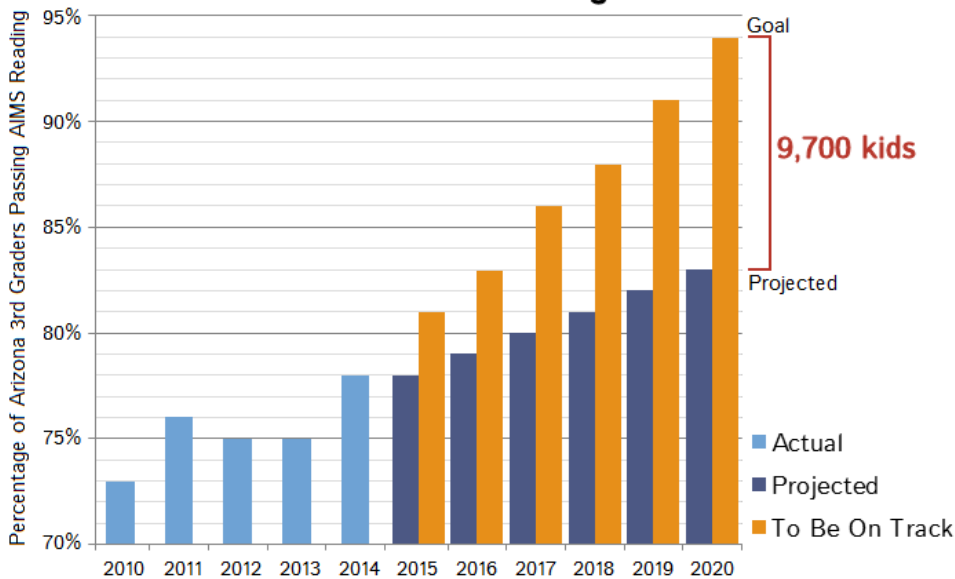


Building competent English Language Arts and Literacy skills creates a solid foundation upon which students build their future academic success. Reading proficiency by the third grade is a crucial measure of a child’s academic future and is a strong predictor of ninth grade course performance, high school graduation, and college and career readiness. According to the National Research Council for the National Academies, “Academic success, as defined by high school graduation, can be predicted with reasonable accuracy by knowing someone’s reading skill at the end of third grade. A person who is not at least a moderately skilled reader by that time is unlikely to graduate from school.”

The Report Card’s analysis of student performance data on the statewide third grade reading assessment allows us to further comprehend how Arizona’s children are performing, how we can foster increased academic achievement, and ensure we are providing the best possible education to prepare our students for a bright, successful academic future. As part of its education reform plan, Arizona has set a goal of at least 94% of Arizona third graders passing the reading portion of the state assessment by 2020.

STATEWIDE PASSING RATE (FIGURE 1.1)

Arizona's Progress Towards its 3rd Grade Reading Goal



Source: Arizona Department of Education - AIMS Results (2010-2014)

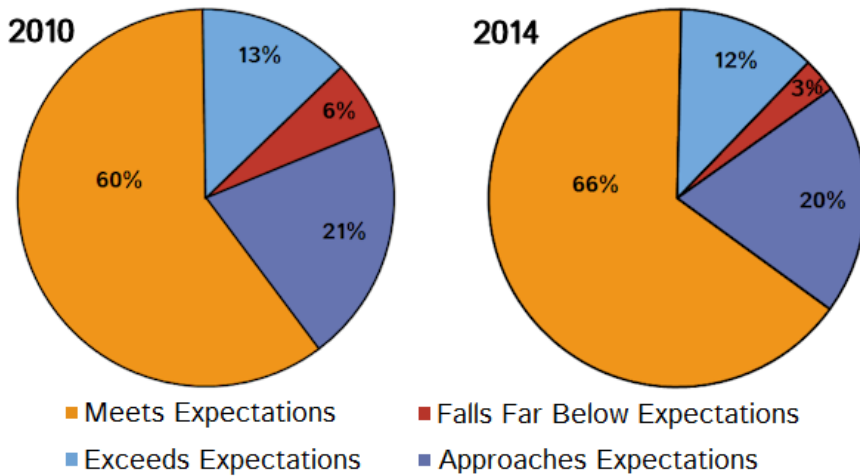
Figure 1.1

Statewide, the number of children passing the third grade reading assessment has risen by a total of five percentage points from 2010 to 2014. Whereas improvement had largely stagnated in 2012 and 2013, the state saw an increase of three percentage points in the last year alone. In 2010, 73% of third graders passed the statewide reading assessment. By 2014, that number has risen to 78%. In 2014, 111 elementary schools in Arizona reached a 94% passing rate. These 111 schools make up 9.4% of the 1,183 elementary schools in Arizona.

