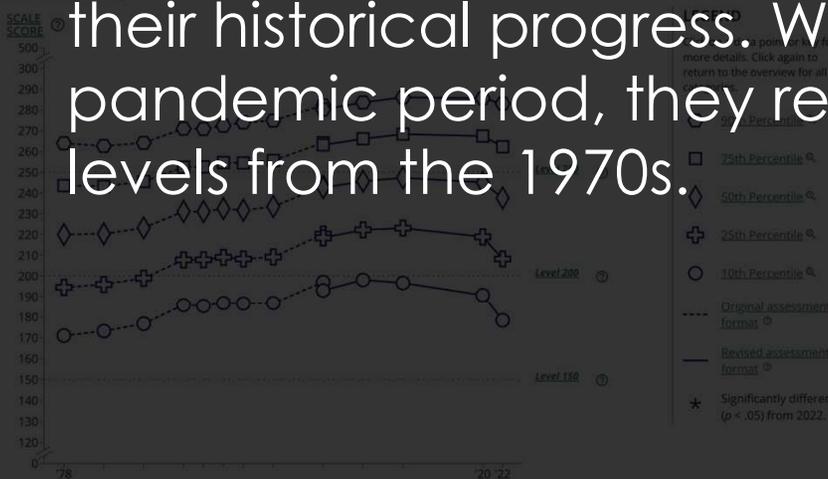


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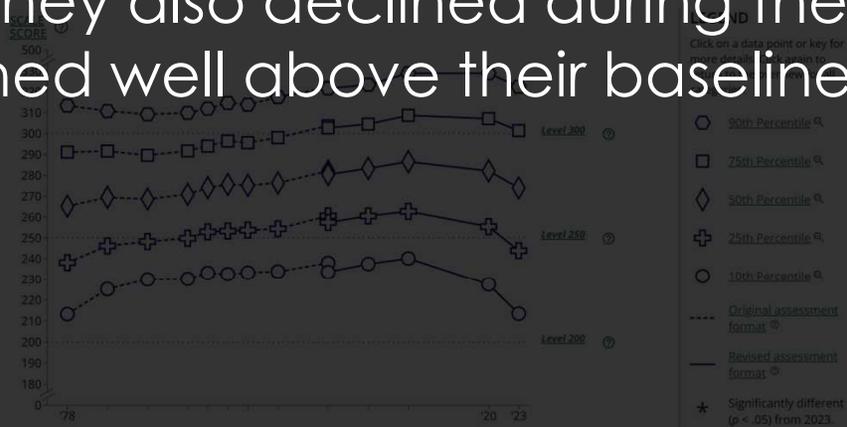


Figure 4. Trend in NAEP long-term trend mathematics scores at five selected percentiles for 13-year-old students

Trend 2: The “Convergence-Divergence” Phenomenon

The graphs reveal a fan-like pattern: achievement gaps narrowed during the long improvement period (roughly from the 1970s through the early 2010s) as lower percentiles gained at faster rates than upper percentiles. However, during the pandemic decline, this reversed: gaps widened as lower percentiles fell more steeply.



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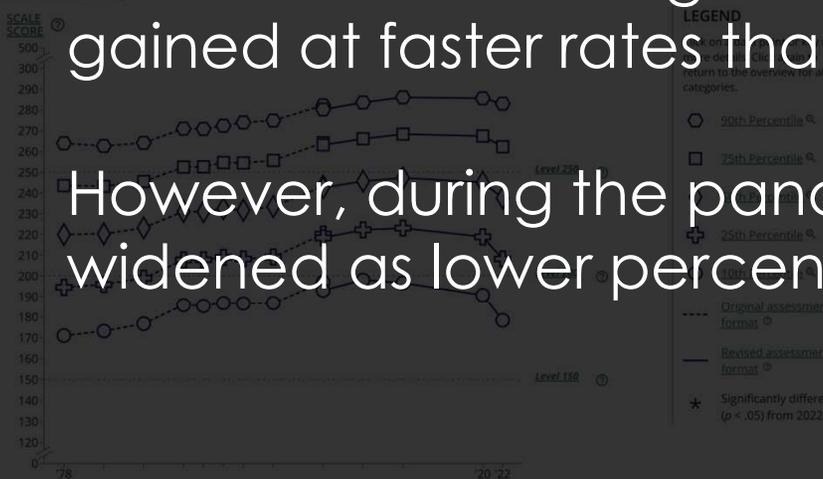


