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DPI releases standardized testing results for 2023-24 school year

MADISON – Standardized assessment results released today by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction show about half of tested students in both public and Private School Choice Programs during the 2023-24 school year are considered proficient in English language arts and mathematics.

Scale scores for ELA and mathematics for 2023-24 cannot be directly compared to prior years, as required revisions to the test design and scale took place this past year, as detailed below. These results are the first year of a new trend when comparing student performance in future years.

Recent revisions to Wisconsin Academic Standards for ELA and mathematics necessitated an update to the Forward Exam test design. These standards show what students should know at a given grade level in these subjects. The test redesign also allows, for the first time, a distinct reading score that will be comparable year-over-year, supporting extensive efforts by the DPI to improve educational outcomes in literacy. More information on these updates [can be found in this DPI resource](#).

Each time there are revisions to academic standards and updates to test designs, a corresponding performance standard-setting process is required to update cut scores. This process last took place for the Forward Exam in 2016. Earlier this year, a group of 88 educators representing education sectors and areas across Wisconsin (including 12 CESAs, the five largest school districts and private Choice schools) took part [in a formal standard-setting event](#) and recommended updating proficiency levels for the Forward Exam to more accurately reflect student performance on the test.

“I am proud of the work our state’s educators did to align our test with Wisconsin’s academic standards,” State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly said. “This work has led to results that will be easier for families to understand and provide them with a much better reflection of what our students should know, and how they are performing at each grade.”

During this multiple-day event, educators reviewed each test question, discussed expectations for students at each given performance level based on academic standards, and ultimately provided updated

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proficiency level recommendations. More information on this process can be found [can be found in this DPI resource](#).

Prior to this year, performance level expectations were connected to proficiency levels determined by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. [A 2021 study by the U.S. Department of Education](#) found performance level expectations in Wisconsin were among the highest in the nation.

For 2023-24, assessment results show public school student proficiency rates in English language arts and mathematics were at 48 percent and 49.4 percent, respectively. Students participating in the state's Private School Choice Programs had proficiency rates of 30.9 percent (ELA) and 28.3 percent (mathematics) for 2023-24. Assessment results show proficiency gaps among different student subgroups continue to exist.

“Our kids have such unique and growing needs, and these assessment results provide data to help educators target resources and support to improve outcomes,” Dr. Underly said. “At the same time, standardized tests are just one measure of student success and only tell us where a student performs on one given day. There are so many other inputs and factors that affect students’ academic performance. As a state, we need to work together to meet these very real and diverse needs and support our students, our educators, and our schools.”

Statewide participation rates for public school students continues to increase, with 95.4 percent of eligible students being tested for 2023-24. Choice student participation declined, with 79.7 percent of eligible students being tested. To access statewide, district, and school Wisconsin Student Assessment System data, [visit the DPI's WISEdash Public Portal](#).

The testing data released today is part of [the Wisconsin Student Assessment System \(WSAS\)](#), a statewide program designed to provide information about what students know in core academic areas at a given time and to help schools and districts understand where additional support may be needed. The WSAS includes the Forward Exam given in Grades 3-8 and 10, the PreACT Secure given in Grades 9 and 10, the ACT with writing in Grade 11, and Dynamic Learning Maps, which is given across all tested grades to students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Results from the WSAS are a foundational component of the state-legislated school and district report cards that will be issued in November.

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NOTE: This news release [is available online on the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's website](#).