

# Iowa Achievement Gaps Legislative Report



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## **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

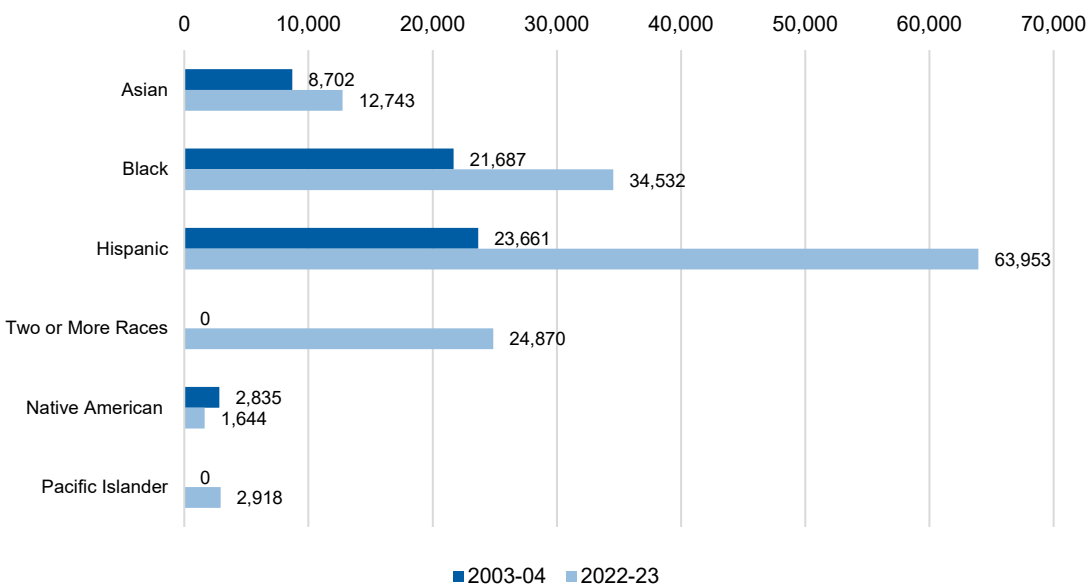
The student population in Iowa schools is more racially and ethnically diverse than any other time in state history. Minority student enrollment has increased approximately 147 percent over the past 20 years, reaching a record high of 28 percent in fall 2022. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the long-term trend of the change in the diversity of the student population. While there has been an increase in the number of minority students, there has also been a corresponding decrease in the number of White students.

School Year	Student of Color	White	Total	Percent Students of Color	Percent White
2022-2023	140,660	370,667	511,327	27.5%	72.5%
2013-2014	105,850	397,955	503,805	21.0%	79.0%
2003-2004*	56,885	424,341	481,226	11.8%	88.2%

\*Only K-12 enrollment counts and percentages were available

Figure 1 provides a detailed breakdown of the number of students in each racial/ethnic minority group over the past 20 years. In 2022-2023, the population of Hispanic students was both the largest (63,953) and the fastest-growing non-White student group in Iowa since 2003-2004 (growth rate of 170%). The second largest minority group in 2022-2023 are Black students who have increased 59 percent over this 20-year period, the second-fastest growth rate in Iowa. The third largest minority group is made up of students who report having two or more races. The growth of this group cannot be calculated because this option was not available before the 2009-2010 school year. Between 2003-2004 and 2022-2023, the Asian student population grew by 46 percent and the number of Native American students dropped by 42 percent.

