

Legislative Report

Closing Achievement Gaps



March 31, 2017

State Board of Education

State of Iowa
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LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENT IOWA CODE 256.9.48

Prepare and submit to the chairpersons and ranking members of the senate and house education committees a report on the state's progress toward closing the achievement gap, including student achievement for minority subgroups, and a comprehensive summary of state agency and local district activities and practices taken in the past year to close the achievement gap.

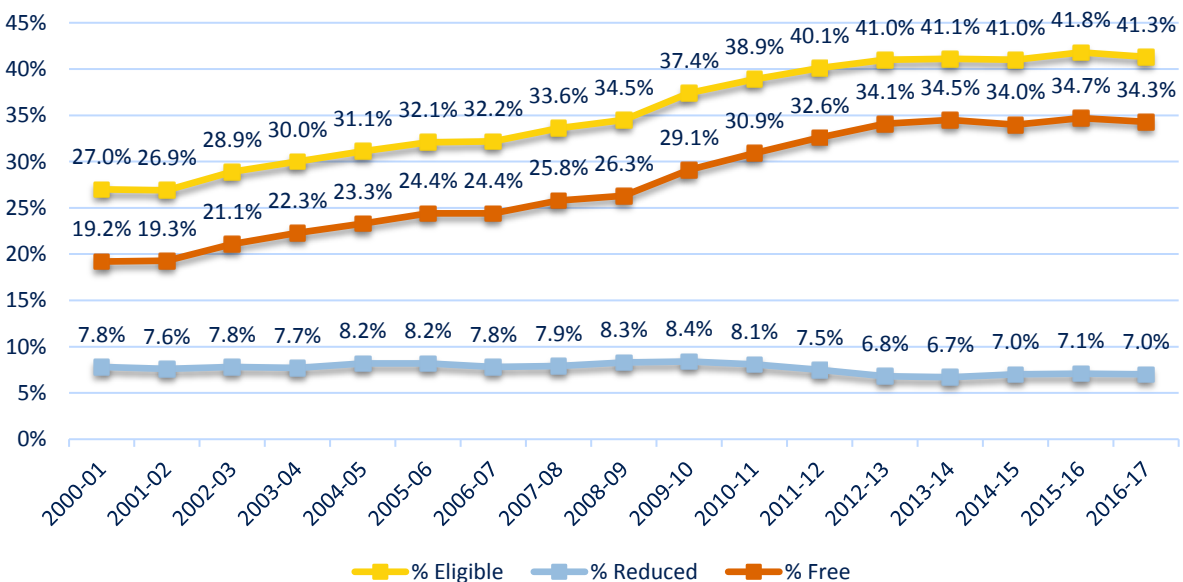
DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

The fall 2016-17 student enrollment data submitted by Iowa school districts show a continued trend of increasing racial and ethnic diversity in Iowa schools. Nearly 24 percent of Iowa students are in a racial or ethnic minority group, compared to 10 percent in the 2000-01 school year.

	Minority	White	Total	Percent Minority	Percent White
2016-17	113,076	368,512	481,588	23.5%	76.5%
2015-16	108,345	371,717	480,062	22.6%	77.4%
2014-15	104,052	373,370	477,422	21.8%	78.2%
2000-01	46,250	430,677	476,927	9.7%	90.3%

Currently, 41.3 percent of Iowa students are eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch, a decrease of .5 percent from the year before. Over the past five years, the percent of eligible students has increased just slightly from 41 percent in 2012-13. This is the second year-to-year decline in eligible students over this same period. A ten-year trend from the 2007-08 school year shows a significant increase in the students eligible.

Figure 1: Percent of Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch - 2000-01 to 2016-17



ANALYZING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), was signed into law in December 2015 and replaced the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. A main driver in ESEA is to provide equity and opportunity for all students. ESSA continues the focus on equity for historically disadvantaged students, including students with disabilities, students who are economically disadvantaged, students from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds, and English language learners (ELL). Additionally, it takes an expanded focus to include students of military-connected families, as well as students who are migrant, homeless or in foster care.

