

Strategic Priority 1: Ensuring Equity and Excellence

The Arlington Public Schools will ensure equity, excellence, and access to rigorous learning experiences for all students. All graduates will be prepared to achieve their choices of post-secondary education, career, and community contribution.

Needs Assessment to Support Initiatives

The Arlington Public Schools have a legacy of providing an excellent education overall. With a strong track record of high achievement and high post-secondary attainment, it may appear to the outside observer that APS has little it needs to transform about teaching and learning. However, educational research over the past several decades has indicated a need for school districts to consider not only their performance in aggregate, but also those areas in which schools may intentionally or unintentionally restrict access for some groups of students. APS has been engaged in efforts to disaggregate data and to deeply understand its achievement and opportunity gaps over the past several years; a 5-year budget plan in 2019 identified “Addressing the Achievement Gap” as a primary focus for spending, and the district is practiced in analyzing data across demographic populations in order to determine where the greatest gaps exist. However, prior to the development of this plan, the district has not developed strategic long-term actions to address disparities in students’, families’, and teachers’ experiences, particularly for those stakeholders who have been traditionally marginalized by the district and in our greater society.

For the purposes of this plan, the strategic planning committee is identifying several “Focal Groups” for the district to track and monitor for gaps, not only in achievement but also in areas of attendance; student, family, and staff experience; and other metrics outlined in this plan. For the purposes of Priority Area 1, those metrics will be primarily student-facing, and actions will focus on addressing gaps in the student experience that are persistent and challenging to address. APS acknowledges that addressing these gaps will require significant shifts in mindset, practice, and content, both for our staff and for members of the Arlington community. We recognize that to address the needs of ALL, we must focus on the needs of those students for whom the system has not necessarily been designed. We recognize that the adjustments we will make to meet the needs of some of our students are truly meant to enhance the learning experiences of ALL of our students; In the initiatives that follow, we encourage the community to notice our commitment to improving achievement for ALL students though the elimination of barriers and resulting achievement gaps for our focal groups.¹

APS will focus on closing experience, opportunity, and achievement gaps for the following 5 focal groups of stakeholders in our work over the next five years:

1. Students, and the families and teachers of students, who **have IEPs**;
2. Students, families, and staff who identify as **Black or Hispanic/Latino**;
3. Students, families, and staff who identify as **lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersexual, and asexual (LGBTQIA+)**;
4. Students who are **multilingual learners (MLs)** and their families, as well students and families who **speak a language other than English as their primary language in the home**; and

¹Blackwell (2017). “The Curb Cut Effect” https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_curb_cut_effect

5. Students and families who **are low-income**.

These five groups provide the most specific and therefore potentially impactful opportunities for improvement and are where we notice the greatest gaps in achievement and opportunity for APS students across levels, content areas, and experiences in our schools.

Not all data are available for all focal groups in all data sets. For example, not all students who identify as LGBTQIA+ are currently identified in our system or reported to the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and therefore academic/achievement data are not readily available for this focal group; however, changes at the state and local levels will make these data available in the coming years. Data for this focal group is available in our experiential outcomes (culture and climate surveys). As another example, some data linked to race and ethnicity may be suppressed in some years due to the number of students in a particular focal group. Through the duration of this plan's implementation, we will continue to refine and improve data collection and reporting practices, with explicit attention paid to these focal groups.

Improving the Experiences and Academic Outcomes of Focal Groups and ALL Students

An analysis of achievement for students with IEPs, students who identify as BIPOC, students who are multilingual learners, and students from low-income households reveal significant differences between the experiences and achievement of these students and their peers in the Arlington Public Schools. These gaps persist not only across academic outcomes, but also across students' self-reported experiences in our schools and the reports of focal student groups' parents and teachers.

It is important to explain what we mean when we talk about "closing an achievement gap." An action-oriented approach to closing achievement gaps requires identifying the *opportunity gaps* that exist within the system that hinder a student's access to the kinds of experiences that are more accessible to their peers.

Closing achievement gaps requires opening up more engagement, enrichment, and academic opportunities and experiences for ALL students. Importantly, closing achievement gaps does not include lowering standards or limiting opportunities for any students.

If APS sees a decline in any group of students' performance, we have not met our mission to provide for all students. Scholars in the field of educational equity emphasize that prioritizing the needs of a traditionally marginalized group of students has the potential to facilitate gains for ALL groups of students when executed effectively.

Districts who have made gains for all students while closing achievement gaps have done so by articulating a clear vision for their work, ensuring all stakeholders have an opportunity to understand and make meaning of that vision. They have done so by implementing actions aligned with their vision strategically over multiple years. In places where this work is successful, there is a focus *not only* on

content, *but also* on pedagogy and practice throughout the school system, from the classroom to the superintendent's office.² The gap analyses that follow provide a baseline for the work of Strategic Priority 1. They focus primarily on academic achievement gaps as measured by MCAS, but also include analysis of gaps in student experience; these are the quantitative district-level data that will allow us to monitor progress on this plan. Additionally, the district will monitor student growth percentiles; a faster rate of growth for focal groups with average-high growth for peers will result in a closing of achievement gaps without compromising the learning of any students. These metrics will also be used at the school level on annual School Improvement Plans. It is important to note that action steps for each initiative include triangulating these quantitative data with equally important qualitative data, such as observational data from walkthroughs and/or interview and focus group data gathered from stakeholders.

