



Results of the *Lesferill* reading fluency tests

September 2017

Lesferill reading fluency tests

Following the signing of the *Þjóðarsáttmáli um læsi* ('National Charter for Reading') by the Minister of Education, Science and Culture, the Chair of the national parents' association Heimili and skóli, and representatives of all local authorities around the country, the so-called *Lesferill* ('On-Track Reading') reading fluency tests were elaborated for the purpose of assessing reading fluency among compulsory school children. Regular reading fluency assessments make it possible to teach reading in ways that are adapted to the needs of each learner.

The *Lesferill* reading fluency assessments were conducted in compulsory schools around Iceland in September 2017. Reading fluency benchmarks for each year group, stated as a goal for the number of correctly read words per minute **by spring** of the relevant school year, are listed in Table 1. The benchmarks indicate the minimum number of correct words per minute a student should be able to read **by the end of the school year**.

Benchmark 1: The goal is for 90 per cent of all students to be able to read at least the specified number of words per minute **by spring**.

Benchmark 2: The goal is for 50 per cent of all students to be able to read at least the specified number of words per minute **by spring**.

Benchmark 3: The goal is for 25 per cent of all students to be able to read at least the specified number of words per minute **by spring**.

Table 1. 'May' benchmarks for the *Lesferill* reading fluency tests—
number of correctly read words per minute.

Year group	Benchmark 1	Benchmark 2	Benchmark 3
	90%	50%	25%
Grade 1	20	55	75
Grade 2	40	85	100
Grade 3	55	100	120
Grade 4	80	120	145
Grade 5	90	140	160
Grade 6	105	155	175
Grade 7	120	165	190
Grade 8	130	180	210
Grade 9	140	180	210
Grade 10	145	180	210

Participation in reading fluency tests

The reading fluency tests conducted in September 2017 had a very high participation rate, as shown in Figure 1 and Table 2. Grades 2 to 5 had the highest rate of participation, at 89 per cent, while in grade 1 participation was only 27 per cent. Low participation in grade 1 can probably be explained by the fact that students are more likely to be administered the test if they already possess some reading skills.

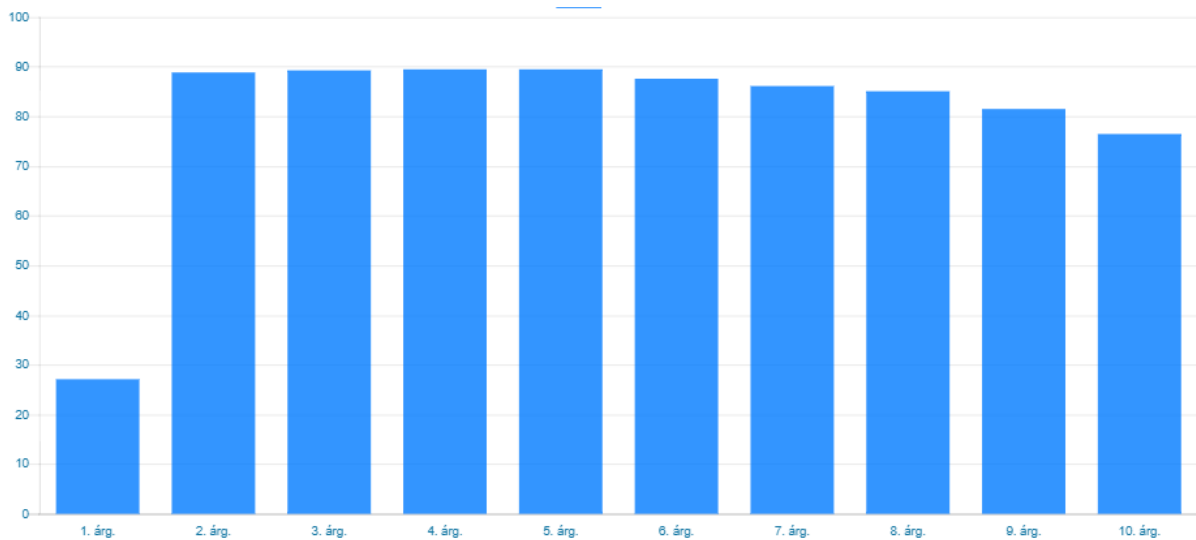


Figure 1. Participation in the reading fluency tests conducted in September 2017 (árg. = 'year group').