**Figure 1: Enrollment Trend - Students of Color**

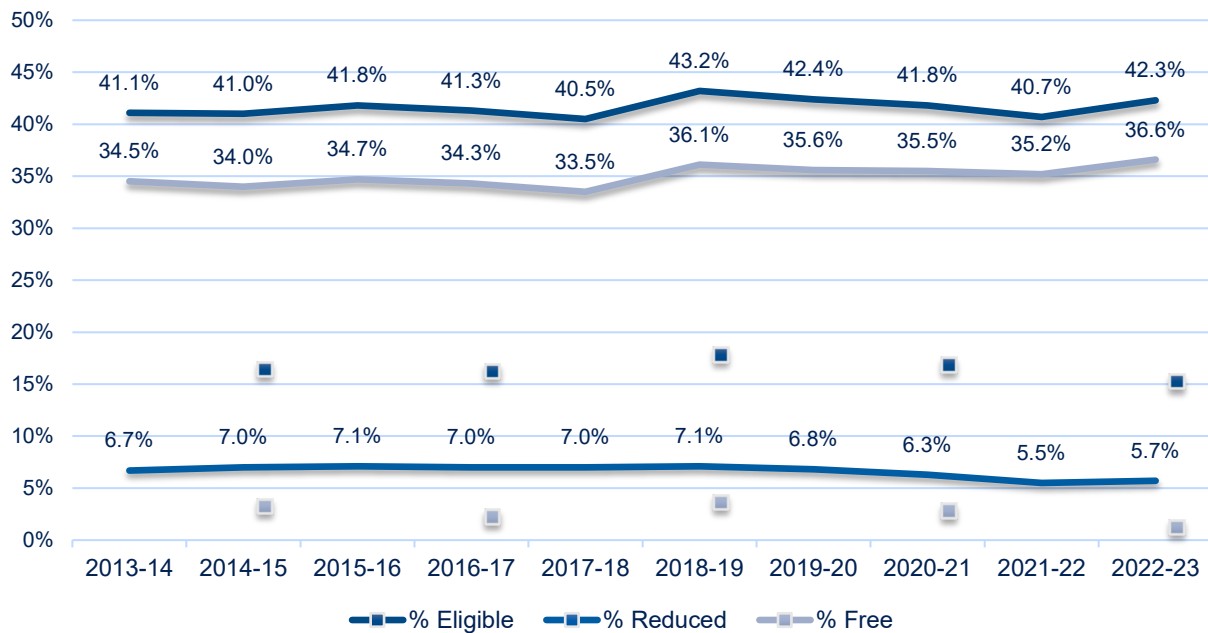


While there is increasing diversity among school age children, Iowa is still fairly homogeneous compared to many states across the US. According to the US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, the school age population (children under the age of 18) across the United States switched in 2018 to majority-minority status. The term majority-minority means that over 50 percent of students in our nation's schools are students of color. A majority-minority school describes a school in which the majority of students are non-White.

Over the past decade, the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced priced lunch (FRL) has remained relatively stable. FRL eligibility is the indicator that provides a proxy measure of the percent of who are living in poverty. Figure 2 provides a breakdown of students eligible by year. The percent of FRL students in Iowa school is up just over 1 percent (1.2%) compared to a decade ago. Figure 2 also provides a breakdown of the percent of students who are eligible for free lunch and reduced priced lunch separately. Interestingly, the percent of students eligible for reduced priced lunch has decreased slightly (1%), while the percent of students eligible for free lunch has increased (2.2%). This suggests there has been an increase in the percent of students that are in higher levels of poverty.

Eligibility for free and reduced priced lunch is determined by household income and the poverty threshold is defined by the US Census Bureau. In 2021, the poverty threshold for a family of four was \$27,740. Free lunch eligibility are students whose household income is 130 percent of the poverty threshold and reduced lunch is 185 percent.

Figure 2: Percent of Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Priced Lunch 2013-2014 to 2022-2023



## STUDENT ASSESSMENT AND THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP - LATEST TRENDS

Over the past decade, Iowa has seen the largest increases in the Hispanic and Black racial/ethnic student groups. Thus, the focus of these analyses is on achievement gaps between Hispanic, Black and White students. The purpose is to highlight differences in performance between the largest and fastest-growing student groups. This does not suggest that other student groups do not also have large differences in achievement but given the focused nature of this report it is not possible to provide an analysis of the gaps between all groups. This analysis uses assessment scores in both English language arts (ELA) and mathematics to measure the achievement gap between these three student groups.

In order to gauge impact, an analysis was conducted on the results from the 2021-22 Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP). Iowa began using this new statewide assessment during the 2018-2019 school year, so longer-term longitudinal trends are not possible.

Figure 3 shows the gap between Black and White students in ELA. An important finding that can be seen in Figure 3 is that the average score difference between Black and White students starts at 21 scale score points in grade 3 but steadily increases across grade levels to 48 scale score points by grade 11. This suggests there is a widening in average student performance between Black and White students throughout formal schooling. The average performance gap between groups doubles by the time students are preparing for life after high school.

From 2018-2019 to 2021-2022, the Black/White gap decreased for grades 6, 7 and 11. When examining the gaps in the three years of data that are available, the Black/White gap stayed the same or increased for all other grade levels. Achievement for both Black and White students increased for grades 4, 6, 7 and 8. The gap for grades 6 and 7 decreased because Black students improved performance more than White students. The gap for grade 11 decreased because Black student performance increased while White student performance decreased.

