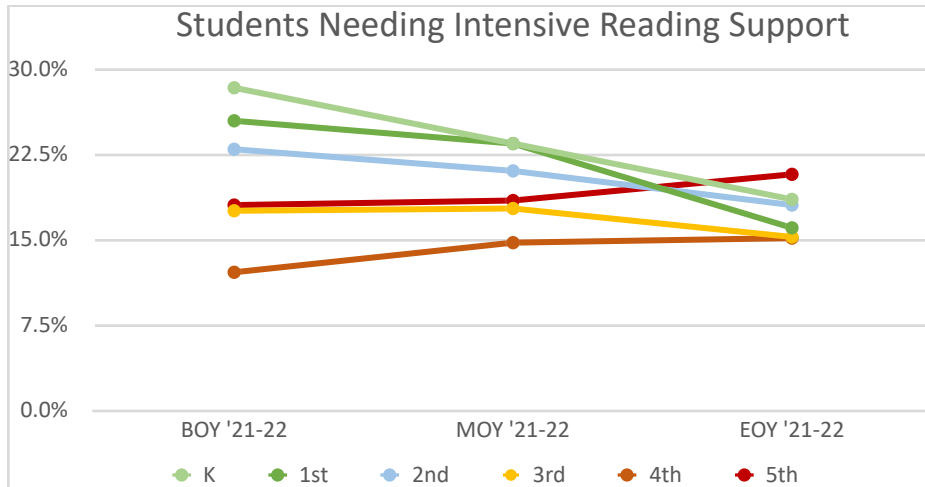


APS Data Shows Unremediated Learning Loss

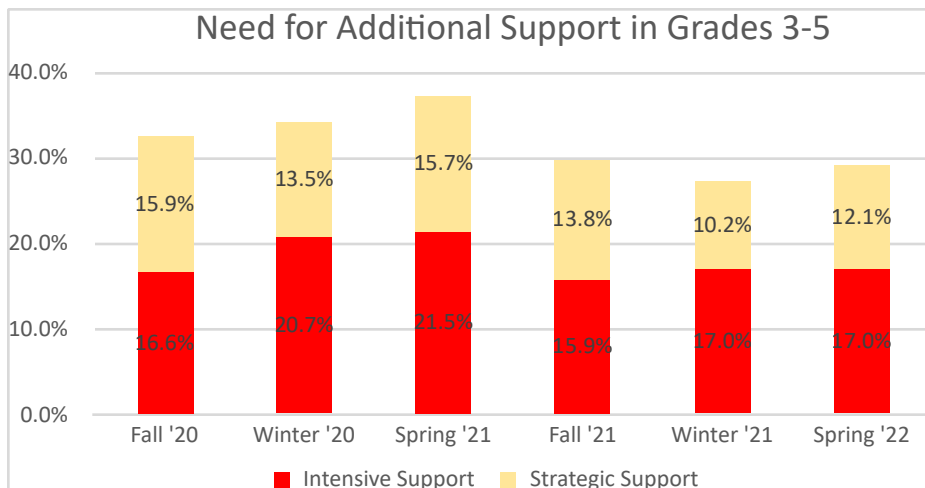
Learning loss is a [serious problem](#) that is not going away. APS finally broached the [possibility of 1:1 tutoring](#) late in the 2021-22 school year and added a small allocation for tutoring in grades 9-12. APS' own data, now updated with End of Year assessments, shows that more resources are needed.

End of year reading data shows improvement among the younger grades, but increasing numbers of at-risk students in the older grades. The APS Student Progress Dashboard publishes data from a literacy screener called DIBELS that is administered at the beginning of the year (BOY), middle of the year (MOY), and end of year (EOY). DIBELS is designed to identify students who may be at risk of reading difficulties. The EOY data for APS elementary students has now been posted to the dashboard.