APS has made a concerted effort to include qualitative assessments alongside quantitative data over the past two years. As examples, a comprehensive equity audit conducted by Longview Education in 2021 engaged stakeholders in over 150 empathy interviews over several months. The equity audit report can be found [here](#). The strategic planning team used this report's recommendations as an initial roadmap to designing the initiatives you will find across all Priority Areas in this plan. The report contains concrete recommendations directly from stakeholders, several of whom come from the focal groups identified above. Furthermore, upon becoming Superintendent, Dr. Homan engaged stakeholders in several listening sessions and developed an [Entry Plan Report](#) that triangulated several qualitative and quantitative data sources. In reporting out on the implementation of this plan, APS will strive to include multiple types of data, prioritizing the stories of students and families as important to the work ahead.

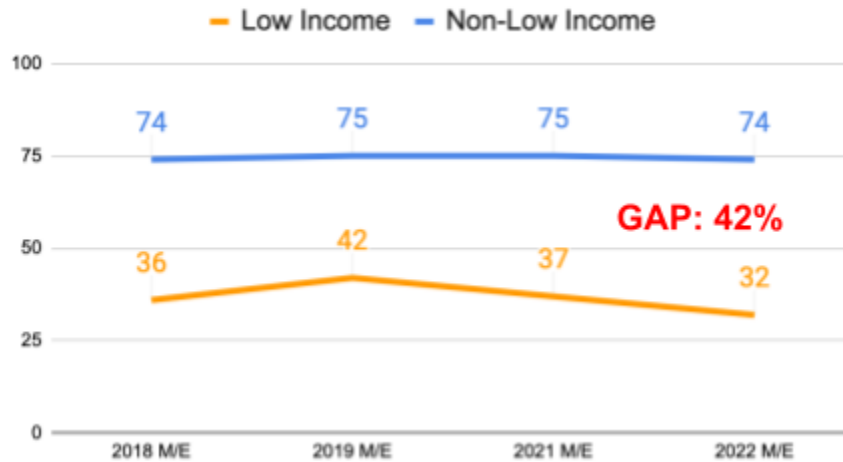
The initiatives that follow focus on identifying an instructional vision for APS (1.1), ensuring all students' identities are represented, and that their identities are celebrated (1.2), and developing systems and structures that support early intervention and providing each student with the support they need to thrive (1.3). This will require APS stakeholders to grapple with sometimes challenging and uncomfortable truths about who our system has historically served and who it has historically marginalized. We know the Arlington community is ready for this work, and so are our students. In the words of one APS student:

"teachers should be addressing big things like this because, it's not only just in Arlington, that racism [is] happening around. It's worldwide. So it's good for teachers to address it to kids, so they know why."

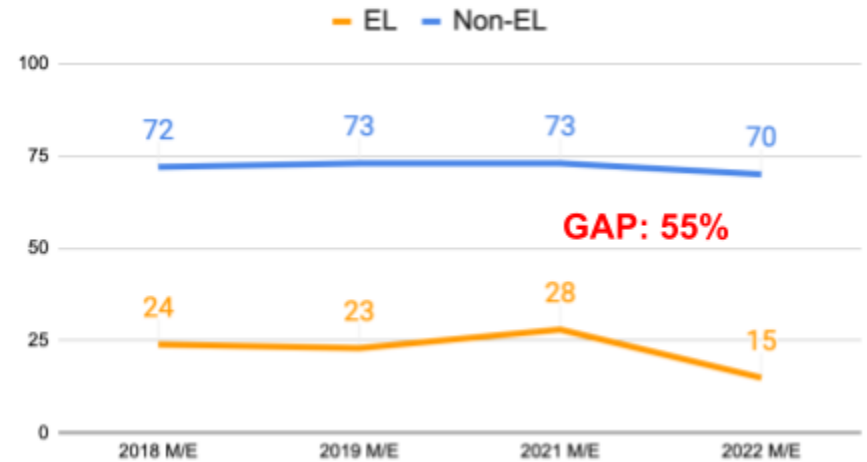
² Mehta, J. and Fine, S. (2019). *In Search of Deeper Learning*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Achievement Gap Analysis: Grades 3-8 ELA for Four Focal Subgroups

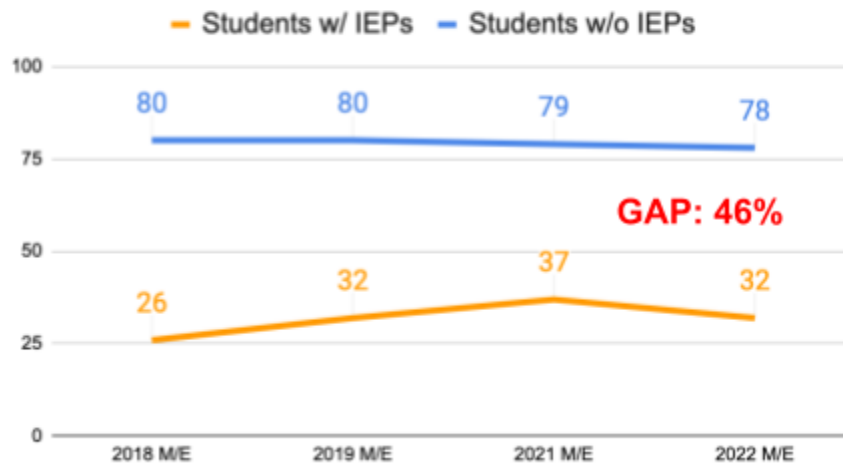
% Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards, 3-8 ELA



