

# Legislative Report

## Closing Achievement Gaps



March 31, 2019

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Des Moines, IA 50319-0146

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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 CHANGES IN IOWA SCHOOLS

Iowa schools are becoming more diverse every year. Beginning in the 2018-19 school year, one in four Iowa students is now a student of color. Over the past 19 years, the percent of Iowa students who identify as students of color has increased 160 percent while the white student population has declined 16 percent. Table 1 and Figure 1 show the change in the student population across almost a 20 year period. The largest increases can be found in the Hispanic and black student groups. Students who are identified as multiracial have also grown significantly since this category was added in 2009. These demographic shifts have occurred while the overall student population has increased over this same period.

**Table 1: K-12 Statewide Enrollment**

School Year	Minority	White	Total	Percent Minority	Percent White
2018-19	120,376	363,215	483,591	25%	75%
2014-15	104,052	373,370	477,422	22%	78%
2000-01	46,250	430,677	476,927	10%	90%

**Figure 1: Minority Student Trend in Iowa**

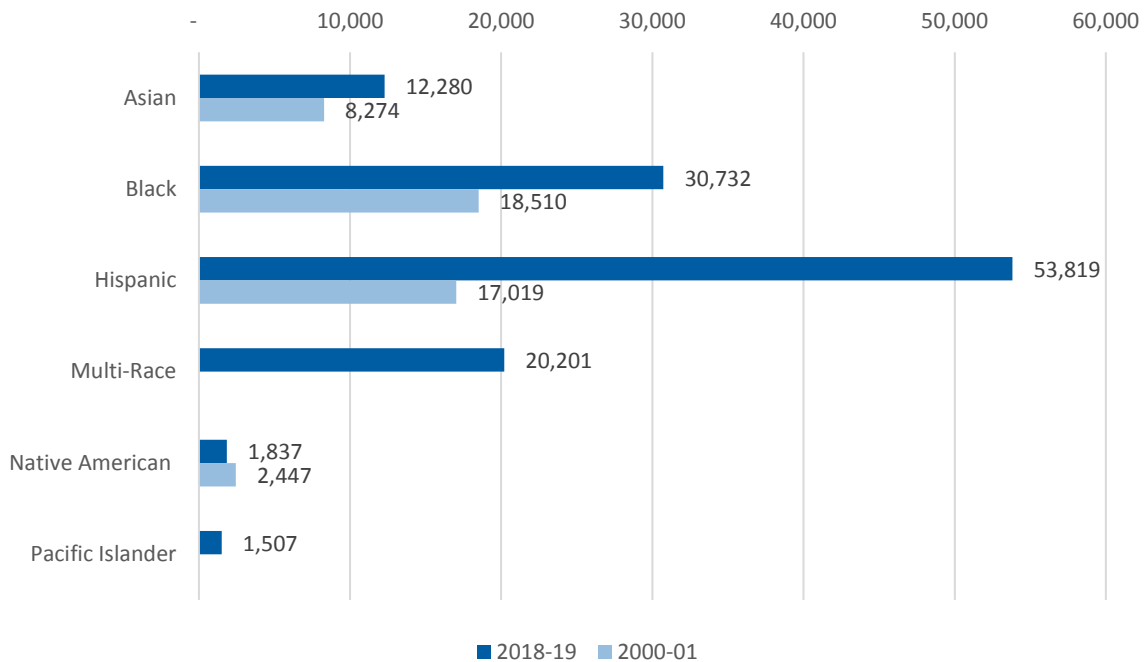
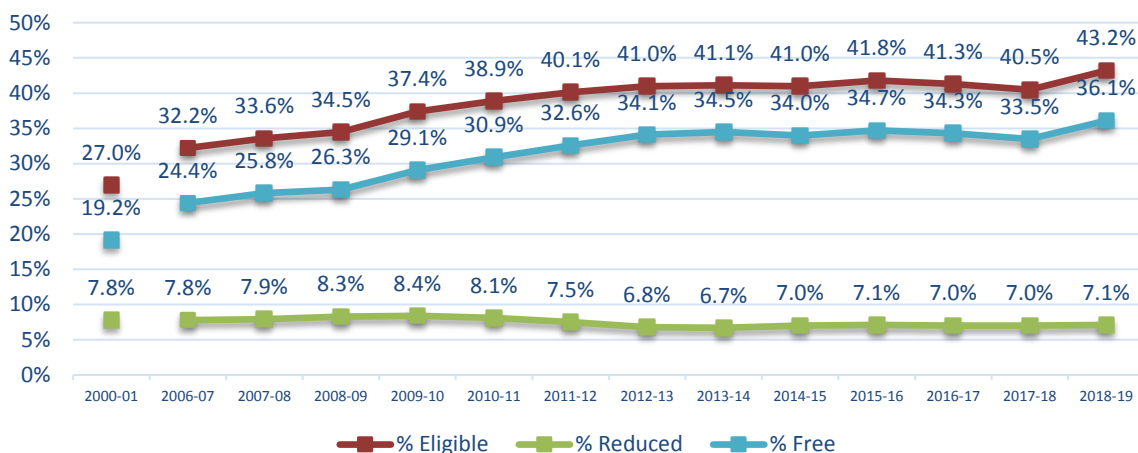