ESSA includes significant reporting requirements to ensure information is available to examine achievement gaps. A report card must be built for the State as a whole and for each school. Two important indicators that must be included in the report card are proficiency and growth measures. Each of these measures answers a different question about student performance. Proficiency is a point in time indicator, which provides a snapshot view of the percent of students performing at a minimum level of performance. Proficiency results answer the question, “What is the percent of students who are performing above or below the proficiency benchmark in both reading and mathematics?” Growth measures, on the other hand, report information about the same set of students across time to see if students are making adequate progress year to year. Growth measures can help answer multiple questions, such as, “What is the percent of students who made their annual growth targets?” and “What percentage of students are growing toward college and career readiness benchmarks?”

There are many ways to examine the achievement gap between student groups. Achievement gaps occur when one group of students outperforms another group and the difference in performance for the two groups is statistically significant. Both proficiency and growth data can provide meaningful information about Iowa’s student achievement gaps.

PROFICIENCY RESULTS

Figures 2 and 3 below provide information about the proficiency rates among Iowa’s largest three racial and ethnic groups on the Iowa Assessments, Iowa’s accountability test: white, black and Hispanic students. While achievement gaps exist between other race/ethnic groups, the largest groups were used to provide a more focused set of analyses.

These analyses combine student achievement results across grades 3-8 and 11 in order to take a high-level state view of performance between groups. Combining results across grade levels creates an aggregate level of proficiency, which was used in these analyses.

Proficiency rates are mostly flat across the past three years. While there is some fluctuation in groups, the gains/losses in reading are very small. Achievement overall for the all students group went down .2 percent in reading and .4 percent in mathematics between 2013-14 and 2015-16. During the same time period, both white students and Hispanic students had gains in reading. White students gained .6 percent and Hispanic student .2 percent in reading. During this same time period, black students saw the largest decrease of 1.8 percent in reading.

Trends in mathematics show a slightly different pattern in proficiency trends from reading. Overall, the mathematics proficiency rates for all students decreased .4 percent. White student performance in mathematics was flat compared to a slight gain in reading. Hispanic students saw a slight decline (.5 percent) in mathematics compared to a slight increase in reading. Black students saw the largest decrease (1.2 percent).

