



A collection of colorful toys including a red and blue airplane, a green ball, yellow blocks, and a string-and-button toy.

ARKANSAS BETTER CHANCE (ABC) 2025 LONGITUDINAL STUDY

ASSESSMENT PROFICIENCY

Report Summary

The Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) Proficiency Longitudinal Study evaluates the impact of ABC Pre-K participation on proficiency outcomes in later grades. This study compares DESE outcomes data for two groups: those who participated in ABC Pre-K and those who did not. By establishing this core comparison, the impact of the ABC program can be isolated and studied longitudinally to assess outcomes in Arkansas K-12 public education through high school graduation.

The purpose of the ABC program is to provide high-quality early education services to children who exhibit developmental and socioeconomic risk factors. The benefits of the ABC program persist from Kindergarten through 12th grade. This study shows that compared to No Known Pre-K, the **ABC participants consistently have:**

- **Higher ATLAS on-time proficiency** in English Language Arts (ELA), Math, and Science
- **+3% higher proficiency in ELA**
- **+3.5% higher proficiency in Math**
- **+3% higher proficiency in Science**

This report includes eight cohorts of students: those who attended Pre-K in 2014 (assessed in 10th grade in 2025) through those who attended Pre-K in 2021 (assessed in 3rd grade in 2025), all evaluated using 2025 ATLAS (Arkansas Teaching, Learning, and Assessment System) scores. The study includes 111,536 ABC participants and 112,414 No Known Pre-K participants, all of whom held direct certification or free lunch status (N = 223,950).



CORE COMPARISON

The “core comparison” of this study is between ABC Pre-K participants and students with no known Pre-K participation who have the same low socio-economic household income. This study only includes data for students who were below 130% of the Federal Poverty Line when they began Kindergarten. These two core groups are identified as “ABC” and “No Known Pre-K (NK)” in this study.

The core comparison groups (ABC and NK) are defined at Kindergarten, and all longitudinal outcomes in this study are measured using Kindergarten as the baseline.

On-Time Proficiency

On-time proficiency is the percentage of DESE Kindergarten students who are proficient on a state assessment for the appropriate grade level after Kindergarten. Proficiency data include reported Proficiency Levels L3 and L4, with L3 indicating proficiency and L4 indicating advanced performance on the test. For example, a student who attended Kindergarten in 2015 would need to score “proficient” on their 10th Grade ATLAS ELA assessment 10 years later to be considered “on time proficient”.

Because this is an annual report, the 2025 data reflects a single point in time across multiple cohorts. Each cohort is a different group of students assessed at the grade level appropriate to their Kindergarten year. For example, students who attended Kindergarten in 2015 are assessed in 10th grade in 2025, while students who attended Kindergarten in 2021 are assessed in 3rd grade in 2025. 'On-time' proficiency, therefore, means that a student is being assessed at the expected grade level for their Kindergarten.

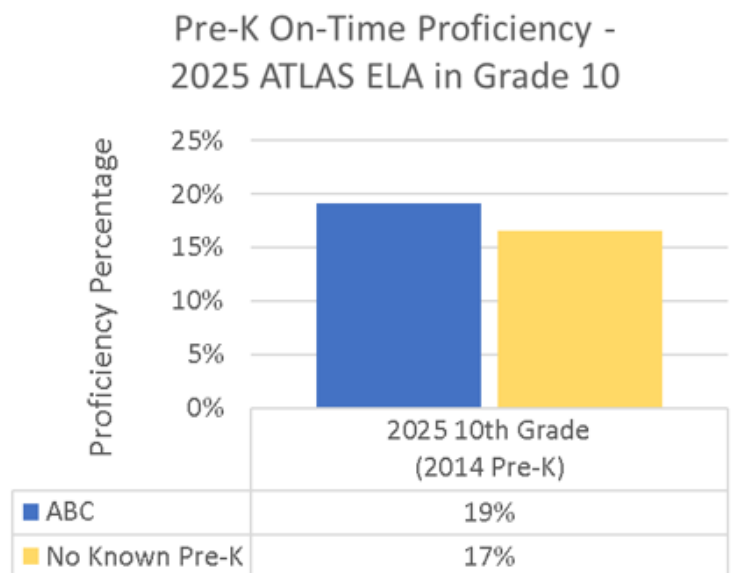
ABC participants are more likely to meet this on-time proficiency threshold than their NK counterparts.

- The on-time Literacy (ELA) proficiency of 2014 **ABC participants** in Grade 10 in 2025 was 19%.
- The on-time Literacy (ELA) proficiency of **No-Known 2014 Pre-K** in Grade 10 in 2025 was 17%.

These on-time proficiency percentages are for the 2015 Kindergarten cohort, using ABC and NK core comparison baseline data. Students who were retained, not proficient, not tested, or no longer attend DESE schools are not on-time proficient for the purpose of this calculation.

ABC and NK Kindergarten students who are no longer enrolled in DESE schools cannot be evaluated, but the outcomes of those who remain enrolled in DESE schools are directly comparable in this study.

Figure 1.



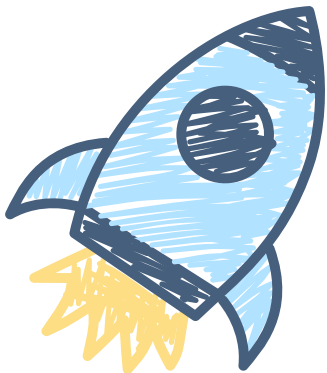
ATLAS Proficiency

This study analyzes ATLAS on-time proficiency outcomes by each student's Pre-K participation status. The 2025 ATLAS was administered to DESE students in grades 3 through 10. Each grade level corresponds to a specific Kindergarten cohort year, which determines each student's Pre-K participation status. Both core comparison groups, ABC and No-Known Pre-K, are represented across all eight grade levels in the 2025 ATLAS data.

Each grade level assessed on the 2025 ATLAS corresponds to a specific Pre-K and Kindergarten cohort year as follows:

2014 Pre-K – 2015 DESE Kindergarten – ATLAS 10th Grade
2015 Pre-K – 2016 DESE Kindergarten – ATLAS 9th Grade
2016 Pre-K – 2017 DESE Kindergarten – ATLAS 8th Grade
2017 Pre-K – 2018 DESE Kindergarten – ATLAS 7th Grade
2018 Pre-K – 2019 DESE Kindergarten – ATLAS 6th Grade
2019 Pre-K – 2020 DESE Kindergarten – ATLAS 5th Grade
2020 Pre-K – 2021 DESE Kindergarten – ATLAS 4th Grade
2021 Pre-K – 2022 DESE Kindergarten – ATLAS 3rd Grade

The 2025 ATLAS outcomes showed ABC students with higher proficiency scores on ELA (+3% higher), Math (+3.5% higher), and Science (+3% higher) compared to the No-Know Pre-K group.

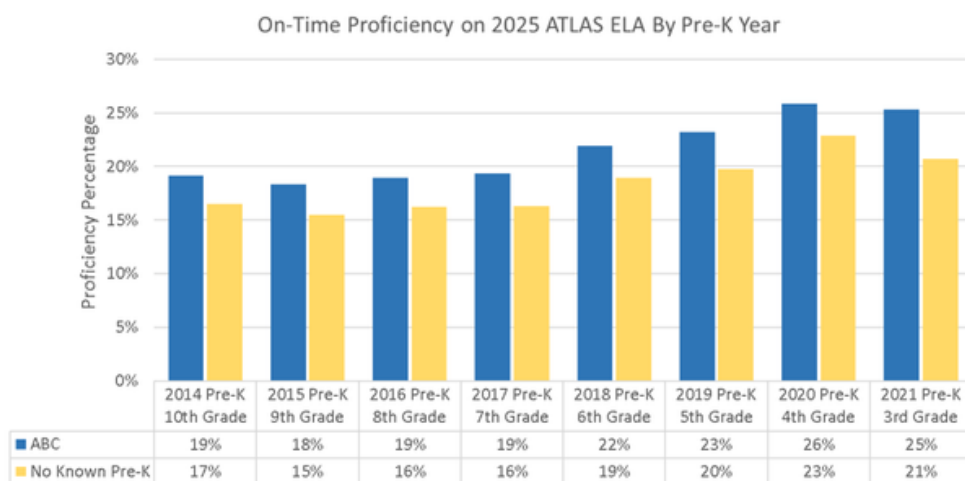


2025 ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (ELA) PROFICIENCY

The 2025 ATLAS ELA assessment was administered to DESE students in grades 3 through 10 in the spring of 2025. Each grade level represents a distinct Kindergarten cohort, ranging from students who attended Kindergarten in 2015 (assessed in 10th grade) to students who attended Kindergarten in 2022 (assessed in 3rd grade). For each cohort, on-time ELA proficiency is calculated as the percentage of students who scored at Level 3 or Level 4 on the 2025 ATLAS ELA assessment.

It is important to note that overall ELA proficiency rates in Arkansas are low across income levels; the rates presented here reflect the specific low-income population defined by the core comparison and should be interpreted in that context. Across all eight grade levels, ABC participants demonstrated higher on-time ELA proficiency than their No-Known Pre-K counterparts on the 2025 ATLAS. Figure 2 shows the 2014 through 2021 Pre-K cohorts' performance on the 2025 ATLAS ELA Test.

Figure 2.



Students with ABC participation have higher on-time English Language Arts (ELA) proficiency than those with No Known Pre-K on the 2025 ATLAS across all grade levels 3 through 10.

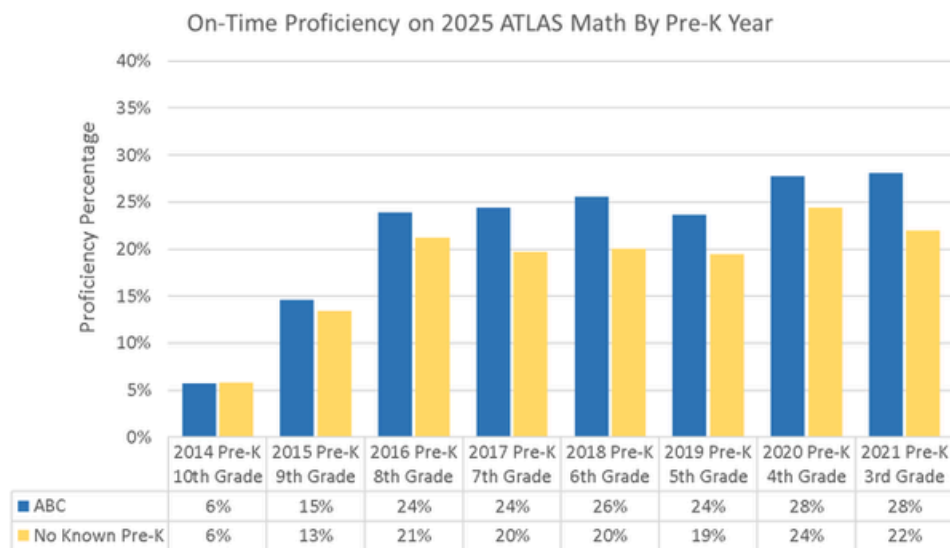
The overall difference is 3% higher on-time 2025 ATLAS ELA proficiency for ABC, ranging from 2% higher for ABC in 10th grade to 4% higher in 3rd grade.

2025 MATH PROFICIENCY

The 2025 ATLAS Math assessment was administered to DESE students in grades 3 through 10 in spring 2025. Each grade level represents a distinct Kindergarten cohort, ranging from students who attended Kindergarten in 2015 (assessed in 10th grade) to those who attended in 2022 (assessed in 3rd grade). For each cohort, on-time Math proficiency is the percentage of students who scored at Level 3 or Level 4 on the 2025 ATLAS Math assessment.

As with ELA, overall Math proficiency rates in Arkansas are low across income levels; the rates presented here reflect the specific low-income population defined by the core comparison and should be interpreted accordingly. Across nearly all grade levels, ABC participants demonstrated higher on-time Math proficiency than their NK counterparts on the 2025 ATLAS. Figure 3 shows the 2014 through 2021 Pre-K cohorts' performance on the 2025 ATLAS Math Test

Figure 3.



Students with ABC participation have higher on-time Math proficiency than those with No-Known Pre-K on the 2025 ATLAS across all grade levels 3 through 9. The 10th-grade on-time proficiency outcomes were equivalent for ABC and No-Known Pre-K.

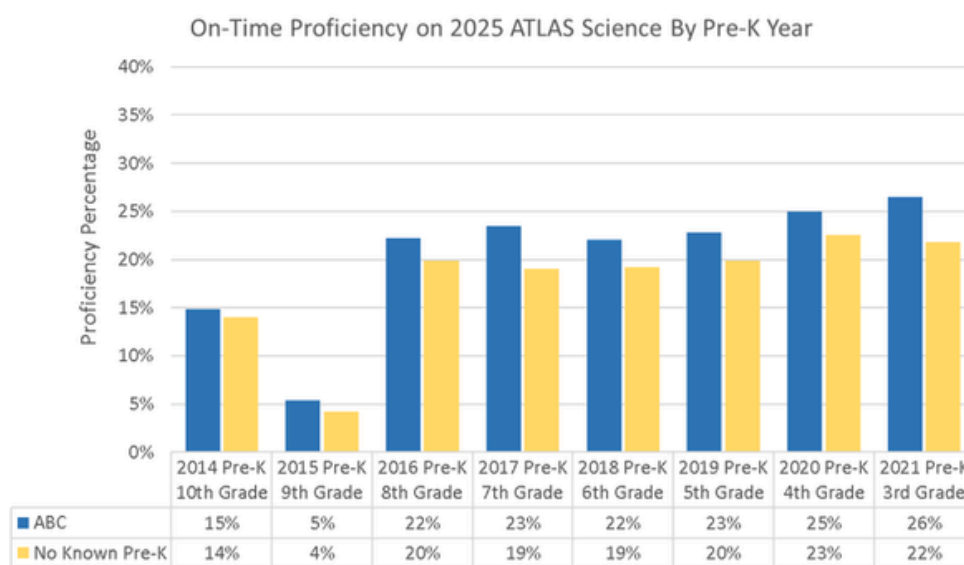
The overall difference is 3.5% higher on-time 2025 ATLAS Math proficiency for ABC, ranging from no difference in 10th grade to 4% higher in 4th, 7th, and 8th grades.

2025 SCIENCE PROFICIENCY

The 2025 ATLAS Science assessment was administered to DESE students in grades 3 through 10 in spring 2025. Each grade level represents a distinct Kindergarten cohort, ranging from students who attended Kindergarten in 2015 (assessed in 10th grade) to those who attended in 2022 (assessed in 3rd grade). For each cohort, on-time Science proficiency is calculated as the percentage of students who scored at Level 3 or Level 4 on the 2025 ATLAS Science assessment.

As with ELA and Math, overall Science proficiency rates in Arkansas are low across income levels; the rates presented here reflect the specific low-income population defined by the core comparison and should be interpreted accordingly. Across all grade levels, ABC participants demonstrated higher on-time Science proficiency than their NK counterparts on the 2025 ATLAS. Figure 4 shows the 2014 through 2021 Pre-K cohorts' performance on the 2025 ATLAS Science Test.

Figure 4.



Students with ABC participation have higher on-time Science proficiency than No-Known Pre-K on the 2025 ATLAS for all grade levels 3 through 10.

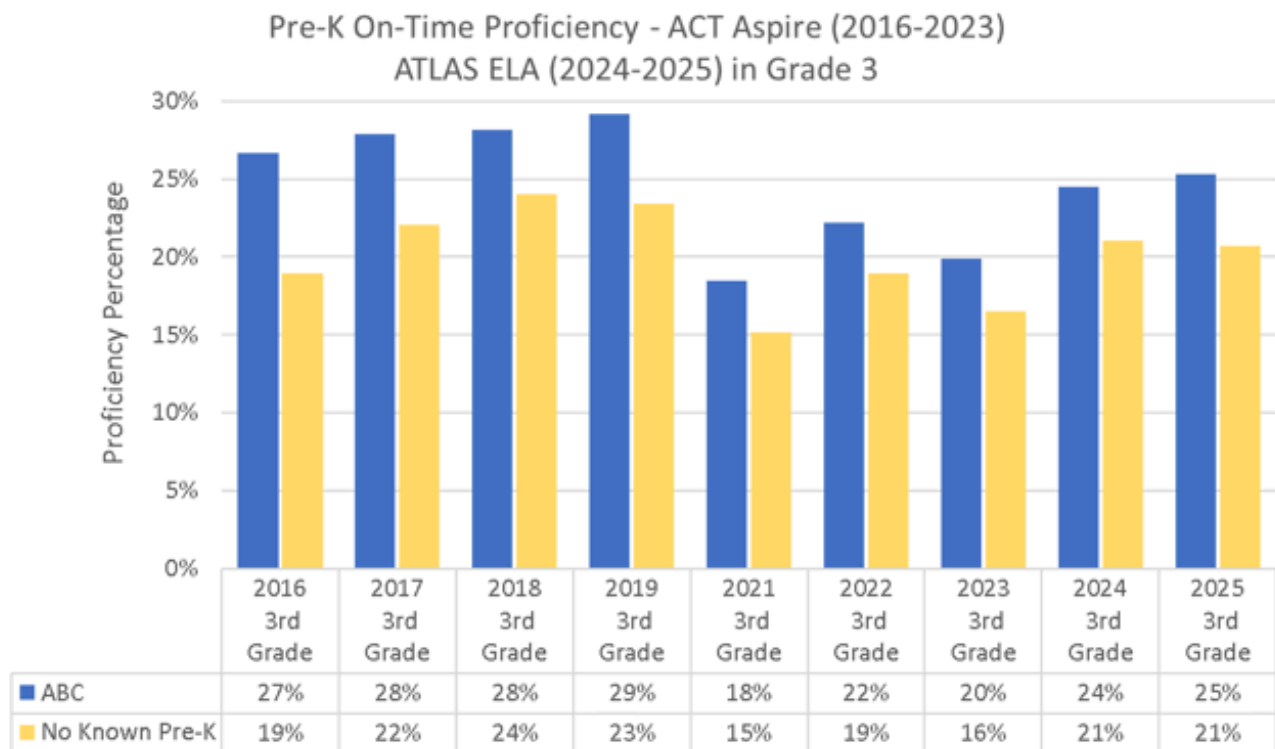
The overall difference is 3% higher on-time 2025 ATLAS Science proficiency for ABC, ranging from 1% higher to 4% higher in all grades. All eight years of Kindergarten students from 2014 to 2021 have higher 2025 ATLAS on-time proficiency in ELA, Math, and Science for low-income ABC participants compared to low-income DESE Kindergarten students with No-Known Pre-K participation.

