Legislative Report
Closing Achievement Gaps

May 2021

State of Iowa
Department of Education
Grimes State Office Building
400 E. 14th Street
Des Moines, IA 50319-0146

State Board of Education

Brooke Axiotis, President, Des Moines
Bettie Bolar, Vice President, Marshalltown
Brian J. Kane, Dubuque
Michael L. Knedler, Council Bluffs
Mike May, Spirit Lake
John Robbins, Iowa Falls
Georgia Van Gundy, Waukee
Kimberly Wayne, Des Moines
Hannah Groos, Student Member, Norwalk

Administration

Ann Lebo, Director and Executive Officer
of the State Board of Education

Division of Learning and Results

Amy J. Williamson, Deputy Director

Bureau of Information and Analysis Services

Jay Pennington, Bureau Chief

Bureau of Learner Strategies and Supports

Brad Niebling, Bureau Chief

Bureau of School Improvement

Janell Brandhorst, Bureau Chief

LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENT IOWA CODE 256.9.45

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.

SHIFTING STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

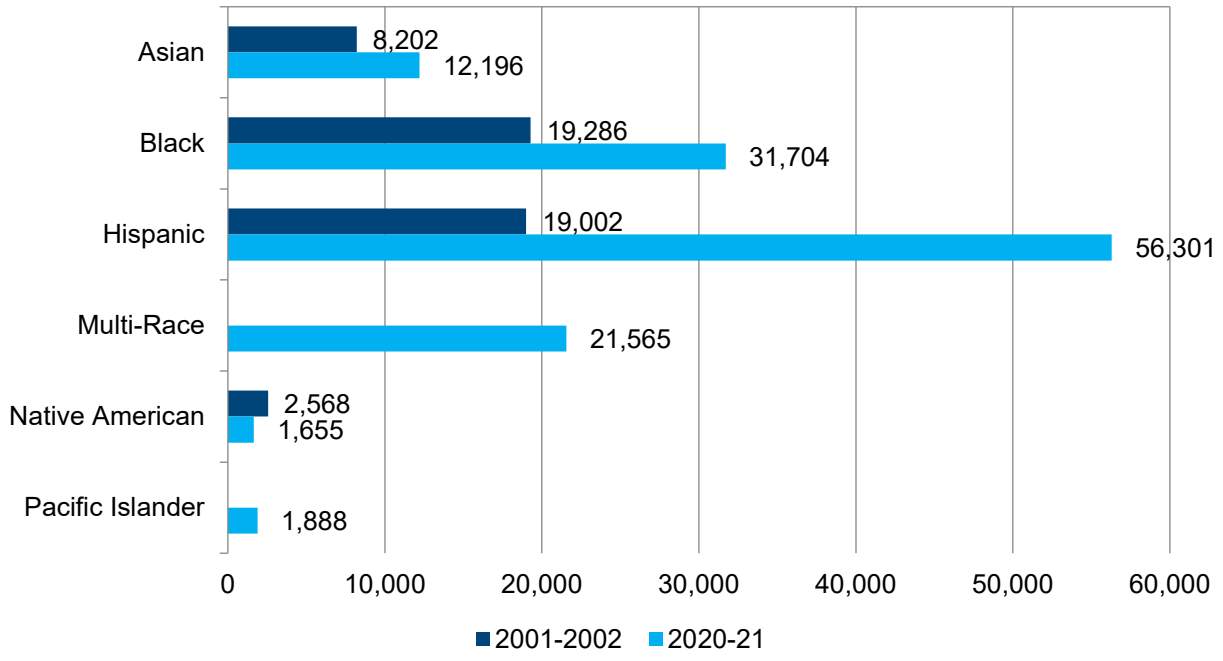
Over the past two decades, Iowa school districts have seen a significant shift in the students they serve. Over this period of time, the percent of Iowa students who identify as students of color has increased 155 percent while the white student population has declined 17 percent. The percentage of minority students remained the same in 2020-21 compared to the prior year.

Table 1 and Figure 1 highlight the changing demographic in the student population across a 20-year period. The largest increases can be found in the Hispanic and Black student groups. The Hispanic student population has grown by 196 percent while the Black student population has grown by 64 percent. Students who identify as multiracial is the third largest subgroup representing about 5 percent of all students. The multiracial student group has also seen a large increase since this category was first introduced in 2009.

Table 1: K-12 Statewide Enrollment

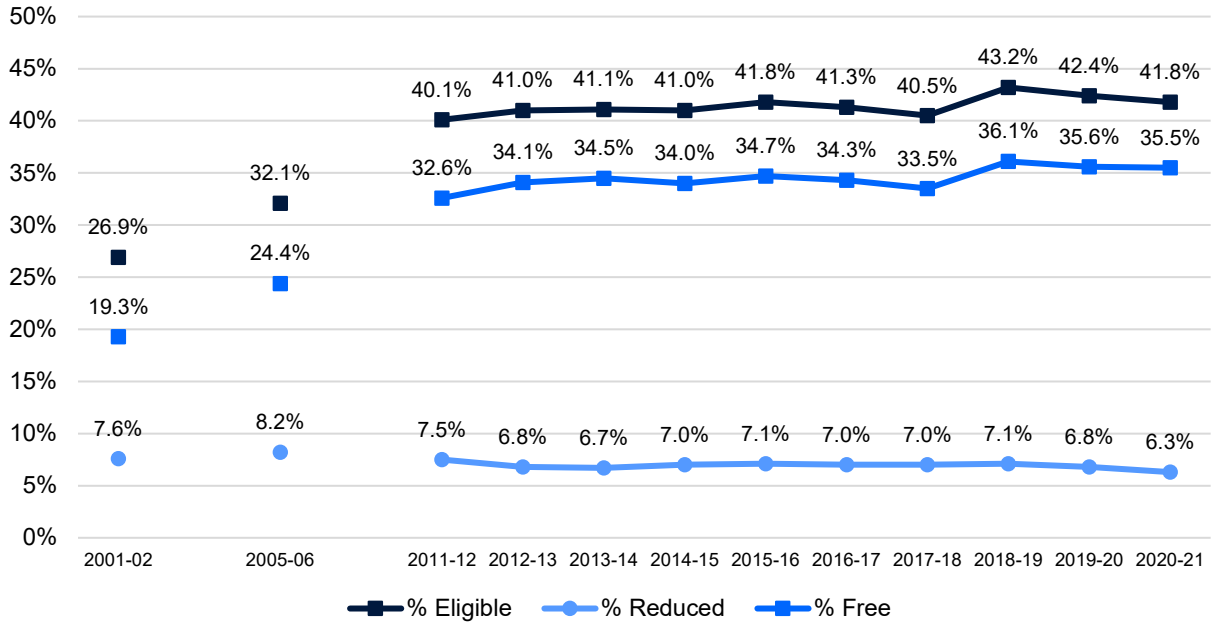
School Year	Minority	White	Total	Percent Minority	Percent White
2020-21	125,309	353,955	479,264	26%	74%
2019-20	124,628	361,226	485,854	26%	74%
2018-19	120,376	363,215	483,591	25%	75%
2014-15	104,052	373,370	477,422	22%	78%
2001-02	49,058	426,351	475,409	10%	90%

Figure 1: Minority Student Trend in Iowa



Long-term trends show significant increases in the percentage of students who are living in poverty. Figure 2 provides a 20-year trend line of the percent of students eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch (FRL). Over the past decade, the percent of students eligible has slightly increased from 40.1 percent in 2011-12 to 41.8 percent in 2020-21. Over the past few years, the percent of students has seesawed, going up one year then back down the next. However, over the past two years, there was a decline of 1.4 percentage points in the percent of students eligible from 2018-19 to 2020-21.

