



Early Grade Reading Outcome Booklet

**Brown County,
Wisconsin**



**Our mission is to
use data and rally community
to co-create equitable conditions
so every young person can *thrive*.**

Purpose of This Booklet

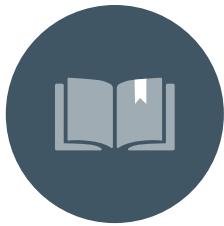
Achieve Brown County exists to bring people and organizations together to change systems so every young person can thrive. One of the core ways we do this is through Data Work—gathering, analyzing, and sharing data that reflects how young people are doing in our community.

This booklet presents a focused look at our Early Grade Reading Outcome and features data for Brown County, Wisconsin. By spotlighting key milestones, patterns, and disparities, this tool helps partners, policymakers, educators, funders, and community members better understand what's happening—and why it matters.

The purpose of this resource is to make data more accessible to guide decision making and strategy development across our community. Whether you're developing a new program, writing a grant, shaping policy, or seeking to understand local outcomes, we hope this booklet supports you. We believe that when communities understand the story behind the numbers, they are better equipped to align efforts and drive lasting change.

This report is not an answer key.

It is a starting point—a shared resource meant to support shared action.



Early Grade Reading Outcome Booklet

Brown County, Wisconsin

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A letter from our Data Manager

Dear Readers,

The Achieve Brown County Collective Impact Partnership is proud to share the information contained in this booklet. The data presented here is more than numbers—**it represents the communities we serve** and the progress we are working towards together.

My hope is that this booklet provides a clear and comprehensive overview of the indicators we use to measure our Early Grade Reading Outcome. We've designed this booklet as a tool to support informed decision-making and inspire action. More importantly, it serves as a resource for community members, partners, and stakeholders to be empowered to move forward thoughtfully and with a shared commitment to addressing the needs of the young people we support across Brown County.

Every chart, graph, and statistic reflects real life and real stories. It is our collective responsibility to use this information to create opportunities for growth and positive change. We urge all readers to approach this data with a constructive mindset, recognizing data as an opportunity for continuous improvement and to guide further action, rather than using it to criticize or undermine anyone who connects with an identifier.

**Data must be used to make progress,
not to strengthen stereotypes or increase inequalities.**

Finally, I want to enforce that the data included in this booklet comes from reliable, publicly available sources, with proper citations to ensure transparency and accountability. Through our analysis and visualization, we adhere to strict data management practices to maintain the highest standards of quality and ethical use. We use rigorous processes of validation, cleaning, and aggregation to ensure that the information shared is accurate, reliable, and up to date.

Thank you for your dedication and for taking the time to explore this valuable resource.



Sincerely,
Atithi Ghimire, Data Manager
(she/her)



About the Achieve Brown County Collective Impact Partnership

We are Achieve Brown County, a movement of individuals and organizations committed to improving systems that affect our young people's learning and early career achievements. We are parents, school representatives, nonprofit staff, business leaders, healthcare, government officials and a dedicated staff who want to create a Brown County *where all young people can thrive*.

Collective Impact Structure

Direct Service organizations run programs. We are a Collective Impact organization; we facilitate Systems Change by creating the conditions and structure in Brown County.



Have a common agenda for change-making.



Agree to the same methods of data collection.



Take on different work to achieve a unified goal.



Engage with other partners to maintain trust and motivation.



Have a **backbone** team to support the whole partnership.

Systems Outcome Improvement

We measure our success by impacting one or more of these Six Conditions of Systems Change.

