

Dept. of Public Education: Graduation rate improves with class of 2018

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MADISON — Students in the class of 2018 graduated at higher rates than their predecessors. The overall graduation rate jumped a point from the 2016-17 school year to 89.6 percent. Four-year graduation rates improved from the prior year for most subgroups of students as well.

“Congratulations to the class of 2018. A high school diploma is a ticket to the future,” noted

State Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor. “Graduation is to be celebrated because it

improves students’ opportunities for better jobs, income, and further education, which contributes to life success.”

There were some notable gap closures for some subgroups of students. The largest gap closure was 5.1 points between 2013-14 and 2017-18 for students learning English and their English proficient peers, though this may be due to changes in criteria for exiting English learner identification. English learners in the class for 2018 had a graduation rate of 70.1 percent compared to 90.2 percent for English proficient students. For economically disadvantaged students the gap closed 1.6 points over five years. Economically disadvantaged students in the class of 2018 had a graduation rate of 80.2 percent compared to 94.5 percent for students who are not economically disadvantaged. By race and ethnicity, notable graduation rate gap reduction over five years was 3.7 points for black or African American students, 3.6 points for Hispanic students, and 0.5 points for Asian students.

“Disparities in graduation rates by race and ethnicity and for English learners, students with disabilities, and students from economically disadvantaged families are truly troubling,” Stanford Taylor said. “We must persist in our work with schools and communities to close gaps.”

The high school graduation rate counts only students who earn a regular diploma. Students are assigned to a cohort year when they first enroll in a Wisconsin public high school, which for the class of 2018 would be students who started high school in the 2014-15 school year. Graduating in four years or less is the standard for federal graduation rate reporting.

However, Wisconsin’s Constitution guarantees young people the right to a public education from the ages of 4 to 20. Additionally, federal law requires educational services for students with disabilities, if needed, until the age of 21. Thus Wisconsin calculates five-, six-, and seven-year graduation rates to honor the additional time and effort of students who, due to illness or injury, personal or family events, or lifetime or temporary disabilities, need longer to complete their high school education.

For 2017-18 data reporting, the five-year graduation rate for the class of 2017 was 91.5 percent. The six-year rate for the class of 2016 was 90.6 percent, and the seven-year rate for the class of 2015 was 92.5 percent.