Figure 2: Reading Proficiency

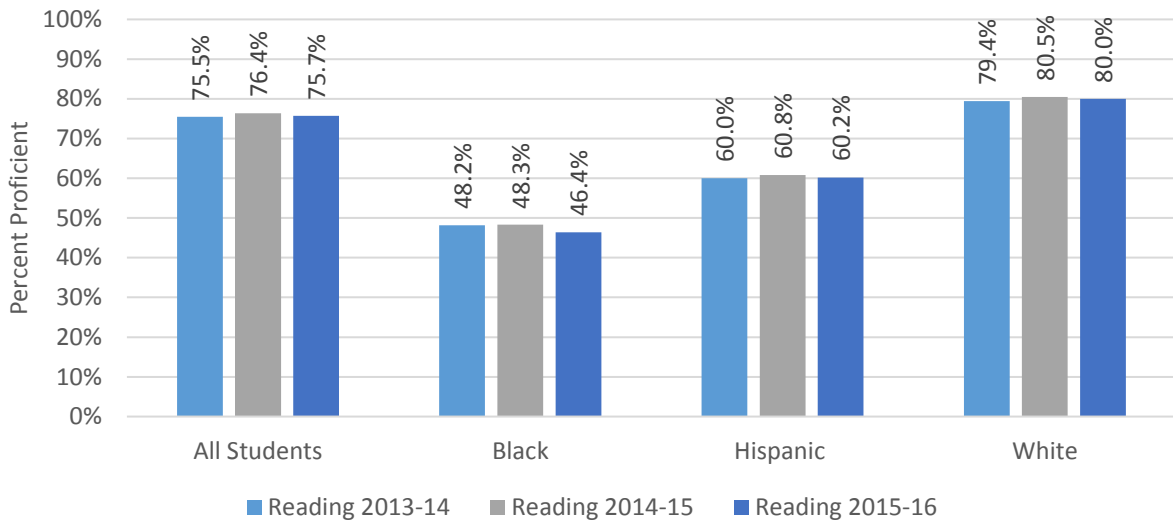
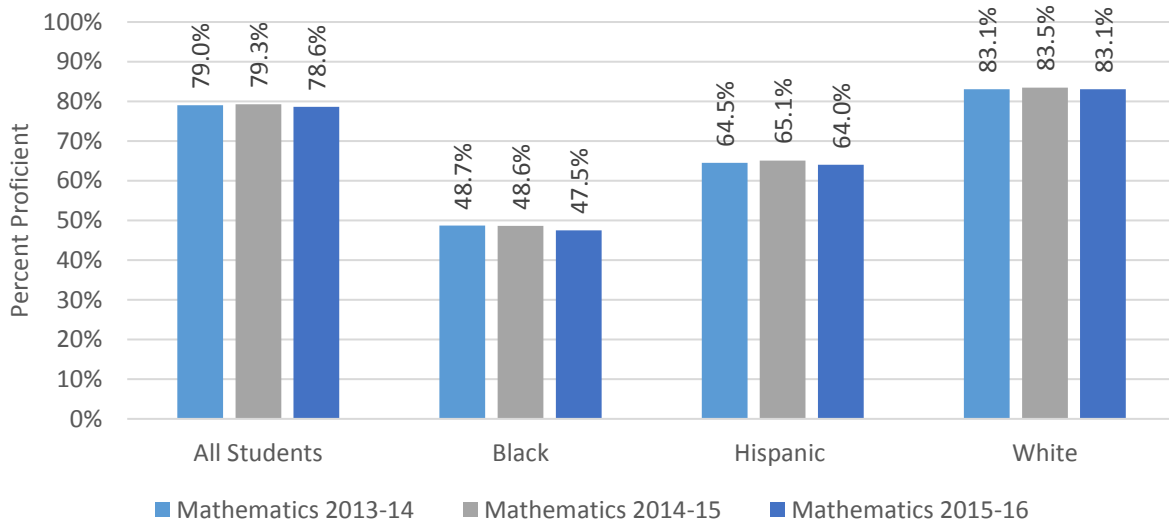


Figure 3: Mathematics Proficiency



GROWTH RESULTS

While it is important to examine student proficiency, it is also critical to ensure that a student is making progress year to year. It helps answer the question, “What percent of students are making a year of academic growth in a year’s time?”

An annual expected student growth model was created for the Iowa School Report Card. This growth measure sets expectations that all students perform at or above the average range (35-65 percentile) for all students. Using the middle range sets a higher growth expectation for a student who is performing at the lower range so that he/she may catch up. It also sets a uniform growth target for all students.