policies

practices

resource flows

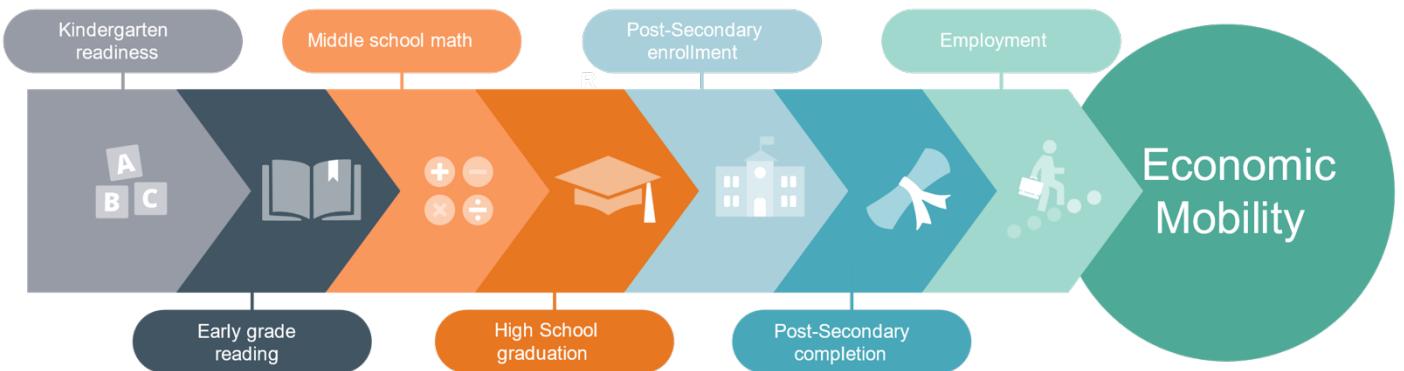
relationships & connections

power dynamics

mental models

Common Measurement - Youth Outcomes

We measure and focus work around seven youth outcomes from cradle to career.



Our Areas of Work



STATEWIDE PARTNERSHIP



Every child. Cradle to career.

NATIONAL NETWORK

Partnerships & Networks





The importance of Early Grade Reading

Early-grade reading is a foundational skill for school-based learning and is associated with future academic success and life outcomes.

Reading and comprehension in early elementary school years is critical for a positive academic trajectory, not only in language arts courses but in all subjects (CCSSO 2019). A longitudinal study on the relationship between third-grade reading and high school performance and college enrollment found that students who were at or above grade level in third grade graduate from high school and attend college at higher rates than their peers who were below grade level (Lesnick et al. 2010). Moreover, students who do not read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely than proficient readers to leave high school without a diploma, and these rates are higher among students experiencing poverty (Hernandez 2012).

Beyond academic outcomes, substantial evidence indicates students that establish basic reading skills by third grade have better social skills and behavioral outcomes (NCES).

For example, students with higher literacy achievement are less likely to be aggressive (Miles and Stipek 2005), and reading achievement in third grade predicted subsequent behavioral engagement (i.e., positive efforts and involvement with academic activities) in fifth grade, with higher effects among students experiencing poverty (Feister 2013; Guo et al. 2015).

Gaps in reading are more prevalent among students of color and students experiencing poverty, and the COVID-19 pandemic compounded the issue. In the pandemic's aftermath, the U.S. experienced the largest decline in reading outcomes since 1990 (NCES). Although students in every demographic group have been affected, Black and Latine students, as well as those experiencing poverty, those with disabilities, and those who are not fluent in English, have fallen furthest behind (Brookings). As of 2022, a long-term analysis of reading at age nine indicated that Black students performed a statistically significant 11 percentage points lower than white students, and Latine students performed a statistically significant nine percentage points lower than white students (NAEP).

Excerpt taken from StriveTogether's Cradle-to-Career Outcomes Data Guides: Early Grade Reading





Important things to know about data

The importance of disaggregated data

Disaggregated data is essential for **fostering equity and building a community culture** that values fairness and inclusion.

Unlike aggregated data, which can mask disparities, disaggregated data reveals how outcomes differ across groups, such as by race, income, or gender. This transparency helps communities **identify systemic barriers** and tailor solutions that address root causes. By prioritizing equity over equality—ensuring resources and opportunities meet specific needs rather than treating everyone the same—communities can drive more meaningful, lasting change and ensure that all individuals have the chance to thrive.

