

## Focus on Early Literacy: Grade 3 ELA Performance in SDP, 2014-2015 – 2016-2017

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### Key Findings:

- The percent of third-grade students scoring proficient or advanced on the ELA-PSSA exam increased by 5 percent between 2015-16 and 2016-17 and 2 percent between 2014-15 and 2016-17.
- The percent of students scoring Below Basic or Basic has decreased slightly since SYs 2014-15 and 2015-16.
- Among subgroups, students with IEPs had the largest increase in percent of students scoring Advanced.

### Anchor Goal 2: 100% of 8-year-olds will read on grade level

The School District of Philadelphia’s Action Plan establishes the goals and values that drive our work.<sup>i</sup> Four Anchor Goals are central to the Action Plan. This brief focuses on District-level progress toward Anchor Goal 2 – “All children will read on grade level by age 8” – by examining third grade performance on the English Language arts (ELA) PSSA exam over three school years (2014-15 to 2016-17).<sup>ii</sup>

### Consistent Focus on Early Literacy

In the 2015-16 school year (SY), the District initiated a comprehensive and cohesive set of supports focused on improving early literacy instruction in grades K-3. These include:

- Establishing a leveled library in every classroom.
- Providing standards-aligned curriculum materials.
- Instituting a district-wide 120-minute literacy block.
- Holding a 40-hour summer literacy institute and implementing full-time teacher coaching for early literacy teachers
- Implementing consistent literacy progress monitoring and benchmarking assessments district-wide.

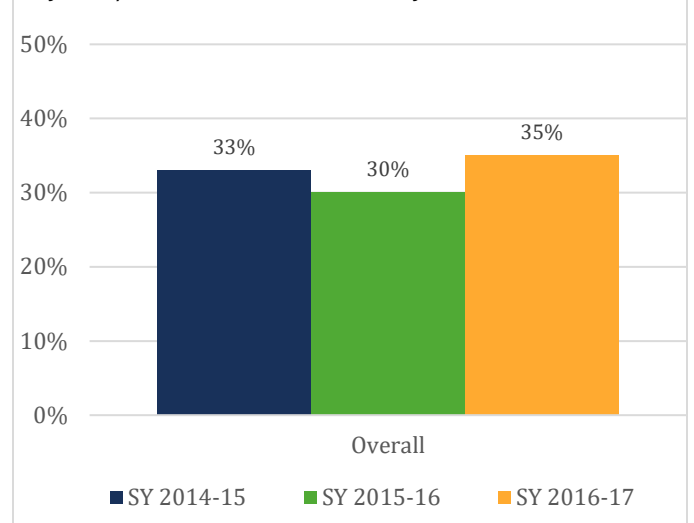
### Changes in Third Grade PSSA Performance Over Time – Proficient/Advanced

In the 2016-17 school year (the most recent data available), 35% of third-grade students scored proficient or advanced on the ELA-PSSA exam. This is an increase of 5 percent from SY 2015-16, when 30% of third graders scored proficient/advanced, and an increase of 2 percent from SY 2014-15, when 33% of third-grade students scored proficient/advanced (Figure 1).

### Changes in Third Grade PSSA Performance Over Time – By Subgroup

The performance of third-grade English Language Learners (ELL) and Economically Disadvantaged<sup>iii</sup> students has remained relatively consistent over the past

Figure 1. Percent of Third-Grade Students Scoring Proficient/Advanced on the ELA PSSA from 2014-15 to 2016-17



three years (Table 1). However, there has been an overall increase in the percent of third graders scoring Advanced (the highest performance category) on the ELA PSSA over time, particularly students with IEPs, who had the largest increase (+10%) in the percent of students scoring Advanced since SY 2014-15. This change appears to mostly be students moving from the Proficient to Advanced categories.

There has also been an overall decrease in the percent of third-grade students scoring Below Basic (the lowest performance category) on the ELA PSSA since SY 2014-15. There has also been a reduction in the percent of third-grade English learners, students with IEPs, and Economically Disadvantaged students scoring in the Basic category from SY 2014-15 to SY 2016-17.

Table 1. Third-Grade Student ELA PSSA Performance by Year and Subgroup

PSSA Category	Student Group	2014-15 # of students	2014-15 % of group	2015-16 # of students	2015-16 % of group	2016-17 # of students	2016-17 % of group	3 yr change	2 yr change
Advanced	Overall	360	3%	437	4%	656	6%	↑	↑
	ELL	7	1%	6	0%	29	2%	↑	↑
	IEP	10	1%	8	0%	170	11%	↑	↑
	Economically Disadvantaged	201	2%	254	3%	655	6%	↑	↑
Proficient	Overall	3,278	30%	2,943	26%	3,160	29%	↓	↑
	ELL	216	17%	215	17%	212	17%	↔	↔
	IEP	267	18%	225	13%	123	8%	↓	↓
	Economically Disadvantaged	2,837	29%	2,500	25%	3,158	29%	↔	↑
Basic	Overall	3,708	34%	3,887	35%	3,573	33%	↓	↓
	ELL	442	35%	443	35%	426	34%	↓	↓
	IEP	284	19%	333	20%	278	18%	↓	↓
	Economically Disadvantaged	3,027	35%	3,220	36%	3,993	33%	↓	↓
Below Basic	Overall	3,564	33%	3,878	35%	3,496	32%	↓	↓
	ELL	615	48%	601	48%	582	47%	↓	↓
	IEP	951	63%	1,109	66%	943	62%	↓	↓
	Economically Disadvantaged	3,404	34%	3,659	37%	3,493	32%	↓	↓

**Table Notes:** Each year represents a different cohort of third-grade students. It is not possible from this table alone to determine how students are moving across the four PSSA performance categories. Therefore, although increases in the percent of students scoring in the Advanced category and decreases in the percent of students scoring in the Below Basic category are positive trends, caution should be used when interpreting changes in the percent of student scoring in the Basic and Proficient categories. The color coding in the far right columns indicate generally positive (green) or generally negative (red) trends, but a more detailed analysis of movement over time is not in the scope of this brief.

<sup>i</sup> <https://www.philasd.org/about/actionplan/>

<sup>ii</sup> Student results on the PSSA standardized assessments are grouped into four performance categories: below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced See <http://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Assessment%20and%20Accountability/PSSA/Pages/DescriptorsCutScores.aspx> for links to more information about cut scores and a description of performance levels at each grade level.

<sup>iii</sup> “Economically Disadvantaged” refers to students who are eligible for free lunch and are not subject to verification (i.e., students directly certified through participation in SNAP or TANF).