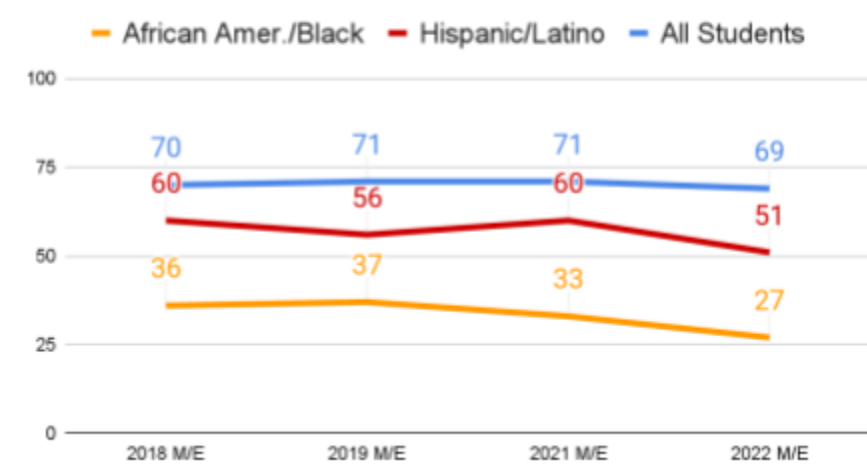
% Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards, 3-8 ELA



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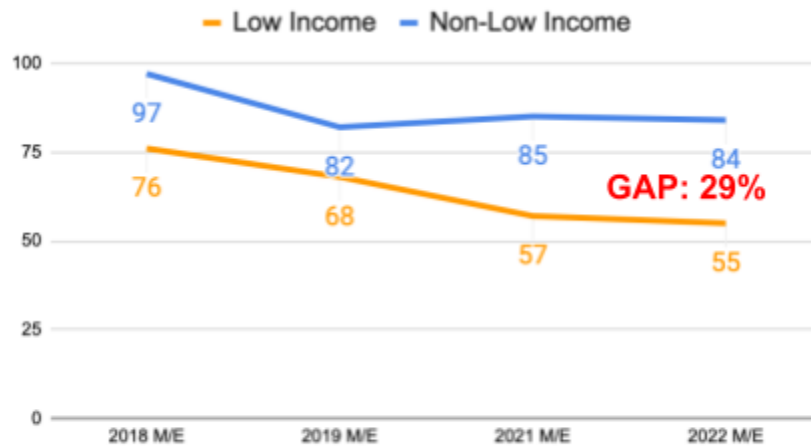


% Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards, 3-8 ELA

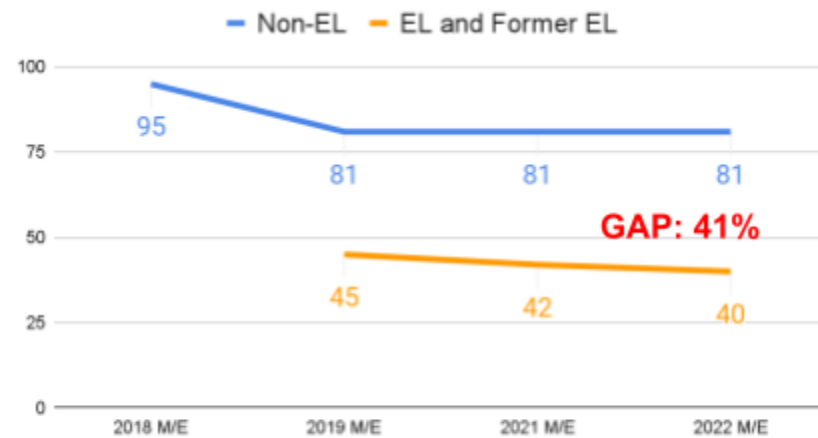


Achievement Gap Analysis: Grade 10 ELA for Four Focal Subgroups

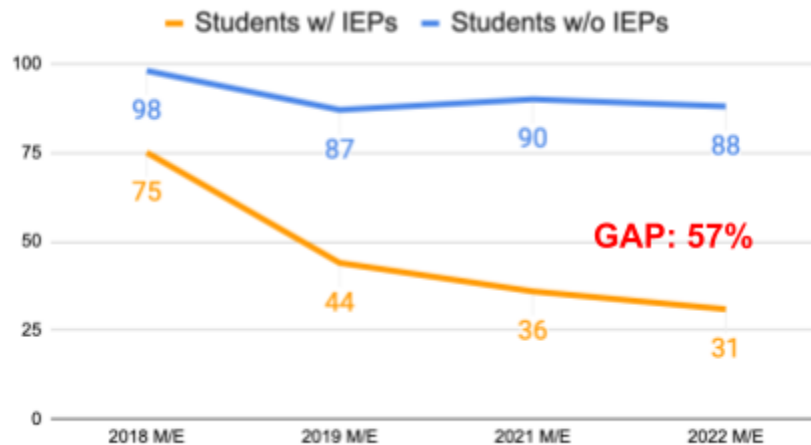
% Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards, G10 ELA



