

# Structured Literacy: Year 1 Implementation and Outcome Evaluation

**July 2023**



**Prepared by:**

Heather M. Wilson, Ph.D.

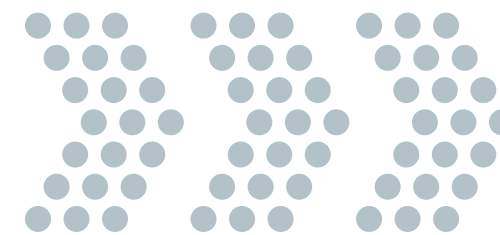
Natalie Wolanin, M.Ed.







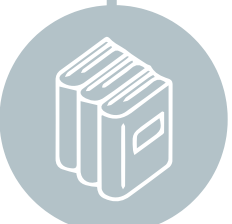
**Shared Accountability**

Applied Research and Evaluation







	Executive Summary.....	1
	Evaluation Scope.....	3
	Program Description.....	4
	Methods.....	5
	Results .....	6
	Conclusion.....	19
	References.....	25

# Structured Literacy

## Year 1: Implementation & Outcome Evaluation



## Executive Summary

### Evaluation Scope

This evaluation aimed to examine MCPS' implementation of Structured Literacy in Grades K–2 during the 2022–2023 school year and its effect on students' foundational skills in reading.

### Methods

A non-experimental design was used to assess the implementation of the essential elements of Structured Literacy. A classroom observation tool developed in collaboration with program staff, was used to gather data. Data were collected from a sample of 35 schools between February 24 and March 31, 2023. For outcome analysis, descriptive statistics were calculated for Grades K–2 students using the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) benchmark levels and progress levels. Paired t-test were used to examine differences between beginning and end of the year outcomes.

### Results

**Overall, results indicate that most of the thirty-five observed classrooms were implementing the key elements of Structured Literacy by the spring of 2023.** A high percentage of classrooms implemented the Word Recognition ( $\geq 80\%$ ) and Small Group Instruction ( $>60\%$ ) components, while lower implementation percentages were observed for the Language Comprehension component. Variation in implementation percentages across grade levels and in specific Structured Literacy elements were observed, highlighting areas where improvement is needed, such as instruction in language structures (46%), providing vocabulary instruction (38%), and providing positive reinforcement when giving corrective feedback (46%). In over half of observed classrooms, students exhibited high engagement across whole group instruction and independent activities during the English Language Arts block.

**Across Grades K–2, a positive, significant improvement on the end-of-year DIBELS reading assessment was found.**

Overall, students in Grades K–2 showed substantial improvement in meeting grade-level DIBELS benchmarks from the beginning to the end of the year. The percentage of students At or Above the Benchmark increased from 53.0% (15,394 students) to 71.2% (20,683 students) during this time. Students receiving services for FARMS, special education, and ELD showed a larger percentage-point change in meeting the end of year benchmark than students not receiving services. Notably, for service groups, EML students showed the most significant gain, with a 21.8% increase in students At or Above the Benchmark, compared to 16.9% for non-EML students.



# Structured Literacy

## Year 1: Implementation & Outcome Evaluation



## Executive Summary

### Results

At the beginning of the year, 13,649 (47% of total) students were Below or Well Below the benchmark. By the year's end, 41.8% (n=5,705) of these students performed Above or Well Above the benchmark. However, among the 9,505 students who were Well Below the benchmark at the beginning of the year, 51.4% (n=4,885) remained Well Below at the end of the year.

At all grade levels, end-of-year DIBELS composite scores significantly improved compared to the beginning of the year. Effect sizes for race/ethnicity and service groups indicated substantive, practically meaningful improvements between the beginning and end of year. Notably, in Kindergarten, Hispanic/Latino students ( $d=4.2$ ) and students receiving ELD services ( $d=4.1$ ) had the largest effect sizes. Second grade exhibited some of the largest effect sizes across all grades and groups; however, three groups fell short of the Grade 2 end of year DIBELS national benchmark score of 439 - Hispanic/Latino students (436.4), ELD (434.9), and Special Education (428.3).

### Conclusion

Evidence from this evaluation reveals Structured Literacy was generally implemented with fidelity and was effective in improving students' reading skills; therefore, warrants continued implementation. The majority of the observed classrooms were found to be implementing the key elements of Structured Literacy by the spring of 2023, with high percentages of implementation for the Word Recognition block (RGR). However, data also highlights areas of improvement, such as ensuring that lessons are completed within the allotted time, providing instruction in language structures, differentiating during small group instruction, and offering positive reinforcement when giving corrective feedback. The average DIBELS scores at the end of the year were significantly higher than at the beginning across all grade levels, indicating meaningful improvements in reading scores for all groups. It is noteworthy that Kindergarten students identified as Hispanic/Latino as well as students receiving ELD services, each had the largest effect sizes among racial/ethnic groups and service receipt groups, respectively. However, a sizeable proportion of students remained Well Below the end of year Benchmark and some Grade 2 subgroups still fell short of their grade level Benchmark at the end of the year despite substantial gains. Recommendations based on the data collected include: continue to provide professional learning and support to improve the implementation of specific elements of the Word Recognition block, Language Comprehension block, small group instruction, and student engagement. Also, identify explicit steps schools should take to support students who perform at the "Well Below" benchmark at the beginning of the year.



# Evaluation Scope

## Background

In alignment with the Academic Excellence pillar of the Strategic Plan, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is committed to improving student achievement in literacy. MCPS began implementing a Structured Literacy curriculum during the 2022–2023 school year in Grades K–2 at all elementary schools to meet that objective; 2022–2023 was the first year of full implementation. Structured Literacy is an instructional approach grounded in the science of reading. It is integral to fostering the development of teachers who can deliver effective early literacy instruction in foundational reading skills. SOR is a body of high-quality, interdisciplinary research that identifies and explains the essential skills students need to become proficient readers and writers (Seidenberg, 2020). This evaluation report provides results on the implementation status of Structured Literacy in 35 MCPS elementary schools and districtwide Grade K–2 student outcome results for foundational skills in reading.

## Purpose of Evaluation



To describe the status of implementation of Structured Literacy across a selected sample of 35 MCPS elementary schools.



To determine the effect of Structured Literacy on the foundational reading skills for students in Grades K–2.

## Research Questions

1

To what extent are teachers in selected schools implementing essential elements in Structured Literacy with fidelity?

2

What is the effect of Structured Literacy implementation on progress in the foundational reading skills of students in Grades K–2?

3

How does growth in student reading performance in selected MCPS elementary schools compare with national benchmarks measured by DIBELS?