ON-TIME PROFICIENCY DETAIL – LITERACY (ELA) BY GRADE

Detailed comparisons of ABC and No-Known Pre-K by grade level across multiple years of ACT Aspire assessments (2016-2023) and ATLAS ELA (2024-2025) are presented in this section of the report for grades 3 through 10.

Figure 5 presents on-time ELA proficiency rates for ABC and No-Known Pre-K (NK) students assessed in 3rd grade from 2016 through 2025. In 2025, 25% of ABC students and 21% of NK students met the on-time ELA proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, a 4-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

Figure 5.



Over the full longitudinal period, ABC students have consistently outperformed NK students in 3rd-grade ELA proficiency. Both groups saw a notable decline in 2021, reflecting the disruption of in-person instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic; no assessment was administered in 2020 due to the pandemic. Proficiency rates for both groups gradually recovered in 2022 and 2023.

The transition from ACT Aspire to ATLAS in 2024 established a new baseline for proficiency measurement; because the two assessments measure different constructs and use different proficiency cut scores, scores from 2024 forward are not directly comparable to prior years (Linn, 2000). The 2025 results indicate a modest recovery from 2024 for ABC students, consistent with patterns expected during the early implementation period of a new assessment.

Figure 6 presents on-time ELA proficiency rates for ABC and NK students assessed in 4th grade from 2016 through 2025. In 2025, 25% of ABC students and 21% of NK students met the on-time ELA proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, a 4-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

The longitudinal pattern in 4th grade mirrors that in 3rd grade, with ABC students maintaining a consistent advantage over NK students across all years. Both groups declined sharply in 2021, following the COVID-19 pandemic and the suspension of statewide assessments in 2020. Recovery in 2022 was modest for both groups. As at other grade levels, the introduction of ATLAS in 2024 established a new proficiency baseline that is not directly comparable to ACT Aspire results from prior years (Linn, 2000). The 2025 data show stability relative to 2024, with ABC students maintaining their proficiency advantage.

Figure 6.

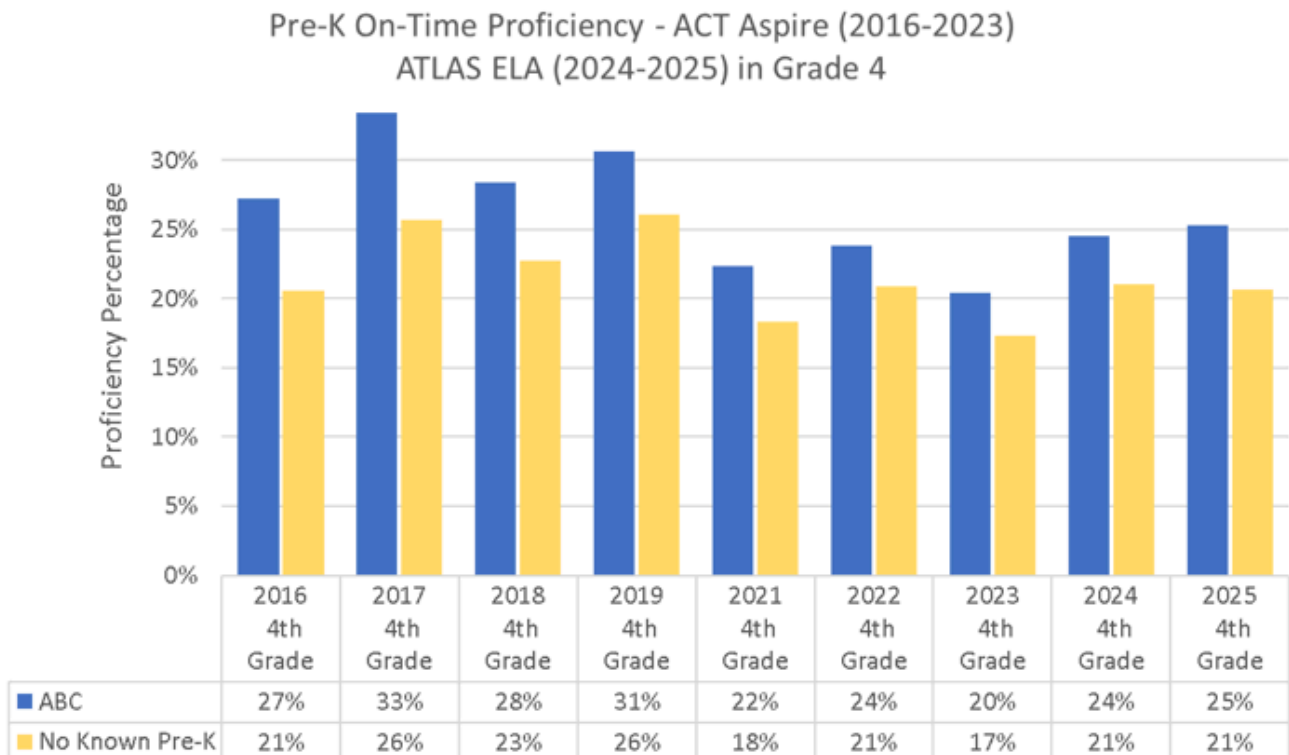


Figure 7 presents on-time ELA proficiency rates for ABC and NK students assessed in 5th grade from 2016 through 2025. In 2025, 23% of ABC students and 20% of NK students met the on-time ELA proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, a 3-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

The longitudinal record for 5th grade shows a consistent ABC advantage across all years. Both groups declined in 2021 following COVID-19 disruption, with partial recovery in 2022. Proficiency rates for both groups peaked in the 2017 assessment year, at 39% for ABC and 30% for NK.

Figure 7.

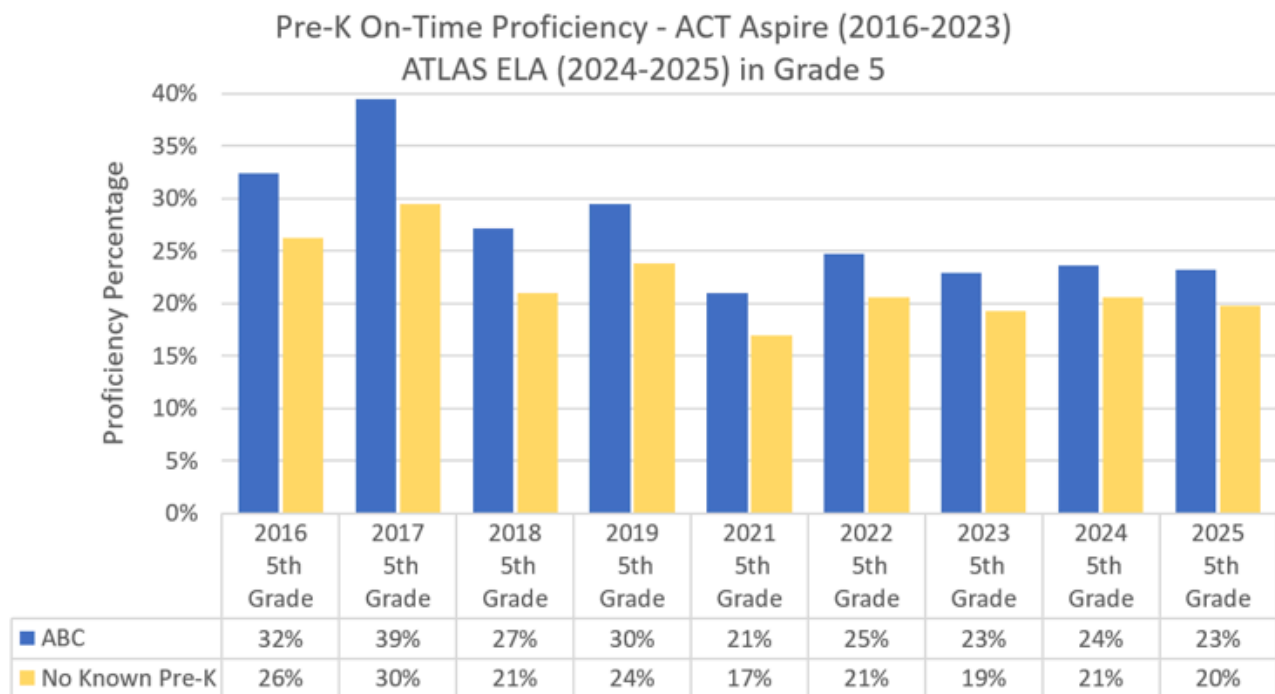


Figure 8 presents on-time ELA proficiency for ABC and NK students assessed in 6th grade from 2016 through 2025. In 2025, 22% of ABC students and 19% of NK students met the on-time ELA proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, a 3-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

ABC students maintained a consistent proficiency advantage over NK students throughout the longitudinal period. Both groups declined in 2021 following COVID-19 disruption and the suspension of statewide assessments in 2020, with a modest recovery in 2022. Notably, 6th-grade proficiency rates for both groups are somewhat lower in the ATLAS period (2024–2025) than in the later ACT Aspire years, consistent with the establishment of a new proficiency baseline; scores across these two assessment systems are not directly comparable (Linn, 2000).

Figure 8.

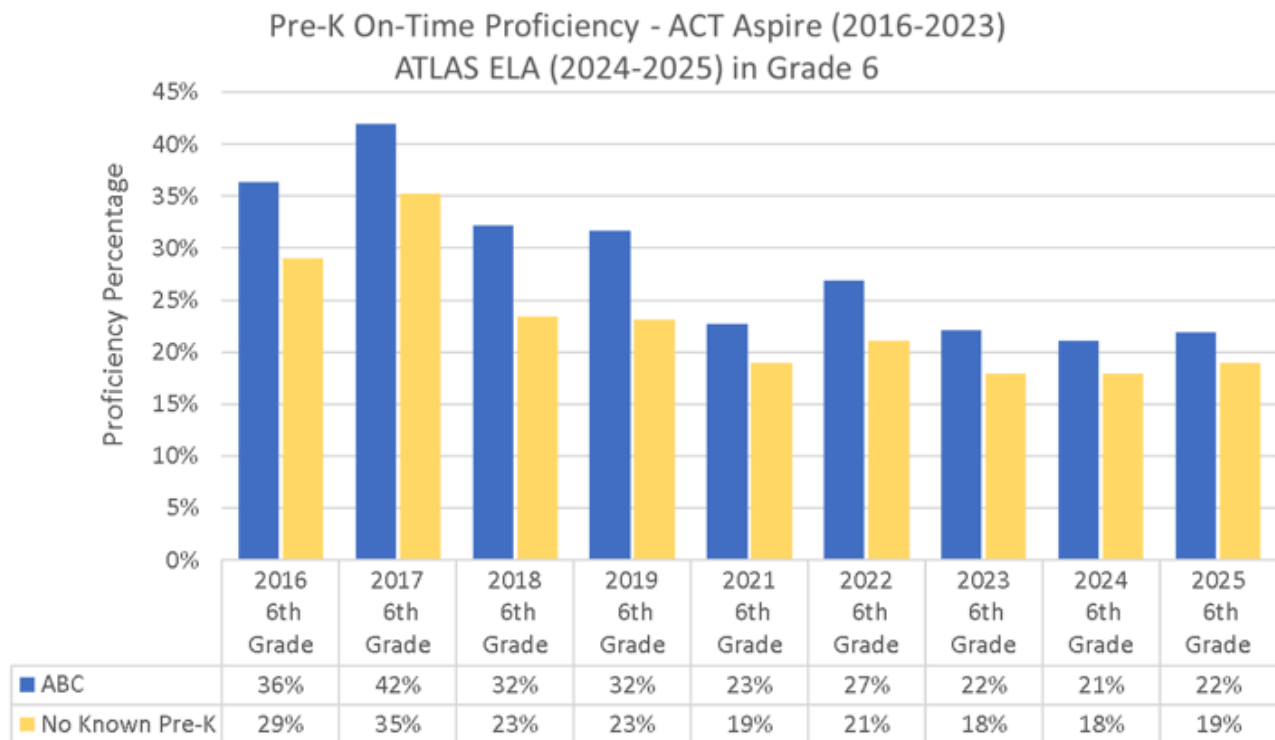


Figure 9 presents on-time ELA proficiency rates for ABC and NK students assessed in 7th grade from 2017 through 2025. In 2025, 19% of ABC students and 16% of NK students met the on-time ELA proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, a 3-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

The 7th-grade longitudinal record shows a consistent ABC advantage across all years. Both groups reached their highest proficiency rates in 2017, at 35% for ABC and 28% for NK, with a general downward trend through the COVID-impacted years. No assessment was administered in 2020. Recovery from the 2021 pandemic-related decline was gradual, and the introduction of ATLAS in 2024 established a new proficiency baseline that is not directly comparable to prior ACT Aspire results (Linn, 2000). ABC and NK proficiency rates were stable between 2024 and 2025.

Figure 9.

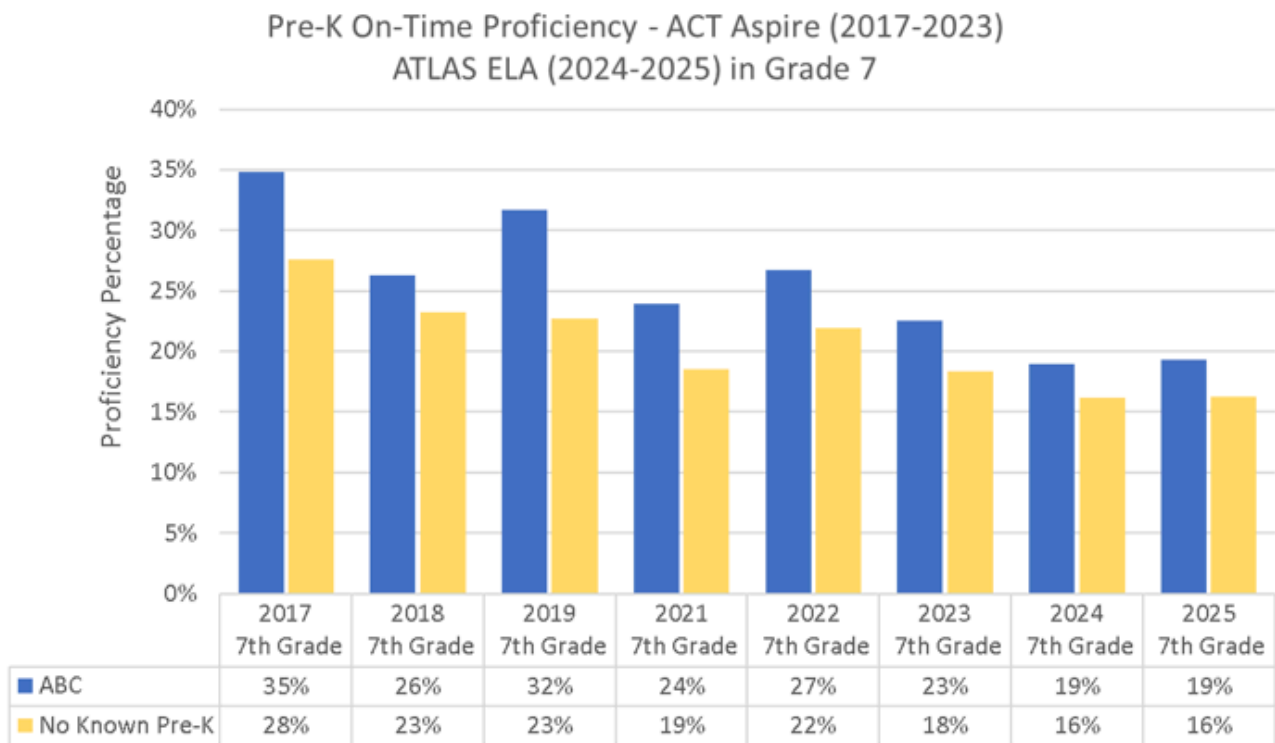


Figure 10 presents on-time ELA proficiency rates for ABC and NK students assessed in 8th grade from 2018 to 2025. In 2025, 19% of ABC students and 16% of NK students met the on-time ELA proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, a 3-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

Across all years of the longitudinal study, ABC students consistently outperformed NK students in 8th-grade ELA proficiency. Both groups peaked in 2019, at 31% for ABC and 26% for NK, before declining in 2021 due to COVID-19 disruptions. No assessment was administered in 2020. Proficiency for both groups recovered modestly in 2022 before declining again in 2023. The introduction of ATLAS in 2024 established a new proficiency baseline; scores from 2024 forward are not directly comparable to prior ACT Aspire results (Linn, 2000). Both groups held steady from 2024 to 2025.

Figure 10.