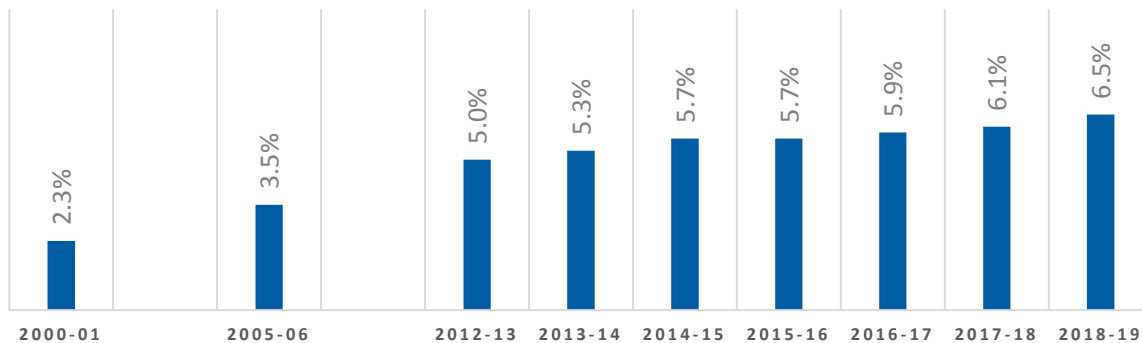
Figure 2 provides a 19-year trend line of the percent of students eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch (FRL). Long-term trends show significant increases in the percentage of students who have economic challenges. However, more recently, the percent of students eligible has seesawed, going up one year then back down the next. In 2018-19, the FRL increased 2.7 percent from the prior year, the largest increase in many years. In addition, in 2018-19 the percent of students eligible (43.2) reached a 20 year high. This suggests the impact of low socioeconomic status on students is more prevalent now than anytime in Iowa's recent history.

**Figure 2: Percent of Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Priced Lunch  
2000-01, 2006-07 to 2018-19**



There is a growing segment of Iowa's school-age population who are students whose native language is not English. In 2018-19, the percent of students identified as English learners (EL) is 6.5 percent. EL students need language instruction programs that allow them to progress academically to become proficient in English. While the percent of students who are EL is relatively small compared to other student groups, there are unique challenges for schools in supporting students who do not speak English. Approximately two-thirds of Iowa's EL student population's native language is Spanish. The other one-third of the EL student population has a wide variety of native languages with no one language representing larger than 3 percent of Iowa's EL population. Finding qualified instructors who have the background and experience to effectively instruct EL students, given the diversity of languages, is a difficult challenge.

