Boston Preparatory Charter Public School

Outcomes Committee Meeting #4

Published on February 27, 2025 at 7:44 PM EST

Date and Time

Friday February 28, 2025 at 11:00 AM EST

Location

Zoom

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Agenda

		Purpose	Presenter	Time
I.	**Opening Items**			**11:00 AM**
A.	Pre-Work		Robert Rametti	
B.	Record Attendance **Roll Call**		Sarah James	1 m

		Purpose	Presenter	Time

Sarah James
Kim Borchert
Vanessa Lipshitz
Jovinson Ripert
Natalie Branch Lewis
Jon Beck

Observing Members:
Bryant Jones
Tom Huff

C. Call the Meeting to Order — Sarah James — 10 m

Icebreaker: If you could life in a different country for a year, what country would you choose? (Call on 3-4 participants)

Call for Public Comment

D. Approve Minutes — Approve Minutes — Sarah James — 2 m

Roll Call:

Sarah James
Kim Borchert
Vanessa Lipshitz
Jovinson Ripert
Natalie Branch Lewis
Jon Beck

II. Outcomes — 11:13 AM

A. Framing - The Opportunity Makers (TNTP Pre-Read) — Discuss — Sarah James — 15 m

Telling the SY25 Boston Prep Story

		Purpose	Presenter	Time

1. My Boston Prep Story (Sarah)
2. Based on TNTP's *Opportunity Makers* report, where do you see alignment with our current work? Where do you think we have the most opportunities for growth? What information do you need to more precisely answer these questions?
3. Board Member Boston Prep Story Reflection & Questions

B. Academic Updates: i-Ready Data and Interim Assessment Performance — Robert Rametti — 45 m

Academic Update Discussion

1. What clarifications do you need about any of the data shared today?
2. What other information or data do you need to be able to tell our academic story this year?
3. What questions or suggestions do these data surface for you that the ELA Curriculum Adoption Committee should consider as they develop a rubric for evaluating HQIM?

III. Closing Items — 12:13 PM

A. Adjourn Meeting — FYI — Sarah James — 1 m

Next Outcomes Committee Meeting is Thursday, April 17, 2025 at 11:00am EST.
***Note: Thursday meeting, not Friday**

Coversheet

Pre-Work

Section: I. Opening Items
Item: A. Pre-Work
Purpose: FYI
Submitted by:
Related Material: 25-0228 The-Opportunity-Makers-TNTP (1).pdf
25-0228 2024 NAEP Results (1).pdf

BACKGROUND:

Pre-work

- **Read the Executive Summary** (pp. 6-10) of TNTP's newest report, *The Opportunity Makers*, to ground the academic updates you will hear about during the meeting, and consider the following question:
    - Based on TNTP's *Opportunity Makers* report, where do you see alignment with our current work? Where do you think we have the most opportunities for growth? What information do you need to more precisely answer these questions?
- **Skim the 2024 NAEP Summary of Results** (especially the blue boxes scattered throughout the document for the "headlines" about this year's data)
- **Review the Reading Performance Update** slide deck and the **Interim Assessment Performance Update** slide deck and consider the following questions as you review:
    - What clarifications do you need about any of the data shared today?
    - What other information or data do you need to be able to tell our academic story this year?
    - What questions or suggestions do these data surface for you that the ELA Curriculum Adoption Committee should consider as they develop a rubric for evaluating HQIM?

Paths of Opportunity Series

TNTP

The Opportunity Makers

How a Diverse Group of Public Schools Helps Students Catch Up — and How Far More Can

Table of Contents

Foreword

America intends its education system to be the cornerstone of the nation's success, the great equalizer propelling each generation beyond the one before it. Yet we have not kept this promise.

The opportunity gap in the U.S. is systemic, real, and widening, and income mobility has been on a steady decline since the 1940s.[1] The job landscape is rapidly changing due to AI and advanced technologies, while graduates often emerge from high school and college without the durable skills expected in entry-level positions. Meanwhile, about 8 million jobs sit unfilled.[2]

It's time to build a future in which public education can truly make it possible for all young people to thrive in life, pursue careers of their choosing, and help shape our democracy. At TNTP, we are orienting our work and research toward this broader vision and asking ourselves: How can young people's experiences become true engines of economic and social mobility?

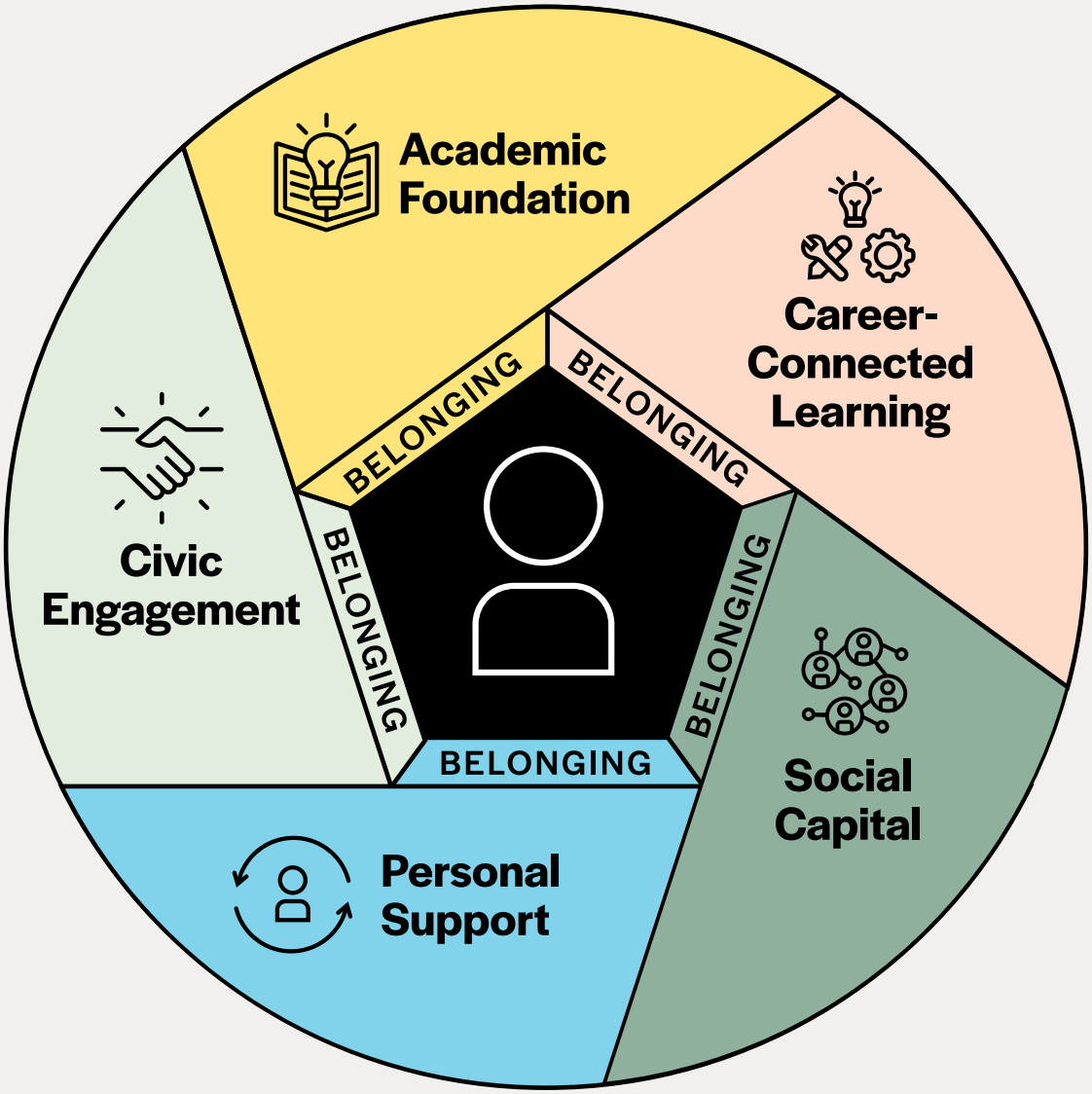
How can young people's experiences become true engines of economic and social mobility?

In the first paper in our *Paths of Opportunity* series, TNTP revealed five interconnected factors of mobility that young people need in order to thrive: a strong academic foundation, career-connected learning, opportunities to build social capital, personal support in their lives, and civic engagement in their community. These five factors do not work in isolation. Instead, they must be woven together into coherent support for young people, with coordinated efforts from the many systems that shape young people's lives. It's going to take all of us—in education, the business sector, government, and community organizations—to make opportunity not only possible but accessible for the next generation.

TNTP's new Research Center of Excellence is currently studying each factor of mobility and, critically, exploring the connections between them. This report, *The Opportunity Makers*, is the first chapter of our ongoing mobility research. It identifies how we can build a strong academic foundation for all students, particularly for historically marginalized groups like students of color, students experiencing poverty, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students with learning and thinking differences.

The Five Factors of Economic and Social Mobility

What do young people need to thrive in life, careers, and democracy?



Academics alone can't outweigh the effects of poverty, but a strong academic foundation remains a prerequisite for widespread mobility. As *Paths of Opportunity* showed, among young people experiencing poverty, those with strong academic outcomes were almost three times as likely to earn a living wage and report high levels of well-being by age 30 as their peers with weak academic outcomes. A solid academic foundation is the first and most important step toward equitable access to economic and social mobility.

As a nation, how do we give every single student the chance to achieve a strong academic foundation and learn at or above grade level? If young people fall behind, for whatever reason, how do we help them catch up? How can we ensure that their long-term opportunities in adulthood are not dictated by learning losses in second or fourth or sixth grade?

Many of these answers already exist in the daily practices of schools across the country. The seven public schools we studied for this report were truly inspiring and energizing. They not only caught students up; they maintained that progress for over a decade. The teams in these schools are setting up structures and making choices each day that create a profoundly different academic experience for young people and educators than their counterparts in schools with average learning.

These trajectory-changing schools make opportunity possible for their students, and their foundational practices can be applied in any school system nationwide. We believe we can learn a great deal from what's working in these schools and help entire school systems boost the learning gains of the next generation.

We are deeply grateful to the school leaders and teachers who opened their doors to us and shared what they've learned over the years. They would be the first to say that they don't have all the answers. But what they do have is proof that building a strong academic foundation is possible, no matter where young people start out. Young people who fall behind can—and do—catch up. The path to mobility is long, but these "opportunity makers" show us a hopeful first step.

Tequilla Brownie

Dr. Tequilla Brownie
CEO, TNTP

The Opportunity Makers

How do we transform PK–12 education into the great equalizer that it could be for all young people in this country? While a solid academic foundation alone does not outweigh the effects of poverty, it is one of five interconnected factors of social and economic mobility. According to our research, young people experiencing poverty are more likely to earn a living wage by age 30 and report high levels of well-being if they have strong academic outcomes in high school. But far too many students fall behind in school, and most students who fall behind stay behind. If we don't transform student learning outcomes at scale, millions of young people may never catch up academically.

We studied 28,000 elementary and middle schools where the average student was not yet on grade level. We found that the top five percent help students catch up by gaining more than 1.3 years of learning per academic year. Growing at this rate allows most students to catch up to grade level during their time in school. In three years, students gain a full extra year of learning—a potentially life-changing difference. Critically, these schools have maintained student academic growth over a decade. We call these schools "trajectory changing" because that's exactly what they do.

To learn what makes these schools so effective, we studied seven trajectory-changing schools around the country that differed in several ways: They serve different communities, use different school models, operate under different state laws, and have different resources and curricula. Their principals have varied backgrounds, tenures, and leadership styles. We collected both quantitative and qualitative data on the experiences of students, teachers, school staff, and caregivers to find out how these schools created exceptional levels of learning for all young people.

What we found was not a silver-bullet solution, a perfect curriculum, or a single rock star leader. Instead, these schools shared a commitment to doing three core things well: They create a culture of belonging, deliver consistent grade-level instruction, and build a coherent instructional program.

Belonging

Schools create an emotional climate for learning that activates students' ability to excel.

Young people who are confident they belong in their learning environment can engage more fully in their learning.

Many schools are not oriented around the experiences of individual students. Under pressure to show results, schools focus on short-term proficiency targets and think about young people in groups, like "students on level," "students with individualized education programs," or "multilingual learners." Unique student needs are addressed in silos, with little coordination between educators and caregivers. Students don't always know how they need to grow, and they feel bad when they fall behind.

Trajectory-changing schools systematically cultivate belonging and design support structures for each individual student. They build a full understanding of each young person—who they are both in and out of school—and work in teams to support their unique needs. They look beyond proficiency in a single year and aim for students to reach grade level over time. Students have a clear path to improvement and the confidence to walk it.

Young people say things like:

"I feel like they make every effort to know who I am as a student and as a person."

A first-grade student high-fives their teacher.

Consistency

Schools deliver consistently good teaching and grade-level content for all students.

Many schools have some great teaching, but they also have a lot of variation in instructional quality. Teachers often plan lessons in isolation or source their own curriculum. Team meetings are unstructured, and leader feedback is unfocused. As a result, most assignments fall short of grade-level expectations, and teachers often lower the rigor of assignments for students who are behind.

Trajectory-changing schools minimize variation among classrooms. All teachers meet a shared bar for quality content and good instruction. All students work on grade-level content, with additional support to access it if needed. Consistency is reinforced by schoolwide structures like a strong shared curriculum, structured collaboration, and focused feedback. Everyone holds the same high expectations and works together to improve.[3]

Peter Rosado captures his students' attention through an interactive math lesson.

Young people say things like:

"We practice every day and I like that. Each lesson, each day, matters."

Coherence

Schools build a unified instructional program and set priorities that are clear to all.

Many schools lack a coherent instructional program. Schools plan for discrete blocks of time—core classes, advisory periods, intervention, tutoring—without considering how they fit together for students. School systems and states pile on programming. Teachers juggle different materials, assessments, and software. Nobody knows where to focus, and student learning experiences are disconnected.