Figure 2: Percent of Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
2000-01 to 2020-21



Iowa school districts are more diverse today than any other time in their history. The Iowa Department of Education enrollment projections suggest that the shifting Iowa student population diversity will continue into the foreseeable future. It is critical for Iowa school districts to ensure they are prepared and to adapt to better serve a more diverse student population.

IOWA VERSUS THE NATION

IOWA HIGHLIGHTS

Iowa has a proud tradition as a leader in education. There are multiple measures which highlight the success of Iowa students including the following examples:

- The most recent national data show Iowa as the leader in high school graduation rates. For the Class of 2019, 91.6 percent of Iowa students completed high school within four years.
- Iowa is a leader in ACT scores. The Class of 2020 ranked third among all states who assessed 50 percent or more of their students. Iowa students have an average ACT composite score of 21.1.

- Iowa is a leader in providing postsecondary enrollment opportunities to their students. Iowa tops the nation in concurrent enrollment. A recently released report shows 51,800 high school students participated in joint enrollment during the 2019-20 school year.

Over the past several years, the state has focused efforts on increasing the number of students that are future ready. Future Ready Iowa is an initiative to build Iowa's talent pipeline. Future Ready Iowa sets an ambitious goal of 70 percent or more of Iowans with a degree or industry recognized credential. With overall high graduation rates and college readiness assessment results, these data certainly suggest Iowa is up to the challenge in making progress toward this goal.

It is important to understand that achieving this goal will require many more students to be prepared for life beyond high school. Currently, data from Iowa's Postsecondary Readiness Reports, show only 67 percent of Iowa high school graduates enrolling in higher education within one year of high school graduation. Furthermore, approximately 58 percent of students persist by enrolling in a second year of college. Lastly, only 48 percent of the original cohort complete a high education degree within six years of high school graduation.

While these measures highlight positive trends, there are also data which show concerning trends. Iowa cannot become complacent in order to stay competitive.

THE NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATION PROGRESS

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the only continuing and nationally representative assessment of what our nation's students know and can do. NAEP has often been called the "gold standard" of assessments because it is developed using the best thinking of assessment and content specialists, education experts and teachers from around the nation. NAEP provides a common measure of student achievement across the country. Because states have their own unique assessments, with different content and standards, it is impossible to use them as a means to compare across state content and achievement standards. Such comparisons are possible with NAEP, however, because the questions and administration of the assessment are the same across all states.

The primary NAEP tests are administered nationally every two years in Grades 4 and 8 in both reading and mathematics. Iowa's participation in NAEP goes back over 30 years which allows for long term analysis across multiple grades and content areas. While Iowa has participated in NAEP for a long time, required national participation has only occurred for about the past 20 years. For this reason, this analysis focused on Iowa's results from 2003 to 2019. The most recent NAEP results available are from 2019. The next administration of NAEP will occur in the spring of 2022.

Figures 3 and 4 show NAEP results for Iowa and the nation over the past 16 years. During this time, Iowa NAEP results have decreased in reading in Grades 4 and 8 while the performance of the nation has continued to close the gap. In 2003, the gap between Iowa and the nation in Grade 4 was 7 scale score points, and by 2019, the gap was only 2 scale score points. When examining Grade 8 reading, the gap was also a 7 scale score point difference. However, by 2019, the performance of Iowa and the nation was the same as Iowa's average performance decreased 6 scale score points while the national average increased 1 point. A significance test on these results shows that Iowa's performance is not significantly different from the nation's as a whole. This suggests that Iowa has become an average performer in reading. Similar trends can be found when examining Iowa student performance in mathematics. The gap between Iowa and the nation is closing because Iowa student performance is getting worse compared to the national public schools over the past 10 years.

Figure 3: NAEP - Reading, Grade 4

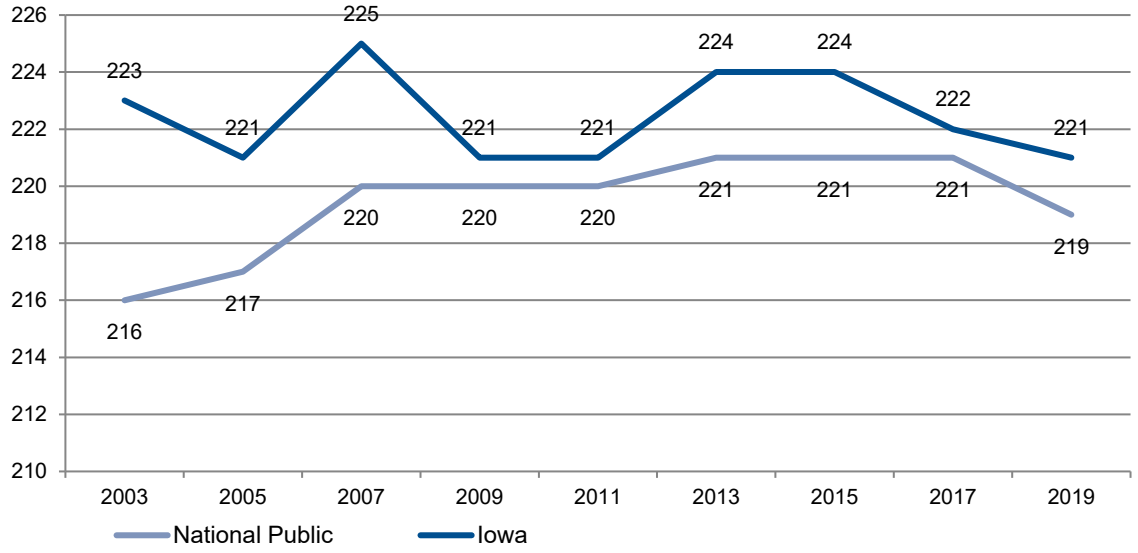
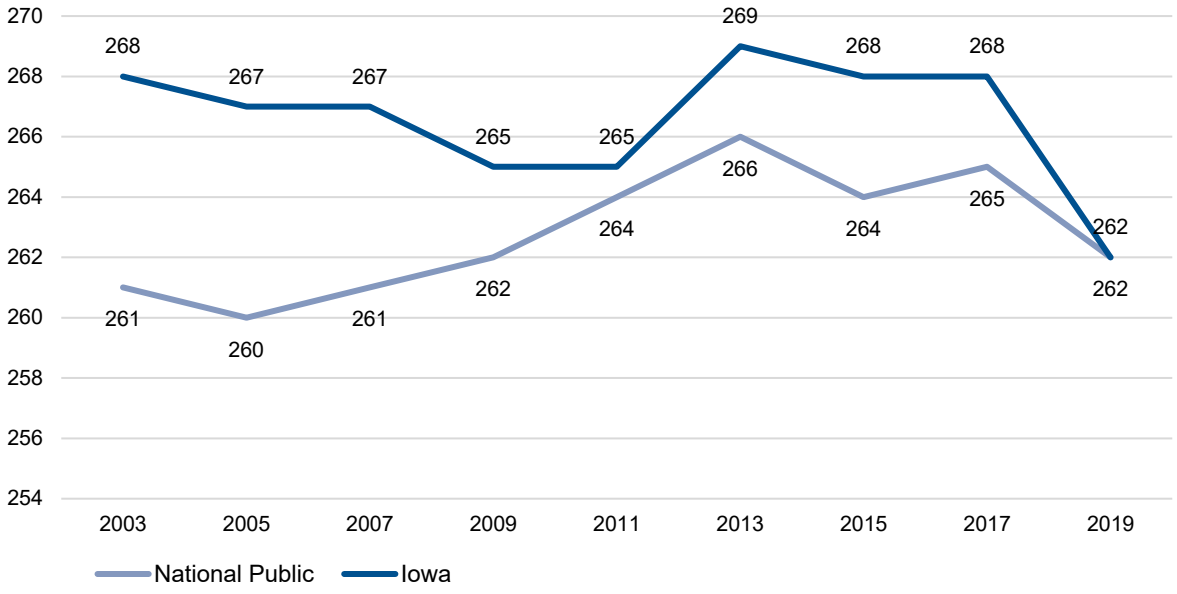


