

State College Area School District Equity Report Update

June 2025

Erica Frankenberg & Ghadir Al Saghir

With Jamilette Castro, Khadijah Ilyas Abdul-Aziz, and Abby Waterhouse



Executive Summary

Since summer 2020, the Center for Education and Civil Rights (CECR) at Penn State University has partnered with the State College Area School District (SCASD) to support equity-focused data collection and analysis. This research-practice collaboration reflects Penn State's commitment to building sustainable partnerships and advancing equity in education through applied research. Now in its third year, this collaboration has produced annual reports that help SCASD examine student outcomes and monitor equity efforts district-wide. These reports align with the district's Inclusive Excellence Policy and Anti-Racism Resolution, which guide SCASD's broader equity initiatives. In 2023, CECR issued two reports analyzing student demographics, graduation, discipline, gifted programming, and Advanced Placement (AP) participation. This year's report builds on those efforts with updated data and year-to-year comparisons. We include analysis of student demographics, economic disadvantage, English Learner (EL) status, special education, attendance, discipline, graduation rates, AP enrollment and testing, and gifted services across elementary, middle, and high school levels. These findings aim to support SCASD's ongoing equity work by identifying trends and gaps that inform policy and practice. To protect student privacy, we submit an executive summary of our findings here, as well as a PowerPoint presentation, and will separately provide more detailed analyses to district administration.

Main Findings

Student demographics

In 2023-24, SCASD enrolled 6,712 students across its schools, reflecting a slight decline of about 1% ($n = 69$) from the previous year. White students continue to make up the majority of the district, though their enrollment declined by 116 students since 2021-22. Hispanic student enrollment increased by 23 students, which is the largest gain among all racial groups, while Asian student enrollment increased slightly and remained the second largest racial group with 589 students. Black student enrollment decreased by 8 students but remained consistent at 2.7% of the total student population.

At the elementary level, the eight elementary schools have some degree of racial diversity, but the racial composition varies significantly. Most schools had over 70% White enrollment, with the exceptions of Easterly Parkway (59.69%) and Radio Park (60.42%). Radio Park has a higher proportion of Asian students (23.6%), while Easterly Parkway enrolled more Black (9.7%) and Hispanic (7.5%) students. Gray's Woods remains the least racially diverse, with 90% White enrollment, and both Gray's Woods and Corl Street had no Black students enrolled in 2023-24. At the secondary level, White enrollment remained consistent across both middle schools and the high school, though the high school experienced a decline of 71 White students. The high school enrolled the highest number of Hispanic (139) and Black (74) students, while Mount Nittany Middle School had the most multiracial students ($n = 229$) and Park Forest had the most Asian

students (n = 84). Asian student enrollment increased by 16 students overall, making it the only racial group to witness increase across both middle and high school levels.

Economic Disadvantage

Free and reduced lunch eligibility is used as a measure of economic disadvantage of students' households. As of October 2023, 21.71% of SCASD students were considered economically disadvantaged, an increase from 19.11% in 2022, or 139 additional students. The numbers and percentages of economically disadvantaged students varied by school. Easterly Parkway Elementary continued to have the highest percentage (39%, n = 126), while Gray's Woods had the lowest (11%, n = 40). Some schools experienced notable increases since 2022, such as Mount Nittany Middle School and Radio Park, each with a four percentage-point increase, and the Delta Program with a three-point increase.¹ Some schools with decreasing overall enrollment still saw an increase in economically disadvantaged students like Ferguson Township which lost 28 students overall but gained 5 economically disadvantaged students, and Delta which lost 14 students overall but gained 7 in this group.

English Learner Students

English Learners are identified based on their proficiency scores in reading, writing, speaking, and listening in English. In 2023-24, 243 students (3.6%) in SCASD were identified as English Learners (EL), continuing a gradual increase from 210 students (3.1%) in 2022-23. Across different racial groups, EL student enrollment remains disproportionate. The Asian student population leads the number of students receiving EL services at 99 students, followed by 82 White students, and 52 Hispanic students. Asian and Hispanic students are overrepresented among students of color who receive EL services. Finally, although EL enrollment differed across schools, each school maintained a consistent number of EL students from 2022-23 to 2023-24. The highest percentage change was Radio Park, with a 3-percentage point increase and which already had among the highest shares of EL students among all elementary schools. Easterly Parkway and Spring Creek were the only schools to see a decrease, dropping from 13% to 12% and from 0.54% to 0% respectively.