Trajectory-changing schools ensure that all pieces of the school's instructional program—curriculum, materials, interventions, and assessments—work together to advance the same set of grade-level expectations. Everyone understands the role they play and how the dots connect. Leaders invest in a few focused initiatives, creating clarity for staff, students, and caregivers alike.

A sixth-grade student beams after solving a difficult question.

Young people say things like:

"[In intervention], you see the topics a little before your class. It always helps me with the lessons that I have coming up."

These focus areas may seem like common sense at first glance, but the cumulative effect of belonging, consistency, and coherence on students is profound. Creating a powerful baseline experience for every single young person, regardless of their background, abilities, or unique needs, means that week after week, the good days at school add up. Learning gains in these seven schools ranged from a remarkable 1.3 to 1.7 years of learning.

To create new paths of opportunity for young people, we must learn from what's already working. This diverse group of schools proves that it's possible to get trajectory-changing results without a perfect curriculum or an ideal educational climate.

The solution is in fact much more attainable. As educators continue to be inundated with new and competing priorities, these three focus areas offer schools much-needed permission to simplify.

To put the recommendations into action, our report includes an Opportunity Makers Toolkit that includes a Baseline Assessment for schools, detailed tools for educators, and Action Guides for different stakeholders based on our research into accelerating learning for students.

It will take a collective effort to transform public education so it can truly prepare all young people for thriving lives, and there is no time to waste. We must act now.

In this report, we recommend specific actions that can be taken to achieve profound results in every classroom across the country:

1. **Create a supportive ecosystem.** System leaders and policymakers can incentivize the three focus areas and remove obstacles for schools. Caregivers and community-based organizations can build belonging and support consistent, coherent learning experiences beyond the classroom.
2. **Reorient to the student experience.** Schools must look beyond nine-month learning increments and anchor all decisions in the experience of the whole person who will be in the school system through age 18.
3. **Choose a narrow entry point.** Trajectory-changing schools do less, and they do it better. School leaders should select a narrow focus that plays to their school's strengths and improve step by step.
4. **Manage ongoing change.** School and system leaders must create an ongoing, multiyear improvement process. Trajectory-changing schools use small "catalyzing" practices to build new habits and get everyone moving in the same direction.

What We Can Learn From Trajectory-Changing Schools

When young people fall behind in school for any reason, it can profoundly affect their opportunities later in life.

To understand what it takes to catch back up, we spent time with 144 elementary and middle school students who weren't yet learning on grade level. Here's what a few of them told us.

Ana, a soft-spoken third grader in small-town Texas, enjoys solving multiplication questions but is still learning English and gaining her confidence in reading. In first grade, she read below grade level and was hesitant to participate in class. **"I was worried I wasn't going to go to second grade,"** she says.

Ethan, a chatty fifth grader in rural Tennessee, is excited about math class even though it's hard for him. He fell behind in math during the pandemic and says he's still playing catch-up from remote learning. **"When we came back last year, there were times when the teacher would be talking and I would think, 'I don't remember this. I don't know this,'"** he says.

Santiago, an earnest fifth grader in Tucson, Arizona, loves hands-on science projects but finds reading challenging. He fell behind in reading due to an undiagnosed learning and thinking difference. **"Sometimes I don't really read some of the words correctly and I get nervous,"** he says. **"I'm doing the best I can."**

Falling behind is hard at any age, but here's the good news: Ana, Ethan, and Santiago all attend the rare public schools where students consistently catch up.

Each year, students at their schools gain more than 1.3 years of learning—which adds up to a full extra year of learning in three years—and regain lost ground. Students will head into high school more confident in their abilities and prepared for complex work. Research shows that they will enter adulthood more likely to reach their goals in life.

Something special is happening. **What's going right?**

Students remain engaged during an interactive lesson on fractions and decimals.

The Challenge

Most students who fall behind stay behind.

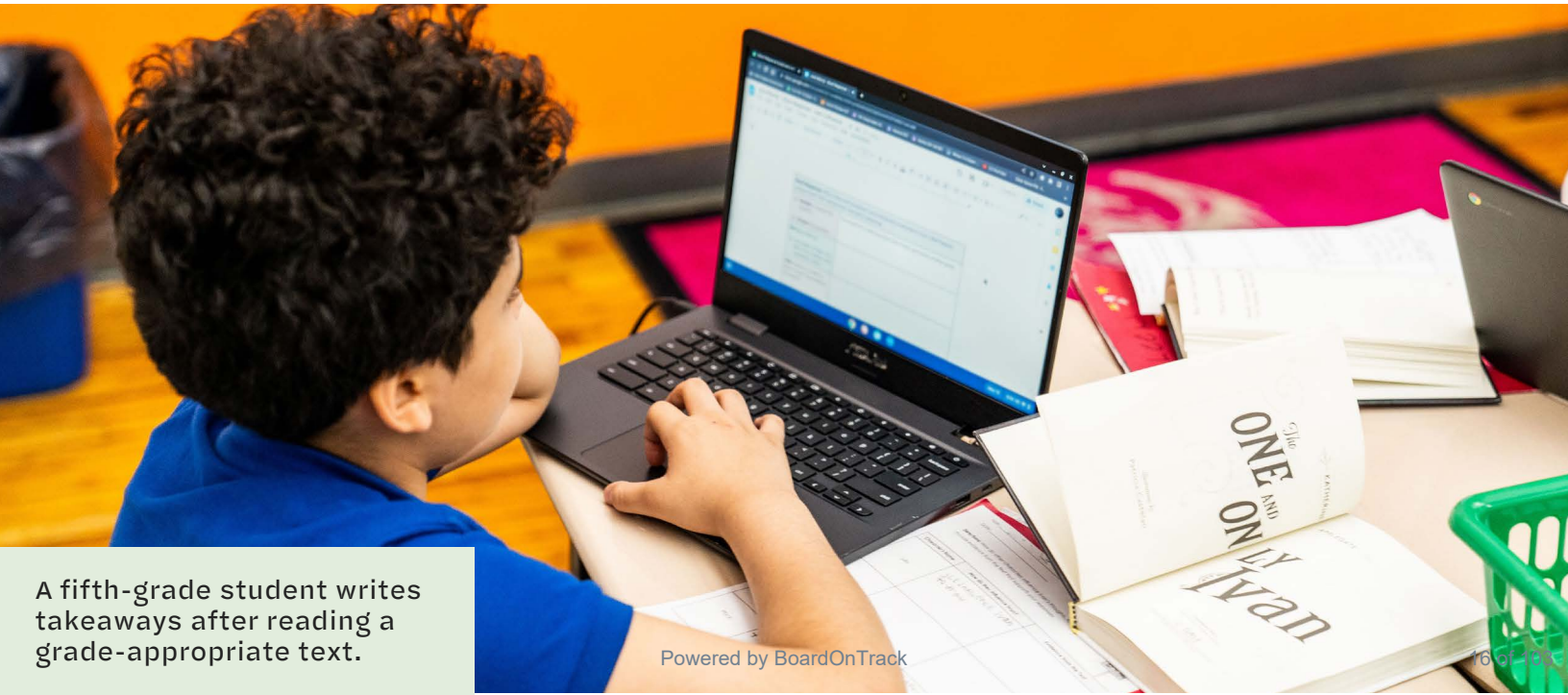
In roughly half of the nation's public elementary and middle schools, the average student is not yet proficient in math and reading/language arts for their grade level.[4] This has a profound impact on young people's life trajectories. Strong academic outcomes are positively correlated with mobility for both young people who go to college and those who go straight into the workforce out of high school.[5]

While academics alone can't outweigh the effects of poverty, excelling at school is a critical component of economic and social mobility in adulthood—and for far too long, the PK–12 education system has left the most vulnerable young people behind.

TNTP's 2018 report *The Opportunity Myth* demonstrated that most students—and especially students of color, those from low-income families, those with mild to moderate disabilities, and English language learners—spent the vast majority of their school days missing out on four crucial resources: grade-appropriate assignments, strong instruction, deep engagement, and teachers with high expectations.

Our more recent research on learning acceleration showed that students of color and those from low-income backgrounds were more likely than their white, wealthier peers to experience remediation—reviewing big chunks of missed material—rather than acceleration, or just-in-time help doing grade-level tasks.

These inequities have significant consequences. Research shows that the gap in test scores between affluent students and those experiencing poverty has grown by about 40 percent since the 1960s.[6] These inequities only deepened during the pandemic, as students who were already behind academically lost the most ground.[7] Our analysis shows that a typical fourth grader who was one year behind in math in 2017 was fully two years behind by eighth grade in 2021.[8]



A fifth-grade student writes takeaways after reading a grade-appropriate text.

As TNTP showed in *Paths of Opportunity: What It Will Take for All Young People to Thrive*, the stakes are high. Students experiencing poverty who had strong academic outcomes were almost three times as likely to earn a living wage and report a high level of adult well-being as their peers with weak academic outcomes.

If we don't transform student learning outcomes at scale, millions of young people may never catch up academically. Without a strong academic foundation, they will be less equipped to pursue careers of their choice, achieve financial security, and thrive in life. This not only shortchanges individual young people; it also weakens our workforce, our communities, and our nation as a whole. For the good of the next generation, we must systematically accelerate student learning in thousands of schools nationwide.

With the right support and hard work, we know it's possible for young people to catch back up and learn on grade level. But how often does that happen?

To find out, we reviewed a decade of student learning data (from 2008-18) from public schools (both traditional and charter) serving elementary and middle school students across the U.S. Unfortunately, our analysis shows that most students who fall behind stay behind.

Out of nearly 28,000 elementary and middle schools where the average student was not yet on grade level, just 5 percent of schools helped the average student gain more than 1.3 years of learning per school year.[9] (Figure 1) At that rate, students gain a full extra year of learning in three years, enabling them to regain lost ground. But catching up is all too rare. In nearly a quarter (23 percent) of those 28,000 schools, students actually gained less than a year of learning, widening the academic gap.[10] Worse, the schools with widening gaps disproportionately served Black students and students experiencing poverty, which means that the young people who are most in need of a learning boost are the least likely to get it.

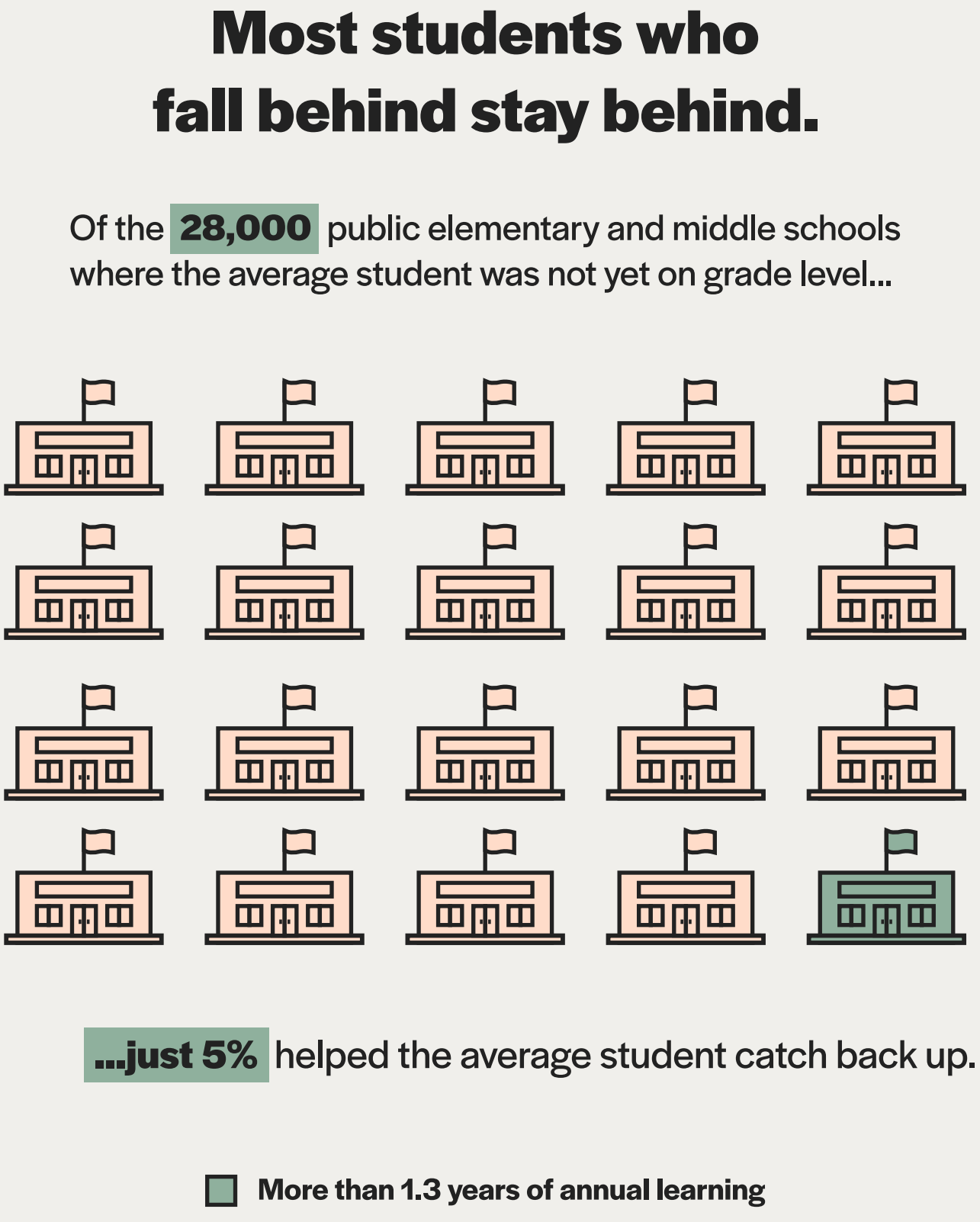
Students aren't falling behind from lack of effort. Educators are doing their best to respond to COVID-related learning loss in relentlessly difficult conditions. Education leaders are throwing money and programs at the problem. But even before COVID, schools struggled to help students catch up. Most students simply aren't making enough progress to close the gap between where they are and where they need to be.

