

Michigan League for Public Policy

2019 BUDGET PRIORITIES

Fully Fund the State's Program for Students At Risk of Low Achievement

— LEAGUE RECOMMENDATION —

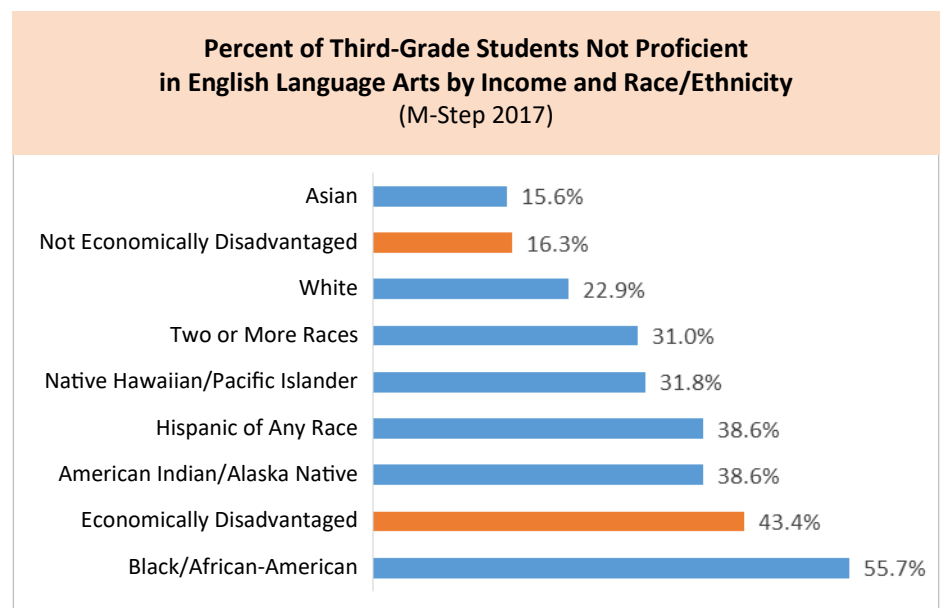
Fully fund the At-Risk School Aid program to ensure that high-poverty schools have the resources they need to address the educational challenges children exposed to the stresses of poverty bring through the schoolhouse doors.

BACKGROUND: The At-Risk School Aid program provides state funds to schools to serve students who are at risk of failing academically or who are chronically absent. After more than a decade of flat funding, when At-Risk payments to districts fell well below statutory levels, the Legislature approved increases of \$70 million for 2015-16 budget and \$120 million for 2017-18. Despite these increases, the program is still not fully funded, so payments are prorated, with the estimated per-pupil amount for most districts falling at \$777 for each eligible pupil in 2017-18.

- **More students are eligible for At-Risk funding this year.** In past years, districts received At-Risk assistance for each student that was eligible for free school meals (130% of poverty). Beginning this year, districts can also receive funding for students eligible for reduced-price meals (185% of poverty), as well as those in families receiving income or food assistance, or those who are homeless, living in migrant families, or living in foster care. This change is expected make an additional 84,000 students eligible this year.
- **Additional districts are now eligible for At-Risk funding.** For 2017-18, the Legislature expanded At-Risk funds to districts that were previously not eligible for the program because of their combined state and local school funding levels. These newly eligible districts can receive 30% of the standard per-pupil funding—an estimated \$233 for each eligible student. Many of these districts have high numbers of children living in poverty.

WHY IT MATTERS:

- **The barriers faced by families in poverty can affect children's learning and success.** While family income alone does not keep children from learning, the many problems faced by those living in poverty can—including low parental literacy, poorer health, frequent moves, a lack of stable housing and less access to high-quality early education and care, fewer afterschool or enrichment programs, and increased exposure to environment toxins like lead that can affect brain growth and development.



- ***Economically disadvantaged students and students of color are less likely to achieve in school or be prepared for college, and the disadvantages start early before they even enter school.*** Students whose families are more economically secure are twice as likely to be proficient on standardized tests for reading and science and are much more likely to be prepared for college. The impact of poverty in the earliest years, when the brain and language are developing, is particularly destructive, but can be overcome with adequate supports to parents like home visitation programs, two-generational programs that address adult literacy, early identification and treatment of developmental delays, and high-quality child care and preschool.