

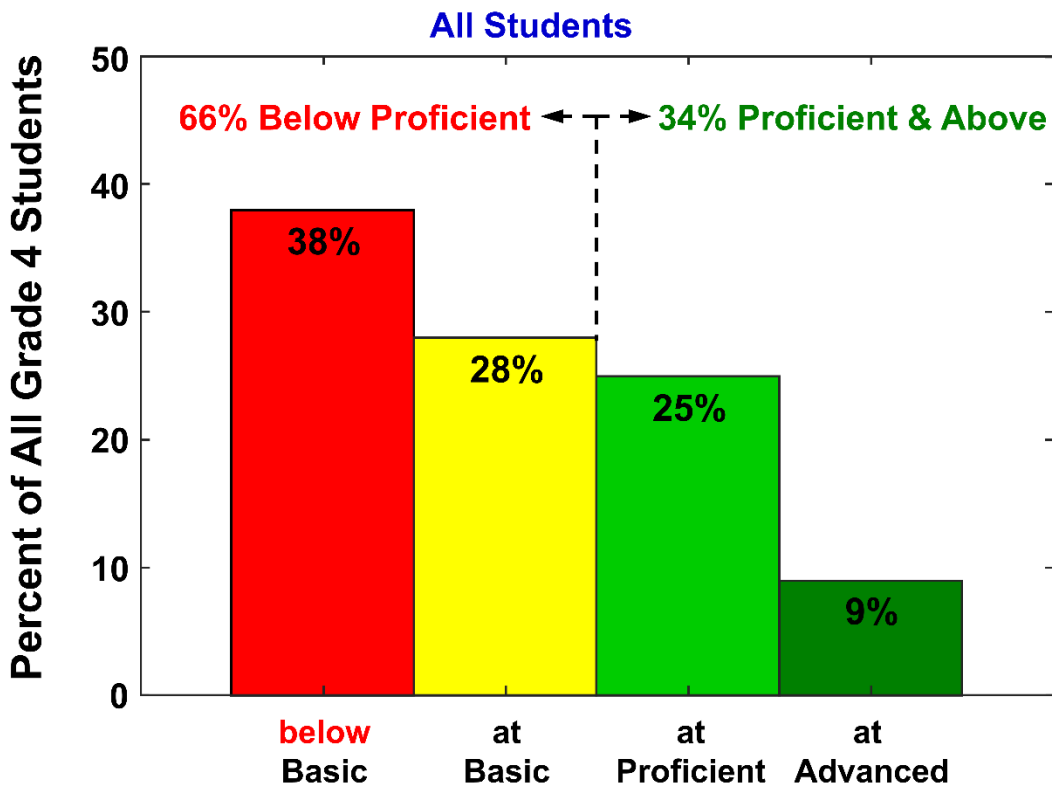
2022 Early Literacy Assessments for Vermont

1. Regular Education Assessments

A. National assessments – National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has four achievement levels: “below Basic,” “at Basic,” “at Proficient,” and “at Advanced.” According to the 2022 NAEP for 4th grade reading scores, 38% of Vermont’s fourth graders are “below Basic” and a total of 66% are below “at Proficient”. See figure below.