Figure 4: NAEP - Reading, Grade 8



Figures 5 to 8 show Iowa student performance of white, Hispanic, Black, and FRL-eligible students compared to all states in the nation. The bar charts in these figures order states from left to right by their average scale score achievement in reading on NAEP. States on the far left have the lowest average performance and states on the right have the highest average performance. Moving from left to right, you can see the relative placement of each state in relation to others and the nation from lowest to highest performing state. Iowa's results are marked in red and the national average is indicated in yellow.

These figures demonstrate that Iowa performance is average and in some cases below average compared to peer states. When comparing Iowa to the nation in Grade 4 reading, Iowa's average scale score in 2019 was significantly lower than the national average for white students and Black students and not significantly different from the nation for Hispanic students or FRL-eligible students. Given these comparisons, it is plausible that Iowa's overall Grade 4 reading average isn't significantly lower than the national average primarily due to its student population makeup – for instance, 42.5 percent of Iowa public school students were FRL-eligible in 2018-2019 while 52.3 percent of U.S. students were eligible.

Iowa's average score is over inflated and could be lower. Because Iowa's student population is homogeneous and primarily white, it raises the average. When examining the average white student performance compared to their peers nationally, Iowa white student scores are below average. As the Iowa student population continues to shift, its average scores on NAEP will continue to slide. It would be incorrect to conclude that the changing diversity of Iowa's student population will be the main contributor to a decline on NAEP. It is not because of the poor performance of minority students but rather due to white students performing below average which has led to stagnant results. In order to improve Iowa's performance on this measure, continued focus should be paid to providing equitable learning opportunities to all Iowa students. When comparing Iowa's Grade 4 reading average scale scores by student group between 2011 and 2019, none of the gaps between Black/white, Hispanic/white, or FRL-eligible/non-FRL-eligible students have significantly narrowed.