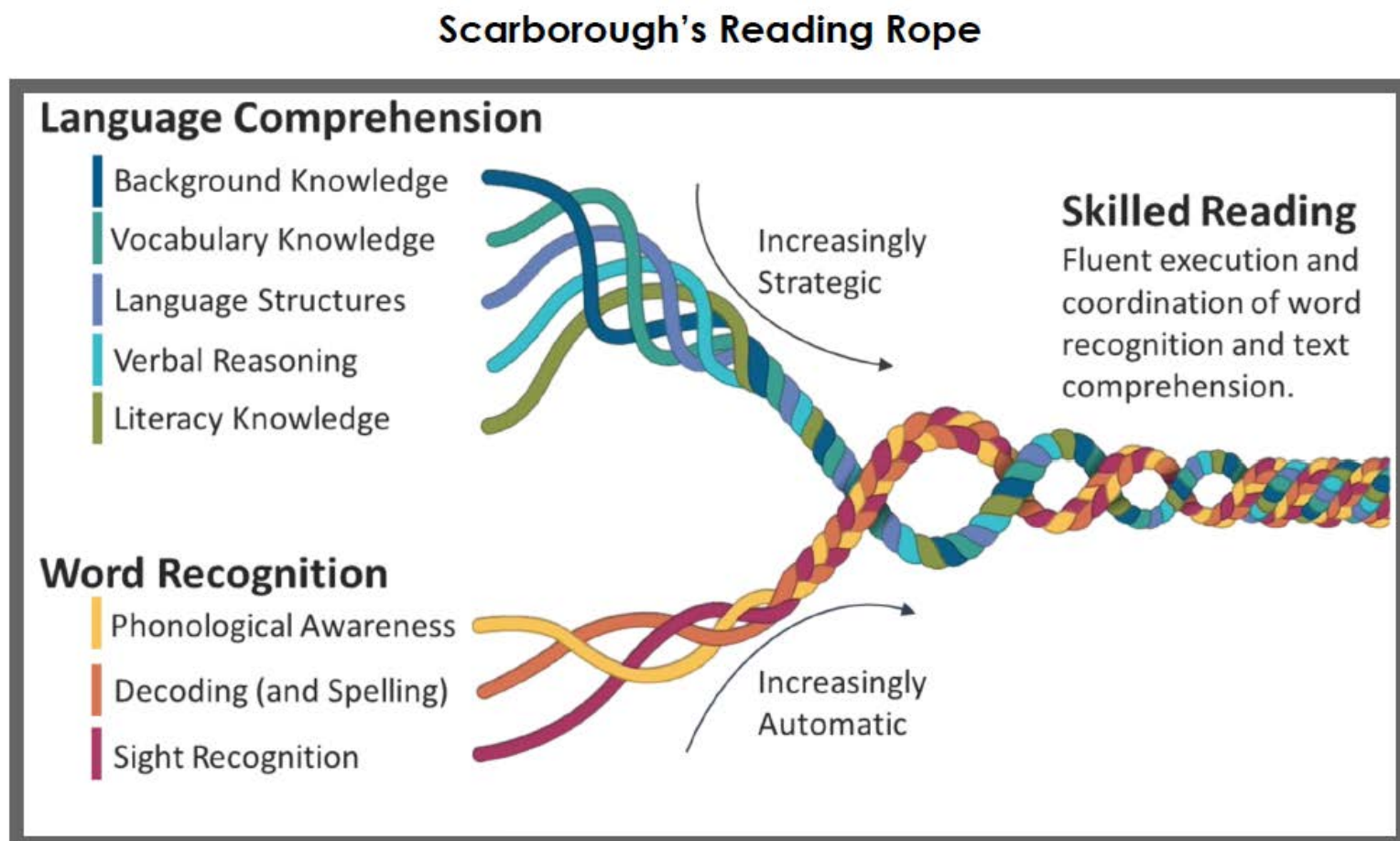


# Program Description

## Overview

During the English Language Arts (ELA) block, teachers were expected to deliver 120 minutes of daily instruction aligned to Scarborough's Reading Rope (Figure 1). Scarborough's Reading Rope contains two main sections: Word Recognition and Language Comprehension. The rope illustrates the individual skill strands that students need to weave together to become skilled readers who can fluently read and comprehend all genres of complex text. The word-recognition strands (phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition of familiar words) work together as the reader becomes accurate, fluent, and increasingly automatic with repetition and practice. Concurrently, the language-comprehension strands (background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge) reinforce one another and then weave together with the word-recognition strands to produce a skilled reader. The literacy block was to be organized into whole and small-group instruction with flexibility based on students' needs.

## Figure 1. Scarborough's Reading Rope



## Program Components



**Word Recognition:** Provision of direct, explicit, and systematic instruction in the foundational skills of reading using the **Really Great Reading (RGR)** literacy curriculum.



**Language Comprehension:** Provision of language comprehension instruction that focuses on building background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, and fluency through the use of grade-level complex texts using **The Benchmark Advance** curriculum and supplemental instruction.



**Small Group Instruction:** Provision of flexible small-group instruction for unique learning that groups students based on need and is beyond what is taught in whole group. Instruction addresses students who struggle with a particular skill or who need enrichment. Time for small groups varies.



A non-experimental design was used to assess the implementation of the essential elements of Structured Literacy. A classroom observation tool, developed in collaboration with program staff, was used to gather data. Data were collected between February 24 and March 31 of the 2023 school year from a sample of 35 schools. For outcome analysis, descriptive statistics were calculated for Grades K–2 students using the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) Benchmark levels and progress levels. Statistical significance testing examined differences between beginning and end-of-the-year DIBELS composite scores.

## Implementation Methods



### Data & Measures

- **Structured Literacy Implementation Observation Tool**
  - Based on the essential components necessary for effective literacy instruction in Grades K–2.
  - Collaboratively developed by OSA and ELA literacy specialists.



### Sample

- 35 schools selected by the OCIP ELA office
- Ten observers comprised of ELA and OSA staff
- Grades K–2, one observation per grade per school
- 104 total observations



### Analysis

- Classroom observation data were summarized across the essential components and reported for grades K – 2 at the aggregate level.

## Outcome Methods



### Data & Measures

- DIBELS Composite Score – changes in average composite score from Beginning of Year (BOY) to End of Year (EOY).
- DIBELS Composite Level–changes in performance levels from BOY to EOY.



### Sample

- All K–2 students with a DIBELS composite score at the BOY and EOY were included (N=29,043).
- Students enrolled in schools piloting the Benchmark Advance 2022 curriculum were not included.



### Analysis

- Descriptive statistics were computed for student proficiency rates and changes in proficiency rates from BOY to EOY.
- Paired t-test were used to determine if there were statistically significant differences in student performance between BOY and EOY. Effect sizes were also computed. No comparison groups were available for analysis as almost all schools were implementing Structured Literacy.



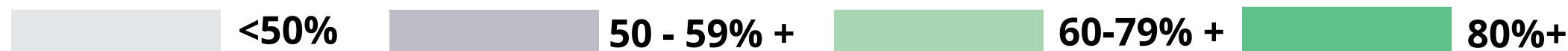


# Results

## Implementation of the Word Recognition Block

### Percentage of Classrooms Where Key Elements of Word Recognition Were Observed (N=104)

	Overall	Kindergarten	Grade 1	Grade 2
Taught Word Recognition Skills and Content	98.1%	97.1%	100%	97.1%
Used Manipulatives if Required by Lesson (N=41)	85.4%	81.3%	88.9%	87.0%
Staff Used Correct Phoneme Pronunciation	84.0%	78.7%	87.9%	85.3%
Appropriate Posters Displayed (e.g. Heart Words)	96.2%	94.3%	100%	94.3%
Finished Lesson in Time Allotted	74.0%	65.7%	88.2%	68.6%



## Findings

A total of 104 K–2 classrooms were observed across 35 schools. Daily instruction in the Word Recognition block is expected to include explicit, systematic instruction related to word recognition skills, including phonemic awareness and phonics lessons (K–2).

- Overall, 98.1% of the 104 observed classrooms were teaching word recognition skills and content. In MCPS, this portion of the ELA block is implemented using the Really Great Reading literacy curriculum.

In addition to delivering instruction in content related to early literacy skills, it is expected that manipulatives will be used if required by the lesson – this addresses the multi-sensory component of the Structured Literacy model.

- Manipulatives were observed in 85.4% of classrooms (N=41) where they were required by the lesson.

For the initial implementation, it is expected that teachers will be using the correct pronunciation of phonemes, and that classrooms will display visuals students can see that align with Structured Literacy.

- 84.0% of classrooms (N=104) used correct phoneme pronunciation during instruction.
- 96.2% of classrooms (N=104) displayed appropriate posters related to Structured Literacy, such as Sound Wall, Vowel Valley, and Heart Words.

Finally, lesson pacing is important to ensure the scope of content is covered.

- 74.0% of classrooms (N=104) successfully finished the lesson within the allotted time.



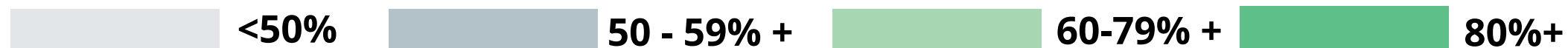


# Results

## Implementation of the Word Recognition Block

**Percentage of Classrooms Where Instructional Strategies for Word Recognition Were Observed (N=104)**

	Overall	Kindergarten	Grade 1	Grade 2
Used Model Coach Apply	60.6%	57.1%	64.7%	60.0%
Provided Guided Practice	76.9%	65.7%	82.5%	82.9%
Checked for Understanding	77.9%	74.3%	85.3%	74.3%
Used Positive Reinforcement/Corrective Feedback	45.5%	46.9%	47.1%	42.9%



## Findings

Providing explicit and systematic instruction in foundational reading skills requires essential instructional practices and techniques. These graphs represent the percentage of observed classrooms where specific instructional strategies were observed during the ELA block.

Overall, 60.6% of observed classrooms (N=104) used the "Model, Coach, Apply" instructional strategy to teach word recognition skills, and just over 75% of teachers provided guided practice (76.9%) and checked for understanding (77.9%).

- 45.5% of classrooms used positive reinforcement when giving corrective feedback during word recognition instruction.

The use of key instructional strategies varied across grade levels. In kindergarten, smaller percentages of classrooms used the "Model, Coach, Apply" strategy (57.1%) and provided guided practice (65.7%) compared to with other grades.

Overall and across all grades, under fifty percent of observed classrooms (N=104) used positive reinforcement when giving corrective feedback.

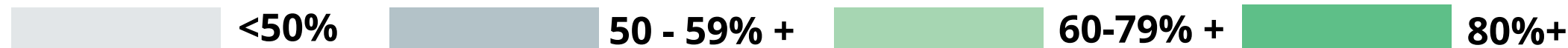


# Results

## Implementation of the Word Recognition Block

### Percentage of Classrooms Where Key Elements of Language Comprehension Were Observed (N=104)

	Overall	Kindergarten	Grade 1	Grade 2
Provided Vocabulary Instruction	37.5%	34.3%	44.1%	34.3%
Delivered a Read Aloud	67.6%	60.0%	74.3%	67.3%
Encouraged Students to Expand their Answers	54.8%	53.3%	54.8%	56.3%
Provided Instruction in Language Structures	26.5%	31.6%	37.5%	7.1%
Provided Instruction in Text Features	67.3%	57.9%	68.8%	78.6%



## Findings

Instruction in Language Comprehension focuses on building knowledge, vocabulary, verbal reasoning, literacy knowledge, language structures, and fluency. Daily instruction in the Language Comprehension block includes 10 minutes for daily read-aloud and mini-lessons in reading, writing, and language comprehension. In addition to the particular content related to language comprehension, interactive read-alouds are expected to be included as often as possible, if not daily.