Table 2. Total number of students taking the tests, participation rates, and average numbers of correct words per minute for each year group.

Year group	Total participants	Participation rate	Average number of correctly read words
1	1.215	27%	17
2	4.305	89%	43
3	4.339	89%	67
4	4.275	89%	94
5	4.075	89%	101
6	3.973	88%	110
7	3.778	86%	123
8	3.768	85%	131
9	3.477	81%	146
10	3.176	77%	153

Results of reading fluency tests

Figure 2 (as well as Table 2) gives the average numbers of correctly read words in each year group. Benchmark scores are shown with grey lines, while the blue line indicates the average number of correctly read words in the different year groups. The goal is for each year group's average to approximate benchmark 2 by the end of the school year (spring). Consequently, it is perfectly normal for every year group to fall short of that benchmark at the beginning of the school year (autumn). The year groups differ in how far they have to go to meet benchmark 2, although grade 4 comes closest to this goal. In grade 4, students read an average of 94 words per minute, compared to the 120 words per minute goal set by benchmark 2. In all year groups, the average number of correct words per minute was higher at the beginning of this school year than the corresponding

benchmark 3 for the end of the school year (spring). Focused coaching should make it possible for all year groups to attain the reading goal specified by benchmark 2.

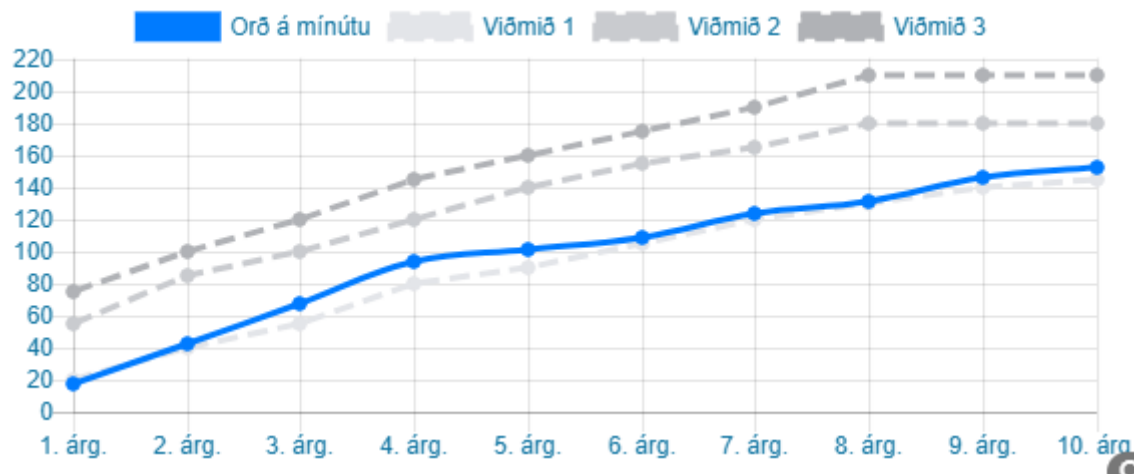


Figure 2. Average number of correct words per minute (blue line) and benchmarks 1, 2 and 3 (grey lines) by year group.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of students in each year group who met benchmarks 1 (yellow), 2 (green) and 3 (blue), as well as the percentage of the same group who did not meet the lowest benchmarks (red) this past autumn (2017). It must be kept in mind that the benchmarks are **spring goals**, meaning that it is normal for a comparatively larger group not to meet benchmarks 1 and 2 in September.

Each year cohort is divided into four groups according to performance against the benchmarks. The group not meeting benchmark 1 is shown in red; the group meeting benchmark 1 but not benchmark 2 is shown in yellow; the group meeting benchmark 2 but not benchmark 3 is shown in green; and the group meeting at least benchmark 3 is shown in blue. The percentage of students meeting benchmark 3 exceeded 7 per cent this last autumn in each of the grades 3, 5 and 10, and was 10.3 per cent in grade 4.

