**Fiscal Facts: English Learners’ performance on key measures lags behind other students**

Most English Learners (ELs) enroll in kindergarten and take at least five years to be reclassified as fully English proficient. However, new ELs are continuously entering the school system at all grade levels, and the older they are when they enter an English-speaking school, the more services they are likely to need and the longer it typically takes to reach full English language proficiency. Nevertheless, both state and federal education accountability laws require Wisconsin to monitor EL performance on statewide achievement measures.

Their performance on two of three key indicators of future success (third grade reading, eighth grade math and the four-year high school graduation rate) may be cause for alarm, as they appear to confirm the state Department of Public Instruction’s assertion that ELs have the lowest achievement scores of any student subgroup on these measures.

In 2017-18, 16.6 percent of third grade ELs scored at the proficient or advanced level in reading. This marks a gap of 26 percentage points below English-proficient students. It is also down from 17.4 percent the previous year and 19.9 percent in 2015-16. To put this in context, 2017-18 also marked a three-year low of 40.2 percent of all students statewide scoring at the proficient level or higher.

In eighth grade math, 36.6 percent of all students statewide scored at the proficient or advanced level in 2017-18, but only 4.3 percent of ELs did so. This represents a margin of 33.8 percentage points below the measure for English-proficient students.

At the same time, the trend in the four-year high school graduation rate for ELs appears to be improving. In 2017-18, 70.1 percent of EL high schoolers had graduated within four years. This was up five percentage points over the previous year and represented the highest EL four-year graduation rate in at least a decade. The high school graduation achievement gap between ELs and English-proficient students has been dropping from a 10-year peak of 26.8 percentage points in 2014-15 to just over 20 percentage points in 2017-18.

*This information is a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at wispolicyforum.org.*