



WISCONSIN POLICY FORUM

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Wisconsin Exam Scores, Absenteeism Rates Have Not Returned to Pre-Pandemic Levels *Interactive tool allows for comparison of key metrics between school districts*

Math and reading levels and chronic absenteeism rates have yet to return to pre-pandemic levels in Wisconsin, as test scores continue to lag 2019 results and absenteeism rates remain sharply elevated.

At the same time, high school graduation rates in Wisconsin have steadily increased. This rate edged upward again in 2024-25 to 92%, its highest level since at least 2012.

Public school student enrollment also continued its longstanding decline in Wisconsin in the 2025-26 school year, as it declined by more than 14,000 students, or 1.7% – the second-largest drop since at least 2012.

These are among the key findings from the Wisconsin Policy Forum's [2026 School DataTool](#). This interactive tool uses state data to compare public school districts on metrics that include student demographics and participation, district finances, graduation rates, test scores, and other measures of student outcomes.

This edition of the tool is the eighth since its 2019 debut. The most recent data are used for each metric, going through the 2024-25 school year for some indicators and 2025-26 for others. While all the figures cited here are for public schools statewide, the interactive DataTool allows users to assess and compare how all 421 individual school districts are faring on each of these metrics.

The tool's key statewide findings include:

- **Student exam scores have not recovered** from the pre-pandemic period across Wisconsin, as shown by Forward Exam scores in math and English Language Arts (ELA). The 2024-25 share of students meeting ELA expectations was two percentage points behind 2018-19 levels, and 3.5 points behind in math. (Although the Forward exam and its scoring changed for 2023-24, DPI estimates allow for comparisons to previous years.)
- **ACT scores have also not recovered.** The average statewide ACT composite score for high schoolers was 19.2 in 2024-25. This was unchanged from 2023-24 but remains below pre-pandemic levels. The share of students who did not take the ACT also fell to 7.9%, a decrease of 0.6 percentage points from 2023-24. Non-testing rates also are well above pre-pandemic levels, which compromises the dataset's integrity and raises concerns about student engagement.
- There was a **slight improvement in 2024-25 Forward Exam ELA results** from the previous year, inching up to 51.6% of students meeting expectations – the highest level since the pandemic. The share of students meeting expectations in math, however, slipped down by 0.3 points to 52.8%. That leaves a slim majority of Wisconsin students meeting expectations overall in the two core subject areas.

- The **share of high school students taking advanced placement (AP) exams** who scored highly enough to receive college credit saw a significant increase. The share who scored 3 or above – the threshold to receive college credit or placement – increased from 71.2% in 2023-24 to 77.9% in 2024-25. This occurred even as the total number of students taking AP exams increased.
- **Chronic absenteeism** refers to students who were absent for 10% or more of school days, or at least 18 days in a typical school year. After spiking in 2021-22, the absenteeism rate has decreased in each successive year. However, the drop in 2024-25 was the smallest one yet, leaving the chronic absenteeism rate stuck above pre-pandemic levels by over four percentage points.
- **Black and American Indian students saw the largest one-year decreases** in chronic absenteeism in 2024-25. However, they remain by far the groups most likely to be chronically absent. Among white students, 10.8% were chronically absent in 2024-25, compared to 12.8% for Asian students, 27% for Hispanic students, 38.9% for American Indian students, and 46.3% for Black students.
- **The share of students with special needs has increased** even as student enrollment has declined. The statewide number and share of students identified with disabilities has increased for five years in a row, including a 0.4% increase (455 students) in 2025-26. Meanwhile, after increasing in prior years, enrollment of English learners fell by 2.5% in 2025-26. The share of English learners in the student population remained steady at 6.9%.
- **Total operating revenue per student in Wisconsin grew** by \$373 (2.1%) in 2024-25. Though federal aid per student fell due to the expiration of pandemic relief aid, that decline was more than offset by increases in state aid (up \$467, or 5.4% per student) and property taxes (up \$546, or 10.0% per student).
- On a per student basis, federal aid, state aid, and total operating revenue for Wisconsin schools have all increased in **inflation-adjusted terms** since 2016. Property tax revenues have seen a long-term real decline, having dropped 7.5% on an inflation-adjusted basis in the last nine years.

Click here to access the [2026 School DataTool](#).

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