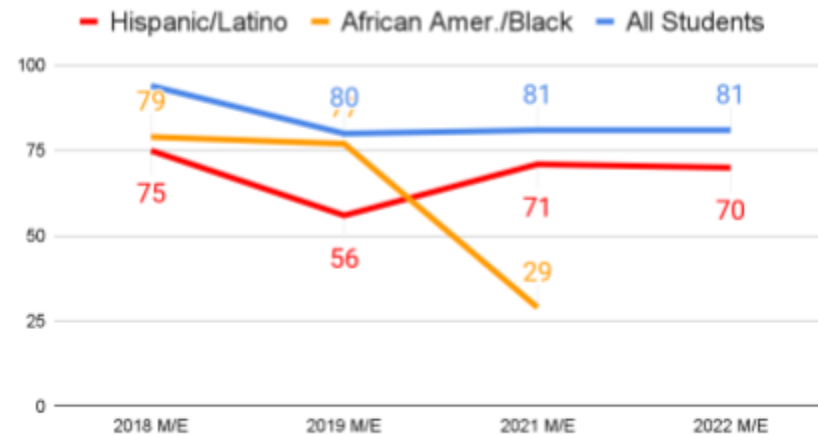
% Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards, G10 ELA



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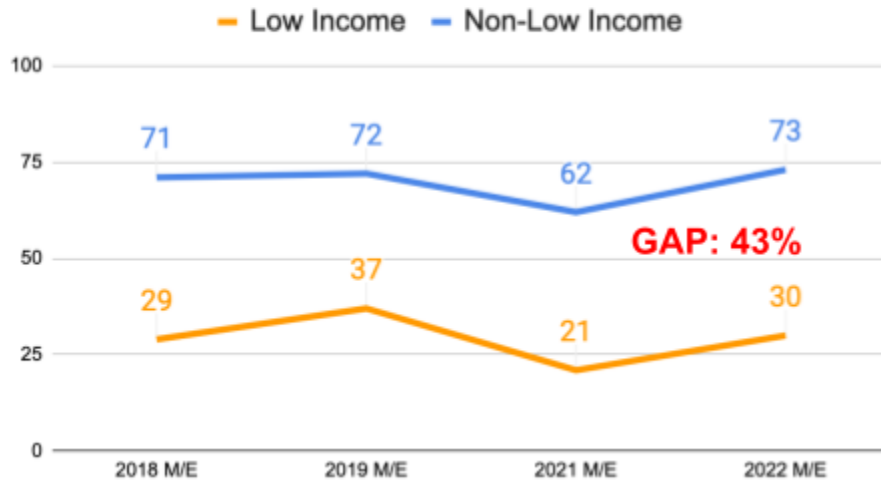


% Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards, G10 ELA

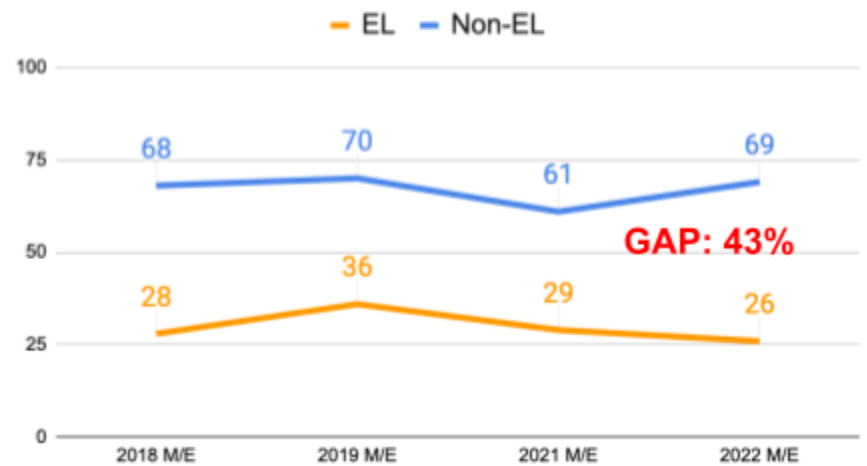


Achievement Gap Analysis: Grades 3-8 Math for Four Focal Subgroups

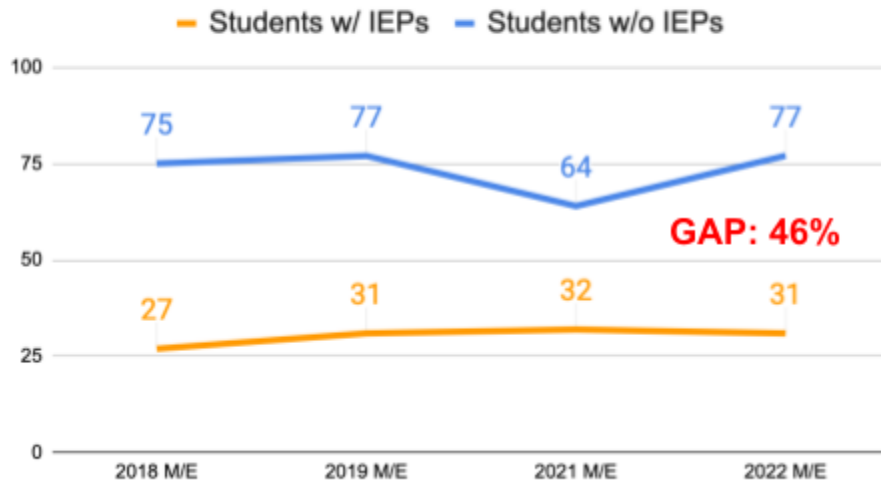
% Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards, 3-8 Math