The overall percentages across all grade levels indicate (N=104):

- 37.5% of classrooms provided vocabulary instruction,
- 67.6% delivered a read-aloud,
- 54.8% encouraged students to expand their answers,
- 26.5% provided instruction in language structures, and
- 67.3% provided instruction in text features.

Percentages varied by grade level, with Grade 1 showing higher percentages of observed classrooms providing the key elements of the Language Comprehension block. 'Provided instruction in language structures' had some of the lowest percentages observed. In Kindergarten, 34.3% of classrooms provided vocabulary instruction, 60.0% delivered a read-aloud, 53.3% encouraged students to expand their answers, 31.6% provided instruction in language structures, and 57.9% provided instruction in text features.



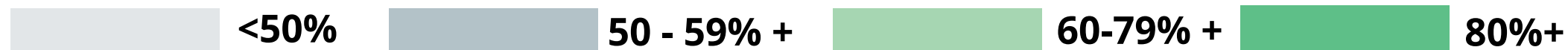


# Results

## Implementation of the Word Recognition Block

### Percentage of Classrooms Where Small Group Instructional Strategies Were Observed (N=104)

	Overall	Kindergarten	Grade 1	Grade 2
Aligned Independent Practice Provided During Small Group Instruction	60.6%	57.1%	64.7%	60.0%
Teachers Differentiated Lessons for Each Small Group	76.9%	65.7%	82.5%	82.9%
Used Positive Reinforcement/Corrective Feedback	77.9%	74.3%	85.3%	74.3%



### Average Number of Small Groups and Number of Small Group Minutes Observed

	Overall	Kindergarten	Grade 1	Grade 2
Average Number of Small Groups	3	2	3	3
Average Minutes per Small Group	12.0	11.7	11.2	12.9



## Findings

In a Structured Literacy classroom, most instruction occurs through whole-group lessons rather than students rotating through multiple small groups. Small-group instruction is to be used for targeted learning beyond what is covered in whole-group instruction. Further, they are meant to be short and flexible, targeting specific skills in reading and providing enrichment in reading or writing.

- The number of small groups across classes ranged from 0 to 10 across 35 classrooms.
- The average number of minutes per small group session was 12.0 minutes.
- In kindergarten, there were two small groups on average, with an average time spent 11.7 minutes per small group.
- In first and second grade, classrooms had three small groups on average, with sessions lasting 11.2 minutes and 12.9 minutes, respectively.

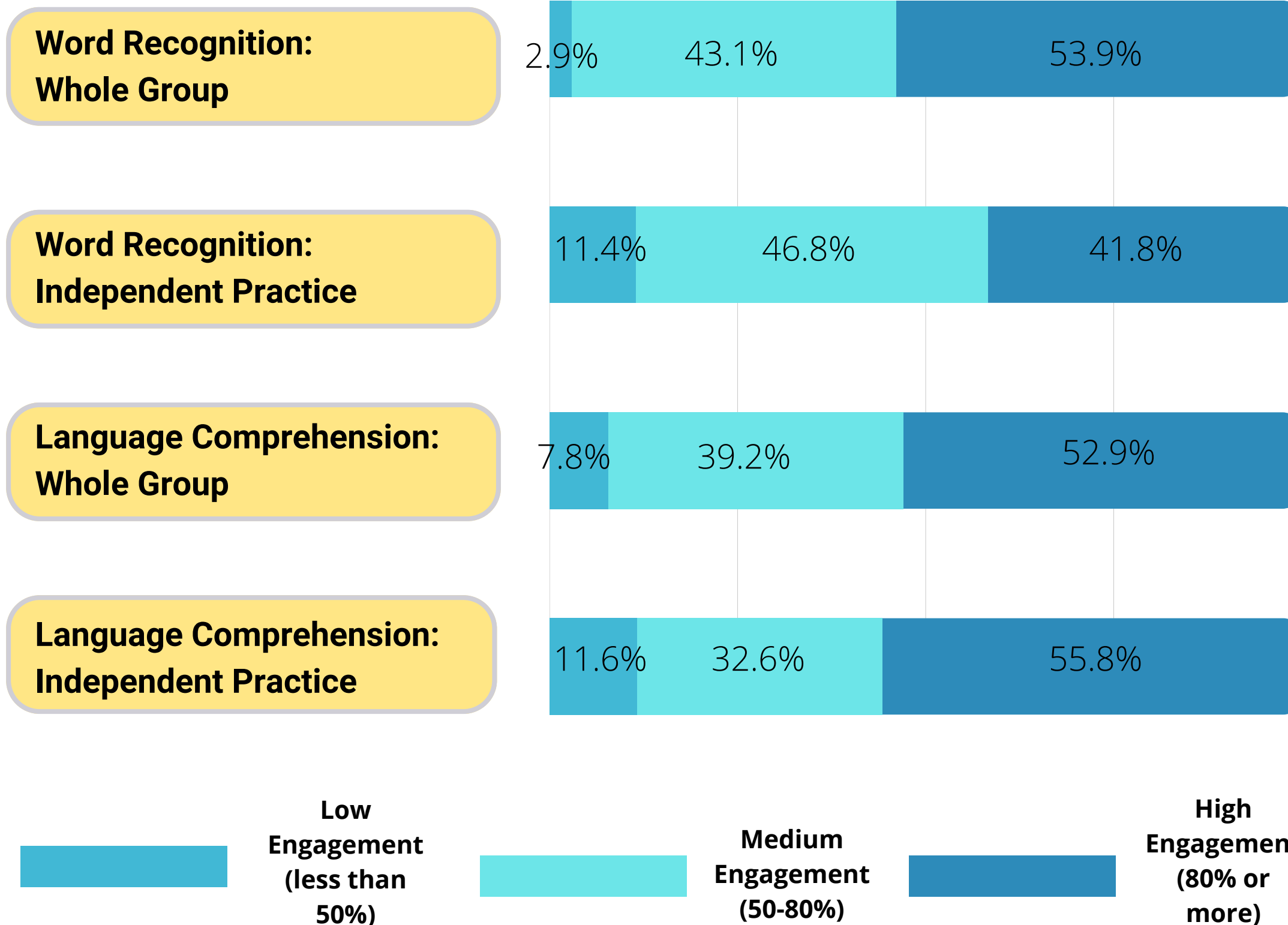
Differentiated lessons for each small group are crucial to making the most efficient use of instructional time versus repeating lessons across the groups.

- Teachers differentiated instruction for each small group in approximately 77% of observed classrooms with small groups.



# Results

## Level of Engagement During the ELA Block



## Findings

Just over one half of the observed classrooms were rated as having high student engagement during whole-group word recognition (53.9%), whole-group language comprehension (52.9%), and independent practice with language comprehension (55.8%). Approximately two-fifths (41.8%) had reported high engagement during independent practice word recognition. High engagement was defined as 80% or more of the students being engaged in that portion of the ELA block.

