

Gaps and trends in District 186 kindergarten and grade 1 reading achievement

Strong reading skills form the foundation for success in later grades. To assist two Illinois school districts in providing support for beginning readers, Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest examined trends and demographic gaps in student reading achievement across kindergarten and grade 1. The findings for **Springfield Public Schools (District 186)** appear below. (See also the findings for [Elgin Area Schools, District U-46.](#))

About the study



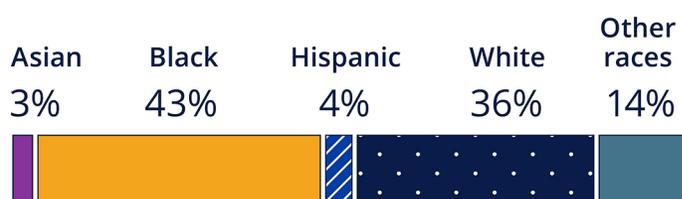
- ◆ Tracked district's **2017/18 kindergarten cohort** through the end of grade 1 (spring 2019)
- ◆ Included students in **23 schools**, with sample size ranging from 927 students in fall of kindergarten to 928 students in spring of grade 1
- ◆ Analyzed data from **student records** and the district's **formative reading assessment**¹
- ◆ Described average **reading achievement scores** of students in fall, winter, and spring of both kindergarten and grade 1
- ◆ Identified **gaps in reading achievement** by race/ethnicity, national school lunch program eligibility, and special education status

About District 186



- ◆ **Midsize district** in west-central Illinois
- ◆ Serves Springfield, the capital of Illinois, and surrounding suburbs and rural areas
- ◆ 14,000 students in prekindergarten through grade 12
- ◆ Serves higher percentages of **Black and White students** than other student racial/ethnic groups

District 186 Grade 1 Student Race and Ethnicity (Fall 2019)

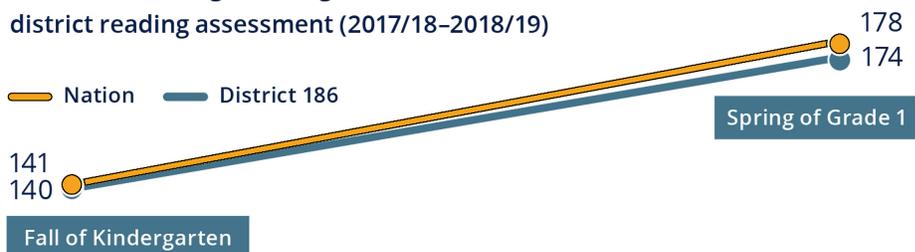


Key findings

Student reading achievement increased across kindergarten and grade 1 at rates similar to the district reading assessment's national norms by the end of grade 1.²

Across the two years, average student reading scores on the district assessment increased by **34 points**, compared with a 37-point increase for the sample used to establish national norms.

Increase in average reading scores on district reading assessment (2017/18–2018/19)



Average reading scores varied across groups of students in kindergarten and grade 1.

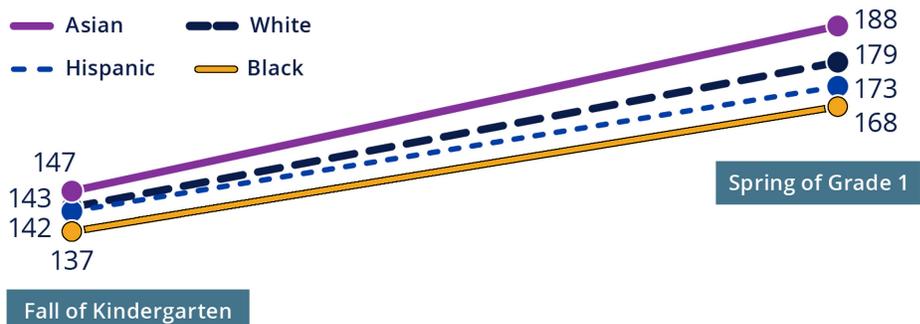
These gaps in reading achievement, which may in part be the result of group differences in learning opportunities before and during elementary school, widened over time.³

Student group

Average reading scores on district assessment

Race/ethnicity

Average reading scores for students in all races/ethnicities increased across kindergarten and grade 1, but Asian and White students had higher reading achievement than Hispanic and Black students by the spring of grade 1, and gaps between students in these racial/ethnic groups widened over the two grades.



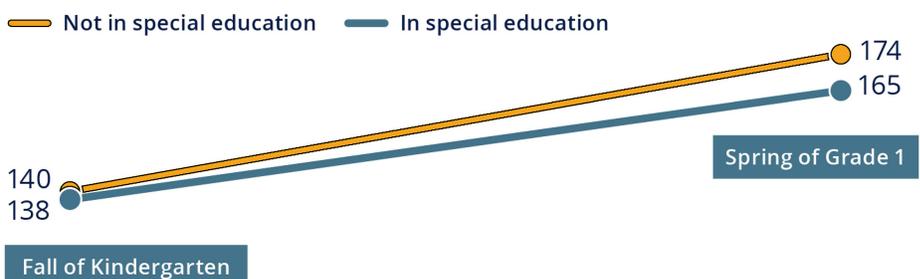
National school lunch program

Students not eligible for the national school lunch program (NSLP) had higher average reading scores across kindergarten and grade 1 than eligible students and the gap widened over time.



Special education

Students not in special education had higher average reading scores across kindergarten and grade 1 than students in special education, and the gap widened over time.



Reflection questions

District 186 administrators, educators, and policymakers can use the following questions to explore the findings and identify actions to support more equitable reading outcomes.



How did **achievement change** over the first two years of schooling for students in different demographic groups? Is that finding surprising?



How can district and school leaders best **allocate resources and opportunities** to promote more equitable reading outcomes across all student demographic groups?



What may be some **root causes of inequities** that contribute to reading achievement gaps in the district? What actions can district and school leaders take to address these root causes?



The use of **early interventions and high-quality assessments** to identify student groups in need of reading support may help remedy reading achievement gaps before they widen. What actions can district and school leaders take to improve the use of early interventions and assessments?⁴



View the report at <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?projectID=4631>

Source: Lewis Presser, A., Lavigne, H., Bowdon, J., Lemieux, C., Zhang, X., & Xia, J. (2020). *Gaps and trends in reading achievement across kindergarten and grade 1 in two Illinois school districts* (REL 2020-058). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?projectID=4631>.

Endnotes

¹To assess reading proficiency, District 186 used the Measures of Academic Progress for Primary Grades assessment, which is adaptive and appropriate for universal screening and for measuring the growth of students' reading scores (Northwest Evaluation Association, 2009). Scores can range from 100 to 300.

²National norms allow for the comparison of students' scores to a national sample of students who took the same test in a prior academic year.

³Bowdon et al., 2019; Reardon & Galindo, 2009; Quinn, 2015. See the report's References section for full citations.

⁴To determine which individual students should receive more intensive reading interventions, educators should use universal screening assessments and ongoing progress monitoring, rather than group membership.

This document was produced by the [Midwest Early Childhood Education Research Alliance at Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest](#). Alliance members represent the following organizations: District U-46, District 186, Chicago Public Schools, Rockford Public Schools, Valley View Public Schools, Governor's Office of Early Learning and Development, Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Head Start Association, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Illinois Department of Human Services, Northern Illinois University, and Foresight Law and Policy.

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