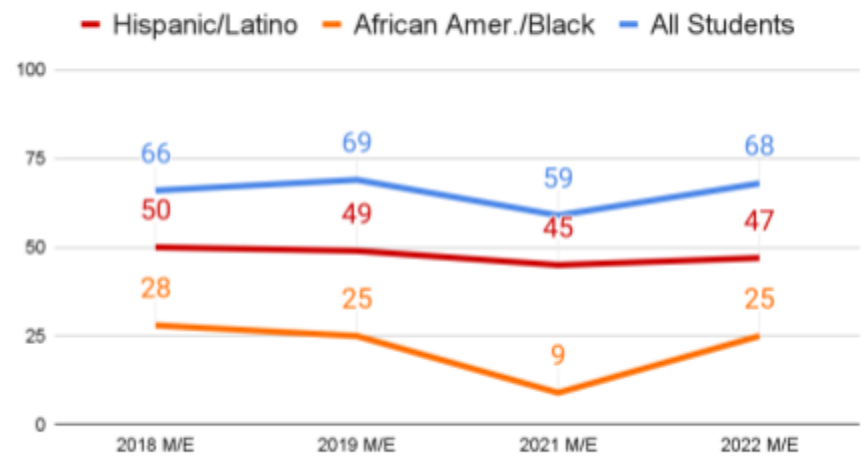
% Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards, 3-8 Math



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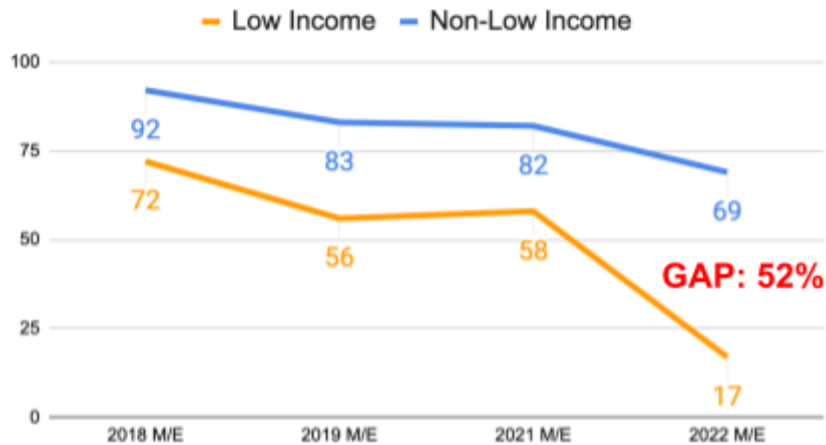


% Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards, 3-8 Math

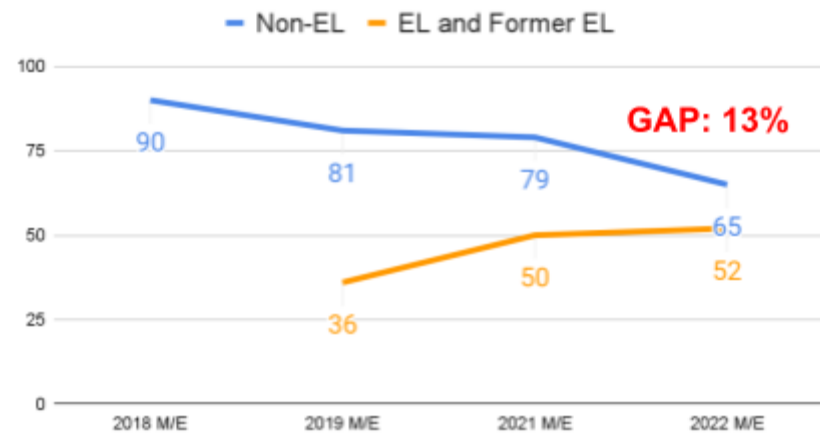


Achievement Gap Analysis: Grade 10 Math for Four Focal Subgroups

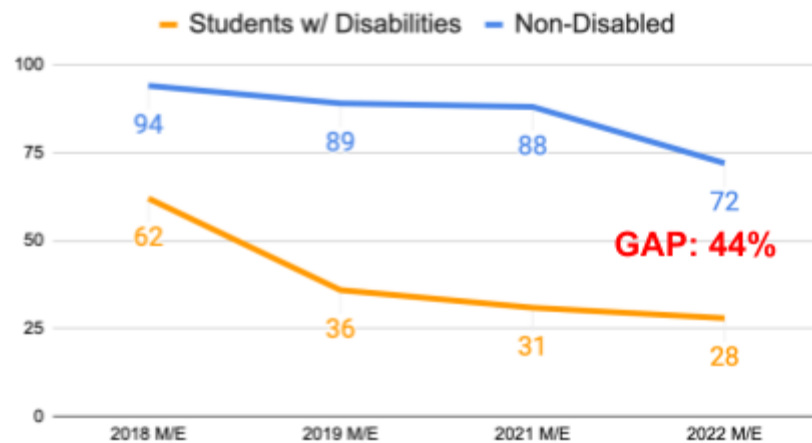
% Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards, G10 Math



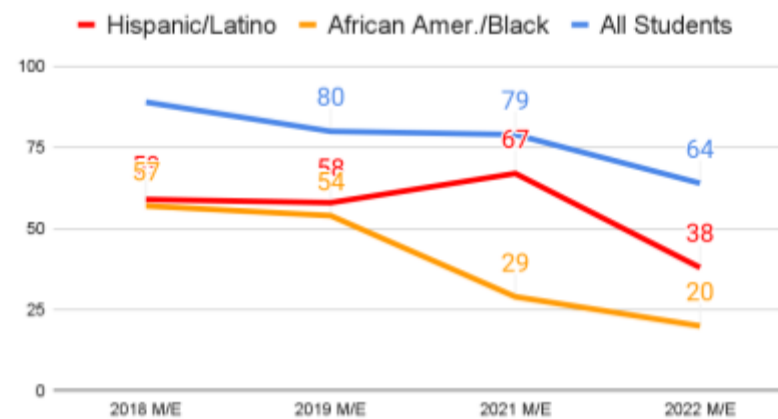
% Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards, G10 Math