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Trend 3: Subject and Age Differences

Mathematics losses were sharper than reading losses across all percentiles, but the differential impact on lower performers was particularly pronounced

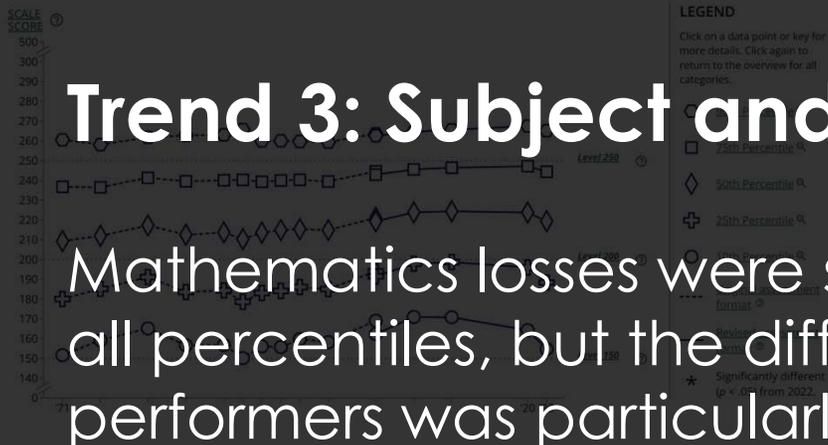


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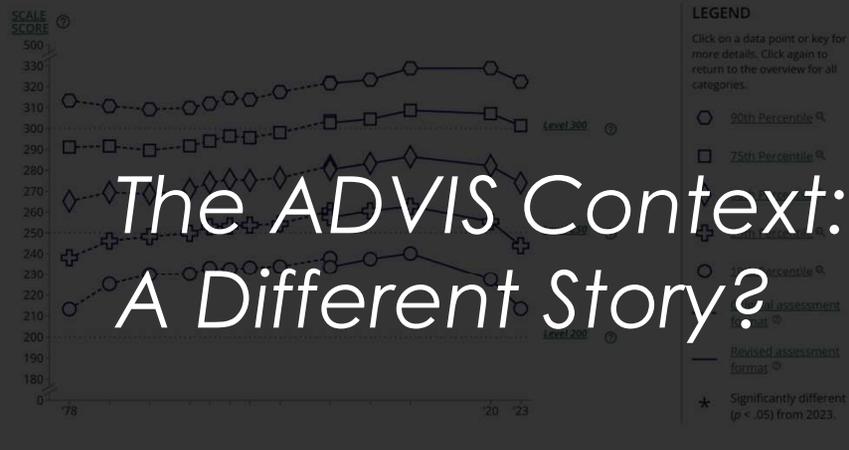


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The ADVIS Context:
A Different Story?

ERB MEASUREMENT APPROACH

- ▶ **Reading Comprehension:** Understanding and analyzing written text
- ▶ **Mathematics:** Computational skills and mathematical concepts
- ▶ **Verbal Reasoning:** Logic and critical thinking with language
- ▶ **Quantitative Reasoning:** Mathematical problem-solving and analytical thinking
- ▶ **Writing Concepts & Skills:** Organization; purpose, audience, and focus; supporting details, and style and craft

Year-Over-Year	Pre-Pandemic	Insufficient Data	Post-Pandemic			
Spring-to-Spring	2018-2019	2019-2020	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025

1,000-1,700 ADVIS students per time period and subject

THE AGGREGATE STORY

Domain	ADVIS Average	NAIS Average	Difference
Quantitative Reasoning	12.34%	10.71%	+1.63%
Mathematics	9.26%	8.36%	+0.89%
Writing Concepts & Skills	7.74%	7.21%	+0.53%
Reading Comprehension	7.10%	6.62%	+0.49%
Verbal Reasoning	9.85%	9.49%	+0.36%