Figure 4: Annual Growth

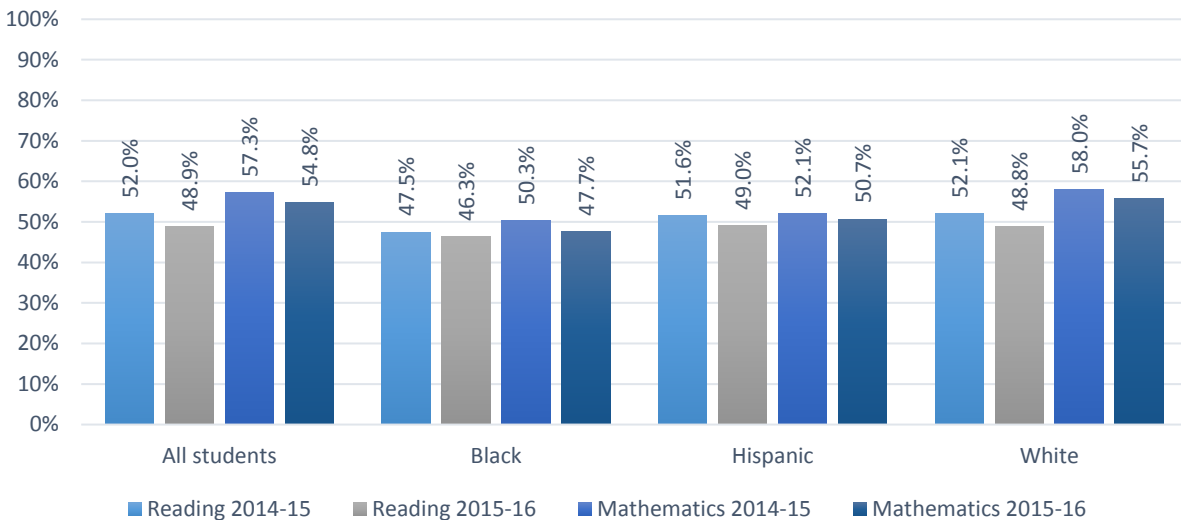


Figure 4 provides information about the different growth rates for all students as a whole and detail about black, Hispanic and white student groups in both reading and mathematics. Across all groups in both reading and mathematics, there was a decrease in the percent of students who achieved their annual growth targets between the 2014-15 and 2015-16. For all students, there was a 3.1 percent decrease in reading and 2.5 percent in mathematics. Black students had a 1.2 percent decrease in reading and 2.6 percent decrease in mathematics. Hispanic students had a 2.6 percent decrease in reading and 1.4 percent decrease in mathematics. White students had a 3.3 percent decrease in reading and 2.3 percent decrease in mathematics.

Table 2 provides a comparison of the growth rates of white, black and Hispanic students. Growth provides a different picture of performance compared to a static point-in-time metric such as proficiency. A positive trend can be seen in growth in reading for Hispanic and black students compared to white students. In 2015-16, Hispanic students had a slightly higher percentage of students growing in reading compared to white students. The percent of Hispanic students achieving growth targets in 2015-16 was 0.2 percentage points higher than white

students. The growth gap between black and white was -4.6 percent in 2014-15 and decreased to -2.5 percent in 2015-16. The growth gap in reading has closed for Hispanic students and is closing for black students. Ideally, it should be expected that students, regardless of demographics, are growing at the same rates. These findings indicate that in reading white and Hispanic students are growing at the same rates. While the percent of black students making their annual growth targets in reading are lower, the results are headed in the right direction.

The gap in mathematics growth shows a different trend. While gaps exist in the percent of students who are achieving their annual growth targets in mathematics, the gaps are much less severe than what is seen in proficiency rates between groups. The proficiency gap between Hispanic and white students is between 18 and 19 percent in mathematics in 2014-15 and 2015-16. However, the Hispanic and white gap in the percent of students reaching growth targets is 5 percent in reading over that same period. The difference in growth rates between black and white students was 7.7 percentage points in mathematics in 2014-15 and increased to 8 percentage points in 2015-16.

Table 2: Proficiency					
	White	Black	Black/White Difference	Hispanic	Hispanic/White Difference
2014-15 Reading	80.5	48.3	-32.2	60.8	-19.7
2015-16 Reading	80.0	46.4	-33.6	60.2	-19.8
2014-15 Mathematics	83.5	48.6	-34.9	65.1	-18.4
2015-16 Mathematics	83.1	47.5	-35.6	64.0	-19.1
Growth					
	White	Black	Black/White Difference	Hispanic	Hispanic/White Difference
2014-15 Reading	52.1	47.5	-4.6	51.6	-0.5
2015-16 Reading	48.8	46.3	-2.5	49.0	0.2
2014-15 Mathematics	58.0	50.3	-7.7	52.1	-5.9
2015-16 Mathematics	55.7	47.7	-8.0	50.7	-5.0

DEPARTMENT AND DISTRICT ACTIVITIES TO CLOSE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT

ESSA is focused on equitable access to education, high standards and accountability, and a decrease in achievement gaps across subgroups. A core component central to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is to provide equity and opportunity for all students while at the same time working to close achievement and equity gaps. Unlike No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which took a one-size-fits-all approach to accountability, ESSA provides states flexibility in building state-level plans tailored to each state's unique context.

The Iowa Department of Education (Department) is in the process of building Iowa's ESSA plan. The Department formed work teams around each of the main components of the law, including Standards and Assessment, School Intervention, Accountability, Educator Effectiveness, Policy and Communications, Legal, Early Childhood, and Finance. Each of these work teams has both an internal Department work group and also an external vetting group. The vetting groups are designed to provide feedback on the details for each component of the plan as it is built.