How does TNTP define "catching up" to grade level?

To identify trajectory-changing schools to study, we used the Stanford Education Data Archive (SEDA 4.1). SEDA combines state testing data with the National Assessment of Educational Progress to compare scores from state tests on a common national scale. It provides test scores from 2008–09 through 2017–18 in reading and math. It captures grades 3–8, so we focused our studies on elementary and middle schools.

We defined "trajectory-changing" schools as schools where the average students was not yet on grade level in the initial tested grade and grew at least 1.3 relative grade levels per year. This threshold, while somewhat arbitrary, is also practical. Setting the bar at 1.3 relative grade levels per year captures the top 5 percent of public elementary and middle schools in SEDA. At this growth rate, compounded over several years, most students who are behind in elementary and middle school can reach grade-level proficiency during their time in school.

Figure 1


Most students who fall behind stay behind.
Of the 28,000 public elementary and middle schools where the average student was not yet on grade level...
...just 5% helped the average student catch back up.
More than 1.3 years of annual learning

Trajectory-Changing Practices

In 1,300 schools, students started behind—and consistently caught up. We can learn from what's going right.

In 2021, we set out to learn from schools that were successfully helping young people catch up. Using public data in the Stanford Education Data Archive (SEDA), we sorted through 28,000 elementary and middle schools where the average student was not yet on grade level in either math or reading in their initial tested grade. We found 1,300 outliers—the 5 percent of schools where students gained more than 1.3 years of learning each school year. These schools generated consistently outsized learning gains for students who were not yet on grade level.

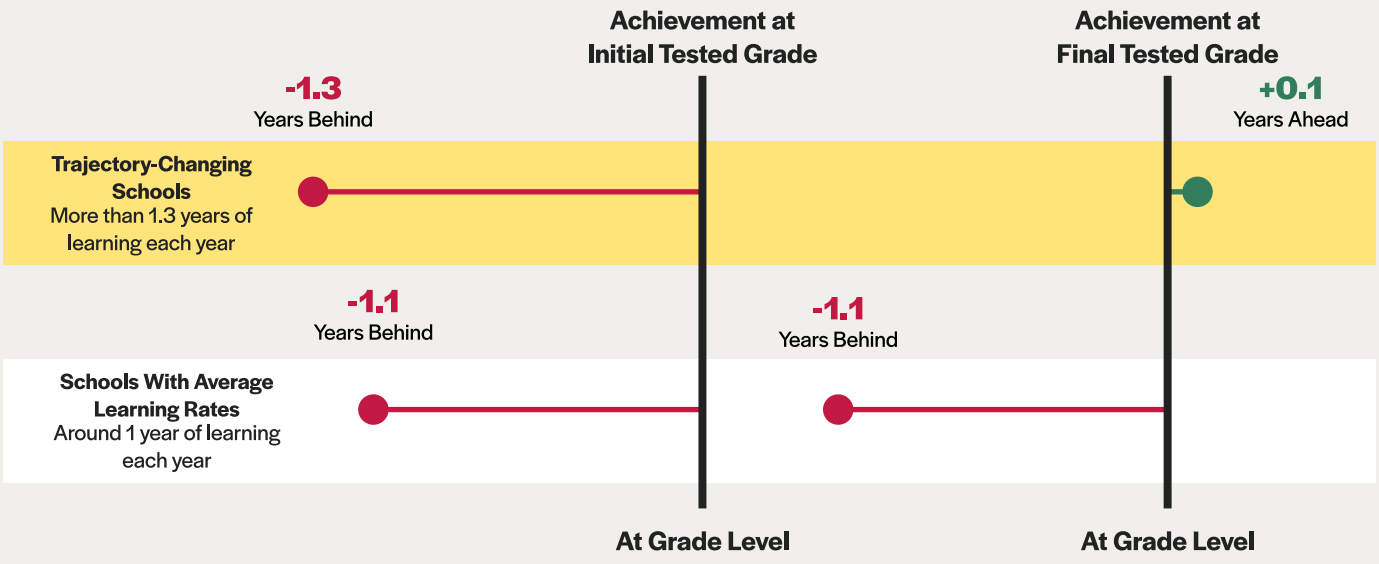
Growing at this rate allows most students to catch up during their time in school. In three years, students gain a full extra year of learning. A student who starts third grade one year behind in math is on grade level by sixth grade—a potentially life-changing difference. We call these schools "trajectory changing" because that's exactly what they do. (Figure 2)

Critically, these trajectory-changing schools have bucked the national trend for a decade. Student academic growth was consistent across different demographic groups and consistent over time. Because their trends are long-term, this isn't about a single heroic leader or group of self-sacrificing teachers. It's not the result of a onetime investment or a one-off initiative. This isn't a silver-bullet story.

Instead, trajectory-changing schools show us a long arc of sustained improvement by helping students gain 1.3 years or more of learning, year after year. These schools have found a way to sustain progress despite changes in leadership and the education landscape. Clearly, there must be durable systems, practices, and daily habits that can create exceptional levels of learning for all young people.

Figure 2

Student Achievement Over Time at Schools Where the Average Student Is Not Yet on Grade Level

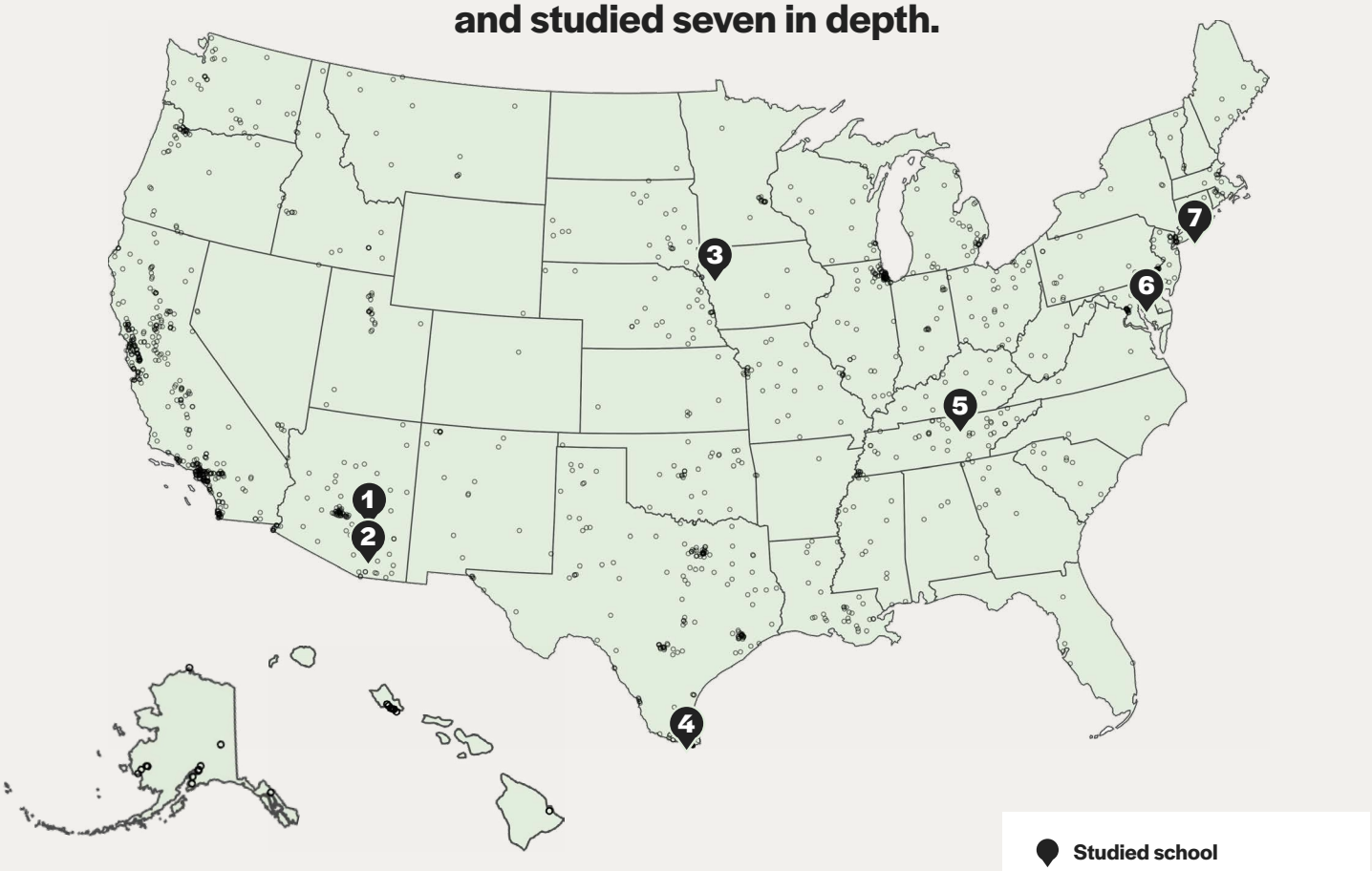


To understand what sets these schools apart, we selected seven trajectory-changing schools around the country for in-depth study. (Figure 3) Since the SEDA data captures grades 3–8, we focused our studies on elementary and middle schools (New Heights Academy Charter spans grades 5–12, but we focused on grades 5–8). These schools serve historically marginalized populations, including students experiencing poverty, students of color, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students with learning and thinking differences.

Collectively, the seven schools are broadly representative of U.S. schools where the average student starts out below grade level at the initial tested grade, with one caveat: The schools serve disproportionately low numbers of Black students, and only one of the seven schools serves a majority-Black student body. (Figure 4) This reflects a larger demographic reality: Black students have significantly less access to trajectory-changing schools overall.

Figure 3

We identified 1,300 trajectory-changing schools and studied seven in depth.



1. C.E. Rose PreK-8
Tucson, AZ

2. Van Buskirk Elementary
Tucson, AZ

3. South Sioux City Middle
South Sioux City, NE

4. JC Kelly Elementary
Pharr, TX

5. Trousdale County Elementary
Hartsville, TN

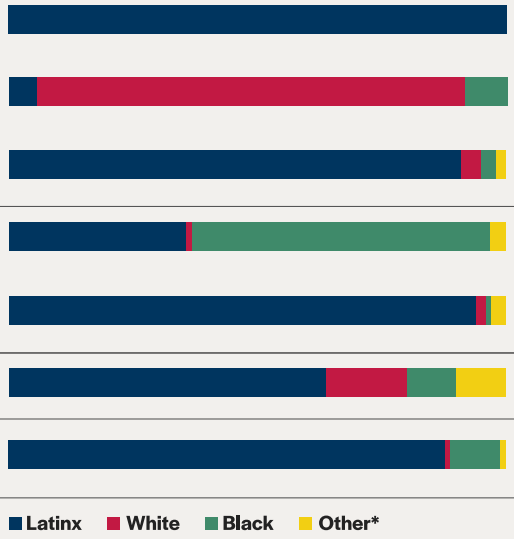
6. Center City Public Charter Schools (PCS), Brightwood
Washington, DC

7. New Heights Academy Charter
New York, NY

Figure 4

Student Demographics at the Studied Schools

	School	Grades	Students	FRPL*	Student Race/Ethnicity
Elementary	JC Kelly Elementary	PK3–5	255	87%	
	Trousdale County Elementary	PK–5	641	55%	
	Van Buskirk Elementary	PK–5	288	86%	
Elementary & Middle	Center City PCS Brightwood	PK3–8	258	87%	
	C.E. Rose PreK-8	PK–8	793	82%	
Middle	South Sioux City Middle	6–8	777	67%	
Middle & High	New Heights Academy Charter	5–12	731	94%	



*FRPL: Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.
*Other: Students of color, multiracial, or undisclosed.

We intentionally chose schools that are very different from one another: They serve different communities, use different school models, operate under different state laws, and have different resources and curricula. Their principals have varied backgrounds, tenures, and leadership styles. So how did they all get outstanding results for students?

To find out, we sought out diverse perspectives from school staff, teachers, students, and caregivers to identify a set of best practices that any school community could replicate. We collected both quantitative data (e.g., academic observations and surveys) and qualitative data (e.g., focus groups, interviews, and field notes from shadowing). (Figure 5) For a detailed summary of our approach, see the Methodology section.

Figure 5

Mixed-Methods Approach

Quantitative Data

491 Lessons Observed
We observed and assessed teachers for a week straight at three times during the year.

601 Surveys Conducted
We surveyed students, teachers, and caregivers on their experiences at school.

Qualitative Data

184 Students & Teachers Shadowed
We shadowed select students and teachers to understand their experience.

161 Interviews Conducted
We sat down with students in small groups and with caregivers in one-on-one interviews.

Targeted Attention to Three Focus Areas Leads to Extraordinary Impact

Before we visited, we worried that the schools would exhibit an unattainable level of perfection. Instead, what we saw was far more replicable. Trajectory-changing schools focus on doing three core things well: They create a culture of belonging, deliver consistent grade-level instruction, and create a coherent instructional program.

These focus areas may seem like common sense, but their cumulative impact was profound. As educators and system leaders continue to be inundated with new and competing priorities, these three focus areas offer schools much-needed permission to simplify.

In this report and associated resources, we aim to share the specific systems and practices that schools can cultivate to achieve these same profound results for students in every classroom across the country.

Belonging

Belonging—the experience of being accepted and respected—is a prerequisite for learning.[11] When young people are confident that they belong in their learning environment, they can engage more fully in learning.[12] In schools that foster a sense of belonging, educators prioritize understanding every student as both a person and a learner. Young people are known as unique individuals rather than as members of groups.[13] In our surveys, students at trajectory-changing schools were more likely to say that they felt supported and cared for by their school and challenged by their teacher than students at schools with average rates of learning.