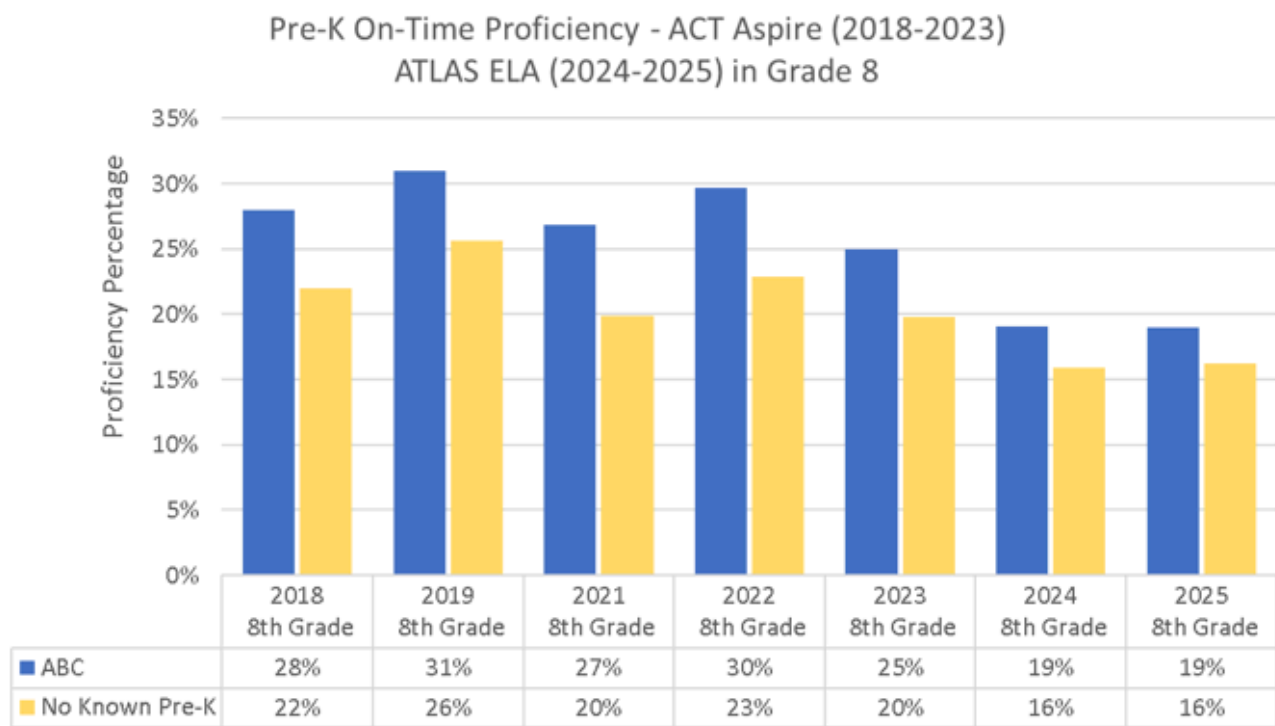


Figure 11 presents on-time ELA proficiency for ABC and NK students assessed in 9th grade from 2019 through 2025. In 2025, 18% of ABC students and 15% of NK students met the on-time ELA proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, a 3-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

The 9th-grade longitudinal record spans fewer years than in earlier grades, reflecting the later availability of high school cohort data. ABC students maintained a consistent advantage over NK students across all years. Notably, ABC proficiency held steady at 24% in 2019, 2021, 2022, and 2023, despite COVID-19 disruption, suggesting relative resilience in this cohort. No assessment was administered in 2020. The introduction of ATLAS in 2024 established a new proficiency baseline not directly comparable to prior ACT Aspire results (Linn, 2000), with both groups showing a slight recovery in 2025 relative to 2024.

Figure 11.

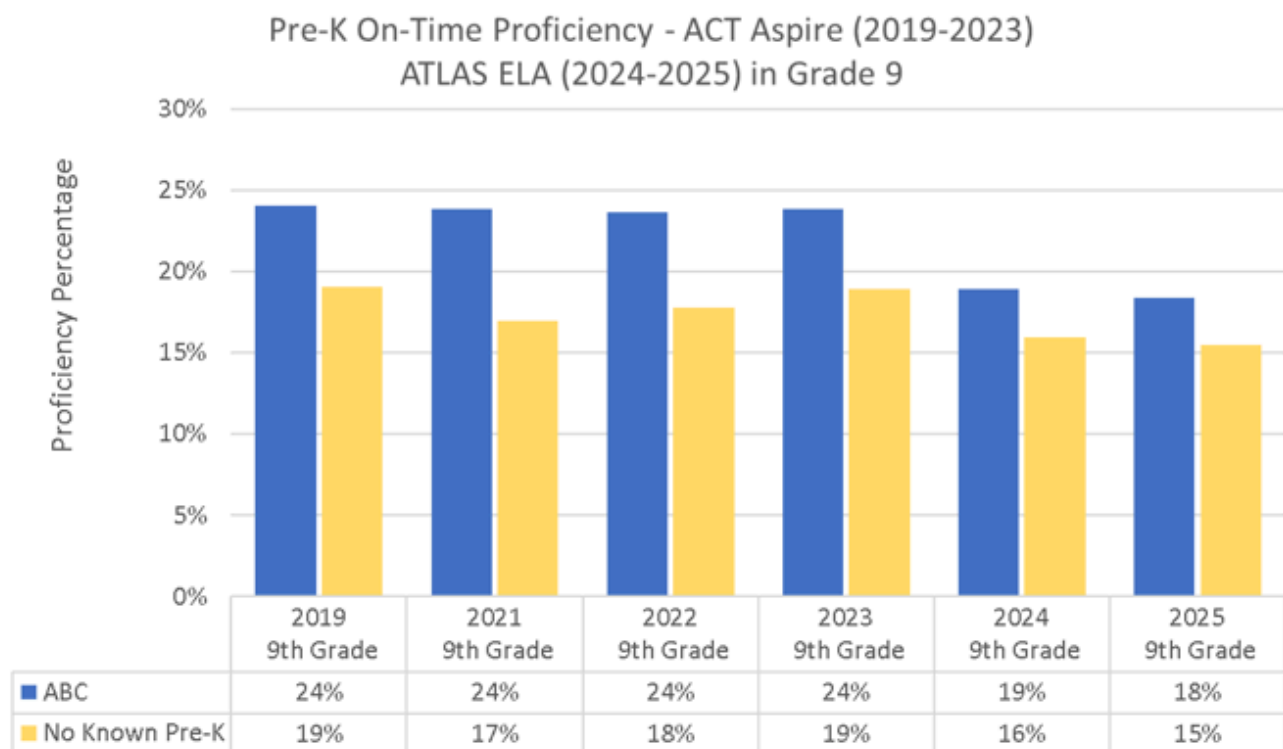
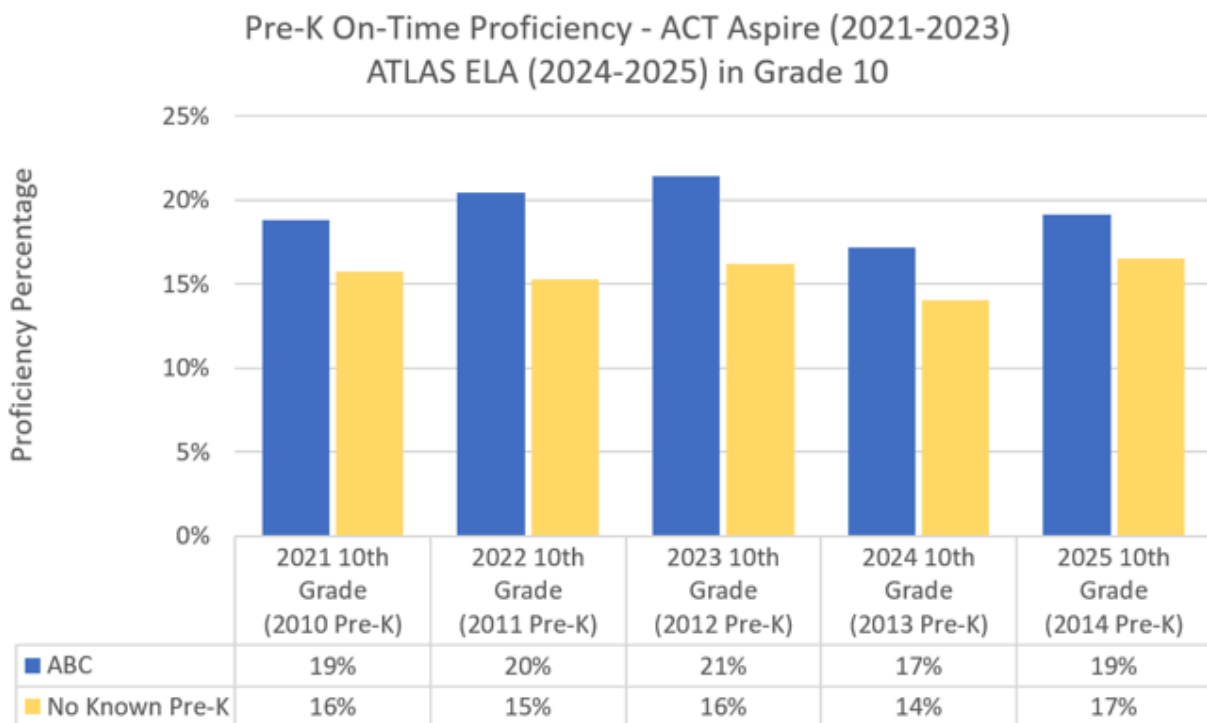


Figure 12 shows on-time ELA proficiency for ABC and NK students assessed in 10th grade from 2021 through 2025. In 2025, 19% of ABC students and 17% of NK students met the on-time ELA proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, a 2-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

The 10th-grade record represents the earliest ABC Pre-K cohorts in the study — students who attended Pre-K in 2014 and Kindergarten in 2015. Earlier ACT Aspire results represent ABC students attending Pre-K as early as 2010. ABC students maintained a proficiency advantage over NK students across all available years. The introduction of ATLAS in 2024 established a new proficiency baseline that is not directly comparable to prior ACT Aspire results (Linn, 2000). Both groups showed modest recovery in 2025 relative to 2024, and ABC students maintained their proficiency advantage over NK students into 10th grade.

Figure 12.



Across all eight grade levels assessed on the 2025 ATLAS, ABC participants demonstrated higher on-time ELA proficiency than their NK counterparts. The ABC advantage ranged from 2 percentage points in 10th grade to 4 percentage points in 3rd and 4th grade, with an overall difference of 3% higher on-time ELA proficiency for ABC participants.

This advantage was sustained across the full span of the longitudinal record, including years affected by COVID-19 disruption and spanning the transition from ACT Aspire to ATLAS. The presence of an ABC proficiency advantage at every grade level from 3rd through 10th grade reflects the persistence of ABC program benefits in ELA outcomes across all cohorts represented in this study.



ON-TIME PROFICIENCY DETAIL – MATH BY GRADE

Detailed comparisons of ABC and No-Known Pre-K by grade level across multiple years of ACT Aspire Math assessments (2016-2023) and ATLAS Math (2024-2025) are presented in this section of the report for grades 3 through 10.

Figure 13 presents on-time Math proficiency rates for ABC and No-Known Pre-K (NK) students assessed in 3rd grade from 2016 through 2025. In 2025, 28% of ABC students and 22% of NK students met the on-time Math proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, a 6-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

Over the full longitudinal period, ABC students have consistently outperformed NK students in 3rd-grade Math proficiency. Both groups saw a notable decline in 2021, reflecting the disruption of in-person instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic; no assessment was administered in 2020 due to the pandemic. Proficiency rates for both groups gradually recovered in 2022 and 2023. The transition from ACT Aspire to ATLAS in 2024 established a new baseline for proficiency measurement; because the two assessments measure different constructs and use different proficiency cut scores, scores from 2024 forward are not directly comparable to prior years (Linn, 2000). The 2025 results indicate a modest recovery from 2024 for ABC students, consistent with patterns expected during the early implementation period of a new assessment.

Figure 13.

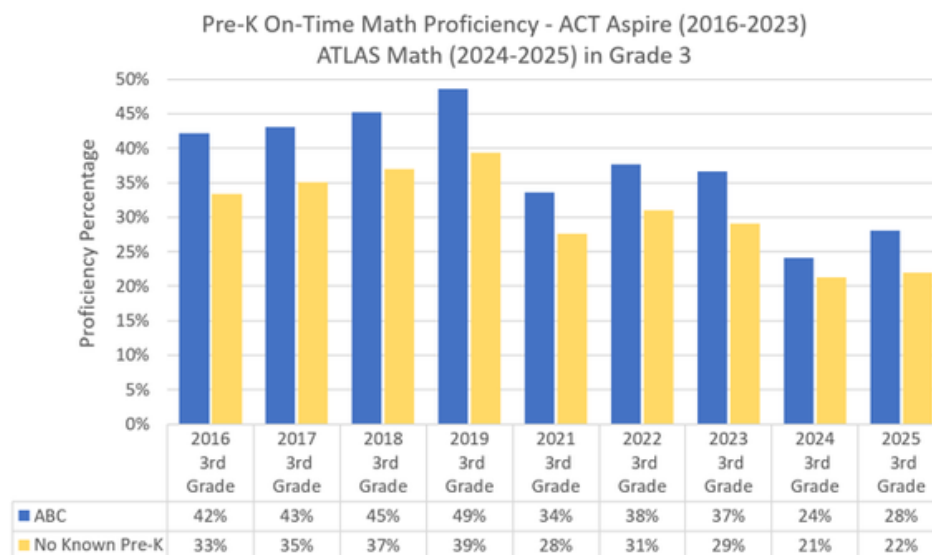


Figure 14 presents on-time Math proficiency rates for ABC and NK students assessed in 4th grade from 2016 through 2025. In 2025, 28% of ABC students and 24% of NK students met the on-time Math proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, a 4-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

The longitudinal pattern in 4th grade mirrors that in 3rd grade, with ABC students maintaining a consistent advantage over NK students across all years. Both groups declined sharply in 2021, following the COVID-19 pandemic and the suspension of statewide assessments in 2020. Proficiency rates in 2022 were consistent with those in 2021 for both groups. As at other grade levels, the introduction of ATLAS in 2024 established a new proficiency baseline that is not directly comparable to ACT Aspire results from prior years (Linn, 2000). The 2025 data show modest improvement relative to 2024, with ABC students sustaining their 4 percentage-point proficiency advantage.

Figure 14.

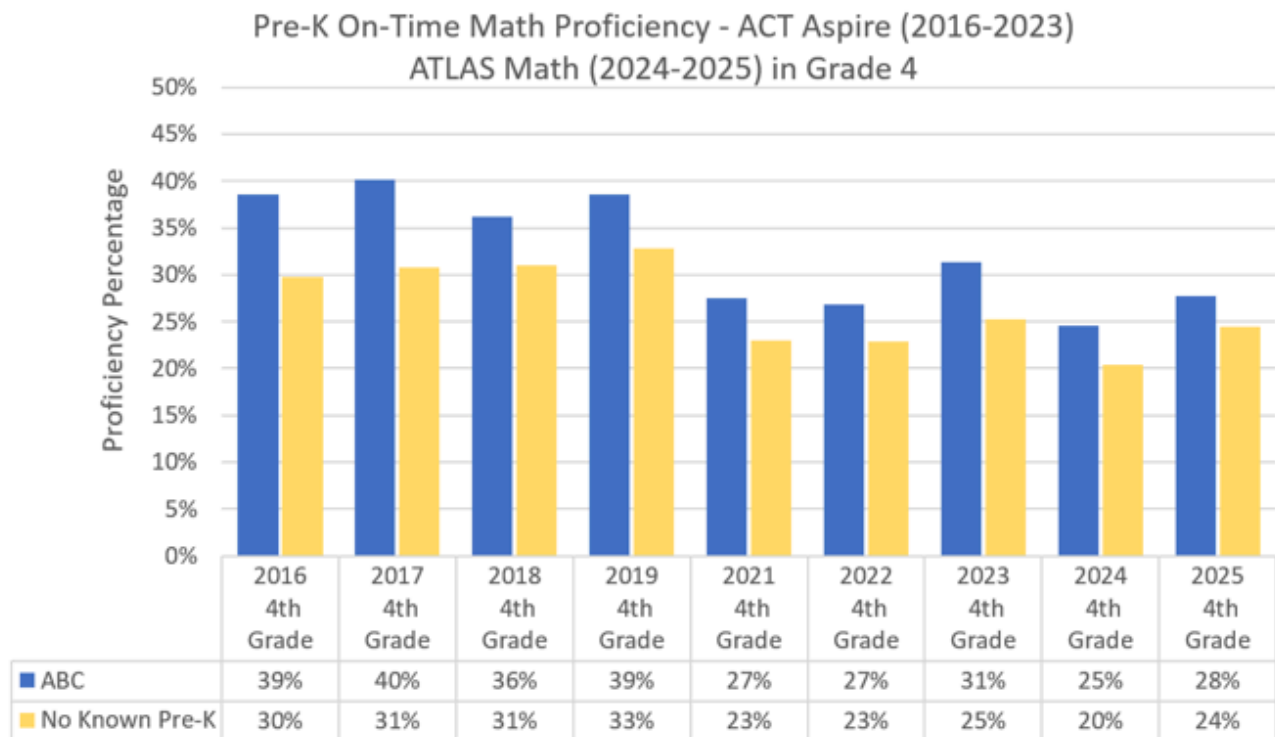


Figure 15 presents on-time Math proficiency rates for ABC and NK students assessed in 5th grade from 2016 through 2025. In 2025, 24% of ABC students and 19% of NK students met the on-time Math proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, representing a 5-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

The longitudinal record for 5th grade shows a consistent ABC advantage across all years. Both groups declined in 2021 following COVID-19 disruption, with partial recovery in 2022. Proficiency rates for both groups peaked in the 2017 assessment year, at 37% for ABC and 28% for NK.

Figure 15.