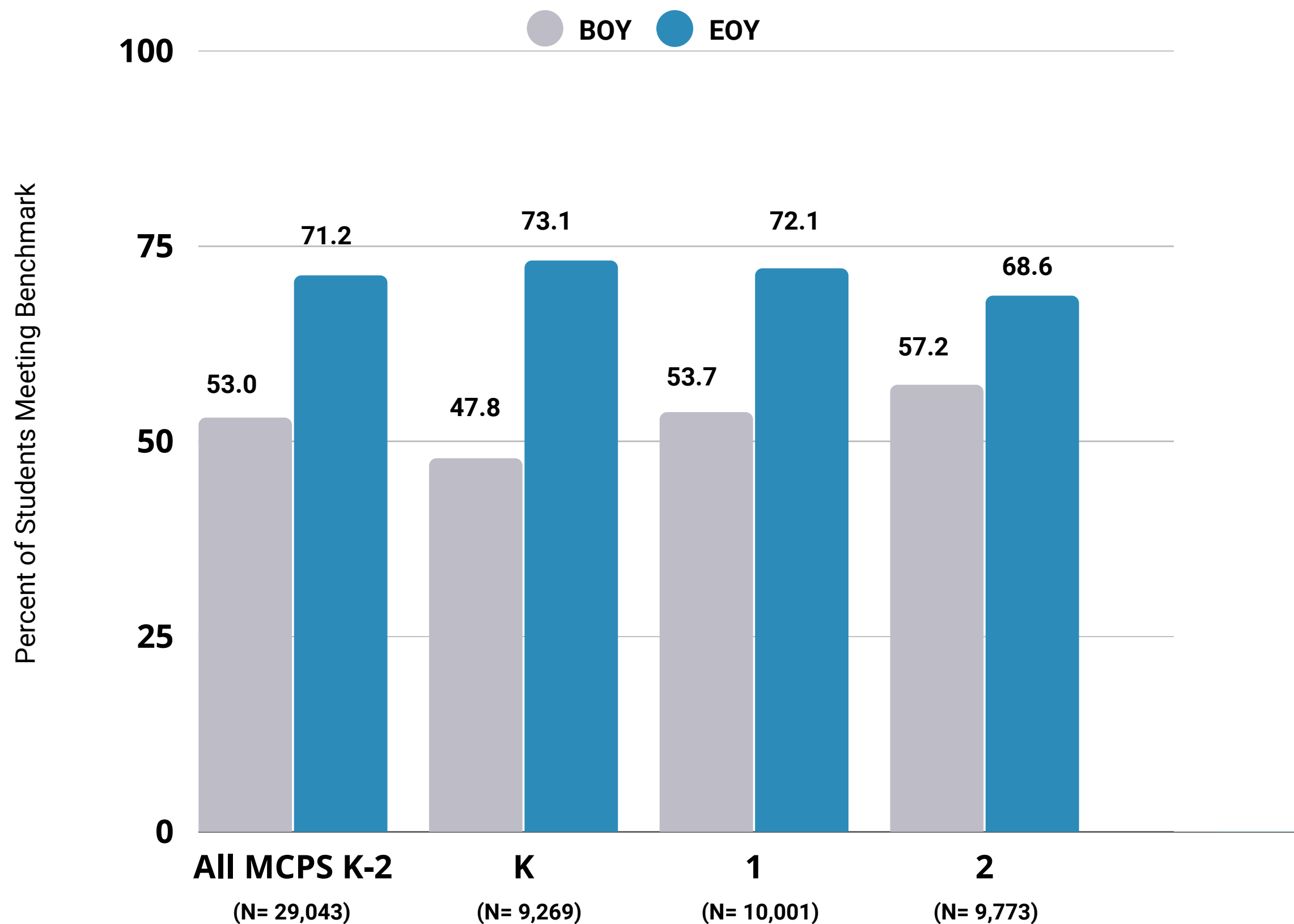
Less than 12% of the classrooms were reported as having low engagement, with approximately 11% during independent practice for both word recognition and language comprehension portions of the ELA block. Only 3% of classrooms were reported as having low engagement during whole group work recognition. Low engagement was defined as less than 50% of the students were engaged in that portion of the ELA block.





# Results

Percent of Students Meeting DIBELS Benchmark at the Beginning of the Year (**BOY**) and End of the EOY (**EOY**)



## Findings

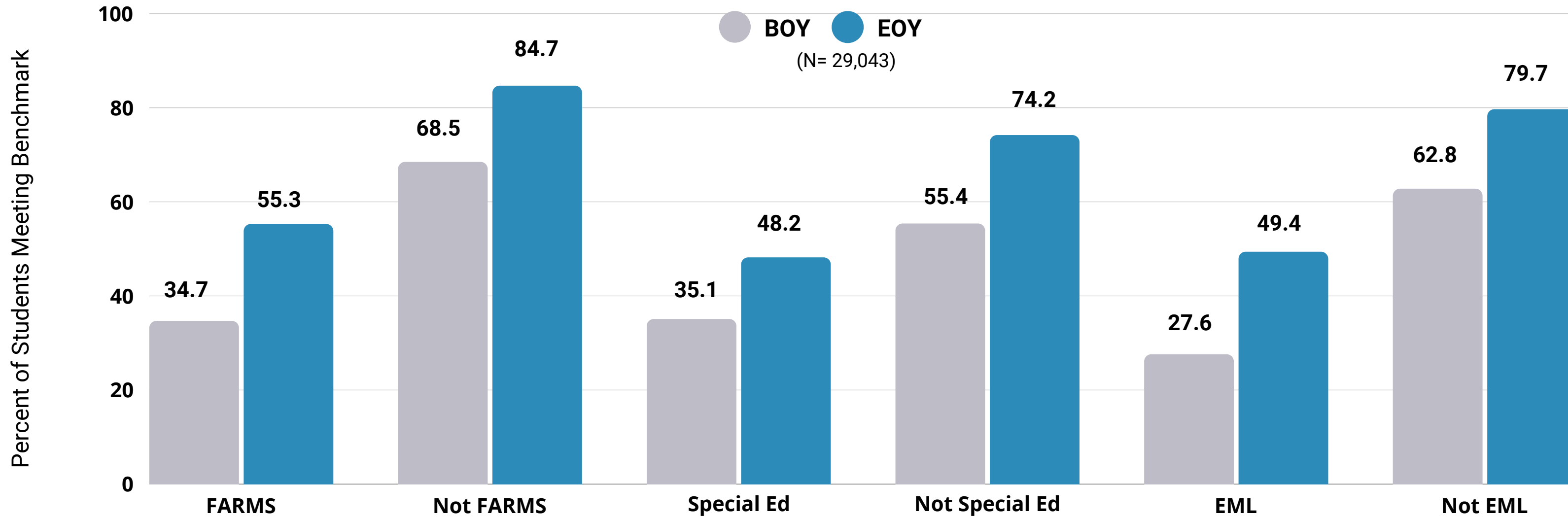
Overall, there was an improvement in the percentage of students meeting the DIBELS benchmark in Grades K–2, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. The percentage of students At or Above Benchmark increased from 53.0% (15,393 students) to 71.2% (20,678 students).

- Kindergarten had the biggest improvement in proficiency levels. The percentage of Grade K students At or Above Benchmark increased 25.3 percentage points, from 47.8% at the BOY to 73.1% at the EOY.
- Grade 1 showed notable improvements with an 18.4% increase in the students At or Above Benchmark, from 53.7% to 72.1% .
- Grade 2 students had smaller improvement, with an 11.4% increase in students At or Above Benchmark from 57.2% to 68.6%.



# Results

## Percentage of Students Receiving Services Meeting DIBELS Benchmark, Grades K-2



## Findings

Overall, all K-2 students showed a gain in meeting the DIBELS benchmark from beginning to end of year. Compared to students not receiving services, students receiving services for FARMS, special education and English Language Development showed a larger percentage-point change for At or Above grade-level Benchmark from the beginning to the end of the year. Students receiving ELD services saw the largest gain. The percentage of Emergent Multilingual Learners (EML) At or Above Benchmark increased by 21.8%, while for non-EML students, the increase was 16.9%.

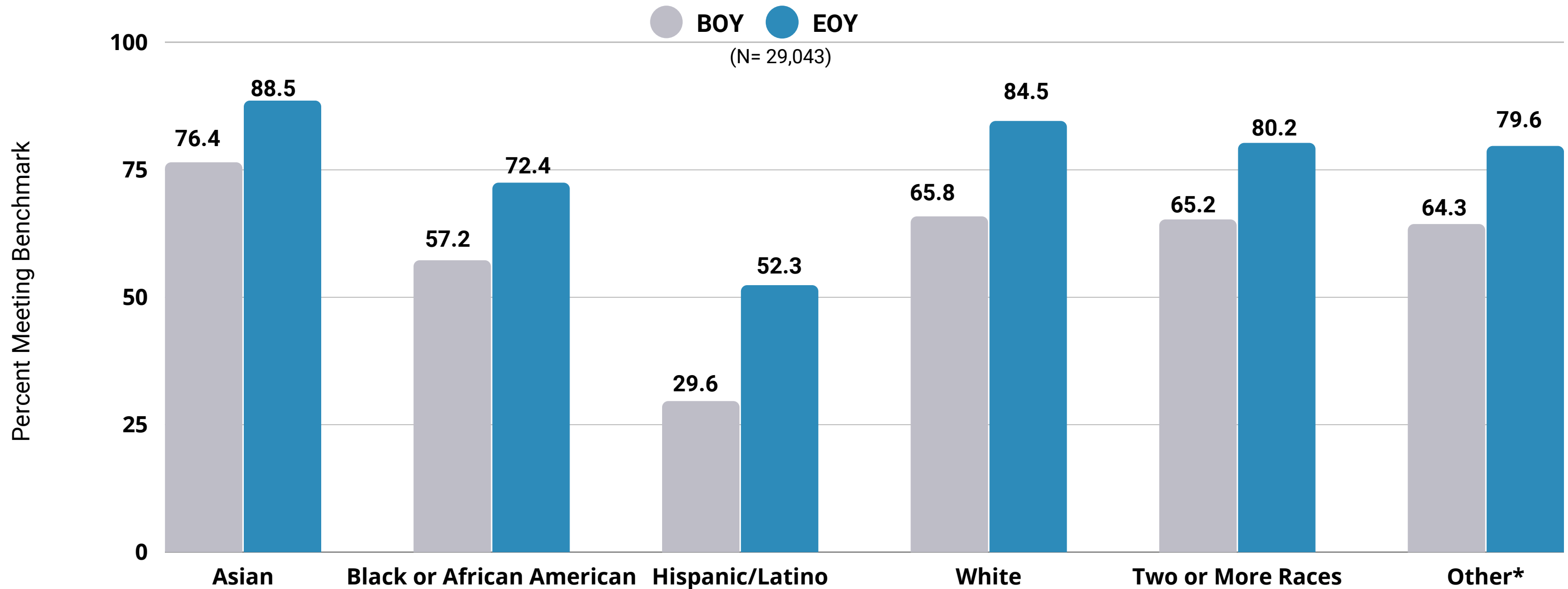
- The percentage of students receiving FARMS At or Above Benchmark increased by 20.6%, while for students not receiving FARMS, the increase was 16.2%.
- The percentage of students At or Above Benchmark in special education increased by 13.1%, while for students not in special education, the increase was 18.9%.





