

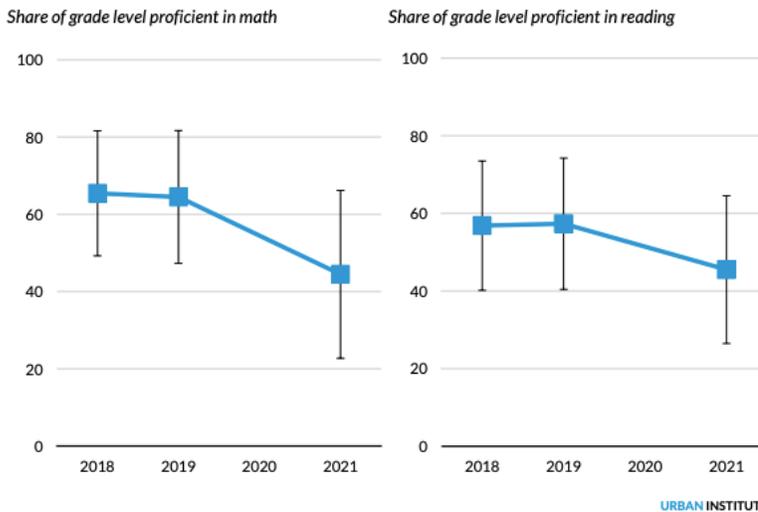
The Emotional and Educational Impact of the Pandemic

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Children have been under stress during the pandemic, and that stress has affected their learning. Parents, our educational specialists, and teacher and school counselor colleagues report anecdotally the academic lag that's occurred. An April 2022 study, [COVID-19 and the System Resilience of Public Education: A View from North Carolina](#) (Domina, Hashim, Kearney, Pham, and Smith), found both universal and community-specific levels of educational loss from the pandemic.

The report's findings on third-graders' spring 2021 math scores indicated that only 44% of students tested were proficient—a significant decline from the 65% proficiency level in 2019. This drop represents approximately a full year of learning loss. The researchers focused on the plummeting of math scores, but a substantial pandemic learning lag appeared also in third-grade reading skills.

FIGURE 1
Average End-of-Grade Math and Reading Test Results for North Carolina Third-Graders, Spring 2018, 2019, and 2021



Source: Authors' analysis of data from "Accountability Data Sets and Reports," North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, accessed April 25, 2022, <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/testing-and-school-accountability/school-accountability-and-reporting/accountability-data-sets-and-reports#2016%E2%80%932017-reports>.

The most significant point of the report, though, is that not all school districts in North Carolina experienced this drop. In fact, students in some schools that had a greater amount of online instruction performed better than students in some in-person schools. After extensive analysis, the researchers found that schools' attention to children's emotional needs seemed to protect students from learning loss, even during remote instruction and even in districts with poor access to resources: "We recognize there are other core functions of schooling beyond reading and math instruction, such as supporting student mental health, supporting social and emotional well-being, and

facilitating access to social services” ([Domina, Hashim, Kearney, Pham, and Smith, April 2022](#)).

Sharon Hoover, co-director of the University of Maryland-based National Center for School Mental Health, validated this realization that school is more than academics and that the pandemic’s emotional toll is real: “Nearly every child in the country is suffering to some degree from the psychological effects of the pandemic. Suddenly everyone is talking about mental health. Parents, teachers, and students are openly discussing it. That’s why schools need to invest now in the mental health and well-being of our kids in a broad and comprehensive way—not just for children with learning disabilities and diagnosed mental health conditions, but for all students” ([COVID Harmed Kids’ Mental Health—And Schools Are Feeling It](#), updated 2021).

Considering both emotions and learning when working with students is crucial for their development. Subject mastery is important, of course, but should be recognized as an aid to children’s education and not just as a way to get good grades. That’s because students’ sense of self is impacted—sometimes even harshly judged—by how much academic mastery they feel they have acquired. So students who struggle with learning are likely to feel anxiety, sadness, and shame. Attending to the child’s emotional well-being, then, directly enhances effective educational intervention. That’s why The K&M Center focuses on the whole child and not just academic achievement.

K&M Center Specialists consider the whole child as they work with students. This model includes:

- 1. The relationship:** Students are treated with respect for who they are and what they do. We understand that real trust is required before children are willing and able to show their weaknesses, take risks, and work on concepts and behaviors that are uncomfortable and difficult for them.
- 2. Contact:** In the educational setting, contact is the ability to be present. We evaluate a student’s ability to stay present, which includes being attentive and engaged.
 - We notice and address students’ emotional availability for each session. If they are not emotionally present, we inquire if something came up at school that’s on their mind. We create the opportunity for students to briefly describe an area of frustration. Our goal is to understand and help reduce any barriers to their ability to focus and learn.
 - We also consider their ability to be in physical contact/presence with their bodies: Are they having a hard time sitting still? If so, we offer options to let them release physical tension, such as moving their bodies or using fidget toys and squishy balls.

3. **Building support:** We see our educational interventions as the bridge to student learning. We offer support and step-by-step strategies until academic skills are internalized as good habits making students confident, independent workers.

4. **Self-awareness:** An important part of our approach is to help students understand their learning profile and how they learn. As students come to realize precisely why they are at K&M and the exact purpose of the exercises they are doing, they increasingly own their learning process.

5. **Generalization:** Educational remediation is successful when a child can generalize, or apply, specific skills taught in sessions to other schoolwork. For example, when they can read and comprehend a paragraph about a social studies assignment in session, and then notice that they can read and comprehend their science assignment, they have generalized reading and comprehension skills to other subjects and have become truly competent readers.

We work hard to address our student's learning needs, targeting all areas of need—pandemic lags as well as learning differences. We remain committed to working with the whole person in every child.

It is a privilege to serve our students, and we're available for any questions you might have about your child.