Pittsburgh Public Schools Goal Monitoring Report:
3rd Grade English Language Arts Proficiency

Introduction and Goal

This report presents our initial findings and progress toward achieving increased English Language Arts (ELA) proficiency among 3rd-grade students within Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS). In alignment with best practices established by the Council of Great City Schools, our goal monitoring report seeks to communicate both the current landscape of student performance and our plan for a targeted strategic response. By the end of the 2024-2025 school year, we aim for 49.4% of our 3rd-grade students to meet proficiency on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) and Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA) in ELA. At the end of the 20-21 school year, 40.20% of third-grade students were proficient, establishing the baseline for our 5-year goal of achieving 54% by 2027. This focus on 3rd-grade ELA proficiency underscores the essential transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn," a critical milestone in academic development that supports sustained success across all subject areas.

Why Focus on 3rd Grade Reading?

Third grade is a pivotal year in a child's educational journey, representing a critical transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." At this stage, students not only solidify their foundational literacy skills, but also begin to apply reading comprehension to access and understand content across various subjects. Research shows that students who are proficient in reading by the end of third grade are more likely to succeed in subsequent grades and beyond.

To support the attainment of 3rd grade reading goals, Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) employs three key assessments: the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA), the Classroom Diagnostic Tool (CDT), and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). Each tool serves a unique purpose:

- **PSSA and CDT**: These assessments provide insights into students' reading proficiency and comprehension skills, essential for "reading to learn." The PSSA is administered statewide, offering a benchmark for student performance across the district. The CDT, on the other hand, is administered three times a year and is a computer adaptive assessment designed to provide diagnostic information to guide instruction that supports intervention and enrichment.
- **DIBELS**: This assessment focuses on foundational literacy skills, crucial for "learning to read." By measuring aspects like fluency, comprehension, and decoding accuracy, DIBELS helps educators track students' progress in essential skills. Students scoring below benchmark often require targeted interventions to enhance their reading capabilities, allowing them to transition more effectively into the comprehension skills needed for academic success.

Scarborough's Reading Rope model illustrates the transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." This model highlights that reading proficiency involves both word recognition and language comprehension. Word recognition, assessed by DIBELS, focuses on foundational skills like phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition, helping students understand how to read. As students develop fluency, they shift to reading for comprehension, assessed by PSSA and

CDT. This phase emphasizes background knowledge, vocabulary, language structure, and verbal reasoning, enabling students to use reading to learn across subjects. See Attachment A
By focusing our efforts on improving 3rd-grade reading proficiency, PPS is committed to ensuring that all students have the necessary skills to thrive academically today and beyond.

The Data

Our data evaluation focuses on three main assessment tools: the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA), the Classroom Diagnostic Tool (CDT), and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS Acadience). Together, these assessments provide a comprehensive view of current student performance and areas for improvement in 3rd-grade ELA.

1. **PSSA Results**
   The PSSA results over the past few years serve as our benchmarks for ELA proficiency. When assessing 3rd grade students, 46.2% of our students attained proficiency for the 2024 school year, which was a 1.6% decline from the previous year. Further analysis highlights significant disparities across subgroups. White students were the only subgroup to see an increase in proficiency. 71.9% of white students were proficient, compared to only 31.1% of African American students, 21.9% of students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and 21.2% of English Language Learners (ELL). While proficiency for white students increased by 2.6% from 2023 to 2024, African American students experienced a 3% decline, ELL students a 4.4% decline, and students with IEPs a 3.3% decline, underscoring an apparent achievement gap between white students and other subgroups. This gap emphasizes the need for targeted, equity-focused instructional strategies and resources to support underperforming subgroups. See Attachment B
2. **Classroom Diagnostic Tool (CDT) Results**
   The CDT is administered three times a year, with the first round providing an early indication of how many students are performing on grade level as well as how they are likely to perform on the PSSA based on Pennsylvania Assessment Anchors and Eligible Content. Pennsylvania Assessment Anchors outline the key concepts and skills that students should master at each grade level, while Eligible Content specifies the knowledge and abilities that may be assessed. Initial CDT data shows that 21% of 3rd-grade students currently meet grade-level expectations, with only 10% projected to achieve proficiency on the PSSA. The disaggregated data highlights that 22.7% of white students will likely achieve proficiency, compared to 3.8% of Black students, 2.9% of IEP students, and 2.2% of ELL students. For all subgroups aside from white students, over 60% are projected to score below proficiency on the PSSA, if it was administered today. However, this is the initial assessment and at the beginning of the year all key concepts and skills have not been taught to students. See Attachment C
3. **DIBELS Acadience Data**
   The DIBELS assessment provides a breakdown of students' foundational literacy skills, measuring aspects like oral reading fluency, comprehension, and decoding accuracy. Our beginning-of-year DIBELS results indicate that 56% of our students are at or above benchmark,

while 44% are below or well below the benchmark. Students scoring below benchmark may require additional support with decoding, comprehension, or fluency. See Attachment D

The Interpretation

The PSSA, CDT, and DIBELS data collectively reveal a concerning trend in 3rd-grade ELA performance, particularly among African Americans, Students with IEPs and ELL. The achievement gap between these subgroups and their white peers is pronounced, underscoring an urgent need for targeted strategies, supports, and resources to support the narrowing of gaps and attainment of respectable student outcomes.

The recent PSSA results highlight that white students are currently the only subgroup with a positive trajectory in ELA proficiency, showing a 2.6% increase over the past year, while African American, IEP, and ELL students have all experienced declines. This downward trend among underperforming subgroups emphasizes the necessity of equity-focused instructional strategies that are specifically designed to meet these students' unique needs and to close the existing proficiency gaps.