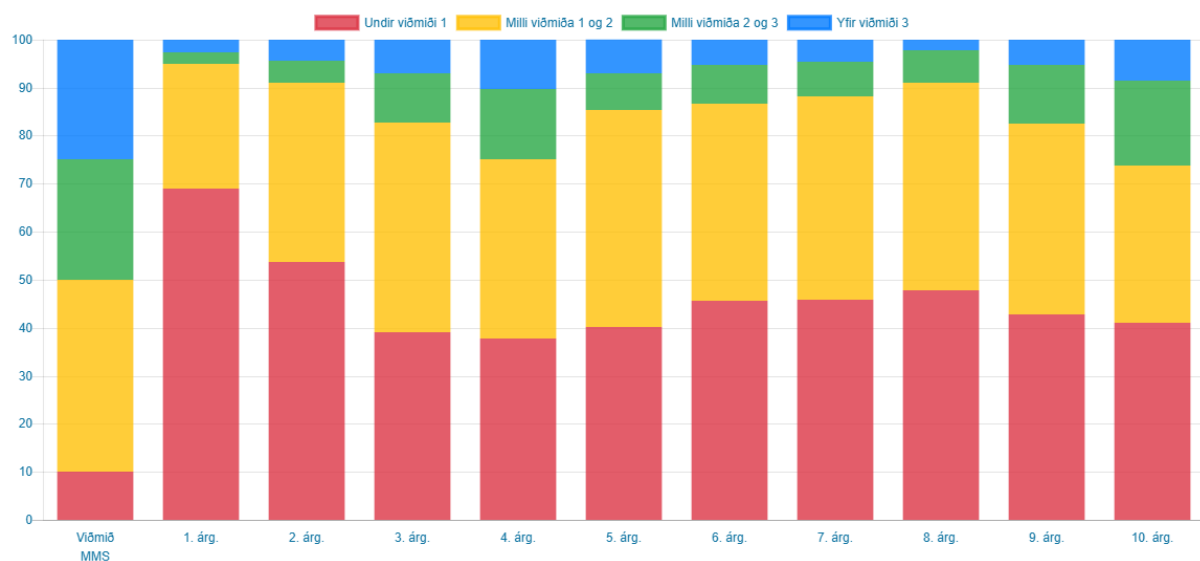


Figure 3. The percentage of students whose results fell, respectively, below benchmark 1 (red); between benchmarks 1 and 2 (yellow); between benchmarks 2 and 3 (green); and above benchmark 3 (blue) (árg. = year group). The bar at the far left shows the Directorate's percentage distribution benchmark.

Objectives

The test results illustrate the importance of setting clear objectives and working towards improved reading fluency at the upper-elementary and lower-secondary levels. The Directorate of Education has placed high priority on providing teachers with accessible and practical working material following the completion of the tests. After the tests, teachers receive the results both in table form and in the form of a bar chart illustrating the achievement and progress of the students over the school year, as well as the average number of correctly read words among all students in each year group who participated in the tests. School administrators are provided with an overview of all year groups in their respective schools. In this way, teachers and school administrators are able to monitor their students' achievement and progress at three different points of the school year. School administrators, teachers and schools can use the detailed information provided about the achievement of each year group and individual students to decide on priorities in the teaching of reading and improve the ways in which they meet their students' needs.

Many local authorities and schools have already adopted reading policies with clearly articulated objectives based on the National Curriculum Guide, and followed these up with actions to improve reading skills. It is important to take a long-term view of improvement in education and reading proficiency, and build the necessary foundations for this.

We all have the same perspective and the same goal: to improve reading skills and education in Iceland. It is therefore imperative for all members of the education community—schools, parents, local authorities, and the society at large—to join hands and continue their strong support of children's reading activities. Acquiring the necessary reading skills can have an impact on children's options in the future and on their freedom to explore the opportunities of life.