Employee Demographics

Employee and teacher diversity is important for both students and teachers of all races at the district. In 2023-24 in SCASD, White teachers remain the overwhelming majority across SCASD, with Easterly Parkway having the lowest percentage at 90% white teachers. Although there were slight shifts in teacher diversity, many teachers of color continue to work in racial isolation, with few or no colleagues of color at their schools. The district had two more Asian

¹ Because these data come from where lunch is served, Delta is separated out as its own building; it is not separate in most other analyses.

teachers. The number of Black teachers remained unchanged overall, as Easterly Parkway gained two, but Mount Nittany Elementary and Delta lost one each. Additionally, the district had one fewer Hispanic teacher than the prior year. Among non-teaching employees, at the elementary level, the percentage of employees of color rose slightly by 2023-24, and declined slightly for middle and high school.

We also looked at the percentages of student of color, teachers of color, and non-teaching employees of color across three academic years (2021-22 to 2023-24). Students of color were a higher percentage than teachers or staff in SCASD schools. While some schools made progress, such as Easterly Parkway, which increased teachers of color from 2% to 10% and employees of color from 13% to 23%, this is still less than students of color at 40%. Schools with lower student diversity, like Gray's Woods (10% students of color in 2023-24), continue to report all white teachers and low employee diversity (2% of other employees were not white). Middle and high schools reflect similar patterns, as Park Forest Middle consistently reports the lowest staff diversity despite notable student diversity.

Finally, we examined the percentages of paraprofessionals of color and how it changed at elementary schools over the past three years. Some schools reported clear improvement in paraprofessional diversity, including Park Forest (7 to 12% of paras were not white) and Corl Street (0% to 13% were not white), while others reported decreases like Spring Creek (9% in 2021-22 to 5% were not white in 2023-24).

Graduation Rates

Analyzing graduation rates among students in the school district helps to measure career and college readiness for different subgroups of students. Cohort data reports each year of student's graduation rate, specifically whether students from the 9th grade cohort that graduate within four years. Students from historically marginalized backgrounds can face several challenges that create equity gaps in education that may affect educational attainment. For the 2022-23 school year, the overall cohort graduation rate remained consistent with previous year at 93.8%. Persistent disparities in graduation rates remain between minoritized groups, such as Black and Hispanic students, and their White and Asian peers. Multiracial students had the lowest graduation rate of all racial groups at 78.4% with 21.6% students were still enrolled, continuing their education. Hispanic students had the second lowest graduation rate at 86.5% with 8.1% of the students still enrolled. The racial group of students with the highest graduation rate was White students, at 95.5%, with a 1% drop-out rate.

Due to some groups having small cohort sizes, we calculated the average weighted graduation rates over four cohorts of SCASD students as another way of understanding variations in graduation. The average weighted graduation rate among all races was 89%, slightly above the national adjusted graduation rate at 87%. Nonetheless, we also see disparities among some student subgroups compared to White and Asian students who both carry weighted averages above the

national average 95.2% and 94.5%, respectively. Hispanic students had the lowest weighted average amongst the four cohort graduation years examined, at 82.3%, nearly 13 percentage points lower than White and Asian students.

Likewise, English learners had a 76.3% graduation rate, exceeding their national average by four percentage points, while economically disadvantaged students had a higher rate of 87.9%. In the last year of data, for economically disadvantaged students in the freshman cohort of 2022-23, 23% of students were economically disadvantaged (n = 142). While 88.7% of these students graduated, that was lower than the rate among non-economically disadvantaged students, 95.4% (458 students).