The CDT data offers a "snapshot", reinforcing the need for a strategic response: only 21% of 3rd-grade students meet grade-level expectations, with a mere 10% projected to score proficient or higher on the PSSA. The disaggregated CDT data underscores that all subgroups, except for white students, are projected to have over 70% of their demographic score below basic. This highlights a critical need for immediate, data-informed instructional support to address literacy skills gaps that could otherwise hinder student progress.

Similarly, the DIBELS data provides insight into the foundational literacy skills that are crucial for early reading success. With 44% of students scoring below the benchmark, there is a clear indication that nearly half of our 3rd-grade population requires additional support in decoding, comprehension, or fluency. Addressing these gaps early on is essential, as these foundational skills are predictors of future academic performance. Together, these data points highlight the need for a comprehensive strategy that combines guidance, support, and accountability measures to address literacy skill deficits while promoting equitable outcomes for all student groups.

Assessment Insights and Instructional Adjustments

The CDT, PSSA, and DIBELS assessments provide critical data that guides our instructional strategies throughout the year:

- **CDT**: CDT results have highlighted specific gaps in skills like summarization and inference, providing an early alert to areas needing emphasis in classroom instruction. Teachers can leverage this information to adjust their teaching strategies and focus on bridging the comprehension gaps identified.
- **DIBELS**: DIBELS data allows teachers to track progress in foundational reading skills, such as fluency and decoding accuracy. Students scoring below benchmark in these areas may benefit from targeted reading interventions, such as small-group instruction and additional support for phonemic awareness and fluency.

The Evidence and Plan

Continuous Improvement Approach

Our approach to achieving 3rd Grade ELA proficiency is through implementing continuous improvement cycles, which emphasizes structured cycles of "Plan, Do, Check, Act" (PDCA). This model is particularly effective for educational improvement as it fosters a culture of iterative progress based on evidence, reflection, and refinement. By embedding this model, Pittsburgh Public Schools aims to systematically address gaps and implement practices that are responsive to real-time data and adaptable to evolving student needs. This PDCA framework ensures that every action taken in pursuit of the ELA goal is data-informed, evidence-based, and student-centered, creating sustainable improvements across classrooms.

Strategic Responses and Plan

Our strategic responses within implementation of continuous improvement cycles focus on three critical areas designed to address gaps revealed by our assessment data: lesson design, differentiated instruction, and best practice identification.

1. **Lesson Design through Visualization of Expectations**
    - *Evidence*: Initial observations indicate varied fidelity in implementing the Science of Reading principles across classrooms. To standardize and enhance instructional quality, our strategy centers on the design and sharing of visual models that outline expectations for lesson progression and design. These clear, accessible models will be posted in every classroom, serving as a consistent guide for teachers and supporting adherence to structured instructional blocks.
    - *Plan*: Deploy literacy coaches and display visual guides in all classrooms, outlining expectations for the progression of lessons and quality instruction for foundational skills, reading comprehension, and language arts activities. Coaches will provide professional development to deepen teachers' understanding and capacity in lesson design aligned with best practices in literacy instruction.
    - *Action*: Through classroom observations and structured feedback, we will monitor and reinforce effective practices, ensuring alignment and consistency across the District. This approach is projected to improve lesson delivery, creating a stronger foundation for reading comprehension and literacy skill-building.
2. **Data-Informed Differentiated Instruction**
    - *Evidence*: Data from CDT and DIBELS highlight significant skill gaps within and between student subgroups, necessitating an individualized approach to instruction. Differentiated instruction, guided by Carol Ann Tomlinson’s framework, will allow us to tailor content, process, product, and environment to meet the diverse needs of our students.
    - *Plan*: We plan to implement a data analysis protocol to help teachers assess and address each student's unique needs, ensuring that student support is individualized, responsive

and equitable. This includes professional development for principals and teachers on using culturally responsive pedagogy.

- *Action*: Through regular classroom observations and feedback, we will ensure that differentiated instruction is both effective and culturally relevant, fostering an inclusive environment that supports the growth of all learners.

3. **Identifying and Scaling Best Practices**
    - *Evidence*: To strengthen literacy outcomes district-wide, we are identifying best practices from schools demonstrating strong ELA performance. Conducting on-site observations at these schools allows us to study successful instructional practices in real time, providing insights into effective teaching and engagement methods.
    - *Plan*: Findings from these observations will be shared through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), where educators can discuss strategies, exchange ideas, and collaboratively adapt best practices to meet the needs of their own students. Principals will be engaged in cross-school partnerships through principal networks, facilitating the adoption of proven strategies across different school contexts.
    - *Action*: To support district-wide implementation, we will develop professional learning sessions that highlight these effective methods, tailored for adaptability across classrooms. By providing structured training and fostering collaborative networks, we aim to establish a continuous improvement culture rooted in data-driven practices and shared successes.

Conclusion

This first Goal Monitoring Report on 3rd-grade ELA proficiency captures the current state of student performance, focusing on key assessment results and subgroup disparities that require targeted intervention. With a multi-faceted approach that leverages CDT, DIBELS, and PSSA data, we aim to address gaps in foundational skills, particularly among underperforming subgroups. By prioritizing data-informed, equity-driven instruction, PPS is committed to meeting the 49.4% proficiency target by the end of the 2024-2025 school year. Through ongoing monitoring and adjustments, we will refine our strategies to foster greater literacy outcomes and ensure all students are prepared to "read to learn" in 3rd grade and beyond.