

English learners' test scores: Before, during, and after COVID-19 *in WIDA Consortium States*

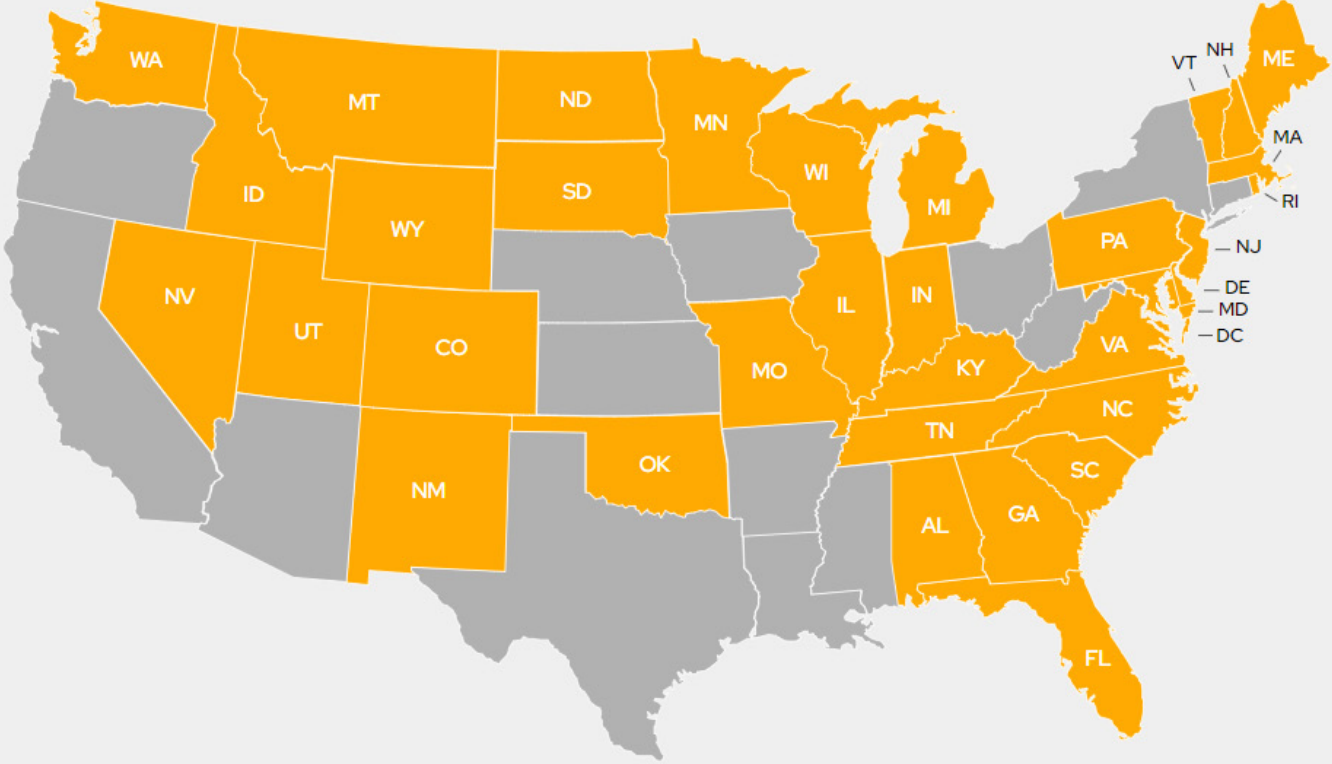
Prepared by Narek Sahakyan, MS, and Glenn Poole, MS

November 14, 2023

Overview

- Introductions: WIDA, multilingual/English learners, and impact of COVID-19 studies
- Motivation and literature
- WIDA reports on the impact of COVID-19 on English learners' proficiency and growth
 - “COVID Report 2.0” spanning 2018–2022:
 - Average English learner proficiency and growth in overall composite and in individual domains by grade-level cluster
 - What do the 2023 data look like?
- Looking ahead: Research the impact of COVID-19 on within-English-learner disparities
- Implications

WIDA Consortium Member States and Territories



Alaska



Hawaii



Northern Mariana Islands



U.S. Virgin Islands



Bureau of Indian Education



Department of Defense Education Activity



Motivation and literature

- Pandemic-related **disruptions in school-based language supports**, such as modified course content, likely **exacerbated existing inequalities** (Dorn et al., 2020; Hamilton et al., 2020).
- During and even after the pandemic, English learners had **reduced opportunities to practice language skills with peers and teachers** (Huck & Zhang, 2021; Nowicki, 2020).
- Online schooling has come with an **“online penalty” for struggling and vulnerable learners** and concerns over the **“digital divide,”** as Black, Indigenous, and other students of color experienced **restricted access to technology and high-speed Internet** (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2020; Dynarski, 2018; Education Trust, 2020).
- Because English learners engage with challenging academic content while mastering an additional language, disruptions to their English acquisition may have had **detrimental, cumulative, and long-lasting effects on their educational and career trajectories** (Sugarman & Lazarin, 2020; Tindal & Anderson, 2019).