Attendance

Regular school attendance is positively correlated to students' academic success. Thus, it's important to examine student attendance rates. While SCASD's overall attendance rate of 93.5% exceeds the national average of 90%, attendance disparities persist across racial and demographic groups. Our report analyzes data for grades 9-11 and examines attendance rates by two factors: full year enrollment at school (177 school days), and days present at school for the time in which a student is enrolled in the district. In the report, differences in how the racial category "undisclosed" students is reported across datasets (n = 207 in attendance dataset while none in enrollment dataset) affected the accuracy of our analysis and created inconsistencies in comparisons. In SCASD, 93.3% of students, totaling 5,888, were enrolled for the entire school year. Black students had the lowest full-year enrollment rate at 74%. About 85% of Asian, Hispanic, and students with undisclosed race were enrolled for the full year, while Multiracial and White students had higher rates, at approximately 92% and 96%, respectively.

Among SCASD's 6,985 students, there were 9,115 unexcused absences, making up 13% of all absences in the district. Unexcused absence rates were generally higher at the middle and high school levels than in elementary schools. At State College High School, seniors had the highest rate, with 30% of their absences marked as unexcused, followed by juniors (24%) and freshmen (23%). Across the district's middle schools, the average unexcused absence rate was about 10%, while early childhood grades reported lower rates, around 3 to 4%.

Finally, we examine chronic absenteeism, which refers to students who have been enrolled for more than 90 days of the school year and have missed more than 10% of their enrolled days for any reason, including excused and unexcused absences. Chronic absenteeism decreased across all racial groups from 2021-22 to 2022-23, with the largest drop among Hispanic students (5.6 percentage points). White students saw a notable decline of 4.1 percentage points, while Black (2.5%), multiracial (1%), and Asian (1.3%) students had smaller decreases. The undisclosed category also decreased significantly, dropping from 19.9% to 16.0%, which shows attendance improvements across all racial groups. Across schools, chronic absenteeism decreased in seven schools in the district from 2021-22 to 2022-23, with notable decreases at Gray's Woods (4.03

percentage points down), Park Forest (7.01 percentage points), and Spring Creek (5.69 percentage points). Easterly Parkway had a significant increase in chronic absenteeism (up 5.37 percentage points), from 13.43% to 18.80%. Finally, the High School had the biggest decrease in chronic absence rate at an 8.4 percentage point decrease.

Special Education

We analyze data of students receiving special education services for 2023-24. These trends allow us to examine over- and under-identifications of certain student subgroups in special education programs in the district. Historically, students of color have been disproportionately represented or not inaccurately identified for special education programs, which may affect their academic environment and educational success. In 2020 and 2021, SCASD received formal notices of significant disproportionality in identifying Black students for special education. Since then, district efforts have resulted in a substantial decrease in the identification rate for Black students from 40% in 2016-17 to 21.9% in 2023-24. In 2023-24, all other student racial groups experienced a decrease in special education identification except for Hispanic students, who saw an increase from 18.3% to 22.3%.

Across different schools, the rates of identification of students receiving special education services varied. Across all elementary schools, Ferguson Township has the highest rates of special education students at 16.2% (n = 47). It is followed by Radio Park at 13.9% (n = 60) and Easterly Parkway at 13.1% (n = 42) that are the most diverse schools in the district for 2023-24, with approximately 40% students of color each. Black students are most have the highest rate of identification at Mount Nittany Elementary, Park Forest Elementary, and Mount Nittany Middle; Hispanic students at Radio Park, Easterly Parkway, Park Forest Middle, and State High; and multiracial students at Corl Street.

504 Plans

504 plans are based on Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act of 2008. They are designed to help remove barriers that limit full participation for individuals with physical or mental disabilities. In 2023-24, SCASD had 382 students with a 504 Plan, representing 5.7% of the student population; white students had a slightly higher identification rate of 6.0%. Most of those students reside in the High School, which comprises 55.8% of students receiving 504 plans across schools in 2023-24. Twelve percent of all high school students had a 504 plan, 7% of middle school students, and under 4% of elementary students.