Ensuring equity in data

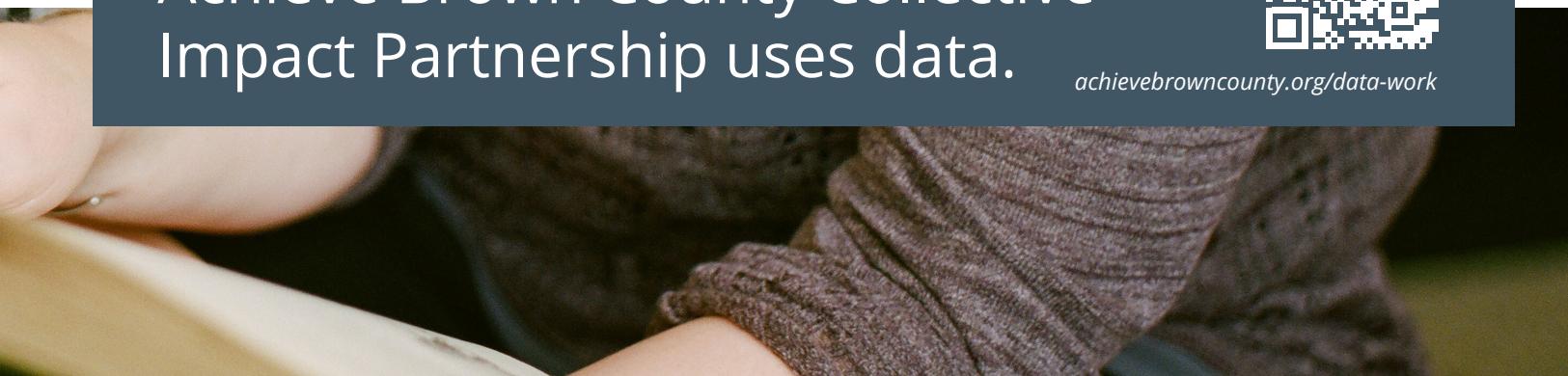
Equitable data use requires examining both individual level and systems level indicators. While individual outcomes like achievement gaps and health disparities highlight inequities, **they often overlook the systemic factors driving these disparities.** Systems-level indicators reveal how resources, decision-making power, and opportunities are distributed across institutions, addressing the norms and policies that perpetuate inequities.

Focusing solely on individual outcomes risks reinforcing discriminatory narratives and ignoring systemic causes. By integrating systems-level data, organizations can hold institutions accountable for creating conditions where all families thrive, regardless of race or income, driving equitable change in education, health, and social mobility outcomes.

Learn more about how the Achieve Brown County Collective Impact Partnership uses data.



achievebrowncounty.org/data-work





Forward Exam English Language Arts section

Achieve Brown County uses the English Language Arts (ELA) portion of the Wisconsin Forward Exam as our **Key Performance Indicator** for our benchmark for our Early Grade Reading Outcome. The data you see in this booklet shows how young people in Brown County preformed on the English Language Arts section of our state wide assessment. This test assesses a young person's literacy in three sections that can be completed in any order.

Session 1: Reading Comprehension

Session 2: Language Arts/Writing, including one short-write task

Session 3: Language Arts/Writing, including one short-write task



Statewide assessment Wisconsin Forward Exam

The Forward Exam is a computer administered assessment that is designed to track and assess how well students are doing in relation to the Wisconsin Academic Standards. These standards outline what students should know and be able to do in order to be college and career ready. The Forward Exam is administered online in the spring of each school year from grades 3-10:

grades 3-8 in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics

grades 4 and 8 in Science

grades 4, 8, and 10 in Social Studies

All students in grades 3-8, and 10 will take the Forward Exam with the exception of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who will take the Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM), Wisconsin's Alternate Assessment.





New statewide literacy curriculum updates: Wisconsin Act 20

Act 20 states that all Wisconsin schools (including independent charters and those participating in the Choice program) are required to provide science-based early literacy instruction in both universal and intervention settings.

Science-based early literacy instruction is defined as instruction that is systematic and explicit and consists of all the following:

- Phonological awareness
- Phonemic awareness
- Phonics
- Building background knowledge
- Oral language development
- Vocabulary building
- Instruction in writing
- Instruction in comprehension
- Reading fluency

The Wisconsin Department of Education does not mandate a specific curriculum that schools/districts must adopt. Instead, they have the flexibility to choose their own early literacy materials, as long as the materials align with the definition of "science-based early literacy instruction" outlined in Act 20.



Terms to know

The Link Between Wisconsin Academic Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment

Wisconsin Academic Standards:

Wisconsin Academic Standards specify what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. They serve as goals for teaching and learning, and define for students, parents, educators, and citizens what students should have learned at each grade level.

Curriculum: While standards provide the goals for learning, curriculum is the day-to-day activity that helps a student meet those goals. Curriculum creates the student's overall classroom experience and includes lesson plans, classroom assessments, textbooks, etc.

Statewide Assessment: The Statewide Assessment refers to the series of standardized tests to evaluate how well students are meeting the state's educational standards in key subject areas like English Language Arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies.

Definitions taken from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.



Performance Level Descriptions

In addition changes in curriculum, new performance standards were set for English language arts in June 2024. A student's overall performance on the ELA assessment is reported as a scale score. Scale scores represent the student's level of achievement, where higher scale scores indicate higher levels of performance on the test and lower scale scores indicate lower levels of performance.

A young person who performs at either advanced or meeting will be categorized as **"meeting grade level expectations"** throughout the data documentation.