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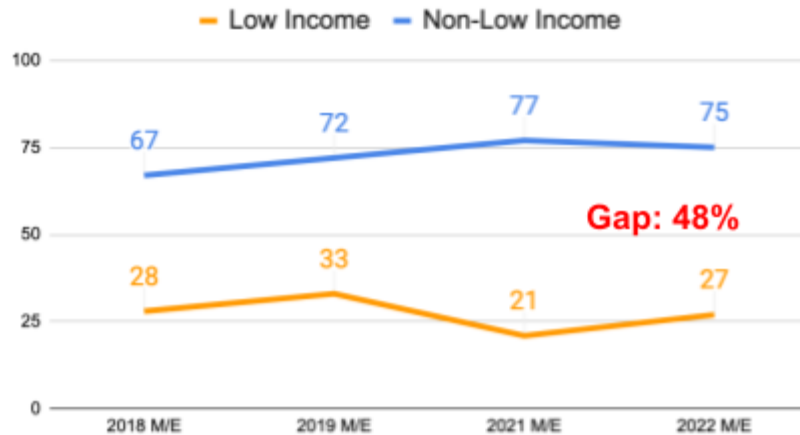


% Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards, G10 Math

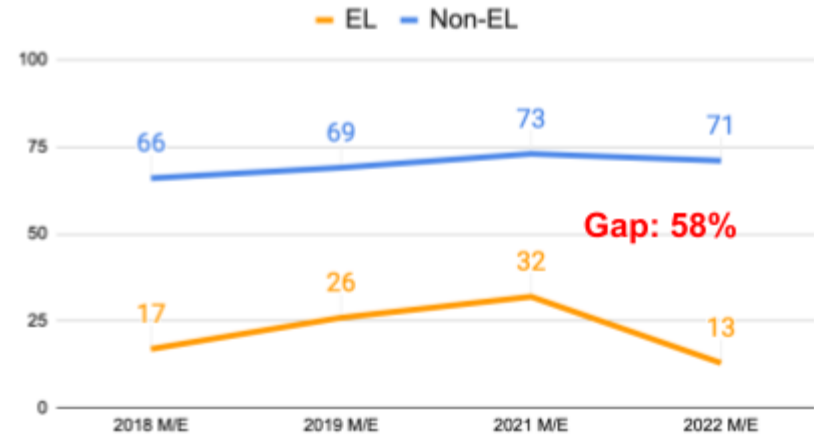


Achievement Gap Analysis: Grade 5 Science for Four Focal Subgroups

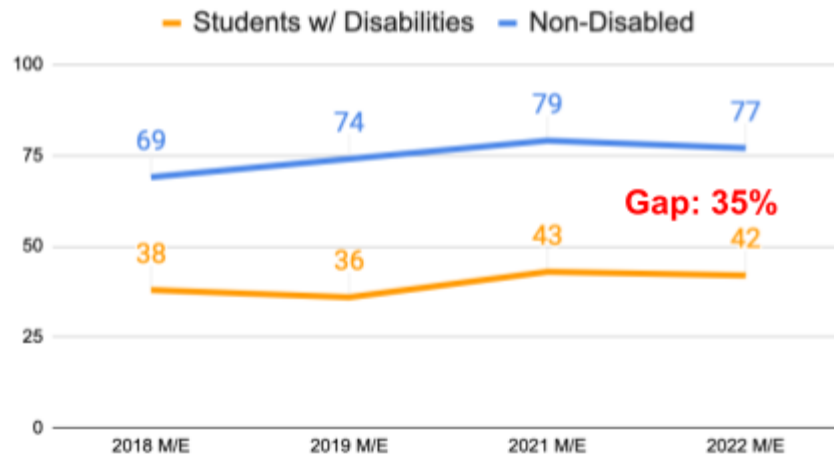
% Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards, G5 Science



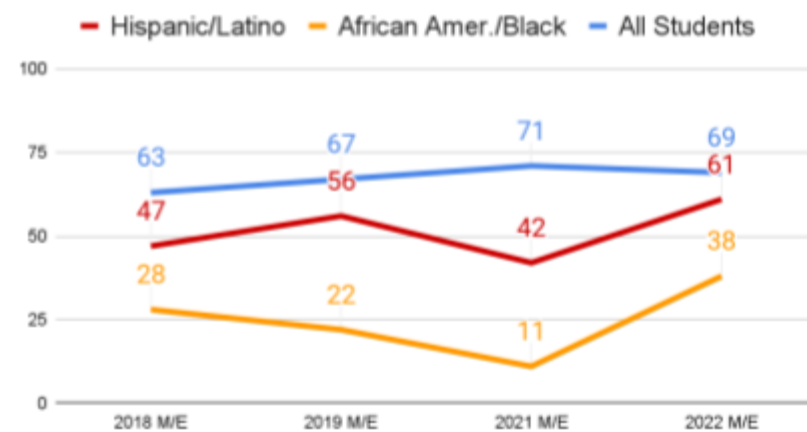
% Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards, G5 Science