Scores have increased by five percentage points over the last five years (2010-2014). If scores continue to improve at this rate, Arizona would achieve an 83% passing rate by 2020. Improving the statewide passing rate to meet Arizona’s 94% goal means an additional 9,700 children will be reading at grade level and be on track towards educational success and opportunities for a better future.

STATEWIDE PERFORMANCE LEVELS (FIGURE 1.2)

AIMS 3rd Grade Reading Assessment Results



AIMS test results are broken out into four performance level categories: falls far below, approaches, meets, and exceeds assessment standards.

It is important to understand how Arizona’s third grade population is measuring up in each of the assessment’s performance categories in order to identify specific areas where Arizona’s children should be improving and to further understand where students are falling through the cracks and not meeting performance level expectations.

Figure 1.2

The number of third graders who meet the statewide standards has increased considerably, from 60% in 2010 to 66% in 2014. This equates to 5,070 additional students reading at grade level in 2014 compared to 5 years ago. In 2014, the number of students *meeting and exceeding* expectations (passing the statewide assessment), reached 78%. This equates to 65,904 Arizona third grade students who are currently reading at grade level.

STUDENT RETENTION RATES (FIGURE 1.3)

Since 2010, when Move on When Reading was passed, the number of students in danger of retention due to low test scores has decreased considerably. The percentage of students who are categorically labeled as falling far below grade level dropped from 6% in 2010 to just 3% in 2014. If schools were to retain all third graders who were labeled as falling far below standards (unlikely due to exemptions written into the law), 2,300 fewer third graders would be at risk of retention in 2014.

Number of 3rd Graders Falling Far Below Grade Level in Reading

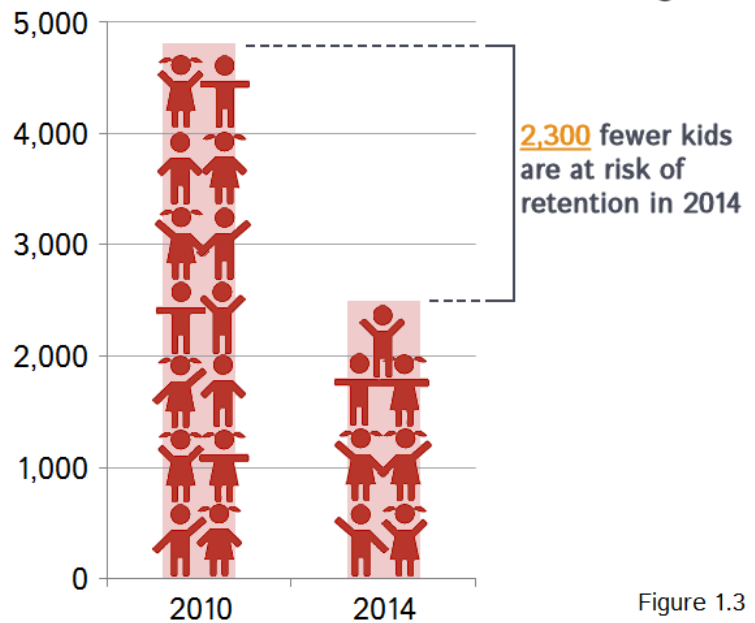


Figure 1.3

PERFORMANCE LEVELS BY COUNTY (FIGURE 1.4)

Almost all counties showed an increased percentage of students passing the assessment from 2010 to 2014. Over half of the counties in Arizona have a passing rate equal to or greater than 75%. Greenlee and Yavapai counties had the highest average passing rates, at 85% and 80% respectively.

In 2014, Apache County had the lowest percentage of students passing at 60%. The 40% of students not passing the assessment in Apache County equates to nearly 350 students. Maricopa County, which has the largest number of third graders in the state, also has the largest number of students who are not passing the assessment. In 2014, 21% of the third grade students in Maricopa County did not pass the AIMS reading assessment, which equates to 11,500 students.

