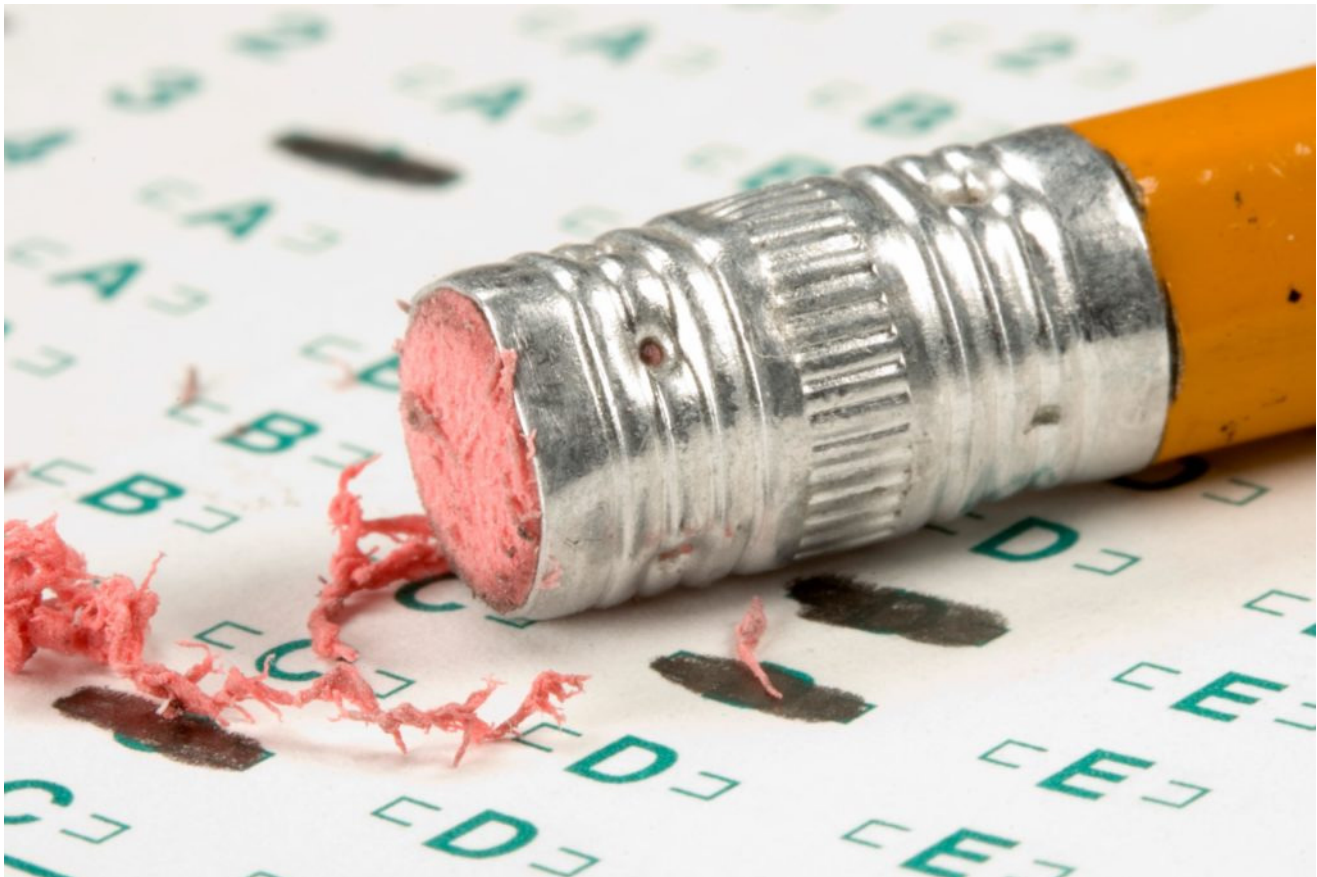


Report takes a hard look at who is scoring “well below proficient” on state’s ELA exams



The state’s standardized tests in English Language Arts made headlines last month when a software glitch disrupted and delayed testing for the second year in a row.

