

GHS students' reading endurance plummets

By Phoebe Skinner, Layout Editor

Mr. Hurley is a teacher at Gering High School who teaches seniors' English classes. Mr. Hurley himself has noticed a decline in seniors' reading and comprehension skills. While it has not been a drastic decline, it certainly has been noticeable as he has been teaching for 14 years, well before COVID-19 ever started. "It started before too," Hurley noted. The decline did not start during COVID; it started far before it.

This means that the root problem was not missing a few months of school, but rather something before the quarantine. Mr. Hurley has recognized one of the main issues with his student's reading scores: reading endurance has decreased among his students.

After noticing this lack of reading skills, he has had to change how he reads and tests his students skills. "So what I do now is I mostly use shorter text bite-size pieces, so then I can properly assess whatever skills that we're working on." Mr. Hurley offered some advice to those who wish to increase their reading comprehension and engagement. He said, "You have to read every day, and you have to practice reading for longer periods of time, staying engaged, actively reading, reading with purpose."

Even if you are not gaining skill for the ACT or SAT, reading is still very important. If you plan on going to college, reading is an essential skill for understanding the assignments, studying the textbooks, and passing the classes. Even jobs in the trade industries require reading and comprehension. "I would definitely be reading novels and short stories and anything that you have interests in, so that you can build those muscles," Mr. Hurley said. Overall, it is an important skill everyone needs to practice and make sure not to lose.



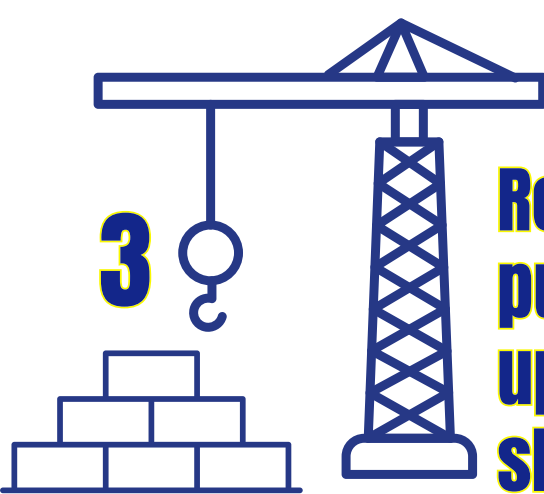
Sophomore Rhyan Buckley splits his focus between two devices while studying recently in the library.

Photo by Phoebe Skinner

3 ways to build reading endurance

1  **Build up your vocabulary**

2  **Read more and with longer stories**

3  **Read with purpose to build up reading skills**

Why is reading so important?

By Phoebe Skinner, Layout Editor

Illiteracy, or a lack of reading skills, can have long term, detrimental effects. Illiteracy deeply affects future education, economic development, and quality of life. Being illiterate also comes with insecurity and self-consciousness. A person who cannot read struggles to know their rights, find good jobs, find housing, and pay bills. It can also affect one's children, as illiteracy is likely to be multi-generational.

It can also lead to financial problems. Being unable to read makes the job market very small and difficult to navigate. Those who cannot read or read well are more likely to be in poverty and miss out on many opportunities within the job market and the community as a whole. Not being able to participate properly within one's community can lead to isolation, which can then cause mental illness and loneliness for you and your family.

Overall, literacy is a foundation for both education and your entire life. It is not just important to pass tests or do well on the ACT. Without reading, it is almost impossible to have a high quality of life compared to those who have a good reading foundation and consequently had a good education and job.

All across the US, high schoolers' reading scores drop to an all-time low, survey finds

By: Phoebe Skinner, Layout Editor



Junior Ashlynn Fitts regularly reads on her phone and rarely from a book.
Photo by Phoebe Skinner

Is reading really that important? If you're a student, you have probably asked yourself this exact question. Do I really need to read this book? Why does my English teacher insist we read Shakespeare? The reality is harsh: reading is essential, yet so many students are avoiding it. This avoidance of school and reading has led to a national decline in senior's reading scores dropping. In over two decades, the reading scores have never been this low.

Most students at Gering High School have probably already stopped reading; or they never started to begin with. This is reflective of the new national norm: not reading. Experts Thomas Kane and William Brangham go into detail about the decline in seniors' reading test scores. The experts explain that this isn't new. They have been seeing this trend for a while. What is new, is the rate at which test scores are lowering.

The main problem is that test scores are dropping; but, another large problem is experts aren't sure why. There are theories, but none with enough evidence to create a tangible solution. The first theory is that teachers have begun to relax pressure and accountability towards state testing.

Many students hated state testing, and as time went on, they lost motivation and staff at schools followed suit. Without the pressure on state testing, students are not taking it seriously enough to get good scores, hence the drop in points.

The second main theory is that social media is becoming a large nuisance to students trying to properly learn. Social media usage is skyrocketing among lower-achieving students. Experts are left to ask one question: is social media causing this decline, or are students slacking off themselves and just turning to social media for simple entertainment. Experts do see hope for an answer in the future. As students



English teacher Mr. Hurley says he has noticed a significant decline in his students' ability to read.
Photo by Phoebe Skinner

begin to have their phones completely banned in schools, it will reveal whether or not phones and social media are causing this literacy downturn. If social media truly is the cause, then expert Thomas Kane is hoping to see improvements once students are not able to use phones during school hours. If phones are not the cause, however, experts are left with the same question of what is causing this diminishing literacy.

The final theory these experts explained was the surplus of students missing school. Student absenteeism is a rising trend that only serves to hold students back from learning at their highest potential. The abundance of students missing school really hit a peak during covid-19; every 19 absenteeism is still very high compared to past decades. Thomas Kane explained that experts and administrators need to find solutions fast, because without solutions, the problem will only serve to get worse.

Literacy issues usually start from kindergarten to second grade, if students do not have an established foundation before going on in their education, it only snowballs from there. Reading is an essential tool for learning in every subject, so, without knowing how to read properly can cause issues in all forms of schooling. In the past, during Covid-19, when many students missed school, this had major repercussions and most likely will as time goes on. If a student missed out on classes during their kindergarten through second grade, that means they missed out on months worth of learning and building their reading fundamentals. This can lead to an unsteady learning environment throughout their entire schooling career.

As these younger students move through middle school and then high school it will have a lasting

Only 36% of students who took the ACT in Nebraska met reading benchmark on ACT
-act.org

292

287

283

1992

2015

2024

Since 1992, the national average reading scores for HS students have hit an all time low.