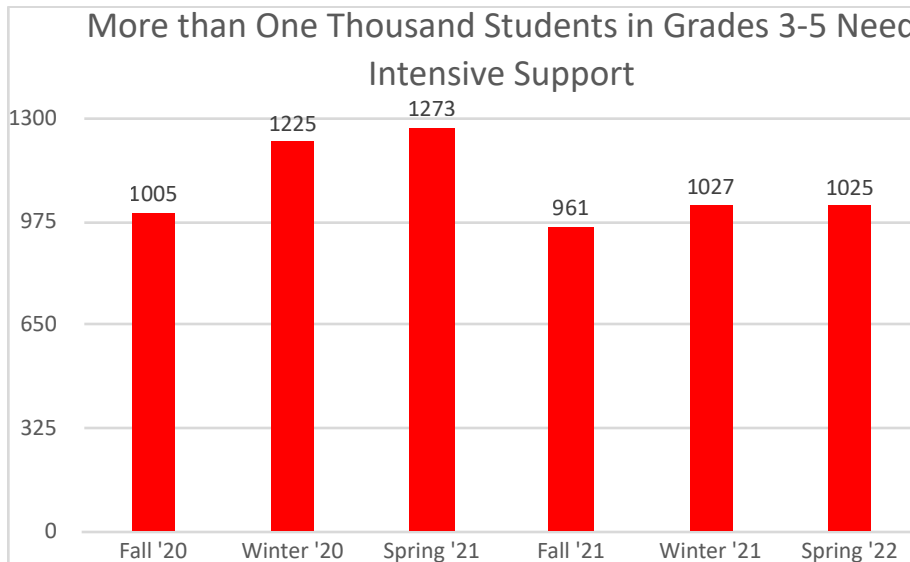
In general, students in the younger grades improved over the course of this school year. Grades K-2 saw nearly a one-third reduction in the percentage needing intensive support. However, the story is different for the older grades. For third graders, there was only about a 13% reduction in the number needing intensive support. For fourth and fifth graders, students in need of intensive reading support **increased** from the beginning of the school year to the end of the school year.



PS reading data shows high numbers of students need support. APS began widespread use of DIBELS during the 2020-21 school year, which means there are no pre-pandemic historical comparisons available for APS. Also, during the 2020-21 school year, APS only administered DIBELS to students in grades 3-5. While it is therefore difficult to draw conclusions about trends, the data show that large percentages of third through fifth graders—roughly 30% as of the end of this school year—are in the “strategic support” or “intensive support” categories, meaning they need support beyond the general curriculum.



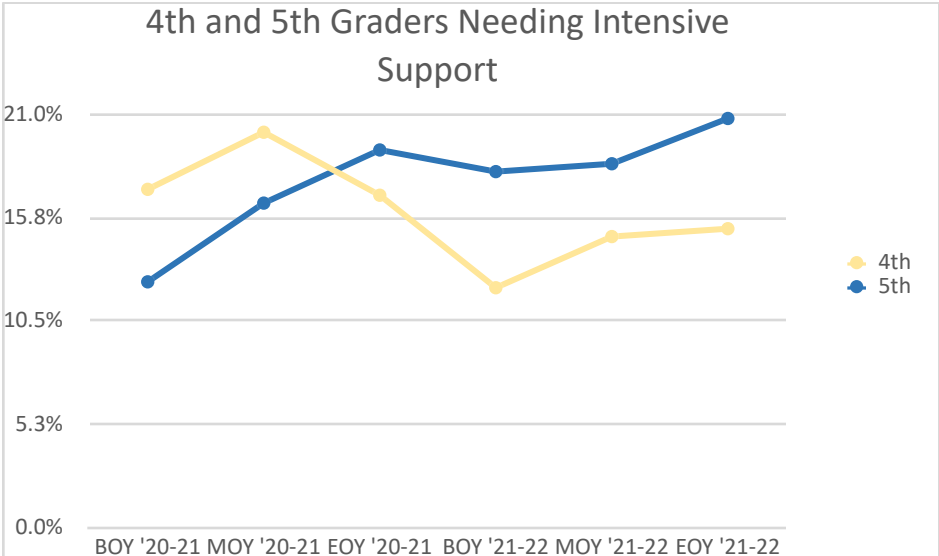
More students in grades 3-5 need intensive support now than at the start of the 2020-21 school year. The data also indicate that the numbers of students in these grades needing “intensive support” has increased during both of the past two school years, and that more students ended this school year in need of intensive reading support than at the beginning of either the prior two school years:



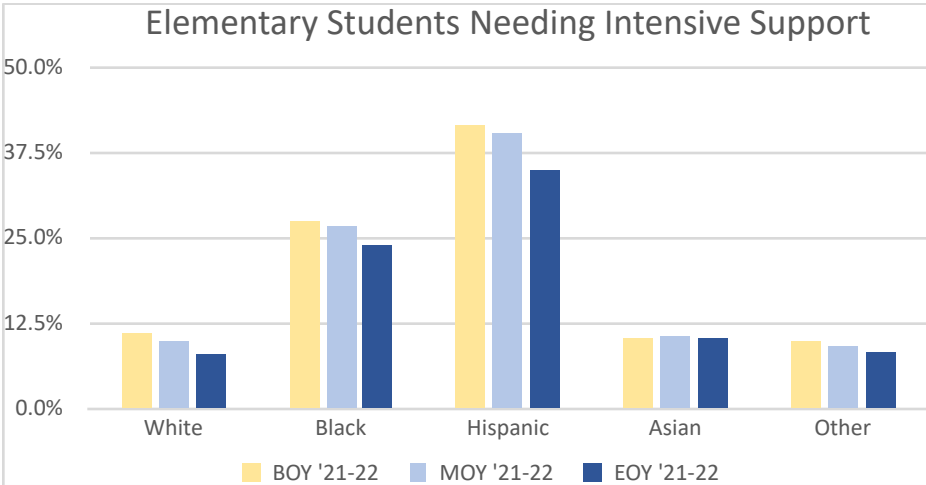
This data is, at least, suggestive of the long-term impact of virtual learning during the 2020-21 school year, the significant interruptions that quarantines and closures posed during the 2021-22 school year, and, perhaps, the slow [changeover to phonics](#) for the upper grades. Among all elementary students, more than 2100 require intensive support as of the end of this school year.