Belonging consists of more than warm relationships with teachers. It is created structurally by intentional policies, practices, and systems[14] that respect students' identities, recognize their agency, and affirm their ability to succeed.[15] Designing support for individual students may sound overwhelming, particularly in larger middle or high schools. Yet these schoolwide structures and practices can scale successfully across all school sizes and grades. All seven trajectory-changing schools, regardless of their size, had key structures in place for belonging.

Consistency

Most schools have some good teaching but a lot of variation from one classroom to the next. In *The Opportunity Myth*, we followed nearly 4,000 students across five school systems, and the average lesson we observed was rated good or strong in 5 out of 10 classrooms—and poor almost half the time.

In trajectory-changing schools, the average lesson we observed was rated good or strong in 9 out of 10 classrooms, and very few lessons were poor. Across all classrooms, the steady accumulation of good lessons—not unattainably perfect ones—sets trajectory-changing schools apart.

In these consistently good lessons, students at all learning levels work on grade-level content, with support to access it if needed. Teachers in all classrooms meet a shared bar for quality content and good instruction. Consistency is reinforced by schoolwide structures like a strong shared curriculum, structured collaboration, and focused feedback. Everyone holds the same high expectations and works together to improve.

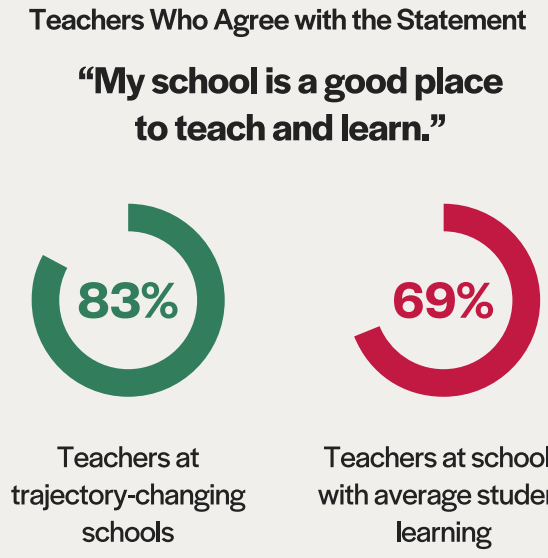
Coherence

Trajectory-changing schools ensure all efforts fit together so students know what to expect and how to succeed. Each piece of the school's instructional program—curriculum, materials, interventions, and assessments—works in concert with the others to advance the same grade-level expectations, and teachers make those connections clear to students and their caregivers. Leaders make it possible for teachers to focus, and caregivers know where students stand and how to help, making students' learning experiences logical, predictable, and unified.

Improving Teacher Experience

Critically, trajectory-changing schools also create a better experience for teachers. We compared teacher surveys from trajectory-changing schools with those from schools with similar student demographics but average rates of learning. Eighty-three percent of teachers at the trajectory-changing schools agreed that their school was "a good place to teach and learn," compared to 69 percent of teachers at schools with average student learning. (Figure 6)

Figure 6



In an era of teacher burnout, this feels hopeful. We can accelerate learning for students and improve the experience for teachers. We don't need to expect an unattainable level of perfection from teachers and school leaders. We don't need to wait for an ideal curriculum or policy environment. We can act now.

Trajectory-Changing Schools Create Opportunities for Students to Thrive

When students learn in an environment with belonging, consistency, and coherence, the cumulative effect is profound. These elements combine to create a powerful baseline experience for every single young person, regardless of their background, abilities, or unique needs. Week after week, the good days at school add up.

The impact these schools have made and sustained makes it possible to envision a nation where trajectory-changing schools are not the exception but the norm. Imagine the possibilities for students, families, and communities if all young people have the chance to develop a strong academic foundation that sets them up for thriving lives, meaningful careers, and economic and social mobility.[16] The road map to changing students' trajectories exists in the practices of the 1,300 schools and communities that are providing those opportunities right now.

Belonging

Schools Create an Emotional Climate for Learning

Trajectory-changing schools know each student well to meet their needs and support their growth.

Santiago is an enthusiastic fifth grader at Van Buskirk Elementary in Tucson, Arizona. He loves building things and hopes to become an engineer. His teacher says he is a "delight" and keeps two of his origami creations—a crane and a bear—on her bulletin board. The bear holds a paper heart addressed to his teacher.

It's hard to tell now, but when Santiago was younger, he often got in trouble. After his father passed away, he struggled to focus in class and was diagnosed with learning and thinking differences. At another school, Santiago might have been written off as a troublemaker. At Van Buskirk, staff understood Santiago's situation and invested in his long-term growth. Over time, with an individualized education program (IEP), consistent instruction, and in-class support at school, Santiago stabilized and began to thrive.

Everyone—his teacher, principal, speech specialist, counselor, mother, and grandmother—is working together to get Santiago the support he needs. Academic support and psychological safety go hand in hand. "If students don't know you love them and care about them, they're not going to succeed, in fifth grade or in life," his teacher says. "Here students are pushed, and they feel safe."

Santiago is still performing below grade level in math and reading but is making progress. His principal, Victoria Barajas, says that reading instruction has been the "secret sauce" to building Santiago's independence and maturity. "Sometimes I don't really read some of the words correctly and I get nervous sometimes," Santiago says. "My teacher works one on one with me. I'm trying my best, and the school is helping boost me up there."

> **"The school is helping boost me up there."**
>
> **–Santiago, fifth-grade student at Van Buskirk Elementary**

In class, Santiago and his partner are reading about the hunting habits of owls, a lesson that Santiago says is "one of his favorites." As he reads out loud, Santiago's partner notices that he's having a hard time with the word "unsuspecting." She asks him to slow down and read it silently to himself, then try saying the word again. This time, Santiago is more accurate.

At the end of the lesson, Santiago is pleased with his progress. He tells his partner, "I hope that this is a fifth-grade text because I read all those paragraphs by myself!"

Belonging

Care and Challenge Go Hand in Hand

Santiago is known well by multiple adults, believes in his own abilities, and trusts that the whole school has his back. This sense of belonging goes beyond a warm relationship with his teacher. Van Buskirk Elementary has schoolwide structures, policies, and practices to support Santiago's long-term growth.

Let's imagine what Santiago's experience might look like in two different scenarios:

	Without an Emphasis on Belonging	With an Emphasis on Belonging
Individual Knowledge	**Students may be known by a teacher, but relationships are left to chance.** *Santiago is primarily known at school as a kid with an IEP who gets into trouble a lot. Only his core teacher knows why or what lights him up.*	**Every student is known well as an individual and a learner.** *Santiago is known by all adults as a budding engineer, a child who experienced a loss, and an enthusiastic learner who loves hands-on activities.*
Individual Needs	**Specialists tend to work in silos.** *Santiago receives speech support and counseling, but they're unconnected to his academic assignments or home life.*	**Educators work together to identify needs and provide personal support.** *Santiago's teacher, principal, speech specialist, counselor, mother, and grandmother work together to support him.*
Individual Growth	**Educators focus on group proficiency in nine-month testing windows.** *Santiago won't be proficient in reading this year so he's not a top priority for test prep. He feels like he's failing.*	**Educators focus on incremental growth for every student over time.** *Santiago's growth is a top priority. He has smaller reading goals that will build his skills over time. He's confident he's improving.*

To understand the student experience of belonging, we compared student surveys from trajectory-changing schools to students in schools with similar student demographics but average rates of learning. In both sets, the average student started below grade level in the initial tested grade.

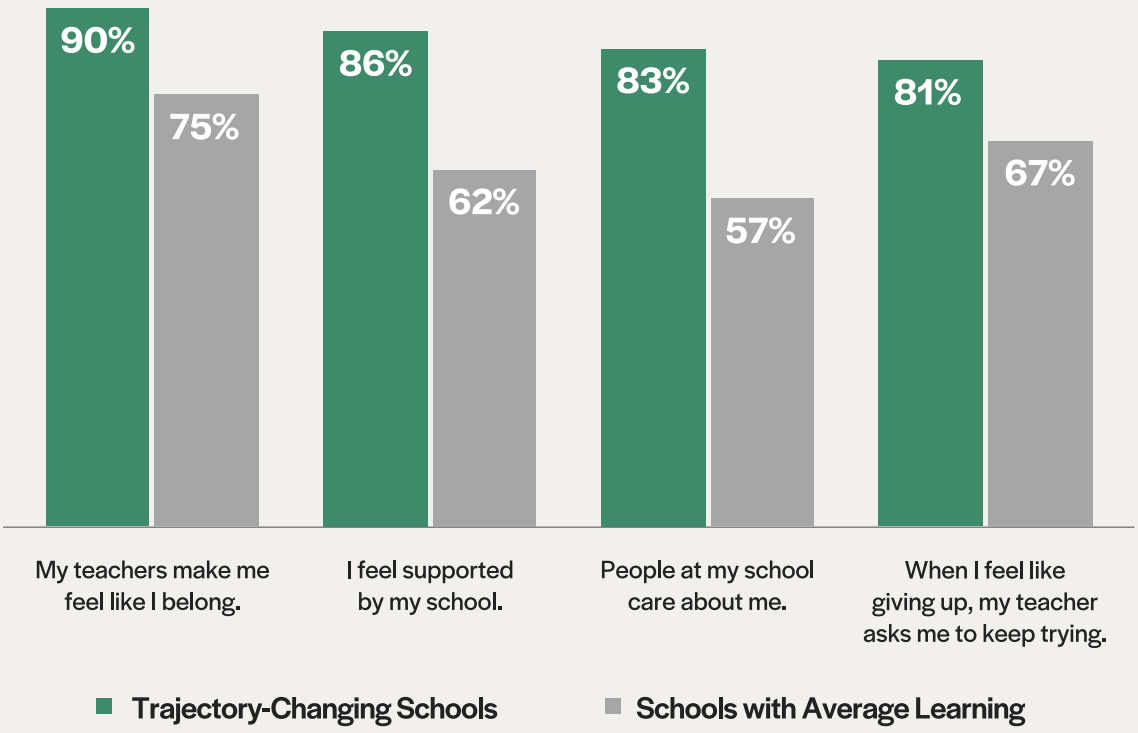
Young people in both sets of schools tended to trust their teacher, particularly in elementary grades. Ninety percent of students at trajectory-changing schools agreed with the statement "My teacher makes me feel like I belong," compared to 75 percent of students at schools with average learning. (Figure 7) But as other research has noted, belonging takes more than just warm relationships with an individual teacher.[17]

At trajectory-changing schools, students trusted the school as a whole. In surveys, more than 8 in 10 students at trajectory-changing schools said they felt supported by their school and cared for by people at their school, compared to around 6 in 10 students at schools with average learning.

Students at trajectory-changing schools were also more likely to feel challenged by their teacher. More than 8 in 10 students said their teacher asks them to keep trying when they felt like giving up, compared to fewer than 7 in 10 in schools with average learning. Care and challenge go hand in hand.[18]

Figure 7

Student Agreement with Statements on Their School Experience



Individual Knowledge:

Every student is known well as an individual and a learner

At trajectory-changing schools, every student is known well by at least one adult. Teachers describe their students holistically: how they learn, what they need academically, and what their life is like outside of school. Principals know when individual students are behind academically and how the school provides support.

Knowing young people well also means knowing their families. Caregivers in trajectory-changing schools recall small, personal touches that made them and their children feel seen: a friendly call from a principal, a crossing guard greeting them by name, a counselor sending home a book when their dog died.

For young people to feel a sense of belonging, educators and caregivers must feel a sense of belonging as well. Ninety-one percent of caregivers at trajectory-changing schools agreed with the statement that "the school is welcoming to people like me," compared to 80 percent of caregivers at schools with average learning.

The expectation of knowing young people and their families well is woven into the fabric of trajectory-changing schools. It's set by leaders, modeled by teachers, and reinforced by school schedules and structures.

Leaders describe a relationship orientation as a mindset that they hire for and reinforce. In hiring, leaders at New Heights Academy Charter School look for evidence that candidates have an "intimate knowledge" of the neighborhood. Leaders at Center City PCS Brightwood look for teachers who learn students' names during demo lessons. "This really small moment says a lot of the work you're willing to do to build relationships," says former assistant principal Anna Kaplan.

But mindset is just the start. Relationships are constantly reinforced by school structures and practices. At New Heights Academy Charter School, each teacher contacts 10 caregivers a week—by text, email, or phone—and logs it in a teacher journal.

A fifth grader concentrates while working on a book report.

Teachers don't just call when something goes wrong. They also reach out to caregivers to talk about an A on a test, academic improvement, or great attendance.

Time for connection is explicitly built into school schedules, particularly in higher grades when students typically begin switching classes and have less time with a single teacher. Both South Sioux City Middle School and Center City PCS Brightwood use an advisory period to build personal relationships. It's a short and unscripted window each week for teachers to interact informally with more students.

C.E. Rose PreK–8 takes a different approach to building relationships with a self-contained model. Instead of rotating classes in middle school, students stay with a single teacher for all subjects, deepening their relationships with a primary teacher.

Schools also document and share what they learn about young people. At both JC Kelly Elementary and Trousdale County Elementary, teachers hand off folders of student information, on both academics and behavior, to the incoming teacher. At the end of every year, Center City PCS Brightwood teachers fill out a simple four-column spreadsheet with

information on each student: name, academic strength, area of growth, and something personal (like a love of soccer or a seating preference) to help the incoming teacher begin to build a relationship.

Individual Needs:

Educators work together to identify needs and provide personal support

To ensure every student feels accepted and respected, trajectory-changing schools proactively identify and address a full range of students' unique assets and needs. These could be intellectual (a learning or thinking difference), physical (medicine or glasses), or emotional (support with self-confidence), building a set of personal supports for each child. This information is discussed collectively and acted on consistently. A specialist isn't the only one thinking about how to support a student holistically; everyone is.