**Figure 3: English Language Arts - Black/White Achievement Gap**

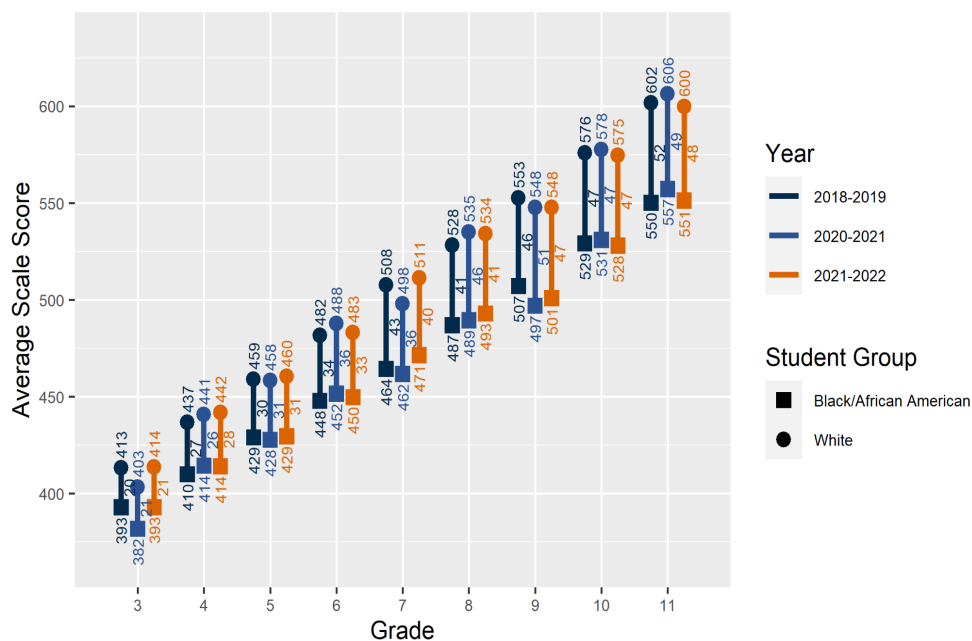


Figure 4 shows the gap between Hispanic and White students in ELA. From 2018-2019 to 2021-2022, the Hispanic/White gap decreased for grades 7, 8, 9 and 10. The Hispanic/White gap stayed the same or increased for all other grades. Achievement for both Hispanic and White students increased for grades 4, 7 and 8. The gap for grades 7 and 8 decreased because Hispanic students improved performance more than White students. The gap for grades 9 and 10 decreased because White student performance decreased by more than Hispanic student performance (which didn't increase). A similar trend to what was seen with Black students can be found in the Hispanic/White gap as the gap starts at 15 scale score points in grade 3 and increases to 31 points by grade 11. Again, the gap between Hispanic and White student doubles throughout schooling.

**Figure 4: English Language Arts - Hispanic/White Achievement Gap**

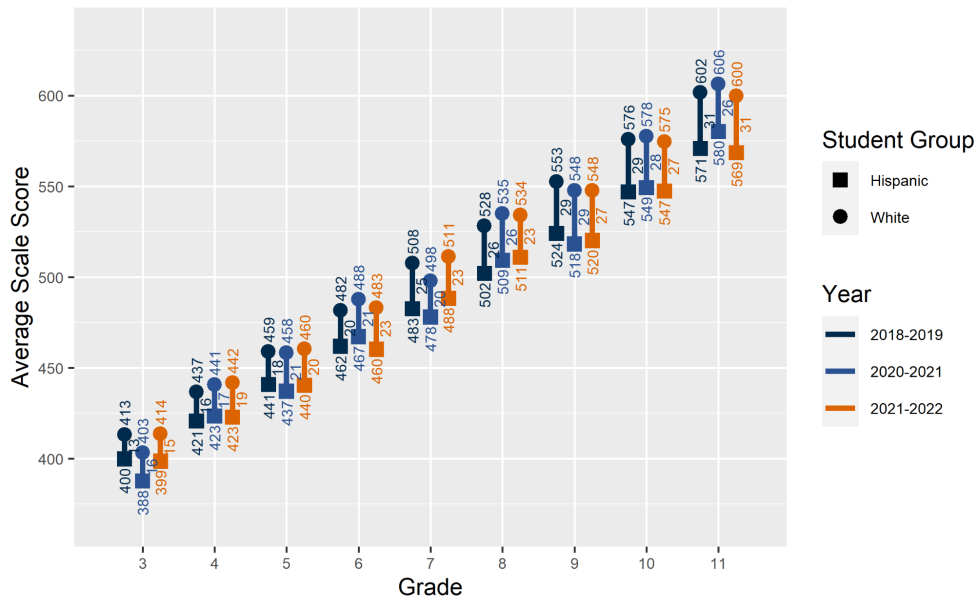
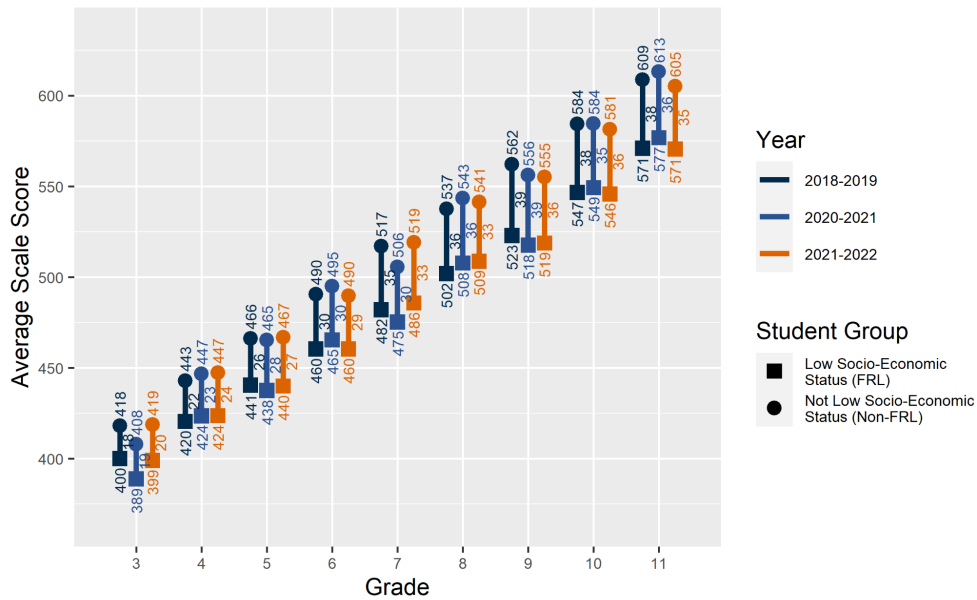