2022 Vermont Grade 4 Reading Achievement Level The Nation's Report Card (National Assessment of Educational Progress)



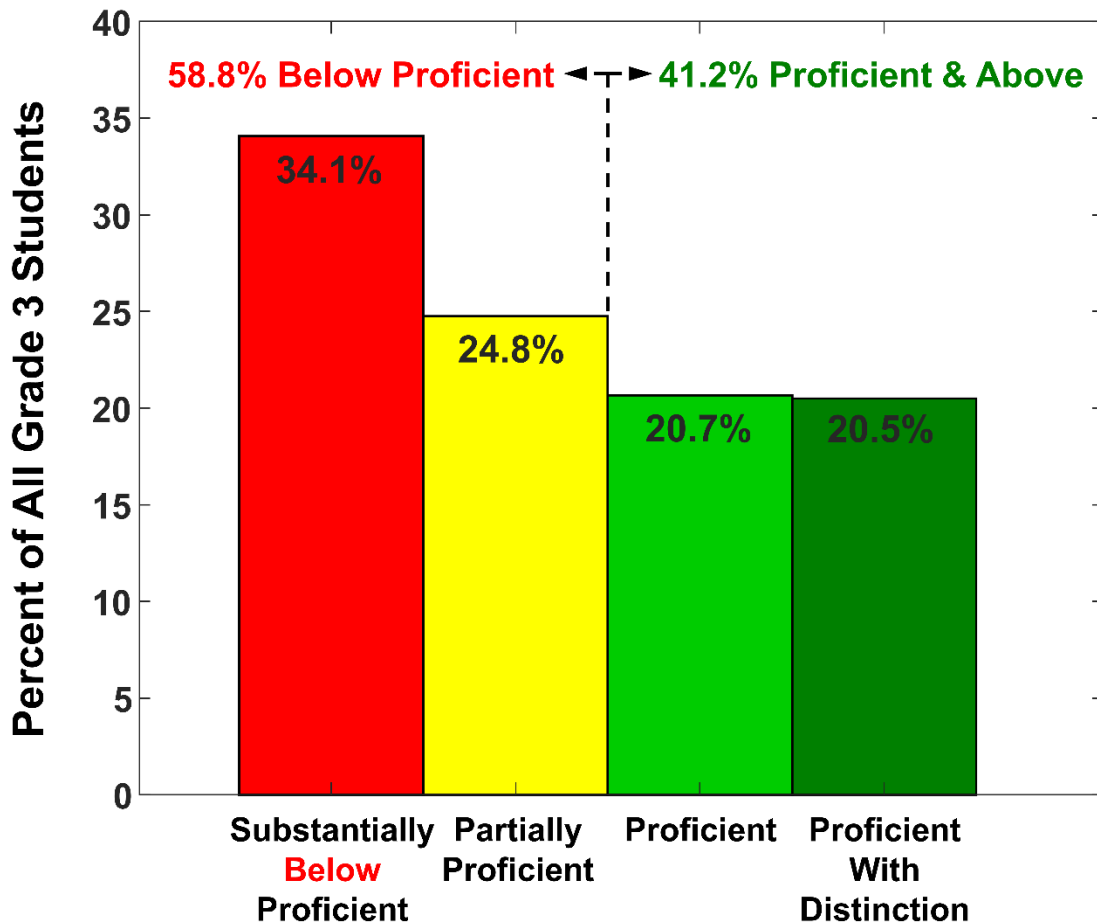
Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2022 Reading Assessment. <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/xplore/nde>

Despite spending over \$440 million (approximately \$5,500 per preK-12th grade student) in Elementary & Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding, these scores represent an approximately 6% decline since the 2019 assessment.

B. Vermont assessments – Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC)

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) assessment has four achievement levels: “Substantially below Proficient,” “Partially Proficient,” “Proficient,” and “Proficient with Distinction.” According to the 2022 SBAC for 3rd grade English Language Arts, 34.1% of Vermont’s third graders are “Substantially below Proficient” and a total of 58.8% are below “Proficient”. See figure below.

2022 Vermont Grade 3 English Language Arts Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC)



Source: Vermont Agency of Education, 2022 SBAC Assessment.

<https://education.vermont.gov/data-and-reporting/vermont-education-dashboard/assessment>

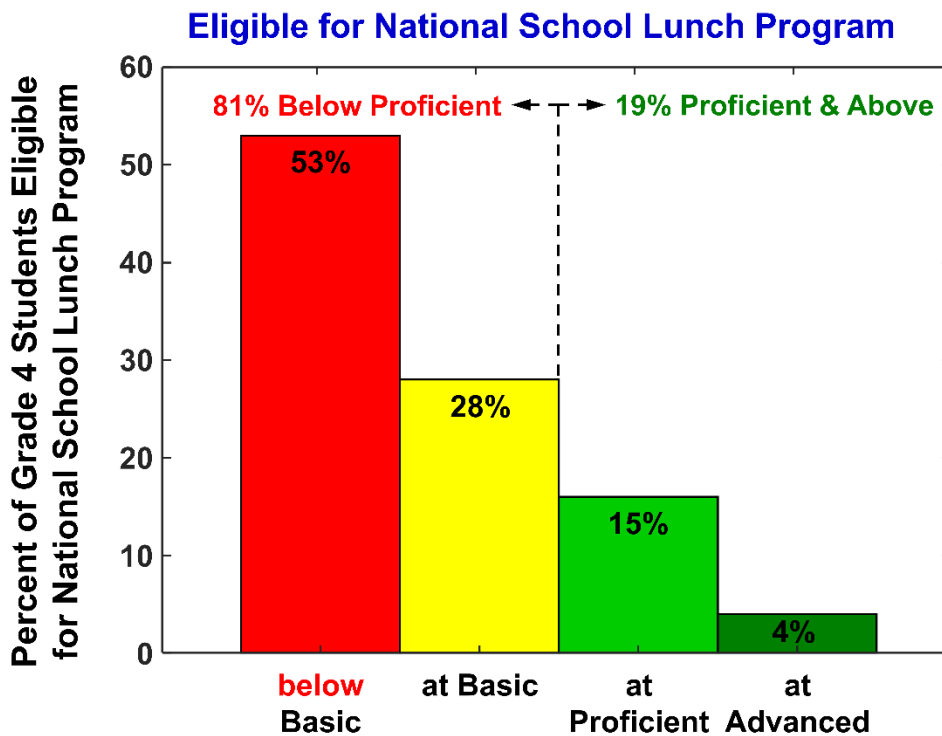
2. Historically Under-Served Populations Assessments