Examining English Learner Testing, Proficiency, and Growth: Before, During, and “After” the COVID-19 Pandemic

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This report examines English learner testing, proficiency, and growth in the years surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. This research builds on an October 2021 report on the impact of the pandemic, and includes data from the 2021-22 ACCESS for ELLs test administration. Findings indicate that in some grades and language domains EL’s average proficiency and growth have returned to pre-pandemic levels. However, for most grades and language domains the evidence points to a continuing impact of COVID-19 on English learners’ English language development.

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Research

ACCESS for ELLs

Research or Technical Report

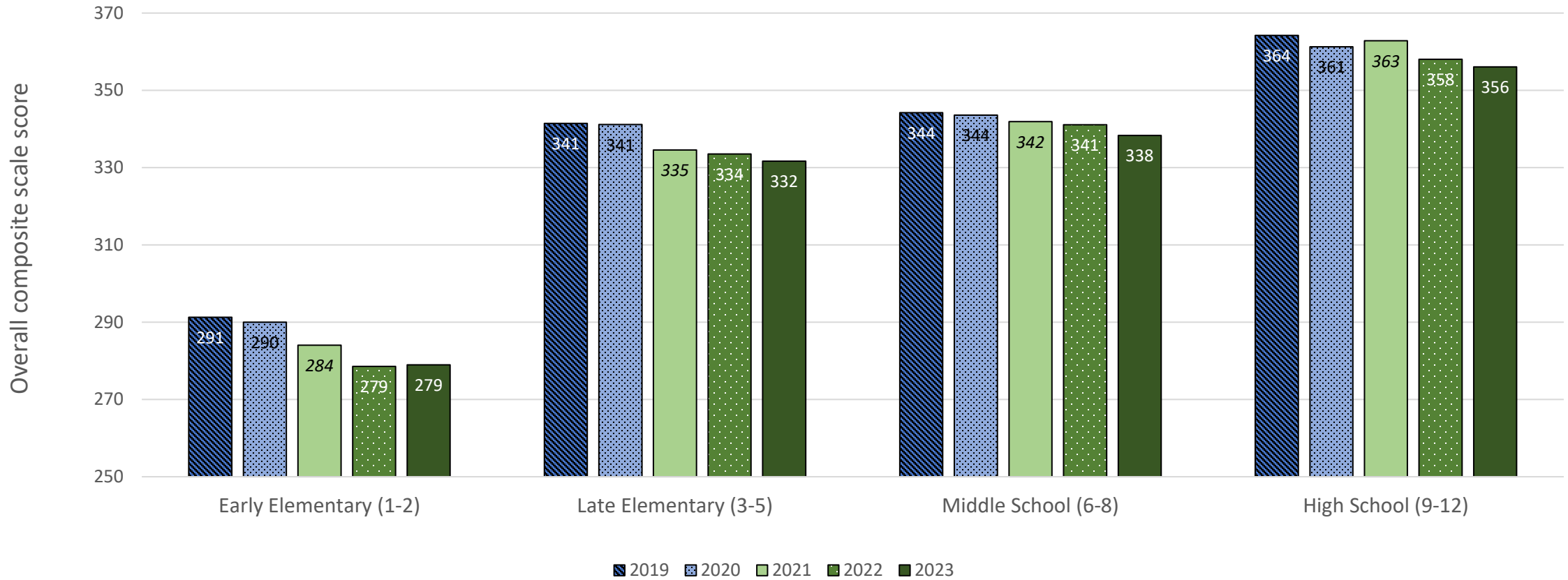


English learners' proficiency

- **Overall Composite Scale Scores**
- Vertically scaled across grades, enabling growth calculations (based on students' adjacent-year scale score difference)
 - Ranging from 100 to 600
 - Weighted composite of Reading (35%), Writing (35%), Speaking (15%), and Listening (15%), with the literacy domains weighted more heavily
- In many states, English learners are reclassified as “fluent English proficient” once they attain a sufficiently high overall composite scale score. With some exceptions, depending on state-level policies on reclassification, this can happen in any grade.