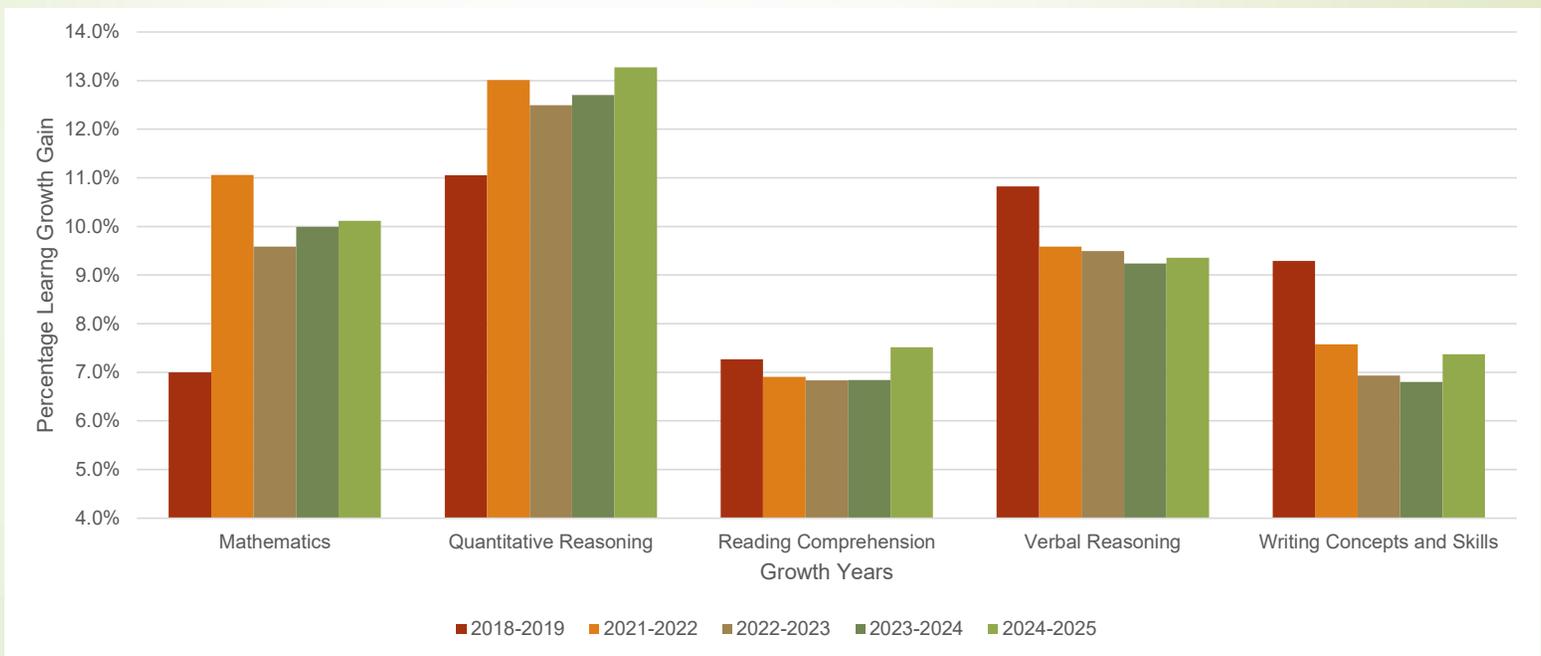
Aggregate numbers **mask** a more complex story



UNPACKING THE COMPLEXITY

- Year-Over-Year Variations
- Achievement-Level Variations
- Subject Area & Grade Differences
- The Middle School Transition Window

