

A Performance Audit of

Student Performance on Statewide Tests

The Importance of Focusing on
Underperforming Student Groups

Office of the Legislative
Auditor General

Report to the UTAH LEGISLATURE





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Audit Subcommittee of the Legislative Management Committee
President J. Stuart Adams, Co-Chair | Speaker Mike Schultz, Co-Chair
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December 9, 2024

TO: THE UTAH STATE LEGISLATURE

Transmitted herewith is our report:

“A Performance Audit of Student Performance on Statewide Tests: The Importance of Focusing on Underperforming Student Groups” [Report #2024-23].

An audit summary is found at the front of the report. The scope and objectives of the audit are included in the audit summary. In addition, each chapter has a corresponding chapter summary found at its beginning.

[Utah Code 36-12-15.3\(2\)](#) requires the Office of the Legislative Auditor General to designate an audited entity’s chief officer. Therefore, the designated chief officer for the Utah State School Board of Education is Dr. Sydnee Dickson. Dr. Dickson has been notified that they must comply with the audit response and reporting requirements as outlined in this section of *Utah Code*.

We will be happy to meet with appropriate legislative committees, individual legislators, and other state officials to discuss any item contained in the report in order to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations.

Sincerely,

Kade R. Minchey, CIA, CFE

Auditor General

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PERFORMANCE AUDIT

AUDIT REQUEST

The Legislative Audit Subcommittee prioritized this audit to evaluate statewide student assessment data and how this data is being used to inform decision-making. We analyzed assessment data to determine trends in testing data by demographic and other factors.

BACKGROUND

The proficiency gap between students who traditionally underperform and those who do not, exists in varying degrees throughout all Utah school districts and charter schools. For the purposes of this report, we examine and refer to underperforming student groups as those who have a higher than typical chance of performing below proficiency and who are economically disadvantaged, learning English, or racial or ethnic minorities. Student growth and academic achievement are the fundamental purpose of all educational efforts and underperforming student groups frequently need the most growth and support.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE ON STATEWIDE TESTS: THE IMPORTANCE OF FOCUSING ON UNDERPERFORMING STUDENT GROUPS



KEY FINDINGS

- ✓ Better strategies and improved interventions are needed to close student proficiency gaps.
- ✓ Top-performing LEAs make data-driven decisions for timely and consistent interventions based on internal student data.
- ✓ Discussions with high performing LEAs revealed potential best practices to improve student proficiency.
- ✓ Statewide percentage proficiency movement remains largely unchanged over time.

Interventions Based on Timely Data Assist LEAs in Narrowing the Proficiency Gap

Making timely decisions based on accurate data is crucial because it informs educational improvements at the policy, state board, and classroom level. Furthermore, timely, accurate data provides quality information for administrators to evaluate the success of



RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Local education agencies should collect and analyze data to determine gaps in student proficiency, and implement programs designed to bridge those gaps.
- ✓ Local education agencies should review intervention data (as mentioned above) and determine whether the interventions were effective, or if efforts could be better focused elsewhere.
- ✓ Local education agencies should reevaluate the effectiveness of their student intervention programs by collecting system level data to review and adjust interventions, as necessary, in response to programmatic weaknesses.

Summary continues on back >>



REPORT SUMMARY

implemented initiatives based on student achievement. Data driven decisions are a common theme among top-performing LEAs. These LEAs have obtained and analyzed student assessment data in a variety of ways including

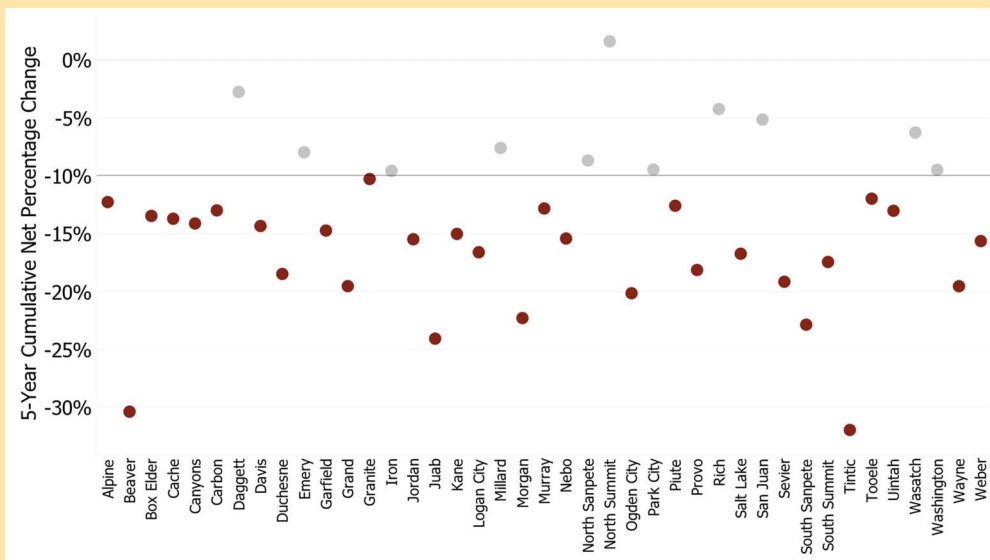
- **Shared Data.** Two school districts provide a shared dashboard allowing individual schools within the districts to have visible, usable student data.
- **Consistent Training.** One school district provides monthly principal training for various low performing student groups.
- **Data Analysis Teams.** One school district has designated data analysis teams that meet every four weeks to review internal student data and reevaluate student placements.

Statewide Percentage Proficiency Movement Remains Largely Unchanged Over Time

We reviewed five years of data showing how many students moved from proficiency to nonproficiency and visa versa. From these analyses we conclude that student performance on previous statewide assessments is a good indicator of student performance on future statewide assessments. These conclusions remained true over time. Considering the net percentage proficiency change over five years, the percent of students who changed their proficiency status remained problematically low. Both state and LEA level observations create a case for school districts and charter schools to reevaluate the effectiveness of their student intervention programs.