**Figure 3: Percent of English Learners**



## DEPARTMENT AND DISTRICT ACTIVITIES TO CLOSE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

### THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

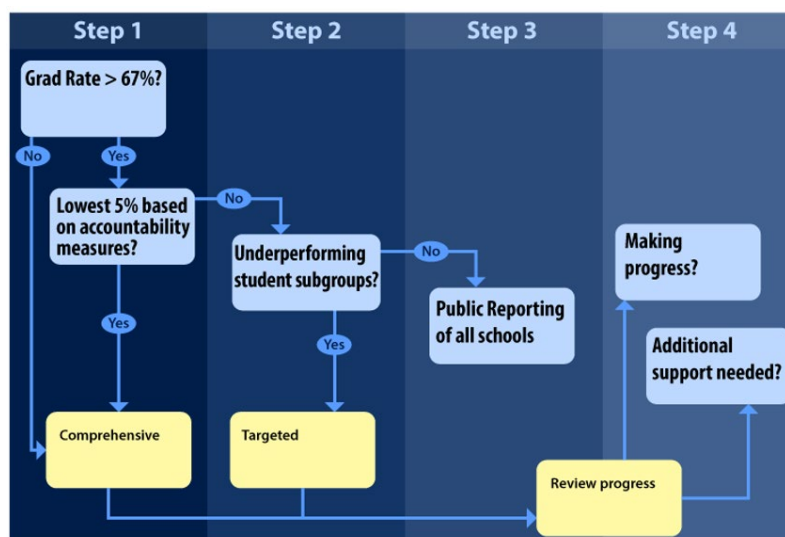
On December 10, 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. As part of this reauthorization, every state was required to submit a plan that addresses specific components of the law. ESSA is focused on equitable access to education, high standards and accountability, and a decrease in achievement gaps across subgroups.

Iowa's consolidated ESSA Plan serves as the foundation of the Iowa Department of Education's (Department) support for students, educators, and schools. Iowa spent approximately two years building the plan and engaging education stakeholders from across Iowa in its design. The [plan](#) is not only a requirement, but an opportunity to align work and a vehicle to reinforce commitment to equity, educational excellence, and coordination of programs and support services.

An important component of Iowa's ESSA Plan is a web based rating system which shows how each public school is performing across a number of educational measures. In December 2018, the Department released the [Iowa School Performance Profiles \(ISPP\)](#) website. The ISPP system is comprised of multiple measures which are combined to determine an overall performance score. This score is a broad indicator of a school's needs. The index includes seven measures: 1) Participation in Assessments, 2) Academic Proficiency, 3) Student Growth, 4) Progress in Achieving English Language Proficiency (ELP), 5) Academic Achievement, 6) Conditions for Learning, and 7) Graduation Rate.

Figure 4 provides an overview of how schools are identified. Based on a school's overall score, a school can be identified as a "comprehensive" school in need of support. A school may be identified as comprehensive for having a low overall score or a low graduation rate. A comprehensive school is a school whose score is in the lowest 5 percent of schools receiving Title 1 federal funding. A school may also be identified as comprehensive if their graduation rate is below 67 percent.

**Figure 4: School Determination Flowchart**



Schools also receive a score for each student subgroup in addition to an overall score. The purpose of the subgroup score is to identify student groups who are struggling. There are ten subgroups for which scores are calculated:

- Low socio-economic status free or reduced-price lunch eligibility (FRL)
- English learners (EL)
- Students with disabilities on an Individualized Education Program (IEP)
- Race/ethnicity
  - Asian
  - Black/African American
  - Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
  - Hispanic
  - Native American
  - White
  - Multi-racial

A school whose subgroup score falls below the same cut point as a comprehensive school is designated as a “targeted” school in need of support. Table 2 provides detail about each measure and their relative contribution to a schools or a subgroups score. The weight of each measure was determined collaboratively by engaging stakeholders in designing the accountability system.

There are several indicators which should be highlighted in Iowa’s ESSA accountability system. These are important considering how much they differ when compared to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) which was the predecessor to ESSA and had a prescribed approach to determining school identification. The rigid and inflexible accountability system under NCLB has been replaced by a more robust and inclusive accountability framework under ESSA. Iowa’s accountability framework includes multiple measures which provides a well-rounded picture of student and school performance. Table 2 provides a detailed overview of each measure and how much it contributes to a school’s score as well as a subgroup score. There are several important differences in Iowa’s new accountability system which should be highlighted.

