

Trends and Gaps in Reading Achievement across Kindergarten and Grade 1 in Two Illinois School Districts

To assess education progress in the early grades and identify achievement gaps, this study examined reading achievement data for kindergarten and grade 1 students in two districts in Illinois: District U–46 (Elgin Area Schools) and District 186 (Springfield Public Schools). Drawing on a different reading assessment in each district, the study team documented reading achievement in these two early grades for two kindergarten cohorts (2016/17 for District U–46 and 2017/18 for District 186) and examined disparities in achievement for several student demographic groups. In particular, the study identified gaps in reading achievement at different time points in kindergarten and grade 1 by students' race/ethnicity, eligibility for the national school lunch program (an indicator of poverty), English learner status, participation in special education, and gender. Policymakers can use these findings to advocate for increased supports for early intervention before or at the start of kindergarten to close the reading achievement gaps found in the study.

Key findings

- **Reading achievement increased across kindergarten and grade 1 in both districts.** In District U–46, 57 percent of students met the district's spring of grade 1 reading proficiency milestone by the end of grade 1. Based on a different reading assessment, students in District 186 increased their reading achievement from kindergarten through grade 1 at rates similar to the assessment's national norms.
- **In both districts Asian and White students had higher reading achievement than Black and Hispanic students by spring of grade 1, and in District 186 gaps in reading scores widened between fall of kindergarten and spring of grade 1.** In District U–46 Asian students had the highest reading achievement in spring of grade 1, followed by White, Hispanic, and Black students. In District 186 gaps in reading scores between Asian and Black students, Asian and Hispanic students, and White and Black students widened between fall of kindergarten and the end of grade 1.
- **Students not in special education had higher reading achievement than students in special education; in District 186 achievement gaps between these groups widened.** In District U–46, 60 percent of students not in special education met the spring of grade 1 reading proficiency milestone by the end of grade 1 compared with 28 percent of students in special education. In District 186 gaps in reading scores between these two student groups widened between fall of kindergarten and spring of grade 1.
- **In District U–46 a higher percentage of students not eligible for the national school lunch program than of students eligible for the program and of non–English learner students than of English learner students met the spring of grade 1 reading proficiency milestone.** About 65 percent of students not eligible for the national school lunch program met the proficiency milestone by the end of grade 1 compared with 52 percent of students eligible for the program. Similarly, 61 percent of non–English learner students met the proficiency milestone by the end of grade 1 compared with 53 percent of English learner students.
- **In District 186 female students started kindergarten and ended grade 1 with slightly higher reading achievement than male students.** Throughout these two grades, female students' reading achievement exceeded that of male students by an amount equivalent to about 22 days of instruction.