*Fiscal Facts by Wisconsin Policy Forum*

**Amid pandemic's upheaval, school enrollment down, graduation rates up**

Wisconsin K-12 school enrollment is down by more than 25,000 students for the 2020-2021 school year, one of many far-reaching impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic that may warrant a response from state and local policymakers.

In welcome news, high school graduation rates continued to rise and the reported student dropout rate continued to decline during the 2019-2020 school year. Meanwhile, data for other metrics — such as student attendance — are more difficult to interpret in light of the pandemic.

These are among the key findings of the Forum’s [updated School DataTool](https://wispolicyforum.org/research/school-datatool/). This interactive online tool enables users to quickly compare each of the 421 school districts in Wisconsin on metrics relating to student enrollment, school district spending, graduation rates, and other measures of student performance.

While 2020-2021 was not the first year statewide school enrollment has declined in Wisconsin, the steep decline came after previous years of steady but small decreases of less than 4,000 students per year in each of the previous five years. The largest declines can be seen in the 4-year-old and kindergarten age groups, as those students may have delayed school for another year.

The pandemic’s fallout cast uncertainty on the reliability of some data metrics. For example, attendance rates remained largely flat in the 2019-2020 school year, the most recent for which there is data, but the latter part of that year was upended by the statewide school closure linked to the pandemic. It is unclear how different schools and districts may have reported or recorded attendance during the period of widespread remote learning that concluded that school year.

Additional findings include:

* The share of advanced placement (AP) tests administered that scored three or higher stayed almost exactly the same in 2019-2020, at 66.5%. This is notable as AP exams in 2019-2020 were conducted virtually due to the pandemic, and fewer tests were administered overall.
* Dropout rates in Wisconsin decreased slightly in 2019-2020 to their lowest point in a decade. The dropout rate for Black students dropped from 4.3% in 2018-2019 to 3.6% in 2019-2020, marking the fourth consecutive year of declines for these students. Other groups saw declines as well. Like other metrics, dropout rates may have been affected by the pandemic.
* Statewide graduation rates continued their ascent, rising from 90.0% in 2018-2019 to 90.4% in 2019-2020. Students of nearly all races saw increases over the previous year with the exception of Black students, whose graduation rate dropped slightly from 71.3% to 70.8%.

*This information is provided to Wisconsin Newspaper Association members as 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*](https://www.wispolicyforum.org/)*.*