**Table 2: ESSA Indicators and Weighting**

Year One Reporting and Identification (2017-2018)							
Elementary/Middle School				High School			
Indicator			Weight	Indicator			Weight
Participation	Math	5%	10%	Participation	Math	5%	10%
	Read	5%			Read	5%	
Proficiency	Math	7%	14%	Proficiency	Math	5%	10%
	Read	7%			Read	5%	
Student Growth	Math	23.5%	47%	Student Growth	Math	20%	40%
	Read	23.5%			Read	20%	
Progress in Achieving ELP			10%	Progress in Achieving ELP			10%
Average Scale Score	Math	7%	14%	Average Scale Score	Math	5%	10%
	Read	7%			Read	5%	
Conditions for Learning			5%	Conditions for Learning			5%
				Graduation Rate	4 year	7.5%	15%
					5 year	7.5%	
				Postsecondary Readiness			0%
Total			100%	Total			100%

First, growth is the largest contributor to a school or subgroup score. This is important philosophically because it suggests that all students have the ability to grow regardless of her or his starting point. In this growth model, a student who is a low performer who has significant gains in performance can have a higher growth score than a high performer who shows little or no growth. Under NCLB, growth could only be considered for students who were not proficient, which is a small percentage of the overall student population. Growth under ESSA is calculated for all students. A school or subgroup growth score represents the average amount of growth students in a school or subgroup has relative to their academic peers.

Another important indicator is Conditions for Learning (CfL). CfL is a student survey administered in grades 5-12 which measures perception of climate and culture of a school across the constructs of safety, engagement and environment. This indicator brings student voice and perception and a non-academic indicator into an accountability system. Research has shown that school climate and culture in a school can lead to increases in achievement.

Lastly, Progress in Achieving English Language Proficiency (ELP) is a new indicator which reports the progress of students in becoming proficient in English. Given there has been a growing population of Iowa students whose first language is not English, it is important to recognize this fact by including this indicator in the overall accountability system. Results from the English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century (ELPA21) are used in determining this measure. This measure calculates the percentage of students making progress across the different domain areas of ELPA21: reading, writing, speaking and listening.



## ESSA RESULTS AND SCHOOL IDENTIFICATION

In the first year of ESSA designations, there were 34 schools identified as comprehensive out of 1,302 schools. In 2017-18, just over one-quarter (26.2) of Iowa schools were identified as a targeted school. Table 3 provides a breakdown of the ESSA designations for the number of comprehensive and targeted schools.

**Table 3: Number of Schools**

Summary - Distinct School Counts	Number of Schools Identified	Number of Schools Not Identified	Total Number of Schools	Percent of Schools Targeted
Comprehensive (lowest 5% of Title I schools)	31	581	612	5.1%
Comprehensive (graduation rate)	3	1,299	1,302	0.2%
Targeted	307	961	1,302	23.6%
Summary	341	961	1,302	26.2%

It is important to not only look at the overall trends, but also dig in further to examine the reasons why schools were identified. Table 4 shows the detail of targeted schools and the various subgroups which scored below the targeted cut.

**Table 4: Targeted - Subgroup Summary**

Student Group	Number of Schools Identified	Number of Schools Not Identified	Total Number of Schools	Percent of Schools Targeted
FRL	101	788	889	11.4%
IEP	216	153	369	58.5%
ELL	42	80	122	34.4%

Race/Ethnicity	Identified	Not Identified	Total	Percent Missed
Asian	0	57	57	0.0%
Black	56	63	119	47.1%
Hispanic	23	211	234	9.8%
Multiracial	6	69	75	8.0%
Native American	1	2	3	33.3%
Pacific Islander	2	0	2	100.0%
White	12	1,120	1,132	1.1%

Several notable findings can be seen in examining these results. First, the most frequent reason a school was identified as targeted is for low performance by students with disabilities. This is not surprising when put in context with other data about students with disabilities in Iowa. Historically, Iowa has had large performance gaps between students with disabilities and their

non-disabled peers. Data from the ESSA accountability system reinforces these earlier findings and underscores the need to continue efforts to close this performance gap.