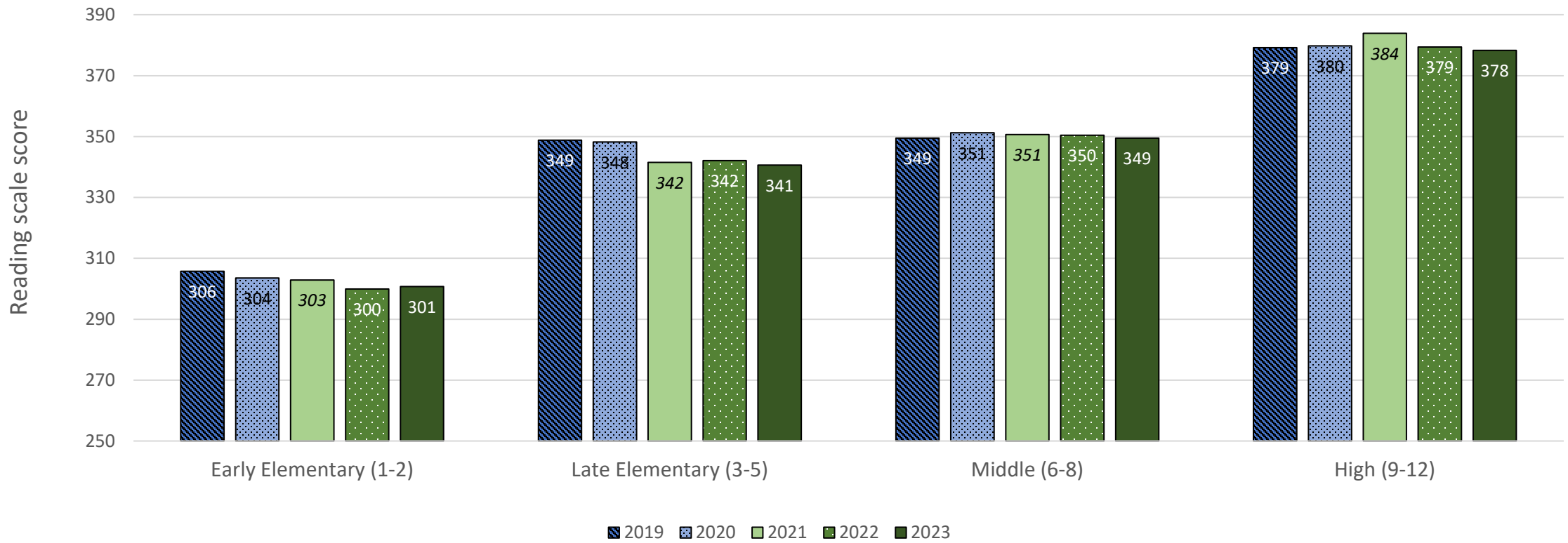
After the COVID-19 pandemic, English learners' average proficiency, as measured by ACCESS Online, is still on the decline.

2019: N = 1,536,475
 2020: N = 1,567,081
 2021: N = 1,194,814
 2022: N = 1,836,690
 2023: N = 1,994,991



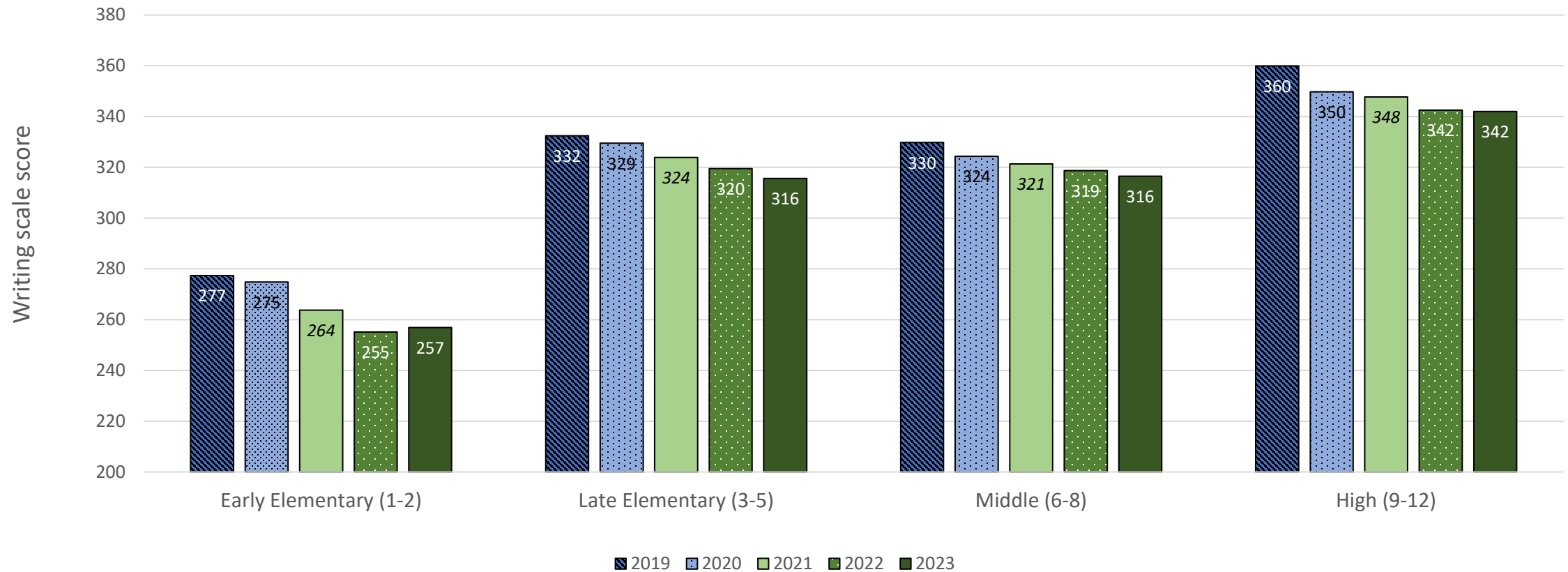
Note: The italic font for the 2021 academic year indicates approximately 30% of data was missing at "non-random".