The Department has also created an ESSA Advisory Committee whose purpose is to provide feedback for the plan as a whole and each component part. The Director's Advisory Committee is a stakeholder group with broad stakeholder representation including representatives from large districts, small districts, Iowa Association of School Boards, school board members, Iowa State Education Association, School Administrators of Iowa, teachers, principals, and superintendents.

The Department has completed significant outreach and engagement activities through the plan development process. In fall 2016, the Department held nine listening tours across the state to educate stakeholders about ESSA and learn what is important to them in building a new plan. The Department also held issue-specific input sessions to target certain areas and ensure these viewpoints are considered. These targeted areas include gifted and talented, special education, ELL, library support, counselors in schools, well-rounded education, early childhood, and other state agencies.

While Iowa's ESSA plan is currently under construction, Iowa is well-positioned to take advantage of the opportunities offered by ESSA. Over the past five years, Iowa has:

- Developed a comprehensive early literacy initiative to ensure all students read proficiently by the end of third grade.
- Created a statewide teacher leadership system that elevates the teaching profession and taps the expertise of teachers to improve classroom instruction and improve student achievement.
- Implemented an ongoing review of Iowa's academic standards to ensure Iowans have input into what students should know and be able to do as they progress toward graduation.
- Launched the Future Ready Iowa initiative, which will build Iowa's talent pipeline by ensuring citizens have access to education and training required for productive jobs and careers both now and in the future.
- Revitalized Career and Technical Education to ensure equitable access to high-quality programs.

- Focused on increasing interest and achievement in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) through the Governor’s STEM Advisory Council.
- Redesigned Iowa’s school accountability system to provide support to schools where and when they most need it.

Iowa’s consolidated ESSA Plan serves as the foundation of the Department’s support for students, educators and schools. The Department has used this as an opportunity to not only align our work, but also as a vehicle to reinforce our commitment to equity, educational excellence, and coordination of programs and support services. A main driver in the Department’s plan is to support all students and assist in closing the achievement and equity gaps that exist between student groups.

The Department is focused on ensuring equity not just in access to a well-rounded education, but to educational excellence leading to success for all Iowa students. We have established an effective infrastructure that draws upon expertise from across our state to establish evidence-based practices embedded in every aspect of what we do in education. We maintain a robust delivery and support system needed to increase student results by providing evidence-based professional learning to educators and leaders statewide. Within this collaborative infrastructure we are committed to ensuring:

- Supports for students to have access to – and thrive within - an equitable and well-rounded education;
- Supports for educators to work in systems that promote excellence in both teaching and learning; and
- Supports for schools to have greater flexibility and positive outcomes through Iowa’s Unified Differentiated Accountability and Support System

For the past four years, the Department has worked in collaboration to establish a robust collaborative infrastructure with area education agencies (AEAs), districts, schools, and related educational organizations. Experts across the state are engaged in this critical work to guarantee what we do as a state is based on current evidence of impact on student outcomes and efficacy in school improvement in the following ways:

- Development - We work as a system to identify, develop, refine, and pilot evidence-based processes, tools, practices and professional learning.
- Delivery - After establishing efficacy within Iowa’s context, members of Iowa’s statewide Training Cadre engage in professional learning which is then, in turn, delivered across agencies. Training Cadre members are personnel from across the educational system who are experts in areas vital to student outcomes and school improvement. Iowa’s Statewide School Improvement Team (SSIT) are members of this cadre and are considered the core experts in school improvement.
- Supports - Training Cadre members are responsible to support schools identified as needing universal, supplemental, or targeted supports. SSIT members are responsible to support schools identified as needing comprehensive or intensive supports.

DIFFERENTIATED ACCOUNTABILITY

The Department implemented a new school improvement process called Differentiated Accountability (DA) in the 2015-16 school year. DA is Iowa's accountability model designed to provide support for public districts, accredited nonpublic schools, and AEAs when and where they need it most. The DA model is built to support compliance with state and federal law as well as build capacity in five conceptual areas essential to continuous improvement in education: Assessment and Data-based Decision-making, Universal Instruction, Intervention System, Leadership, and Infrastructure.

