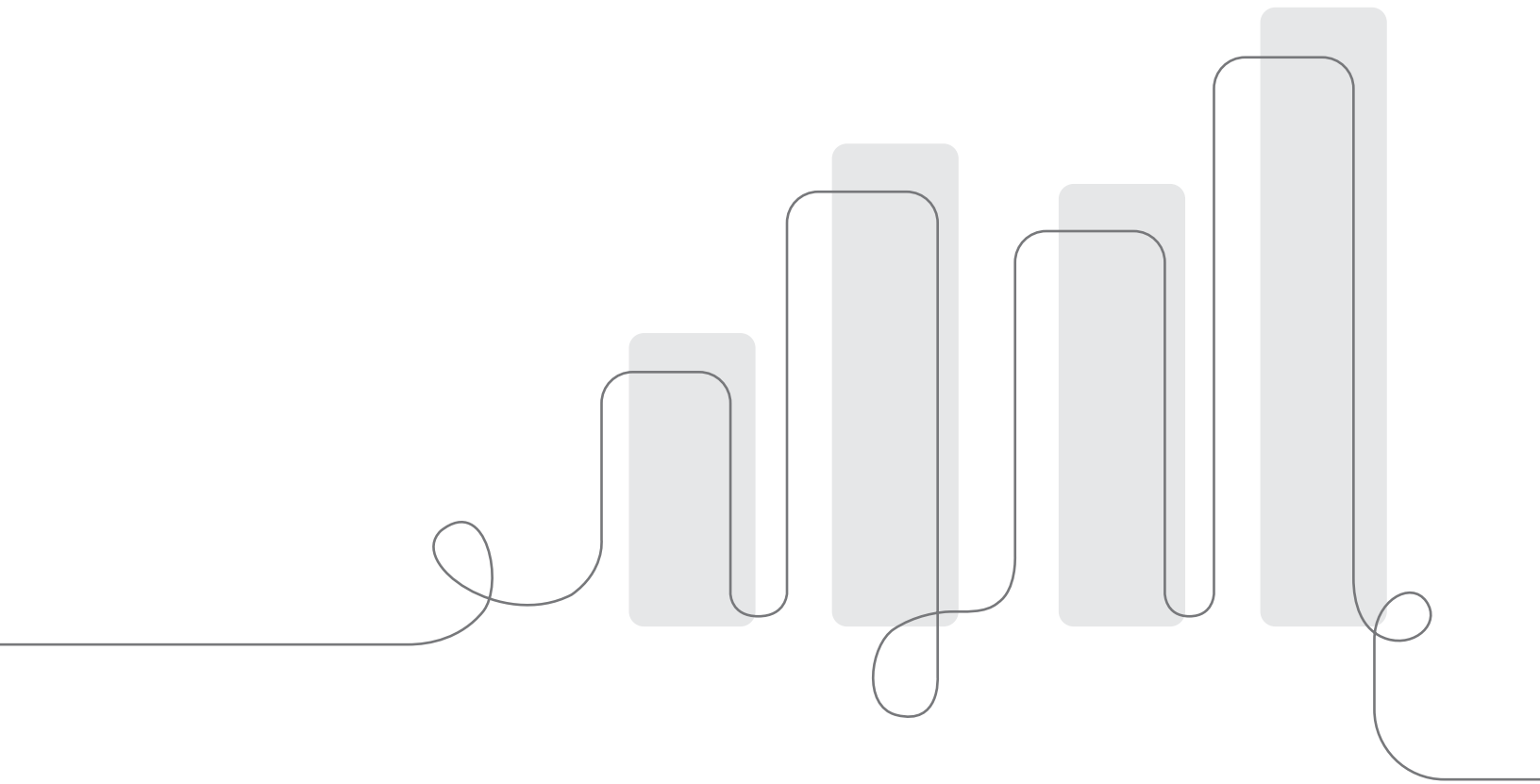


RESEARCH BRIEF

Middle-of-year data show early literacy improvements are slowing, and broader U.S. literacy rates remain a concern.