Advanced

Student demonstrates a thorough understanding of the knowledge and skills described in the Wisconsin Academic Standards for their grade level and is on-track for future learning

Meeting

Student is meeting the knowledge and skills described in the Wisconsin Academic Standards for their grade level and is on-track for future learning

Approaching

Student is approaching the knowledge and skills described in the Wisconsin Academic Standards for their grade level needed to be on-track for future learning

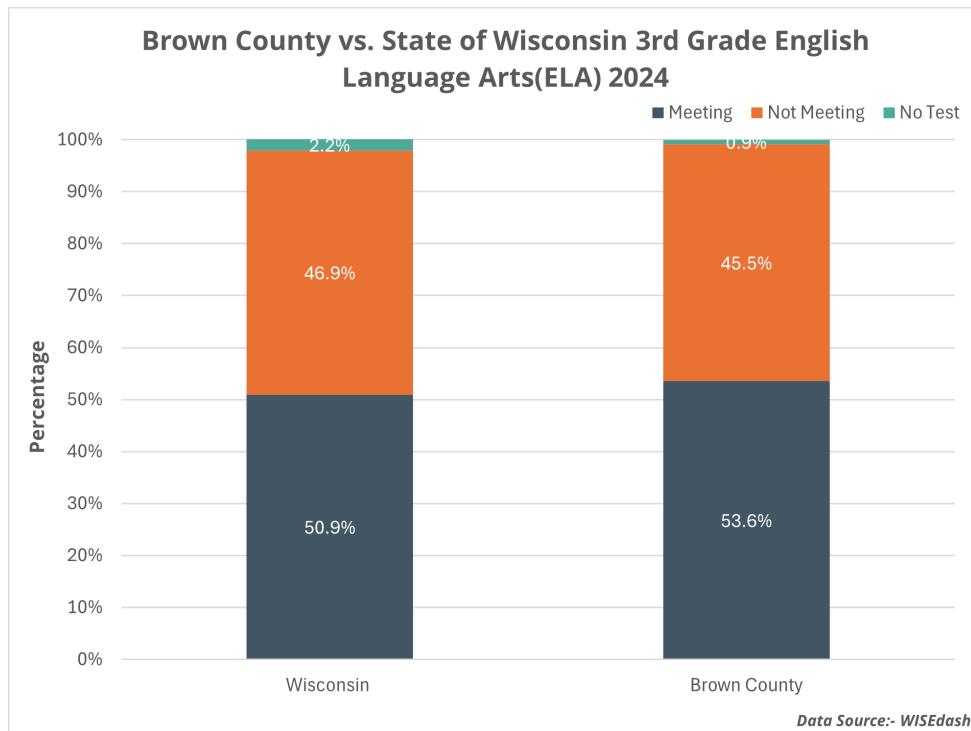
Developing

Student is at the beginning stages of developing the knowledge and skills described in the Wisconsin Academic Standards for their grade level needed to be on-track for future learning

A young person who performs at either approaching or developing will be categorized as **"not meeting grade level expectations"** throughout the data documentation.

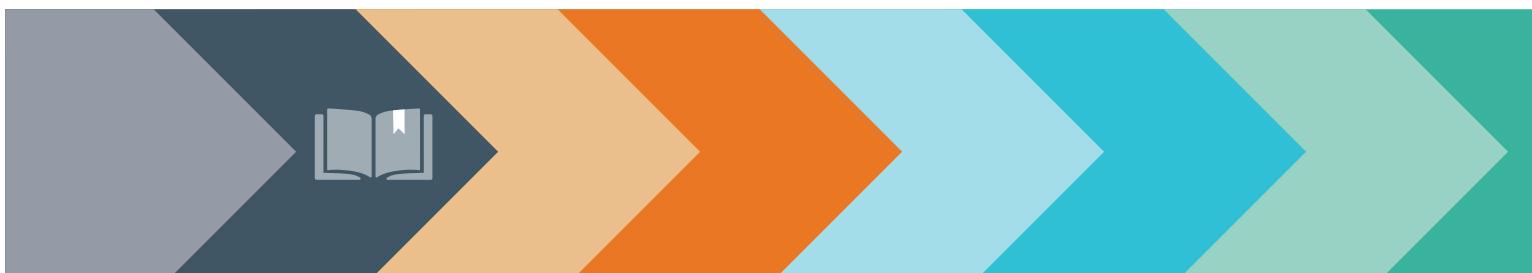
Note: Previously, students were categorized into the levels Advanced, Proficient, Basic, and Below Basic, and those who scored in the Advanced and Proficient ranges were referred to as "proficient." This terminology is no longer used. The current performance level system no longer includes the use of "proficient" to describe students in the Advanced and meeting categories.