During 2015-16, the Statewide School Improvement Team successfully completed a pilot of DA using on-site school visits. The pilot of DA yielded a significant amount of feedback, which led to several process adjustments and a pool of positive support responses. In the 2016-17 school year, DA was brought to scale.

With DA as the foundation of the school improvement process, the Department updated the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) to match. The purpose of the CSIP is to chart the course for improved student learning for each district and nonpublic school. Through CSIP development, districts and schools work collaboratively to review data, set goals, determine strategies or actions to accomplish goals, and evaluate the results. This process of continuous improvement focuses efforts on instructional improvement linked to student learning. Districts, through the CSIP, report their solutions to increasing student achievement which impacts all students and can assist in closing achievement gaps.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach or strategy that will lead to increased student achievement results and close performance gaps among groups of students. If such an approach existed, districts and schools would be well on their way to solving this persistent and difficult problem. Instead, the solution must be localized and tailored to the context of the district or school. Contextual information such as the demographics of the school and the background of the student population are important considerations in determining solutions that will have a positive impact on student learning. Further, there will be differences in achievement in different grade levels and between different subgroups.

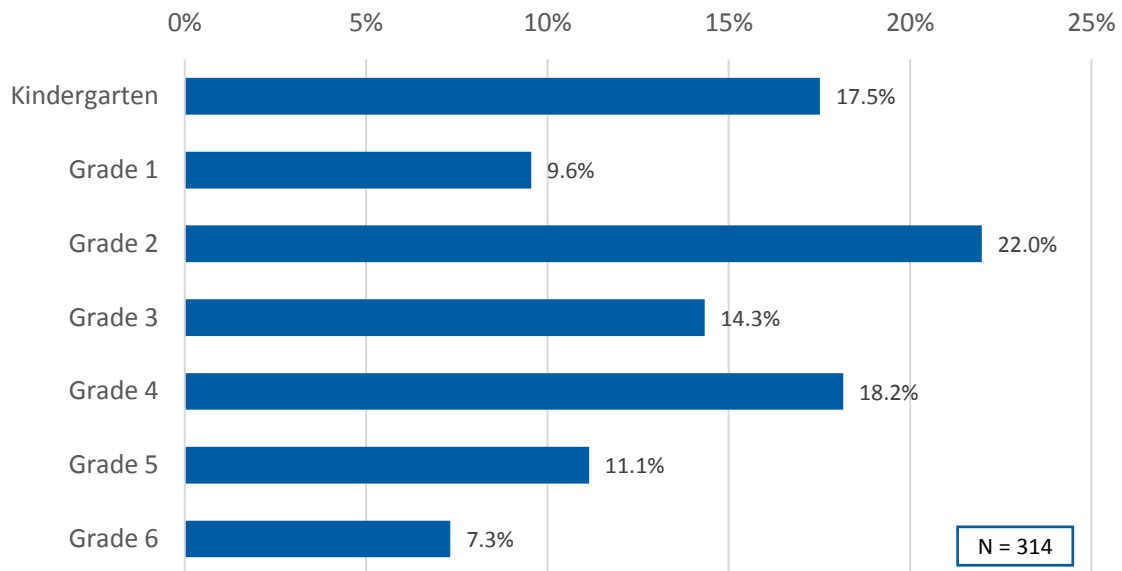
To that end, districts report in their CSIP goals and localized strategies to achieve their goals. An analysis was completed of the 2016 CSIPs submitted by Iowa districts. The purpose of the analysis was to examine areas identified in needs of improvement by Iowa districts. This is not an exhaustive analyses of all parts of the CSIP, but rather an examination that highlights targeted areas and districts plans to address these targets.

Student Groups Not Meeting Benchmark

Districts were asked to identify which grade level and subgroup had the largest percent of students who were not meeting benchmark in the prior year. Districts could report the grade level and subgroups which they identified as having the lowest performance within their districts. These questions were optional on the CSIP, so not all districts reported.