The focus on personal support for students is explicitly stated and modeled by leaders, and schools place students with the greatest needs at the center of their approach. In Center City PCS Brightwood, this priority is displayed prominently: "In 2023-24, we will prioritize high-quality, rigorous, and joyful learning at school, with a specific focus on exceptional learners," meaning multilingual learners, students with disabilities or learning and thinking differences, and gifted and talented students.

School structures reinforce this shared ownership. Brightwood restructured its data reviews and co-planning meetings by opening them with discussion of exceptional learners, which keeps them at the center of all conversations. Former assistant principal Anna Kaplan explains, "We flipped the questioning by starting with: How did our exceptional students perform? Usually at meetings, you cover the exceptional students at the very end. But if you start with exceptional learners, you'll find a way to support everyone else."

In Trousdale County Elementary, staff who provide core instruction and supplemental support for students—general education, special education, specialists for multilingual learners, and grade-level principals—work together. They meet every four weeks to review assessment data and align lesson plans for whole-class instruction and intervention. Teachers also meet during their planning periods on joint support for individual students. In most schools, core teachers and specialists work in silos. Trajectory-changing schools have structures in place for educators to align and plan instruction together for students receiving supplemental services.

"When we see the most growth is when I am able to collaborate with the [general education] teacher," says a Trousdale special education teacher. "It helps me know what to work on during pull-out and how to hold students accountable. Collaboration should be common sense."

> **"The data is alive and breathing, and student work is the fertile ground. I'm not assessment-driven; I'm driven by grade-level standards and what kids are learning."**
>
> **—Victoria Barajas, principal of Van Buskirk Elementary**

Individual Growth:

Educators focus on incremental growth for every student over time

Belonging is not separate from academics. Research shows that learning environments that emphasize belonging affirm each student's capacity to succeed by combining high expectations with the guidance and strategies needed to meet them.[19] They also normalize the use of academic support, reducing the shame and stigma of falling behind.[20]

At trajectory-changing schools, each student has a challenging and reasonable goal that puts them on track to reach grade level over time. Schools know that some students won't catch up in a single year—and that's OK. Instead, they break down the big goal into small chunks and celebrate progress with students, teachers, and caregivers. This focus on growth affirms students' capacity to succeed. Young people believe in their capacity to meet their goals because everyone around them believes it too.

As a teacher at JC Kelly Elementary explains, "Growth is our goal, and we tell students it's their goal too. For me, success is them reaching their own goals. If they improved, it was a successful year."

A focus on long-term growth doesn't erase the reality of annual testing. But while trajectory-changing schools are subject to the same annual accountability metrics as any other school, leaders don't shortcut instruction to prep for tests. They play a longer game: Every student will reach grade level over time.

For example, leaders at Van Buskirk Elementary believe that literacy is the key to unlocking learning in all subjects, so they focus their attention on a singular goal: Every student will read on or above grade level by middle school. Similarly, leaders at Trousdale County Elementary set a multiyear goal for all students to reach grade-level proficiency by the end of fifth grade.

To ensure students are on track for their long-term goals, schools use regular assessments linked to their primary growth goal (like weekly quizzes aligned to the state standards) and simple shared tools to capture and analyze data. The goal is not to prep for tests; the goal is to understand what students are learning.[21] Instead of waiting for year- or term-end assessments, they analyze student work and assessment results to monitor learning and tailor support for students in real time.

As Barajas, Van Buskirk's principal, explains: "The data is alive and breathing, and student work is the fertile ground. I'm not assessment-driven; I'm driven by grade-level standards and what kids are learning."

Data collection doesn't need to be complicated. Van Buskirk Elementary and Center City PCS Brightwood use tables in Word documents to review weekly quiz results. Trousdale County Elementary uses a basic data spreadsheet in Excel. JC Kelly Elementary has a "data room" with student learning profiles and recent results on the wall. Regardless of the format, what matters is that data is broken down by student and used consistently.

Clear data keeps the focus on individual students who need support. In data conversations, educators plan for student growth in both the short and long term. They don't just think about student performance in a single year; they work across teams to identify knowledge gaps and close them over time.

In Center City PCS Brightwood, middle school math teachers work together to ensure that kids master core concepts each year and leave prepared for algebra in high school. They know exactly what has been covered in previous grades and collaborate to fill gaps. This helps teachers stick to grade-level work in class, with support for students who need it, rather than spending time on review.

At New Heights Academy Charter School (grades 5–12), educators view all eight years with the students as a runway to get them on grade level. They have "data on top of data" and they can fill holes over time. As high school principal Fred Givens puts it: "Do you judge the team at halftime or when the game is over? Middle school performance is a little lower right now, but we have them for four more years."

Explore The Opportunity Makers Toolkit

Action Guide for Educators: Belonging

Center City Public Charter Schools, Brightwood

PK3–8 ▪ WASHINGTON, D.C.

In morning advisory at Center City Public Charter Schools (PCS) Brightwood, a middle school math teacher is eating breakfast in the auditorium with nine students from grades 5–8. He's talking sports with students on the left while helping students on the right finish their math homework. After breakfast, a teacher leads all middle school students in a spirited competition to build paper towers. The math teacher's advisory group ekes out a win and celebrates with high fives and good-natured trash talk.

This exercise is more than just fun; it's an intentional way to build relationships. Relationships are the foundation of the Brightwood campus, a small community school that serves a D.C. neighborhood with a vibrant immigrant population. Brightwood's motto—"All our kids are all our kids"—is referenced constantly. It means that every staff member strives to know the name of every student and to be collectively responsible for both their academics and well-being.

Relationships have always been important, but the school made the norm more explicit in 2016 after mapping their school safety net with the CityBridge Foundation. During a staff meeting, they wrote all 250-plus student names on chart paper. Teachers put check marks by each child they felt like they had a genuine relationship with and then brainstormed ways to reach the students without advocates.

Rather than just relying on individual teachers to take initiative, teachers and leaders proposed creative school programs and structures to reinforce the norm of knowing kids well. "We tried a million different things. We start small, bias toward action, and scale up what works," says principal Micah Westerman.

They shifted from grade-level homerooms to smaller-group, mixed-grade middle school advisories to encourage relationships across grade bands. They added a weekly assembly, with games like building the paper towers. They created a "Brightwood Families" program, where teachers have 10 students from different grades assigned to their "family," and they do collaborative service projects and fun activities together several times a year.

Collective knowledge of students is also baked into the school academic schedule. Middle school teachers are in and out of each other's classrooms frequently, particularly in the first six weeks of school, a practice they call "swarming." Swarming encourages all teachers—both core content teachers and support staff—to visit other classrooms during planning time and work with students. After the first six weeks, teachers have a defined schedule for visiting classrooms in other grades or subjects to provide support. This deepens collaboration and helps teachers build a 360-degree view of students.

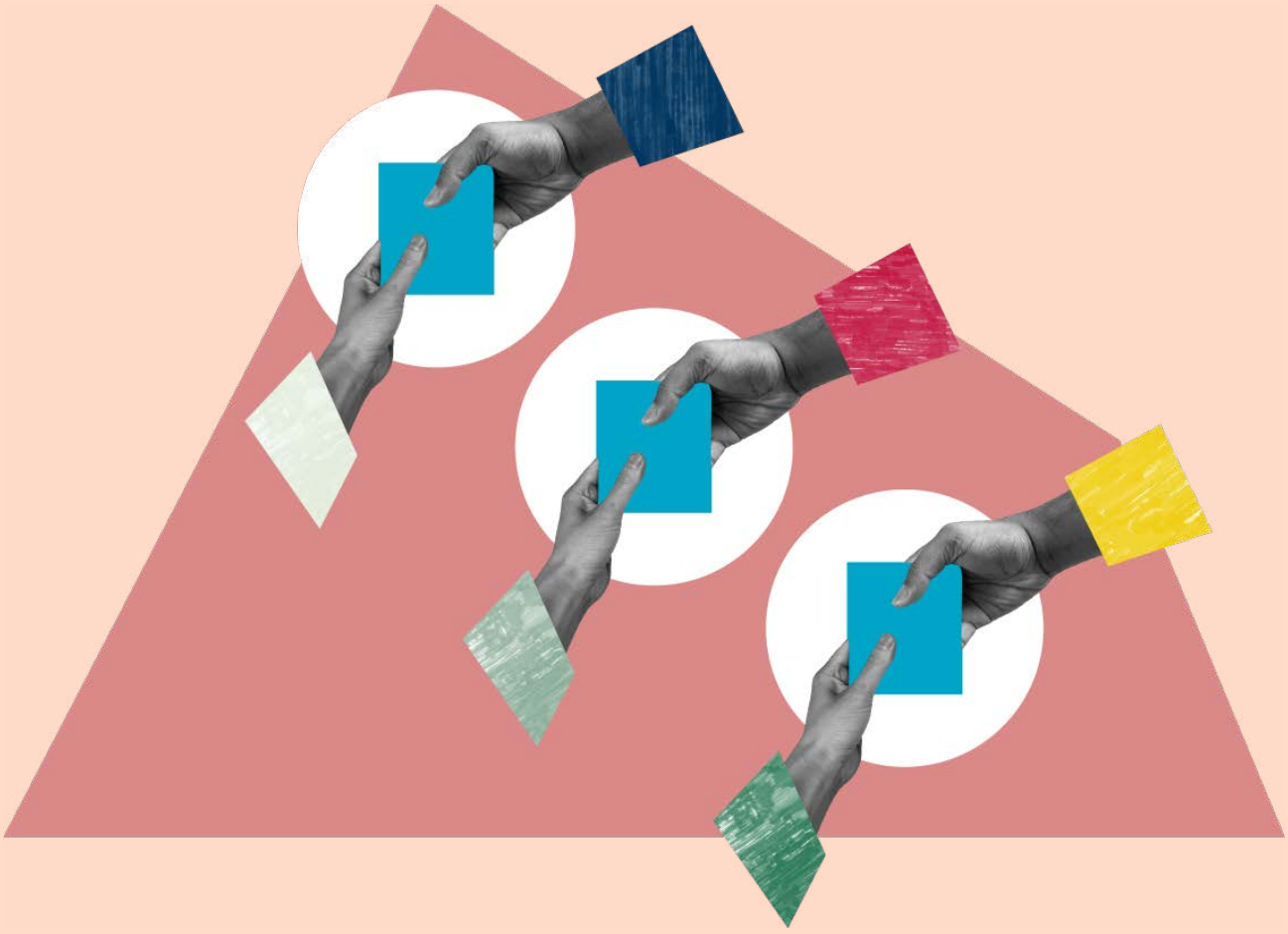
When the structures are set up to reinforce knowing kids, schools don't need to script the actions. There is no checklist for knowing young people well. Instead, Brightwood is intentional about hiring teachers with the right mindset, using scenario questions to understand how candidates interact with students. Then they set clear norms and create an environment that fosters daily opportunities to build relationships.

As one middle school teacher explains, "We say, 'All our kids are all our kids,' and we really mean that. We've made some good hires who are able to model it. People are just doing it, and if we see someone doing it in a way that's inauthentic, we can call each other on it. We believe it and live it out."

Consistency

Schools Stack Good Days for Students

Trajectory-changing schools raise the bar with consistently good teaching and grade-level content.



At C.E. Rose PreK–8, fourth graders Eduardo and Sara are practicing persuasive writing. They're hunched over their notebooks, drafting a five-paragraph essay in response to their favorite text from the learning unit. In the story, a guinea pig tricks a fox into believing the sky is falling.

Together, they workshop their essay's opening hook: "The sky is falling! The sky is falling! Have you ever heard that the sky is falling?" They agree that this hook will make the reader want to know more, particularly from the drama added by the exclamation points and question mark.

Then they discuss what to include in the introductory paragraph and a thesis statement. They focus on the entertaining characters, the way the story makes them laugh, and the funny words it contains, like "alfalfa." Sara proposes an intro: "This story is funny because..." Eduardo replies: "I've got a better one: 'It makes us laugh because...'" Sara responds that they "can't just keep writing over and over that it's funny. It's funny because of how the characters behave."

They work independently as the teacher circulates, building off each other's ideas and referencing their notes from the previous day's work in their "data notebook," a practice designed to build students' ownership over their own learning. Eduardo asks Sara to check his spelling of a word. Sara writes the word two different ways in her notebook, and they find the answer together.

The lesson itself is not particularly special, but the way Eduardo and Sara are engaging with it is. Eduardo is a multilingual learner who is still "minimally proficient" on state reading tests. Sara is a more advanced reader than Eduardo, but they're both digging into the same grade-level text, and they're supporting each other as they work. They're comfortable with classroom routines and confident in finding answers on their own.

That confidence is built through consistent content and practice, day after day, and week after week. Eduardo says that writing lessons are his favorite and that he enjoys the daily practice. "Our teacher has us do it every day, and I like that," he says.

"Each lesson each day matters."

–Eduardo, fourth-grade student at C.E. Rose PreK–8

Consistency

Collaboration, Shared Expectations, and Dependably Good Lessons

Eduardo and Sara are engaging independently with a solid, grade-level lesson, using routines they know well. They are on task, leading the thinking and enjoying the work. Eduardo and Sara get lessons of similar quality all day long—some are excellent, but all are consistently good. This steady consistency is what sets trajectory-changing schools apart.