Brown County vs. State of Wisconsin 3rd Grade English Language Arts

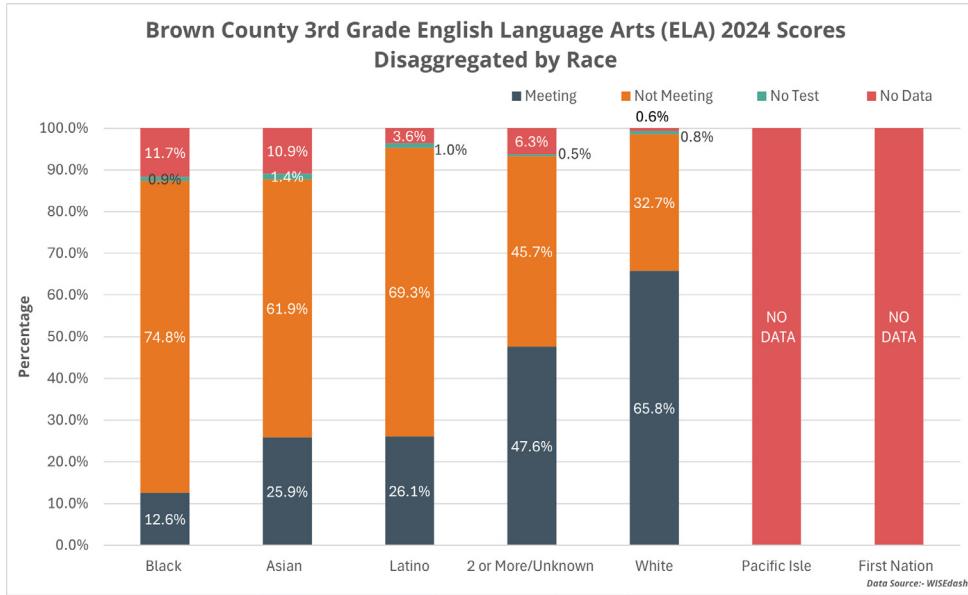


Description: This visual shows the percentage of 3rd graders in Wisconsin and Brown County who are 1. Meeting Expectations (Meeting or Advanced), 2. Not Meeting Expectations (Developing or Approaching), and 3. No Test (did not take the test) for the 3rd grade English Language Arts exam.

What It Means: In 2024, the percentage of third-graders meeting grade-level expectations in English Language Arts is slightly higher in Brown County compared to Wisconsin. Of the 2,804 students who took the exam in Brown County, 1,502 students (53.6%) in Brown County met the grade-level expectations, 1,277 students (45.5%) did not meet the expectations, and 25 students (0.9%) did not take the test.



3rd Grade English Language Arts Disaggregated by Race



Description: This visual shows the percentage of 3rd graders in Brown County, disaggregated by race, who are 1. Meeting Expectations (Meeting or Advanced), 2. Not Meeting Expectations (Developing or Approaching), 3. No Test (did not take the test), and 4. No Data for the 3rd grade English Language Arts exam.

What It Means: In Brown County, White students outperformed all other racial groups (1,776 test takers with 65.8% or 1,169 students meeting grade-level expectations). The next highest performing groups in order are Two or More Races/Unknown (208 test takers with 47.6% or 99 students meeting grade-level expectations), Latino (495 test takers with 26.1% or 129 students meeting grade-level expectations), Asian (147 test takers with 25.9% or 38 students meeting expectations) and Black (111 test takers with 12.6% or 14 students meeting grade-level expectations). Data for Pacific Islander and First Nation students were unavailable or were masked to protect student privacy.