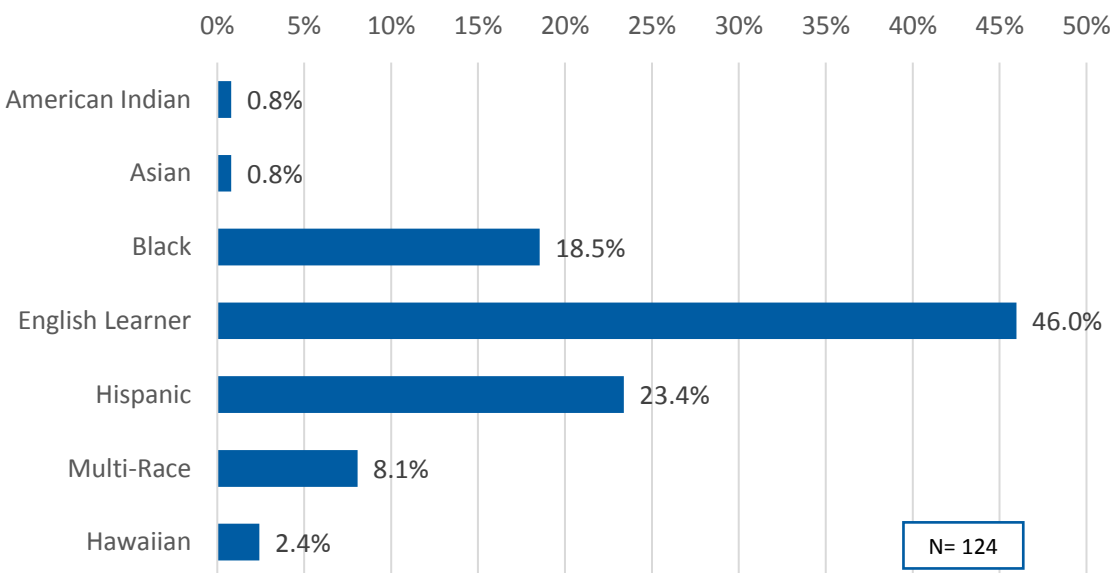
Between kindergarten through grade 6, the most frequently reported grade level that did not meet benchmark was grade 2 at 22 percent. The second and third most frequently reported grades which were not meeting benchmark was grade 4 followed by kindergarten. In all, 314 districts reported the grade level which were not meeting benchmark.

Figure 5: Grade Level Not Meeting Benchmark



The most frequently identified subgroup that did not meet benchmark was ELL at 46 percent. Hispanic (23.4 percent) and black (18.5 percent) students were the second and third most identified group not meeting benchmark.

Figure 6: Subgroup Not Meeting Benchmark



In total, 124 districts responded to this question. This represents 37 percent of all Iowa districts. While this question was not answered universally, the sample of respondents appears to be representative. Respondents included a wide variety of Iowa districts.

District Strategies to Achieve Goals

Districts reported a number of strategies to accomplish their annual and long-range goals. Districts were asked to identify teacher professional development needs over the next few years to reach their literacy goals. On average, districts indicated four teacher professional development targets. The table below provides a breakdown of professional development needed, identified by district leadership. The most frequently reported area of need was the development of a professional development plan to implement best practices for use in literacy and progressing monitoring data for educators. This is not surprising given the implementation of the Iowa TIER system to administer assessments, track progress, and intervene with students to achieve benchmark and close performance gaps.

Overall, there was only about a six percent range across professional development actions identified by districts. This indicates there is no single professional development area of need reported by districts in their comprehensive improvement plans. These findings suggest districts having a variety of different needs tailored to the specific area identified for improvement.

Table 3: Actions to Accomplish Annual and Long-Range Goals

Action	Percent of Actions
Develop and implement a professional development plan to study and implement best practices in literacy progress monitoring data	20%
Develop and implement a professional development plan to operationalize and align instructional practices	19%
Building consensus for and establishing a framework to implement a multi-tiered system of supports	18%
Develop and implement professional development plan to understand the role of universal tier practices and engage in collaborative inquiry practices	15%
Develop and implement a professional development plan to understand the role of fluency and/or screening data and engage in collaborative inquiry practice	14%
District/school will develop and implement a professional development plan to study, implement, and evaluate the features of explicit instruction	14%

In the CSIP development process, districts had the opportunity to describe additional actions they plan to take to achieve their annual and long-range goals. In examining district reported actions, a variety of themes emerged across districts. Actions identified include the following:

- Enhancing leadership/professional learning communities/coaching activities.
- Parent, staff, and student engagement activities.
- Assessment activities.