A. Socioeconomic Status

Based on the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 4th grade reading scores, 53% of Vermont’s fourth grader students from lower income families (School Lunch Program Eligible) are “below Basic” and a total of 81% of students from lower income families are below “at Proficient”. See figure below.

This compares to 28% of Vermont’s fourth grader students from higher income families (Not eligible for School Lunch Program) are “below Basic” and a total of 56% of students from higher income families are below “at Proficient”. These results represent a 3% decline for both groups from the 2019 assessment maintaining the 25% equity difference between the two groups.

2022 Vermont Grade 4 Reading Achievement Level The Nation’s Report Card (National Assessment of Educational Progress)



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2022 Reading Assessment. <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/xplore/nde>

Based on the 2022 Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) for 3rd grade English Language Arts, 74.4% of students from lower income families (on Free and Reduced Lunches) are below “Proficient” compared to just 48.5% of students from higher income families (not on Free and Reduced Lunches). The discrepancy between children from low-income families and high-income families is slightly larger on the SBAC test. Children from lower income families score almost 26% lower.

B. Race/Ethnicity

Based on the 2022 SBAC for 3rd grade English Language Arts, 68.8% of black students are below “Proficient” compared to just 58.6% of white students. The almost 10% increase in the number of White students below “Proficient” from the 2019 SBAC assessment helped to reduce the equity gap.

C. Disabilities

Based on the 2022 NAEP 4th grade reading scores, 94% of Vermont students identified with disabilities (having either an Individualized Education Program [IEP] or protection under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973) are below “at Proficient” compared to just 59% of Vermont students not identified with disabilities. 35% more children identified with disabilities are below “at Proficient” compared to those not identified with disabilities. 94% represents a 3% increase in the number of students identified with disabilities since the 2019 NAEP assessment.

Especially disturbing is the distribution of scores for students identified with disabilities. 83% of students with disabilities are “below Basic” and only a total of 6% are “at Proficient” or above. See Figure below. Why is there such a large equity gap in reading for students with disabilities?

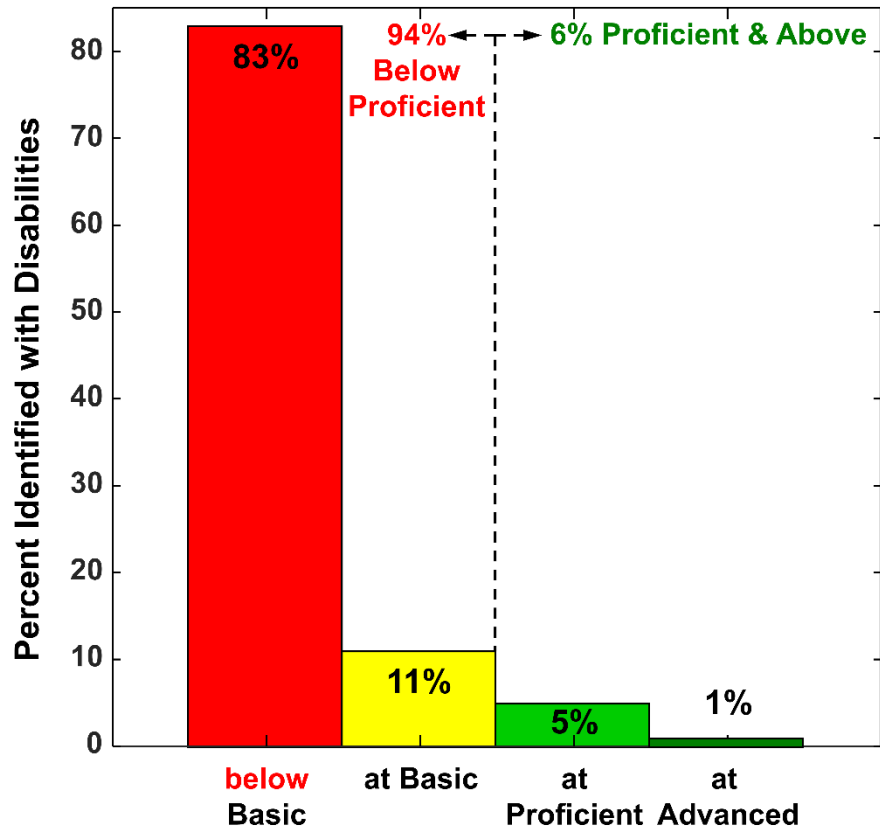
Why are 59% of students **not** identified with disabilities below “at Proficient”? If they are struggling to read, why are they not identified and given help?

