



PUBLIC POLICY FORUM

IMPARTIAL RESEARCH. INFORMED DEBATE.

For more information:

Rob Henken
President, Public Policy Forum
414-276-8240 or 414-708-4392 (c)
rhenken@publicpolicyforum.org

For immediate release

December 16, 2016

Report provides detailed look at school district performance and finances in southeast Wisconsin

MILWAUKEE – *Friday, December 16, 2016* – The Public Policy Forum’s annual analysis of data from southeast Wisconsin’s public school districts finds large achievement gaps across the region on state assessments for low-income students and students of color. Those results are countered, however, by largely positive showings on new district report cards.

“The new state report cards show that 68 of the 92 school districts in southeast Wisconsin are exceeding or significantly exceeding expectations,” says Joe Yeado, Forum Senior Researcher and the report’s lead author. “Despite this positive result, success is not equally shared by student groups across the region and districts remain challenged to improve proficiency rates and academic outcomes across race, economic levels, and geography.”

The new school and district report cards include revised metrics designed to better capture *growth* in student achievement, as opposed only to achievement at a particular point in time. In addition to showing district-by-district performance on the new report cards, this year’s analysis includes the first year of data for the new state assessment – the Forward Exam – which is the third type of state assessment used in as many years.

“While the region largely mirrors the state in the percentage of students who are proficient or advanced on the Forward Exam, fewer than half of students score on grade level for English and math,” says Yeado. “Moreover, the achievement gaps for low-income students and students of color on this assessment are much larger in southeast Wisconsin than across the state.”

The Forum has produced an annual report on the performance and finances of southeast Wisconsin’s public school districts for the past 30 years. The 2016 edition provides a detailed look at K-12 school enrollments and student demographics, including a special look at English Language Learners and students with disabilities in southeast Wisconsin districts. The analyses detail the results of the Forward Exam and district report cards, though trend analyses are not possible given their recent implementation. The report also provides a deep exploration of high school achievement measures, such as graduation rates and the ACT and Advanced Placement exams.

The report’s annual trend analysis of school district finances, meanwhile, shows that per-pupil expenditures in the 2014-15 school year increased in six of the seven counties in southeast Wisconsin. On the revenue side, every county in the region experienced per-pupil revenue increases over the previous year.

Other major findings from this year’s report:

- **Regional enrollment decline quickens.** School district enrollment in southeast Wisconsin declined by 1.2 percentage points in 2015-16, a loss of 3,576 students. This follows a 0.8-point decrease in 2014-15.
- **Student diversity increases.** Students of color comprise 43.3% of enrollments in regional school districts, up from 42.7% in 2014-15. Hispanic students continue to increase in numbers, while African American and white student enrollment decreased in the past year.

- **Achievement gaps are particularly large.** Proficiency rates for African American students on the Forward Exam are 39 to 47 points lower than their white peers for 3rd and 8th grade English Language Arts and math. Hispanic students perform better, but still trail white students by at least 27 points across the two tests and grade levels.
- **College readiness measures stagnant or declining.** The composite ACT score for the region and state showed no change in 2015-16. More students participated in AP exams, though the pass rate fell 1.6 percentage points. The high school graduation rate in southeast Wisconsin is 83.9%, a decrease of 0.6 points, and trails the state average graduation rate of 88.4%.
- **Higher student attendance, but also higher truancy.** Districts in the region posted a 95.4% attendance rate, up 1.3 percentage points in the past year. However, the region also saw truancy rates tick up 0.4 points to 2.1%.

The Forum's schools report is sponsored by Alverno College, Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, Concordia University, and the Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance. Also, the Forum's general education research is supported by the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and the Northwestern Mutual Foundation. A copy of the report can be downloaded at the Forum's web site, www.publicpolicyforum.org.

Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum, established in 1913 as a local government watchdog, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the effectiveness of government and the development of southeastern Wisconsin through objective research of public policy issues.

#####