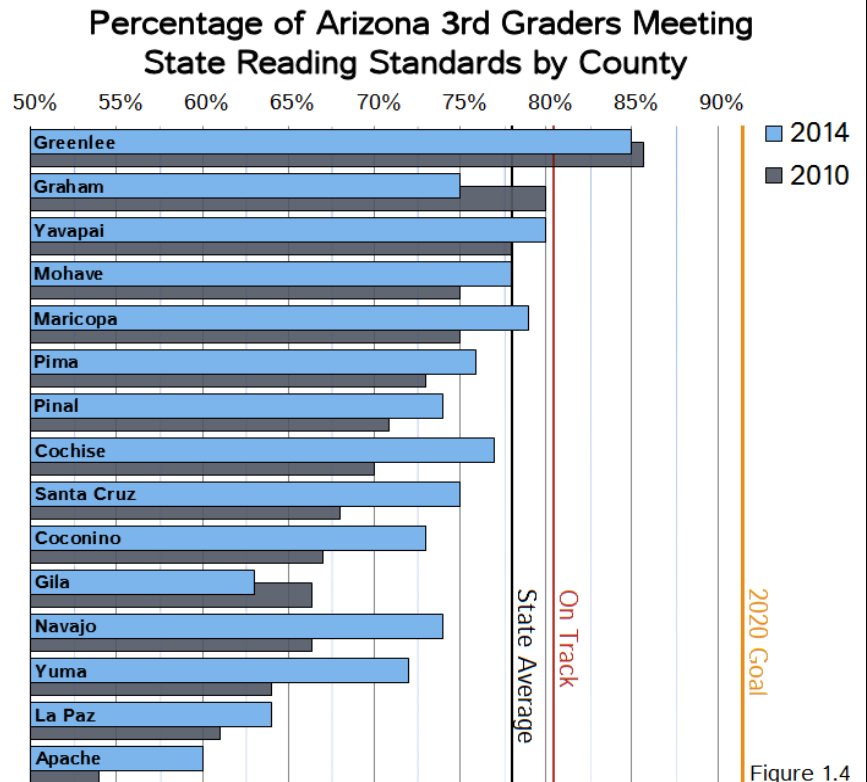


Figure 1.4

COUNTIES FALLING FAR BELOW READING STANDARDS (FIGURE 1.5)

Percentage of Arizona 3rd Graders Falling Far Below State Reading Standards by County

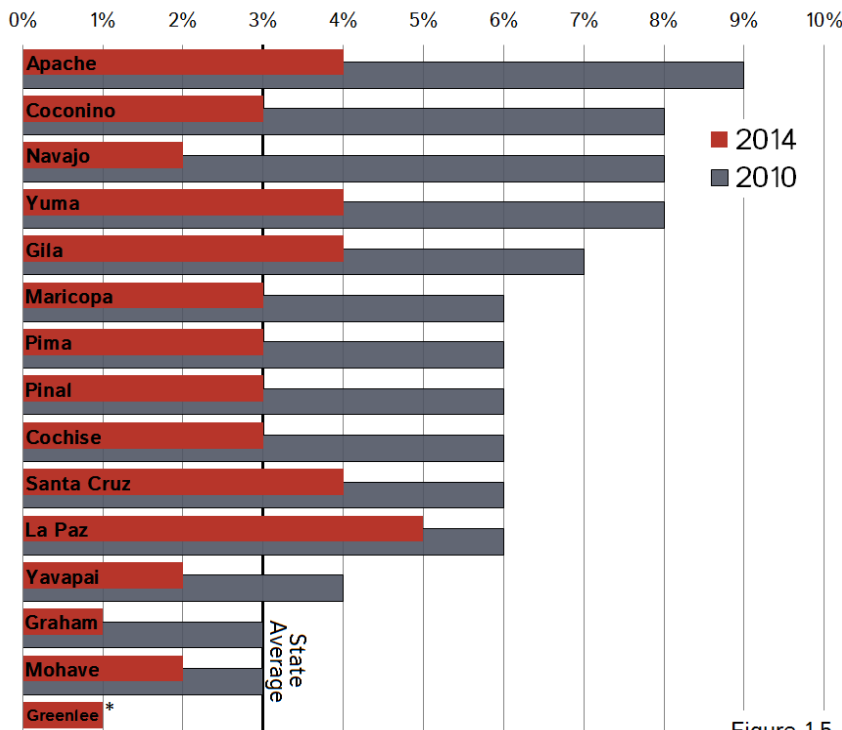


Figure 1.5

The percentage of Arizona students falling far below the state reading standards decreased in 14 out of 15 counties from 2010 to 2014. Across the state, an average of nearly 3% of all third graders are falling far below assessment standards, which means roughly 2,500 Arizona students would be at risk of retention in 2014.