Reading proficiency declined slightly, mostly in elementary grades.



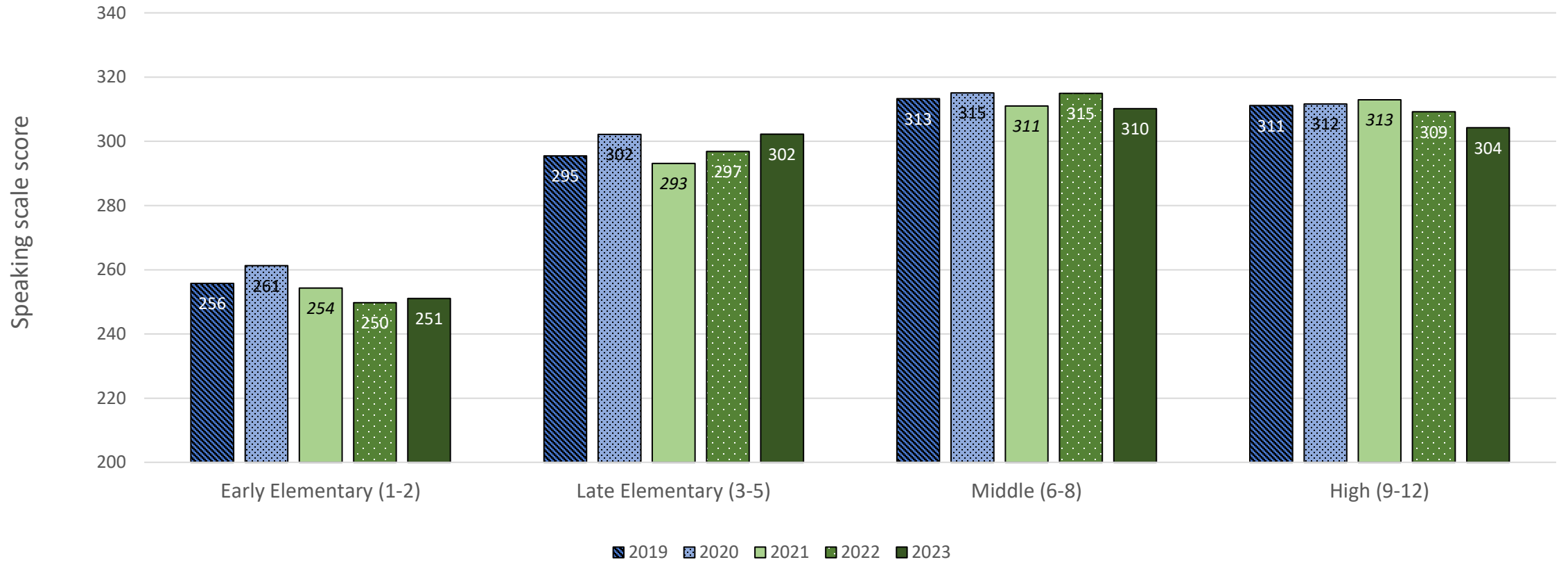
Note: The italic font for the 2021 academic year indicates approximately 30% of data was missing at “non-random”.

Writing proficiency is still declining in late elementary and middle school grades. It has stopped decreasing in early elementary and high school grades but is well below pre-pandemic levels.