March 2024



# Middle-of-year data show early literacy improvements are slowing, and broader U.S. literacy rates remain a concern.

**The latest middle-of-school-year data show that throughout the spring and fall of 2023, schools across the country made some progress increasing the number of K–2 students on track for learning to read, but that progress is slowing.** Between 2021–2022 and 2022–2023, the number of students on track for learning to read increased by four to five percent across all grades; however, between 2022–2023 and 2023–2024, the increase was only two percent in each grade.

**Across grades K–2, only half of students are on track for learning to read at middle-of-year, and three in ten students are far behind.** The data demonstrate how literacy rates in the United States remain a concern. Too many students are at risk of failing to read proficiently by the end of third grade, an important indicator of future academic success.

Just over half of U.S. students in grades K–2 are on track for learning to read, yet the latest data show literacy improvements slowing year-over-year. To address these slowing gains, schools and districts must act now to accelerate literacy outcomes.

The good news: When students receive science-based reading instruction, outcomes improve<sup>1</sup>. See the Recommendations section on page 10 of this report for actions schools and districts can take at middle-of-year.

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1 Petscher, Y., Cabell, S. Q., Catts, H. W., Compton, D. L., Foorman, B. R., Hart, S. A., Lonigan, C. J., Phillips, B. M., Schatschneider, C., Steacy, L. M., Terry, N. P., & Wagner, R. K. (2020). How the Science of Reading Informs 21st-Century Education. *Reading research quarterly*, 55(Suppl 1), S267–S282. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.352>

## About the data





Over the past four years, elementary schools across the U.S. have been assessing students on early literacy skills with Amplify's mCLASS®. The DIBELS® 8th Edition data, collected by teachers interacting with students one on one, either live or over video, reveals instructional loss and the extent to which students have recovered from those losses.

This report compares mCLASS with DIBELS 8th Edition benchmark data from the 2019–20, 2020–21, 2021–22, 2022–23, and 2023–24 school years. From more than 2 million students assessed with mCLASS, approximately 300,000 students in a matched set of 1,400 schools in 43 states are represented. The schools in the source data are slightly more likely to be in large urban metropolitan areas than the nation overall.

## About mCLASS

The data was collected with mCLASS, Amplify's teacher-administered literacy assessment and intervention suite for grades K–6. mCLASS, powered by DIBELS 8th Edition, automates the data collection of Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), a widely-used series of short tests that assess K–8 literacy. Developed by the University of Oregon, DIBELS is an observational assessment collected by teachers interacting with students one-on-one, either live or over video. DIBELS is typically administered three times a year (beginning, middle, and end of year), and is used to identify reading difficulty, monitor progress, and inform instruction, especially for struggling readers.

### Explanation of assessment performance levels

DIBELS performance levels	Status	Instructional implications
 Above benchmark	On track	Ready for core instruction, likely to meet grade-level reading standards at end of year
 At benchmark		
 Below benchmark		Not far behind, require some strategic support, reasonably likely to meet end of year standards
 Well below benchmark	At risk	Far behind, require intensive intervention, unlikely to meet end of year standards