It also may be the case that certain grades, such as older elementary students, were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic education offered by APS. For example, this year’s graduating 5th graders were in 3rd grade when schools closed in March 2020. Those then-3rd graders who were not strong readers by March 2020 may not have received the supports they needed over the course of mostly virtual 4th grade and this year’s less-than-normal 5th grade in order to transition effectively from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.”

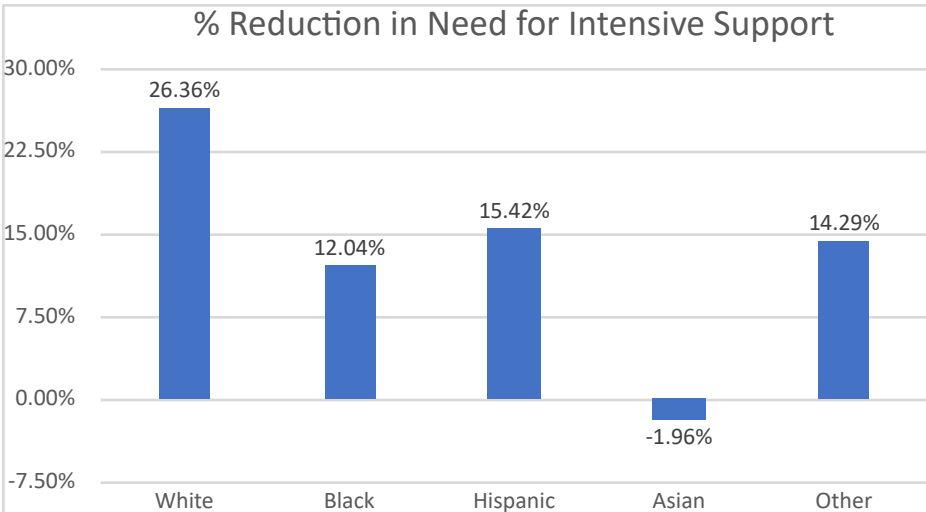
An alarming number of rising sixth graders need intensive reading support. The dashboard allows for a two year look at APS students who were in 2nd and 3rd grades when schools closed. Using data from 2020-21 for third and fourth graders, and data from 2021-22 for fourth and fifth graders, respectively, progress (or lack thereof) can be charted. This year’s 4th graders, who were in 2nd grade when the pandemic began, showed progress but a concerning trend of “at risk” students increasing over the course of the 2021-22 school year. Worse, this year’s 5th graders (3rd graders when the pandemic began) has, over the past two years, shown a 40% increase in the number categorized as “at risk.” One in five graduated elementary school needing intensive reading support. These students are now advancing to middle school.



The achievement gap is widening. Far higher percentages of Black and Hispanic students than white students need intensive reading support. These disparities existed before the pandemic and worsened during it.