Let's imagine what Eduardo's experience might look like in two different scenarios:

	Inconsistent	Consistent
Content	**Students who are behind spend their time on remedial work.** *Eduardo does a fill-in-the-blank worksheet while Sara reads a grade-level text and writes an essay. He doesn't get to practice persuasive writing.*	**All students do grade-level work with different support.** *Eduardo reads the same text as Sara. He previewed the text in a small group the day before and takes notes on each paragraph in his data notebook as he rereads.*
Collaboration	**Teachers work independently and plan lessons in isolation.** *Eduardo's teacher knows he needs more support but is unsure how to help. She searches for resources online.*	**Teachers work in structured teams to improve instruction.** *Eduardo's teacher shares his essay with other teachers in her weekly team meeting. Together, they identify a new way to support Eduardo in the upcoming lesson sequence.*
Reinforcement	**Leader feedback is unfocused.** *The principal periodically pops in without context. She gives Eduardo's teacher a dozen improvement areas.*	**Leaders focus on foundational practices in all classrooms.** *The principal reads the team meeting notes. In her weekly walk-through, she checks Eduardo's work and gives his teacher one clear tip.*

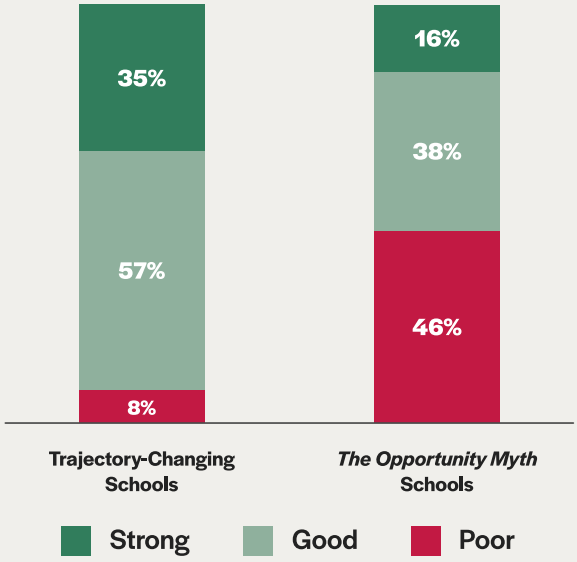
To understand the student experience of consistency, we observed nearly 500 lessons in trajectory-changing schools, rating them on more than 20 indicators, including a culture of learning, grade-level content, and student ownership. A "good" lesson hits most of the criteria most of the time; a "strong" one covers every element.

We found that the average lesson across all seven schools was rated strong in 35 percent of classrooms. By contrast, the average lesson we observed in a typical public school in *The Opportunity Myth* was rated strong in just 16 percent of classrooms. (Figure 8) Students in trajectory-changing schools receive strong instruction twice as often as students in a typical school.

Figure 8

Trajectory-changing schools raise the bar for instruction.

Quality of Average Lesson in Observed Classrooms



But isolated pockets of excellence don't accelerate student learning at scale, as other research has noted.[22] It's the steady accumulation of good lessons that sets trajectory-changing schools apart. Across all seven schools, the average lesson was good or strong in 9 out of 10 classrooms, and very few lessons were poor. In a typical school, the average lesson was good or strong in just 5 out of 10 classrooms—and poor nearly half the time, often because teachers don't have the clarity and support they need to be successful.

If we picked a student at random in a typical school, that student would have a 1 in 2 chance of having a good lesson on any given day. But in trajectory-changing schools, we could pick a student in any class, on any day, and almost always land a good lesson. Moving the average lesson from poor to good makes a big difference, and delivering consistently good lessons is an eminently reachable goal.

Consistent Content:

All students do the same grade-level work with different supports

The Opportunity Myth found that students had the opportunity to meet grade-level standards on their assignments just 17 percent of the time. Teachers often lower the rigor of assignments for students who are behind. A student struggling with third-grade math may get a second-grade practice assignment, a trend exacerbated by attempts to respond to learning loss related to the pandemic. But when students spend most of their time on assignments below grade level, it's nearly impossible for them to make up lost ground.

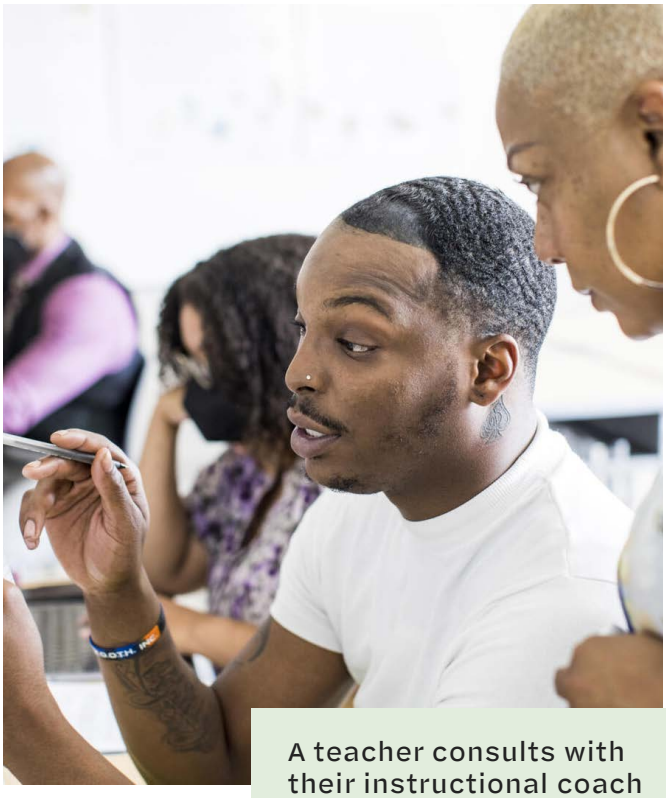
At trajectory-changing schools, all students consistently get grade-level content, regardless of their learning level. In nearly 8 out of 10 observed lessons (85 percent in math and 69 percent in reading), tasks were aligned to grade-level standards.[23] In 9 out of 10 lessons, all students were expected to complete the same assignment. This, above all else, is what all "good" lessons have in common: Every student has the same opportunity to do grade-level work, and some students get more support to access the content.

That additional support responds to the strengths and needs of each student, not just their scores. In the writing lesson, Eduardo needs extra peer support and teacher prompts to finish his essay, but he's held to the same bar as Sara, who needs less.

The expectation is that all students can achieve the academic standards for their grade level, with appropriate support, and they deserve to have that chance.

The Opportunity Myth documented the power of high expectations. In trajectory-changing schools, high expectations aren't left to individual teachers; they're embedded in the school culture. In South Sioux City Middle School, former assistant principal Lora Crowe says the focus starts with the district curriculum director: "She says over and over that 'all students can learn.' We pass this on to our staff." This expectation is woven into professional learning communities, teacher evaluations, and goals for students.

One of the most powerful ways that schools achieve these expectations is by using a shared curriculum for math and reading. Just using the same curriculum across the school improves consistency, because no matter what teacher they have, students will get a version of the same lesson, anchored in the same standards.



A teacher consults with their instructional coach during a planning session.

Overall, teachers at trajectory-changing schools are far more likely to use the shared curriculum adopted by their school as their starting point for lesson planning. In surveys, two-thirds of teachers at trajectory-changing schools said they mostly used the adopted curriculum, rather than materials they found or created. By contrast, only about one-third of elementary school teachers and one-fifth of middle school teachers nationwide say they mostly use their school's adopted curriculum without making major changes.[24]

High-quality instructional materials (HQIM) take consistency to the next level. For example, in Trousdale County Elementary, which uses a high-quality curriculum in both math and reading, 80 percent of teachers said they mostly use the adopted curriculum—and their lessons were rated "strong" at nearly twice the rate of most of the other studied schools.

Consistent Collaboration:

Teachers work in structured teams to improve instruction

Many schools have professional learning communities (PLCs), but they vary widely in use and effectiveness. They tend to be unstructured and are often focused on administration (like planning for an upcoming test or field trip) rather than on instruction.

Trajectory-changing schools, on the other hand, use the time to improve instruction. PLC meetings are the primary catalyst for frequent cycles of improvement centered on a core practice or area of focus. Teachers come together to analyze student data and work samples, decide how to address individual student needs, and apply strategies in class the next day. Then, teachers bring new student data and work samples to the next PLC meeting, and the cycle begins again. It's one continuous, schoolwide loop.

Through these structured conversations, instructional leaders reinforce shared school expectations and identify variations in teacher or student performance. Instructional leaders may not be able to join every PLC meeting, but they prioritize the ones that need more support on data analysis or focused reflection. Instead of using elaborate agendas, instructional

leaders ask a few simple questions, focused on individual student learning, to guide the PLC discussion and build consistent habits.

Consistency across classrooms is an explicit goal. A sixth-grade teacher at South Sioux City Middle School who leads her PLC says, "The goal is to be able to have set standards, so we know what we are focused on, and we are consistent across the classrooms. Consistency is important to me."

At C.E. Rose PreK–8 and South Sioux City Middle School, instructional leaders ask their own versions of four questions that echo a popular PLC framework:[25] "What do we want our students to learn? How will we know if each student has learned it? How will we respond when some students do not learn it? How will we extend learning for students who are proficient?"

At New Heights Academy Charter School, educators walk through data ("Are individual students on level, above, or below?"), feedback ("What am I taking away from this information?"), and strategy ("Here are the strategies I'm going to try"). Each week, every teacher analyzes a student assessment, shares a report answering these three questions in their department meeting, and gets focused input from their colleagues.

The guiding questions vary, but they all prompt data-driven reflection focused on individual students. As Chris Erickson, assistant principal at South Sioux City Middle School, says, "Our PLC process is not perfect—we've been through all the protocols over the years—but just having a conversation about what is and is not working in class is important. It helps teachers put a product in front of students that is coming from more than one person."

At the end of each meeting, all teachers commit to concrete actions for individual students, rather than for groups. At other schools, teachers might reteach a lesson to the entire class or send kids with the bottom 20 percent of scores to intervention. In trajectory-changing schools, actions are more targeted. Teachers may reteach just students who missed a particular problem or regroup students each day based on the previous day's exit ticket (a short, informal assessment at the end of class). They also take steps to support students holistically, like checking on a student's absences or meeting with a student's interventionist.

Nikolas Weiss works with a seventh-grade student.

At Trousdale County Elementary, teachers document the next steps for individual students each week in the shared data spreadsheet for collective accountability. "We are very intentional about making sure that everyone knows what to do for each student," says principal Demetrice Badru. "If we don't say what we're doing, we do nothing. If we don't corral the information, it can get away from us quickly."

Consistent Reinforcement:

Instructional leaders maintain a simple, shared focus

Trajectory-changing schools ensure that each classroom is meeting baseline school expectations. Leaders intentionally home in on a few core practices and monitor them consistently.

JC Kelly Elementary shares a checklist of non-negotiables to ensure all teachers have core practices in place. It includes lesson plans, classroom setup, student-generated class rules, bilingual resources,

and student data charts. The school's principal, Dora Proa, explains, "This year we have new teachers, and we needed to simplify and focus. We needed a model to guide everyone first before we could work on improvement."

New Heights Academy Charter School orients new teachers to a four-step instructional framework, which anchors all lesson planning, training, coaching, and feedback. Executive director Christina Brown explains, "It's the way we do the work, and we use it in every classroom, every lesson, every day. It simplifies things for teachers. You can focus on using this approach, and everyone knows what we expect to see."

This focus is reinforced by consistent routines and accountability measures. Some leaders collect lesson plans at the same time each week and skim them for quality. Some coaches ask the same questions in every debrief conversation. No matter the specific approach, educators create habits and perform them consistently, week after week.

As Van Buskirk Elementary's principal, Victoria Barajas, explains, "It's important to keep things simple because it's easy to get distracted. Once all the grade-level teams are using the same routines, teachers are watching everyone else do the same things, and more experienced teachers can help their peers."

"It's important to keep things simple because it's easy to get distracted. Once all the grade-level teams are using the same routines, teachers are watching everyone else do the same things, and more experienced teachers can help their peers."

—Victoria Barajas, principal of Van Buskirk Elementary

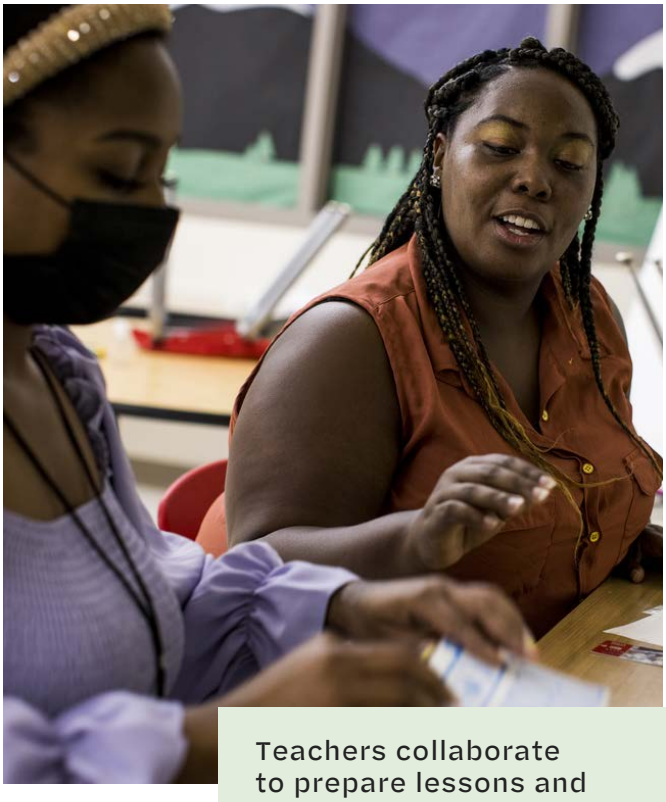
Schools use regular classroom walk-throughs to monitor implementation. As Trousdale principal Badru puts it, "You can't expect what you don't inspect." With clear standards for instruction, leaders quickly spot where a teacher might need extra support and use shared reference points to bring practices up to baseline. Feedback is typically focused and relevant because everyone is having the same conversations.

In Van Buskirk Elementary, Barajas reads all the PLC notes each week, knows what learning standard(s) should be addressed, and can quickly spot when a lesson is not rigorous enough. For example, she observed a third-grade class learning how to tell time and saw that students spent too long coloring clocks instead of working on the standard. The teacher knew how to challenge students but didn't always do it consistently. "I addressed it by looking at her planning. I talked to her about rigor and the basics students need to master in third grade," Barajas says.