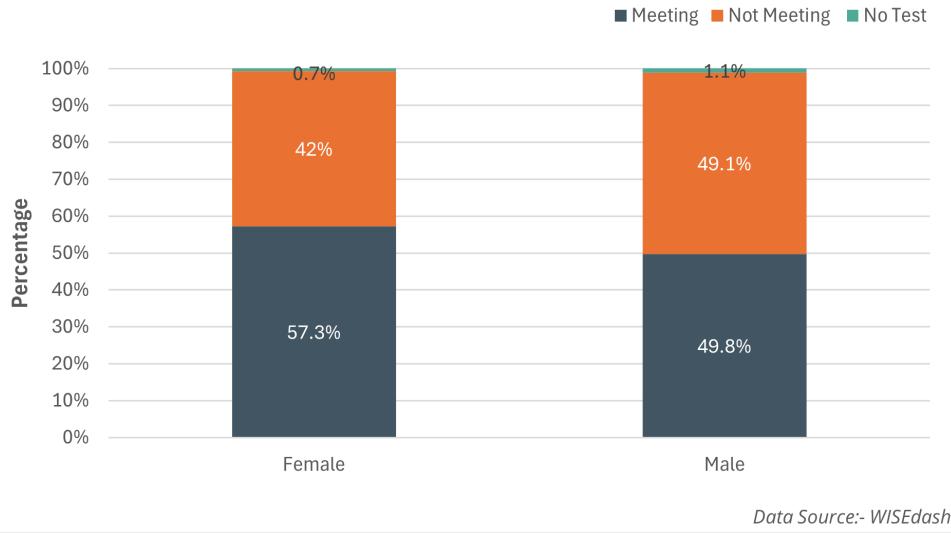


3rd Grade English Language Arts Disaggregated by Gender

Brown County 3rd Grade English Language Arts (ELA) 2024 Scores Disaggregated by Gender

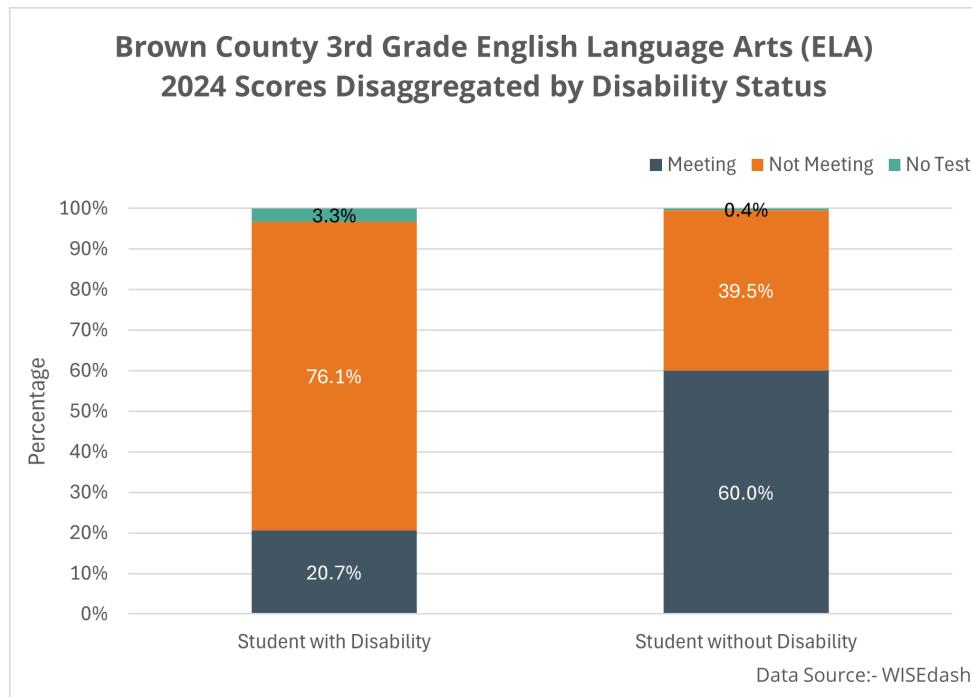


Description: This visual shows the percentage of 3rd graders in Brown County, disaggregated by gender, who are 1. Meeting Expectations (Meeting or Advanced), 2. Not Meeting Expectations (Developing or Approaching), and 3. No Test (did not take the test) for the 3rd grade English Language Arts exam.



What It Means: In Brown County, 3rd graders are almost evenly distributed between male and female students. Overall, a higher percentage of female students are meeting grade-level expectations compared to male students. In numbers and percentages this equates to 1. Female students (1,410 test takers with 57.3% or 808 meeting expectations) and 2. Male students (1,394 test takers with 49.8% or 694 meeting expectations). A small percentage of students (0.7% or 10 females and 1.1% or 15 males) did not take the test.

