

Spring 2017 ELA and Math Results Show Enduring Resource and Achievement Gaps



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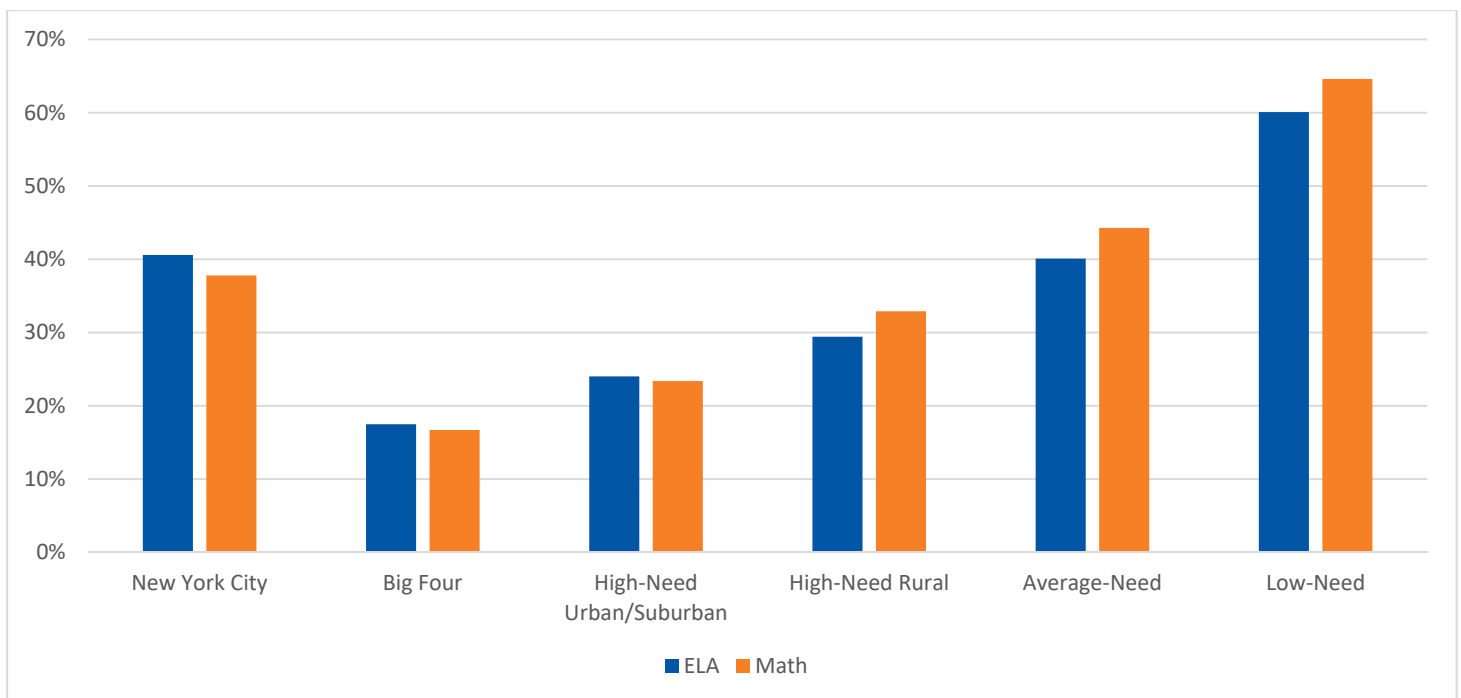
Introduction

On Tuesday, August 22, the New York State Education Department released the 2017 results for English Language Arts and Math tests administered statewide to students in 3rd through 8th grades. Student proficiency improved across all subgroups reported by NYSED. While proficiency gains are certainly worth celebrating, troubling achievement gaps persist. This research note examines connections between local resources, student poverty, and student outcomes.

District Need and Student Performance

The state divides school districts into Need Resource Capacity (NRC) Categories based on a district's ability to generate local resources as well as the degree of student poverty present in a district. Figure 1 shows student proficiency rates in each NRC. In low-need districts, which have the highest amounts of local wealth and the lowest rates of poverty, proficiency rates for ELA and math were above 60 percent, while no other NRC had proficiency rates above 50 percent in either subject. At the other end of the spectrum, the Big Four city districts (Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers) had proficiency rates below 20 percent.