Figure 5: NAEP Reading Grade 4 - White
Average Scale Score: 2019

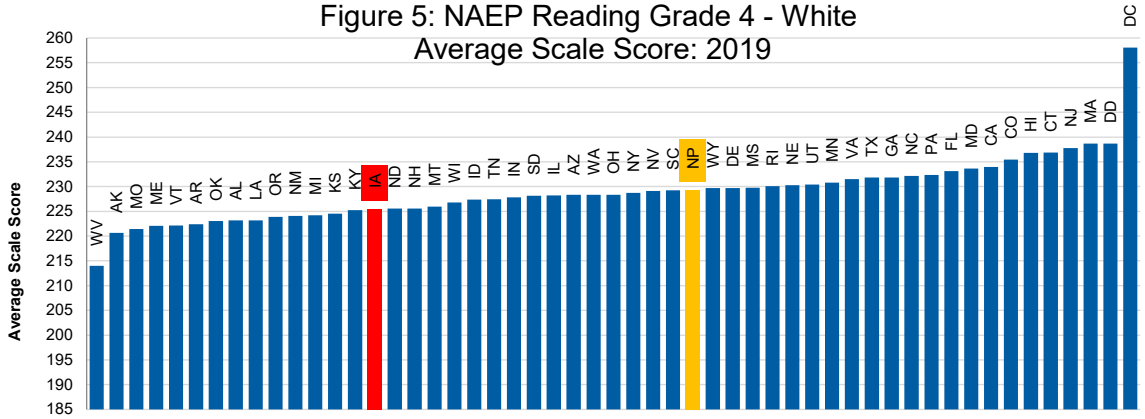


Figure 6: NAEP Reading Grade 8 - Hispanic
Average Scale Score: 2019

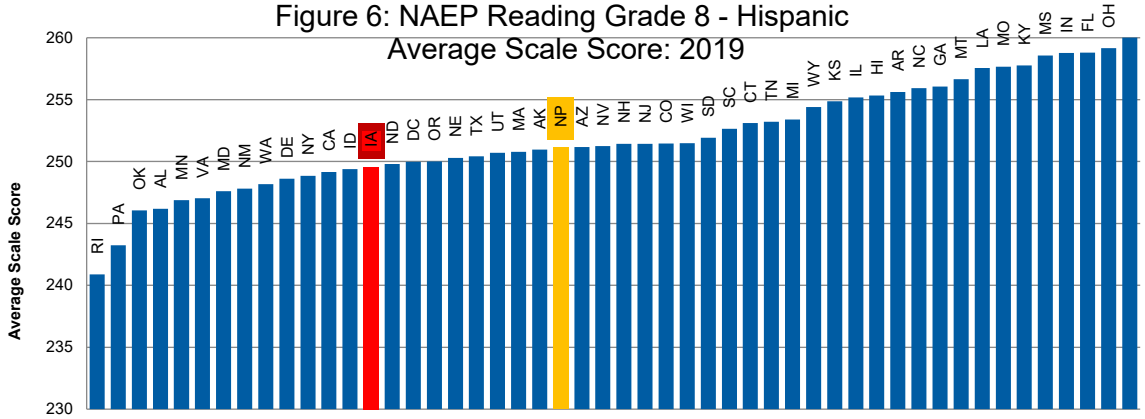


Figure 7: NAEP Reading Grade 4 - Black
Average Scale Score: 2019

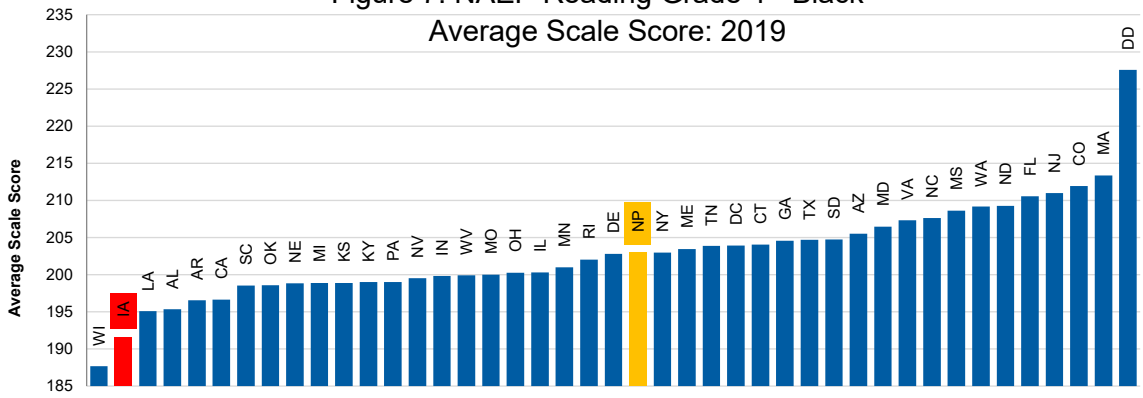
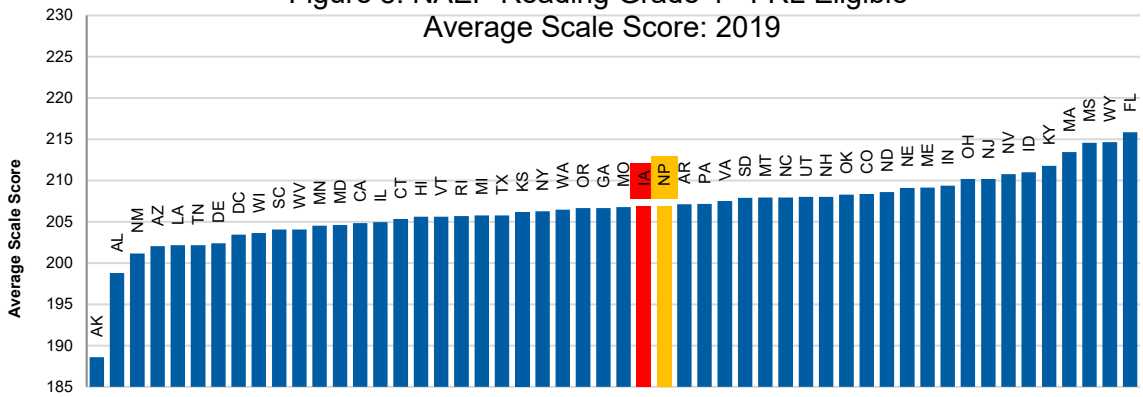


Figure 8: NAEP Reading Grade 4 - FRL Eligible
Average Scale Score: 2019



THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY LEARNING

Much of a student's success in school and in life depends on the ability to read. Research shows that students must be proficient readers in order to learn and progress in school. Reading is a gateway skill which must be mastered in order for other learning to occur. Poor reading ability has been linked to lower graduation rates, higher juvenile and adult crime, and higher likelihood of unemployment.

Consider that:

- Over 60 percent of inmates in the U.S. prison system have reading skills at or below the fourth-grade level.
- Eighty-five percent of U.S. juveniles in prison are functionally illiterate.
- Forty-three percent of adults with extremely low reading skills live at or below the poverty line (Marshall, 2014; Write Express Corp, 2014).

Research findings have shown that the number of words a child is exposed to before the age of four is significantly correlated with the child's academic outcomes. Early exposure to language is correlated with income. Children who come from lower-income households hear several million fewer words than their peers from more affluent homes during a critical developmental period. As a result, children from low-income households are less likely to achieve academic success. These findings highlight the importance of language in early childhood development.

Achievement in preschool and early childhood years refers mainly to a set of reading and mathematics-related skills. Children with a basic knowledge of mathematics and reading are more likely to have academic success in later phases of their learning (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010). Children who are behind at the beginning of schooling have a hard time catching up.

The predictability of reading for life success is strong. The proportion of middle school students who are far behind in reading is a robust predictor of problems with the law and potential incarceration later in life (Boulton, 2013). Early childhood interventions for disadvantaged children are more effective than later in a child's development. Children from low-income families participating in early childhood interventions experienced higher achievement test scores, decreased grade retention, reduced time in special education, less crime and delinquency, and increased high school graduation (Heckman and Masterov, 2007).

IOWA'S EARLY LITERACY SCREENING ASSESSMENTS

In order to examine the impact of achievement gaps in early learning, an analysis was completed looking at the screening assessment results of students in kindergarten through Grade 3. Literacy screening assessments have the goal of identifying students who may be at-risk for not being successful readers. In Iowa, screening assessments are given three times a year to all students in kindergarten through third grade. Figures 9 to 11 show the performance of students from 2019-20 to 2020-21 moving from one grade level to the next covering each grade level progression. This includes a breakdown for Black, Hispanic, and white students. Table 2 provides additional detail about early literacy screen results from year to year as well as information about the achievement gap.

Most alarming are the large decreases in the overall percentage of students achieving at or above benchmark from 2019-20 to 2020-21. White students had the largest decline of 26 percentage points compared to 22 for Black students and 19 for Hispanic students. There were also sizable declines in the percent of students at or above benchmark between Grades 1 and 2. These losses appear to stabilize between Grades 2 and 3.

Figure 9: Percent of Students At/Above Benchmark
Simple Cohort: Kindergarten in 2019-20 and 1st Grade in 2020-21

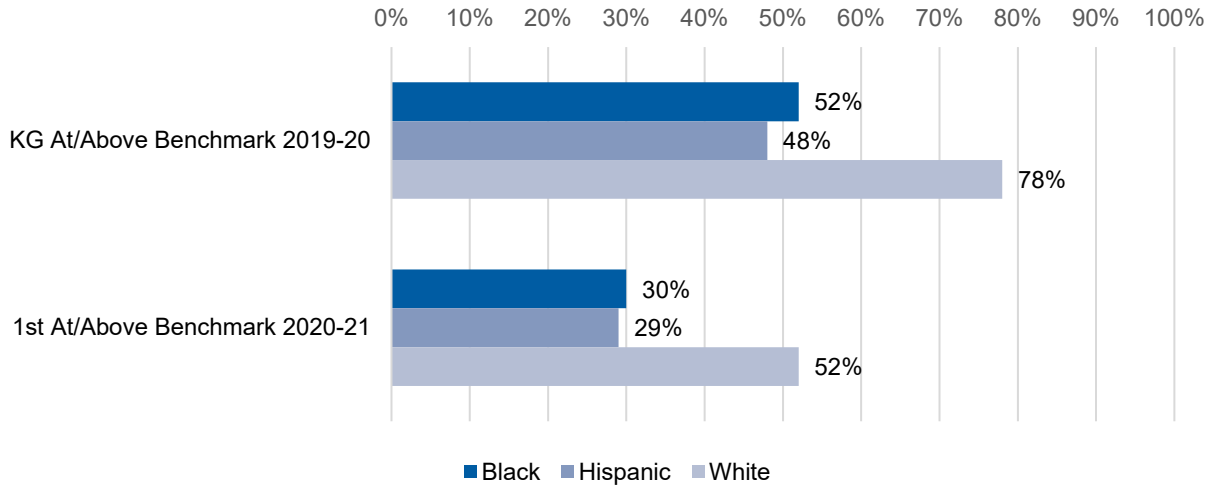


Figure 10: Percent of Students At/Above Benchmark
Simple Cohort: 1st Grade in 2019-20 and 2nd Grade in 2020-21