Discipline

Research shows that students of color, in particular, face disproportionate rates of disciplinary referrals and suspensions. Exploring trends in disciplinary and referral incidents, including in-

school suspension (ISS), out-of-school suspension (OSS), and expulsions will help understand how discipline affected SCASD students. Differences in state reporting and district data systems make it challenging to compare across years. First, we examine discipline referrals. Discipline referrals are reports submitted by teachers to administrators to determine appropriate actions, but not all referrals result in disciplinary measures. In 2022-23, SCASD recorded 979 total referrals and 89 disciplinary actions, with only 9.1% of referrals leading to discipline. Across elementary schools, Black, Hispanic, and Multiracial students consistently had the highest referral rates. This pattern persisted at the secondary level, where Black students were the second most referred group in all middle and high schools. In 2023-24, there were 2,749 referrals.

Second, we examine disciplinary action in SCASD. Variations across different racial groups were prevalent in all our analyses. In 2022-23, SCASD recorded 89 disciplinary outcomes, with most students involved in a single infraction, while 10 students had multiple infractions. Although ISS and expulsions slightly declined from the previous year (17 incidents in 2021-22 to 13 in 2022-23), an increase in OSS (42 incidents in 2021-22 to 63 in 2022-23) and an increase in expulsions (from 3 to 4) contributed to a higher overall number of disciplinary actions compared to 2021-22, rising from 63 to 79 incidents. The number of incidents slightly increased in 2023-24 to 86 incidents. There was a decrease in OSS incidents (63 to 52), and an increase in ISS incidents (13 to 26) in 2023-24; there were also 2 expulsions.

In a diverse district like SCASD, looking at discipline rates by racial group helps understand disciplinary patterns effectively. When comparing the number of disciplined students to their overall representation, Black students had the highest discipline rate at 3.22%, followed by Multiracial (2.66%) and Hispanic students (2.61%). In contrast, White and Asian students had significantly lower discipline rates, at 0.92% and 0.51%, respectively. In 2023-24, discipline rates for most students of color declined, but Hispanic students had the highest rate of disciplinary actions in 2023-24.

Finally, data shows that male students are more frequently disciplined than female students. At the High School, 20 females and 43 males faced disciplinary actions in 2022-23. This trend of a higher percentage of male students being disciplined is consistent across other schools in the district, such as 13 more male students being disciplined at the middle school level. Within each racial group, more male than female students were disciplined. Among both female and male students, White students had the highest number of disciplinary incidents (12 for females and 17 for males), with similar patterns for smaller racial groups.

Retention

Although there were only 33 students retained in SCASD for 2023-24, it's important to examine the student groups most impacted. The district's overall retention rate slightly decreased from 0.62% in 2022-23 to 0.49% in 2023-24, with the majority of retention cases occurring at the High School level. Specifically, 31 out of the 33 retained students attended the High School, and

a majority of them (22 students) had IEPs. It's also noteworthy that while last year's report showed significant disproportionality of students of color being retained, this year's data still shows a less-pronounced disparity. For example, the proportion of Black students among those retained has dropped from 11.9% to 6.4%.

Advanced Placement

This section focuses on trends in Advanced Placement (AP) course enrollment and test-taking in SCASD. We compare students enrolled in AP courses to those who took the AP test, highlighting trends by grade level, school, race, gender, and students receiving free/reduced lunch. In SCASD, AP courses enrolled 979 students, with White students making up 720 students (73.77%), Asian students at 117 (11.99%), Multiracial at 57 (5.84%), Hispanic at 42 (4.30%), undisclosed at 21 (2.15%), and Black at 19 (1.95%). Because students often took more than 1 course, AP course enrollments summed to 1,597. Of those 979 students, 79% took the test. However, this percentage varies widely across different racial groups. Asian students have the highest AP test participation, with more than 94% of those enrolled in AP courses also taking the test ($n = 110$). In contrast, Black students have the lowest test-taking rate. Further, 18.84% of all Asian students in the district are enrolled in AP course, while only 4.84% of Black students are enrolled. Black students are most underrepresented in AP testing and show the largest gap between course enrollment and test-taking rates among all racial groups.