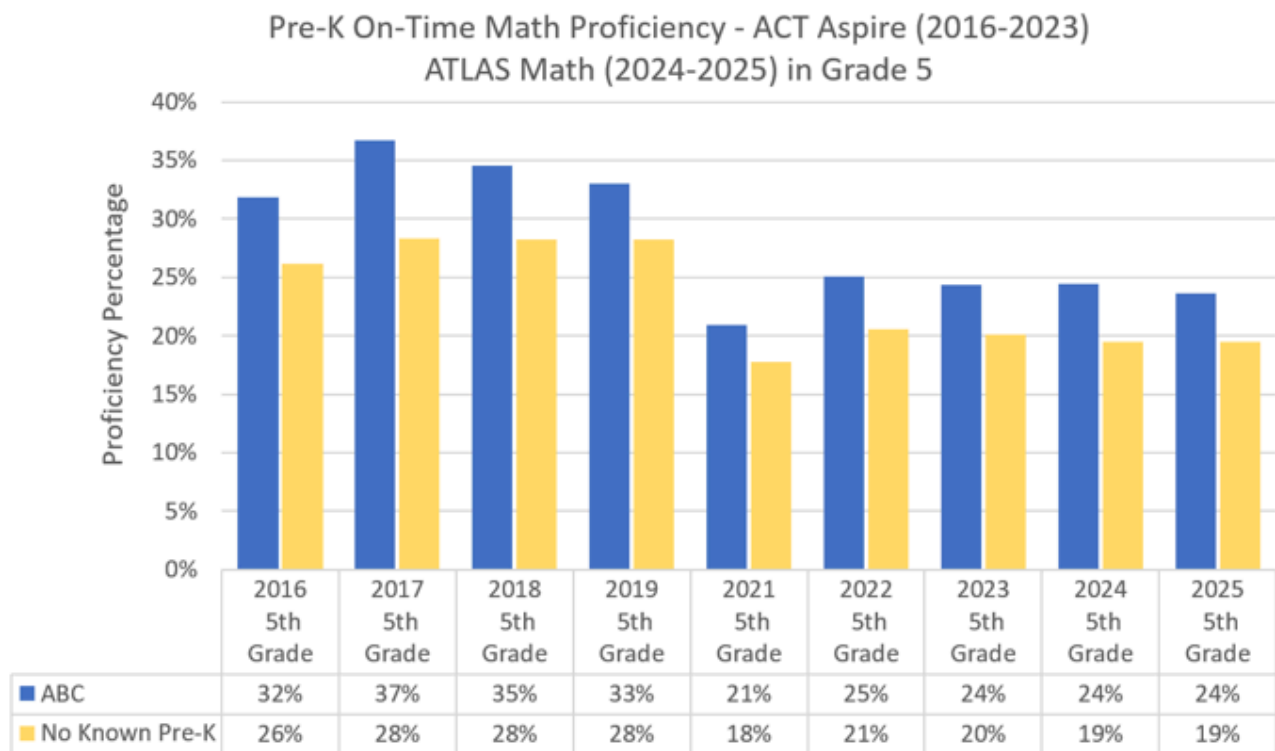


Figure 16 presents on-time Math proficiency for ABC and NK students assessed in 6th grade from 2016 through 2025. In 2025, 26% of ABC students and 20% of NK students met the on-time Math proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, representing a 6-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

ABC students maintained a consistent proficiency advantage over NK students throughout the longitudinal period. Both groups declined in 2021 following COVID-19 disruption and the suspension of statewide assessments in 2020, with a modest recovery in 2022. Notably, 6th-grade proficiency rates for both groups are slightly lower in the ATLAS period (2024–2025) than in the later ACT Aspire years, consistent with the establishment of a new proficiency baseline. Scores across these two assessment systems are not directly comparable (Linn, 2000).

Figure 16.

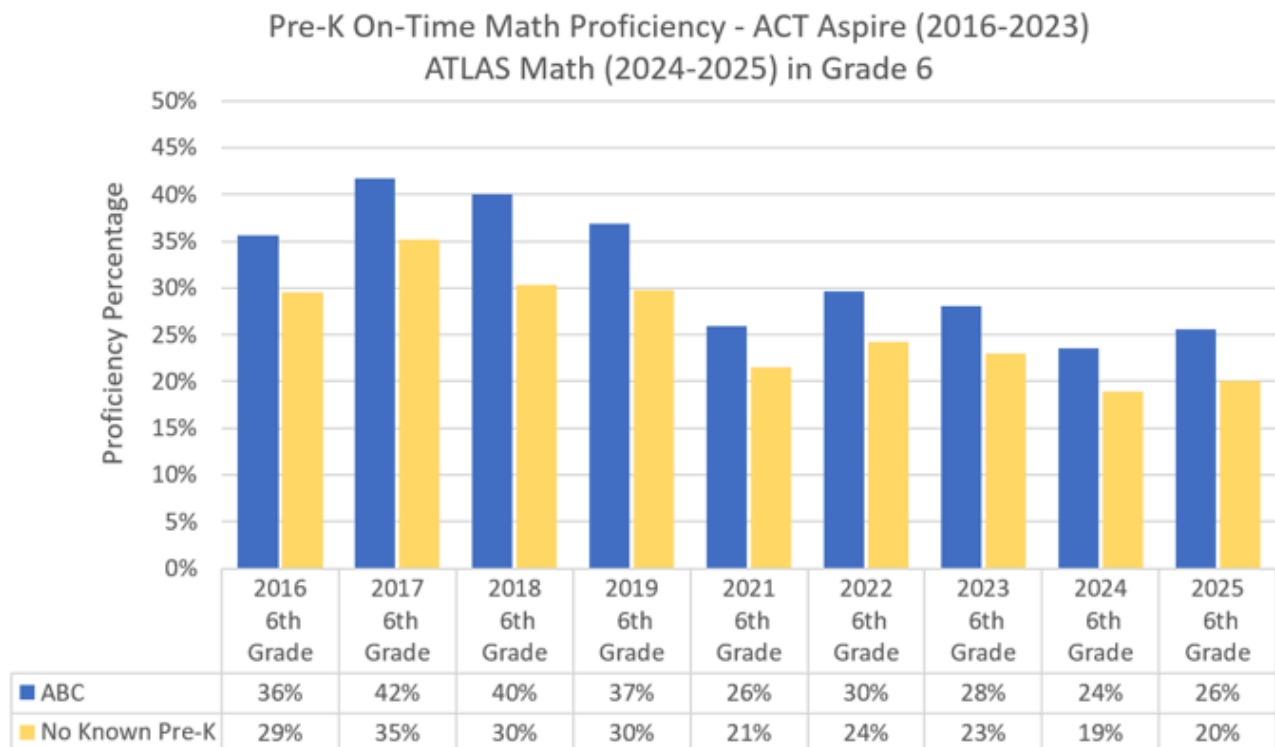


Figure 17 presents on-time Math proficiency rates for ABC and NK students assessed in 7th grade from 2017 through 2025. In 2025, 24% of ABC students and 20% of NK students met the on-time Math proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, reflecting a 4-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

The 7th-grade longitudinal record shows a consistent ABC advantage across all years. Both groups reached their highest proficiency rates in 2019, at 32% for ABC and 24% for NK, with a general downward trend during the COVID-impacted years. No assessment was administered in 2020. Recovery from the 2021 pandemic-related decline was gradual, and the introduction of ATLAS in 2024 established a new proficiency baseline that is not directly comparable to prior ACT Aspire results (Linn, 2000). ABC and NK proficiency rates remained stable between 2024 and 2025.

Figure 17.

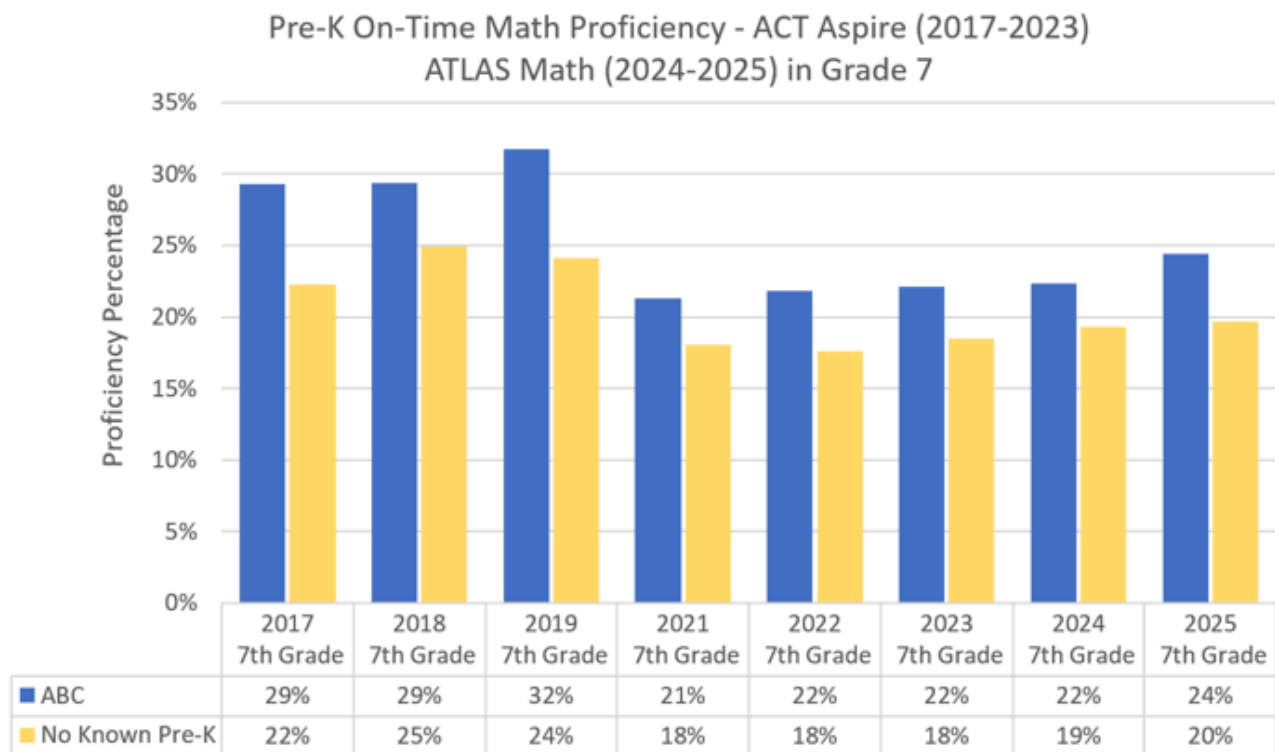


Figure 18 presents on-time Math proficiency rates for ABC and NK students assessed in 8th grade from 2018 to 2025. In 2025, 24% of ABC students and 21% of NK students met the on-time Math proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, representing a 3-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

Across all years of longitudinal study, ABC students consistently outperformed NK students in 8th-grade Math proficiency. Both groups peaked in 2019 at 29% for ABC and 25% for NK, then declined in 2021 following COVID-19 disruptions. No assessment was administered in 2020. Proficiency for both groups recovered modestly in 2022, then declined slightly in 2023. The introduction of ATLAS in 2024 established a new proficiency baseline; scores from 2024 forward are not directly comparable to prior ACT Aspire results (Linn, 2000). Both groups showed a modest increase from 2024 to 2025.

Figure 18.

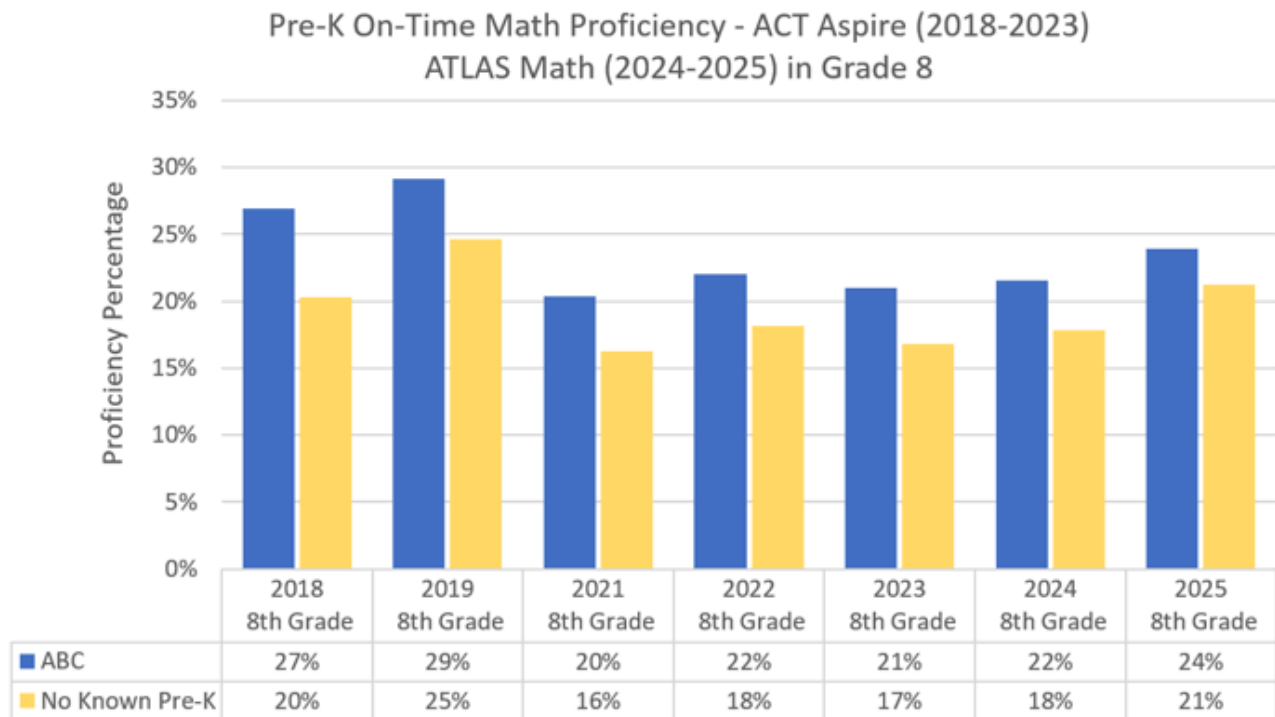


Figure 19 presents on-time Math proficiency for ABC and NK students assessed in 9th grade from 2019 through 2025. In 2025, 15% of ABC students and 13% of NK students met the on-time Math proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, a 2-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

The 9th-grade longitudinal record covers fewer years than in earlier grades, reflecting the later availability of high school cohort data. ABC students maintained a modest but consistent advantage over NK students across all years. No assessment was administered in 2020. The introduction of ATLAS in 2024 established a new proficiency baseline that is not directly comparable to prior ACT Aspire results (Linn, 2000). Both groups showed a slight recovery in 2025 relative to 2024.

Figure 19.

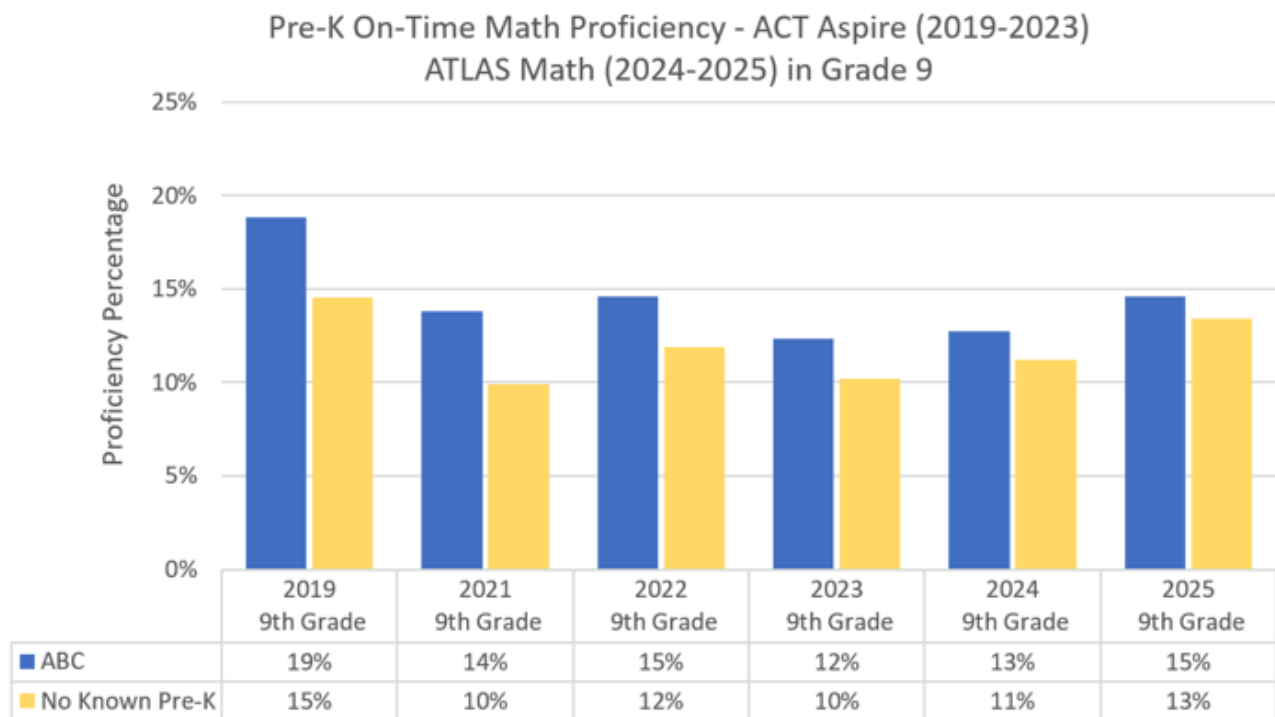
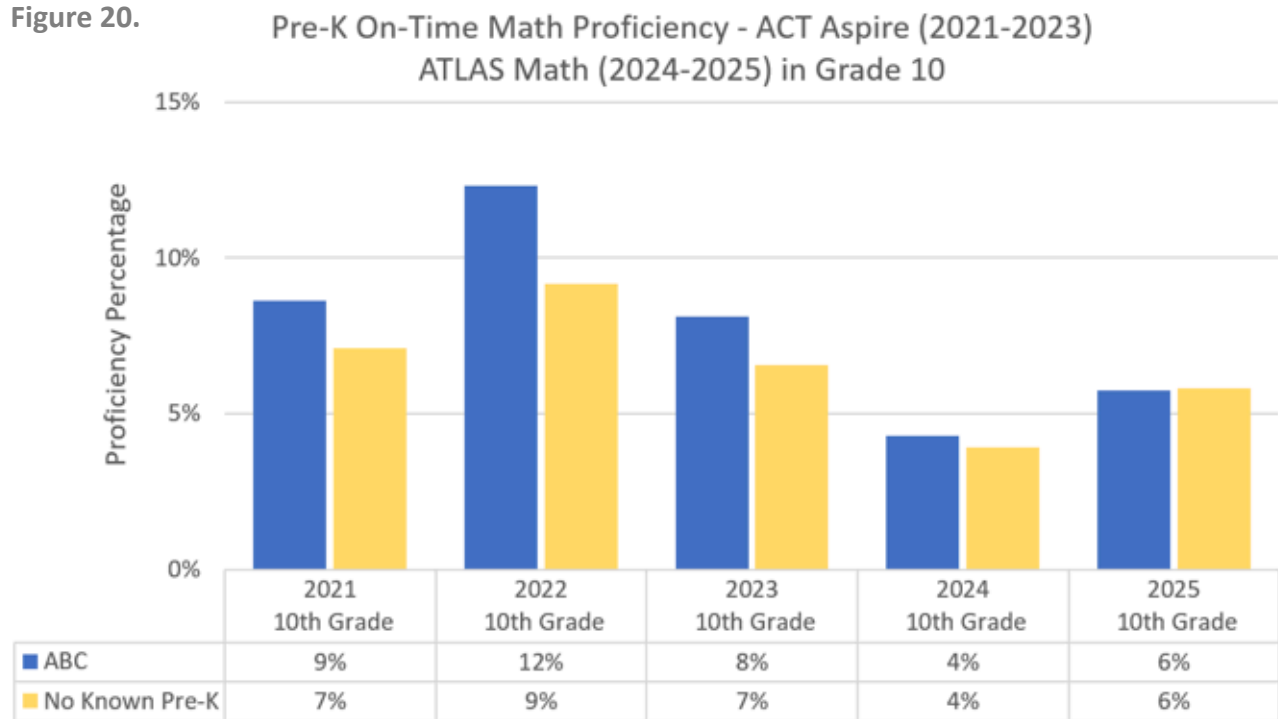


Figure 20 shows on-time Math proficiency for ABC and NK students assessed in 10th grade from 2021 through 2025. In 2025, 6% of ABC students and 6% of NK students met the on-time Math proficiency threshold on the ATLAS. The proficiency rates were also the same in 2024, at 4%.