## About Amplify

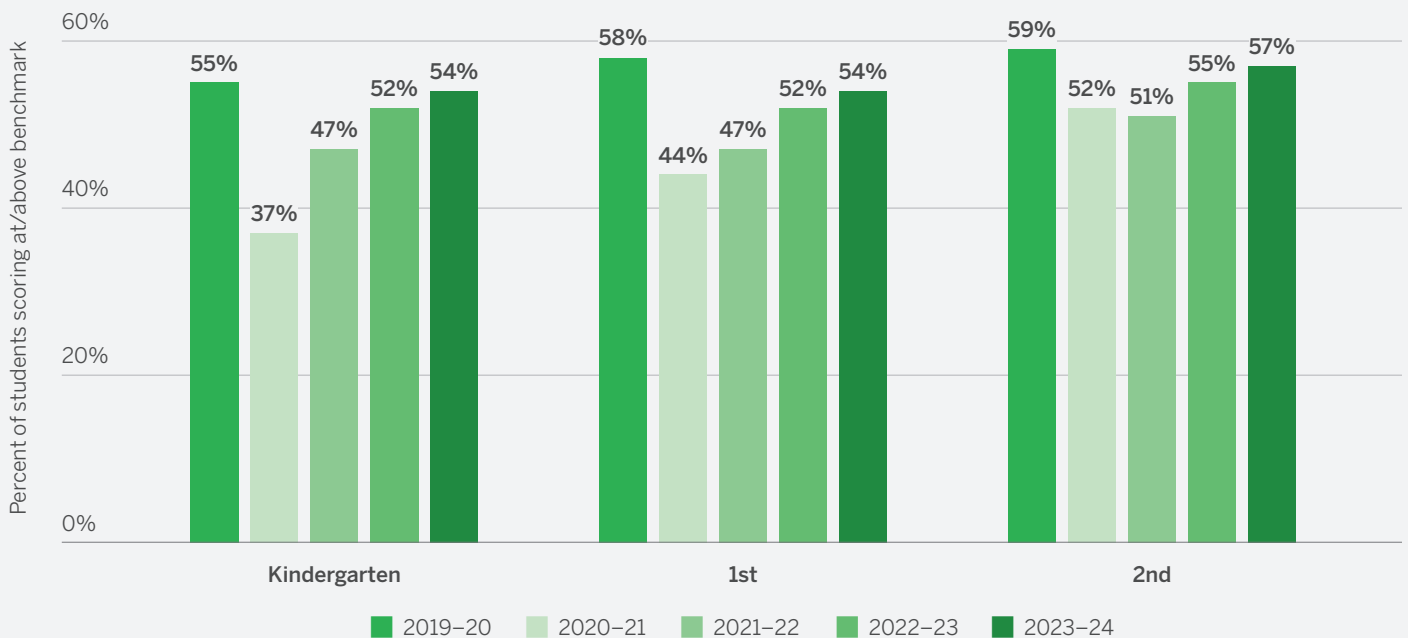
A pioneer in K–12 education since 2000, Amplify is leading the way in next-generation curriculum and assessment. Our captivating core and supplemental programs in literacy, math, and science engage all students in rigorous learning and inspire them to think deeply, creatively, and for themselves. Our formative assessment products turn data into practical instructional support to help all students build a strong foundation in early reading and math. All of our programs provide teachers with powerful tools that help them understand and respond to the needs of every student. Today, Amplify reaches more than 15 million students in all 50 states. To learn more, visit [amplify.com](https://www.amplify.com).

# Insights

## How many students are on track to learn to read?

The following table shows the percentage of students in each grade who were identified as being on track (ready for core instruction) in early literacy skills. They include the most recent data from the middle of the current school year (2023–24), as well as data from the middle of the four previous school years (2019–20, 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23).

Percent of students on track (Ready for core instruction)