Some School Districts Are Able to Move More Students to Proficiency than Others.

The gray dots represent those school districts that had a five-year cumulative net percentage change above -10 percent (eleven districts total). The red dots represent those school districts that had a five-year cumulative net percentage change below -10 percent (30 districts total). When viewing the data collectively, roughly three out of four school districts netted losing more than 10 percent of their “proficient” students to the “not proficient” student group.





BACKGROUND

There is a statewide gap between the performance of students who are in an underperforming student group with a higher than typical chance of performing below proficiency, and those who aren't. The student group categories in this report include students who are economically disadvantaged, learning English, or racial or ethnic minorities. Local education agencies such as school districts and charter schools should make all reasonable efforts to identify students in need and intervene quickly at the first signs of difficulty.

FINDING 1.1 **Interventions Based on Timely Data** **Assist LEAs in Narrowing the** **Proficiency Gap**

RECOMMENDATION 1.1

The Utah State Board of Education should review the cycle of student assessment data and identify opportunities to expedite the process thereby improving the turnaround time to Utah local education agencies.

FINDING 1.2 **Discussions with High Performing** **LEAs Revealed Potential Best** **Practices to Improve Student** **Proficiency**

RECOMMENDATION 1.2

Local education agencies should collect and analyze data to determine gaps in student proficiency, and implement programs designed to bridge those gaps.

RECOMMENDATION 1.3

Local education agencies should review intervention data (as mentioned in Recommendation 1.2) and determine whether the interventions were effective, or if efforts could be better focused elsewhere.



CONCLUSION

Although we were able to identify and meet with top performing LEAs and identify what they believe helps close student proficiency gaps, the extent to which the narrower proficiency gaps are based on their practices remains uncertain. To better understand this relationship, LEAs should collect and analyze student and program level intervention data. This research will help LEAs to better predict outcomes while improving existing strategies.





Chapter 1

Better Strategies and Improved Interventions Are Needed to Close Student Proficiency Gaps

There is a statewide gap between the performance of students who are in a group that traditionally struggles with academic proficiency, and those who aren't.¹ Student growth and academic achievement are a fundamental purpose of all educational efforts and underperforming student groups frequently need some of the most growth and support. As such, Local education agencies (LEAs), which include school districts and charter schools, should make all reasonable efforts to identify students in need and intervene quickly at the first signs of difficulty.

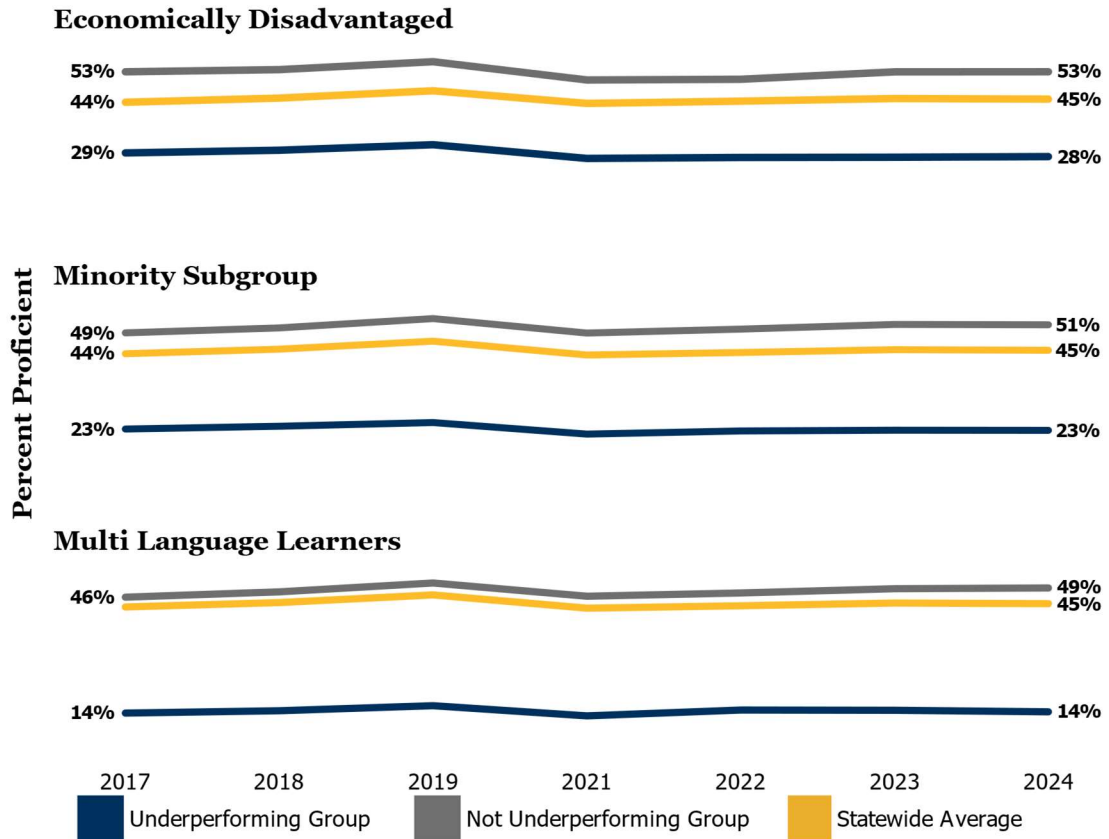
We recognize LEAs' current efforts to provide children with a high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps. We also acknowledge that there are internal and external complexities potentially affecting students' academic performance that cannot be quantified by data, such as the level of family or home support. For this reason, the practices and suggestions set forth in this report are intended to offer information and recommendations to further improve what is already being done. Furthermore, this report identifies practices used by LEAs with smaller student performance gaps and recommends a heavier use of student performance data to address those gaps.