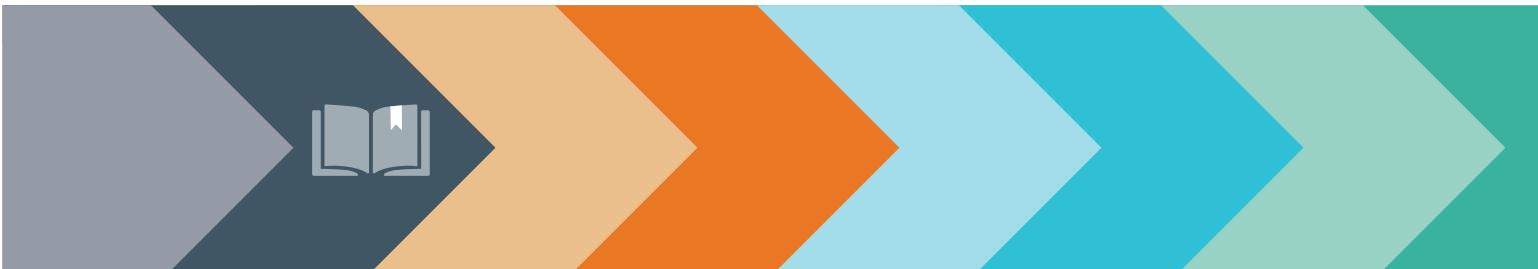
3rd Grade English Language Arts Disaggregated by Disability Status



Description: This visual shows the percentage of 3rd graders in Brown County, disaggregated by disability status, who are 1. Meeting Expectations (Meeting or Advanced), 2. Not Meeting Expectations (Developing or Approaching), and 3. No Test (did not take the test) for the 3rd grade English Language Arts exam. A student with a

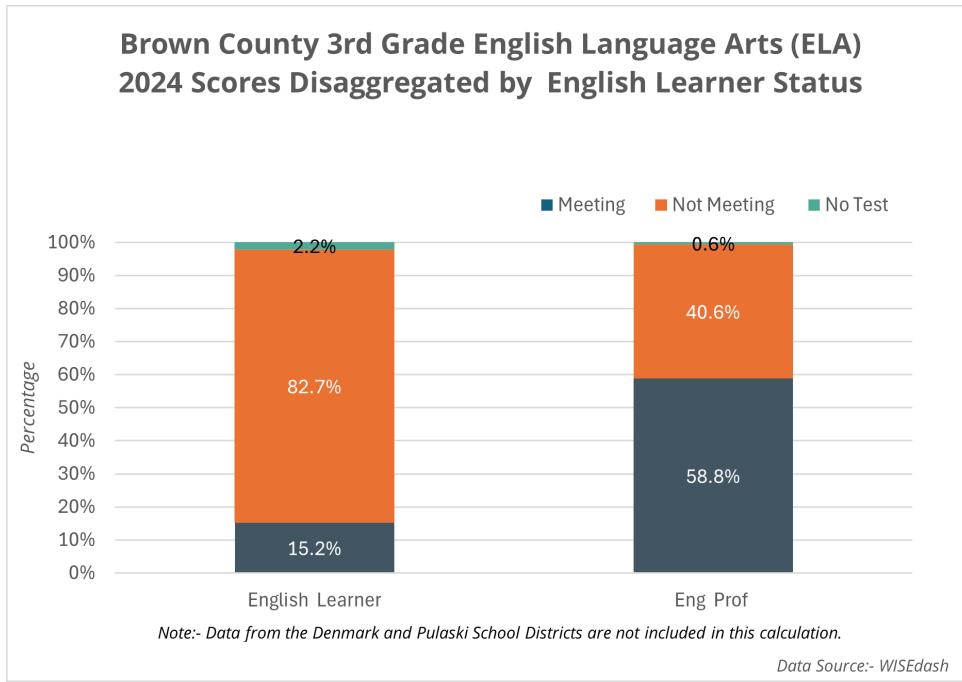
disability is defined as a student being reported by the school district as needing special education and/or related services.

What It Means: In Brown County, 460 (16.4%) out of 2,804 3rd graders, were categorized as a student with a disability on the English Language Arts Exam. Overall, a higher percentage of students without disabilities are meeting grade-level expectations compared to students with a disability. In numbers and percentages this equates to 1. Students without a disability (2,344 test takers with 60% or 1,407 meeting expectations), and 2. Students with a disability (445 test takers with 20.7% or 95 meeting expectations).



