

Gaps and trends in District U-46 kindergarten and grade 1 reading proficiency

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



About the study

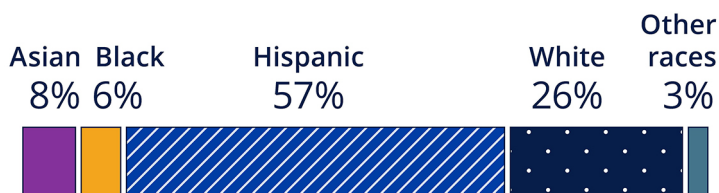
- ◆ Tracked district's **2016/17 kindergarten cohort** through the end of grade 1 (spring 2018)
- ◆ Included students in **40 schools**, with sample size ranging from 2,396 students in fall of kindergarten to 2,582 students in spring of grade 1
- ◆ Analyzed data from **student records** and the district's **formative reading assessment**¹
- ◆ Described the percentage of students that passed **proficiency thresholds in reading** in winter and spring of both kindergarten and grade 1
- ◆ Identified **gaps in reading proficiency** by race/ethnicity, English learner status, national school lunch program eligibility, and special education status



About District U-46

- ◆ **2nd largest** district in Illinois; located northwest of Chicago²
- ◆ 40,000 students in prekindergarten through grade 12
- ◆ Serves a higher percentage of **Hispanic students** than other student racial/ethnic groups
- ◆ Serves a high percentage of **English learner students** in the early grades (52 percent of grade 1 students in fall 2018)

District U-46 Grade 1 Student Race and Ethnicity (Fall 2018)



Key findings

57% of students met the district's **reading proficiency milestone** in the spring of grade 1.³

Gaps in reading proficiency across student groups were present in the spring of grade 1.

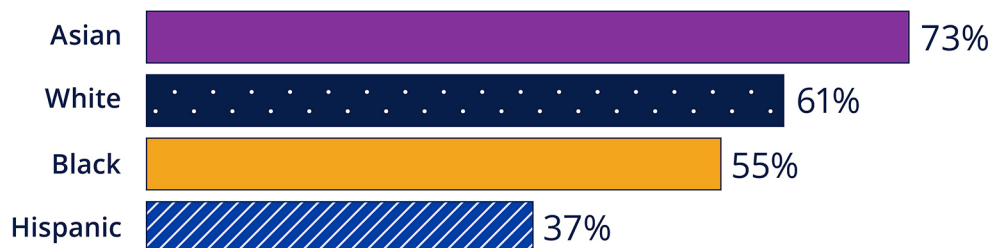
Such gaps can be the result of group differences in learning opportunities before and during elementary school and can widen over time.⁴

Student group

Percentage of students who **met district's reading proficiency milestone** (spring of grade 1)

Race/ethnicity

Nearly three-quarters of Asian students were proficient in reading at the end of grade 1, while fewer than half of Hispanic students were.



English learner status

Non-English learner students had higher reading proficiency than English learner students at the end of grade 1.

61%
Non-English learner students



53%
English learner students

National school lunch program

A higher percentage of students not eligible for the national school lunch program (NSLP) met the district's reading proficiency milestone than eligible students at the end of grade 1.

65%
Not eligible for NSLP



52%
Eligible for NSLP

Special education

A higher percentage of students not in special education met the district's reading proficiency milestone than students in special education at the end of grade 1.

60%
Not in special education



28%
In special education

Reflection questions

District U–46 administrators, educators, and policymakers can use the following questions to explore the findings and identify actions to support more equitable reading outcomes.



Only 37% of Hispanic students and 55% of Black students were **proficient in reading** at the end of grade 1. Is this 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?⁵



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

¹ To assess reading proficiency, District U–46 used the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System, a formative reading assessment administered by teachers (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007).

² District U–46 serves Elgin as well as Bartlett, Hanover Park, South Elgin, Streamwood, Wayne, and portions of Carol Stream, Hoffman Estates, St. Charles, Schaumburg, and West Chicago (District U–46, n.d.).

³ At the end of grade 1, District U–46 students met the reading proficiency milestone if they achieved Level J on either the English or the Spanish version of the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007).

⁴ Bowdon et al., 2019; Reardon & Galindo, 2009; Quinn, 2015. See the report's References section for full citations.

⁵ To 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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