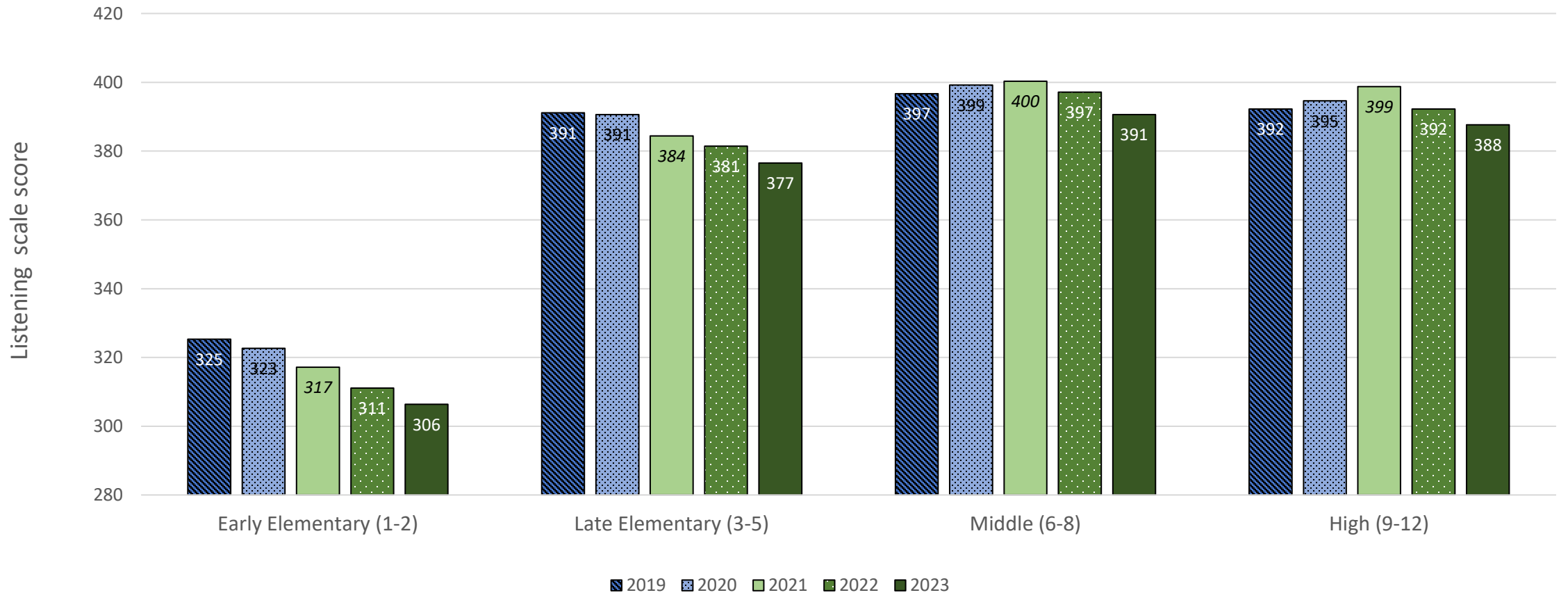
Note: The italic font for the 2021 academic year indicates approximately 30% of data was missing at “non-random”.

Speaking proficiency is back to pre-pandemic levels only in the late elementary grades, but is still declining in middle and high school grades.



Note: The italic font for the 2021 academic year indicates approximately 30% of data was missing at “non-random”.

Listening proficiency is still on the decline in all grade-level clusters.