Figure 5 shows the gap between Low SES (FRL) and Non-Low SES (Non-FRL) students in ELA. From 2018-2019 to 2021-2022, the FRL/Non-FRL gap decreased for grades 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11. The FRL/Non-FRL gap stayed the same or increased for grades 3, 4 and 5. Achievement for both FRL and Non-FRL students increased for grades 4, 7 and 8. The gap for grades 7 and 8 decreased because FRL students improved performance more than Non-FRL students. The gap for grades 6, 9, 10 and 11 decreased because Non-FRL student performance decreased by more than FRL student performance (which didn't increase). The gap between Low SES and Non-Low SES starts at 20 scale score points in grade 3 and widens to 35 points in grade 11. The gap does not widen as much between poor and non-poor students when compared to the Black/White gap and Hispanic/White gap but still remains sizeable.

**Figure 5: English Language Arts – FRL/Non-FRL Achievement Gap**



Figures 6 to 8 provide information about the performance gaps between student groups in mathematics. Figure 6 shows the gap between Black and White students. From 2018-19 to 2021-22, the Black/White gap decreased for grades 7, 8, and 11. The Black/White gap stayed the same or increased for all other grades. Achievement for both Black and White students increased for grade 3. The gap for grades 7, 8, and 11 decreased because White student performance decreased by more than Black student performance (which didn't increase). A similar phenomenon can be found in the widening of the gaps from grades 3 to 11 in mathematics. However, unlike ELA, the mathematics gap approaches but does not double throughout formal schooling. This suggests mathematics gaps remain sizable between student groups but are smaller than the performance gaps found in ELA.

**Figure 6: Mathematics - Black/White Achievement Gap**

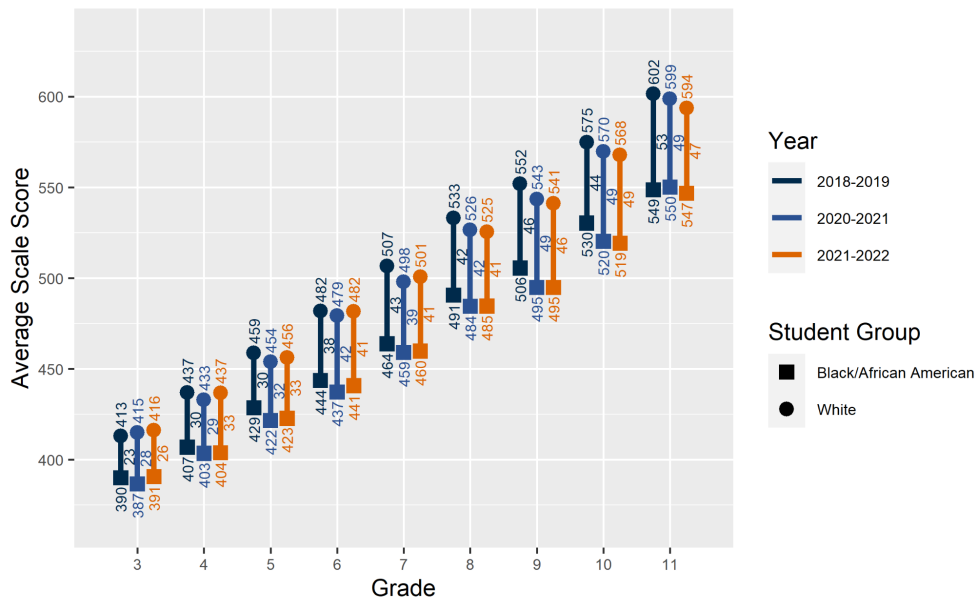


Figure 7 shows the gap between Hispanic and White students in mathematics. From 2018-2019 to 2021-2022, the Hispanic/White gap decreased for grades 7, 8, and 11. The Hispanic/White gap stayed the same or increased for all other grades. The gap for grades 7, 8, and 11 decreased because White student performance decreased by more than Hispanic student performance (which didn't increase).