Overall Academic Achievement Trends in ADVIS Schools by Subject, 2018-2025



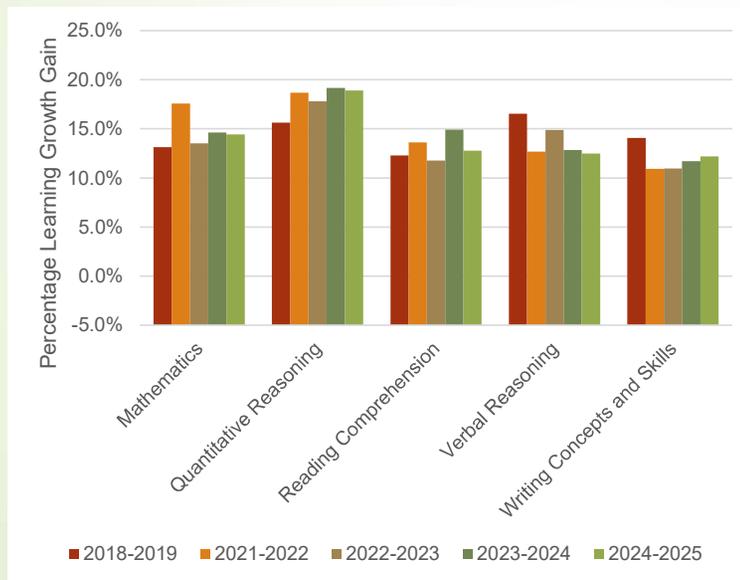


UNPACKING THE COMPLEXITY

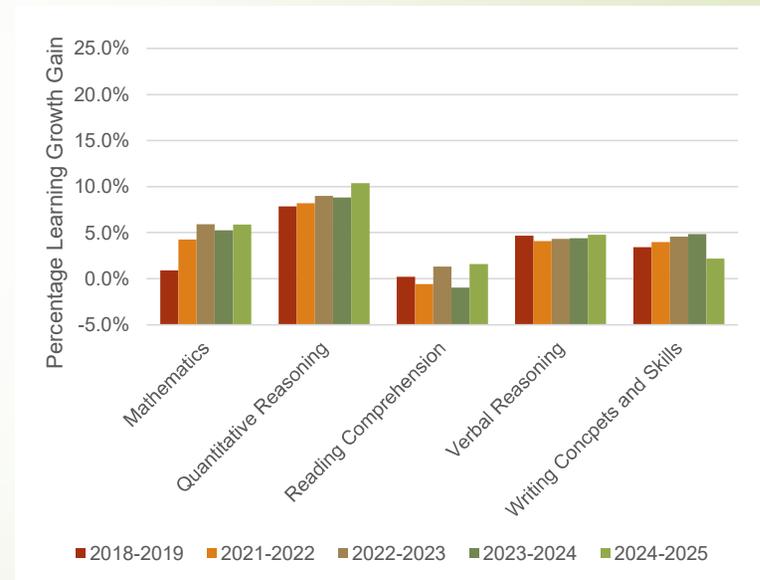
- 1. Where Students Started Matters Most.** Whether a student was in the lower, middle, or upper performance student group on the first of two springtime assessments is the single biggest factor in how they recovered. This finding has profound implications: different student groups need different support to achieve learning growth.
- 2. The Subject Makes a Big Difference.** The trajectory of mathematics recovery looks different from that of reading recovery. Language arts recovery differs from quantitative reasoning.
- 3. Age and Grade Level Matter.** Younger students recovered differently from older ones, with challenges intensifying as students moved into upper middle school grades. Developmentally appropriate instructional strategies will support continued learning and growth.
- 4. Just Being “Post-Pandemic” Doesn’t Tell Us Much.** Simply looking at whether something happened before or after the pandemic wasn’t a strong predictor of student performance on its own. The disruption impacted every group of students differently, and recovery was further impacted by what they were learning.
- 5. Different Students Experienced Different Pandemics.** Upper performance students didn’t just bounce back differently from their peers. They actually experienced different disruptions. The statistical interaction between pandemic status and achievement level confirms that recovery strategies must be tailored to specific student groups.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT TRENDS OF LOWER AND UPPER PERFORMANCE STUDENTS

Lower Performance Students



Upper Performance Students





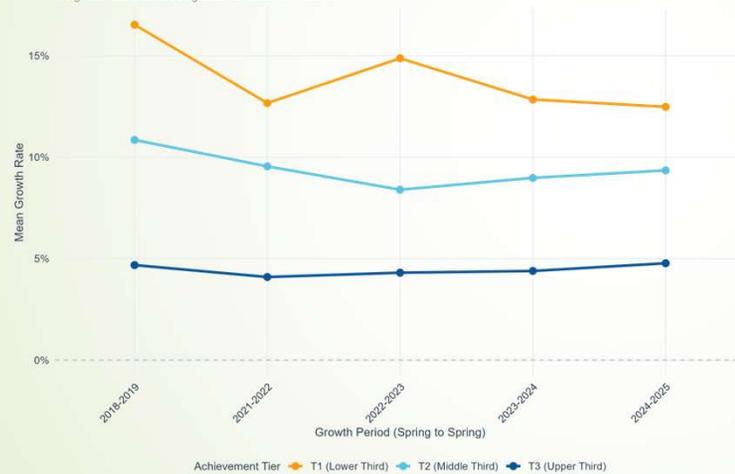
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Verbal Reasoning and Mathematics Trends by Performance Group