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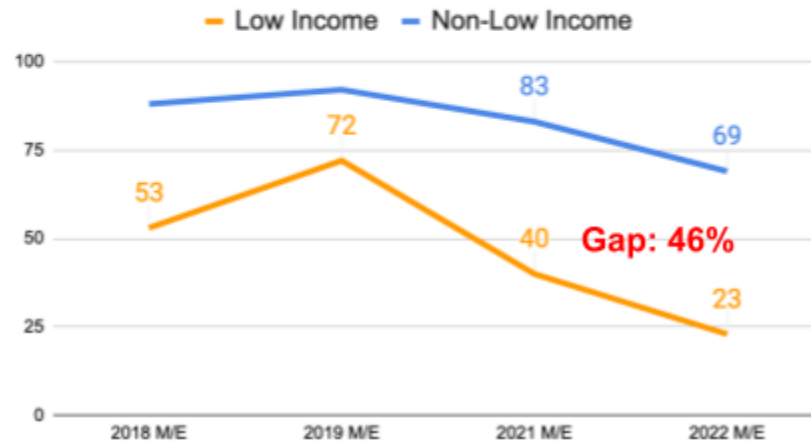


% Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards, G5 Science

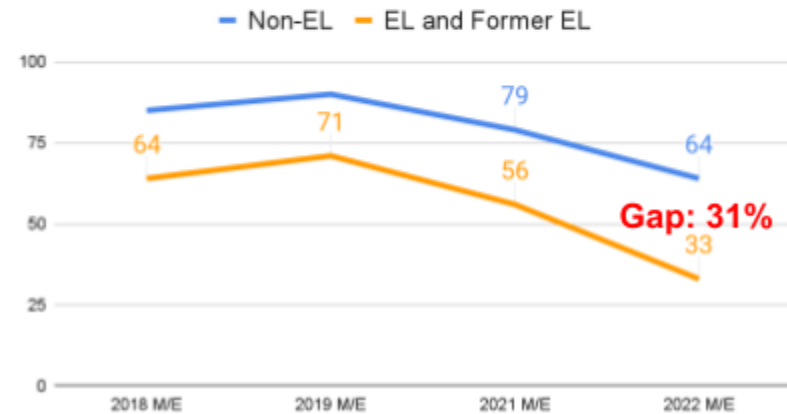


Achievement Gap Analysis: Grade 9 Science (Physics) for Four Focal Subgroups

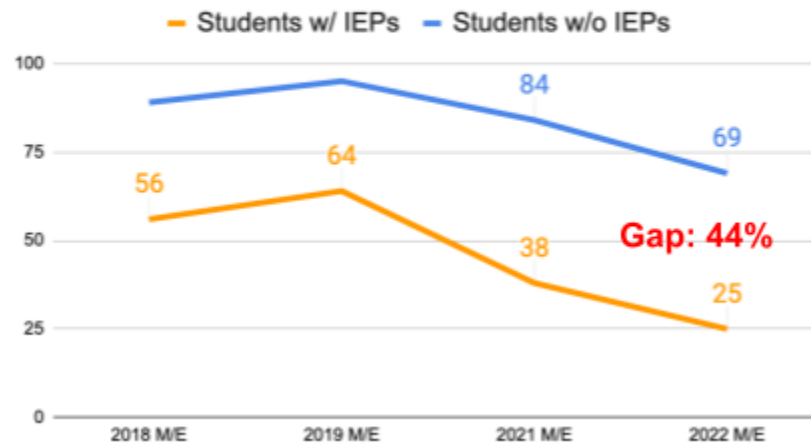
% Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards, G9 Science



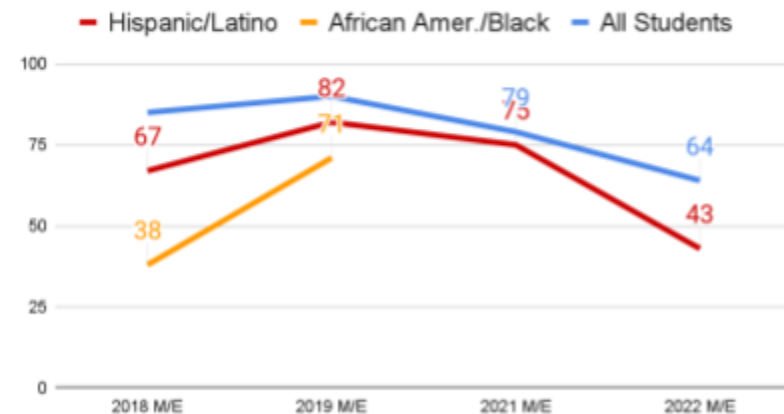
% Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards, G9 Science



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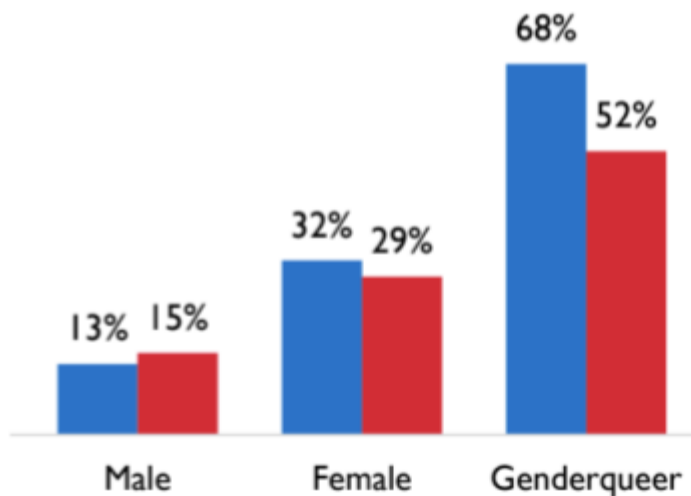
Experiential Gap Analysis: Grades 3-5 and 6-12, Gender Identity