The 10th-grade record captures the earliest ABC Pre-K cohorts in the study — students who attended Pre-K in 2014 and Kindergarten in 2015. Earlier ACT Aspire results cover ABC students who attended Pre-K as early as 2010. Across all available years of ACT Aspire Math results, ABC students maintained a proficiency advantage over NK students. The introduction of ATLAS in 2024 established a new proficiency baseline that is not directly comparable to prior ACT Aspire results (Linn, 2000).

Figure 20.



Across grades 3 through 9, ABC participants demonstrated higher on-time Math proficiency than their NK counterparts on the 2025 ATLAS. The ABC advantage in Math ranged from 2 percentage points in 9th grade to 6 percentage points in 3rd and 6th grade, with an overall difference of 3.5% higher on-time Math proficiency for ABC participants. In 10th grade, on-time Math proficiency rates were equivalent for ABC and NK students, at 6% each. The ABC Math proficiency advantage was present throughout the longitudinal record for grades 3 through 9, spanning years affected by COVID-19 disruption and the transition from ACT Aspire to ATLAS.

ON-TIME PROFICIENCY DETAIL – SCIENCE BY GRADE

Detailed comparisons of ABC and No-Known Pre-K by grade level across multiple years of ACT Aspire Science assessments (2016-2023) and ATLAS Science (2024-2025) are presented in this section of the report for grades 3 through 10.

Figure 21 presents on-time Science proficiency rates for ABC and No-Known Pre-K (NK) students assessed in 3rd grade from 2016 through 2025. In 2025, 26% of ABC students and 22% of NK students met the on-time Science proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, a 4-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

Over the full longitudinal period, ABC students have consistently outperformed NK students in 3rd-grade Science proficiency. Both groups saw a notable decline in 2021, reflecting the disruption of in-person instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic; no assessment was administered in 2020 due to the pandemic. Proficiency rates for both groups remained consistent with 2021 levels in 2022 and 2023. The transition from ACT Aspire to ATLAS in 2024 established a new baseline for proficiency measurement; because the two assessments measure different constructs and use different proficiency cut scores, scores from 2024 forward are not directly comparable to prior years (Linn, 2000). The 2025 results indicate a modest improvement over 2024 for ABC students, consistent with patterns expected during the early implementation period of a new assessment.

Figure 21.

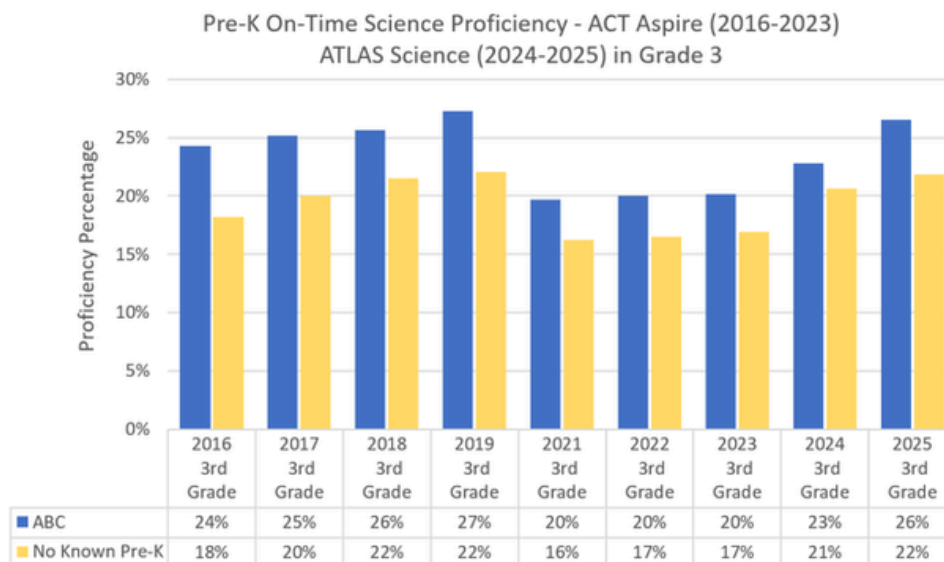


Figure 22 presents on-time Science proficiency rates for ABC and NK students assessed in 4th grade from 2016 through 2025. In 2025, 25% of ABC students and 23% of NK students met the on-time Science proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, a 2-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

The longitudinal pattern in 4th grade mirrors that in 3rd grade, with ABC students consistently outperforming NK students across all years. Both groups declined sharply in 2021, following the COVID-19 pandemic and the suspension of statewide assessments in 2020. Recovery in 2022 was modest for both groups. As at other grade levels, the introduction of ATLAS in 2024 established a new proficiency baseline that is not directly comparable to ACT Aspire results from prior years (Linn, 2000). The 2025 data show stability relative to 2024, with ABC students maintaining their proficiency advantage.

Figure 22.

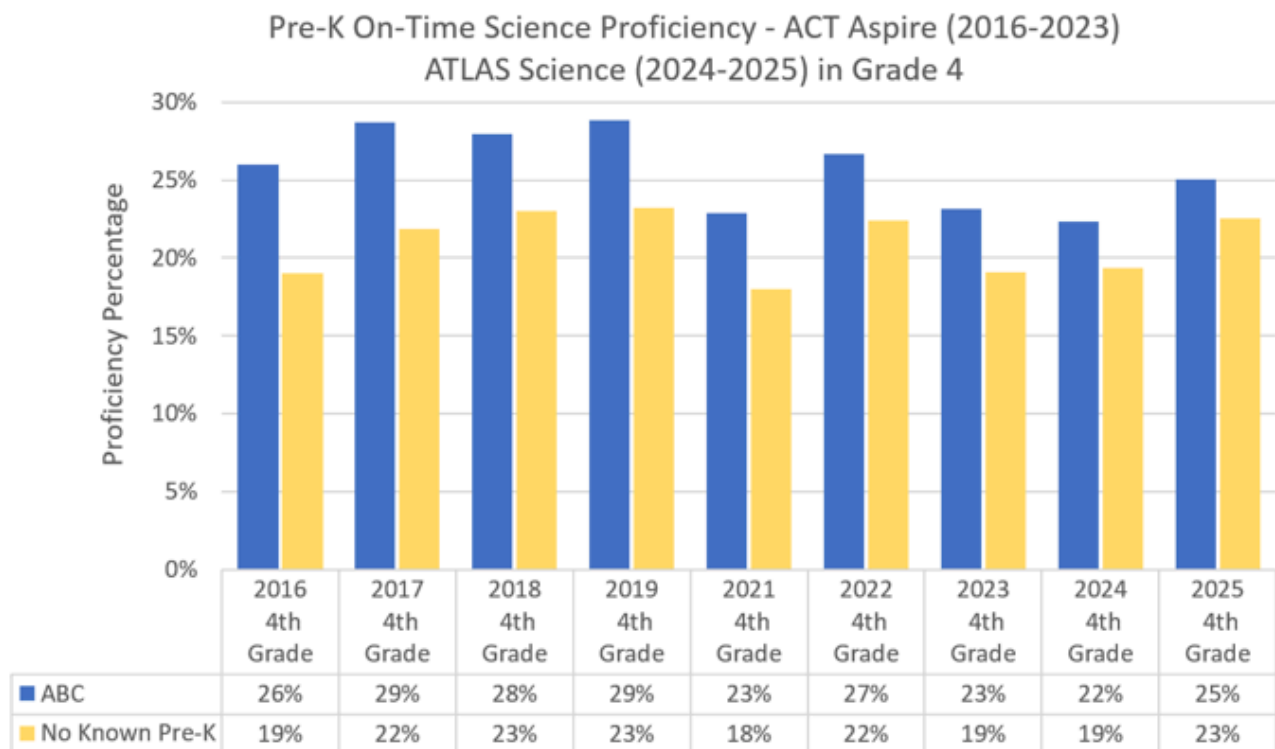


Figure 23 presents on-time Science proficiency rates for ABC and NK students assessed in 5th grade from 2016 through 2025. In 2025, 23% of ABC students and 20% of NK students met the on-time Science proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, a 3-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

The longitudinal record for 5th grade shows a consistent ABC advantage across all years. Both groups declined in 2021 following COVID-19 disruption, with partial recovery in 2022. Proficiency rates for both groups peaked in 2017 and 2018, at 27% for ABC and 21% for NK.

Figure 23.

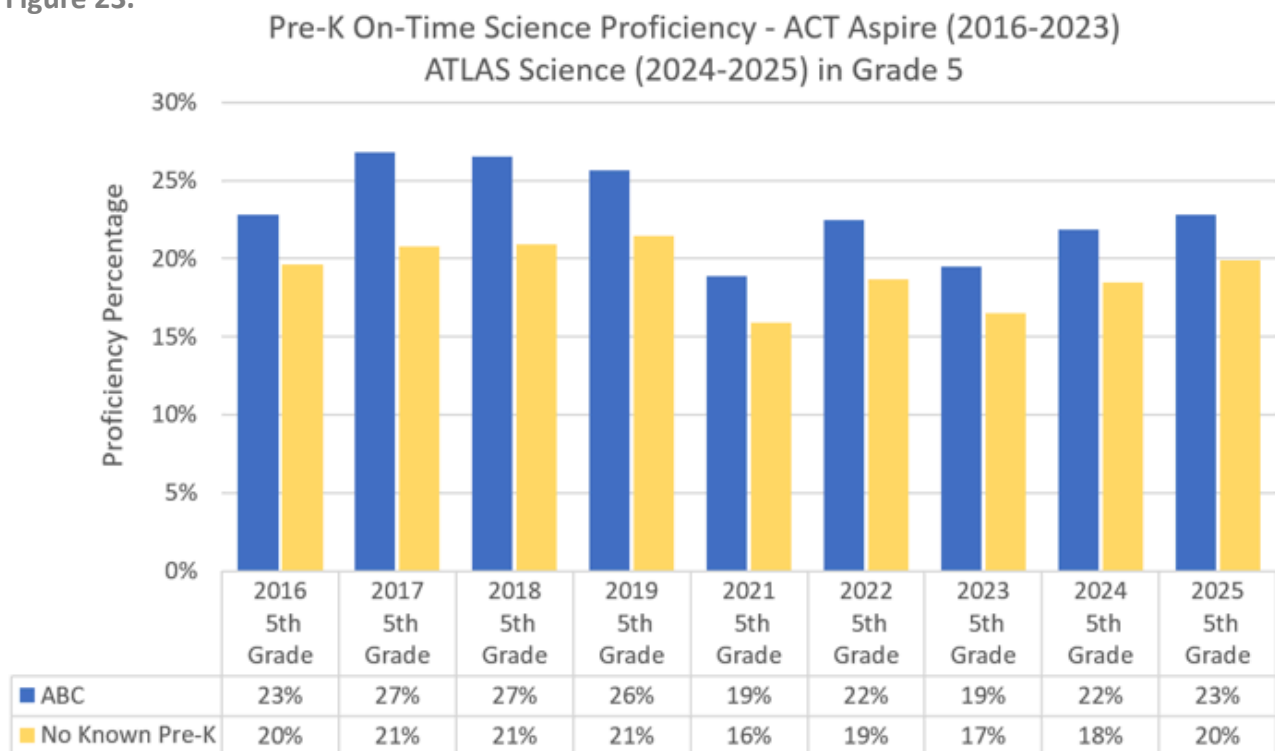


Figure 24 presents on-time Science proficiency for ABC and NK students assessed in 6th grade from 2016 through 2025. In 2025, 22% of ABC students and 19% of NK students met the on-time Science proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, a 3-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

ABC students maintained a consistent proficiency advantage over NK students throughout the longitudinal period. Both groups declined in 2021 following COVID-19 disruption and the suspension of statewide assessments in 2020, with a modest recovery in 2022. Notably, 6th-grade proficiency rates for both groups are slightly lower in the ATLAS period (2024–2025) than in the later ACT Aspire years, consistent with the establishment of a new proficiency baseline. Scores across these two assessment systems are not directly comparable (Linn, 2000).

Figure 24.

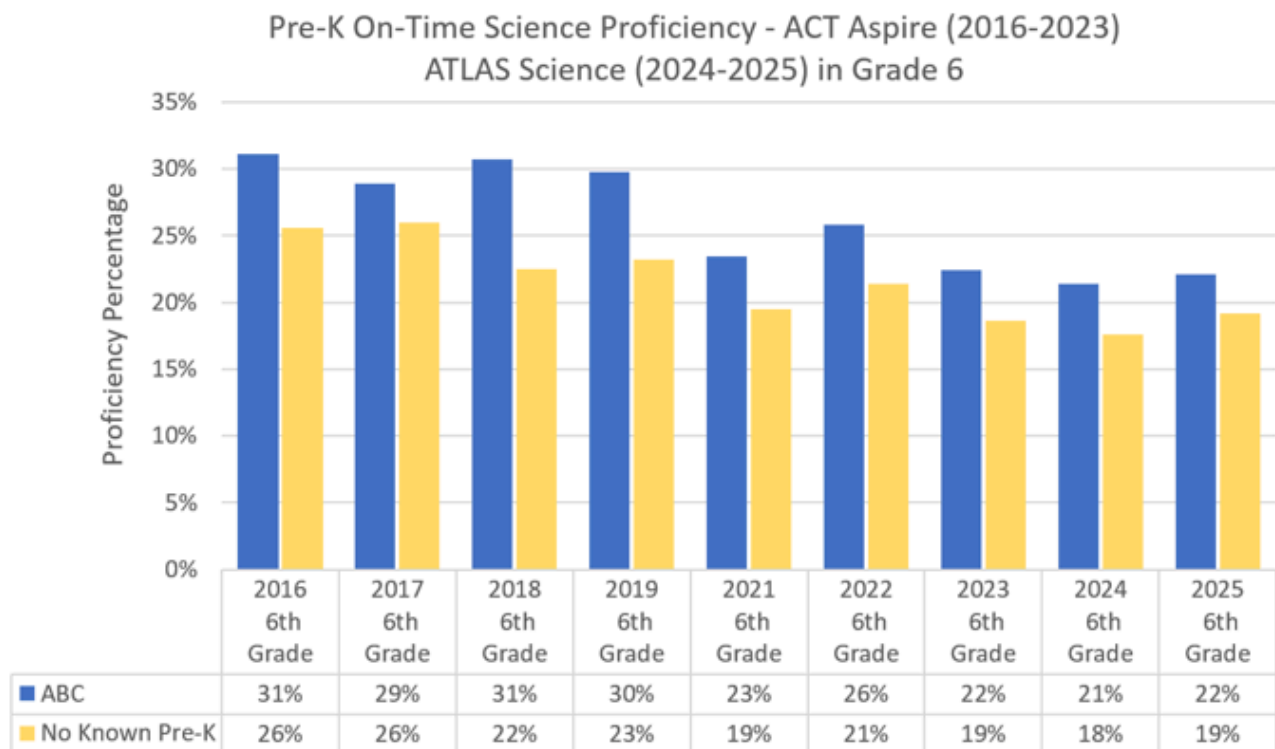


Figure 25 presents on-time Science proficiency rates for ABC and NK students assessed in 7th grade from 2017 through 2025. In 2025, 23% of ABC students and 19% of NK students met the on-time Science proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, representing a 4-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

The 7th-grade longitudinal record shows a consistent ABC advantage across all years. Both groups reached their highest proficiency rates in 2019, at 28% for ABC and 21% for NK, with a general downward trend during the COVID-impacted years. No assessment was administered in 2020. Recovery from the 2021 pandemic-related decline was gradual, and the introduction of ATLAS in 2024 established a new proficiency baseline that is not directly comparable to prior ACT Aspire results (Linn, 2000). ABC and NK proficiency rates remained stable between 2024 and 2025.

Figure 25.

