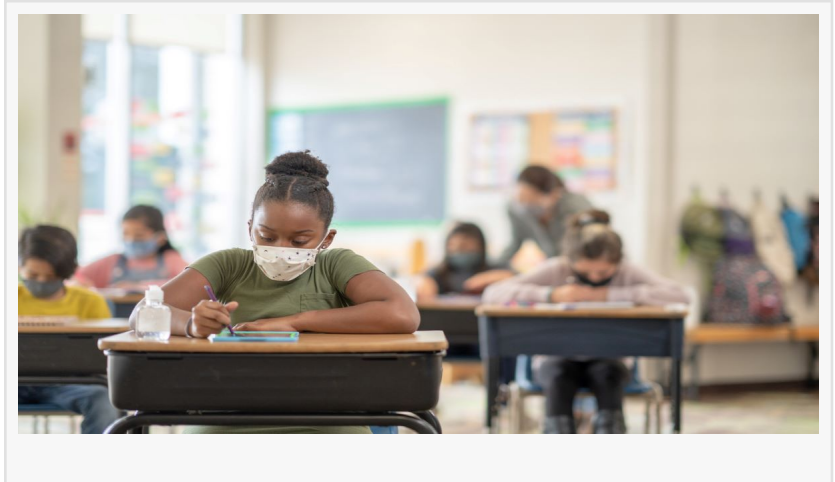


# Academic Proficiency in Pennsylvania Declined Steeply During the Pandemic, But Signs of Partial Recovery Have Emerged

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[/EINPresswire.com/](#) -- [Findings from a new study](#) in Pennsylvania indicate that the pandemic led to a substantial reduction in academic proficiency in grades 5 through 8 in 2021. Due to lower, nonrepresentative test participation in 2021, these findings offer the first glimpse into Pennsylvania's 2021 academic proficiency rate, the most commonly reported measure of student performance. The recently published findings were the result of a partnership between Mathematica, an independent research and evaluation firm, and the Pennsylvania Department of Education.



The study showed proficiency rates in grades 5 through 8 declined 13 percentage points in math and 10 percentage points in English language arts (ELA) in 2021. During the previous five years, proficiency rates in math and ELA had been about 40 percent and 60 percent, respectively, so changes of this magnitude are quite large. The analysis also adds to previous research on the negative impacts of COVID-19 on academic achievement for vulnerable groups of learners and students in remote learning.

Because 2021 assessment participation rates were lower than in a typical year, particularly among students with lower performance before the pandemic, simply looking at 2021 test scores does not provide an accurate barometer for the statewide proficiency rate. The study used predictive modeling to estimate what proficiency rates would have been had a more representative set of students taken the 2021 assessments.

"We don't see the full picture when we look at only raw assessment data for 2021," said [Stephen Lipscomb](#), a principal researcher at Mathematica and co-author of the study. "Predictive modeling allowed us to account for Pennsylvania's unique assessment issues in 2021 and consider proficiency for nearly all students—not just test takers."

The 2022 statewide assessment data, which included a more representative sample of test takers, show [signs of partial recovery](#). Proficiency rates in grades 5 through 8 remain below pre-pandemic levels, but they regained nearly 5 points of their 13-point drop in math and 6 points of their 10-point drop in ELA. The results are encouraging, but more work is needed to help students recover from the pandemic.

This research provides critical insights for policymakers and educators as they continue to evaluate progress in Pennsylvania's pandemic recovery efforts and strive to better serve the commonwealth's public school students.

#### About Mathematica

At Mathematica, we apply our unique knowledge and experience at the intersection of data, analytics, policy, and practice to help address ongoing challenges related to COVID-19. We're an employee-owned and mission-driven company, with a deep bench of expertise in both data and social science. The wide range of organizations that rely on Mathematica count on us to deliver evidence-based solutions that improve programs, refine strategies, and deepen understanding. For more than half a century, we've served clients including federal, state, and local government agencies, foundations, international aid organizations, and commercial health organizations.

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