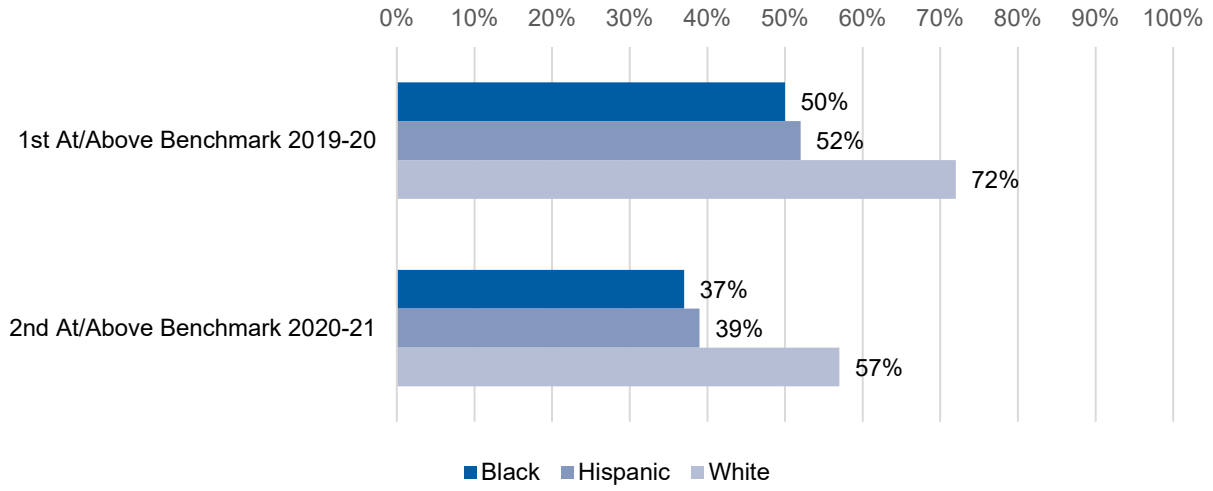
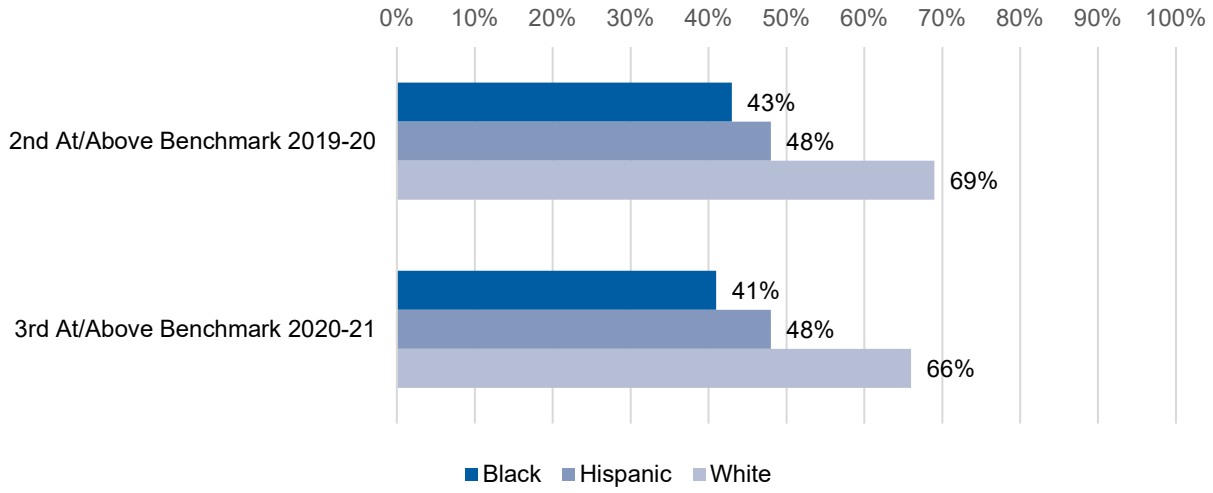


Figure 11: Percent of Students At/Above Benchmark
Simple Cohort: 2nd Grade in 2019-20 and 3rd Grade in 2020-21



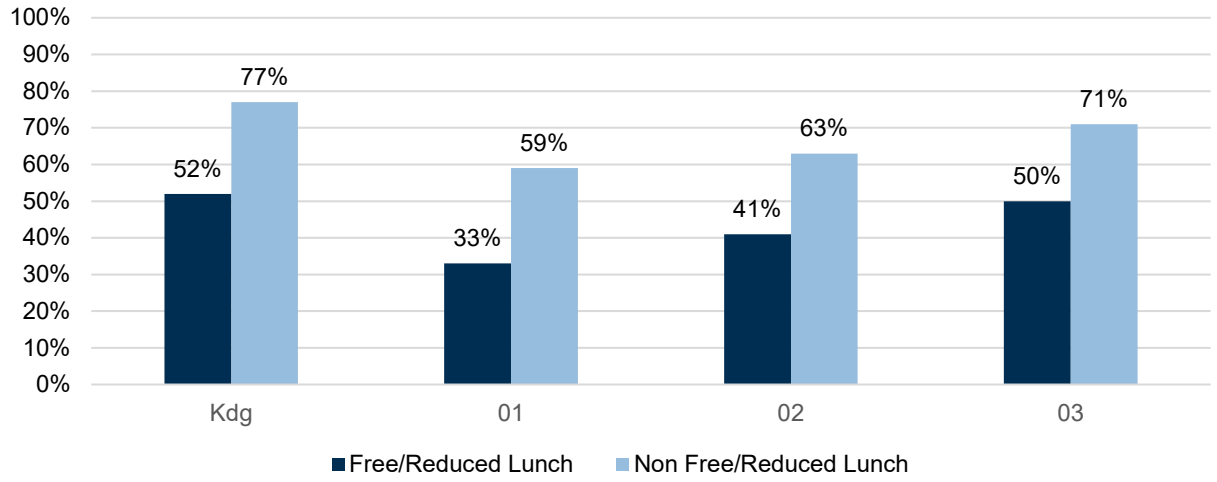
When specially examining the achievement gap, it appears that the gap overall decreases slightly in the later elementary grades. The Black/white gap is 26 percentage points in kindergarten in 2019-20 but only 22 percentage points in Grade 1 in 2020-21. The Hispanic/white gap is 20 percentage points in Grade 1 in 2019-20 and has decreased to 18 percentage points in Grade 2 in 2020-21.

Table 2: Grade-to-Grade Early Literacy Results

	Kindergarten 2019-20	Grade 1 2020-21	Benchmark Decrease
White	78	52	-26
Black	52	30	-22
Hispanic	48	29	-19
Black/White Gap	-26	-22	--
Hispanic/White Gap	-30	-23	--
	Grade 1 2019-20	Grade 2 2020-21	Benchmark Decrease
White	72	57	-15
Black	50	37	-13
Hispanic	52	39	-13
Black/White Gap	-22	-20	--
Hispanic/White Gap	-20	-18	--
	Grade 2 2019-20	Grade 3 2020-21	Benchmark Decrease
White	69	66	-3
Black	43	41	-2
Hispanic	48	48	0
Black/White Gap	-26	-25	--
Hispanic/White Gap	-21	-18	--

Figures 12 provides a snapshot of information about the achievement gap between students eligible for FRL compared to students who are not eligible for non-FRL. These data show the percent of students performing at or above benchmark on the most recent data available from the fall of 2020-21. The difference in the percentage of students non-FRL eligible and FRL eligible students is the largest in kindergarten and the smallest in Grade 3. In kindergarten, the gap was 25 percentage points between FRL/non-FRL and only 21 percentage points in Grade 3. It is important to point out that while it is good to see the gap smaller in later grades, this is partially due to an overall decrease in the percentage of students at or above benchmark from kindergarten and Grade 3. In kindergarten, 77 percent of non-FRL students are at above benchmark compared to 71 percent in Grade 3. Similarly, in kindergarten, 52 percent of FRL students are at above benchmark compared to 50 percent in Grade 3.