# Results

## Percentage of Students Meeting DIBELS Benchmark by Race/Ethnicity



\*Includes American Indian and Pacific Islander



## Findings

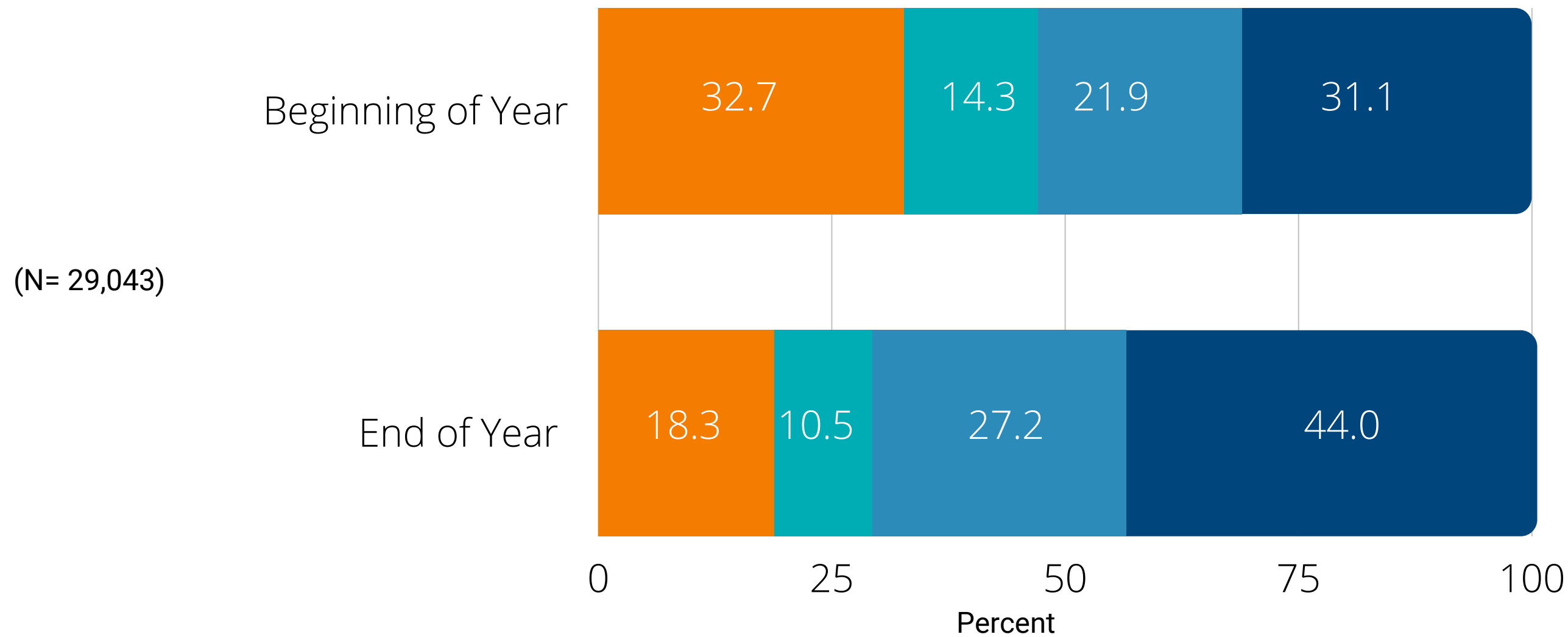
When comparing across race/ethnicity groups, all groups showed improvements in meeting the DIBELS benchmark from the beginning to the end of the year. However, Hispanic students had the biggest percentage change in proficiency levels where the percentage of students At or Above Benchmark increased by 22.7%. Other improvements included 18.7% for White students, 15.3% change for students in the Other category, 15.2% for Black or African American students and 12.1% for Asian students.



# Results

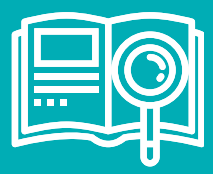
Percentage of Students Meeting **DIBELS Benchmark Levels** at the Beginning of the Year and at the End of the Year

● Well Below Benchmark ● Below Benchmark ● Above Benchmark ● Well Above Benchmark



## Findings

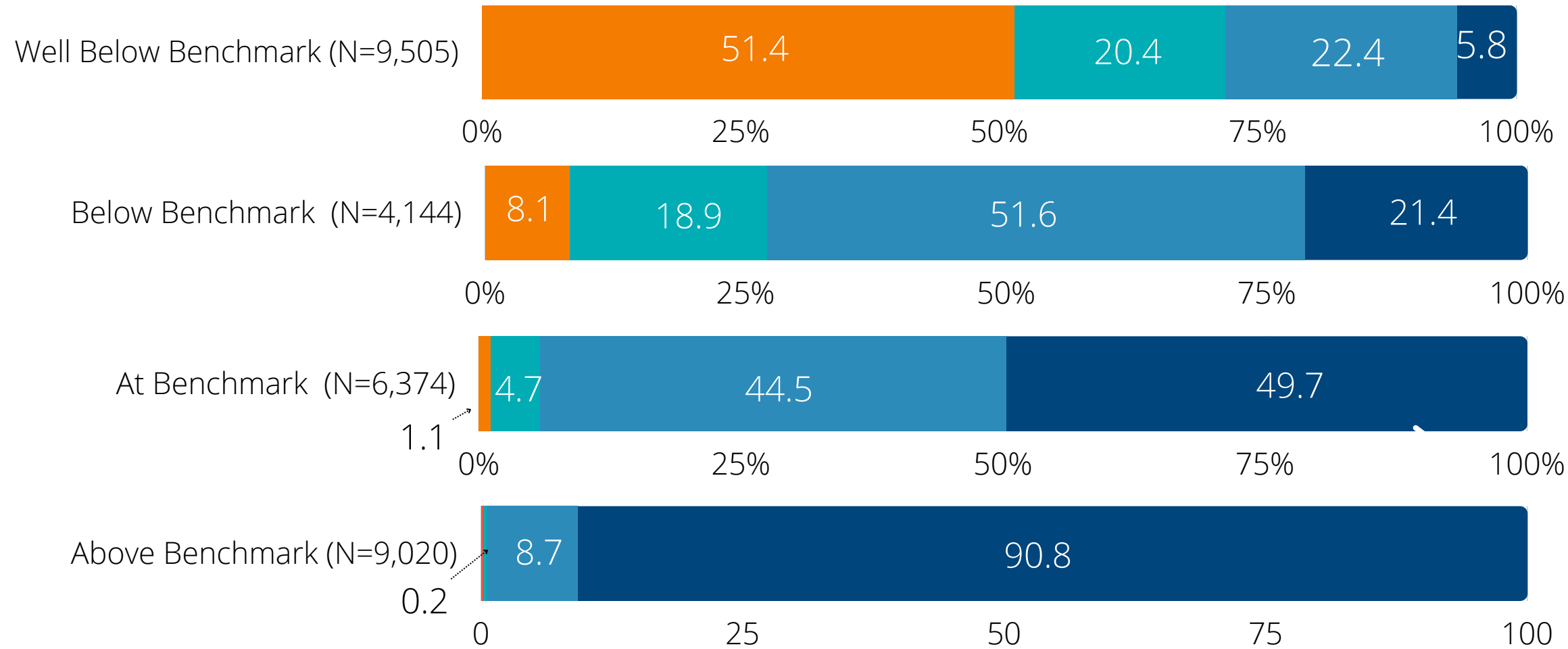
Overall, the data shows an improvement in student performance across all benchmarks from the beginning to the end of the year. The percentage of students categorized as "Well Below Benchmark" and "Below Benchmark" decreased by 14.4% and 3.8%, respectively. In comparison, the rate of students classified as "At Benchmark" and "Above Benchmark" increased from 31.1% to 44.0%.