3rd Grade English Language Arts

Disaggregated by English Learner Status

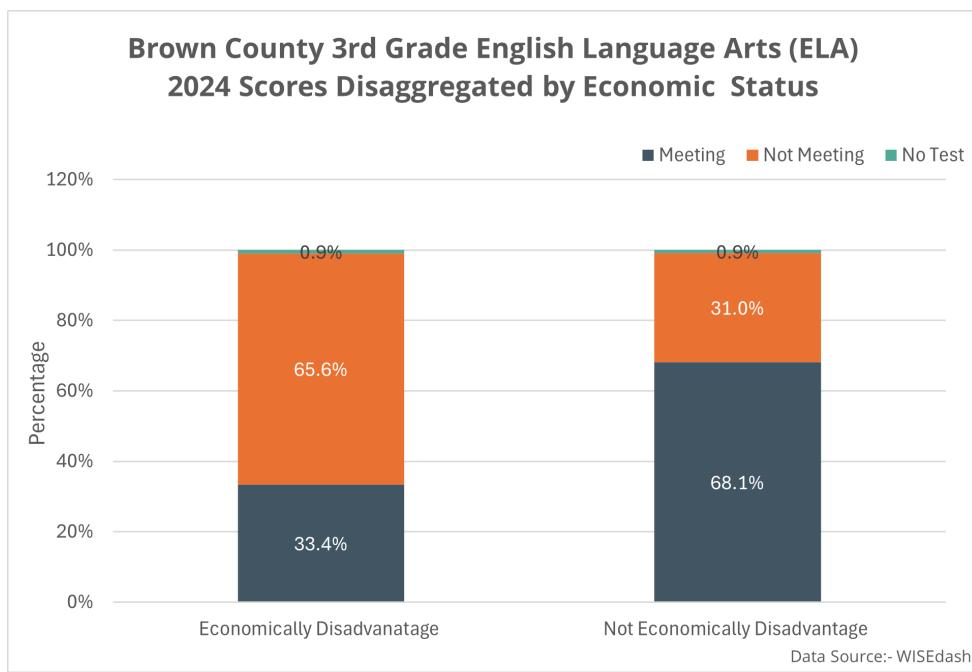


Description: This visual shows the percentage of 3rd graders in Brown County, disaggregated by English Learner Status, who are 1. Meeting Expectations (Meeting or Advanced), 2. Not Meeting Expectations (Developing or Approaching), and 3. No Test (did not take the test) for the 3rd grade English Language Arts exam. A student who is categorized as an English Learner is defined as any

student whose first language, or whose parents' or guardians' first language, is not English and whose level of English proficiency requires specially designed instruction, either in English or in the first language or both, in order for the student to fully benefit from classroom instruction and to be successful in attaining the state's high academic standards expected of all students at their grade level.

What It Means: In Brown County, 369 (15.3%) out of 2,413 3rd graders were categorized as English Learners on the English Language Arts exam, however, the total number of 3rd graders is 2,804, meaning approximately 13.93% of the data is unavailable. Overall, a higher percentage of students who are English Proficient are meeting grade level expectations compared to students who are English Learners. In numbers and percentages, this equates to 1. English Proficient (2,044 test takers with 58.8% or 1,202 students meeting expectations), and 2. English Learners (369 test takers with 15% or 56 students meeting expectations). Data from the Denmark and Pulaski School Districts is not included in this calculation.

3rd Grade English Language Arts Disaggregated by Economic Status



Description: This visual shows the percentage of 3rd graders in Brown County, disaggregated by Economic Status, who are 1. Meeting Expectations (Meeting or Advanced), 2. Not Meeting Expectations (Developing or Approaching), and 3. No Test (did not take the test) for the 3rd grade English Language Arts exam. A student who is categorized as Economically Disadvantaged is defined as a student whose household

income qualifies them for free or reduced lunch under the National School Lunch Program or through approved alternative mechanisms. Students in this category meet requirements for coding as F, R, or A as described on Economically Disadvantaged Data Collection and Reporting. Prior to 2005-06, only students eligible for free or reduced lunch based on an approved application or direct certification under the National School Lunch Program were counted as economically disadvantaged (no alternative mechanism).

What It Means: In Brown County, 1,172 (42%) out of 2,792 3rd graders were categorized as Economically Disadvantaged on the English Language Arts exam, however, the total number of 3rd graders is 2,804, meaning approximately 0.43% of the data is not available. Overall, a higher percentage of students who are Not Economically Disadvantaged are meeting grade level expectations compared to students who are Economically Disadvantaged. In numbers and percentages, this equates to: 1. Not Economically Disadvantaged (1,620 test takers with 68.1% or 1,104 students meeting expectations), 2. Economically Disadvantaged (1,172 test takers with 33.4% or 392 students meeting expectations).



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