**Figure 7: Mathematics - Hispanic/White Achievement Gap**

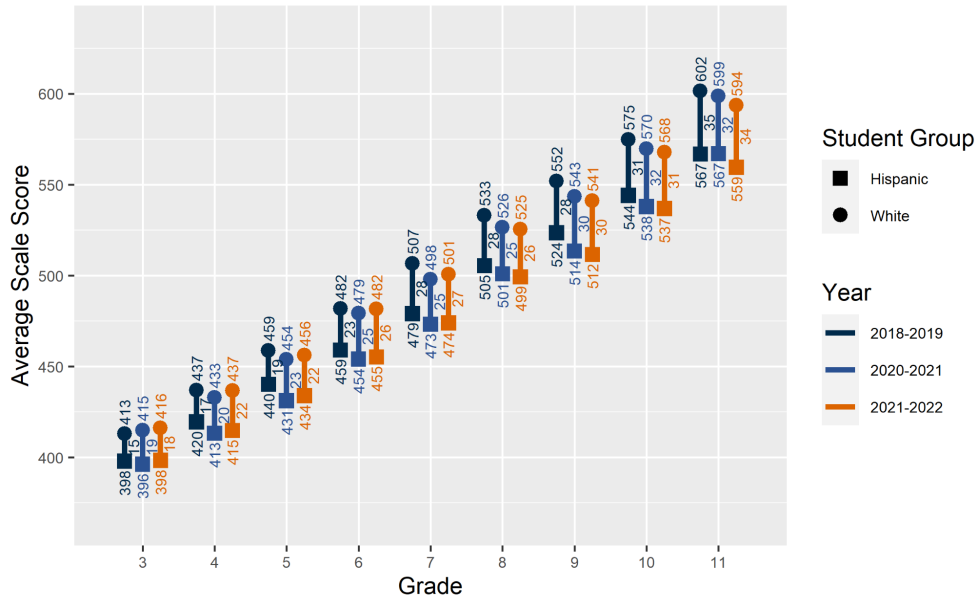
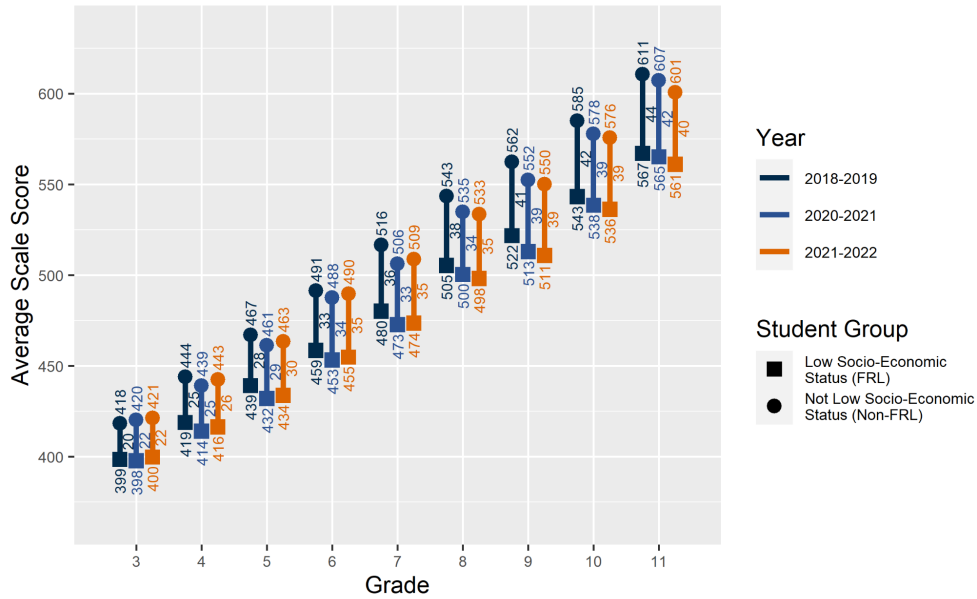


Figure 8 shows the gap between Low SES (FRL) and Non-Low SES (Non-FRL) students in mathematics. From 2018-2019 to 2021-2022, the FRL/Non-FRL gap decreased for grades 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11. The FRL/Non-FRL gap stayed the same or increased for all other grades. Achievement for both FRL and Non-FRL students increased for grade 3. The gap for grades 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 decreased because Non-FRL student performance decreased by more than FRL student performance (which didn't increase).

**Figure 8: Mathematics – FRL/Not-FRL Achievement Gap**



Tables 2 and 3 provide an overall summary of the achievement gaps from Figures 3 to 8. Across the three different student group comparisons, two content areas, and nine grade levels there are 54 combinations where the achievement gap could have increased, decreased or stayed the same. Cells in green highlight where the lower performing group improved more than the higher performing group (neither group decreased) and as a result closed the achievement gap. Cells highlighted in orange depict cases where the achievement gap closed because the lower performing group increased while the higher performing group decreased. Cells highlighted in red show where the achievement gap closed but for the wrong reason. In these cases, the higher performing group scored lower and as a result of performance going down, the achievement gap narrowed (even though neither group improved).

In examining Table 3, across all combinations, in close to half of the cases (46%), the achievement gap increased between student groups. Additionally, there were 24 cases (44%) where the achievement gap decreased. On the surface, this appears to be a positive finding. However, when looking more closely, the majority (n=17) of the gaps decreased because the higher performing group had a decrease in student performance (and neither group improved). In five cases (9%) performance stayed the same and the achievement gap did not change. In six cases (11%), the achievement gap narrowed because the lower achieving student group gained in achievement more than the higher performing student group. Overall, 78 percent of the gaps between student groups either increased or decreased for the wrong reason (because performance dropped). These results reinforce prior findings and the continued challenge of closing the performance gap between student groups.