FRL students were the second most likely reason that schools were identified as targeted. There is a large body of evidence in education research documenting the impact of poverty on low student performance. Therefore, it is not surprising to see a number of schools identified as targeted for this student group. This finding underscores the need to continue to find ways to improve student performance for students who have a low socioeconomic background. This is particularly important given the recent trend line which shows an increase in the overall number of students who are eligible for FRL.

While FRL was one of the most likely reasons a school was identified as targeted, the percent of schools identified for this student group was proportionally low. There were 889 schools in Iowa who had a FRL subgroup score, however, only 11.4 percent (101) were identified as targeted. There are a high number of Iowa schools (788) whose FRL students are performing above the cut for identification and in some cases well above this cut. This suggests that while poverty certainly plays a significant role in student performance, there are districts and schools who may be models for others. Future analyses could identify schools who have small performance gaps to understand what supports are in place which can be leveraged by schools who are struggling in this area.

The third most likely reason a school was identified as targeted was for the black student group. Forty-seven percent of schools were identified for this student group. This finding is also not surprising when put in context with other student performance data we have seen for black students in Iowa. Previous versions of the Closing the Achievement Gap report show large and persistent performance gaps between black students and their academic peers. Recent assessment results show that approximately only 50 percent of black students are proficient in reading and mathematics on the Iowa assessments. This is compared to approximately 75 percent of students proficient overall. Therefore, it is not surprising to see a large number of schools identified as targeted for the black student group.

While the above findings show areas for improvement, there are also results which are positive for Iowa schools. Both the Hispanic and EL student group performance on the ESSA accountability index were potentially encouraging. Ten percent of schools were identified as targeted because of the Hispanic subgroup. This finding is consistent with previous findings the Department has published about Hispanic students in Iowa. In the 2018 version of this report, gains were found in closing the student achievement gap between Hispanic students and their academic peers.

Another important finding on the ISPP was that only 34 percent of schools were identified for EL students. The inclusion of the English Language Progress indicator on the ISPP underscores the importance of EL students in an Iowa accountability system. Research shows that once EL students gain English proficiency, the gap in student performance disappears. The overall low identification rate of schools for EL students highlights the work of schools to ameliorate performance gaps of EL students.

It is important to note that a school can be identified for more than one subgroup of students. Table 5 provides information about the number of schools who were targeted for one or more student groups in that same school. Overall, the largest group of schools were in targeted status for only one subgroup (47 percent). At the same time, a slight majority of schools (53 percent) were targeted for two or more subgroups. This finding suggests that schools that are struggling, by and large, have multiple student groups who are underperforming. Under thirty percent (29 percent), of schools were targeted for three or more student groups. These schools have multiple populations to address in closing gaps and raising student achievement.

**Table 5: Targeted Schools by Number of Subgroups Missed**

Number of Schools	Number of Subgroups Missed	Total Number of Subgroups	Percent of Schools Targeted
214	1	214	46.6%
55	2	110	24.0%
24	3	72	15.7%
10	4	40	8.7%
1	5	5	1.1%
3	6	18	3.9%
307	1-6	459	NA

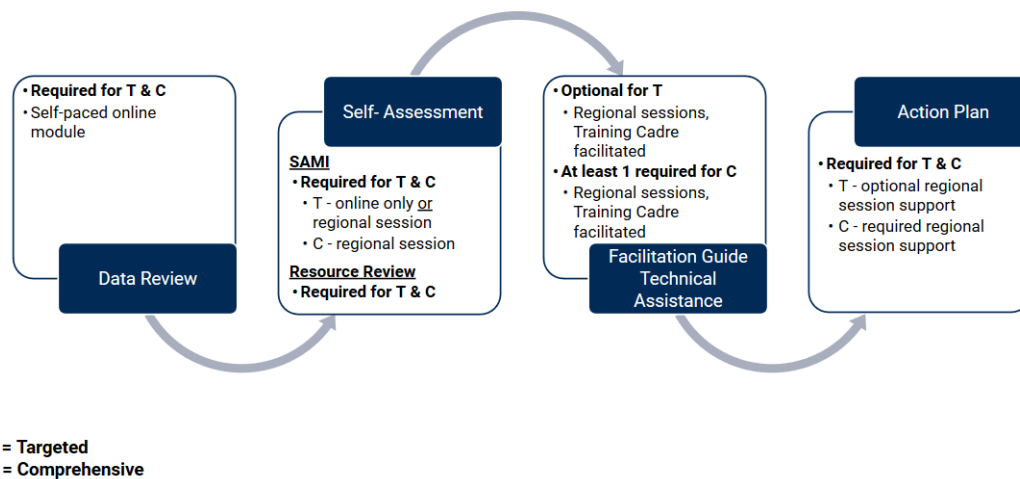
### **PIVOTING FROM IDENTIFICATION TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

