**Fiscal Facts: Student Absenteeism Rises Again; Test Scores Still Below Pre-Pandemic Levels**

Rates of chronically absent students continued to increase in Wisconsin schools in the 2021-22 school year, with the reported data rising even more sharply than during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The share of students in grades 3 through 8 scoring proficient or advanced in English language arts (ELA) and math increased in 2021-22 across grade levels, but it did not rebound to pre-pandemic levels.

Meanwhile, the statewide enrollment decline in 2022-23 of 6,339 students was Wisconsin’s second-largest decrease in 12 years, exceeded only by the drop during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21. Public school enrollment declined among American Indian, Black, and white students, while the number of Asian, Hispanic, and students of two or more races increased.

These are among the key findings of the Wisconsin Policy Forum’s updated School DataTool. This online interactive tool allows for comparison of each of the state’s public school districts on metrics relating to student demographics and participation, school district finances, graduation rates, test scores, and other measures of student performance. For each metric, the most recent available data are used, going through the 2021-22 school year for some indicators and 2022-23 for others.

In 2021-22, the statewide absenteeism rate rose for the sixth straight time, continuing a particularly pronounced ongoing increase during the pandemic. The absenteeism rate increased from 12.9% pre-pandemic in 2019-20 to 16.1% in 2020-21, then to 22.6% in 2021-22. The absenteeism rate is the share of chronically absent students (students who were enrolled for at least 90 days and attended less than 90% of those days) out of all students who were enrolled for at least 90 days.

Student math and English language scores on the state’s Forward exams ticked upward in 2021-22, but were still below where they stood in 2018-19, before the enormous disruption wrought by the pandemic. While precise trends differ by grade level, for most grades 3 through 8, the share of students scoring proficient or advanced in English language arts had been declining pre-pandemic. They saw a large drop in 2020-21, then rebounded in 2021-22 but remained below 2018-19 levels. There is less of a long-term trend in math proficiency; rates in this subject were largely stable or increasing before their pandemic plunge.

*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*](https://wispolicyforum.org/research/state-tax-burden-up-but-overall-burden-still-falling/)*.*