# Results

## Percent Meeting the EOY Benchmark Level Based on Performance at the Beginning of the Year

### End of Year Benchmark Level



- Well Below Benchmark
- Below Benchmark
- At Benchmark
- Above Benchmark

### Student Benchmark Level at the Beginning of the Year

### Findings



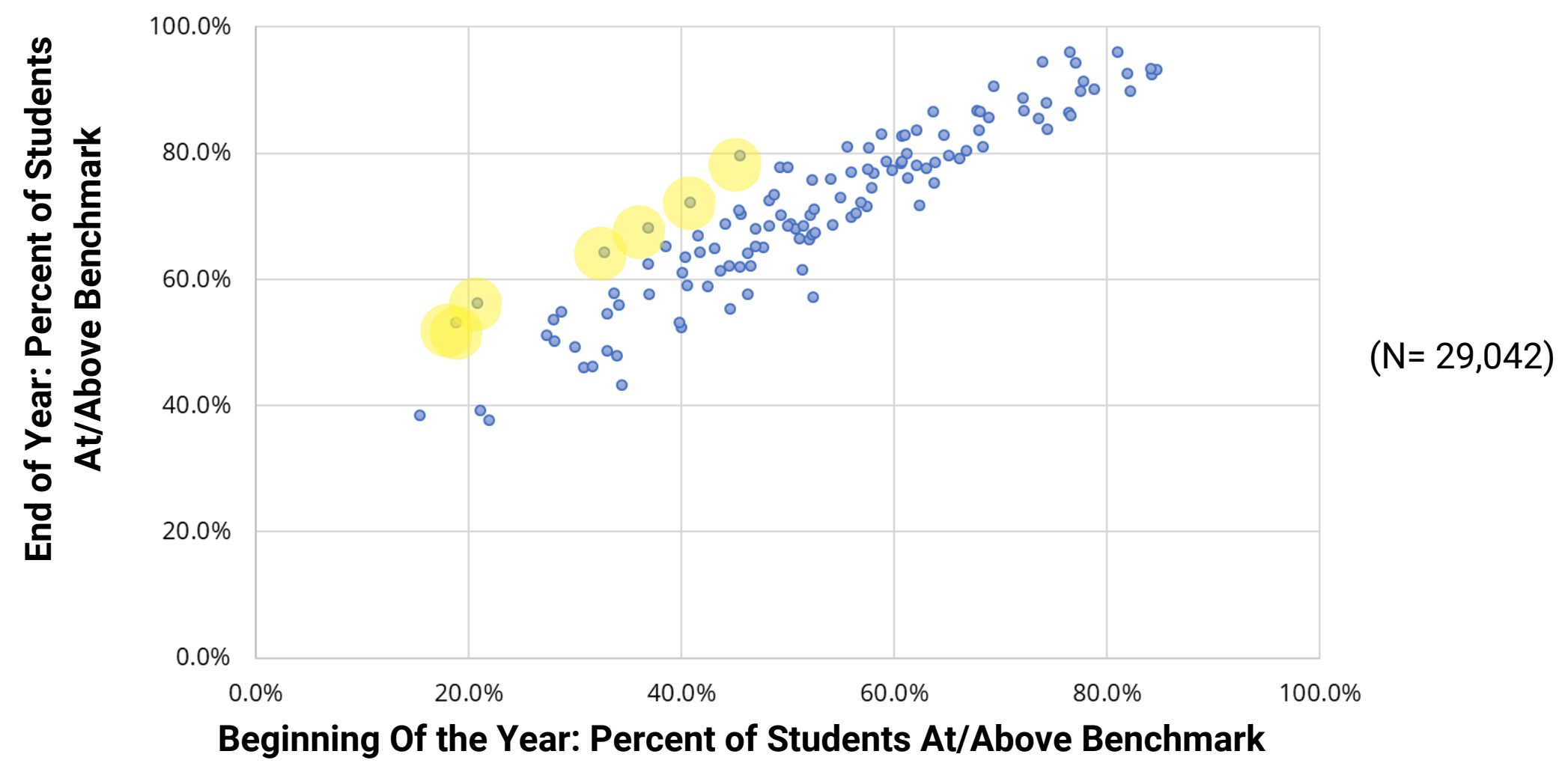
Of the 9,505 students who performed Well Below Benchmark at the beginning of the year, 28.2% (2,680 students) performed At or Above Benchmark at the end of the year; one-fifth (20.4%) were Below Benchmark and 51.4% (4,885 students) were still Well Below Benchmark at the end of the year.

Of the 4,144 students Below Benchmark at the beginning of the year, 73% (3,025 students) were performing At or Above Benchmark at the end of the year. A small number of students who performed At Benchmark at the beginning of the year scored Below (4.7%) or Well Below Benchmark (1.1%) at the end of the year (369 students).



# Results

Percent Meeting the EOY Benchmark Level Compared to the BOY Benchmark Level by School



## Findings

This graph displays elementary schools by the percentage of students meeting the DIBELS benchmark at the beginning of the year and the end of the year by school.

- Across MCPS elementary schools, there was strong, positive growth from the beginning of the year to the end of the year in the percentage of students meeting benchmark.

Six highlighted schools increased the percentage of students meeting the benchmark from the beginning to the end of the year by 30 percentage points or more; the largest increases for elementary schools across MCPS.

- Fifty percent or more of the students at these schools made above average or well above average growth during the year.
- Five of the six schools had a FARMS rate greater than 70%. Two of the schools had a 94% and 87% FARMS rate, more than one-half receiving ESOL services (71% and 57%) and more than 85% identified as Hispanic/Latino. One of the six schools had low FARMS and EML rates, a high proportion of white students, and a very small enrollment of 167 student.

Six highlighted schools (increased by 30 or more percentage points)

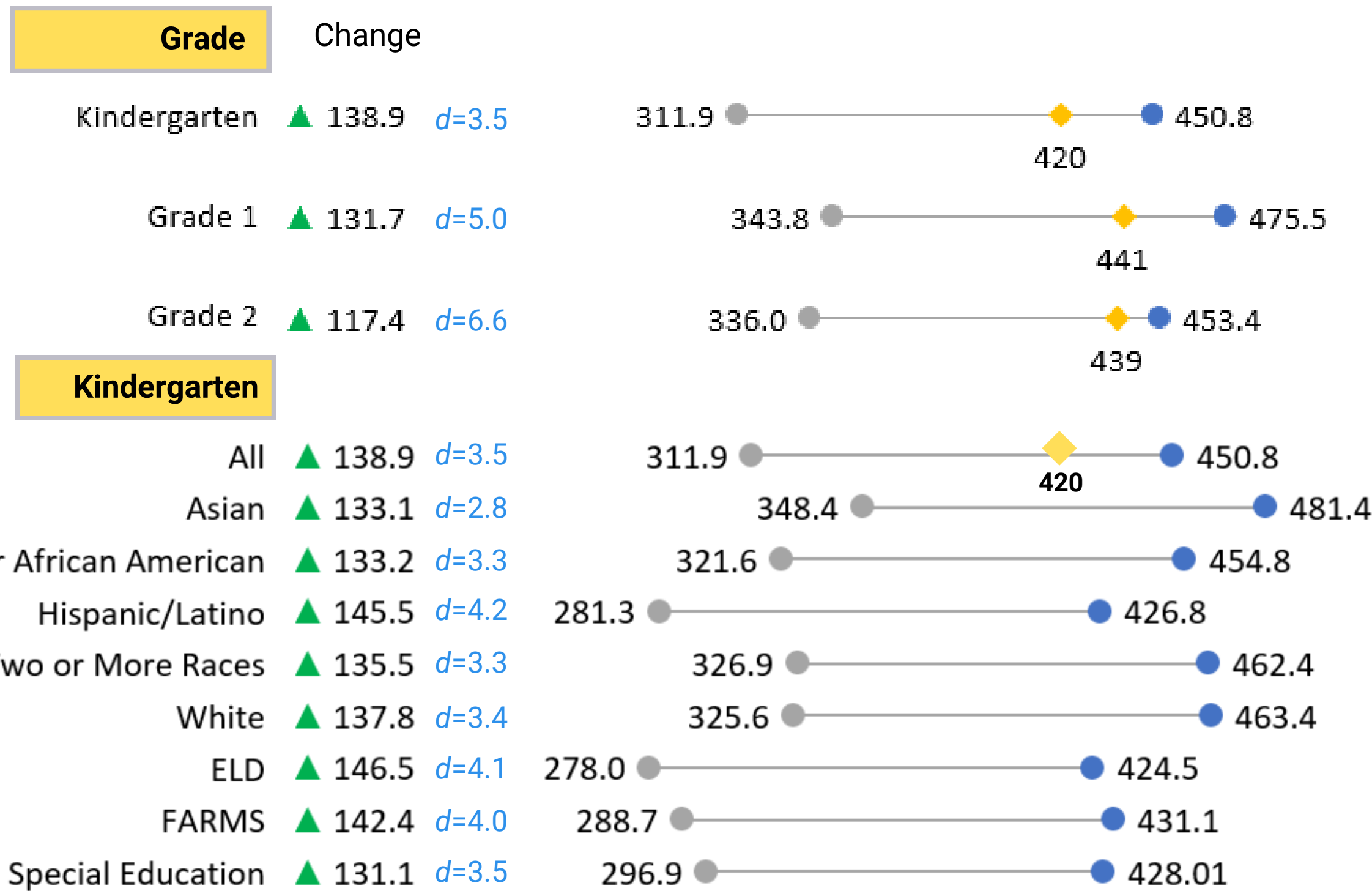
	Enrollment	% FARMS	% EML	% African American or Black	% Hispanic/Latino	% White
School 1	761	93.6%	71.0%	9.2%	87.6%	≤5.0
School 2	422	87.4%	56.6%	11.1%	84.6%	≤5.0
School 3	515	77.5%	41.6%	7.8%	77.7%	6.2%
School 4	522	76.6%	37.0%	27.4%	58.0%	6.1%
School 5	410	71.2%	34.6%	22.9%	59.3%	≤5.0
School 6	167	28.7%	8.4%	≤5.0	16.8%	71.3%



# Outcomes: BOY vs. EOY DIBELS

Differences and effect sizes on BOY and EOY DIBELS  
Composite scores

● Beginning of Year    ◆ DIBELS National End-of-Year benchmark    ● End of Year



Note: *d*= Cohen's *d* (measure of effect size). All differences presented are statistically significant.