*Data unavailable for Greenlee in 2010

PERFORMANCE BY ETHNICITY (FIGURE 1.6)

Percentage of Arizona 3rd Graders Meeting State Reading Standards by Ethnicity

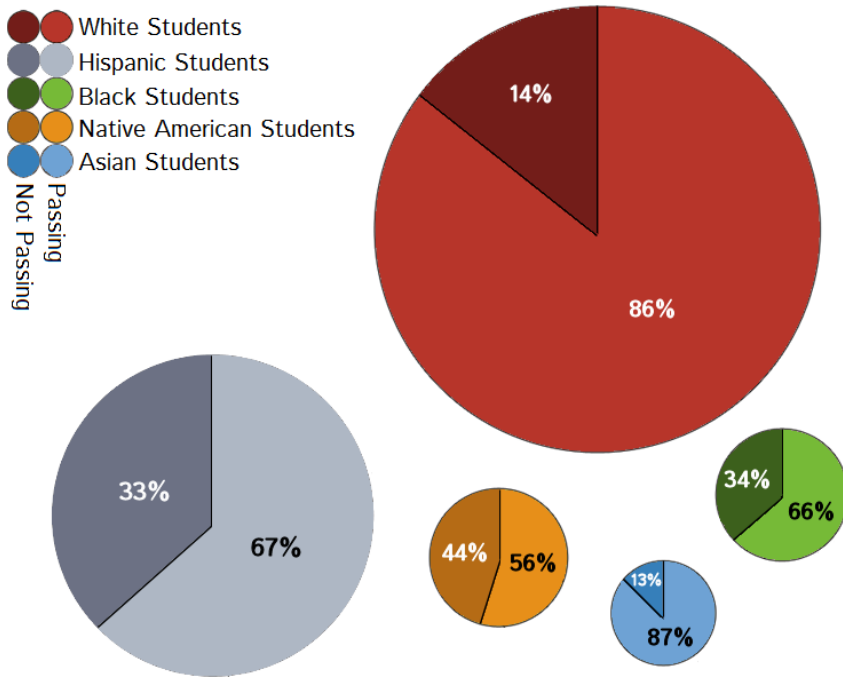


Figure 1.6

In 2014, students identifying as Asian or White were the most likely to read at or above grade level on the 3rd grade AIMS reading assessment. Asian students had an 87% passing rate while students who identified as White followed close behind at 86%. Students identifying as Native American remain the least likely to perform at grade level. Nearly half (44%) of third grade students identifying as Native American were not reading at grade level in 2014.

Furthermore, the passing rate among Native American students has not changed since 2011. Hispanic students make up the second largest racial group, yet only two-thirds were reading at grade level in 2014.

ACTIONS AT THE STATE AND LOCAL LEVELS

In 2012, Governor Brewer championed legislation that provided an additional \$40 million in state funding to assist schools in reading proficiency rates among all Arizona students by the end of third grade. These measures are clearly paying off, paving the way for successful school literacy programs that ensure Arizona students are well prepared for their educational future.

In order to ensure that Arizona children are prepared to succeed in high school and beyond, the Arizona State Board of Education adopted Arizona’s College and Career Ready Standards in 2010 in English Language Arts and Mathematics. Mastery of these new standards will be measured by a more rigorous state assessment that will replace AIMS, beginning in the 2014-2015 school year. In addition, data on student academic progress is now included in the reformed evaluation system for school leaders and teachers. These reforms are adding accountability into Arizona’s education system, which will hold our students, teachers, administrators, and schools accountable to higher standards in order to foster student growth and future success.

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

At a local level, Arizona school districts and charter schools can submit reading plans that center around proven best practices. In particular, districts and charters can focus on schools similar to their own that have made great gains, analyzing the reading programs and interventions that the successful schools have implemented, and putting these

best practices to work within their own school systems. In addition, Arizona can consider ways to provide access to high-quality early literacy environments for at-risk children.

At a state level, policy makers can consider gradually raising the Move on When Reading bar. When Move on When Reading was established, the retention bar was set at falls far below; however, it is clear there are many students who score above this level who continue to struggle with reading. The state can also highlight and celebrate best practices at the local level. Finally, the state can coordinate and encourage the promotion of literacy throughout its agencies and partners, including: parks, libraries, First Things First, and local governments to promote early reading and literacy.

In addition, research shows that effective teachers and leaders are the largest in-school contributors to student learning and achievement. It is clear that no education reform initiative will be successful without highly effective teachers and school leaders. Therefore, the state should consider ways to attract and retain top-quality talent in Arizona's education system.

Sourcing

Figure 1.1: Arizona Department of Education - AIMS Results (2010-2014)

Figure 1.2: Arizona Department of Education - AIMS Results (2010, 2014)

Figure 1.3: Arizona Department of Education - AIMS Results (2010, 2014)

Figure 1.4: Arizona Department of Education - AIMS Results (2010, 2014)

Figure 1.5: Arizona Department of Education - AIMS Results (2010, 2014)

Figure 1.6: Arizona Report Cards - State Report Card (2012, 2013)