In New Heights Academy Charter School, principals and instructional coaches meet weekly to review student data, which sets up the conversations that will happen in the classrooms. Every teacher meets with a coach twice a week, once individually and once as a content team, and then debriefs with their peers in their PLC meeting. Brown says, "It's very clear what teachers should be experiencing with the coach. The cyclical process for coaching provides transparency for the community."

A fifth-grade teacher at the school agrees and says that the amount of feedback she gets sets her school apart: "There's always someone coming in and out of the room, both coaches and administrators. They always have to give 'glows' and 'grows,' and it builds my confidence that I'm doing my job well."

These simple expectations and foundational habits help minimize the variation between classrooms. In trajectory-changing schools, nearly every teacher—95 percent—agreed that "the instructional practices I use in my classroom are aligned to our shared vision of student success."



Teachers collaborate to prepare lessons and maximize instructional time.

Explore The Opportunity Makers Toolkit

Action Guide for Educators: Consistency

Building Teams That Create Trajectory-Changing Results

We found that trajectory-changing schools tend to select and support teachers differently. Leaders hire staff for their mindset and openness to coaching, rather than for specific skills or experience. If teachers are open to learning, the school can help them grow. Leaders look for teachers who will adopt the school's expectations and work as a team rather than operate alone.

Former New Heights Middle School principal Rinaldo Murray explains, "We look for the 'Three Cs': culture fit, care about this particular community, and openness to coaching, no matter if you've been teaching for two years or 20. Not everyone will thrive in this space, and we want to pick folks who will be successful."

In the schools we studied, staff experience and demographics varied significantly. In some schools, fully a third of teachers had more than 10 years of experience; in others, only a single teacher did. In some schools, the staff was predominantly Latinx, just like the students. At another, the student body was predominantly Black and Latinx, and the staff was predominantly white.

All the schools faced challenges hiring and retaining great staff, especially after the disruptions of COVID. School leaders in New York and D.C. had vastly different talent pools than leaders in small towns in Texas and Nebraska. In rural schools, most staff came from the local community. In other areas, staff came from more varied backgrounds. However, all schools prioritized hires with a strong connection to the community and to their students.

Van Buskirk Elementary School

PK–5 ▪ Tucson, AZ

When you ask students to describe Van Buskirk Elementary School, they use words like "joyful" and "fun," and they say time in class "just goes by so fast." They talk enthusiastically about their favorite lessons (like dissecting owl pellets in science) and topics they find hard ('Learning angles haunts me'). But there's one thing they almost never talk about: test scores.

Historically, Van Buskirk students entered third grade two years behind in math and reading, doing work at a first-grade level—the largest learning gap of our studied schools. Van Buskirk is fiercely focused on helping every single student catch up. Yet the school is not squeezing out art and science or teaching to the test. A focus on academic growth can coexist with curiosity and joy.

To accelerate learning, Van Buskirk prioritizes consistent collaboration through PLCs. Victoria Barajas, Van Buskirk's principal, is passionate about the power of teams. "You're not off running your own school," she says. "Once you build a strong team mentality, teachers can hold each other up."

Each grade-level team meets weekly. They discuss the previous week's formative assessment, which is a short, teacher-designed quiz that's aligned to the curriculum and grade-level content covered that week. Teachers review work samples to ensure that students are not only choosing the right answer but also using the right strategies to arrive at that answer. Their goal is to answer a single question: What learning gaps do we see in the data, and how do we improve instruction to close them?

Then they analyze individual student performance, which Barajas describes as the "core of what we do." Teachers plot students' quiz results on a simple data chart in Microsoft Word, writing student names in one of five categories, from "highly proficient" to "far below." They review progress from week to week, discussing individual student growth and needs.

The conversation typically focuses on students who are not showing progress on grade-level content. Students who are below grade level are the first priority; those who are proficient but not demonstrating adequate growth are second. Teachers dig into what's standing in their way, drawing on their shared knowledge base of individual students and their learning needs.

In a typical PLC meeting, for example, teachers notice that for the third straight week, one student is in the "far below" category. His teacher notes that he has been repeatedly absent and missed a foundational lesson sequence. She plans to include him in a small-group reteach and to work with him one-on-one during independent practice time. The instructional coach sitting in on the PLC notes his absences.

Teachers discuss five more students in depth and identify individual actions to support them. At the end of the meeting, all teachers commit to one instructional adjustment to support all students in their class, as well as several specific actions to accelerate learning for those students who need the most help. The coach adds those action steps to her calendar and will look for them during the upcoming week's walk-through. She also stops by the front office to ask the staff to look for the frequently absent student during drop-off, to celebrate him and his caregivers when he arrives on time, and to let her know if he's absent.

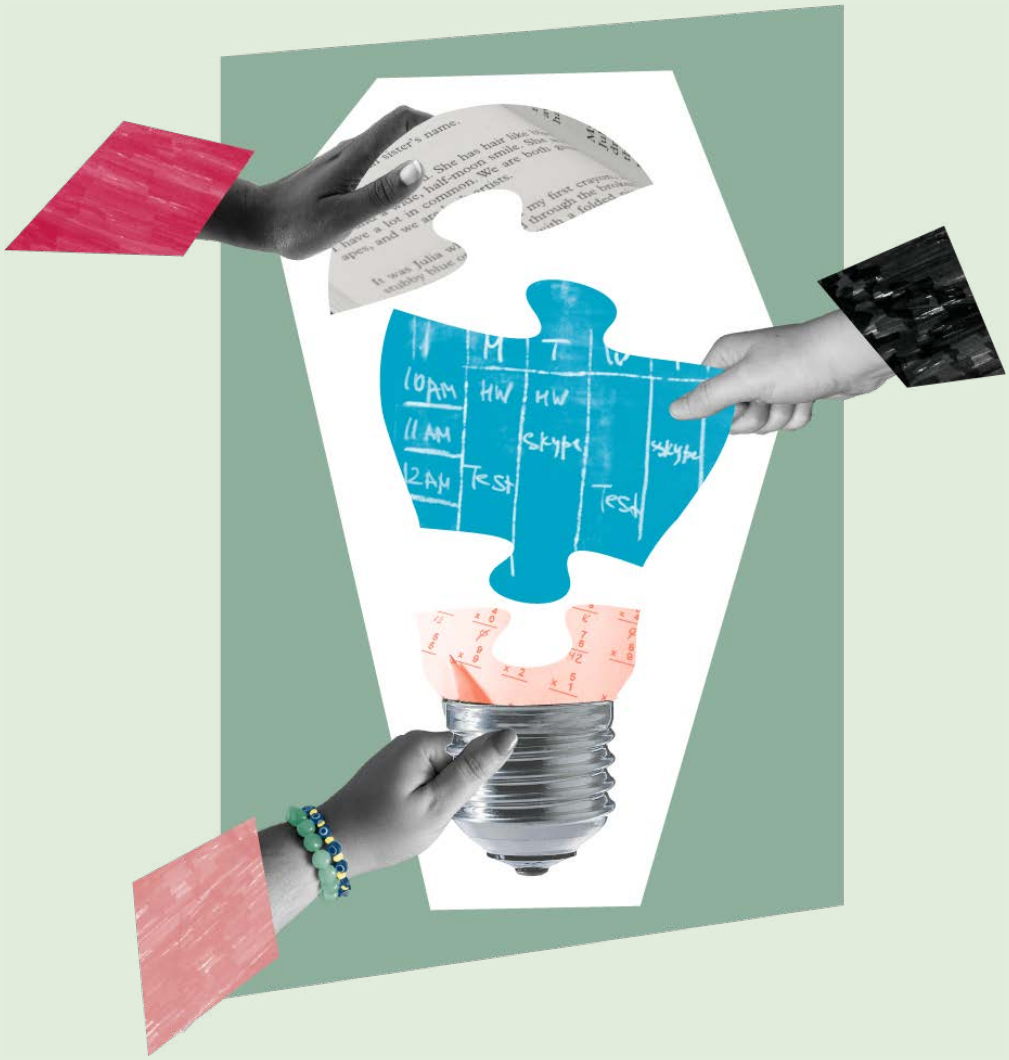
Van Buskirk staff deeply understand the needs of individual students and ensure that each one is on track to meet their goals. Over time it adds up: Lessons improve, students get the consistent instruction they need, and learning accelerates. For a decade, Van Buskirk students have gained a remarkable 1.7 years of learning each year.

"When a student is struggling, we find out why," says Barajas. "What it really comes down to is student growth. That's what matters most."

Coherence

Schools Ensure All Efforts Fit Together

Trajectory-changing schools build a unified instructional program and set priorities that are clear to all.



In a fifth-grade math class at Trousdale County Elementary, Ethan and his classmates are learning to graph points on a coordinate plane, part of the school's high-quality math curriculum.

Today, they're graphing the pounds of tomatoes produced per week. When the teacher asks the class if anyone has grown tomatoes before, Ethan volunteers that "tomatoes can take a very long time to grow."

Ethan is an amiable, chatty kid who's excited about math, even though it's not always easy for him. He is pulled out for intervention three days a week, where he practices the same rigorous content from class in smaller chunks, both with his tutor and using an aligned online math program.

"A lot of times you see something [in intervention] before you learn it in class, and then it helps you understand the lesson," Ethan explains.

This tightly linked practice helps Ethan engage with the work in math class, even when it's hard. In the tomato lesson, Ethan raises his hand to share his answer but gets stuck. His teacher encourages him to "phone a friend" for help, and the two students arrive at the solution together.

"I'm not worried about asking for help," Ethan says. He enthusiastically describes all the strategies he uses when he gets stuck: referencing anchor charts in the classroom, working in small groups, or asking his teachers or tutor for help. "Sometimes you just need help in a different way," he says.

> **"Sometimes you just need help in a different way."**
>
> **–Ethan, fifth-grade student at Trousdale County Elementary**

Every part of Ethan's experience with math—from his core math class to intervention to the problem-solving approaches—is reinforcing his ability to engage with challenging content. Even though he needs extra support, Ethan considers himself "a math person."

"Our teacher doesn't give us the answer. She makes us think about it," Ethan says. "She shows us where we are on the right track, and pretty soon we can do it by ourselves. Successful means you go from being bad at something to working harder and then you get really good at it."

Coherence

All the Pieces Connect

All parts of Ethan's day fit together like interlocking puzzle pieces. Everything he learns in one class helps him with the next. Ethan's experiences are logical, predictable, and unified. This is the student experience of instructional coherence: Every element of an instructional program works in concert to advance the same grade-level expectations, and teachers make those connections clear to students.

Research shows that instructional coherence in a school helps students learn, while incoherence creates confusion and saps students' confidence. According to Newmann et al. (2001), "Students are more likely to engage in the difficult work of learning when experiences within classes, among classes, and over time are connected to one another. When faced with incoherent activities, students are more likely to feel that they are targets of apparently random events and that they have less knowledge of what should be done to succeed."[26]

Incoherence isn't intentional; it's often the result of people with good intentions trying to do too many things. Siloed district and state teams launch overlapping initiatives. Budget items are earmarked for specific uses. School leaders try to prioritize within real constraints. But the costs of incoherence are real. At the school, staff time is scattered among competing initiatives, and students struggle to keep up with different content and expectations in each class.

A teacher captivates first grade students.

Let's imagine what Ethan's experience might look like in two different scenarios:

	Incoherent	Coherent
In Class	**Schools teach different content for classwork and interventions.** *Ethan's math class, intervention block, and online program all teach and assess fractions differently, creating confusion. In intervention, he mostly reviews remedial content that's unrelated to the current lesson in class.*	**Students start with Tier 1 content in both classwork and interventions.** *Ethan learns and practices fractions in the same way in class, in intervention, and online, which helps him connect the content. In intervention, he reviews past concepts that prepare him for the current, grade-level lesson in class.*
At School	**Teacher time is scattered among competing priorities.** *Ethan's teacher juggles data from three unrelated math tests. She doesn't know how to identify what Ethan needs most.*	**Leaders clear space for teachers to focus.** *With her principal, Ethan's teacher reviews a single set of data that is connected to core instruction. They pinpoint specific support for Ethan and materials to use.*
At Home	**Caregivers don't always know how their students are performing.** *Ethan's mom gets state test results every six months but is not sure how to read them or how to help with his homework.*	**Caregivers know where students stand and how to help.** *Ethan's mom gets weekly updates from his teacher about his progress on fractions and simple practice exercises to do at home.*

Coherence in Class:

Students start with Tier 1 content in both classwork and interventions

Many schools use intervention time to focus on remediation, the traditional approach of reteaching all the content students missed. Schools often use supplemental materials and assessment programs in targeted, small-group interventions (known as Tier 2) that only tangentially connect to what's being taught in whole-class instruction (known as Tier 1). Assessments often measure different things in intervention and in class, making it difficult to connect student support. As a result, the students who receive the most support typically have the most disjointed experiences at school.

Trajectory-changing schools give every student access to grade-level content in every class, regardless of their learning level. For students who need extra support, intervention is geared toward learning acceleration: starting with the current

grade's content and providing "just-in-time" support when necessary. At times they may reference older content if they need to, but it's not the primary starting place.

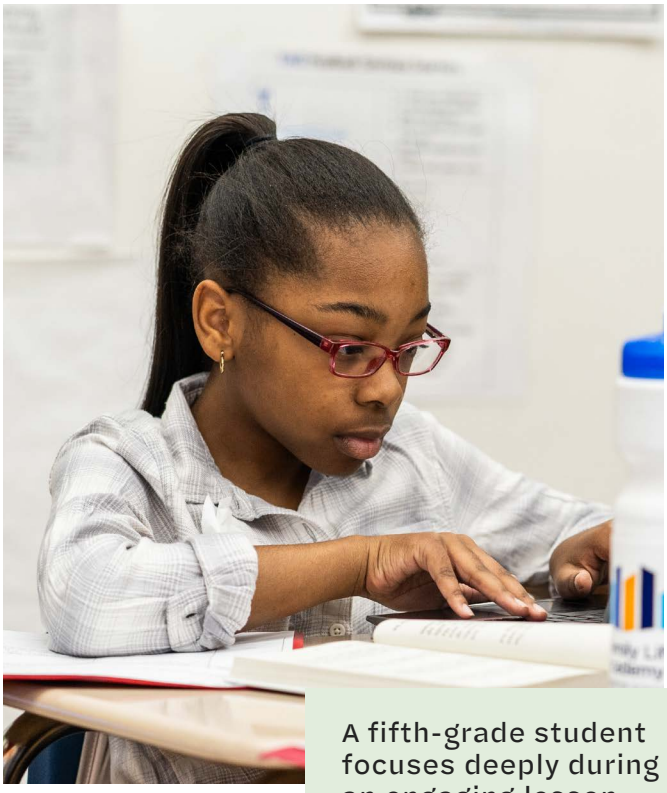
Trajectory-changing schools that are strongest in coherence use the same materials and curriculum for both Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction, giving students more repetition with challenging material. In addition, schools plan Tier 1 and 2 instruction together, rather than as independent blocks.