¹ There are ten student group categories that the Utah State Board of Education (USBE) considers for federal accountability requirements. For the purposes of this report, we examine and refer to underperforming student groups as those who have a higher than typical chance of performing below proficiency. The student group categories in this report include students who are economically disadvantaged (low income), learning English, or racial or ethnic minorities.



Figure 1.1 The Gap Between Students with Increased Risk Factors and Those Without Occurs Statewide, Indicating a Need for Increased Focus on These Groups.

This figure summarizes statewide student proficiency gaps for the English language arts subject area of the Utah SAGE, RISE, and Aspire+ assessments.² In this view, multiple language learners are of particular concern since the proficiency gap for this student group is greater than 30 percent.



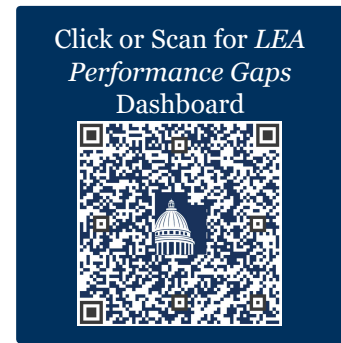
Source: Auditor generated from USBE data.

The proficiency gap between students who traditionally underperform and those who do not, exists in varying degrees throughout all Utah districts and charter schools that met the sample size requirement.³ To illustrate this, we created an interactive dashboard that allows the user to view proficiency gaps by selecting

² The objective of this analysis is to evaluate an LEA as a whole and to determine whether statewide proficiency standards are being met.

³ Data was filtered to exclude subgroups with a population of less than 40 observations to ensure anonymity and avoid extreme fluctuations in the data.

the LEA, underperforming group, statewide assessment,⁴ and statewide assessment subject area. The accompanying interactive dashboard can be found by clicking or scanning the QR code.



Furthermore, we were asked to analyze student statewide assessment data to determine three things:

- Trends in statewide testing data by demographic and other factors (shown in the dashboard)
- Educational practices used in high and low performing LEAs
- How previous test performance correlates with future test performance

To determine educational practices, we spoke to several LEAs that are among the highest and lowest performing in the state for proficiency gaps. We would note that some LEAs indicated that they use the same methods on all students regardless of underperforming group status. Additionally, we recognize that not all evidence-based interventions will work for all LEAs due to the differences in the number of students, level of funding, and degree of necessity.

1.1 Interventions Based on Timely Data Assist LEAs in Narrowing the Proficiency Gap

Data driven decisions for timely and consistent interventions based on internal student data is a common theme among top-performing LEAs. These LEAs have obtained and analyzed student assessment data in a variety of ways. For example, some LEAs use internal data or have designated data analysis teams, as outlined in the following text boxes.

⁴ We analyzed five years of English language arts, math, and science student proficiency data in aggregate for three of four statewide assessments including 1) SAGE/RISE, 2) Aspire +, and 3) ACT. The fourth statewide assessment, Acadience, is administered from kindergarten to third grade and was evaluated in two parts: literacy and numeracy. For consistency, the figures in this report reflect data from the SAGE, RISE, and Aspire + assessments. Acadience and ACT assessment data were intentionally left out of these analyses to avoid combining tests with different intent. That said, this information is available and publicly provided in the accompanying dashboard.

*Note: The Acadience numeracy assessment benchmark is a relatively new benchmark that was approved during the 2020 General Legislative session. Additionally, this benchmark was introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic when a brief break from collecting assessment data was taken for the 2020 and 2021 school years. Consequently, Acadience numeracy data only exists for the 2022 school year forward.



Shared Data

Two school districts provide a shared dashboard allowing individual schools within the districts to have visible, usable student data. To provide this dashboard, these LEAs complete their own internal analysis prior to USBE data becoming available.

Consistent Training

One school district trains principals on how to use data to conduct root cause analyses for various low performing student groups. These trainings are conducted monthly.

Data Analysis Teams

One school district has designated data analysis teams that meet every four weeks to review internal student data and reevaluate student placements. According to the district, internal student data has the capability to drill down to individual students' skillsets to ensure timely, targeted interventions. A focus of this district has been pairing homogenous student groups with specific interventions designed to develop the specific skillset(s) that students lack.

Conversely, challenges reported by LEAs with larger student proficiency gaps include a lack of access to timely data, disparate access to software programs, and insufficient resources. Although there have been improvements, multiple LEAs mentioned that student data received from Utah's State Board of Education (USBE) has not been timely. For example, one school district reports building in lag-time for state owned program data, which could prolong introducing or adjusting targeted student interventions. Legislative intent for statewide assessments as contained in *Utah Code*⁵ states



Low performing school districts report a lack of access to timely data, disparate software programs, and insufficient resources.

...a statewide assessment provides... a) evaluative information regarding the various levels of proficiency achieved by students, so that they may have an additional tool to plan, measure, and evaluate the effectiveness of programs in the public schools; and b) information to recognize excellence and to identify the need

⁵ *Utah Code* 53E-4-301.5(2).