**Table 2: Achievement Gaps Status Between 2018-2019 and 2021-2022**

Grades	ELA			Mathematics		
	Black/White	Hispanic/White	FRL/Non-FRL	Black/White	Hispanic/White	FRL/Non-FRL
3	Increase	Increase	Increase	Increase	Increase	Increase
4	Increase	Increase	Increase	Increase	Increase	Increase
5	Increase	Increase	Increase	Increase	Increase	Increase
6	Decrease	Increase	Decrease	Increase	Increase	Increase
7	Decrease	Decrease	Decrease	Decrease	Decrease	Decrease
8	No Change	Decrease	Decrease	Decrease	Decrease	Decrease
9	Increase	Decrease	Decrease	No Change	Increase	Decrease
10	No Change	Decrease	Decrease	Increase	No Change	Decrease
11	Decrease	No Change	Decrease	Decrease	Decrease	Decrease

- Lower performing group improved more than the higher performing group, neither group decreased
- Lower performing group improved, higher performing group decreased
- Higher performing group decreased more than the lower performing group, neither group improved

**Table 3: Summary of Achievement Gaps Between 2018-2019 and 2021-2022**

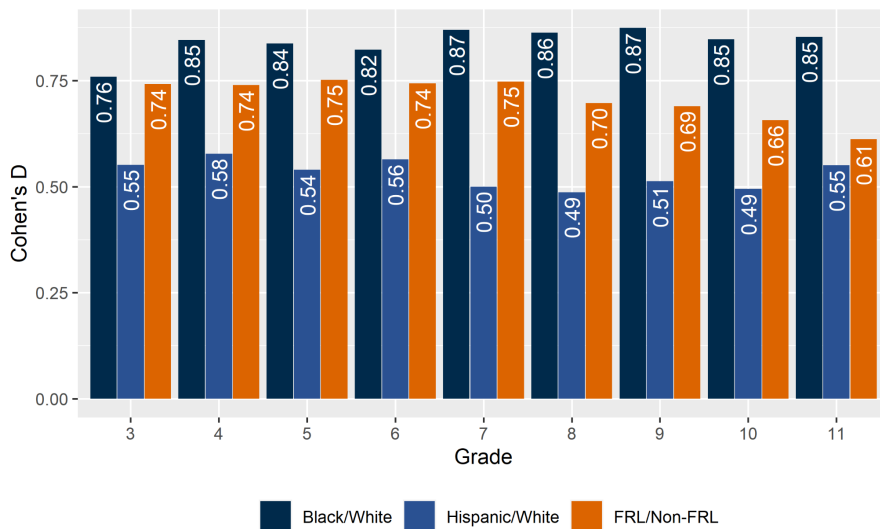
Gap Status	ELA			Mathematics			Total	Percent
	Black/White	Hispanic/White	FRL/Non-FRL	Black/White	Hispanic/White	FRL/Non-FRL		
Increase in gap	4	4	3	5	5	4	25	46.3%
Decrease - wrong reason (red)	0	2	4	3	3	5	17	31.5%
Decrease - mixed reason (orange)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1.9%
Decrease - right reason (green)	2	2	2	0	0	0	6	11.1%
No change	2	1	0	1	1	0	5	9.3%
Total	9	9	9	9	9	9	54	100.0%

**Magnitude of the Achievement Gaps**

Analyses were conducted to examine the magnitude of the achievement gaps. An effect size (in this case, Cohen’s d) is a statistic that shows the strength of a relationship. It is a simple way to quantify the differences in performance between two groups. The larger the effect size, the more meaningful and stronger the result. A typical effect size ranges between zero and 1. 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 9 shows the effect sizes between student groups in ELA from the spring 2022 assessment administration. Generally, across all grades and content areas, the Black/White gap would be considered large, the Hispanic/White gap would be considered moderate, and the FRL/Non-FRL gap would be considered to be approaching large. This suggests that the achievement gaps between student groups is not only significant but also moderate to large. A similar analysis of the magnitude of mathematics achievement gaps produced comparable results.

**Figure 9: ELA – Achievement Gap Effect Sizes: 2021-2022**



## LEARNING LOSS ANALYSIS

Beginning with the 2019-2020 school year, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically impacted traditional methods of student learning. To further understand the impact of students' lost instructional time, the Iowa Department of Education and SAS® collaborated to leverage existing student assessment data and yield insights into the impact of the pandemic on student learning. Overall, this analysis shows that Iowa students performed close to prepandemic levels.

### Overview of Learning Loss Analysis

It is critical to understand the extent to which the pandemic affected student learning. Further, it is important to determine if there are differences between student groups. This can provide information to better understand current education needs and develop recovery plans to meet those needs.

This analysis uses a student's score history as baseline information about their past performance to calculate their projected score on the spring 2021 and 2022 ISASP. The student's projected scores are then compared to their actual performance to determine if she/he is above, below, or in line with prepandemic expectations. An adjustment is made to the projections based on average school performance.