As for different grade levels, there are lower percentages of AP test taking among students in older grades. Grade 12 students have the lowest test-taking rates, which is substantially lower compared to earlier grades. Around 90% of grade 9 students took at least one AP test, 87% of grade 10 students, and 82% of grade 11 students, while only around 60% of grade 12 students who were enrolled in an AP course took an AP test. Despite having the largest number of students enrolled in AP courses ($n = 272$), grade 12 students had the smallest number of test-takers ($n = 161$). Additionally, grade 12 students had the highest rate of students who took the AP test without enrolling in a course during the current academic year, with 36.84% of all test-takers in this grade taking the test independently.

Finally, we look at the rate of AP test-taking by students who receive free or reduced lunch (FRL), which is our indicator for economic disadvantage. 17.76% of students enrolled in AP courses are considered economically disadvantaged, somewhat lower than the high school's percentage of students from economically disadvantaged households. There is a gap when comparing AP course enrollment with AP test participation, particularly between students who receive FRL and those who do not. While 62.07% of FRL students took the AP test, 77.27% of non-FRL students participated in the test. Taking the AP test requires a fee, which could be one of the factors contributing to this difference in test-taking rates.²

² This year immediately preceded implementation of SCASD's AP test fee policy.

Gifted Students

In 2023-24, the number of gifted students differed by school level, with 151 in elementary schools, 204 in middle schools, and 163 in high school. When looking at the rates of total enrollment, gifted students made up 5.31% of elementary students, 11.51% of middle school students, and 6.95% of high school students. These rates show a decrease in the proportion of students receiving gifted services as the grade level increases. As for variations across different racial groups, White students are reported as the largest groups of gifted students and Asian students are reported to be the second largest. This comes with one exception for grade 11 students where Multiracial students are the second largest gifted group instead of Asian students. Gender variations also show some variation with consistently more male students than female students receiving gifted services and across all types of gifted services. This discrepancy is more prevalent among younger students. For example, male students make up 57.62% of gifted students at the elementary school level, 56.37% at the middle school level, and 50.30% at the high school level. We also look at gifted students who are also economically disadvantaged. 20.71% of SCASD's student body is economically disadvantaged. In 2023-24, economically disadvantaged students made up 5.3% of the total elementary gifted student population, 3.92% of the total middle school gifted student population, and 6.75% of the total high school gifted student population. Just three of the elementary schools had any students identified as both gifted and economically disadvantaged (Easterly Parkway, Radio Park, and Spring Creek).

Recommendations

This report, with a mixture of 2022-23 and 2023-24 data, updates prior CECR reports and helps to examine trends in demographics, access to opportunity, and outcomes for students in SCASD. Responsive to prior district requests, and informed by research, we report on a number of indicators. Regularly reporting informs the SCASD equity plan and actions.

In brief, we make several recommendations:

1. District leadership should identify and prioritize how they will use research about equity in their work at the district and school level. Transparency and accessibility are important.
2. Urgent attention is needed to data quality and consistency between schools and years; we have repeatedly called attention to our concerns about the data underlying our report, which affects the analysis we can do and the confidence in our conclusions.
3. Many of our analyses, not reported here due to concerns about student privacy, show stark differences between schools, especially at the elementary level, and may indicate the need for different supports and different plans to ensure students.
4. By high school, there are gaps in student enrollment in advanced offerings, test taking, and ultimately graduation. The district should support equitable opportunities for

advanced learning beginning in elementary school and should carefully assess whether and how policies may be unintentionally contributing to inequitable outcomes.

5. Plan to increase recruitment and retention of faculty and staff. Our earlier [report](#) on PA teacher diversity may be helpful.
6. Further assessment and support is needed to understand student experiences for special education, students with 504 plans, and multilingual students.
7. Finally, this report showed a number of promising trends, such as overall decrease in chronic absences, and continuing to monitor and support for efforts that result in declines is needed.

About the Center for Education and Civil Rights (CECR)

The Center for Education and Civil Rights seeks to be a hub for the generation of knowledge and coalition-building among the education and civil rights communities to promote research-based actions that address the complicated nature of racial and ethnic inequality in the 21st century. The Center's collective work is intended to promote equity across the educational pipeline by supporting efforts that facilitate integration through an interdisciplinary approach. CECR is directed by Erica Frankenberg. For more information, see [**cecr.ed.psu.edu**](http://cecr.ed.psu.edu).