The first step in Iowa’s accountability framework is to identify schools and student groups who are struggling. While this is an important step, identification alone in isolation will not lead to school improvement. To make an identification system useful, it must include school improvement as the primary focus and be combined with technical assistance in a school’s area of need. The goal is to build a process whereby schools have a clear means to drive toward improvement, which in turn increases student achievement outcomes.

To that end, Iowa’s ESSA Plan was built to leverage its Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to drive school improvement efforts. Iowa’s MTSS is an every-education decision-making framework of evidence-based practices in instruction and assessment that addresses the needs of all students. As an every-education process, MTSS allows educators to judge the overall health of their educational system by examining data on the educational system as well as identifying students who need additional supports.

Figure 5 provides an overview of the activities which must be completed for comprehensive or targeted schools. All schools who are comprehensive or targeted have to complete: 1) a data review, 2) a self-assessment, 3) a resource review, and 4) an action plan. Comprehensive schools also need to complete a facilitation guide.

## Support for Schools: 2018-19



These support components include a comprehensive needs assessment (CNA) and root-cause analysis (RCA) that facilitates identification and verification of school needs. In addition, all schools have access to one unified action plan which is connected to the results of the CNA and RCA. Districts with at least one school identified in need of Comprehensive Support and Improvement and/or Targeted Support and Improvement will participate in a resource allocation review. The review focuses on the equitable distribution of programs and personnel. For example, the review may consider equitable access to preschool programs, advanced coursework, and licensed teachers. The review will be facilitated by AEA and Department staff. A district leadership team will participate.

Findings of inequity will be expected to be addressed within the school improvement plan which is developed as an outcome of each component step. Once the improvement plan is created, schools are expected to begin to implement evidence-based strategies which will assist in closing gaps and lead to improved student achievement. Iowa schools have just begun this planning process and will start to implement their improvement efforts in the coming months and into the 2019-20 school year.

## CONCLUSION

Over the past two decades, there has been a significant shift in the demographics of students who attend Iowa schools. Iowa schools are more diverse now than in any other time in our history. One in four students is now a student of color. Additionally, over this period of time, there are historic highs in the percent of Iowa students from an economically disadvantaged background and students who are English learners. These data highlight the challenges to Iowa districts and schools in serving an increasingly diverse student population.

The Department has spent the last two years engaging a broad base of stakeholders, including the education community, in designing a system of accountability and support which meets the requirements of ESSA while at the same time is tailored to Iowa's context.

In December 2018, the first set of school designations were released that identify schools with significant challenges who are designated as comprehensive. In addition, schools who had one

or more student subgroups who are underperforming were also identified. Results show just over one quarter (26.2 percent) of Iowa schools were identified as comprehensive or targeted. Thirty-four schools were comprehensive while 307 were targeted for subgroup performance. Targeted results show three primary student groups that are underperforming: 1) students with disabilities, 2) FRL students and 3) black students. Results also highlight some positive student group performance including Hispanic and EL students.

In January 2018, the Department has been working to roll out the system of support to address the performance for comprehensive and targeted schools. This system includes a series of tools: 1) data review, 2) self-assessment, 3) resource review, 4) facilitation guide, and 5) an action plan. Districts and schools who have been identified are in the process of using these tools to build their school improvement plans. Over the coming months into the 2019-20 school year, schools will begin to bring these improvement plans online and start to implement evidence-based strategies aimed at closing the achievement gap and increase student achievement.