

Report Cards Talking Points Fall 2016

Office of Educational Accountability
Department of Public Instruction



The talking points below are meant to inform conversations with local stakeholders regarding the calculation changes found in the 2015-16 School and District Report Cards. The Department of Public Instruction is sharing the same information with the media and legislators as we prepare for the public release of the report cards on November 17th.

What changed?

There were three areas of change to this year's report card calculations. These changes were legislatively required and cannot be changed without further legislation.

1. **Variable weighting.** This is a weighting scheme meant to address the impact of poverty on student achievement. A sliding scale is applied when the school/district has both Student Achievement and Student Growth scores. The higher the percentage of economically disadvantaged students enrolled, the higher the weight that is placed on the Student Growth score. High-poverty schools or districts in which growth scores are higher than achievement scores generally see an increase in their overall score. Conversely, high-poverty schools and districts in which growth scores are lower than achievement scores generally see a lower overall score. Schools and districts have fallen into both categories as a result of this change.
2. **Value-Added.** The methodology for calculating Student Growth was changed from Student Growth Percentiles (SGP) to a Value-Added methodology. Value-added (like SGPs) statistically controls for prior test performance but also controls for student demographics like poverty, race, and ELL or SWD status. The model calculates projected growth for a school or district with all those controls in place and compares that projection to the actual growth. The difference is the value-added, and the accountability system translates this into a score.
3. **State Assessment.** The legislature has required additional assessment transitions in recent years which means that this round of report cards is based on different state assessments given over three years: 2015-16 Forward, ACT Plus Writing, and DLM Exams; 2014-15 Badger, ACT Plus Writing, and DLM Exams; and the 2013-14 WKCE and WAA-SwD in grades 3-8. While the metrics that calculate scores in the report cards are designed to work across different assessments, it is still true that changing the state test three times in three years is a disruption to the continuity of the system.

Why is our district score different from our school report cards?

Scores from the School Report Cards are aggregated, not averaged, to arrive at the district score. The district is treated as one big school, in which all students in the district are pooled for District Report Card calculations. This means there are often subgroup scores at the district level but not enough at the school level to show up on the School Report Card. In such cases, it is not uncommon for the district to have a lower overall score than the schools within the district. It may also be the case that the weighting

scale applied in combining the student achievement and student growth priority area scores into the overall score differs at the district level than for some individual schools in the district.

What about Test Participation?

Federal and state law contradict.

Federal law requires all students to participate in statewide standardized assessments. The law requires 100% participation in tests used for accountability (currently Forward/DLM in grades 3-8 and the ACT Plus Writing and DLM in grade 11), and allows for a 95% test participation threshold to be used in state accountability systems. DPI measures participation rates against the 95% target to account for year-to-year fluctuation.

Federal law requires that opt outs be counted as non-tested students for purposes of test participation calculations. Yet, in Wisconsin, state law mandates that schools honor parental requests for student opt-outs in grades 4, 8, and 9-11.

Report card calculations balance state and federal requirements.

The report cards attempt to balance state and federal law in the following manner:

Per federal law, parental opt-outs are counted as non-test participants. However, to increase the reliability and validity of test participation deductions, DPI calculates the test participation rate two ways: using just current year data and using up to three years of participation data in order to mitigate the impact of a one-year anomaly in test participation. While the use of a multi-year rate provides some leniency for these anomalies, it also allows schools and districts to see more chronic test participation problems. A school or subgroup must miss the target both with the current year and the multi-year rate before a deduction is applied.

To honor state law, students whose parents opt them out of state assessments are not included in any performance calculation for the years in which they did not test. They do not count “against” any test performance measures (Student Achievement, Student Growth and Closing Gaps priority areas); they are removed from the denominator. These students are included in graduation and attendance measures, generally counting “for” a school and district’s graduation and attendance rates.

Finally, DPI did not apply test participation deductions in the 2015-16 District Report Cards, even when the district fell below the 95% threshold. Test participation data are still reported on district report cards. This is because accountability for test participation rates under the new federal education law, ESSA (the Every Student Succeeds Act), are at the school – not district – level. In order to remain in compliance with federal requirements and maintain federal funding, test participation deductions remain in place at the school-level.

Test participation matters.

Equity: The federal education law – the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) – was first passed in 1965 and is foundationally a civil rights law. While some bemoan the focus on standardized testing introduced in the No Child Left Behind 2002 reauthorization of ESEA, the requirement for all students to participate in the test is ultimately an equity issue, in terms of both accountability reporting as well as opportunity and access. Documented research confirms that when all students take a college readiness assessment, like the ACT, many students previously not deemed ‘college material’ are found to be ready for college. This opportunity – or lack thereof - has disproportionately affected students of

color, and is part of the reason why the state required assessment for Wisconsin high school students is the ACT.

In order to understand the performance of all students and all subgroups of students, and to better identify and close achievement gaps, it is necessary to have performance information for all of our students.

Data Accuracy: When not all students are tested, reports of performance, including school and district report cards, are less accurate. As the percentage of non-tested students increases in a school or district, the likelihood that the school will be miscategorized increases. DPI analysis confirmed that when more than 5% of student test results are removed from report card calculations, the likelihood that the school and district's overall rating is different compared to when all student test increases significantly. This means that the validity of the report card index and accountability system rest on full test participation.

How should we use the report card?

First, **be cautious about drawing conclusions** from overall results until we have more years based upon the new calculations. Second, as always, priority area results provide more detailed and relevant information than a summative score. **Look at your priority area results** and the student engagement indicators. Analyze these data by subgroup with educators in order to drive school improvement. What's going well and what can you work on in your school based on what you see?

Finally, remember that the **report cards do not – cannot – measure all of the important work** that happens in your school and district. It is critical that you **pair any conversation about report card results with local data** and stories that tell a fuller picture of student opportunities and performance.