

## After COVID plunge, Louisiana's LEAP scores continue rebound, particularly in English

- [BY CHARLES LUSSIER | Staff writer](#)

[Louisiana public school students](#) overall have almost recovered academically from the coronavirus pandemic after two consecutive years of improvement [on a key test](#), state education leaders announced Wednesday.

The percentage of students in grades 3-12 who met Louisiana's longtime achievement goal — called mastery — rose by 2 percentage points over the past year to 33%, which compares to 34% in 2019, the last time the exams were given in math, English, science and social studies before the pandemic.

The rate plunged when those tests were given in 2021, the first testing cycle after the pandemic.

“This is good news to see this consistent improvement,” state Superintendent of Education Cade Brumley said about the LEAP results.

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Scores in math and English rose 1 and 2 percentage points, respectively, to 32% and 43% respectively, [according to the state Department of Education](#). English scores are 1 percentage point below pre-pandemic levels, but math scores are still 3 percentage points behind where they were.

Brumley is particularly happy with growth in third-grade, where mastery in English increased by 5 percentage points. Similarly, fourth-graders showed a 6 percentage point increase compared to where they were a year ago when they were third-graders.

Brumley said the latest numbers confirm results last year on a national test known as NAEP — National Assessment of Educational Programs — [showing Louisiana fourth-graders growing faster than the rest of the nation in literacy](#).

“This is a testament to so much of the literacy work we are seeing throughout the state,” Brumley said.

Prior to this year, third — grade English results were stagnant for several years, representing a persistent source of worry. John Wyble, chief executive officer with [The Center for Literacy & Learning](#), said this year’s long-hoped-for growth in that grade is encouraging.

“This is very promising not only for education but for our economic future across Louisiana. We have much still to do so we will continue to lead and partner for quality instruction in every classroom,” said Wyble in a statement.

Wyble said the center will have more to say about the results in the days to come.

Lagging math results, however, will require special effort to turn around. Brumley noted that math mastery declines as Louisiana children get older, peaking at 37% in fourth-grade and falling to just 24% by eighth-grade.

“We are starting math ‘refresh’ work in Louisiana that is beginning to resemble the literacy work we’ve been doing,” he said.

"Mastery" is the second-highest of five achievement levels a student can reach. It means students are ready for the next grade level. By 2025, schools will need to average mastery or above in order to earn an "A" rating from the state.

About 300,000 students in grades 3-8 took the tests in the spring.

These results will be a major factor in the annual letter grades and performance scores that the state is planning to issue in October or November.

The five achievement levels are unsatisfactory, approaching basic, basic, mastery and proficient.

The percentage of students who earned mastery in science rose 1 point this year — to 28% — while social studies remained at 26% mastery.

Brumley blamed the flat scores in social studies on an outdated curriculum, noting that a new one is reading Louisiana classrooms this year.

Erin Bendily, a former top official of the state Department of Education and now vice-president for policy and strategy at the [Pelican Institute for Public Policy](#), said the state may want to reconsider over time how it awards more points in school performance scores for math and English, but less for science and social studies.

“Early literacy is where our state has put its attention in the past few years, rightly so, because if you can’t read, you can’t do anything else,” Bendily said. “But we also need to put our resources into other areas.”

The department said 75% of the state's school systems improved their mastery rate compared to 2021-22.

“We’re going to lean in more heavily with those systems that did not improve,” Brumley said.

The year before 80% of districts showed one-year improvement.

Mike Faulk, executive director of the [Louisiana Association of School Superintendents](#), said he’s happy to see the broad-based nature of the growth on LEAP.

“It wasn’t just a small pocket. It was from south Louisiana to north Louisiana,” Faulk said.

“That’s exciting. It showed that people did some really hard work.”

The 2022-23 school year was the first since the pandemic where teachers and students were not losing significant classroom time due to COVID sickness or exposure. And unlike the two previous, Louisiana did not face major hurricanes that forced schools to close for extended periods of time.

Brumley said those were factors in this past year’s growth.

“We have probably had more time on task than the past couple of years, more instruction and that’s what you are seeing in these gains,” he said.

Barry Erwin, president and chief executive officer of the [Council for a Better Louisiana](#), said he's happy with the growth, particularly in early literacy, but returning to pre-COVID levels goes only so far in a state with historically low academic performance. He said he regrets the damage done by the pandemic in interrupting literacy and reading growth in Louisiana.

“If we would have had 5-point growth this year compared to where we were in 2019, we would have had half our kids at mastery (in English),” Erwin said.

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