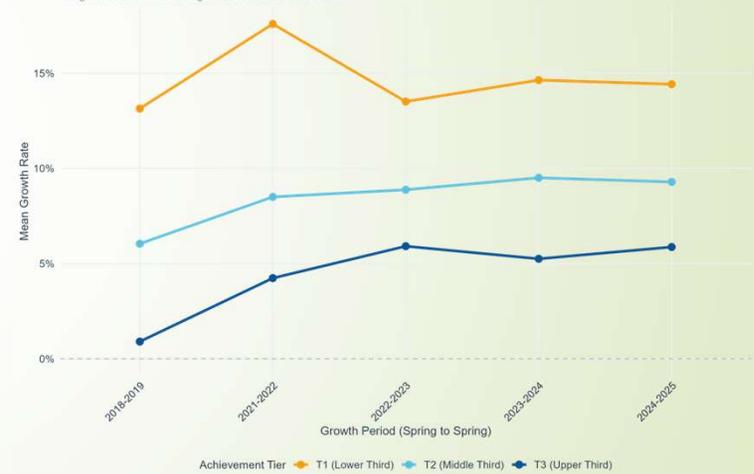
Achievement Tier Growth Patterns: Verbal Reasoning

Weighted means across all grades for successive cohorts



Achievement Tier Growth Patterns: Mathematics

Weighted means across all grades for successive cohorts



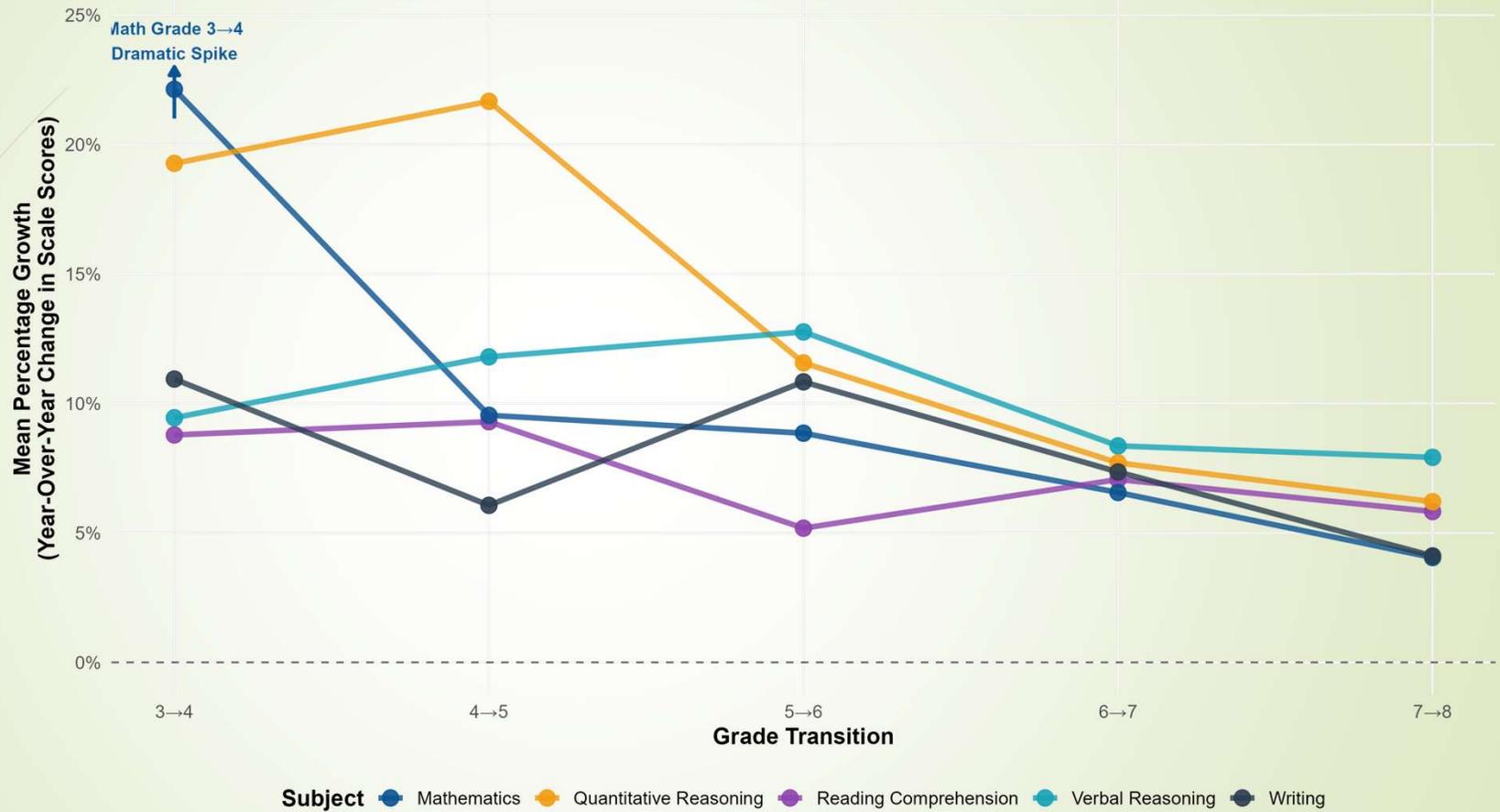


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Learning Growth Declines Steadily as Students Progress Through Middle School

Mean year-over-year percentage growth by grade transition (pooled across 2018-2025) | All subjects show younger > older pattern



Note: Grade 3→4 represents students tested as 3rd graders (Spring Y1), then 4th graders (Spring Y2).
Mathematics shows dramatic spike at Grade 3→4. All subjects show lowest growth at Grade 7→8 (middle school exit).
Source: ADVIS-rework CTP Assessment Data 2018-2025 | Analysis: Education Research Partners, LLC



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THE STUDENT WELL-BEING LENS



Student Well-Being Nationally

Students can only commit fully to learning when emotionally healthy, academically engaged, and genuinely belonging

- ▶ **The COVID catalyst:** Pandemic amplified stress/isolation, but revealed deeper long-term trends
- ▶ **CDC data (2013-2023):**
 - ▶ 40% of high school students reported feeling so sad or hopeless almost every day for at least two consecutive weeks during the past year that they stopped engaging in their usual activities
 - ▶ 29% experienced poor mental health in the past 30 days
- ▶ **Gender disparity:** Female students report 2x the rates of persistent sadness or hopelessness (53% vs. 28%)
- ▶ **Leadership reality:** 96% of school heads identified "caring for students/staff through stressful times" as a primary challenge (summer 2023)



ERB's Check-In Survey

Fairness and Belonging

Overall perception of a fair and inclusive school environment.

Sample items:

- At school, I feel like I belong.
- I can be myself at school.

Academic Engagement

Overall interest and engagement in the classroom.

Sample items:

- I feel it is important to do well in school.
- I can succeed at school if I try.

Emotional Well-Being

Overall happiness and stress levels at school.