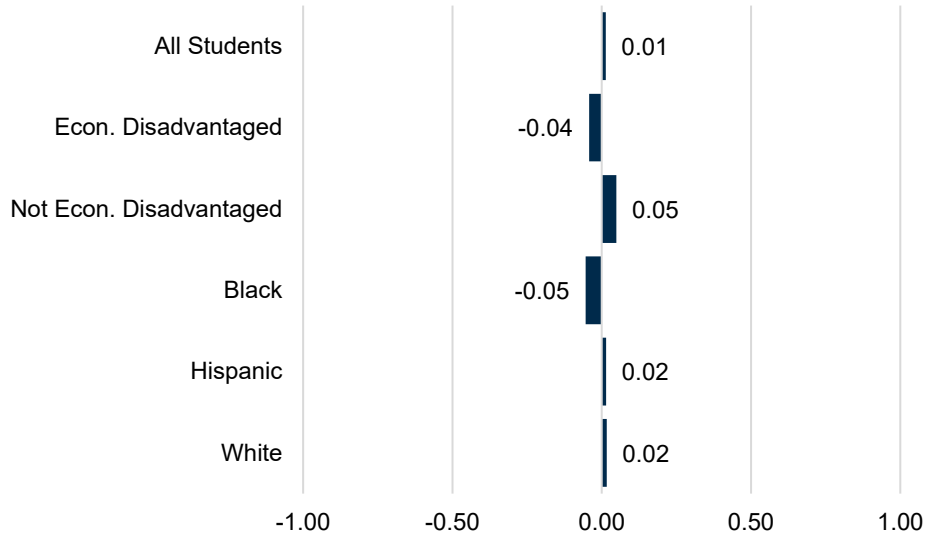
### Summary of Statewide Findings

- On average, Iowa students performed close to their prepandemic expectation on both 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 assessments across all subjects and grades included in the analysis. This suggests that on average students are performing similarly to what might have been expected had the pandemic not occurred.
- For some of the ISASP ELA assessments included in the analysis, on average students met or even exceeded the prepandemic expectation. These results were relatively consistent for both 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 assessments.
- While many ISASP mathematics assessments show some evidence that students on average tended to fall short of prepandemic expectations, the size of these impacts is considerably smaller than those reported in similar research using national data or data from other states. The results for 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 were similar.
- Across all ISASP assessments included in the analysis for both years, there were many students across the state who met or even substantially exceeded their prepandemic expectations in spite of the challenges posed by the pandemic.

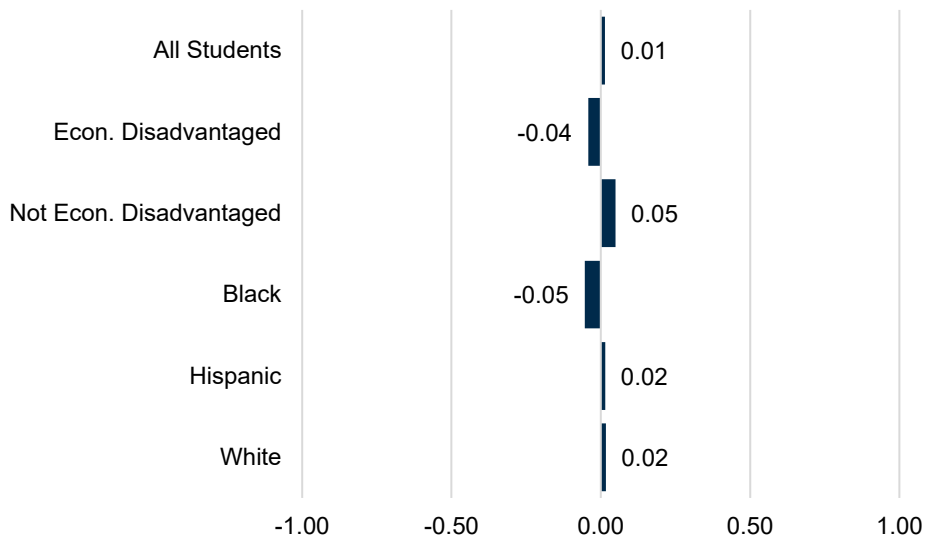
Figures 10 and 11 below show the average effect sizes for ELA and mathematics, respectively, grades 6-11 2021-2022 ISASP results for selected student groups. These compare students' 2021-2022 results (scale scores) to their projected/expected results based on their prepandemic score trajectories. An average effect size above zero indicates the group exceeded prepandemic expectations while an effect size below zero indicates the group fell short of prepandemic expectations. An effect size of less than .2 is considered a small effect. An effect size of zero would indicate no effect.

- Students identified as economically disadvantaged tended to fall further short of their prepandemic expectations than their peers, and these differences held across assessments and for both years of the analysis.
- Students identified as Black, American Indian, or “Two or More” tended to experience more learning loss than their peers, with the differences largely driven by mathematics assessments.

**Figure 10: English Language Arts 2021-2022 Learning Loss Average Effect Size, Grades 6-11**



**Figure 11: Mathematics 2021-2022 Learning Loss Average Effect Size, Grades 6-11**





## NAEP RESULTS

### IOWA VERSUS THE NATION

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 in the past 20 years. The next administration of NAEP will occur in spring 2024. In Iowa for any given NAEP administration, about 170 schools with about 2,000 students per grade level and content area participate. NAEP employs a stratified sample to ensure results are representative.