Enhancing leadership/professional learning communities/coaching activities

It is clear leadership plays an important role in schools. Quality leadership can make teachers and staff feel valued and supported. This can impact the climate and culture in a school setting the stage for impacting achievement.

The statewide Teacher Leadership and Compensation (TLC) system is now available in all Iowa districts. Districts are at various stages of implementation of their TLC system. Some districts are in their first year of implementation, while other districts have had their systems in place for multiple years. As it would be expected, districts reported a variety of goals and activities related to their TLC systems. As examples, districts reported enhancing their instructional coaching system, leveraging their TLC system to reach their literacy goals, and implementing the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) model, including professional development through their TLC system.

Additionally, districts reported enhancing building leadership teams or implementing/leveraging professional learning communities to drive their improvement efforts. One district reported developing a literacy leadership team to implement systematic instructional practices. Several districts reported similar themes where they would use existing infrastructure, such as a coaching team, to implement their targeted strategy.

Parent, staff, and student engagement activities

Research suggests that positive school culture and climate can have an impact on student learning. Triangulation of information between school staff, parents, and students can be used as a tool to enhance school climate and culture. To that end, districts reported a variety of activities related to parent, staff, and student engagement. Several districts reported survey activities such as implementing parent, teacher, or staff surveys. Other engagement activities include working with an equity committee, engaging business leaders, engaging the teacher leadership team, and increasing parent involvement such as increased attendance at parent teacher conferences. One district reported engaging with a student advisory team. Another district reported engaging a community round table.

Assessment and data activities

Assessment is a powerful tool in determining areas of strength in student performance as well as identifying targets for improvement. Additional assessment can be used by districts to provide supplementary information to triangulate results. Districts reported a variety of assessment activities in their CSIP.

There were a number of districts who identified focusing on universal screening assessment information. Several districts reported implementing the Measures of Academic Program (MAP) assessment, ACT or other third party assessments in mathematics and reading. One district reported implementing formative and summative assessments linked to the Iowa Core. These assessment and data activities were reported to be used in professional learning communities or coaching teams. One district reported building a data wall. Other districts reported examining behavior referral, discipline information or positive behavior supports data in their improvement efforts.

CONCLUSION

There is a continued growing trend of student diversity in Iowa districts. Almost one quarter (23.5) of Iowa students are students of color. This trend is likely to continue into the future. On the other hand, free-or-reduced priced lunch eligibility has declined twice in the past four years.

Proficiency results for Iowa students overall are mixed in reading and mathematics. Significant achievement gaps still exist between white, Hispanic, and black students. Growth provides a different picture of student performance. In examining the growth results, gaps are significantly smaller than what is seen with proficiency. While the black-white growth gap in mathematics is

still large, it is much smaller in reading. The percent of Hispanic students meeting annual growth targets in reading is above white student growth.

The Department has been hard at work building an Iowa-specific plan for ESSA. The goal of this plan is to create equity and educational excellence through alignment and coordination of programs and support services. This will include supports for students, supports for educators through programs like TLC, and supports for schools through Iowa's Unified Differentiated Accountability and Support System.

The most frequently identified grade level not meeting benchmarks is second grade. This certainly supports the need for early intervention in literacy. Iowa districts also identified ELL students as the largest group not meeting benchmark.

There is no one size fits all approach Iowa districts can implement to address the student achievement gap. Through the DA and CSIP process, Iowa districts identified a variety of professional development needs to support their educators. In addition, Iowa districts identified enhancing leadership, professional learning communities, and coaching activities as key components of their CSIP. Districts also targeted parent, student, and educator engagement activities as part of their plans. Lastly, additional assessment information was also an identified need.