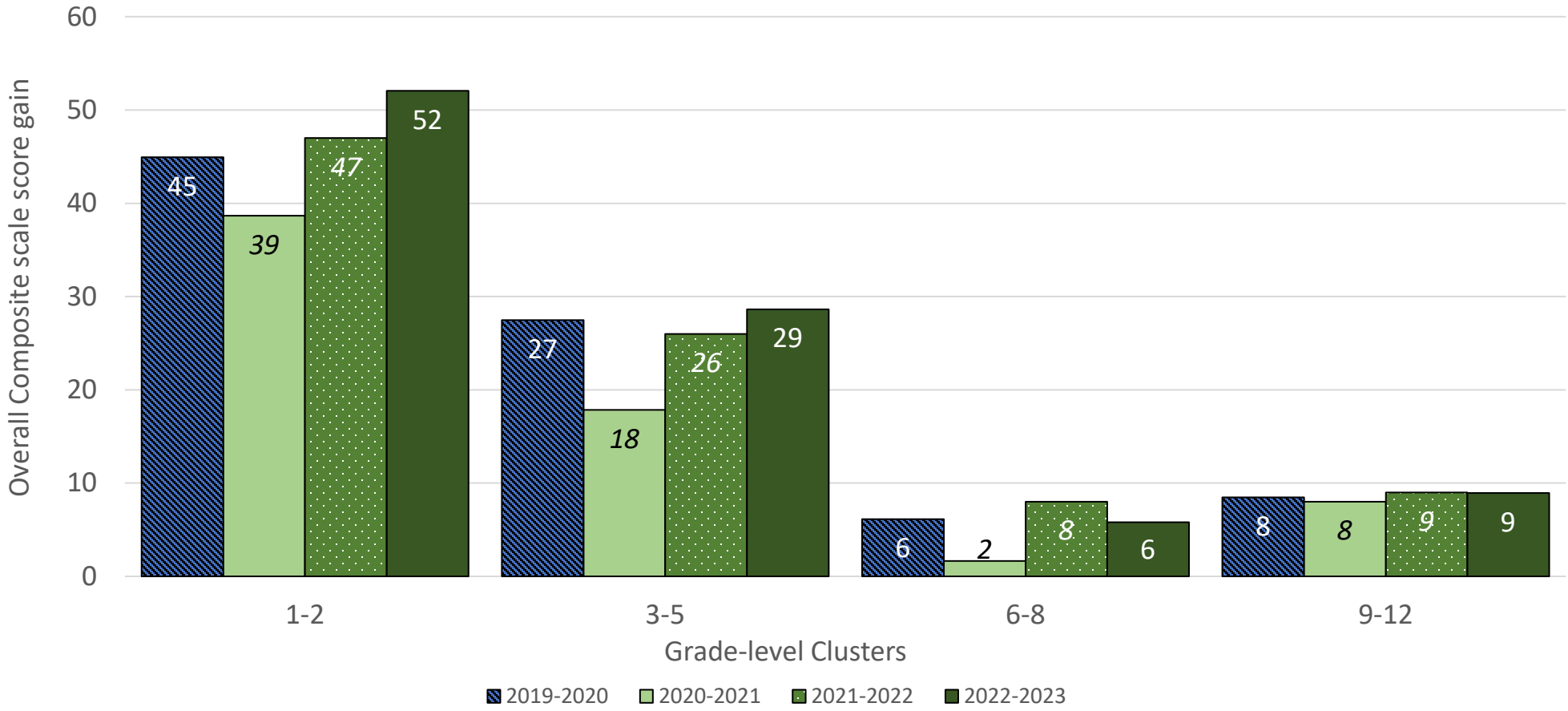
Note: The italic font for the 2021 academic year indicates approximately 30% of data was missing at “non-random”.

Summary of English learner proficiency results

- Since the COVID-19 pandemic, English learner students' average (Overall Composite) proficiency has been gradually declining across all grade-level clusters.
- Declines in proficiency can be observed in all language domains, with **Reading** proficiency impacted the least and **Writing** proficiency impacted the most.
- Except for the outlier result for the late elementary grade-level cluster in **Speaking**, most of the declines in all language domains, especially those in **Listening** and **Writing**, are observed in earlier grades.

