

# Student Achievement on California's K–12 Assessments

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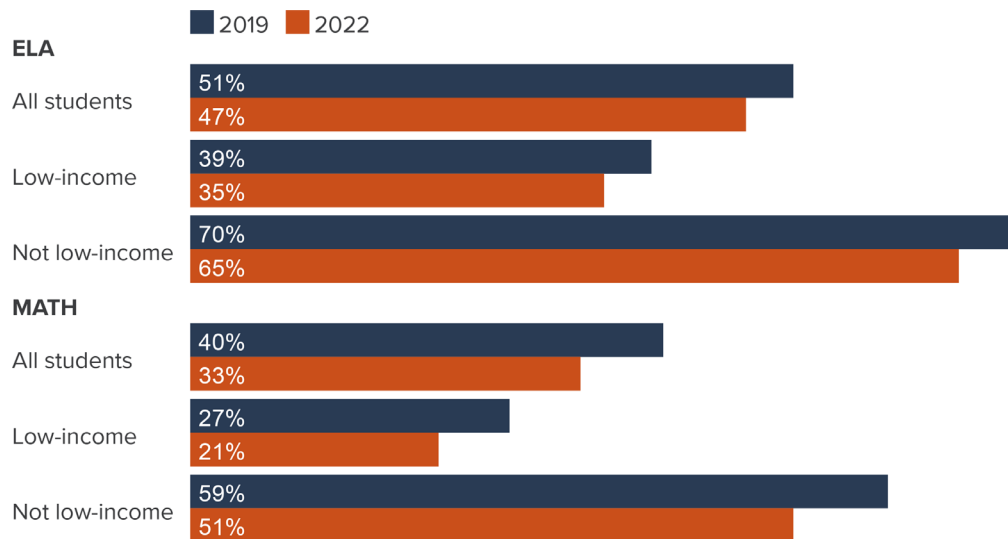
## Pandemic disruptions reversed nearly six years of academic progress.

- ▶ Results from California's 2022 Smarter Balanced Assessments—the first since pandemic began—showed significant declines in proficiency rates. Overall, the share of students meeting proficiency standards in English Language Arts (ELA) fell by 4 percentage points. In math, the drop was 6.4 percentage points.
- ▶ Declines were widespread, but there was substantial variation across grade levels and demographic groups.
- ▶ High-need students experienced [longer school closures](#) and were more likely to have [limited access](#) to the tools needed for virtual learning. Despite adverse schooling conditions, high-need students' test score declines were not as large as those for other students.

## Student achievement varies across demographic groups.

- ▶ Only 35% of low-income students met state standards in ELA, and 21% were proficient in math, compared to 65% of higher-income students in ELA and 51% in math.
- ▶ Disparities were similar between students who had ever been designated as English Learners (ever-ELs) and those who had not (never-ELs). About 35% of ever-ELs met ELA standards, and only 23% were proficient in math, compared to 51% of never-ELs in ELA and 38% in math.
- ▶ Proficiency rates in ELA and math were highest among Asian American (75% in ELA, 70% in math), Filipino (70% in ELA, 54% in math), and white (61% in ELA, 48% in math) students. Rates were lower among Black (30% in ELA, 16% in math), Latino (36% in ELA, 21% in math), Native American (33% in ELA, 21% in math), and Pacific Islander (40% in ELA, 25% in math) students.
- ▶ About 41% of students in rural districts achieved proficiency in ELA, compared to 46% of students in urban districts. A comparable gap was observed in math: 29% of rural students and 24% of urban students met standards.

## Proficiency rates fell dramatically across most student groups during the pandemic



Sources: California Assessment of Student Progress and Performance (CAASPP) research files; author calculations.

Notes: SBAC tests were fully administered in spring 2022 for the first time since the start of the pandemic. The 2020 tests were cancelled outright and the 2021 tests were optional—fewer than 1 in 4 students took them. Low-income students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals or other safety net programs. “Ever ELs” are current or former English Learners; English-only and initially English-fluent students are “never ELs.”

## Yearly progress slowed significantly for students affected by the pandemic.

- ▶ Students affected by the pandemic saw less score growth across grades than earlier cohorts. ELA scores for students who moved from grade 3 to grade 6 during the pandemic rose by 63 points, this was only 79% of the progress made in earlier cohorts. The disruption was more evident in math, where growth between grades 3 and 6 was 89 points, or 68% of pre-pandemic progress.
- ▶ Disparities across demographic groups in three-year growth were minimal in ELA, but quite large in math. Low-income and ever-EL students moving from grade 3 to grade 6 saw about two-thirds as much progress as higher-income and never-EL students from 2019 to 2022.
- ▶ Black and Latino students saw below-average progress, while white and Asian American students had higher than average growth—although not larger than before the pandemic.

## California's 2022 proficiency rates are below the national average.

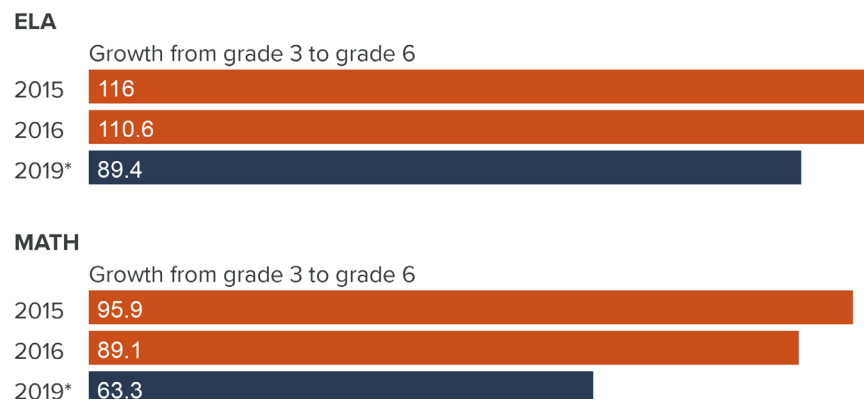
- ▶ The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—a nationwide test of proficiency in reading and math—shows that California has consistently lagged behind most other states. Among the 50 states and Washington, DC, California is ranked 38th in math and 33rd in reading.
- ▶ Given the NAEP's national administration, we can compare California's results to other similarly large states such as Florida, Texas, and New York. Florida ranks much higher than California and the other two large states. California is ranked just above Texas in reading but far below in math. California ranks well ahead of New York in both math and reading.
- ▶ California's reading proficiency rates were roughly unchanged relative to 2019, while the national average dropped significantly. However, California's math proficiency rates fell by 5%, slightly more than the nationwide average of 4%.

## As California's schools emerge from the pandemic, several issues need to be addressed.

- ▶ Pandemic-era learning loss has been a key focus over the past few years. Substantial state and federal investments have helped fund a variety of new programs, such as the [Expanded Learning Opportunities](#) grant, to help students recover.
- ▶ The state also needs to continue its efforts to close long-standing achievement gaps.
- ▶ While the Smarter Balanced assessments are a key measure of student success, schools are also focused on other areas, including college and career readiness, school climate and connectedness, and graduation rates.

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## Pandemic-affected students saw less progress than earlier cohorts



Sources: California Assessment of Student Progress and Performance (CAASPP) research files; author calculations.

Notes: Mean scale scores are comparable across grades, with the ranges for each achievement level rising to account for expected annual progress. The cohorts are defined by the year each group entered Grade 3. Asterisks (\*) identify cohorts impacted by the pandemic between their initial mean scale scores and three-year growth.

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Sources: California Department of Education: CAASPP research files, public school directory. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).