Figure 12: Percent of Students At/Above Benchmark by Grade and Free/Reduced Lunch Status Fall 2020-21



IOWA STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT PROGRESS

Over the past decade, Iowa has seen the largest increases in the Hispanic and Black racial/ethnic student groups. In order to assess the current status of achievement gaps, an analysis was completed examining the average assessment results between Hispanic, Black, and white student groups. This analysis will focus on the gap in average achievement of students proficient in both English language arts (ELA) using the most recent results on the Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP). The purpose is to highlight differences in performance between the largest growing student groups. This does not suggest that other student groups do not also have larger differences in achievement. Results from the 2018-19 administration were analyzed since this is the most recent data available[1].

Significant differences in student group performance can be found in examining the Black/white and Hispanic/white achievement gaps. Further, the average scale score gap between Black, Hispanic, and white students doubles between Grades 3 and 11. This same phenomenon occurs in both of the core subject areas of ELA and mathematics.

The overall scale score difference between Black and white students is larger than the gap between Hispanic and white student groups. The difference in average scores for a third grader on the ELA assessment was 21 scale scores points between Black and white students. However, by Grade 11, the average scale score point difference was 50 points in ELA.

For Hispanic students, the difference in average scores for third graders on the ELA assessment was 15 scale score points lower than their white classmates. The average scale score gap increases to 30 points by Grade 11. This demonstrates that if a student starts behind, it is harder to close the gap the older the student becomes, and the achievement gap widens in the later grades.

[1] The spring 2020 administration of the ISASP was canceled due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Figure 13: ISASP ELA Black/White Achievement Gap

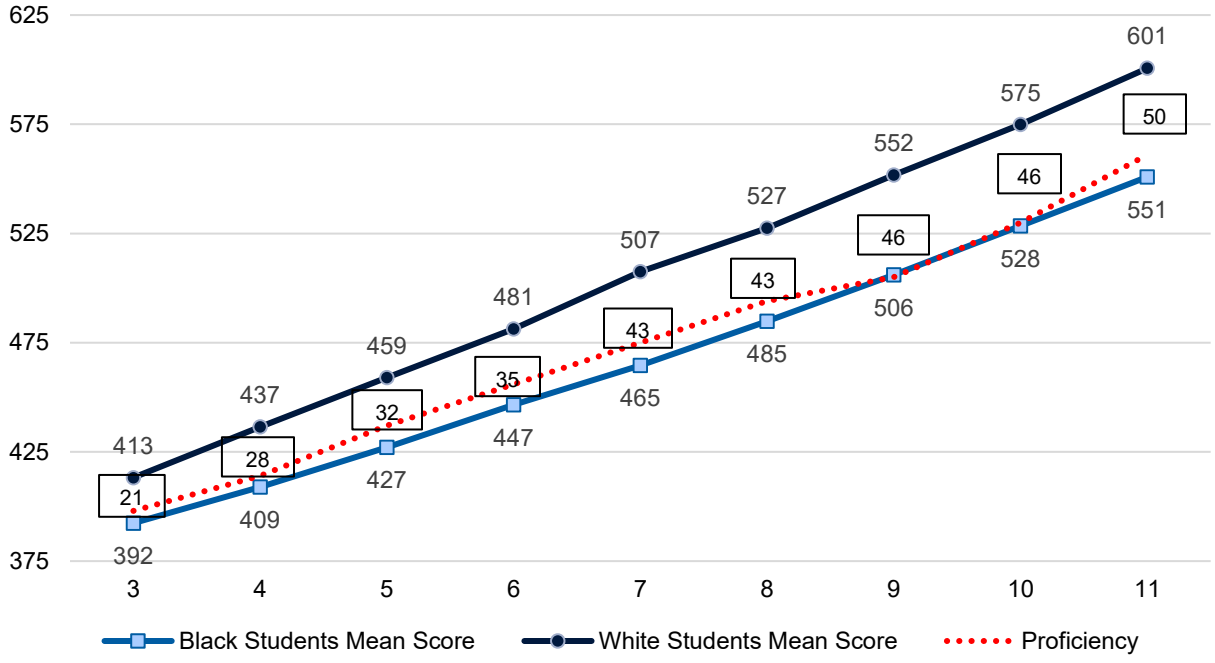
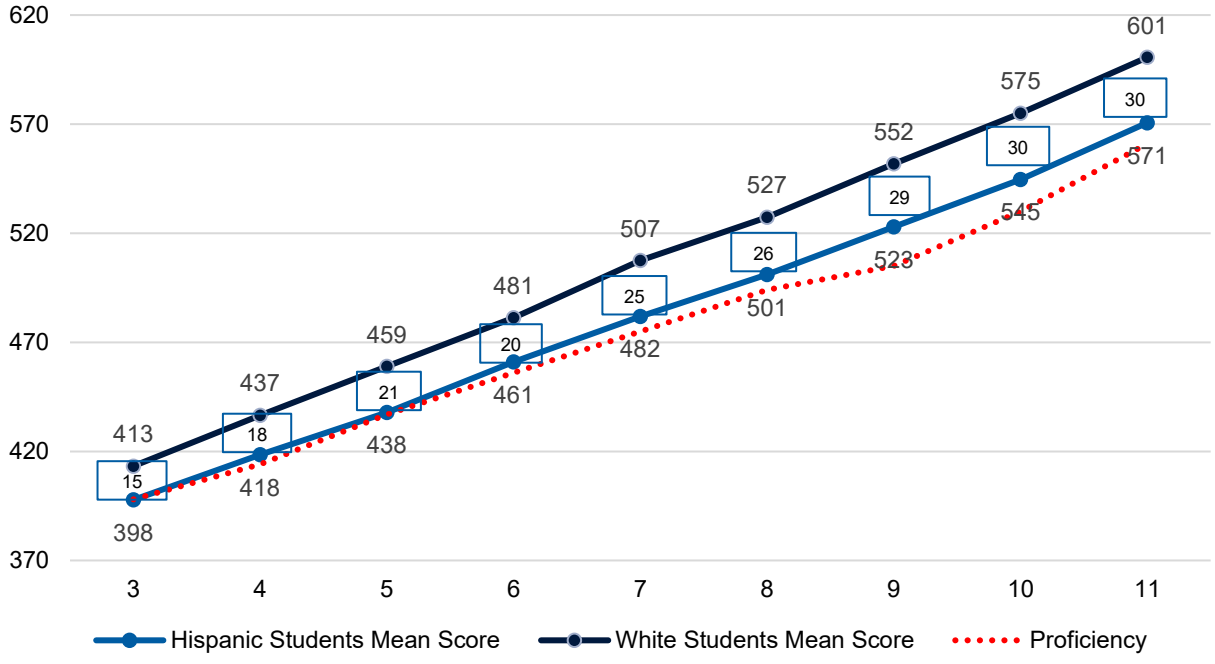
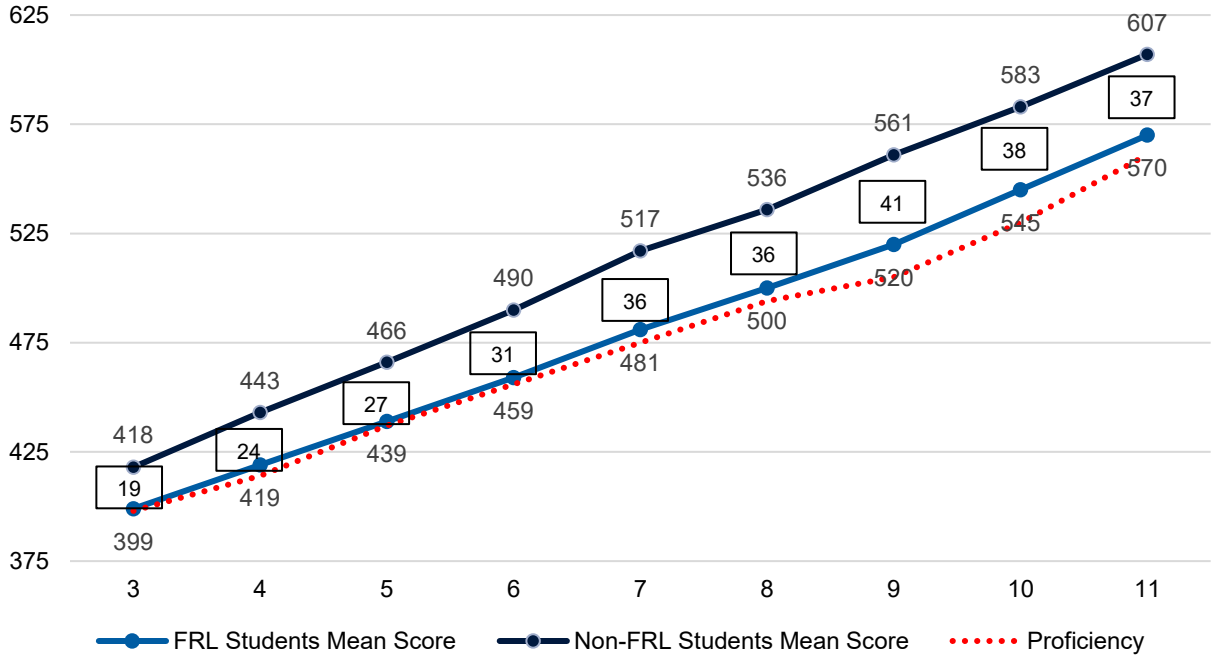