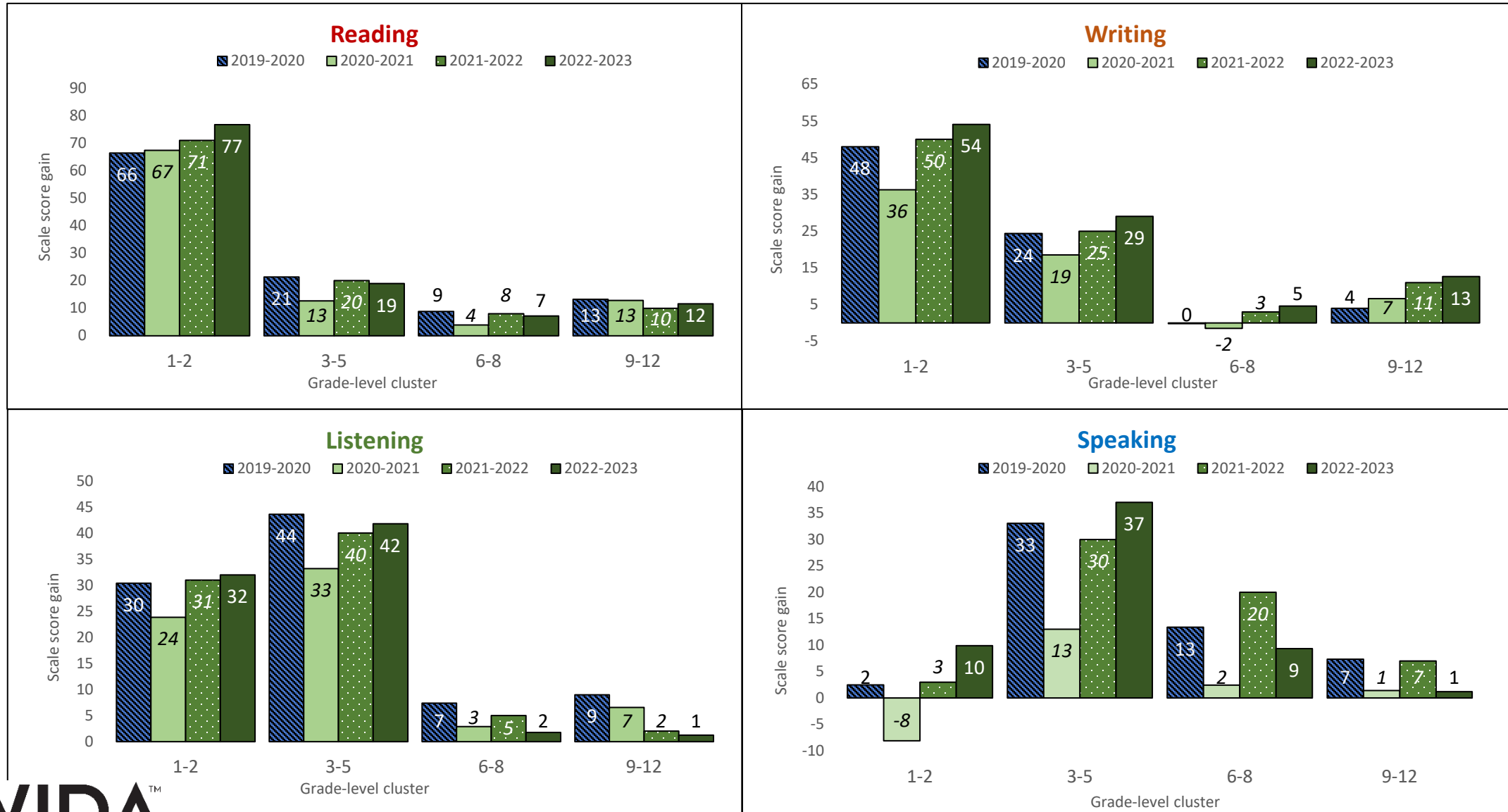
English Learners' growth has exceeded pre-pandemic levels in early grade-level clusters, and has caught up in middle and high school.

N (2019-2020) = 1,333,436
 N (2020-2021) = 961,280
 N (2021-2022) = 1,112,785
 N (2022-2023) = 1,652,856



Note: The italic font for the 2020-21 and 2021-22 academic years indicates approximately 30% of data was missing at “non-random”.