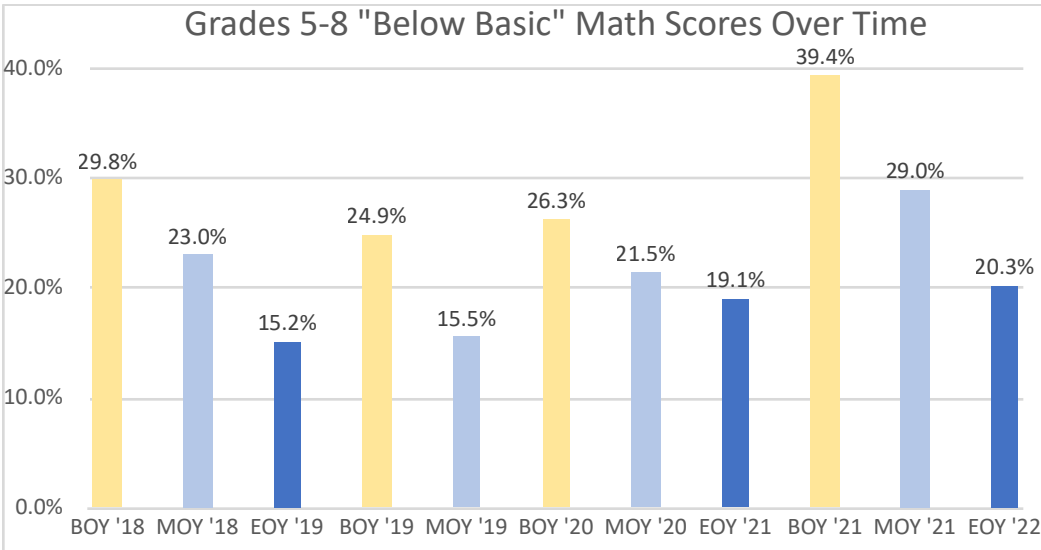


While almost all demographics showed progress over the course of this school year, white students are recovering at a faster pace than non-white students. Over the course of this school year, the number of students in the “intensive support” category was reduced by 26% for white students. In contrast, the reduction in Black and Hispanic students in the “intensive support” category was only 12.04% and 15.42%, respectively. The number of Asian students needing intensive support increased by the end of year vs. the beginning of the year.

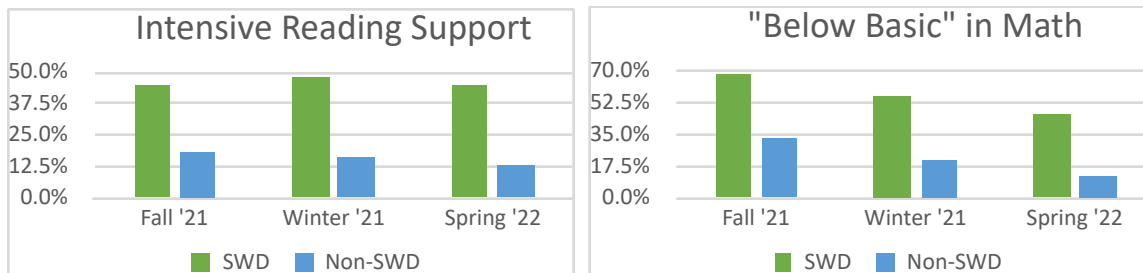


The result, if not corrected, will be wider demographic disparities.

Math assessments show that many more students are behind than pre-pandemic, and more are behind at the end of this school year than at the end of last school year. APS administered Math Inventory assessments to students in grades 5-8 prior to the pandemic, so we have more historical data for math. Data obtained via [FOIA request](#) goes back to 2018 for these grades. The data show that the percentage of students in the “below basic” category—nearly 40% of all 5th through 8th graders—was significantly higher at the beginning of the 2021-22 school year than in prior years. Though students improved over the course of the school year, pandemic shortfalls have not been remediated and students are still behind where they normally would be. At the end of the 2018-19 school year and by the middle of the 2019-20 school year (EOY assessments were not administered that year due to the pandemic), approximately 15% of 5th through 8th graders were categorized as “below basic.” At the end of the 2020-21 school year, that figure was 19.1%. At the end of this school year, it was over 20%. To get a sense of the magnitude of recovery services needed, just to return to pre-pandemic levels of students scoring at below-basic would require improving the math performance of over 400 students.



Students with disabilities made limited progress this year. DIBELS data for students with disabilities is disheartening: approximately 45% of students with disabilities across all elementary grades needed intensive support at the beginning of this school year, and that number remains at 45% at year-end. In math, students with disabilities in grades 2-8 began the year with over two-thirds categorized as “below basic,” which was reduced to 45.9% in “below basic” by the end of the school year. The older grades are even more behind as a group; in grades 5-8, more than half of students with disabilities remained in the “below basic” category at the end of the 2021-22 school year.



APS has the data. It should use it. Students are supposed to improve over the course of a school year. The dashboard data shows specific groups and grade levels where improvement is lagging, or even moving in the wrong direction. Our students need stronger support and more resources to recover lost learning. What we need now, and have needed, is a plan to target those students with additional instructional time, track and report on progress, and react quickly and nimbly to what the data shows.

The magnitude of the problem requires more than last minute add-ins to the budget; it requires a focused effort with sufficient resources to actually improve student performance. The School Board [added \\$600,000](#) for a year of tutoring in grades 6-12, but this is far short of the need. As one example, APS [has indicated](#) that it would cost \$4 million to provide one semester of twice weekly tutoring to the 1,201 students in grades 6 and higher who failed the Reading Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments last year.

To the extent that there are unspent funds from the 2021-22 budget, APS should identify those amounts now and devote them to a robust tutoring program.

Arlington Parents for Education is a volunteer-led, non-partisan coalition of parents, teachers, students and citizens dedicated to accountability, transparency and education excellence at Arlington Public Schools. Follow us [@ArlParentsForEd](#)