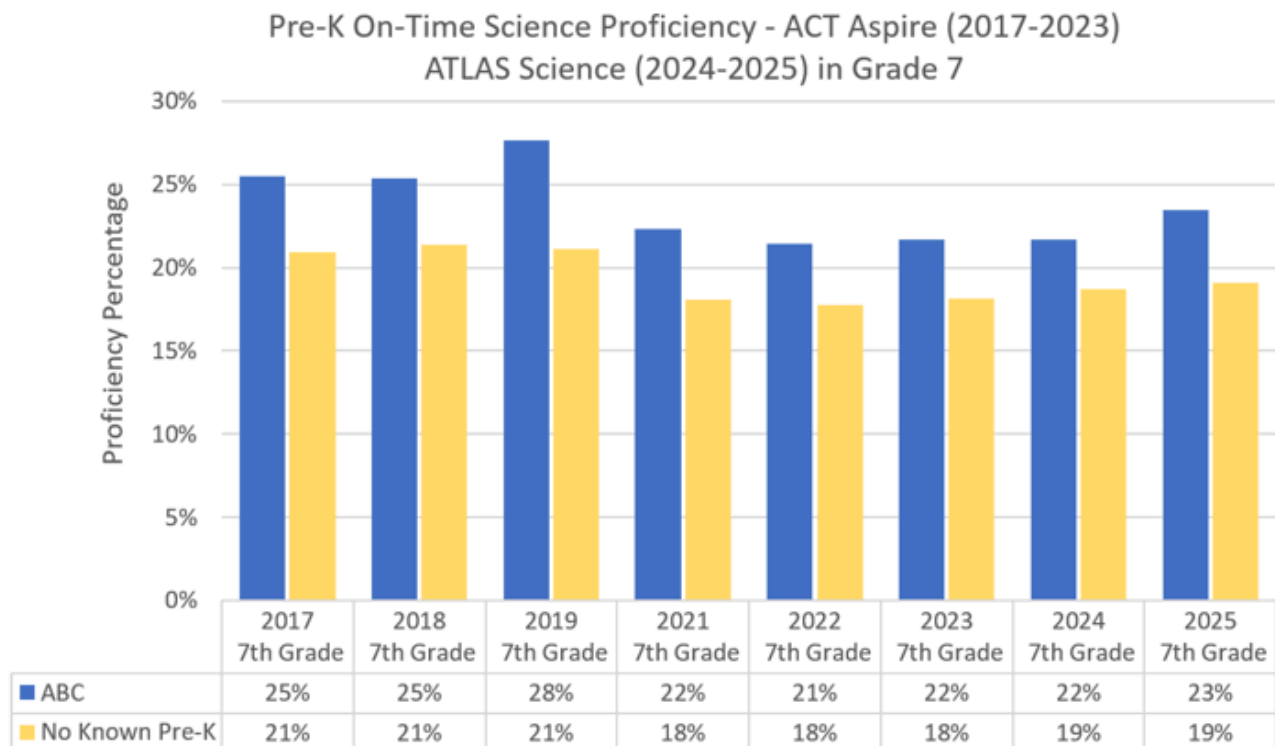


Figure 26 presents on-time Science proficiency rates for ABC and NK students assessed in 8th grade from 2018 to 2025. In 2025, 22% of ABC students and 20% of NK students met the on-time Science proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, a 2-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

Across all years of the longitudinal study, ABC students consistently outperformed NK students in 8th-grade Science proficiency. Both groups peaked in 2019 at 25% for ABC and 21% for NK, then declined in 2021 after COVID-19 disruptions. No assessment was administered in 2020. Proficiency for both groups recovered modestly in 2022, then declined again in 2023. The introduction of ATLAS in 2024 established a new proficiency baseline; scores from 2024 forward are not directly comparable to prior ACT Aspire results (Linn, 2000). Both groups held steady from 2024 to 2025.

Figure 26.

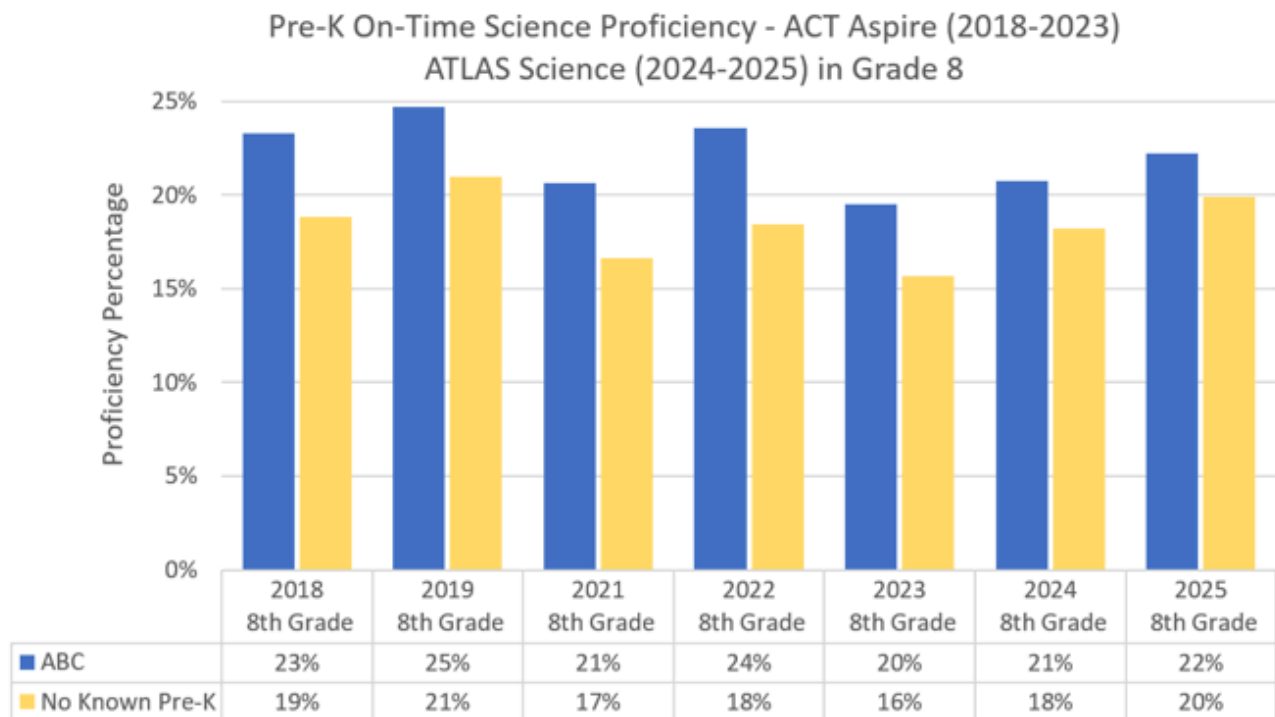


Figure 27 presents on-time Science proficiency for ABC and NK students assessed in 9th grade from 2019 through 2025. In 2025, 5% of ABC students and 4% of NK students met the on-time Science proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, a 1-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

The 9th-grade longitudinal record spans fewer years than in earlier grades, reflecting the later availability of high school cohort data. ABC students consistently outperformed NK students across all years. Notably, ABC proficiency remained at 16% or higher from 2019 to 2023, despite COVID-19 disruptions, suggesting relative resilience among children who attended an ABC program. No assessment was administered in 2020. The introduction of ATLAS in 2024 established a new proficiency baseline that is not directly comparable to prior ACT Aspire results (Linn, 2000). Both groups showed a slight recovery in 2025 relative to 2024.

Figure 27.

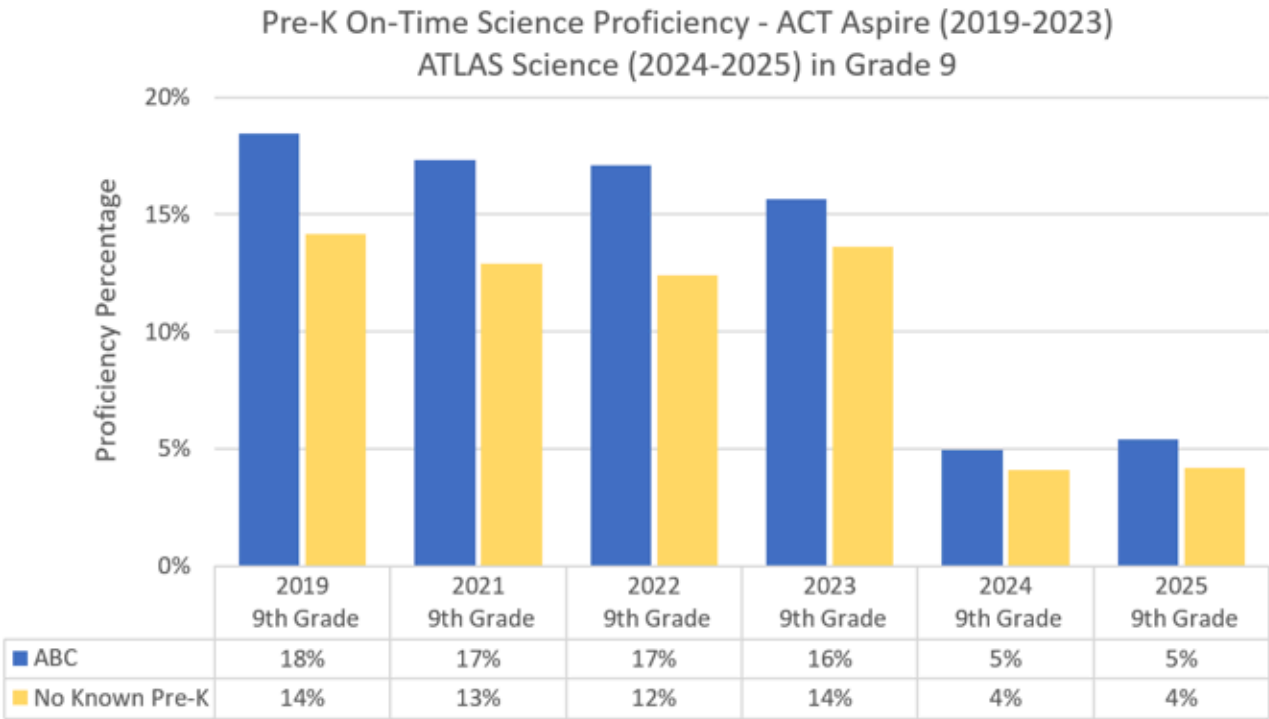
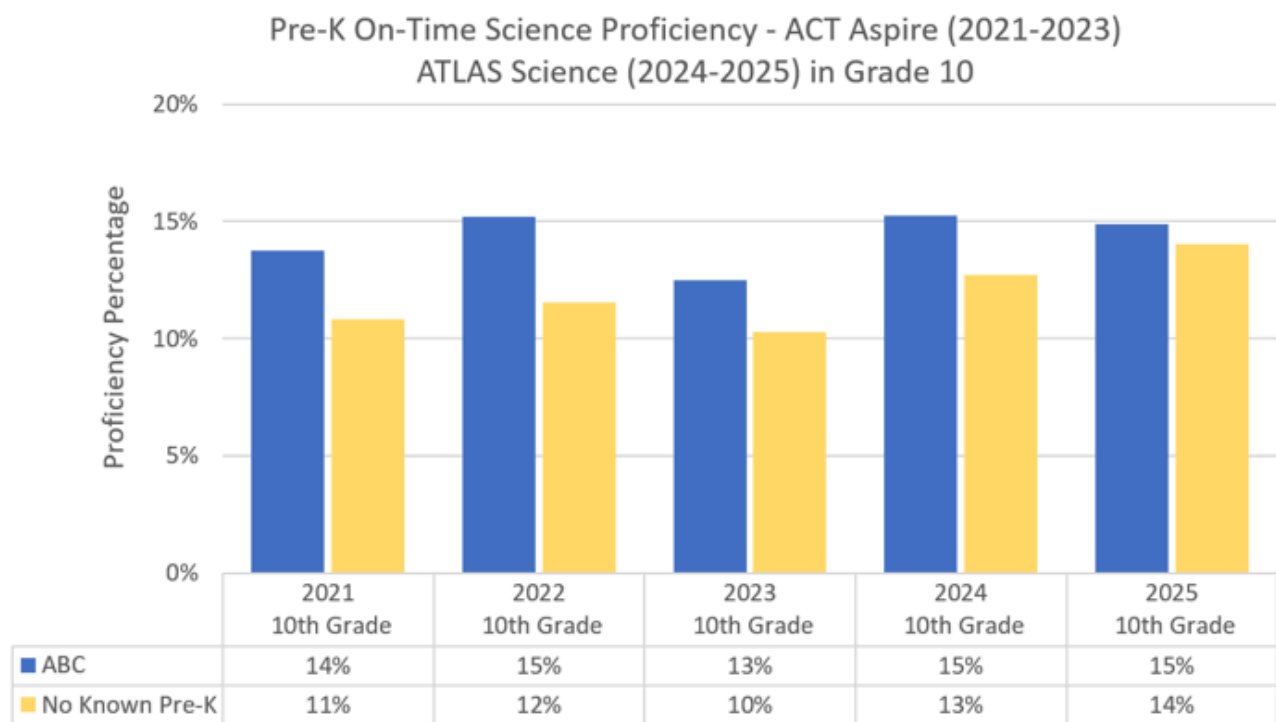


Figure 28 shows on-time Science proficiency among ABC and NK students assessed in 10th grade from 2021 through 2025. In 2025, 19% of ABC students and 17% of NK students met the on-time Science proficiency threshold on the ATLAS, a 2-percentage-point advantage for ABC students.

The 10th-grade record represents the earliest ABC Pre-K cohort — students who attended Pre-K in 2014 and Kindergarten in 2015 — and therefore 10th grade has the fewest cohorts reported of any grade in this report. ABC students maintained a proficiency advantage over NK students across all available years. The introduction of ATLAS in 2024 established a new proficiency baseline that is not directly comparable to prior ACT Aspire results (Linn, 2000). Both groups showed consistency in 2025 relative to 2024 during the first two years of ATLAS testing, and ABC students maintained a modest proficiency advantage over NK students into 10th grade.

Figure 28.



Across all eight grade levels assessed on the 2025 ATLAS, ABC participants demonstrated higher on-time Science proficiency than their NK counterparts. The ABC advantage in Science ranged from 1 percentage point in 9th grade to 4 percentage points in 3rd and 7th grade, with an overall difference of 3 percentage points in on-time Science proficiency for ABC participants. This advantage was maintained throughout the longitudinal period, including years affected by COVID-19 disruption and spanning the transition from ACT Aspire to ATLAS. The presence of an ABC proficiency advantage at every grade level from 3rd through 10th grade reflects the consistency of ABC program benefits in Science outcomes across all cohorts represented in this study.



CONCLUSION

The 2025 ABC Proficiency Longitudinal Study shows that participation in the Arkansas Better Chance program is consistently associated with higher on-time proficiency in English Language Arts, Math, and Science across all assessed grade levels. Across eight Kindergarten cohorts, from students who attended Pre-K in 2014 and were assessed in 10th grade in 2025 to those who attended Pre-K in 2021 and were assessed in 3rd grade in 2025, ABC participants outperformed their No-Known Pre-K counterparts on the 2025 ATLAS. On average, ABC participants scored 3% higher in ELA, 3.5% higher in Math, and 3% higher in Science than NK students from the same low-income population.

This advantage was consistent across all eight Kindergarten cohorts represented in this report and across all three assessed subject areas. In ELA and Science, the ABC advantage was present at every grade level. In Math, ABC participants outperformed NK students at all grade levels except 10th grade, where outcomes were equivalent.

The longitudinal record in this report spans multiple assessment systems and includes data from years significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, when statewide assessments were suspended entirely in 2020 and proficiency rates declined for both groups in 2021. Despite these disruptions, the ABC advantage over NK students remained intact throughout the period covered by the available data. The transition from ACT Aspire to ATLAS in 2024 introduced a new proficiency baseline that is not directly comparable to prior assessment results (Linn, 2000); however, the relative advantage of ABC participants over NK students is also evident during the ATLAS period.

These findings align with the broader body of evidence supporting the long-term benefits of high-quality Pre-K participation for low-income children. Barnett and Jung (2021) found persistent positive effects on achievement in language arts and literacy, mathematics, and science through 10th grade among low-income children who participated in a large-scale, publicly funded preschool program, with these effects not fading after 3rd grade. The persistence of the ABC proficiency advantage from 3rd grade through 10th grade, across subject areas and years of significant external disruption, reflects the sustained impact of the ABC program on the academic outcomes of Arkansas's most economically vulnerable students.

Reporting Terms

ABC

Unless otherwise stated, references to Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) in this analysis specifically refer to full-time ABC participants (7 hours or more per day). While other children also received ABC services and are included in the ABC data sets provided, the evaluation of the ABC program focuses upon participants in the full-time ABC program.

CORE COMPARISON

In the core comparison, a phrase used throughout this analysis, the full-time participants in the ABC program with the lowest socio-economic indicator (free meal status) are compared to students who received No-Known Pre-Kindergarten services and are also in the lowest socio-economic indicator (free meal status) according to their DESE Kindergarten enrollment record. This core comparison isolates the difference between the two groups in participation in ABC while minimizing any differences attributable to socio-economic factors. The evaluation of the ABC program is most valid when external factors are reduced in the calculations.

DESE

DESE is the abbreviation for the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, which is part of the Arkansas Department of Education and oversees public schools in Arkansas. All grade levels from Kindergarten through 12th grade, including high school graduation, are included.

FREE MEAL STATUS

Free meal status is the lowest socio-economic indicator in DESE enrollment data. Both types of free meal status (Direct Certification and Free Meal) are included under Free Meal status. ABC Participants have different levels of socioeconomic status. The Core Comparison of this study isolates full-time ABC participants identified by DESE as Direct Certification or Free Meal (below 130%).

Percent of national poverty level	Below 130%	130% to 185%	Above 185% to 200%	over 200%
Meal Status	Direct Certification or Free Meal	Reduced	Full-price	
ABC participation	Eligible			Not Eligible

Data Quality Notes

ROUNDING PRECISION

Throughout this analysis, calculations have been rounded to the nearest whole number, to the nearest percentage, or to the nearest tenth for smaller calculated values. For display purposes and readability, this rounding may produce apparent errors, but the original calculations are accurate.

BASELINE AND EXCLUDED DATA

The longitudinal count of students is set for DESE Kindergarten and remains unchanged. All calculations for on-time measures use the original DESE Kindergarten count as the baseline.

Certain records have been excluded from the analysis when one or more of the following is observed:

- Fiscal years prior to Kindergarten, when the Research ID is associated with a higher DESE grade level
- DESE research ID application may inadvertently combine records for two students under the same research ID.
 - Kindergarten students without a corresponding enrollment record in Cycle 2 (Oct. 15), indicating the student was not enrolled before October 1.

PROFICIENCY CALCULATIONS

The proficiency calculations in this analysis will not match the official proficiency reporting for Arkansas because the Kindergarten research data sets form the basis for student selection. In this report, third-grade proficiency is calculated only for students who attended a DESE school in Kindergarten, not for all third-grade students. Official reporting on proficiency for all Arkansas students exceeds the scope of this analysis, which focuses on ABC Pre-school participation and comparison groups of Arkansas Kindergarteners.

The longitudinal aspect of this analysis extends to proficiency on assessments in later years and grade levels, but it does not extend to Arkansas students beyond the established starting point, which is Kindergarten data. The assessment data sets provided for this research include a proficiency-level data element with values L1, L2, L3, and L4. In this analysis, proficiency calculations treat L3 and L4 as proficient outcomes. Students with L1 and L2 proficiency levels are not considered proficient in these calculations.

STUDY DESIGN AND COMPARISON GROUP

This study uses an observational, non-experimental design. The core comparison between ABC participants and No-Known Pre-K students controls for socioeconomic status by using free meal status as an eligibility criterion, but it cannot fully account for other differences between families who enrolled in ABC and those who did not. Factors such as parental engagement, home language environment, neighborhood characteristics, and access to other supportive services are not captured in DESE administrative data and may contribute to observed differences in outcomes. Findings should be interpreted as descriptive comparisons between the two groups rather than as causal estimates of the effect of ABC participation.