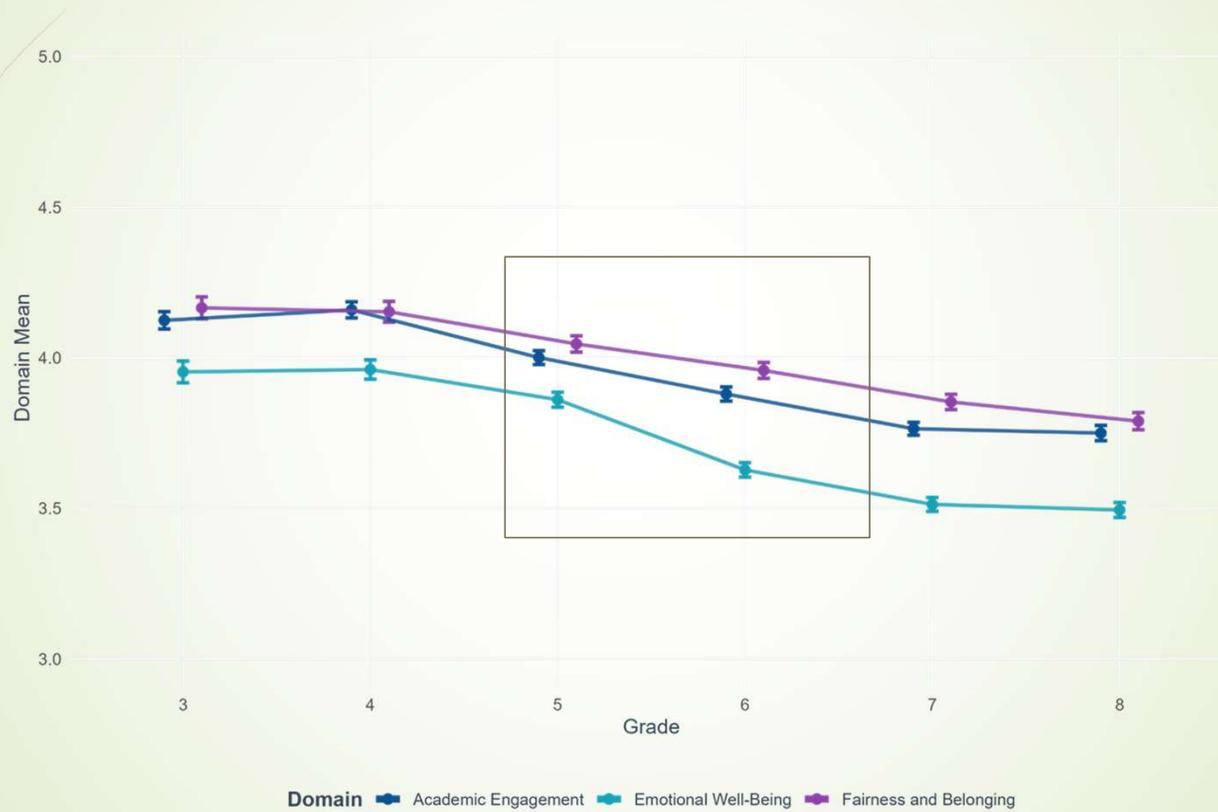
Sample items:

- I often feel happy.
- I feel stressed about schoolwork.

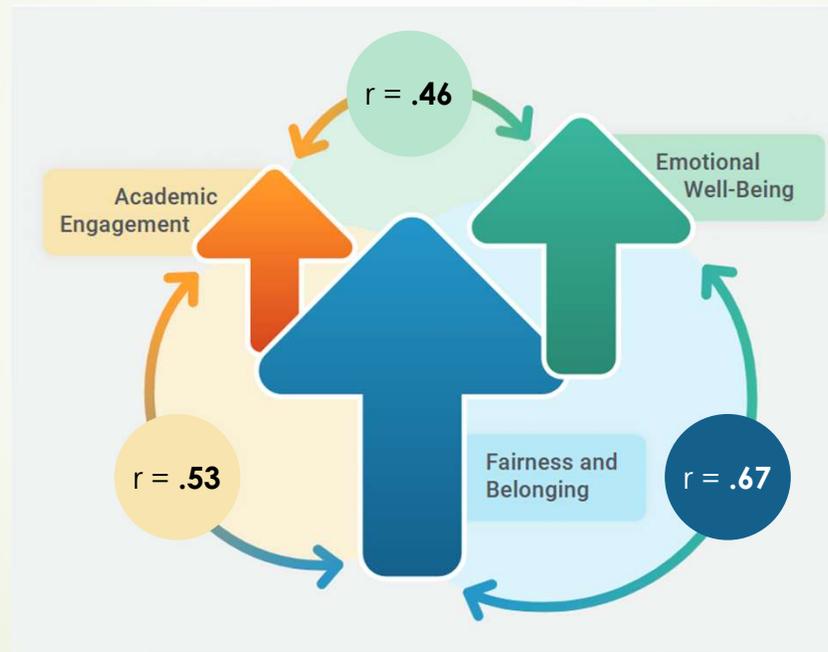
Independent School Student Well-Being: Grades 3–8 (N = 15,084)



Side-by-Side Comparison by Grade



How Belonging Affects Emotional Well-Being and Academic Engagement



INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUR SCHOOL

Which student populations deserve closer attention at your school?

Where do academic and well-being patterns intersect in concerning ways?

What's one assumption you're reconsidering based on today's data?