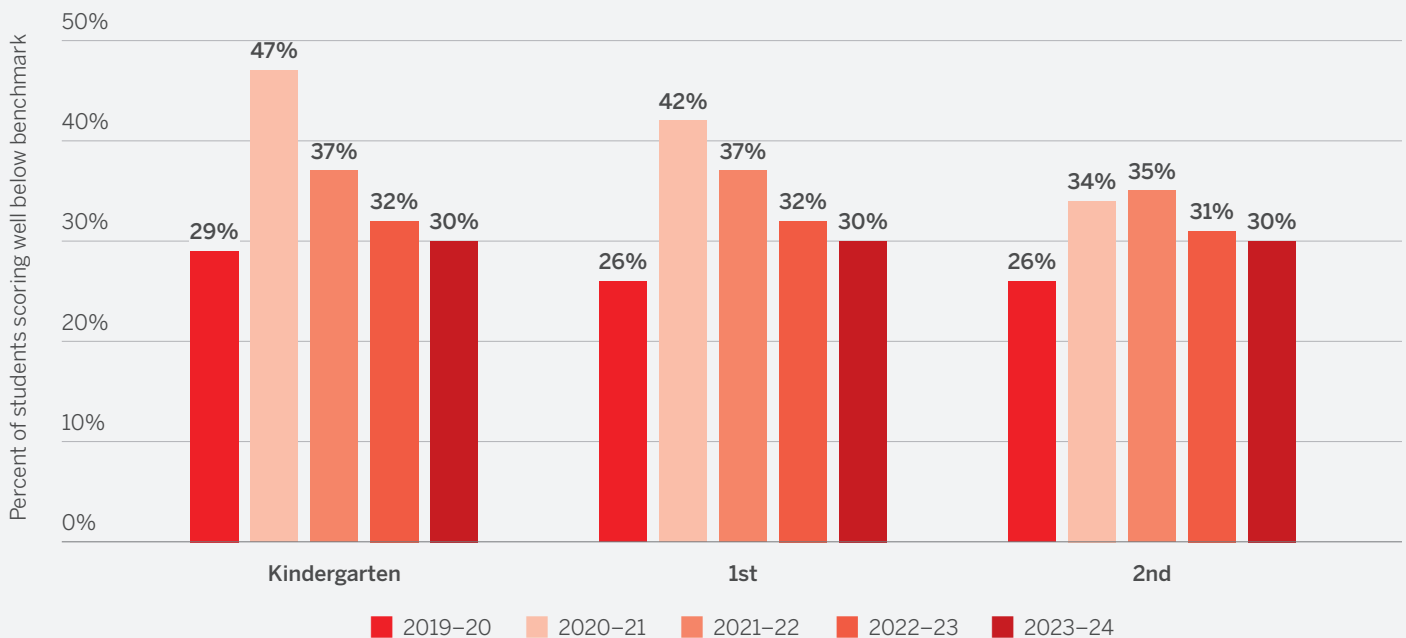


The data show that there are now more students on track for learning to read than there were two years ago (mid-year 2021–22), but not as many as there were four years ago (mid-year 2019–20). In kindergarten, the percentage of students on track for learning to read fell from 55 percent in the middle of 2019–20 to 47 percent in the middle of 2021–22 and has since climbed back up to 54 percent in the middle of 2023–24. In grade 1, it fell from 58 percent to 47 percent before rebounding to 54 percent; in grade 2, it fell from 59 percent to 51 percent before rising to 57 percent. All grades K–2 show signs of progress, as there are more students on-track now than there were in 2021–22, with notable gains in kindergarten and grade 1.

## How many students are still at greatest risk?

The following figure shows the percentage of students in each grade who were identified as being far behind (in need of intensive intervention) in early literacy skills based on their DIBELS 8 performance. It includes the most recent data from the middle of the current school year (2023–24), as well as data from the middle of the four previous school years (2019–20, 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23).

Percent of students far behind (Needing intensive intervention)



The data show that there are now (mid-2023–24) fewer students far behind in learning to read than there were two years ago (mid-2021–22), but more than there were four years ago (mid-2019–20). In kindergarten, the percentage of students at greatest risk for not learning to read rose from 29 percent in the middle of 2019–20 to 37 percent in the middle of 2021–22 before falling to 30 percent in the middle of 2023–24. In grade 1, it increased from 26 percent to 37 percent before dropping to 30 percent; in grade 2, it increased from 26 percent to 35 percent before declining to 30 percent. In all grades K–2, there are signs of progress: fewer students are far behind now than there were a year ago (mid-2021–22), with notable improvement in kindergarten and grade 1.

## How many Black and Hispanic students are on track to learn to read?

The following three tables disaggregate student data by race/ethnicity. They show the percentage of students in each grade who were identified as being on track (ready for core instruction) in early literacy skills. They include the most recent data from the middle of the current school year (2023–24), as well as the changes from 2022–23, 2021–22, and 2019–20.

