

# Student Achievement: Only as Good as the Books Read in English Class?

When it comes to improving education, a lot of emphasis is placed upon the STEM subjects: science, math, and the like. Proficiency in such areas, it is argued, is necessary if the U.S. wants its students to be successful on a global scale.

Such a supposition may be true; however, new evidence suggests that student success may not be found solely in the number and quality of math and science courses our kids take. In fact, one of the greatest instigators of student success may be in the quality of school English courses.

As Stanford Professor Susanna Loeb [explains](#), research has generally found that a high quality math teacher can have a large positive impact on student success in math the following year. The impact is much less for English courses, as shown by the dark blue bars in the chart below.

But as the light blue bars demonstrate, English instruction goes a long way in boosting student performance in other subjects, whereas math does not. According to Loeb, this is likely the case for two reasons:

- Good reading skills are needed to comprehend lessons in math, science, and other STEM related fields.
- English instruction “promotes the ability to think logically and organize complex materials,” which in turn can be applied to other courses.



Such a revelation suggests the vital importance of ensuring that English Language Arts instruction maintains high

standards in the books students are required to read, in the papers they are asked to write, and in the thought processes they are instructed in.

Unfortunately, that doesn't seem to be happening. When it comes to English Language Arts instruction, many college professors find that the students coming out of the nation's schools have not been properly equipped. According to [an ACT study](#), students struggle with:

- Determining central ideas
- Identifying important details
- Drawing conclusions and making inferences
- Evaluating evidence and/or support for an author's claims
- Distinguishing among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment

Given this information, does it seem possible that the path to greater student achievement across the spectrum of subjects might come simply through demanding greater rigor and excellence from the English courses in U.S. schools?