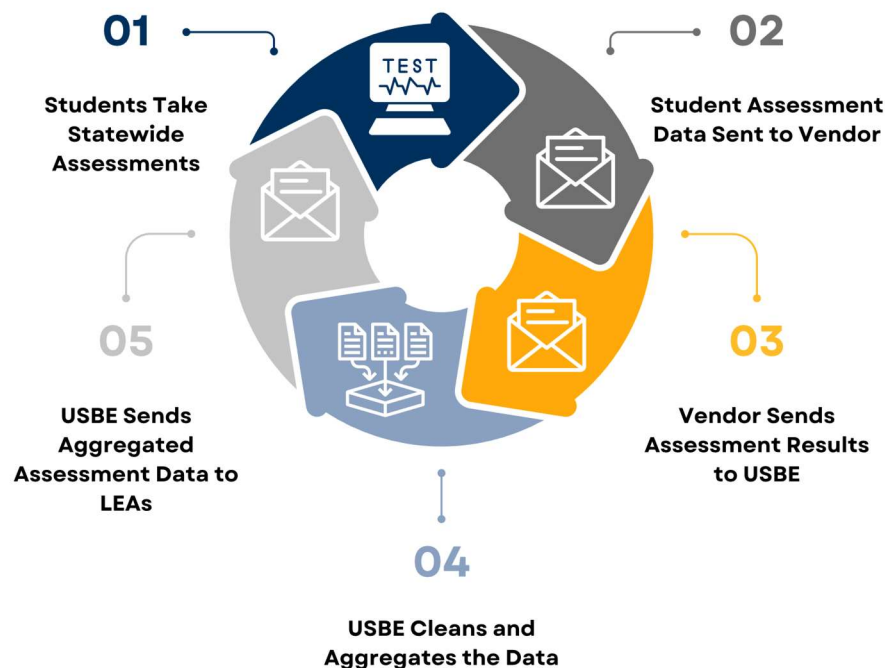


for additional resources or to reallocate educational resources in a manner to ensure educational opportunities for all students and to improve existing programs.

It is noteworthy to mention that while one of the few purposes of these statewide assessments is for educational program evaluation, individual student score reports are available to LEAs almost immediately. However, program level data cleaned and aggregated by the state requires time. Although individual student performance data can promptly inform student-level decisions, program-level data should be used for decisions at the programmatic level to inform overarching policy and/or instructional decisions.

Furthermore, multiple LEAs reported building a reliance on externally funded software programs, which becomes problematic when external funding sources are no longer available. To remedy this issue, one top performing school district has restructured their budget to prioritize funding their own software program.






The delay in receiving program-level data is partially built into the process of cleaning and aggregation. For example, large scale student assessment data changes hands multiple times before it is sent to its respective LEAs.



Source: Auditor generated.



The Need for Accurate, Timely Data in Education Is a Problem that Has Persisted Over Time. While some LEAs have been able to devote resources to aggregate, clean, and develop their own student assessment data, other LEAs either do not have the resources or haven't prioritized data analytics. Our office has released several reports addressing the need for timely, accurate data in many areas of education. Concepts from these reports include:

| | |
|--|--|
|  | Addressing concerns with statewide student assessment data regarding Utah's opt-out provisions, as well as perceived inaccuracies due to student disengagement. ⁶ |
| Identifying the lack of reliability and validity in the state's teacher evaluation rating data. ⁷ |  |
|  | Identifying insufficiencies in local-level data to understand overall trends in teacher retention and teacher shortages. ⁸ |
| Advising USBE to routinely collect, track, and report performance on internal operations and streamline measures. ⁹ |  |
|  | Identifying inconsistencies in charter school financial data making it difficult for charter schools to plan and analyze operations. ¹⁰ |

⁶ *A Performance Audit of Public Education Assessment Data* (Report #2019-12). This report concluded that the impact of Utah's opt out provisions on statewide assessments have minimal effect on data accuracy.

⁷ *A Performance Audit of Teacher and Principal Performance Within Utah's Public Education System* (Report #2022-03).

⁸ *A Performance Audit of Teacher Retention Within Utah's Public Education System* (Report #2021-13).

⁹ *A Performance Audit of the Utah State Board of Education's Internal Governance* (Report #2021-04).

¹⁰ *A Performance Audit of Utah Charter Schools* (Report #2007-01).



Making timely decisions based on accurate data is crucial because the data can inform educational improvements at the policy, state board, and classroom level. Furthermore, timely, accurate data provides quality information for administrators to evaluate the success of implemented initiatives based on student achievement.



Timely, accurate data provides quality information to evaluate the programmatic success of implemented initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION 1.1

The Utah State Board of Education should review the cycle of student assessment data and identify opportunities to expedite the process thereby improving the turnaround time to Utah local education agencies.



1.2 Discussions with High Performing LEAs Revealed Potential Best Practices to Improve Student Proficiency

High performing LEAs with comparatively smaller student proficiency gaps offered some suggestions of their own best practices. In this section, we highlight what is being done to close proficiency gaps and bolster student performance across the state. We provide a menu of options for consideration because we recognize that implementation methods will depend on the LEA. For example, LEAs have different resources, student populations, and geographical regions making a one-size-fits-all approach impractical.

We recommend that LEAs consider the best practices outlined in this report, as well as other best practices, and implement those that they can. We would note that we were not able to conclusively link these best practices to improved student performance, as the studies necessary to determine this outcome were not conducted. For this reason, we recommend that LEAs collect and analyze student and program level data to determine the best option(s) of addressing the student proficiency gaps in their respective regions.

Standards-Based Instruction

One school district reports systematizing the Utah Core Standards to create learning rubrics. The standards identify basic knowledge, skills, and competencies—teachers create lesson plans based on the standards and instruct their students on core content.

Proficiency-Based Learning Approach to Grading

Progress and reporting “grades” are meant to show what a student knows and can do with respect to specific subject standards during a specific period (grading period). Assessments are tied to specific standards to show a student’s progress toward proficiency.

Peer Learning at the Administrative Level

Taking a collaborative approach to learning and development, one LEA spends significant time compiling data to identify other LEAs throughout the state that they can learn from. Schools within the district meet regularly to learn where they can improve.



Early and Consistent Intervention

New students are immediately tested to determine appropriate placements. Pairing new students needing intervention with the appropriate intervention program is key for student development. For consistency, students needing intervention remain with the same advisory teacher and/or instructional coach.

Although we were able to identify and meet with top performing LEAs and identify what they believe helps close the gap, the extent to which the narrower proficiency gaps are based on their practices remains uncertain. To better understand this relationship, we recommend that LEAs collect and analyze student and program level intervention data to better understand its effect on student performance and proficiency gaps. This research will help LEAs to better predict outcomes while improving existing strategies.