## Findings

By the end of year (EOY), average DIBELS literacy scores for students in Grades K–2 were significantly higher than beginning of year (BOY) scores. The overall difference between BOY and EOY composite scores was 138.9 points for Kindergarten; 131.7 for Grade 1 and 117.4 for Grade 2.

EOY scores for students in Kindergarten also increased significantly from BOY for all race/ethnic groups and service receipt groups. Differences between BOY and EOY scores ranged from 131.1 for students receiving special education services to 146.5 for students receiving English Language Development (ELD) services.

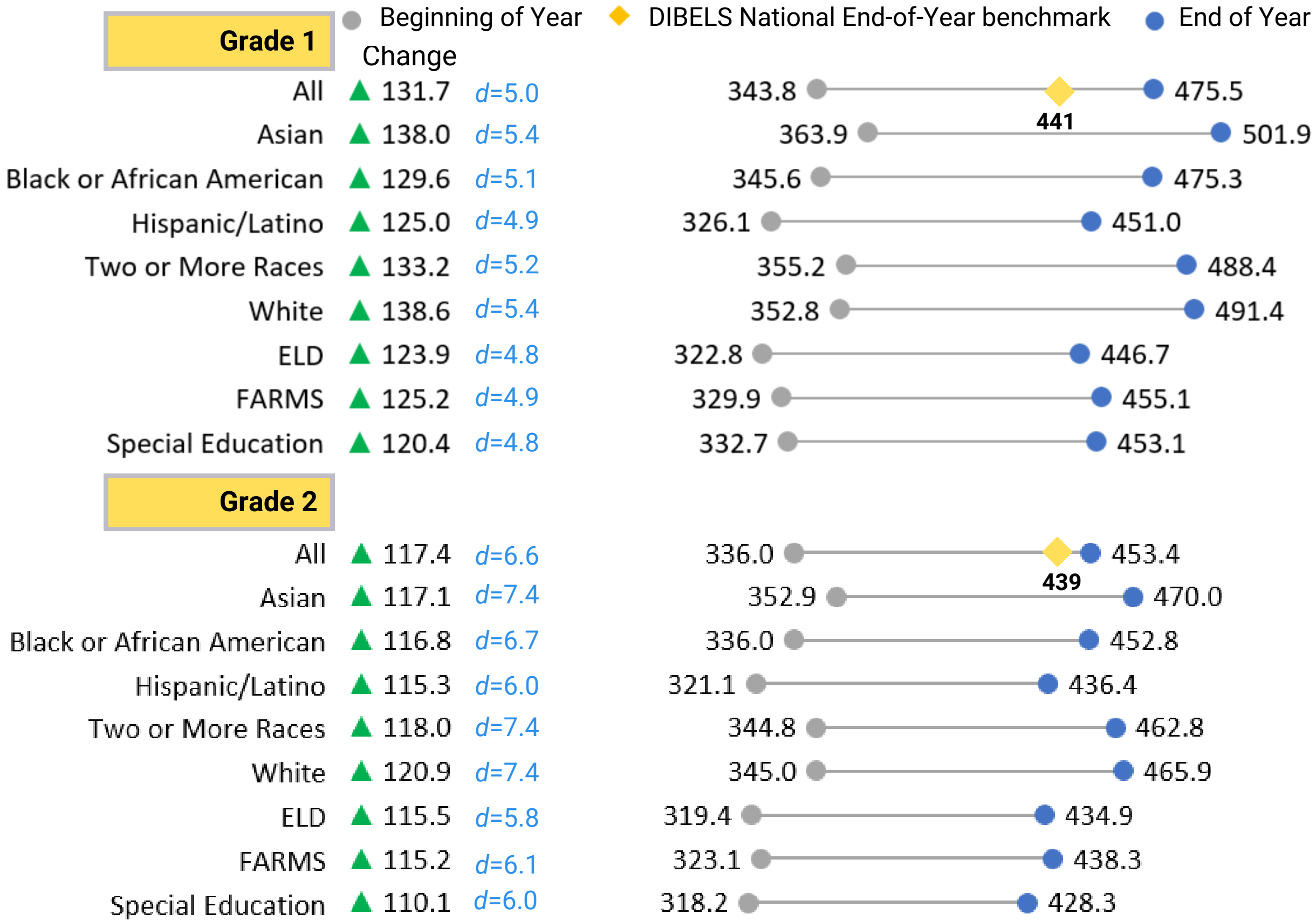
Effect sizes tell us the strength of the differences between the BOY and EOY composite scores. All of the effect sizes, which ranged from *d*=3.5 to *d*=6.6 overall, and *d*=2.8 to *d*=4.2 among student groups, indicated substantive, practically meaningful improvements between BOY and EOY scores.

For Kindergarten, EOY average DIBELS composite scores surpassed the DIBELS national EOY benchmark overall and among all student groups.



# Outcomes: BOY vs. EOY DIBELS

Differences and effect sizes on BOY and EOY DIBELS composite scores



Note: d= Cohen's d (measure of effect size). All differences presented are statistically significant.



## Findings

End of year scores for students in Grades 1 and 2 increased significantly from the BOY overall, for all race/ethnic groups, and for all service receipt groups. All effect sizes, ranging from  $d=4.8$  to  $5.4$  for Grade 1 student groups and  $d=5.8$  to  $7.4$  for Grade 2 student groups, indicated substantive, practically meaningful improvements between the beginning and end of year. Students identified as Asian or White had the largest effect sizes among racial/ethnic groups in Grades 1 and 2 ( $d=5.4$  and  $d=7.4$ , respectively). Students receiving FARMS had the largest effect sizes among service receipt groups in Grades 1 and 2 ( $d=4.9$  and  $d=6.1$ , respectively).

For Grade 1, EOY average DIBELS scores surpassed the DIBELS EOY benchmark overall and among all student groups.

For Grade 2, EOY average DIBELS scores surpassed the DIBELS EOY Benchmark overall and among most race/ethnic groups, with the exception of Hispanic/Latino students whose EOY average score (436.4) fell short of the Grade 2 EOY benchmark (439 points). Additionally, Grade 2 EOY scores among service receipt groups were below the DIBELS national EOY benchmark: 434.9 for ELD, 438.3 for FARMS, and 428.3 for Special Education, compared to the Grade 2 EOY benchmark of 439 points.





## Summary of Key Findings

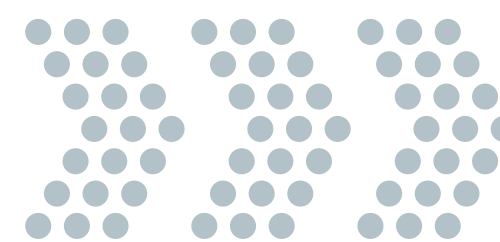
Findings from this evaluation reveal positive results and warrant continued implementation of Structured Literacy. Key elements of the model were implemented with fidelity, and notable improvements in reading outcomes were observed. Further analysis and adjustments may be necessary to ensure consistent and effective program delivery as lower levels of implementation were observed for important elements of the Language Comprehension block, such as vocabulary instruction and instruction in language structures.

### Word Recognition Block

**Overall, the results indicate that most of the observed classrooms implemented the key elements of the Word Recognition block.** Almost all of the observed classrooms (98.1%) provided instruction in word recognition skills and content. The use of manipulatives, correct phoneme pronunciation, appropriate posters related to Structured Literacy, and finishing the lesson within the allotted time generally met expectations. However, some key elements showed variations across grade levels. For example, in Kindergarten, the correct pronunciation of phonemes (78.7%) and finishing the lesson within the allotted time (65.7%) were observed at a lower percentage compared to other grades. The use of key instructional strategies during the word recognition block varied across grade levels. Over three-quarters of classrooms provided guided practice to students and checked students' understanding of the instruction. However, smaller percentages of classrooms were observed using the 'Model, Coach, Apply' strategy (60.6%), and less than half (45.5%) of observed classrooms used positive reinforcement when giving corrective feedback.

### Language Comprehension Block

**Overall, 50% or more of classrooms delivered two of the five key elements for the Language Comprehension block; a read-aloud and instruction in text features.** Other key elements had lower percentages, like providing vocabulary instruction (37.5%) and instruction in language structures (26.5%). Across all grade levels, rates of classrooms providing key elements of language comprehension instruction varied. Grade 1 classrooms had higher percentages compared to Kindergarten and Grade 2. Education in language structures had some of the lowest percentages observed.