Grades 3-5, Gender Identity, Climate and Culture Surveys Fall 2022

Group Name	Group Size	Cultural Awareness and Action	Rigorous Expectations	School Climate	School Safety	Sense of Belonging	Teacher-Student Relationships
All respondents	1,264	33%	72%	64%	71%	68%	66%
Do you identify as transgender?							
Yes	27	+4	-9	-10	-18	-16	-9
No	1,014	+1	+3	+1	+2	+2	+1
I'm not sure	129	-6	-4	-4	-7	-5	-6
I'd rather not answer this qu...	80	0	-12	-8	-11	-16	-4

Grades 6-12, Gender Identity, Climate and Culture Surveys Fall 2022

Group Name	Group Size	Cultural Awareness and Action	Rigorous Expectations	School Climate	School Safety	Sense of Belonging	Teacher-Student Relationships
All respondents	2,016	62%	69%	58%	77%	48%	66%
Do you identify as transgender?							
Yes	68	-6	-9	-15	-14	-22	-10
No	1,840	0	+1	+1	+2	+1	+1
I'm not sure	63	+2	-2	-10	-7	-9	0
I'd rather not answer this qu...	34	-14	-13	-9	-14	-22	-11

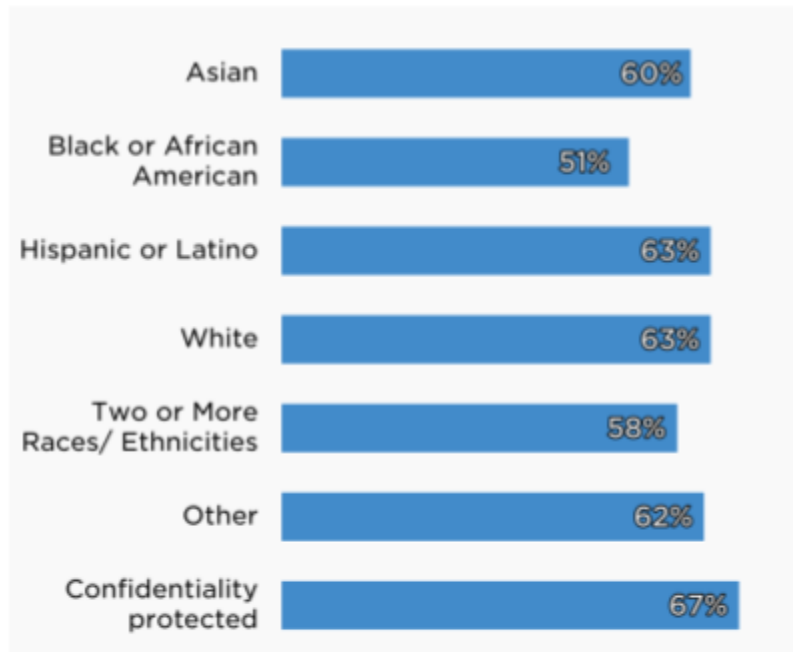


2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey: Percent of Arlington middle and high school students who reported that their mental health was not good most of the time or always in the past 30 days

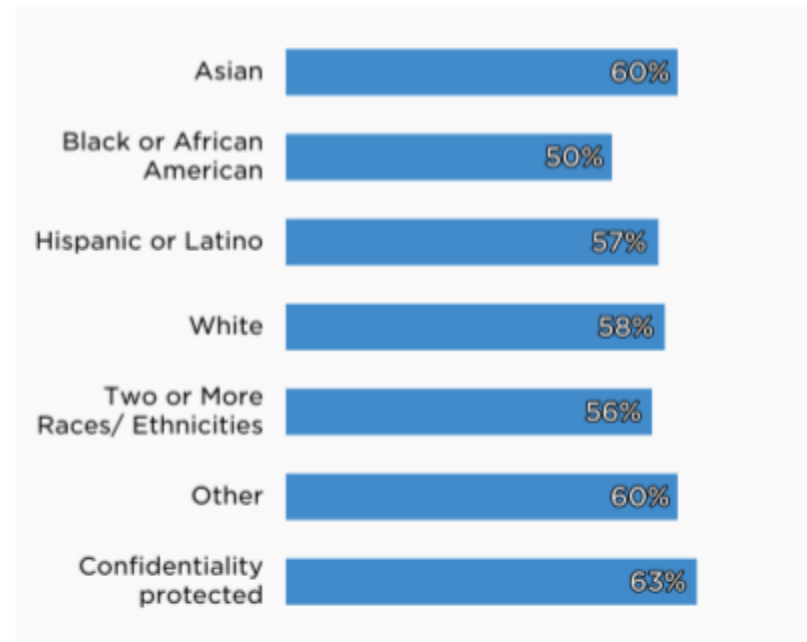
■ Arlington HS ■ Arlington MS

Experiential Gap Analysis: Grades 6-12, Race / Ethnicity

Grades 6-12, Race or Ethnicity, Cultural Awareness and Action



Grades 6-12, Race or Ethnicity, School Climate



% Favorable Responses on Fall 2022 Culture and Climate Surveys