RECOMMENDATION 1.2

Local education agencies should collect and analyze data to determine gaps in student proficiency, and implement programs designed to bridge those gaps.¹¹

RECOMMENDATION 1.3

Local education agencies should review intervention data (as mentioned in Recommendation 1.2) and determine whether the interventions were effective, or if efforts could be better focused elsewhere.¹¹

¹¹ Our office intends to follow-up with these recommendations by randomly sampling several school districts that will be notified upon selection.





BACKGROUND

We reviewed five years of data showing how many students moved from the “not proficient” student group to the “proficient” student group and vice versa. The statewide movement between proficiency groups appears to balance out to stagnation. Some of this may be explained by recovery efforts from the COVID-19 pandemic; however, these conclusions remain true over time. The average net percentage proficiency changes for pre and post pandemic school years is below two percent.

FINDING 2.1 **Statewide Percentage Proficiency** **Movement Remains Largely** **Unchanged Over Time**

RECOMMENDATION 2.1

Local education agencies should reevaluate the effectiveness of their student intervention programs by collecting system level data to review and adjust interventions, as necessary, in response to programmatic weaknesses.



CONCLUSION

Our observations of both state and local education agency (LEA) level data create a case for school districts and charter schools to reevaluate the effectiveness of their student intervention programs. Student interventions should aim to link the root cause of the problem to a specific, targeted intervention that directly addresses the underlying issue. Additionally, timely and consistent interventions can significantly reduce the student proficiency gap by providing targeted support when students first show signs of difficulty.





Chapter 2

Statewide Percentage Proficiency Movement Remains Largely Unchanged Over Time

Student performance on previous statewide assessments is a good indicator of future performance. We reviewed five years of data showing how many students moved from non-proficiency to proficiency and vice versa.¹² Statewide movement between proficient and not proficient student groups appears to balance out to stagnation. Some of this may be explained by recovery efforts from the COVID-19 pandemic. That said, observations of student proficiency measures between the 2022-23 school years appear largely unchanged.



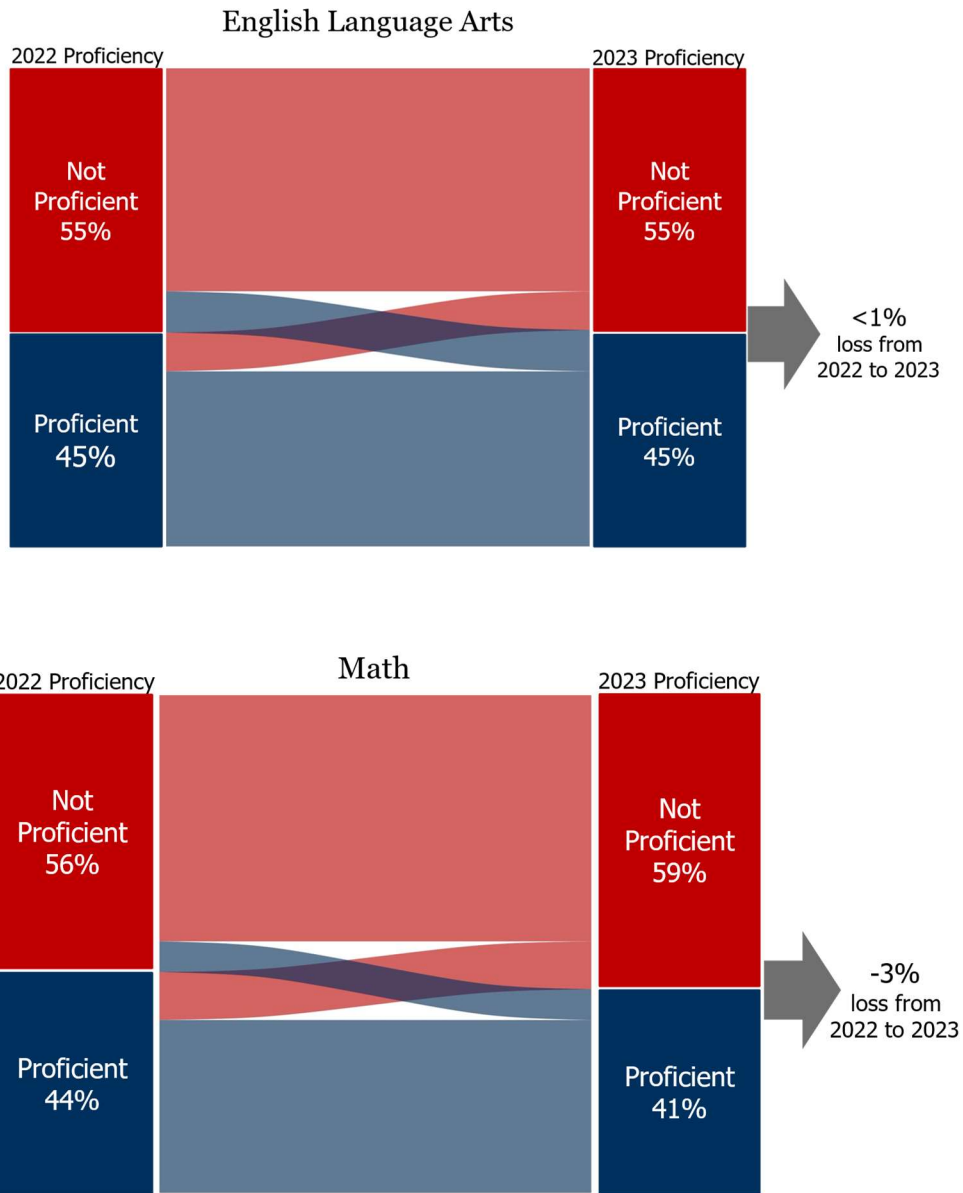
Student performance on previous statewide assessments is a good indicator of future performance.

For example, when referring to the English Language Arts subject area in Figure 2.1, nearly 8 percent of proficient students fell to nonproficiency, and just over 8 percent of not proficient students moved to proficiency, resulting in a nominal net change. Figure 2.1 shows three examples of percentage proficiency movement patterns by subject area. Data is aggregated at the state level.