Figure 1. 2017 ELA and Math Proficiency by Need Resource Capacity Categories



New York instituted the Foundation Aid formula to ensure that local resources and student need would not prevent any student from receiving an adequate education. However, Foundation Aid has yet to be fully phased in and there is currently \$3.4 billion in Foundation Aid still due. As Figure 2 shows, there are strong links between student proficiency and Foundation Aid Still Due. High-need urban and suburban school districts have proficiency rates under 25 percent and have \$3,757 per pupil of Foundation Aid Still Due.

Figure 2. Student Proficiency and Per Pupil Fiscal Data by Need Resource Category

NRC Category	2017 ELA Proficiency	2017 Math Proficiency	Expenditure Per Pupil (2015-16)	Foundation Aid Still Due Per Pupil
New York City	40.6%	37.8%	\$24,036	\$1,466
Big Four	17.5%	16.7%	\$21,287	\$1,714
High-Need Urban/Suburban	24.0%	23.4%	\$21,254	\$3,757
High-Need Rural	29.4%	32.9%	\$22,647	\$661
Average-Need	40.1%	44.3%	\$21,790	\$620
Low-Need	60.1%	64.6%	\$26,819	\$563

While the NRC categories are useful for highlighting disparities in local resources and student need, the state has not updated school district’s official NRC classifications since 2008 (and 2003 NRC classifications also play a prominent role in state funding formulas). Using the data underlying the Need Resource Index (NRI), which is used to determine NRC classifications, we split school districts into ten equally sized groups. Figure 3 compares the overall proficiency rate and the Foundation Aid Still Due per pupil by NRI decile and the table in Figure 4 provides more detailed proficiency and fiscal data.

There are striking disparities in student performance, district level spending, and Foundation Aid Still Due. For the highest need decile, ELA and Math proficiency rates are both under 20 percent, while per pupil spending is \$21,111. Foundation Aid Still Due per pupil for this decile is \$2,807. At the other end of the spectrum, for the lowest need decile, ELA and Math proficiency rates are more than three times higher and per pupil spending in these districts is \$28,715.

Figure 3. 2017 Proficiency Rate and Foundation Aid Still Due Per Pupil by Need Resource Index Decile