### Percent of students on track: Performance trends by student subgroup

Subgroup	MOY 2023–24	Change from 2022–23	Change from 2021–22	Change from 2019–20
<b>Kindergarten</b>				
All Students	54%	+2 pts	+7 pts	-1 pt
Asian	73%	+2 pts	+3 pts	0 pts
Black	55%	+4 pts	+13 pts	-1 pt
Hispanic	47%	+1 pt	+8 pts	-3 pts
White	61%	+3 pts	+4 pts	-2 pts
<b>1st Grade</b>				
All Students	54%	+2 pts	+7 pts	-4 pts
Asian	76%	+1 pt	0 pts	-4 pts
Black	48%	+4 pts	+11 pts	-3 pts
Hispanic	49%	+1 pt	+7 pts	-5 pts
White	60%	+3 pts	+2 pts	-5 pts
<b>2nd Grade</b>				
All Students	57%	+2 pts	+6 pts	-2 pts
Asian	79%	-1 pt	+3 pts	-2 pts
Black	46%	+2 pts	+4 pts	-3 pts
Hispanic	53%	+1 pt	+5 pts	-3 pts
White	63%	+1 pt	0 pts	-5 pts

\* Change of 5 pts or more is highlighted.

**The data show that in most grades and demographic categories, there are now more students on track for learning to read than there were two years ago (mid-year 2021–22), but not as many as there were at mid-year 2019–20.** The good news is that in the past two years, Black and Hispanic students have achieved greater gains than their Asian and white peers, narrowing their measurable disparities in achievement.

- For instance, most recent kindergarten data (mid-year 2023–24) show that only 55 percent of Black and 47 percent of Hispanic students are on track, compared to 61 percent of white and 73 percent of Asian students. This represents an improvement of 13 percentage points for Black students and 8 percentage points for Hispanic students from two years prior (mid-year 2021–22), more than the improvement of four percentage points for white students and three percentage points for Asian students. However, this most recent growth has not overcome the declines from the 2019–20; Asian students have returned to the same levels, while Black students are one percentage point below, white students are two percentage points below, and Hispanic students remain three percentage points below.
- Similarly, most recent grade 1 data (mid-year 2023–24) show that only 48 percent of Black and 49 percent of Hispanic students are on track, compared to 60 percent of white and 76 percent of Asian students. This represents an improvement of 11 percentage points for Black students and seven percentage points for Hispanic students from two years prior (mid-year 2021–22), more than the improvement of two percentage points for white students and zero percentage points (no change) for Asian students. Again, this most recent growth has not overcome the declines from 2019–20; Black students are three percentage points below, while Asian students are four percentage points below, and white and Hispanic students remain five percentage points below.
- Finally, the most recent grade 2 data (mid-year 2023–24) show that only 46 percent of Black and 53 percent of Hispanic students are on track, compared to 63 percent of white and 79 percent of Asian students. This represents an improvement of 4 percentage points for Black students and five percentage points for Hispanic students from two years prior (mid-year 2021–22), more than the improvement of three percentage points for Asian students and zero percentage points (no change) for white students. This most recent growth has not overcome the declines from 2019–20; Black and Hispanic students are three percentage points below, while Asian students are two percentage points below, and white students remain five percentage points below.

## How many Black and Hispanic students are at greatest risk for not learning to read?

The following four tables disaggregate student data by race/ethnicity. They include the most recent data from the middle of the current school year (2023–24), as well as the changes from 2022–23, 2021–22, and 2019–20.

### Percent of students far behind: Performance trends by student subgroup

Subgroup	MOY 2023–24	Change from 2022–23	Change from 2021–22	Change from 2019–20
<b>Kindergarten</b>				
All Students	30%	-2 pts	-7 pts	+1 pt
Asian	16%	-2 pts	-3 pts	+1 pt
Black	29%	-4 pts	-12 pts	+2 pts
Hispanic	37%	-1 pt	-8 pts	+2 pts
White	23%	-3 pts	-4 pts	+2 pts
<b>1st Grade</b>				
All Students	30%	-2 pts	-7 pts	+4 pts
Asian	14%	-1 pt	-2 pts	+2 pts
Black	36%	-4 pts	-13 pts	+4 pts
Hispanic	35%	-1 pt	-8 pts	+5 pts
White	24%	-3 pts	-3 pts	+4 pts
<b>2nd Grade</b>				
All Students	30%	-1 pt	-5 pts	+4 pts
Asian	13%	+1 pt	+1 pts	+3 pts
Black	39%	-4 pts	-8 pts	+5 pts
Hispanic	33%	-2 pts	-6 pts	+4 pts
White	24%	-1 pt	-2 pts	+5 pts

\* Change of 5 pts or more is highlighted.