The poor outcomes for students identified with disabilities is mirrored on the 2022 SBAC for 3rd grade English Language Arts assessment. 91.8% of students in special education are below “Proficient” compared to just 52.0% of students not in special education. The discrepancy between children identified with disabilities and those without disabilities is larger on the SBAC test with almost 40% more children identified with disabilities below “Proficient”.

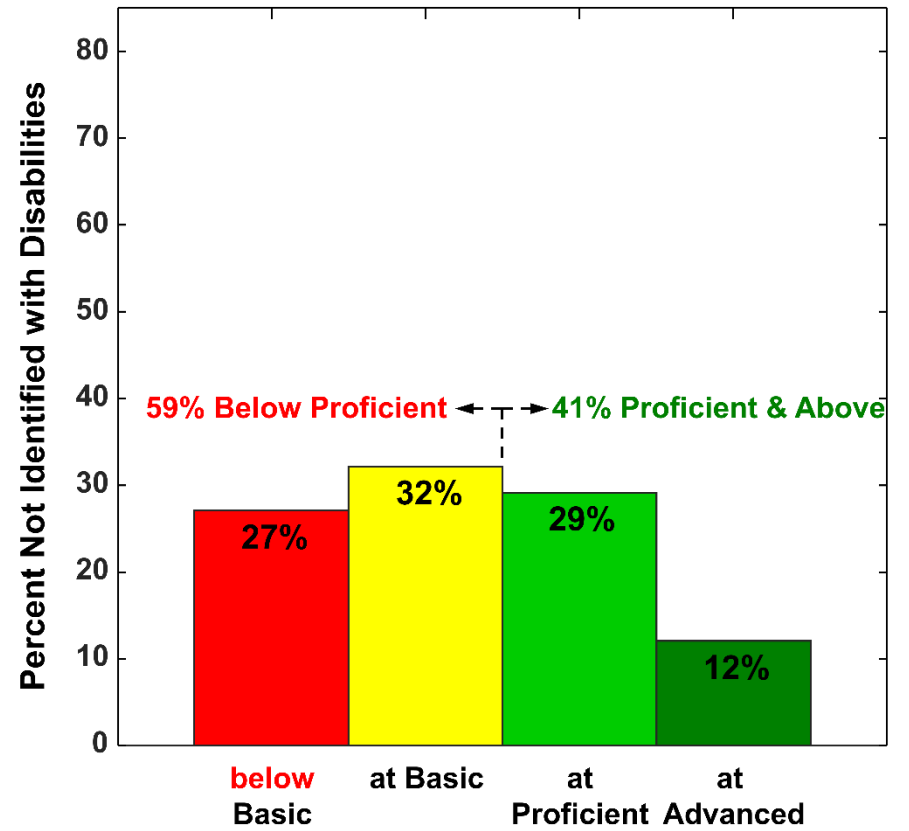
2022 Vermont Grade 4 Reading Achievement Level

The Nation's Report Card (National Assessment of Educational Progress)