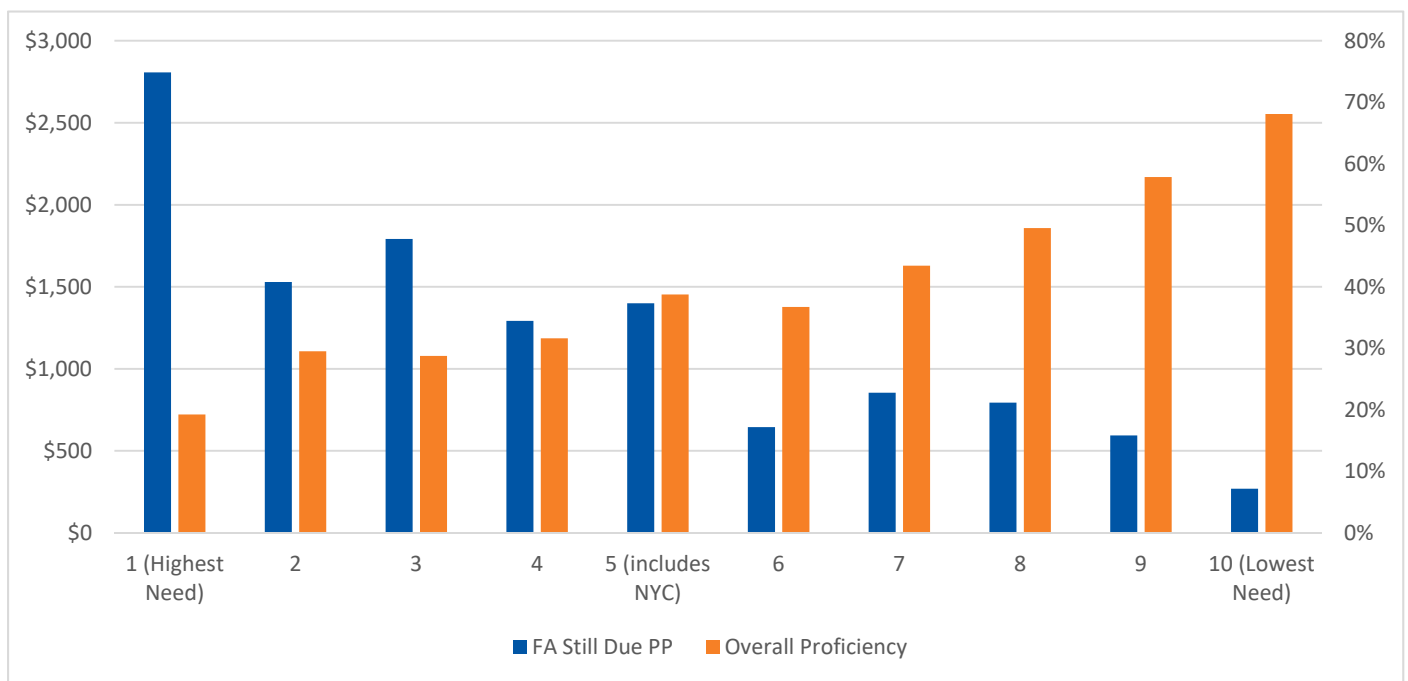


Figure 4. Student Proficiency and Per Pupil Fiscal Data by Need Resource Index Decile

	2017 ELA Proficiency	2017 Math Proficiency	Expenditure Per Pupil (2015-16)	Foundation Aid Still Due Per Pupil
1 (Highest Need)	19.1%	19.3%	\$21,111	\$2,807
2	28.1%	31.0%	\$21,705	\$1,529
3	28.0%	29.5%	\$21,525	\$1,792
4	30.8%	32.5%	\$21,565	\$1,292
5 (includes NYC)	40.0%	37.5%	\$23,953	\$1,400
6	35.2%	38.3%	\$21,462	\$644
7	41.7%	45.2%	\$22,097	\$855
8	47.3%	51.8%	\$23,211	\$794
9	55.3%	60.4%	\$23,436	\$594
10 (Lowest Need)	65.5%	70.7%	\$28,715	\$270

Recommendations

The persistence of student proficiency gaps based on local resources and student need underscore the importance of fully implementing the Foundation Aid formula. To break the connection between need and student outcomes, we strongly encourage policy makers to incorporate recommendations made by NYSASBO’s Foundation Aid Task Force Report.¹

- Removing caps on local fiscal capacity: State Aid arbitrarily caps its measure of local income at both ends of the spectrum, minimizing extremes of poverty and wealth. Statewide, Income Wealth Index (IWI) scores range from 0.168 to 5.722, but the state cuts off scores below 0.6 or above 2. These cutoffs treat the 43.5% of districts with scores below 0.6 as having more resources than they actually do. For the wealthiest districts, 6.1 percent have a score above the upper cut off. Almost half of all districts fall outside of the 0.65 to 2 range. This research note shows the widest achievement gaps exist between schools at either end of the need and resource spectrum. Removing these caps will ensure a more equitable distribution of State Aid.
- Updating NRC classifications: School districts are currently funded based upon their NRC classifications in 2003 and 2008. Updating the categorization of districts and strengthening the data used in calculating student poverty and fiscal capacity will provide a more accurate assessment of school district need.
- Improving the Foundation Aid formula: State funding needs a more accurate understanding of the costs of educating targeted groups, including English Language Learners, students in poverty, and students with disabilities. Furthermore, in updating its analysis of successful schools, the state should closely analyze high-need school districts that have achieved high levels of student success in order to gain a more accurate measurement of the cost of providing an adequate education.

¹ <https://www.nysasbo.org/page/news-5/news/supporting-our-schools--nysasbo-task-force-releases--foundation-aid-study-and-recommendations-574.html>

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