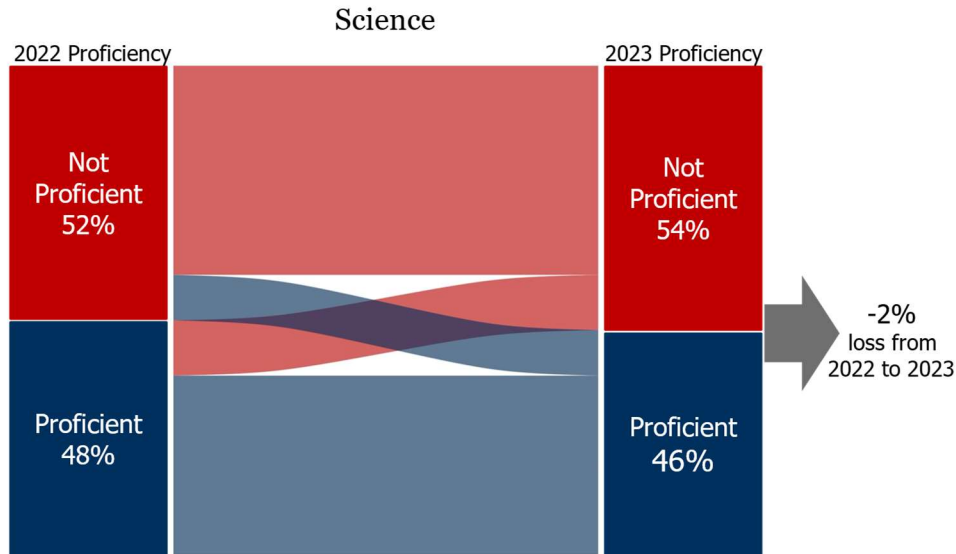
¹² The five years of data reviewed span the 2018-2023 school years. Percent proficiency movement data for the 2020 school year was omitted due to disruptions with the COVID-19 pandemic.



Figure 2.1 Utah Students Below Proficiency Rarely Move to Proficiency. Utah saw a net percentage change of one to three percent between 2022 to 2023.¹³ The lack of movement highlights the need to focus on improvement for underperforming student groups as discussed in Chapter 1.



¹³ These measures don't account for student growth. While growth is a vital measure for a student, this audit focuses on the overall movement in proficiency. The objective of these analyses is to look at how proficiency levels are maintained year over year.



Source: Auditor generated from USBE data.

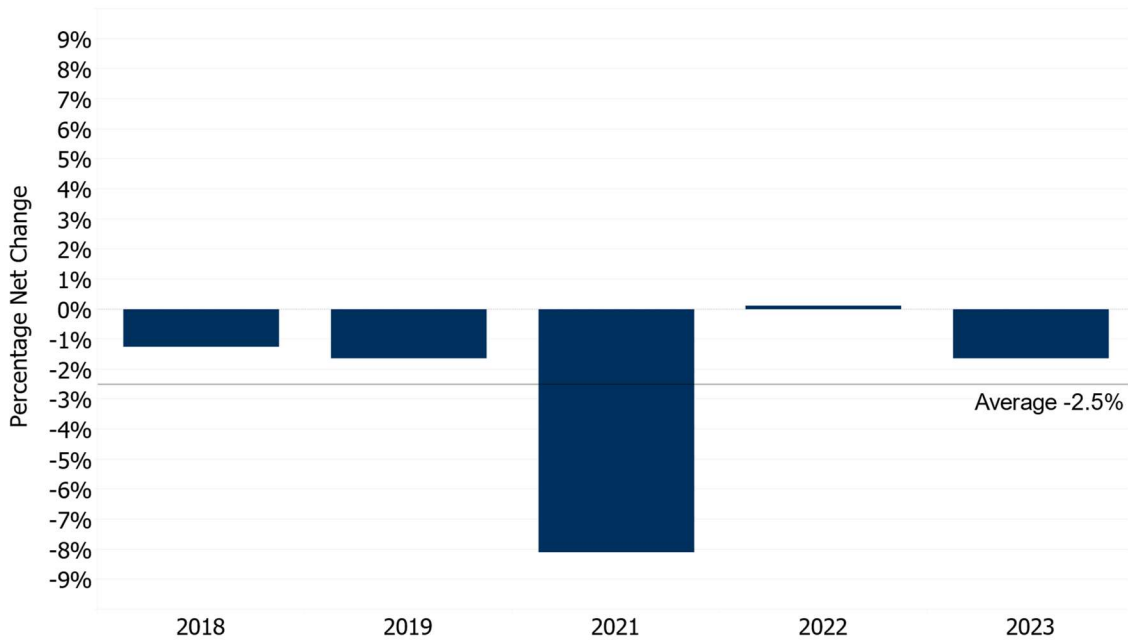
Note: This figure represents data from the Utah SAGE, RISE, and Aspire+ assessments. The population includes those students that took a test in both the 2022 and 2023 school years.

From these analyses, we conclude that student performance on previous statewide assessments is a good indicator of student performance on future statewide assessments.¹⁴ In other words, students who are proficient will likely remain proficient the following year, and students who are not proficient will likely remain not proficient. These conclusions remained true over time. Figure 2.2 illustrates the net percentage change of all LEAs over a five-year period.

¹⁴ Student group interventions may vary depending on the direction of movement of the student's proficiency. For example, the response to a student who remains nonproficient will likely be different than for a student who moved from proficiency to nonproficiency.



Figure 2.2 Over Five Years, the Percent of Students Who Changed Their Proficiency Status Remained Problematically Low. The largest net percentage proficiency change was during the 2021 school year, which could be explained by recovery efforts from the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁵ The net change for the remaining school years is below two percent.



Source: Auditor generated from USBE data.

Note: Percent proficiency movement data for the 2020 school year was omitted from the data source due to disruptions with the COVID-19 pandemic. Figure 2.2 represents data from the Utah SAGE, RISE, and Aspire + assessments to include three subject areas: math, science, and English language arts. The population includes those students that tested in consecutive years.