English learners' growth in language domains

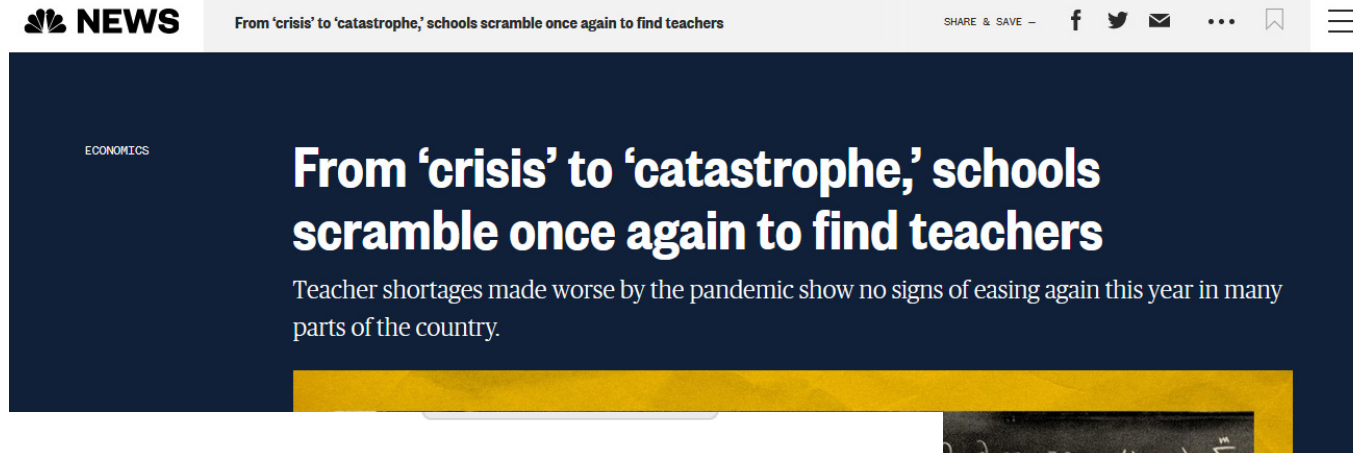


Summary of English learner growth results

- English learners' annual growth in overall proficiency declined substantially following the pandemic but has reverted to pre-pandemic levels in early elementary and late elementary grade-level clusters according to the most recent, 2023 data.
- Highest scale score gains are observed in the early grades in the domains of **Reading** and **Writing**.
- English learners' growth has also increased in the domain of **Speaking**, exceeding pre-pandemic levels in the elementary grades but still lagging behind in later grades.
- In **Listening**, average growth has remained stable in elementary grades but is still declining in middle and high school grades.
- Some of this growth is likely driven by the relatively low average proficiency level of “newcomer” students who enroll in WIDA states as English learners in early grades after the pandemic.
 - As average proficiency decreased, there was more room to grow, especially in early grades (where we see most of the growth) and at lower proficiency levels.

Looking Ahead

- English learners are a diverse and heterogenous group with many unique and distinguishing circumstances, yet we have looked only at average proficiency, average growth, and the average impact of the pandemic on them.
- Forthcoming research will provide evidence of substantial subgroup disparities between English learners' proficiency across ethno-racial, gender, and disability categories (among others) and how the pandemic has exacerbated many of these existing disparities.
 - For example, preliminary results suggest that the average impact of the pandemic for Hispanic English learners was estimated at about -13 scale score points, compared with half of that at -7 scale score points for non-Hispanic English learners.
 - Similarly, the pandemic has had a negative impact on the average proficiency of English learners identified as Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian and as mixed or two races.
 - On the other hand, White, Black, and Asian English learners' average proficiency has increased after the pandemic.
 - The disparities in the average proficiency of English learners enrolled in micro and small schools compared with medium and large schools have increased after the pandemic.



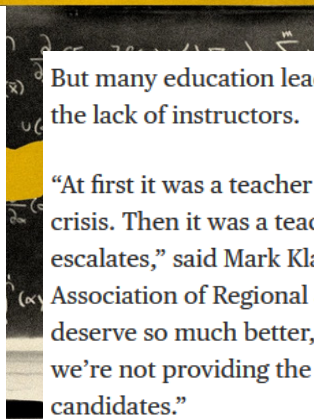
Aug. 13, 2023, 6:00 AM CDT

By Shannon Pettypiece

Vance Varner is heading into another school year desperately searching for teachers and staff members: an English instructor, a special education teacher, a speech therapist.

Varner, the superintendent of schools in Mifflin County, Pennsylvania, a rural community 30 minutes from the Penn State campus, said four of his teacher positions are still vacant less than a month before the start of school. He said that with some positions getting zero applications, he is preparing to fill some of the vacancies with people who have no teaching experience or training, which he rarely had to do a decade ago.

“There’s a perfect storm in education right now, especially in rural communities such as ours,” said Varner, who has worked as a teacher and an administrator in Mifflin County for 25 years.



But many education leaders say the real problem in classrooms is the lack of instructors.

“At first it was a teacher shortage. Then there was a teacher shortage crisis. Then it was a teacher shortage catastrophe, and it just escalates,” said Mark Klaisner, the president of the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools. “Our kids deserve so much better, and it just feels almost criminal, because we’re not providing the quality that we would if we could find the candidates.”

Administrators say that to deal with the staffing shortfalls, they are relying again this year on long-term substitute teachers, hiring emergency certified teachers with no teaching qualifications or experience, bringing in teachers from overseas, and increasing class sizes. It means yet another year when many students won’t be able to get the support they need as standardized tests show kids **falling behind** in key areas, educators said.

The New York Times Magazine

THE EDUCATION ISSUE

American Schools Got a \$190 Billion Covid Windfall. Where Is It Going?

Unprecedented federal aid could help schools dig out of pandemic problems — if they can figure out how to spend it in time.

By Charley Locke

Published Sept. 8, 2022 Updated Sept. 9, 2022

Relief in sight?

- Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund
 - **Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act)** set aside \$13.2 billion for the ESSER Fund (March 2020).
 - **Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act** added \$54.3 billion (ESSER II) (December 2020).
 - **American Rescue Plan Act** added \$122 billion (ESSER III), dwarfing the previous ESSER allocations and any previous federal investments in education (March 2021).
- In a usual year, the federal government spends around \$13,000 per student; in some low-income districts, the ESSER III funding alone allocates an additional \$30,000 per student.
- The states must disburse at least 90 percent of the funding to districts and local agencies, using **Title I formulas to prioritize low-income students**;
 - Districts must spend at least 20 percent on addressing learning loss through *evidence-based interventions that respond to students' social, emotional and academic needs*.
- **All the funding must be spent or allocated by 2024!**

Thank you!

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Question-and-answer session