Identified as Students with Disabilities



Not Identified as Students with Disabilities

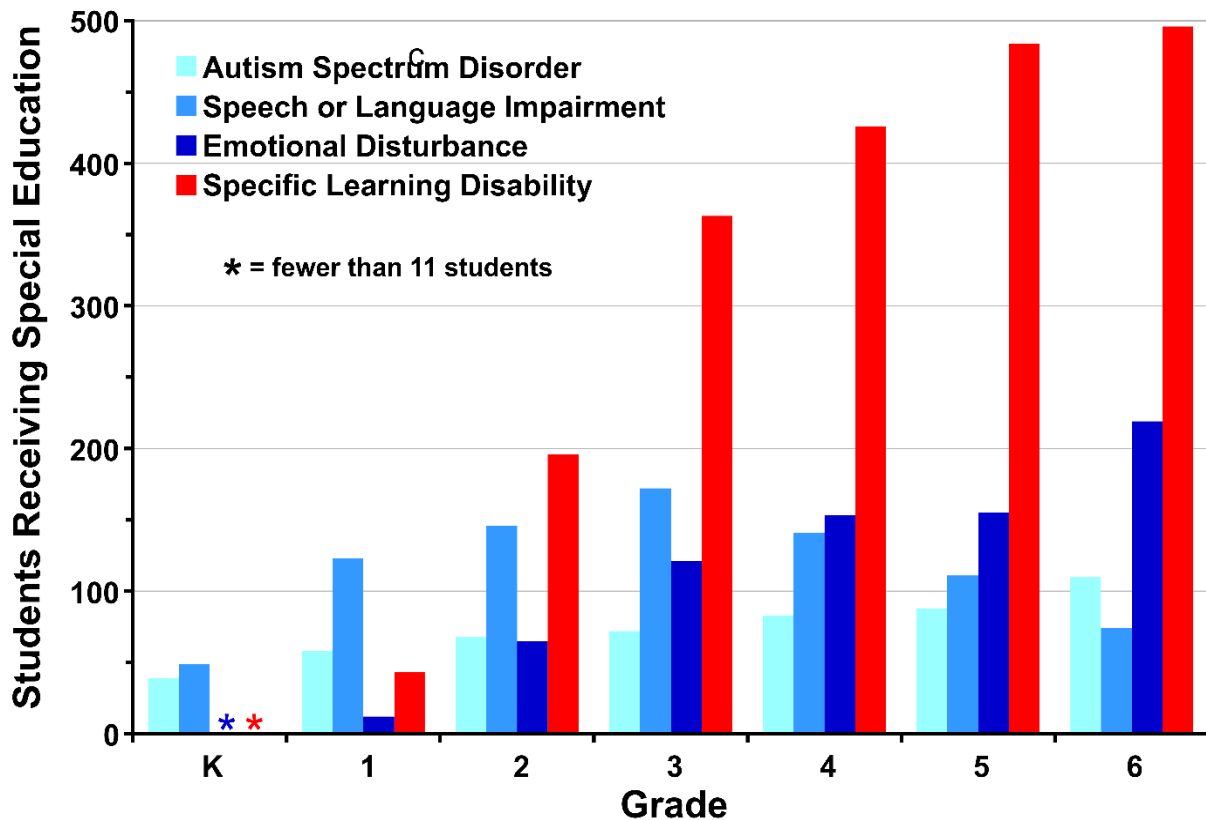


Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2022 Reading Assessment. <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/xplore/nde>

3. Special Education Services for Students with Specific Learning Disabilities by Grade

About 80-85% of children with specific learning disability (SLD) have significant reading difficulties like dyslexia. As shown in the graphs below, less than 11 students identified with SLD are receiving special education services in kindergarten in the 2021-2022 school year. Assuming 10 children with SLD in kindergarten (less than 11), that means only 2.2% of the number of children with SLD in sixth grade were identified and getting services in kindergarten. Even in first grade, only 8.7% (less than 10%!) of the number of children with SLD in sixth grade were identified and getting services.

Most Vermont students with Specific Learning Disabilities are not getting services until after 1st grade



Data for school year 2021-2022. Source: Vermont AOE, March 2023

If students with SLD (lowest 7% of the students in reading) are not being identified and getting services in the lower grades when most advantageous, no wonder the 59% of students not identified with disabilities who are below “at Proficient” cannot get identified and get supported!

I noticed that this week’s Advisory Council on Literacy agenda includes two What Works Clearinghouse Practice Guides. Since a majority of Vermont’s early readers are below proficient in reading, why isn’t the Council also reviewing the [“Assisting Students Struggling with Reading: Response to Intervention \(RtI\) and Multi-Tier Intervention in the Primary Grades”](#) practice guide? Early identification and intervention are critical to helping Vermont’s struggling readers.

A research report on struggling readers is the 2018 “[Struggling Readers](#).” More information on RtI is available from the [RTI Action Network](#) and a [video](#) from Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest (REL Midwest) discusses the most effective evidence-based practices for identifying and assisting struggling readers. There is also the 2014 “[Improving Reading Outcomes for Students with or at Risk for Reading Disabilities](#).”

4. Conclusion

Approximately half of Vermont’s white children from higher income families and without any identified disabilities are below proficient. Why are so many advantaged children failing to get identified and the help they need to succeed at reading?

How can we most effectively identify and provide supports for our children from lower income families, children with different race or ethnicity, or children identified with disabilities to reduce these measured disparities?

I hope the Advisory Council on Literacy will make recommendations for all of Vermont’s readers including struggling readers and historically under-served students.

Respectfully,

Mack Gardner-Morse
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