**The data show that in most grades and demographic categories, there are now (mid-year 2023–24) fewer students far behind (needing intensive intervention) in learning to read than there were two years ago (mid-year 2021–22), but still more than there were at mid-year 2019–20.** In the past two years, Black and Hispanic students have achieved greater improvement than their Asian and white peers, narrowing their measurable disparities in achievement.

- For instance, most recent kindergarten data (mid-year 2023–24) show that 29 percent of Black and 37 percent of Hispanic students are far behind, compared to 23 percent of white and 16 percent of Asian students. This represents an improvement of 12 percentage points for Black students and eight percentage points for Hispanic students from two years prior (mid-year 2021–22), more than the improvement of four percentage points for white students and three percentage points for Asian students. However, this most recent growth has not quite overcome the declines from 2019–20; Asian students remain one percentage point higher than pre-pandemic levels, while Black, Hispanic, and white students are all two percentage points higher.
- Similarly, most recent grade 1 data (mid-year 2023–24) show that 36 percent of Black and 35 percent of Hispanic students are far behind, compared to 24 percent of white and 14 percent of Asian students. This represents an improvement of 13 percentage points for Black students and 8 percentage points for Hispanic students from two years prior (mid-year 2021–22), more than the improvement of three percentage points for white students and two percentage points for Asian students. However, this most recent growth has not quite overcome the declines from 2019–20; Asian students remain two percentage points higher than pre-pandemic levels, while Black and white students are four percentage points higher, and Hispanic students are five percentage points higher.
- Finally, most recent grade 2 data (mid-year 2023–24) show that 39 percent of Black and 33 percent of Hispanic students are far behind, compared to 24 percent of white and 13 percent of Asian students. This represents an improvement of eight percentage points for Black students and six percentage points for Hispanic students from two years prior (mid-year 2021–22), more than the improvement of one percentage point for white students and a decline of one percentage point for Asian students. However, this most recent growth has not quite overcome the declines from 2019–20; Asian students remain three percentage points higher than pre-pandemic levels, while Hispanic students are four percentage points higher and Black and white students are five percentage points higher.

# Recommendations

## Accelerating literacy outcomes in the earliest grades

Just over half of U.S. students in grades K–2 are on track for learning to read, yet the data show that literacy improvements are slowing year-over-year. To address these slowing gains, districts and schools must act now to accelerate literacy outcomes.

Changing literacy outcomes requires that districts and schools review the processes and practices they have in place at all levels. Schools that deliver strong outcomes focus on getting students on track—and often ahead—in the earliest grades, because it’s easier to get students ahead from the beginning than to catch them up later.

Districts should analyze middle-of-year data by school, grade, and classroom to create comprehensive plans that keep student learning in focus. **They should invest in a reliable universal screener, high-quality core curriculum, evidence-based interventions, and professional development for educators.** If schools do not use a universal screener or administer middle-of-year assessments, those should be part of the district’s plan. Educators can use the data from universal screeners to evaluate core instruction.

With these resources, schools and districts should:

- Administer universal screening assessments three times per year to monitor levels of risk for reading difficulties.
- Allocate staff to support students who are at risk, spending additional time in literacy instruction beyond grade-level instruction.
- Regularly monitor progress for students who are at risk, making adjustments as needed.
- Ensure instructional staff gain knowledge about science-based reading instruction and implement high-quality core curriculum with fidelity.
- And instill a love of reading and books during all school-based programs, with the support of caregivers and the community.

### Elements of a coherent approach

Types of instruction	Scheduling/formatting options	Which students
Grade-level core instruction focused on both language development and foundational skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• During school day (literacy block)</li></ul>	All
Additional foundational skill instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• During the school day (in addition to literacy block)</li><li>• Summer school</li></ul>	Students who are at risk
Intervention opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• During the school day</li><li>• Before and after school tutoring</li></ul>	Those who continue to struggle even with additional foundational skill instruction
Science of Reading based personalized learning (online program)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• During the school day (as part of additional foundational skills)</li><li>• At home</li><li>• Before and after school</li><li>• Summer school</li></ul>	All

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