Figure 14: ISASP ELA Hispanic/White Achievement Gap



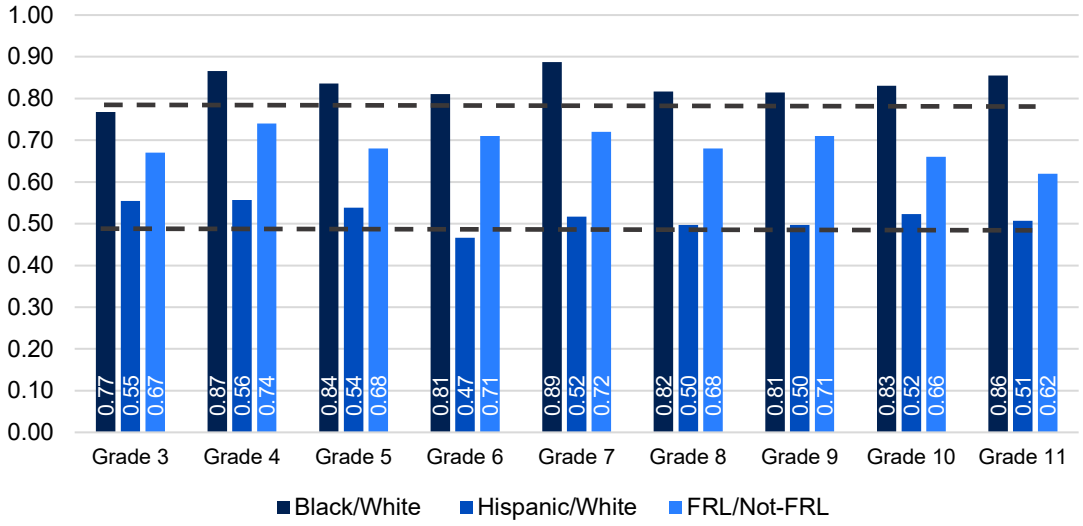
A similar pattern can also be found in examining average student performance for students eligible for FRL compared to students who are non-FRL. In Grade 3, the gap between poor and non-poor students is 19 scale score points. However, by Grade 11, the gap increases to 37 scale score points, almost doubling across this grade span.

Figure 15: ISASP ELA - FRL Achievement Gap



In order to confirm the results of the achievement gap analyses, an effect size was calculated between Black and white, Hispanic and white, and FRL and Non-FRL student groups. An effect size is a simple way to quantify the differences in performance between two groups. An effect size of .5 and above is considered medium in magnitude, and an effect size of .8 or above is considered a large effect. Figure 16 shows that the achievement gaps between student groups are medium to large. An effect size of .5 means the average Hispanic student would score below 69 percent of white students. An effect of .7 indicates the average student eligible for FRL would score below 73 percent of Non-FRL students. Lastly, an effect size of .8 shows that the average Black student would perform below 79 percent of white students. These findings demonstrate both the significance and the magnitude of achievement gaps between student groups are substantial in Iowa.

Figure 16: Achievement Gap - Effect Size



While this analysis highlights the achievement gap in ELA, the picture of performance is almost mirrored when examining the performance gaps in mathematics.

EVIDENCE BASED STRATEGIES TO HELP CLOSE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

The existence of achievement gaps in student performance is well documented between different race/ethnic student groups and poor students and their affluent peers. This phenomenon is not unique to Iowa schools and students, but the impact can be found in our classrooms, schools, and districts. Furthermore, as evidenced by our data in Iowa, achievement gaps persist, widen, and are more difficult to turn around the longer they persist. The issues of inequity in achievement and access cannot be addressed by simply doing the same things harder (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The solutions implemented to close gaps must be evidence-based and sustained if they are to be effective.

An Evidence-Based Solution: Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

In an effort to reduce achievement gaps, the Iowa Department of Education has invested in supporting the implementation of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). MTSS is a process by which schools use data to identify the academic and behavioral supports each student needs to be successful in school and to leave school ready for life. It is not a packaged program, set of assessments, or curriculum that can be purchased. Schools using MTSS provide students with evidence-based instruction and interventions matched to their needs and monitor student progress to improve educational outcomes. MTSS also allows educators to evaluate the overall health of the system and target resources by providing the necessary data to determine which elements of the educational system are performing adequately and which require further development.

Assessment data has consistently indicated the need for a systemic approach to addressing students' learning in Iowa. According to an extensive meta-analysis, John Hattie (2017) ranked MTSS near the top of the list of practices with the greatest impact on student achievement, especially with students who were struggling. Given this, Iowa selected MTSS as a critical framework to support all students.