NO-KNOWN PRE-K CLASSIFICATION

Students classified as No-Known Pre-K (NK) had no Pre-K participation recorded in DESE administrative data. This classification does not rule out the possibility that some NK students attended programs not captured in state records, such as private preschools, federally operated Head Start programs, tribal programs, or informal care arrangements. The extent of any such misclassification is unknown. If NK students with unrecorded Pre-K experience are in the comparison group, the observed advantage for ABC participants may understate the true difference between ABC participants and students with no Pre-K experience.

STUDENT ATTRITION

Students who leave DESE schools after Kindergarten are not included in later assessments. Outcomes reported in this study reflect only students who remained enrolled in DESE schools at each subsequent grade level. Attrition rates are reported separately by group in the ABC Longitudinal Study – Supplemental Report.

ASSESSMENT TRANSITION

The transition from ACT Aspire to ATLAS in 2024 involves changes to the assessment instrument, proficiency constructs, and cut scores. As noted throughout this report, results from 2024 and 2025 are not directly comparable to those from prior years (Linn, 2000). The relative advantage of ABC participants over NK students is evident in both assessment periods; however, changes in the magnitude of that advantage at the transition point should be interpreted cautiously, given the differences between the two assessment systems.

ABC PROGRAM VARIATION

ABC is treated as a single program in this analysis, consistent with the study's design and purpose. In practice, ABC is delivered across multiple sites, with variation in program quality, staffing, curriculum, and instructional hours. The core comparison focuses on full-time participation of seven or more hours per day, but the available data do not capture variation in program characteristics within that category. Findings represent average outcomes across all full-time ABC participants and should not be assumed to apply uniformly across all program sites.

References

- Barnett, W. S., & Jung, K. (2021). Effects of New Jersey's Abbott preschool program on children's achievement, grade retention, and special education through tenth grade. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 56, 248–259. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2021.04.001>
- Linn, R. L. (2000). Assessments and accountability. *Educational Researcher*, 29(2), 4–16.



DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION



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2026



Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) Longitudinal Study 2009-2025

Supplemental Report

Arkansas Research Center | University of Central Arkansas

Ellie Wheeler Hill, M.S.

Sarah Argue, Ph.D.

Greg Holland, Ph.D.



ARKANSAS BETTER CHANCE (ABC) 2025 SUPPLEMENTAL LONGITUDINAL STUDY

Report Summary

The Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) Supplemental Longitudinal Study evaluates the impact of ABC Pre-K participation on educational engagement and attainment in later grades, focusing on attendance, enrollment, retention, and graduation. This study compares DESE outcomes data for two groups: those who participated in ABC Pre-K and those who did not. By establishing this core comparison, the impact of the ABC program can be isolated and studied longitudinally to assess outcomes in Arkansas K-12 public education through high school graduation. ADE DESE participation data range from 2009 to 2023, and outcome data range from 2010 to 2024.

The purpose of the ABC program is to provide high-quality early education services to children who face socioeconomic disadvantage (at or below 130% of the Federal Poverty Line) and/or other developmental and family risk factors. The benefits of the ABC program persist from Kindergarten through 12th grade.



CORE COMPARISON

The “core comparison” in this study is between ABC Pre-K participants and students with no known Pre-K participation who have the same low socioeconomic household income. This study includes only data on students who were below 130% of the Federal Poverty Line, the threshold for free lunch, in Kindergarten.

These two core groups are identified as “ABC” and “No Known Pre-K (NK)” in this study. The core comparison groups (ABC and NK) are defined at Kindergarten, and all longitudinal outcomes in this study are measured using Kindergarten as the baseline.

This study shows that compared to No-Known Pre-K, the **ABC participants consistently have:**

Attendance benefits

- More days attended in Kindergarten through 12th grade

Enrollment benefits

- Higher enrollment in DESE schools beginning in 1st grade
- Up to +11% higher enrollment identified in Grades 11 and 12

Graduation benefits

- Higher rates of graduation (first calculated in the 2023 ABC Longitudinal Study)
- Consistently higher graduation rate for Pre-K students who have completed high school
- Higher graduation rate when allowed an additional year to graduate

Retention benefits

- Lower rates of grade-level retention



Attendance

KINDERGARTEN AVERAGE TOTAL DAYS PRESENT

A central finding of this study is that the attendance advantage ABC participants demonstrate in Kindergarten is not a one-time occurrence but a stable, recurring pattern. Figure 1 and Table 1 present the difference in average days attended between ABC participants and No-Known Pre-K (NK) students for each Kindergarten cohort across the study period. Figure 1 illustrates the trend, while Table 1 presents the underlying attendance figures for both groups and the calculated difference.

Across every year of the study period, ABC participants attended more days of Kindergarten than their No-Known Pre-K peers, with the advantage consistently ranging from roughly five to seven additional days. This advantage persisted through periods of broader disruption and shows no sign of narrowing over time, reinforcing that the benefits of ABC participation are evident from the earliest point of measurement.

This attendance advantage is meaningful: research shows that chronic absence in Kindergarten is associated with lower academic performance in first grade for all children, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, and that among poor children, chronic absence in Kindergarten predicts the lowest levels of educational achievement at the end of fifth grade (Chang & Romero, 2008).



CORE COMPARISON - KINDERGARTEN DAYS PRESENT

Children who attend ABC Pre-K have higher attendance rates in Kindergarten. This trend has persisted throughout the study period. On average, **ABC kindergarten students attend +5.7 additional days of Kindergarten compared to No-Known Pre-K students.**

Figure 1.

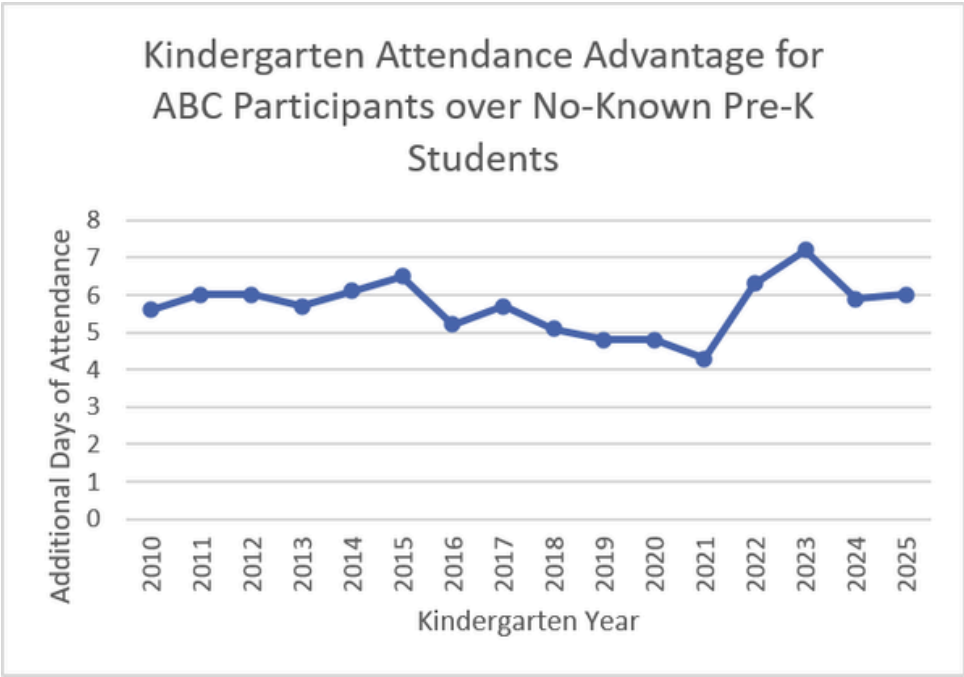


Table 1.

Kindergarten Year	ABC Participants	No Known Pre-K	ABC Days vs. NK
2010	163.7	158.1	+5.6
2011	164.5	158.5	+6.0
2012	165.1	159.1	+6.0
2013	165.2	159.5	+5.7
2014	164.1	158.0	+6.1
2015	164.8	158.3	+6.5
2016	165.4	160.2	+5.2
2017	165.0	159.2	+5.7
2018	163.8	158.7	+5.1
2019	164.2	159.4	+4.8
2020	167.0	162.2	+4.8
2021	163.4	159.1	+4.3
2022	162.2	155.9	+6.3
2023	161.6	154.4	+7.2
2024	158.3	152.4	+5.9
2025	155.1	149.1	+6.0

TOTAL DAYS PRESENT IN LATER GRADES - 2025

At every grade level, ABC participants attended more school days than their No-Known Pre-K peers. The advantage is largest in the earliest grades, narrows through the elementary and middle school years, and then widens again as students move through high school. Notably, the benefit never disappears: even at its smallest, the gap remains positive across all thirteen grade levels, and by twelfth grade, ABC participants again attend several additional days per year. This sustained advantage is meaningful because attendance predicts student success across the entire grade span, not only in the early years.

Research following nearly 13,000 urban students found that indicators of poor attendance as early as sixth grade can identify the majority of students who will later fail to graduate from high school (Balfanz, Herzog, & MacIver, 2007). The middle grades—where the ABC attendance advantage is narrowest—are a particularly consequential period: among a comparable cohort of low-income students, chronic absence during the early middle grades reduced the probability of on-time, four-year high school graduation by 18 percentage points (Smerillo, Reynolds, Temple, & Ou, 2018). **That ABC participants sustain an attendance advantage through this critical window, and widen it again in high school, suggests the program's benefits extend to the years when attendance matters most for graduation.**

This data captures students still enrolled in DESE schools. Figure 2 and Table 2 present the difference in average days attended between ABC participants and No-Known Pre-K (NK) students at each grade level for the 2025 school year. Figure 2 illustrates the trend across grades, while Table 2 presents the underlying attendance figures for both groups, along with the calculated difference.



CORE COMPARISON - TOTAL DAYS PRESENT IN LATER GRADES

Children who attend ABC Pre-K have higher attendance rates in later grades. A snapshot of the 2025 school year shows that students who participated in ABC Pre-K maintain higher attendance rates than those in the No-Known Pre-K group across all grade levels.

Figure 2.

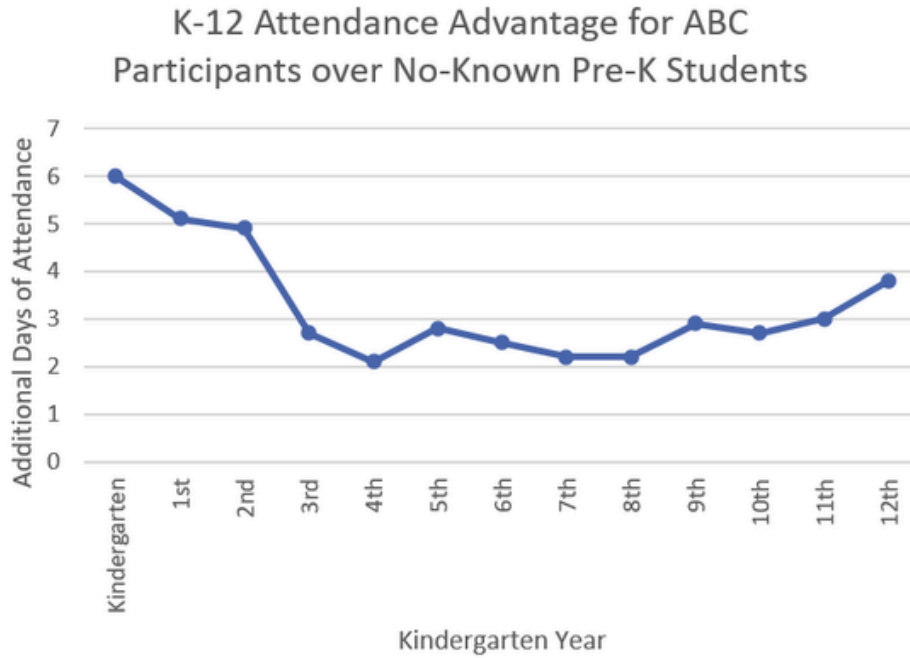


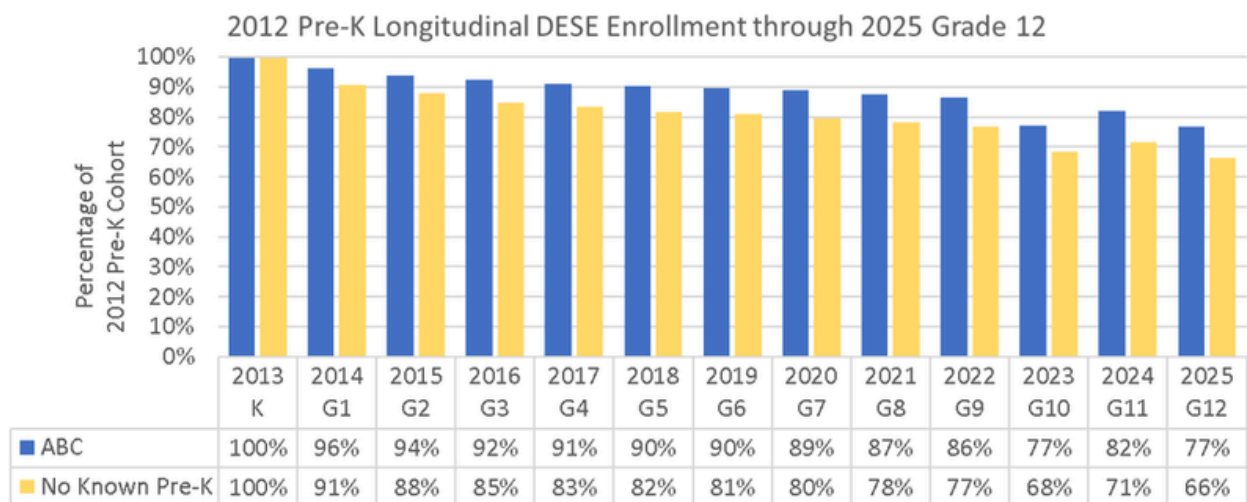
Table 2.

Kindergarten Year	2025 Grade Level	ABC Participants	No Known Pre-K	ABC Days vs. NK
2013	12th	148.5	144.7	+3.8
2014	11th	148.5	145.5	+3.0
2015	10th	150.5	147.7	+2.7
2016	9th	153.0	150.1	+2.9
2017	8th	153.3	151.0	+2.2
2018	7th	154.4	152.2	+2.2
2019	6th	154.8	152.2	+2.5
2020	5th	155.1	152.4	+2.8
2021	4th	155.6	153.5	+2.1
2022	3rd	155.6	152.9	+2.7
2023	2nd	156.2	151.3	+4.9
2024	1st	155.7	150.6	+5.1
2025	Kindergarten	155.1	149.1	+6.0

Enrollment

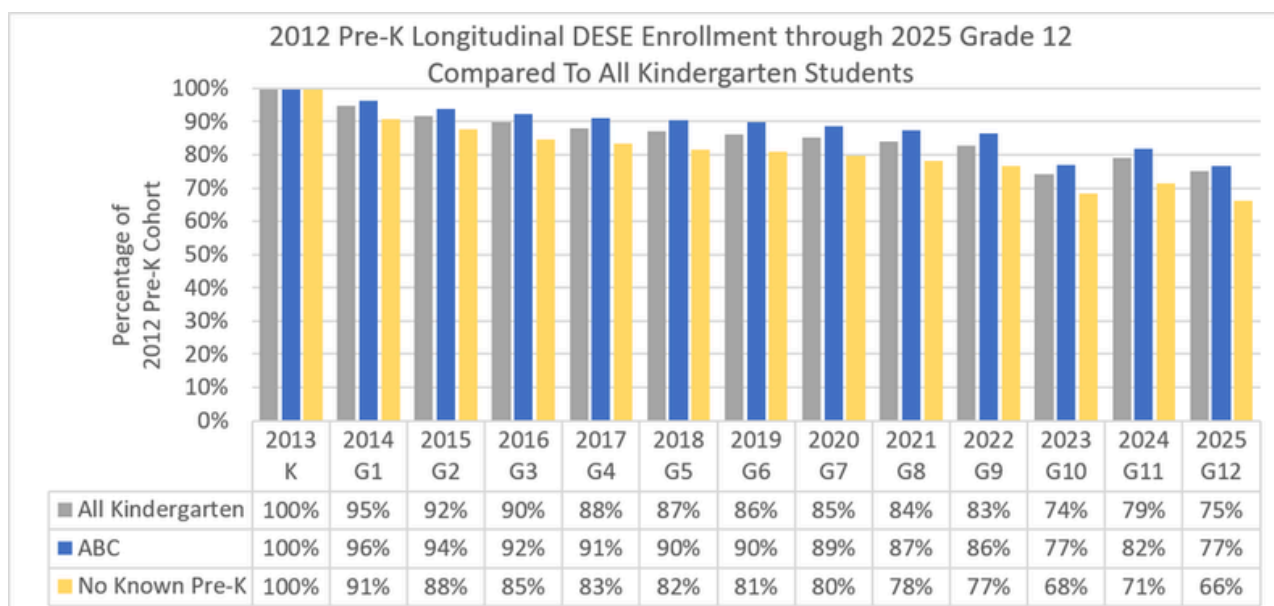
A second sustained benefit of ABC participation is enrollment persistence: ABC participants were more likely to remain enrolled in a DESE school through all twelve grades. Figure 3 presents DESE enrollment rates for the 2012 ABC cohort and the No-Known Pre-K (NK) group, expressed as percentages of the original cohort, tracked from Kindergarten through twelfth grade. The 2012 ABC participants maintained higher enrollment rates than their No-Known Pre-K peers throughout, with the advantage ranging from +5% in 1st grade to +11% in Grades 11 and 12. The cohort grade levels are shown in Figure 3, but students are counted as long as they are reported as enrolled in a DESE school, regardless of their grade level; retention rates do not affect these enrollment percentages.

Figure 3.