In fall 2022 the US Department of Education released the results for the spring 2022 NAEP administration. Results show that Iowa maintained similar standing compared to 2019 for three of four areas, reading grade 4 and 8, and mathematics grade 4. Average scale scores were not significantly different from 2019 to 2022. Only six states, including Iowa, had three areas that were not significantly different from 2019. Another seven states were not significantly different from 2019 in two areas, while the remaining 38 states (including Washington DC Public Schools) had a significant decrease in student performance in three or more areas when compared to 2019.

- 29 states' 2022 grade 4 reading scores were significantly lower than their 2019 scores.
- 33 states' 2022 grade 8 reading scores were significantly lower than their 2019 scores.
- 41 states' 2022 grade 4 mathematics scores were significantly lower than their 2019 scores.
- 49 states' 2022 grade 8 mathematics scores were significantly lower than their 2019 scores.

Although Iowa's grade 8 mathematics scores decreased significantly from 2019 to 2022, Iowa's rank among states improved, primarily because nearly all states performed lower in 2022 than in 2019.

- In grade 4 reading, 4 states performed significantly higher than Iowa. 33 states were similar to Iowa, with 12 states lower.
- In grade 8 reading, 6 states performed significantly higher than Iowa. 33 states were similar to Iowa, with 10 states lower.
- In grade 4 mathematics, 1 state performed significantly higher than Iowa. 19 states were similar to Iowa, with 29 states lower.
- In grade 8 mathematics, 6 states performed significantly higher than Iowa. 17 states were similar to Iowa, with 26 states lower.

These results suggest that Iowa fared well compared to many states nationally who lost significant ground. While not truly causal, these results also suggest a large impact of the

pandemic on student performance. Further, Iowa NAEP results also triangulate the findings of the learning loss analysis.

## ACTIVITIES TO CLOSE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

As mentioned earlier in this report, over the past year, like many states, district and school activities have been focused on recovery efforts after the COVID-19 pandemic. To determine the impact of the pandemic, the Department of Education engaged SAS® in completing an analysis of learning loss to see how students performed compared to their prepandemic expectation. While learning loss did occur and student performance has not rebounded to prepandemic levels, Iowa students appear to have lost less ground than many other states.

Over the past two years, the US Department of Education allowed states to temporarily freeze accountability determinations that are required as part of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). However, as recovery efforts are underway, states were required to re-start their accountability determinations under ESSA. In fall of 2022, Iowa released the results of its ESSA report card. Results, including how scores were calculated, can be found on the Iowa School Performance Profiles (ISPP) website (<https://iaschoolperformance.org>).

ESSA requires states to identify a minimum of 5 percent of schools that have the lowest performance ratings. Schools with an overall rating in the lowest 5 percent are identified as a school in need of comprehensive support. States are also required to identify schools with struggling student groups. The ISPP includes overall scores for every school but also a score for each student group including: students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, English learners, students with disabilities and students by race/ethnicity. Scores for each group allow for comparisons to determine if there are gaps in performance. Schools who had a student group score below the cut point is considered a school in need of targeted support.

With the fall 2022 determinations, schools for the first time were also allowed to exit a status (i.e., comprehensive or targeted) if there was improvement in scores. Comprehensive schools whose overall score was above the cut point for identification (lowest 5%) could exit and targeted schools whose student group score was above the cut could also. Schools that did not make progress were identified as extended comprehensive or extended targeted.

Table 4 shows the results of the fall 2022 ISPP release.

	Extended Comprehensive Year 1	Comprehensive Year 1	Extended Targeted Year 1	Targeted Year 1	No Support Required	Total (All Schools)
# of Schools	11	22	159	178	923	1,293
% of Schools	0.9%	1.7%	12.3%	13.8%	71.4%	100.0%

The release of a new round of school determinations also kicks off a new support and improvement cycle. Each school that is designated has a set of required improvement activities as a result of their designation. 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 that increases student achievement outcomes.

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

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. The 11 schools who were identified as extended comprehensive received an intensive site visit from the Department of Education. Every site visit resulted in feedback with observations and recommended next steps to be included in their school improvement activities.

## 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. Approximately, 28 percent of students are 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.

This report shows both areas of strength as well as opportunities for improvement when examining the latest student achievement results. Results from the spring 2022 NAEP found that Iowa was one of six states who had a significant decline in only one (or fewer) grades and content areas. Further, Iowa's relative placement increased but only because many states saw larger and significant declines in performance. This suggests that while the pandemic did have an impact, its effect within the state was less than many other states. The learning loss research also triangulates this finding. The learning loss research shows that overall Iowa students are performing close to but still less than their prepandemic expectations. The effect sizes demonstrate a very small effect.

Lastly, results of the ISASP demonstrate the sizeable and significant gaps that exist between Black, Hispanic, and White students and poor students and their more affluent classmates. In ELA, the gaps between Black/White and Hispanic/White are sizeable in grade 3 but also double by grade 11 when students are getting ready to leave formal schooling. Results in mathematics gaps follow this same pattern but are slightly smaller than ELA. Effect sizes, which highlight the magnitude of the gaps, are large to medium in scale.

In October 2022, the Department released the latest round of determinations required by ESSA. Identified schools have to engage in systemic school improvement activities. 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. During the 2022-2023 school year, schools are required to build their improvement plans and begin to implement evidence-based strategies aimed at closing the achievement gap and increasing student achievement.