Iowa's MTSS framework is the ultimate equalizer in educational access and attainment of student success. The foundation of MTSS is providing educators with the knowledge and skills they need to meet every student where they are at and to support them to realize their academic and non-academic potential. MTSS in Iowa is embedded in Differentiated Accountability. There are five conceptual areas within Differentiated Accountability that encompass the critical components of MTSS:

1. **Assessment and Data-Based Decision-Making** – This includes established comprehensive assessment systems that support student learning (which includes universal screening and progress monitoring) and data-based decision-making practices at both the system and student level.
2. **Evidence-Based Universal Instruction** – This includes standards-based, research/evidence-based instruction to meet the needs of all students, professional learning on Iowa Academic Standards and Iowa's Social-Emotional Learning Competencies, and the building blocks that create the infrastructure of universal instruction.
3. **Evidence-Based Intervention System** – This includes the diagnosis and identification of specific learning needs of individual students (across all subgroups) as well as groups of students, how to design instruction to address identified student need(s), and how to effectively deliver instruction to maximize student engagement and achievement.
4. **Leadership** – This includes professional learning in distributed leadership, research/evidence-based practices and competencies in instructional programming, and systems work within continuous improvement and MTSS.
5. **Infrastructure** – This includes the school/district structures necessary for continuous improvement and MTSS–professional learning on effective structures for professional learning, program evaluation practices, effective community and family engagement, and system functioning (e.g., resources, scheduling, alignment), and effective management of financial resources.

Implementation of MTSS and Return-to-Learn

The established plan for statewide, systemic implementation of MTSS through Differentiated Accountability during the 2019-20 school year was significantly disrupted by the global COVID-19 pandemic. In preparation for supporting districts and schools to develop and implement their Return-to-Learn plans, the Iowa Department of Education prioritized specific MTSS practices that could be adapted to the unique circumstances districts and schools faced for the 2020-21 school year.

Specifically, the Iowa Department of Education partnered with Iowa's area education agencies (AEAs) to develop a number of resources aimed at supporting districts and schools to address a central challenge of students missing several months of school at the end of the 2019-20 school year. This central challenge is the need to accelerate learning to essentially make up lost learning time and to help students get back onto the learning trajectory they were on before the pandemic. There are three major areas of work done by the Iowa Department of Education to support districts and schools in their efforts to accelerate student learning:

1. **Resource Development** – As was noted earlier, the Iowa Department of Education partnered with the AEAs to develop a number of resources to support accelerating learning. This work started by doing an audit of existing MTSS resources and practices to determine which ones were best suited for the anticipated need to accelerate student learning for the 2020-21 school year. This resulted in the development of a number of resources, including: (a) Planning Protocol for Accelerated Learning and Protocol for Accelerating Student Learning; (b) Planning: Assessment Protocol for Initial Learner Needs; (c) Assessment Protocol for Assessing Initial Student Learning; (d) a Unit Assessment Tool; (e) UnboundEd Modules for designing and implementing instructional resources that facilitated both prior and current learning needs; and (f) the Return-to-Learn Infographic for Accelerating Learning. This last resource tied together all of the previous resources.
2. **Resource Dissemination** – Two main strategies were used to get the developed resources into the hands of educators. First were regular webinars hosted by the Iowa Department of Education. During these webinars, resources were shared and reviewed to give attendees an opportunity to initially engage with them. Included in these webinars was the second strategy, sharing the Return-to-Learn Support Site with attendees. This support site made all resources freely available to anyone that was interested in learning more and using them locally.
3. **Resource Implementation Support** – The third area of work was to build out a statewide structure of staff that was knowledgeable and well-positioned to provide ongoing coaching and support to districts and schools. The Iowa Department of Education worked with the AEAs to establish a Return-to-Learn Statewide Team of staff dedicated to building their own learning around the resources and tools, as well as to have a network of peers to help troubleshoot and improve practice. These staff, in turn, worked with districts to make them aware of the resources and to provide coaching support to assist with implementation.

Return-to-Learn and Gap-Closing Practices

The benefit of prioritizing the accelerating learning resources during the 2020-21 school year is that they are not only beneficial to those that implemented them with fidelity, but they can also be easily embedded into ongoing MTSS implementation and future school improvement practices. This is because these are evidence-based practices that were already a part of existing efforts through Differentiated Accountability. For example, resources for lesson planning to target missing skills, and to bundle instruction on missing prerequisite skills with current grade-level learning. Unfinished learning from the 2019-20 school year has created

a sense of urgency to implement these practices across the full range of learners, as opposed to just in interventions.

As was mentioned earlier in this report, achievement gaps typically exist because of inequities in opportunities to learn, be at home or in school. Whole-school assessment of student learning needs, a hallmark of MTSS, and implementation of accelerating learning strategies as a part of universal instruction are central to reducing gaps within and across subgroups. These practices will be incorporated into future MTSS implementation work through Differentiated Accountability.

CONCLUSION

The latest NAEP results show Iowa as an average performer. Iowa's NAEP results in reading have declined while the nation has closed the gap. In 2003, Iowa performed significantly above the national average in Grade 4 and Grade 8 reading. However, by 2019, Iowa's results were no longer statistically different from most states and the national average. When examining Iowa's position relative to other states, Iowa is below average and, in some cases, in the bottom quarter of states when looking at Black, Hispanic, and white student groups compared to their peers. These results are alarming and should be a call to action. It will require sustained focus and effort by all levels of the education system to reverse these trends and have Iowa move from the middle of the pack to a top performer.

The most recent results on the ISASP show significant performance gaps between Black, Hispanic, white, and FRL and non-FRL student groups. Further, achievement gaps between these student groups are much smaller in the lower grades and increase in both the middle school and high school grades. Across all student groups analyzed, the scale score difference doubles from Grade 3 to Grade 11. This suggests that the Black/white, Hispanic/white, and FRL/Non-FRL gaps are sizeable and become harder to close the older a student gets. If a student falls behind, learning loss compounds and makes it harder to catch up to the performance of their peers. This suggests the need to focus efforts on early intervention to catch problems early using evidence-based interventions to get students back on track.

The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced significant challenges both in Iowa and nationally in potential learning loss due to school closure in the spring of 2020. While the vast majority of school districts in Iowa have been in person throughout the 2020-21 school year, there is a sizeable group of students that have been learning entirely remotely or with a hybrid schedule with a combination of in-person and remote learning. Districts and schools across Iowa have experienced periodic disruptions due to student infections or potential exposure, which has interrupted student learning. These challenges could further exacerbate the sizeable achievement gap which already exists.

Over the past several years, Iowa has been focusing efforts on early learning and, in particular, early literacy using a MTSS framework. These state-level efforts led to the creation of a delivery system and resources to assist districts and schools to work to address the achievement gap and accelerate student learning. Iowa must continue to work collaboratively across all levels of the system to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students.

REFERENCES

The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2010). 2010 Kids Count Data Book: State Profiles of Child Wellbeing. Baltimore, MD: Author. Available: https://www.aecf.org/resources/the-2010-kids-count-data-book January 2019.

Boulton, D. (2014). *Evidence Based Education Science and the Challenge of Learning to Read: An interview with Grover Whitehurst*. Learning Stewards, Anchorage, Kentucky. Retrieved from http://www.childrenofthecode.org/interviews/whitehurst.htm#PrisonCellsandReadingScores

Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). *The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future.* Teachers College Press, New York.

Heckman, J and Masterov, D. (2007) The Productivity Argument for Investing in Young Children. NBER Working Paper No. 13016.

Marshall, P. (2014). *The Importance of Reading Comprehension*. Retrieved from http://www.k12reader.com/the-importance-of-reading-comprehension/

Write Express Corporation, (2014). *Begin to Read: Literary Statistics.* Write Express Corporation, Highland, Utah. Retrieved from http://www.begintoread.com/research/literacystatistics.html