Notably, the enrollment advantage is not constant: it widens as students grow older, peaking in the final years of high school, precisely when students are most at risk of leaving the system. Figure 4 sets an even more demanding benchmark by including the entire 2013 Kindergarten cohort ("All Kindergarten") in the comparison. Unlike the ABC and No-Known Pre-K groups, which are drawn from the low-income population, the "All Kindergarten" group includes students across all income levels. Even against this broader, more advantaged benchmark, the 2012 ABC participants remained enrolled in DESE schools at comparable or higher rates, a striking result, given that ABC participants were selected for the program based on socioeconomic, developmental, or family risk factors.

Figure 4.



That a population selected for elevated risk sustains enrollment rates that match or exceed those of the general Kindergarten cohort points to a durable, protective effect of ABC participation. This pattern matters because remaining continuously enrolled in a single school system is itself linked to better long-term outcomes. Research on a nationally representative sample found that students who change schools are significantly more likely to drop out of high school, and this relationship holds even after accounting for background characteristics that make mobility more likely in the first place (Rumberger & Larson, 1998). By keeping a greater share of at-risk students enrolled and stable within the DESE system, especially during the high school years, when dropouts peak, ABC participation supports the educational continuity foundational to eventual graduation.

Retention

Alongside higher attendance and stronger enrollment persistence, ABC participation is associated with a reduced likelihood of grade retention. Students who are not promoted from one grade level to the next according to standard annual progress are retained or “held back” to repeat a grade. Figure 7 and Table 3 present the cumulative percentage of each cohort retained at least once, from Kindergarten through twelfth grade, for ABC participants and the No-Known Pre-K (NK) group.

As with the enrollment measures, several conditions shape how these retention figures are calculated. Students who transfer out of DESE schools are not counted during years without DESE enrollment, but may return to DESE in later years and be counted again. Formerly retained students are no longer counted as retained once they have been promoted back to their original on-time grade level. Students who do not attend a DESE school are not included in these calculations, as they have no DESE enrollment record.



CORE COMPARISON - RETENTION

Lower retention rates are observed across all grades for ABC participants compared with their No-Known Pre-K peers. As with the other outcomes in this study, the gap is present from the earliest grades and generally widens over time: by twelfth grade, 18.5% of ABC participants had been retained at least once, compared to 24.8% of No-Known Pre-K students—a difference of more than six percentage points.

Figure 5.

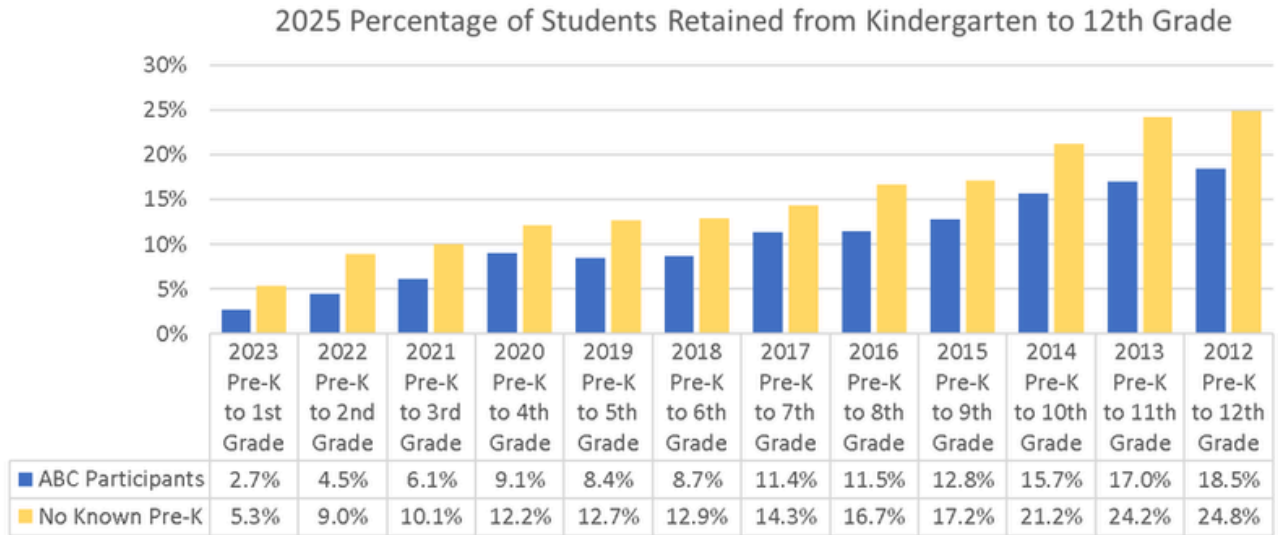


Table 3.

Kindergarten Year	2025 Grade Level	ABC Participants	No Known Pre-K	ABC vs. NK
2024	1st	2.7%	5.3%	-2.6%
2023	2nd	4.5%	9.0%	-4.4%
2022	3rd	6.1%	10.1%	-3.9%
2021	4th	9.1%	12.2%	-3.1%
2020	5th	8.4%	12.7%	-4.2%
2019	6th	8.7%	12.9%	-4.2%
2018	7th	11.4%	14.3%	-2.9%
2017	8th	11.5%	16.7%	-5.2%
2016	9th	12.8%	17.2%	-4.4%
2015	10th	15.7%	21.2%	-5.5%
2014	11th	17.0%	24.2%	-7.1%
2013	12th	18.5%	24.8%	-6.4%

Lower retention is not only a benefit in its own right; it is closely tied to the graduation outcomes documented in the next section. Grade retention is among the most powerful predictors of eventual high school dropout: prospective longitudinal research has found that retained students drop out at substantially higher rates than their promoted peers, even when compared to low-achieving students who were promoted (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002).

By reducing the share of at-risk students who are held back, particularly in the later grades, where the gap is widest, and the consequences of dropping out are most acute, ABC participation helps remove one of the strongest known obstacles to high school completion. As the following section shows, this lower retention rate is accompanied by exactly the outcome it would predict: higher graduation rates among ABC participants.



Pre-K Graduation

2012 COHORT

Graduation is the outcome toward which the attendance, enrollment, and retention benefits documented above ultimately point, and the same advantage appears here.

Students who participated in ABC Pre-K were more likely to graduate from high school than their No-Known Pre-K counterparts. Among 2012 Kindergarteners, ABC participants appeared in the 2025 DESE high school graduation data 14% more often than students with No-Known Pre-K (65% versus 51%).

For reference, 64% of all 2013 DESE Kindergarten students, regardless of Pre-K participation or meal status, were included in the 2025 DESE high school graduation data.

ABC participants thus graduated at a rate exceeding not only their No-Known Pre-K peers but also the Kindergarten population as a whole, despite having been selected for the program based on risk factors.

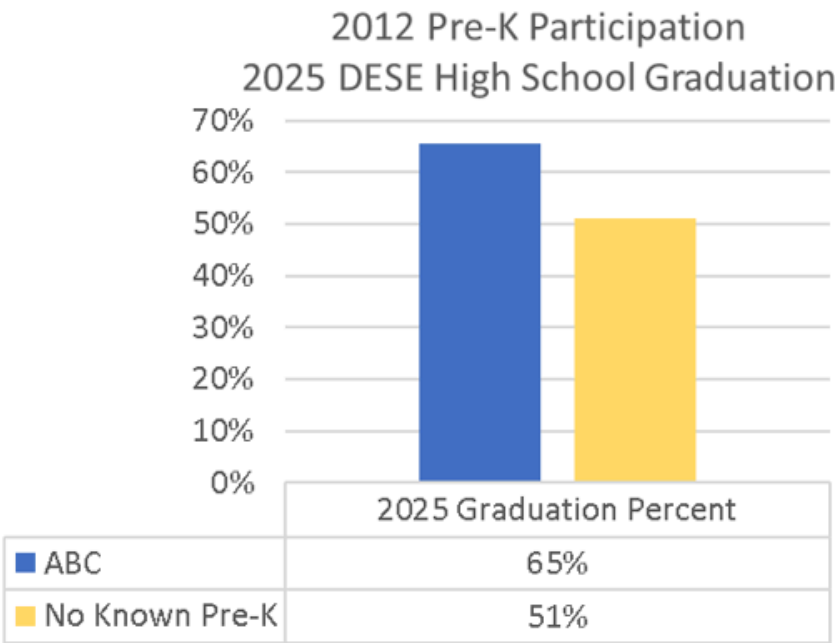
Several factors should be kept in mind when interpreting these figures: students who transferred out of DESE schools are not included in the 2025 graduation percentage, nor are students who remained enrolled in DESE schools but had not graduated by 2025. It is expected that some students graduated from non-DESE schools or completed their GED, so these figures represent a conservative measure of high school completion.



NOTE

The graduation measure used in this section is not a standard calculation of high school graduation rate; it is a Pre-K measure. It is specific to the core comparison groups established for 2012 Pre-K: ABC participation or No-Known Pre-K participation, with free-meal status in 2013 DESE Kindergarten.

Figure 6.



2009 COHORT

The 2009 Pre-K cohort provides the study's most complete view of graduation outcomes, with four years of follow-up data now available. This cohort was scheduled to graduate in 2022, and the ABC Longitudinal Study first reported on its graduation rates using 2022 DESE data. Additional data now allows for an amended analysis that includes students who took an extra year to graduate.

In the first two years of study, ABC participants graduated on time at a rate 11% higher than No-Known Pre-K students (59% versus 48%). Allowing an additional year for students to complete high school raises both rates and widens the gap slightly: ABC rises +10.5% (from 59% to 69.5%) and No-Known Pre-K rises +10% (from 48% to 58%), leaving ABC participants 11.5% ahead at 69.5% versus 58%.

Across both cohorts, the pattern is consistent: ABC participants graduate from high school at meaningfully higher rates than comparable students with No-Known Pre-K, whether measured on time or with additional years allowed, and whether for the mature 2009 cohort or the newer 2012 cohort. This outcome is the culmination of the benefits documented throughout this study. The same students who attend more days, remain enrolled in DESE schools at higher rates, and are retained less often also go on to graduate at higher rates, each advantage reinforcing the next along the path from Kindergarten to a diploma.



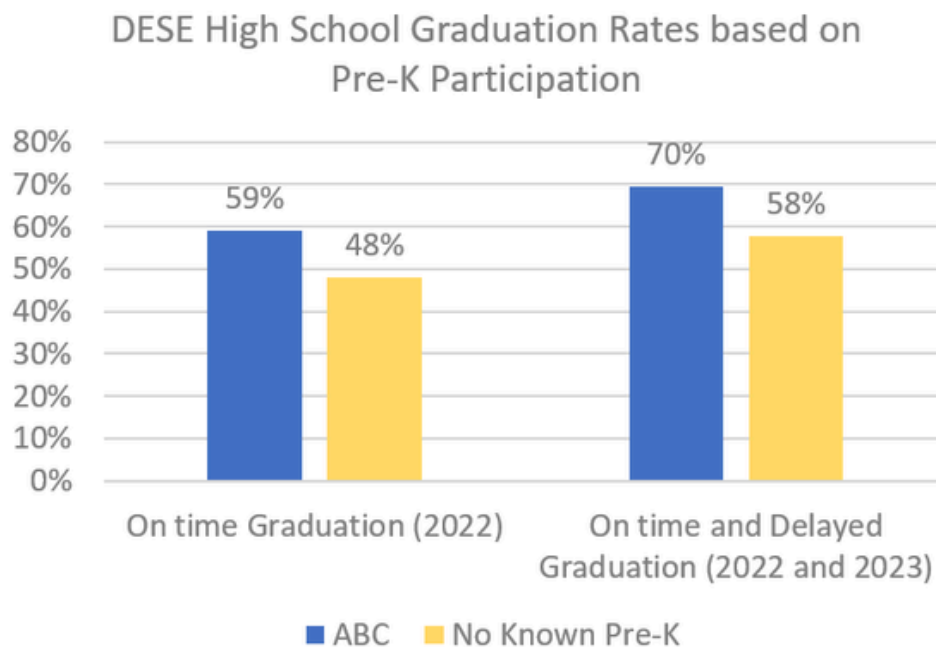
2025 UPDATE

The 2024 and 2025 graduation records added a marginal additional improvement of +0.4% additional graduates for ABC and +0.7% additional graduates for No-Known Pre-K.

Overall, the 2009 Pre-K cohort graduation rates are substantially higher for ABC (69.9%) than No-Known Pre-K (58.7%).

This durable graduation advantage is also consistent with the most rigorous national research on comparable programs. A 15-year follow-up of low-income children in a publicly funded, center-based preschool program in the Chicago public schools—a program closely resembling ABC in design and population—found that preschool participation was associated with significantly higher rates of high school completion and educational attainment (Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2001). That ABC produces a similar graduation advantage among Arkansas's at-risk students, sustained across multiple cohorts and years of follow-up, confirms that its benefits extend to the outcome that matters most for students' long-term prospects.

Figure 7.



Conclusion

This Supplemental Longitudinal Study set out to evaluate the impact of ABC Pre-K participation on educational engagement and attainment, measured not by test scores but by how students show up, stay enrolled, progress on time, and ultimately complete high school. Across all four measures and across more than a decade of DESE data, the same pattern holds: students who participated in ABC Pre-K consistently outperform comparable students with No-Known Pre-K, drawn from the same low-income population.

The findings reinforce one another. ABC participants attend more days of school, beginning in Kindergarten and continuing through the grade levels where attendance most strongly predicts graduation. They remain enrolled in DESE schools at higher rates, even when measured against the entire Kindergarten population rather than only their low-income peers. They are retained at lower rates across all grades, avoiding one of the most powerful known predictors of dropping out. And they graduate from high school at meaningfully higher rates, whether measured on time or with additional years allowed, and across every cohort old enough to have completed high school. Each advantage is a step along a single path, and each makes the next more likely.

Taken together, these results indicate that the benefits of ABC participation are neither temporary nor narrow. They appear at the earliest measurement point, persist throughout K–12 schooling, and culminate in the outcome that matters most for students' long-term prospects. This durability is notable because ABC serves children specifically identified by socioeconomic, developmental, and family risk factors, the very students for whom positive long-term outcomes are least assured. That a population selected for elevated risk matches or exceeds the broader student population on these measures underscores the program's protective value.

These conclusions align with the strongest national research on comparable early childhood programs, which has repeatedly linked high-quality, publicly funded preschool for low-income children to higher attendance, lower retention, greater school stability, and higher rates of high school completion. The ABC program's results in Arkansas add to that body of evidence through a large, longitudinal, in-state dataset, and they make a clear case: the advantages conferred by ABC participation begin in early childhood and extend, measurably, all the way to a high school diploma.

Reporting Terms

ABC

Unless otherwise stated, references to Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) in this analysis specifically refer to full-time ABC participants (7 hours or more per day). While other children also received ABC services and are included in the ABC data sets provided, the evaluation of the ABC program focuses upon participants in the full-time ABC program.

CORE COMPARISON

In the core comparison, a phrase used throughout this analysis, the full-time participants in the ABC program with the lowest socio-economic indicator (free meal status) are compared to students who received No-Known Pre-Kindergarten services and are also in the lowest socio-economic indicator (free meal status) according to their DESE Kindergarten enrollment record. This core comparison isolates the difference between the two groups in participation in ABC while minimizing any differences attributable to socio-economic factors. The evaluation of the ABC program is most valid when external factors are reduced in the calculations.

DESE

DESE is the abbreviation for the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, which is part of the Arkansas Department of Education and oversees public schools in Arkansas. All grade levels from Kindergarten through 12th grade, including high school graduation, are included.

FREE MEAL STATUS

Free meal status is the lowest socio-economic indicator in DESE enrollment data. Both types of free meal status (Direct Certification and Free Meal) are included under Free Meal status. ABC Participants have different levels of socioeconomic status. The Core Comparison of this study isolates full-time ABC participants identified by DESE as Direct Certification or Free Meal (below 130%).

Percent of national poverty level	Below 130%	130% to 185%	Above 185% to 200%	over 200%
Meal Status	Direct Certification or Free Meal	Reduced	Full-price	
ABC participation	Eligible			Not Eligible

Data Quality Notes

ROUNDING PRECISION

Throughout this analysis, calculations have been rounded to the nearest whole number, to the nearest percentage, or to the nearest tenth for smaller calculated values. For display purposes and readability, this rounding may produce apparent errors, but the original calculations are accurate.

BASELINE AND EXCLUDED DATA

The longitudinal count of students is set for DESE Kindergarten and remains unchanged. All calculations for on-time measures use the original DESE Kindergarten count as the baseline.

Certain records have been excluded from the analysis when one or more of the following is observed:

- Fiscal years prior to Kindergarten, when the Research ID is associated with a higher DESE grade level
- DESE research ID application may inadvertently combine records for two students under the same research ID.
 - Kindergarten students without a corresponding enrollment record in Cycle 2 (Oct. 15), indicating the student was not enrolled before October 1.

STUDY DESIGN AND COMPARISON GROUP

This study uses an observational, non-experimental design. The core comparison between ABC participants and No-Known Pre-K students controls for socioeconomic status by using free meal status as an eligibility criterion, but it cannot fully account for other differences between families who enrolled in ABC and those who did not. Factors such as parental engagement, home language environment, neighborhood characteristics, and access to other supportive services are not captured in DESE administrative data and may contribute to observed differences in outcomes. Findings should be interpreted as descriptive comparisons between the two groups rather than as causal estimates of the effect of ABC participation.

NO-KNOWN PRE-K CLASSIFICATION

Students classified as No-Known Pre-K (NK) had no Pre-K participation recorded in DESE administrative data. This classification does not rule out the possibility that some NK students attended programs not captured in state records, such as private preschools, federally operated Head Start programs, tribal programs, or informal care arrangements. The extent of any such misclassification is unknown. If NK students with unrecorded Pre-K experience are in the comparison group, the observed advantage for ABC participants may understate the true difference between ABC participants and students with no Pre-K experience.

STUDENT ATTRITION

Students who leave DESE schools after Kindergarten are not included in later assessments. Outcomes reported in this study reflect only students who remained enrolled in DESE schools at each subsequent grade level. Attrition rates are reported separately by group in the ABC Longitudinal Study – Supplemental Report.

ABC PROGRAM VARIATION

ABC is treated as a single program in this analysis, consistent with the study's design and purpose. In practice, ABC is delivered across multiple sites, with variation in program quality, staffing, curriculum, and instructional hours. The core comparison focuses on full-time participation of seven or more hours per day, but the available data do not capture variation in program characteristics within that category. Findings represent average outcomes across all full-time ABC participants and should not be assumed to apply uniformly across all program sites.

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