While we applaud the efforts of LEAs to maintain proficiency, we are concerned that the nonproficient student groups are generally not improving. We acknowledge the risk that the disruption in learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic may have long-term consequences on student learning and achievements. However, the effects of COVID-19 make it more, not less, important to focus efforts on proficiency gains. Schools and LEAs have acknowledged the extent that education was disrupted by COVID-19 and have subsequently made efforts to get back on track by reducing potential learning deficits.

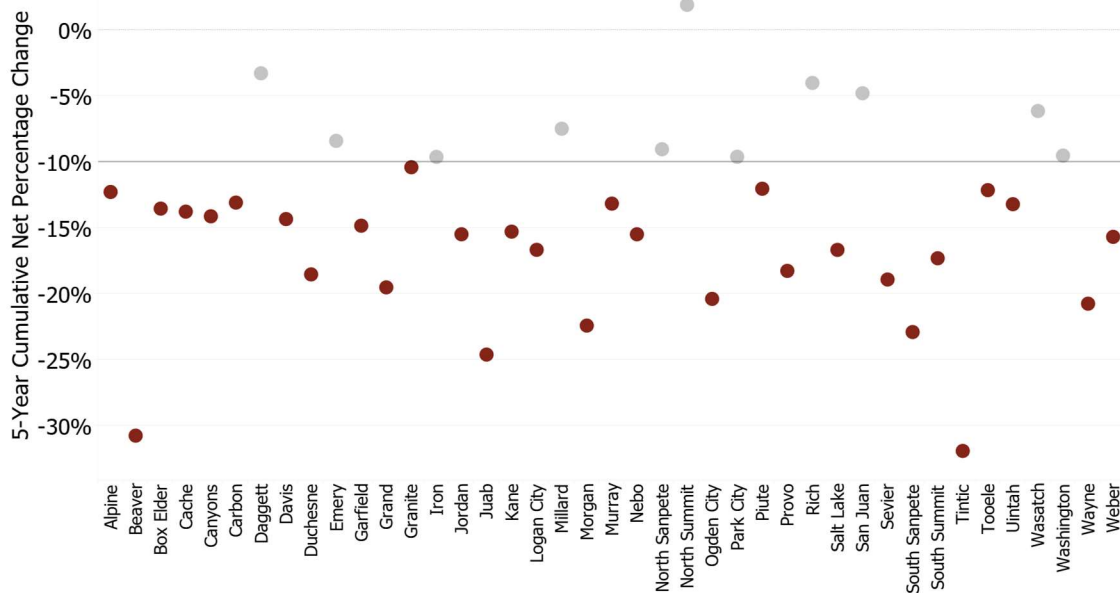
Nevertheless, the rate of movement between the proficient and not proficient student groups significantly varies between LEAs. Although prior performance is still a reliable indicator for current and future performance, the net change for

¹⁵ Since the 2021 school year was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, we acknowledge the possibility that proficient students may have scored below proficiency in 2021 (simply due to COVID-19 interference), which could cause in the net percentage change in 2022 to be artificially inflated. That said, the net percentage change for school years 2018, 2019, and 2023 appear relatively similar as pre and post pandemic markers.



some LEAs is more substantial than others. Figure 2.3 demonstrates the net percentage change over time for Utah’s school districts.

Figure 2.3 Some School Districts Are Able to Move More Students to Proficiency than Others. The gray dots represent those school districts that had a five-year cumulative net percentage change above -10 percent (eleven districts total), and the red dots represent those school districts that had a five-year cumulative net percentage change below -10 percent (30 districts total).



Source: Auditor generated from USBE data.
 Note: Figure 2.2 represents data from the Utah SAGE, RISE, and Aspire + assessments to include three subject areas: math, science, and English language arts.

When viewing the data collectively with all subject areas selected, roughly three out of four of school districts netted losing more than ten percent of their “proficient” students to the “not proficient” student group.¹⁶

It is important to note that in each case where the net rate of movement is a negative percentage, it represents students moving from proficiency to nonproficiency. This observation is arguably more concerning than that of the stagnant student groups at the statewide level because it further emphasizes the need for increased focus on underperforming student groups.

¹⁶ When viewing pre-pandemic data from school years 2018 and 2019, nine school districts saw positive movement, while the other 32 school districts saw negative net changes. Although the impacts of the pandemic can be seen in the data (particularly in school year 2021), pre and post pandemic data from Figure 2.2 consistently indicate less than a two percent statewide net negative change for school years 2018-19 and 2022-23.



One Reason for Drops in Proficiency Could Be Poor Attendance After the COVID-19 Pandemic. In the years since the pandemic, absenteeism rates in one Utah school district have nearly doubled. In fact, the district presented a study reporting six-year chronic absenteeism rates by demographic group. The largest gap in attendance was for English language learners, which increased from 19 percent in 2018 to 38 percent in 2023.

The National Center for Education Statistics links chronic absenteeism to student achievement. Students who attend school regularly have been shown to achieve at higher levels than students who do not have regular attendance.

To address this issue, the Legislature passed House Bill 400 in the 2023 Legislative General Session, which directs LEAs to create and implement evidence-based strategies to reduce student absenteeism. Additionally, USBE is required by statute to assist LEAs in addressing, preventing, and providing interventions for student absenteeism. Therefore, LEAs (in conjunction with USBE) should be actively addressing any issues associated with chronic absenteeism including student achievement.



State and LEA observations create a case for school districts and charter schools to reevaluate the effectiveness of their student intervention programs.

Our observations of both state and LEA level data create a case for school districts and charter schools to reevaluate the effectiveness of their student intervention programs. Student interventions should aim to link the root cause of the problem to a specific, targeted intervention that directly addresses the underlying issue. Additionally, timely and consistent interventions can significantly reduce the student proficiency gap by providing targeted support when students first show signs of difficulty.