## Summary of Key Findings

### Small Group Instruction

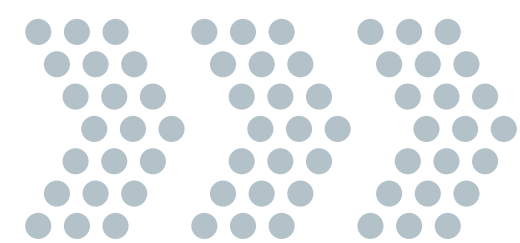
Overall, small group instruction in the observed classrooms aligned with best practices for this component providing short, flexible lessons to address specific skills in reading. On average, classrooms had three small groups for instruction, with an average session time of 12 minutes. **Approximately 76.9% of classrooms differentiated lessons for each small group, and 60.6% provided independent practice aligned with whole-group instruction.** Also observed in the Word Recognition block, using positive reinforcement when giving corrective feedback during small group instruction varied across grades, with second-grade classrooms exhibiting the lowest percentage (74.3%).

### Classroom Engagement

In just over half of the observed classrooms, students exhibited high engagement across activities in the English Language Arts block. **Over half of the classrooms were rated as having high student engagement during whole-group word recognition (53.9%), whole-group language comprehension (52.9%), and independent practice language comprehension (55.8%).** Approximately two-fifths (41.8%) had high engagement during independent practice word recognition.

### Reading Achievement Outcomes Grades K-2

Overall, the percentage of students meeting the DIBELS benchmark rates for students in Grades K-2 improved substantially from the beginning to the end of the year. The percentage of students At or Above the Benchmark increased from 53.0% (15,394 students) to 71.2% (20,683 students) from the beginning to the end of the year. **Students receiving services for FARMS, special education, and ELD showed a larger percentage-point change in meeting the end of year benchmark than students not receiving services.** EML students saw the most notable gain, where the percentage of EML students At or Above the Benchmark increased by 21.8 percentage points. In contrast, for students not receiving EML services, the increase was 16.9 percentage points. When comparing across race/ethnicity groups, all groups showed improvements in proficiency levels from the beginning to the end of the year. However, Hispanic/Latino students had the biggest percentage change in proficiency levels, where the percentage of students At or Above Benchmark increased by 22.7 percentage points.



## Summary of Key Findings

### Reading Achievement Outcomes Grades K-2

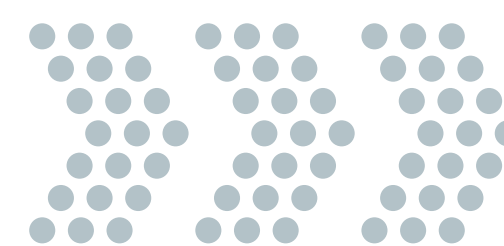
At the beginning of the year, 13,649 (47% of total) students were Below or Well Below the benchmark. By the year's end, 41.8% (n=5,705) of these students performed Above or Well Above the benchmark. However, among the 9,505 students who were Well Below at the beginning of the year, 51.4% (n=4,885) remained Well Below the benchmark at the end of the year. Several elementary schools exhibited notable improvements, with an increase of 30 percentage points or more from the beginning to the end of the year, the largest increases for elementary schools across MCPS.

Overall, for students in Grades K-2, the average DIBELS literacy scores were significantly higher at the end of the year compared to the beginning of the year (BOY). Among race/ethnicity and service groups, all effect sizes indicated substantive, practically meaningful improvements between the beginning and end of year scores. Notably, in Kindergarten, students identified as Hispanic/Latino had the largest effect size ( $d=4.2$ ) among racial/ethnic groups, and students receiving ELD services had the largest effect size ( $d=4.1$ ) among service receipt groups. Second grade exhibited some of the largest effect sizes across all grades and groups; however, three groups did not reach the Grade 2 EOY DIBELS national benchmark score of 439 - Hispanic/Latino students (436.4), ELD (434.9), and Special Education (428.3) Caution should be exercised when interpreting the effect sizes of this study, as effect sizes in studies involving pre-post differences tend to exhibit greater magnitude than those examining differences between groups of students (Baker et al., 2019).





# Recommendations



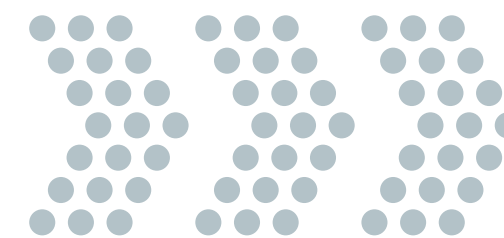
These recommendations aim to enhance the implementation of Structured Literacy and, ultimately, the effectiveness of instruction in foundational reading skills that will support students in becoming skilled readers who can fluently read and comprehend complex texts. Based on the evaluation data, the following recommendations are provided:

1 Continue to provide professional learning and support to improve the implementation of Structured Literacy.

1. **Word Recognition Block:** Focus on additional support and resources to improve key elements like the correct pronunciation of phonemes and consistency in using manipulatives. Focus on increasing the use of key instructional strategies like the "Model, Coach, Apply" strategy. While the majority of observed classrooms used this strategy (60.6%), there is room for improvement, especially in kindergarten and second grade. Increase the utilization of positive reinforcement when giving corrective feedback strategies during word recognition instruction, where 45.5% of observed classrooms used this strategy.
2. **Language Comprehension Block:** Lower percentages of implementation were observed for the Language Comprehension components. Focus on improving the percentage of classrooms providing vocabulary instruction (37.5% were observed) and instruction in language structures (26.5%). Provide professional development opportunities and resources to support teachers in delivering these elements effectively.
3. **Small Group Instruction:** Provide professional learning and support to encourage teachers to differentiate lessons for each small group to meet students' specific needs and maximize instructional time. Approximately 76.9% of observed classrooms differentiated small group lessons, indicating room for improvement. Additionally, during small group instruction during the Word Recognition block, focus on increasing teachers' use of positive reinforcement when providing corrective feedback. Notably, second-grade classrooms exhibited the lowest percentage of positive reinforcement at 74.3%.
4. **Student engagement:** Over half of the classrooms were rated as having high student engagement during whole-group word recognition (53.9%), whole-group language comprehension (52.9%), and independent practice language comprehension (55.8%). Provide strategies on ways to keep young students engaged during instructional blocks, such as providing brain breaks, involving all students in responses, etc.



# Recommendations



These recommendations aim to enhance the implementation of Structured Literacy and, ultimately, the effectiveness of instruction in foundational reading skills that will support students in becoming skilled readers who can fluently read and comprehend complex texts. Based on the evaluation data, the following recommendations are provided:

2

Identify explicit steps schools should take to support students who perform at the "Well Below" benchmark at the beginning of the year.

**Student progress among under-achieving students:** Of the 9,505 students who performed Well Below Benchmark at the beginning of the year, 28.2% (2,680 students) performed At or Above Benchmark at the end of the year; one-fifth (20.4%) were Below Benchmark and 51.4% (4,885 students) were still Well Below Benchmark at the end of the year. Although these students may have made progress during the year, students scoring below the benchmark are at higher risk of not achieving subsequent reading goals without receiving additional, strategic, and targeted instructional support. Assist school staff in analyzing various sources of data to identify reasons for inadequate student progress so appropriate instructional adjustments and interventions can be implemented.



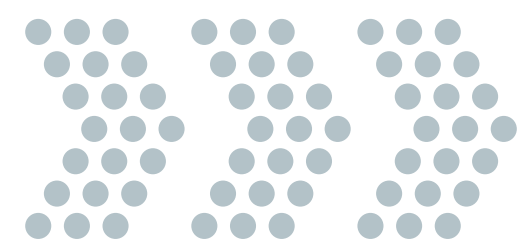
## **CONTINUE IMPLEMENTATION**

The findings from this evaluation support the ongoing implementation of Structured Literacy in elementary schools. The essential components of the model were generally implemented with fidelity, resulting in notable improvements in reading outcomes for students in Grades K-2. Furthermore, these positive results align with the program's goals and the Academic Excellence pillar of the MCPS Strategic Plan.





# References



Bakker, A., Cai, J., English, L. et al. Beyond small, medium, or large: points of consideration when interpreting effect sizes. *Educ Stud Math* 102, 1–8 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10649-019-09908-4>

Folsom, J. S., Smith, K. G., Burk, K., & Oakley, N. (2017). Educator outcomes associated with the implementation of Mississippi's K–3 early literacy professional development initiative (REL 2017–270). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED573545.pdf>.

Montgomery County Public Schools. (2022). Office of Curriculum and Instruction. Grades K – 2 Literacy Block Best Practices.

Montgomery County Public Schools. (2022). Office of Curriculum and Instruction. ELA Block Instructional Guidance.

Scarborough, H. S. (2001). Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis)abilities: Evidence, theory, and practice. In S. Neuman & D. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook for research in early literacy*. New York: Guilford Press.