But research being conducted by the Benjamin Center at SUNY New Paltz demonstrates a more pervasive and deep-rooted problem with the mandated exams — the surprisingly high number of third- and fourth-graders who are considered “well below proficient for their grade” according to State Education Department criteria.

The Benjamin Center study uses data on students’ overall performance on the ELA tests from 2012 to 2018, with a focus on children the state testing program is leaving behind; the students who, in SED’s terms, do not even meet basic proficiency standards on the tests.

The April 2018 tests were administered to nearly one million students statewide. In September, the State Education Department announced that 45.2 percent of students were proficient on the ELA tests, an increase of 5.4 percent over last year.

According to state standards, “proficiency” is achieved when a student scores a Level 3 or Level 4 on the exams. But that still leaves 54.8 percent who were not—over half of the 966,000 students who took the ELA.

Students who test at Level 2 are considered not proficient, and students who test at Level 1 are “performing ... well below proficient for their grade,” according to State Education Department language. “They demonstrate limited knowledge, skills and practices embodied by the ... Common Core Learning Standards for ELA/Literacy that are considered insufficient for the expectations at this grade.”

The study, using data from the State Education Department and the New York City Department of Education, looks at the big picture of children’s overall performance on the ELA from 2012 to 2018, and investigates the students who are being left behind by the state’s testing program.

They are the ones who, in the State Education Department’s terms, do not even meet basic proficiency standards on the tests. For non-native speakers, students with disabilities, or for children in marginalized groups, especially in the lower grades, the results are troubling.

GRADE /YEAR	ELA: Percent of Students Performing Well Below Proficient (Level 1) Statewide and Broken Down by Subgroup, 2012-2018							
	All Students	English Language Learners	Students with Disabilities	Black	Hispanic	Asian	White	Economic Disadvantage
GRADE 3								
2012	14%	38%	45%	21%	20%	8%	9%	20%
2013	36%	67%	74%	50%	47%	20%	27%	47%
2014	37%	72%	74%	49%	48%	21%	29%	47%
2015	37%	71%	73%	48%	46%	21%	29%	47%
2016	27%	63%	65%	36%	35%	14%	20%	35%
2017	28%	59%	63%	36%	36%	15%	21%	37%
2018	18%	40%	43%	25%	24%	8%	13%	24%
GRADE 4								
2012	9%	30%	35%	14%	13%	6%	6%	13%
2013	30%	70%	71%	43%	42%	16%	23%	41%
2014	31%	70%	70%	43%	42%	16%	23%	41%
2015	31%	68%	68%	43%	40%	16%	22%	41%
2016	24%	61%	62%	33%	31%	12%	19%	32%
2017	24%	60%	58%	33%	31%	12%	18%	32%
2018	20%	48%	48%	26%	25%	10%	15%	26%

Courtesy of the Benjamin Center

The research found, among other things, that for third graders:

In 2013, 67 percent of English language learners, and 74 percent of students with disabilities, were put in the category of Level 1. And close to half of black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students were rated Level 1.

By 2018, the percentage of L1s was in the 40 percent range for English language learners and students with disabilities, while nearly 25 percent of black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students scored at that level.

For fourth graders taking the test, the research found:

In 2013, about 70 percent of English language learners and students with disabilities, and around 40 percent of black, Hispanic and economically disadvantaged students, were deemed well below proficient.

By 2018, the percentages were less severe. Still, nearly half of the English language learners and students with disabilities were well below proficient, while approximately 25 percent of children of color and economically disadvantaged kids also had scores in the L1 category.

The Benjamin Center report was researched and written by Fred Smith, a retired administrative analyst with the New York City public school system, and Robin Jacobowitz, director of Education Projects at the Benjamin Center. It can be found [here](#).