RECOMMENDATION 2.1

Local education agencies should reevaluate the effectiveness of their student intervention programs by collecting system level data to review and adjust interventions, as necessary, in response to programmatic weaknesses.



Complete List of Audit Recommendations



Complete List of Audit Recommendations

This report made the following four recommendations. The numbering convention assigned to each recommendation consists of its chapter followed by a period and recommendation number within that chapter.

Recommendation 1.1

We recommend that the Utah State Board of Education review the cycle of student assessment data and identify opportunities to expedite the process thereby improving the turnaround time to Utah local education agencies.

Recommendation 1.2

We recommend that local education agencies collect and analyze data to determine gaps in student proficiency, and implement programs designed to bridge those gaps.

Recommendation 1.3

We recommend that local education agencies review intervention data (as mentioned in recommendation 1.2) and determine whether the interventions were effective, or if efforts could be better focused elsewhere.

Recommendation 2.1

We recommend that local education agencies reevaluate the effectiveness of their student intervention programs by collecting system level data to review and adjust interventions, as necessary, in response to programmatic weaknesses.





Agency Response Plan





November 21, 2024

Kade Minchey, CIA, CFE, Auditor General
Office of the Legislative Auditor General
Utah State Capitol Complex
Rebecca Lockhart House Building, Suite W315
PO Box 145315
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-5315

Dear Mr. Minchey,

Please find the required response to report 2024-23 *A Performance Audit of Student Performance on Statewide Tests* below.

We appreciate the finding in the report as an identified risk that must be assessed and responded to appropriately. We further acknowledge the related recommendation in the report as a recommended risk response.

| Finding* | Finding Description | Risk Assessment | Risk Responses |
|-------------|---|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| Finding 1.1 | The Need for Accurate, Timely Data in Education is a Problem That Has Persisted Over Time | Low | See Response to Recommendation 1.1 |

**Other findings in the report are not addressed to the Utah State Board of Education*

This response is provided in accordance with Utah Code Annotated (UCA) 36-12-15.3, with recognition that given protections of draft audit reports under the Government Records Access and Management Act (UCA 63G-2-305), the Utah State Board of Education (Board) has not had the opportunity to review the report nor the response. Therefore, the response may be revised subject to Board direction; any changes will be identified in the audit response update required in accordance with UCA 36-12-15.3(6).

Sincerely,

Sydnee Dickson, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
Utah State Board of Education

PO Box 144200 Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200 | Phone: (801) 538-7500

cc: Molly Hart, USBE, Vice Chair and Audit Committee Chair
 Darin Nielsen, USBE, Assistant Superintendent of Student Learning
 Aaron Brough, USBE, Director of Data & Statistics
 Debbie Davis, USBE, Chief Audit Executive

enc. Risk Responses

| Finding | Finding Description | Risk Assessment |
|-------------|---|-----------------|
| Finding 1.1 | The Need for Accurate, Timely Data in Education is a Problem That Has Persisted Over Time | Low |

Recommendation 1.1

The Utah State Board of Education should review the cycle of student assessment data and identify opportunities to expedite the process thereby improving the turnaround time to Utah Local Education Agencies.

USBE Response

Option 2 – Will Implement an Alternative Action

Explanation: USBE appreciates the recognition in the report that “each student receives an individual student score report that is available to LEAs almost immediately (p.5).” USBE has also been actively working to expedite assessment results for program evaluation and will continue to do so as part of its commitment to effective governance and oversight. For example, the school report card in 2024 was released 30 days earlier than the school report card in 2023.

Because USBE has already worked to expedite results of assessments, and will continue to do so, it is more prudent for USBE to increase efforts to help educators understand appropriate uses of various assessments to assist in improving outcomes for all students.

Who: Darin Nielsen, Assistant Superintendent of Student Learning
darin.nielsen@schools.utah.gov

What: USBE provides Utah public education educators with several high-quality formative assessment resources designed to support educators by increasing their capacity to leverage the formative assessment process to

inform personalized instruction and more effectively work with students to build competency. The resources include the Formative Assessment Toolkit and an Assessment Literacy course as well as high quality assessments that have been designed for this purpose or use case. These include RISE benchmark assessments, Utah Compose, the Utah Test Item Pool Service (UTIPS), and Acadience progress monitoring.

How: USBE Assessment and Accountability staff will provide training to LEA instructional leadership staff on the value and use of these resources towards increasing student learning and closing learning gaps. In addition to these trainings, the USBE will provide substantial professional learning regarding the effective use of data to improve instruction and increase student achievement through the Assessment to Achievement (A2A) initiative. This work includes cohorts of school leadership teams that receive professional learning and coaching over a four-year period.

Documentation: USBE will have evidence of the implementation of this plan through meeting agendas and MIDAS registration information.

Timetable: Beginning in January 2025 and concluding not later than August 15, 2025.

When: While USBE staff will complete the identified actions by September 1, 2025, the formative assessment and assessment literacy resources are available “on demand.” In addition, R277-404-5(3)(d) includes the requirement that LEAs provide “training for an educator and an appropriate paraprofessional to use statewide assessment results effectively to inform instruction” on an annual basis.





Utah School Superintendents Association

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Dr. Lexi Cunningham, Executive Director

December 2, 2024

Kade R. Minchey CIA, DFE Auditor General
Office of the Legislative Auditor General
Utah State Capitol Complex
Rebecca Lockhart House Building, Suite W315
PO Box 145315
Salt Lake City, UT 84114

Dear Mr. Minchey,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written response to the *Student Performance on Statewide Tests Audit*. I appreciate the professionalism of the audit team and am grateful for their openness to dialogue and feedback. I am also grateful for their analysis and the insights they provided. The thoughtfulness and thoroughness of the audit and subsequent findings will help LEAs support teachers and students.

USSA is grateful for the working relationship that we have with the Office of Legislative Auditor General and looks forward to collaborating on future audits.

Sincerely,

Lexi Cunningham

Lexi Cunningham, Ed.D.
Executive Director





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