Students may preview an idea in intervention before they see it in class, which equips them to engage with challenging content in a larger group setting. Students know exactly what to expect, and even the youngest students can explain how each lesson builds on the next. Better yet, students who have often experienced feeling behind in their lessons get a chance to feel ahead of the pack, building confidence and reinforcing their sense of mastery over challenging material.

At New Heights Academy Charter Middle School, students are identified for intervention and grouped by ability based on data from class or their online math curriculum. Regardless of students' learning level, intervention lessons start with the prerequisites for the skill that will be taught in the core class. If the whole class is learning fractions, students will practice understanding fractions in their intervention block.

At Trousdale County Elementary, students who are behind in math attend a small-group intervention two to three times a week, where they work directly with Tier 1 materials. Instead of just reviewing past content, they preview math concepts coming up in class, work through misconceptions, and practice their online math curriculum aligned with upcoming lessons.

Trousdale County summer school follows the same acceleration approach: Students who need extra support preview the most critical content and skills for the upcoming grade level. "It doesn't feel like they're behind; it feels like they're getting the code," says Trousdale superintendent Clint Satterfield.



A fifth-grade student focuses deeply during an engaging lesson.

Leaders constantly stress the link between the two. "The superintendent has been in my ear about coherence and that what we are doing in intervention should align with what we are doing in the classroom," says Trousdale's principal, Demetrice Badru. "When I am meeting teachers, I will pull up the data, pinpoint a student with a gap, and ask what we are doing for that student in Tier 1 and in intervention."

Coherence at School:

Leaders clear space for teachers to focus

Once they have a coherent instructional program in place, trajectory-changing schools focus on implementing it well. Everyone in the school community understands what they're working toward and the role they play. In his book *Coherence*, Michael Fullan describes this as "focused direction to build collective purpose."[27] Coherence comes to life in the way school leaders articulate and reinforce their focused direction and remove obstacles that get in the way.

For example, Center City PCS Brightwood set just two schoolwide goals for the 2023–24 school year: high-quality, rigorous, and joyful learning for all students, with a specific focus on exceptional learners, and holding high expectations for adults to do what's best for kids. "You can only hold so many priorities in your head," says former assistant principal Anna Kaplan. "We really tried to stick to two."

"At a lot of schools, teachers do things to check boxes. We try not to ask teachers to do things unless there's intention behind it."

—Micah Westerman, principal of Center City PCS Brightwood

Based on the requirements of Brightwood's school system, all teachers must evaluate their practice against a shared teaching rubric and set goals for improvement. This could easily become a time-consuming compliance exercise. Instead, leaders use goal setting to support the school's main priorities. Leaders and teachers collaboratively set one or two narrow goals with concrete actions to take, so educators always know where to focus. A teacher might focus on using more complex questions. An interventionist might focus on increasing the frequency of family communications. Their actions are different, but both advance the school's focused direction.

"At a lot of schools, teachers do things to check boxes," explains Brightwood's principal, Micah Westerman. "We try not to ask teachers to do things unless there's intention behind it. The organization requires self-evaluations and goals, so we've made it a worthwhile part of our time and something that's important to teachers."

Leaders also look for ways to do less. Brightwood leaders deprioritized individual check-ins with teachers to make room for things like productive data meetings and co-planning. "We maximize the time we have together to ensure that it's purposeful and aligned to what is best for kids," says Westerman.

At Van Buskirk Elementary, the focus for the 2023–24 school year was pandemic recovery and consistent grade-level lessons using a certain instructional approach, executed through quality lesson plans in PLCs. Teachers knew exactly what was expected, how to deliver it, and how they'd be held accountable. "My communication is consistent: This year, our focus is on the lesson plans. They should be in by 3 p.m. each Friday, and I follow up at 3:30," explains the school's principal, Victoria Barajas.

On her end, Barajas put resources behind the effort and removed obstacles. She found ways to use pandemic funding and a state stipend to pay teachers for extra planning time during the school year and over the summer. She pushed back on district initiatives, like a new training, that would have added work to teachers' plates. "I said, 'No. We have to get back to normal first.'"

It's not always possible to pick and choose from district initiatives, but Barajas has a good working relationship with district leadership, and together they discuss what makes sense for the school. "I push what the district is going to do if it aligns with our goals," she explains. "But if it adds too much, I shield my teachers from it."

In an ideal world, district and state requirements would help schools focus rather than piling on more responsibilities on. But even in an imperfect environment, school leaders work within their locus of control to keep all actions intentional.

Coherence at Home:

Caregivers know where students stand and how to help

In trajectory-changing schools, caregivers are an indispensable part of the school community. Educators, students, and caregivers make explicit agreements on how all parties can work together to support student learning. Caregivers have

clear expectations for their school, like keeping their kids safe, knowing them well, and making sure they are on grade level. In return, they agree to get their children to school on time, check backpacks and grades, and help with homework.

At JC Kelly Elementary, school leaders walk the neighborhoods to talk with families about what they expect of the school. They ask caregivers to sign a code of conduct and tell them what the school expects of students and families. They are realistic about what busy families can do. A mother at JC Kelly Elementary says: "At other schools, there was judgment. I work and I couldn't attend all the meetings, and it made me look bad. Not here. Here they understand that I can't."

Schools make it easy for caregivers to support their students' learning in the most meaningful ways. They share easy-to-read updates on students' academic progress, including students' performance relative to grade-level expectations, and offer learning strategies (like shared reading at home) to help students reach their individual growth goals. Caregivers have an objective, accurate understanding of where their students stand—and how they can help.

Schools use caregiver conferences to raise concerns and invest caregivers in the response. Van Buskirk Elementary explicitly prioritizes caregiver-teacher conferences for students' urgent academic, behavioral, or social-emotional needs. This includes students who are below grade level or not making progress (considered "urgent") or both ("double urgent.") Students receiving intensive interventions (Tier 3) get caregiver-teacher conferences at least twice a year, directing teacher time where it's needed most.

At both Center City PCS Brightwood and C.E. Rose PreK–8, students lead the caregiver-teacher conferences. At Brightwood, students in grades 5–8 lead 30-minute conferences three times a year with their family and teacher. Students share recent work, the group reviews grades and behavior, and families can ask their student questions about their work and school experience.

Schools are affirming but clear when students are behind. At Van Buskirk's conferences, teachers and caregivers look at student data (like scores on weekly quizzes) and walk through examples of student work, along with samples of grade-level work for easy comparison. Then they set a concrete action plan to help the students catch up, including accessible activities caregivers can do with students at home.

Caregivers appreciate knowing exactly what's going on with their child and how they can help. A mother at Van Buskirk Elementary says, "It was brought to our attention at our parent-teacher conference that my third grader was struggling in reading. The teacher explained where he is now and where we need him to be. She made it easy for us to use the resources and advised us to make it a fun game."

A fourth-grade teacher works one-on-one with a student.

Explore The Opportunity Makers Toolkit

Action Guide for Educators: Coherence

Trousdale County Elementary School

PK–5 ▪ Hartsville, Tennessee

Trousdale County Elementary is the only elementary school serving Hartsville, Tennessee, a rural community about an hour from Nashville. Both the school's superintendent, Clint Satterfield, and principal, Demetrice Badru, grew up in Hartsville. Badru's mother was one of the first Black children to attend the school during integration.

In 2008, when the local high school ended up on the No Child Left Behind "needs improvement" list for its graduation rate, the district hired Satterfield to turn things around. His diagnosis: low expectations. Students were receiving A's and advancing without mastering grade-level material.

Satterfield and Badru decided to focus on standards and adopt a high-quality curriculum to raise the bar. High-quality instructional materials (HQIM) ensure students receive access to grade-level content, tasks, and assignments, allowing teachers to focus on the important work of supporting students rather than building curriculum. They invested in coaching teachers to use the new materials well and blocked school-based access to websites like Teachers Pay Teachers and Pinterest to encourage teachers to stick with the curriculum.

"We really tried to convince our teachers that you no longer have to be a miner for curriculum. We have it. You just have to intellectually prepare to use it," says Satterfield.

At first, they faced resistance from both teachers and caregivers, but as student scores started to rise, so did buy-in. Then Badru encountered a new problem. The materials in core classrooms were strong, but those in intervention didn't match. For a student, the experience was fragmented.

Badru explains: "In reading intervention, we had one resource in Tier 1, and then another program in Tier 2 and another in Tier 3. A kid who was struggling the most used three different programs. On top of that, we would assess with something else. It was too much."

Badru brought the superintendent "a crazy idea": get rid of the stand-alone programs in intervention and use HQIM in all student-support tiers. "When we got the HQIM, we could have coherence and all use the same materials," she says.

For example, the school uses nationally created HQIM for the core math curriculum and aligned online software for intervention. In a math intervention group, several students practice online while their intervention teacher guides others through prior exit tickets from class. The teacher focuses on the highest-leverage state standards—content that is a building block for understanding future lessons.

Students are crystal clear on how the intervention assignments prepare them for their main math class. "My math tutor really helps me with my multiplication. In [the online software], they help us solve equations, and it helps me know what we're fixin' to do in math in my actual homeroom," says a third grader.

With clear links between core classes and intervention, it's easier for Trousdale's teachers to prepare all students for grade-level content, regardless of their starting level of learning.

"Every child needs to have a grade-level opportunity. Every single child. I'm not saying you won't have to meet them one-on-one and build them up, but they have to have that opportunity," Badru says. "My mom was not allowed to come to this school because she was a little Black girl. Now this Black girl is advocating for all students. Not just Black, not just white, not just rich, but ALL students."

Turning Insight Into Action

Learning at or above grade level has profound implications for young people. As TNTP reported in *Paths of Opportunity: What It Takes for All Young People to Thrive*, a strong academic foundation is one of five factors crucial for economic and social mobility, particularly for students experiencing poverty. Among young people experiencing poverty, students who had strong academic outcomes were almost three times as likely to earn a living wage and report high levels of well-being by age 30 as those with weak academic outcomes. This is a life-changing difference.

All young people deserve the chance to learn at or above grade level, no matter where they start. To make widespread improvement in PK–12 public education at scale, we need more than just school-by-school efforts; we need trajectory-changing school systems nationwide. Achieving that will require an intentional, focused effort to build belonging, consistency, and coherence into thousands of public schools. Stakeholders at every level—school-based educators, school system leaders, policymakers, families, and community members—must work together to accelerate student learning.

Too often, the schools we studied achieved outstanding results despite their district or state environments, rather than with their support. For schools beginning this work, applying these practices may seem daunting in the current context of U.S. public education. School systems are facing the very real pressures of funding cuts and declining enrollment. School leaders are often juggling competing initiatives from their state and district to reverse pandemic learning loss. Educators are working overtime to help young people reengage at school, both academically and emotionally.

These far-reaching challenges are beyond the control of any one school and require meaningful, equitable solutions from policymakers and system leaders. Yet focusing on belonging, consistency, and coherence is not something to do once the challenges have subsided; it's the only way through those challenges.

Trajectory-changing schools are rare but replicable. These three focus areas—belonging, consistency, and coherence—and the practices that sustain them can be applied in any school nationwide. As we collectively set out to forge paths of opportunity for all students, the following four recommendations offer a critical starting point.

Recommendation 1: Create a supportive ecosystem.

A school's context can support change—or seriously hinder it. Each school operates in a district or network and state with its own policies and priorities and serves a local community with its own assets and expectations. To improve education at a national scale, we must equip system leaders to implement trajectory-changing practices that meet the needs of their school communities.

Students' lives are shaped by more than what happens within the four walls of their schools. Creating a supportive ecosystem looks different at each level and builds on what each group knows best:

State level

Policymakers—including governors, state legislators, state board members, chief state school officers, and other leaders in state education agencies—can incentivize trajectory-changing practices at scale. Our Action Guide for State Policymakers helps leaders to direct policies, support, and funding toward high-value efforts.

School system level

Leaders of districts and charter management organizations can position groups of schools to adopt trajectory-changing practices. Our Action Guide for System Leaders helps leaders set focused goals and clear away obstacles for schools.

School level

Educators can integrate trajectory-changing practices into schools and classrooms and engage caregivers as experts who can help build holistic knowledge of each student. Our Opportunity Makers Toolkit contains resources to help educators maximize belonging, consistency, and coherence and collect input from young people and their caregivers on their experiences in these areas.

Caregivers should know exactly where their child stands academically and how to support their long-term goals for growth. Our Action Guide for Caregivers offers simple but powerful ways that families can engage with their child's school.

Community level

Community-based organizations are also deeply connected and committed to young people and families, but they often lack access to meaningful partnerships with schools or may not yet know how their work intersects with PK–12 education. Our Action Guide for Community-Based Organizations helps leaders of organizations understand school priorities, identify where they can add the most value, and set clear goals for collaboration.

"For us to really focus on what matters, we have to look at the big picture for our district. What are our district initiatives, and what are our initiatives as a school? But then we ask ourselves, 'OK, what is going to be the biggest bang for our buck?' First and foremost, we must be intentional with our practices."

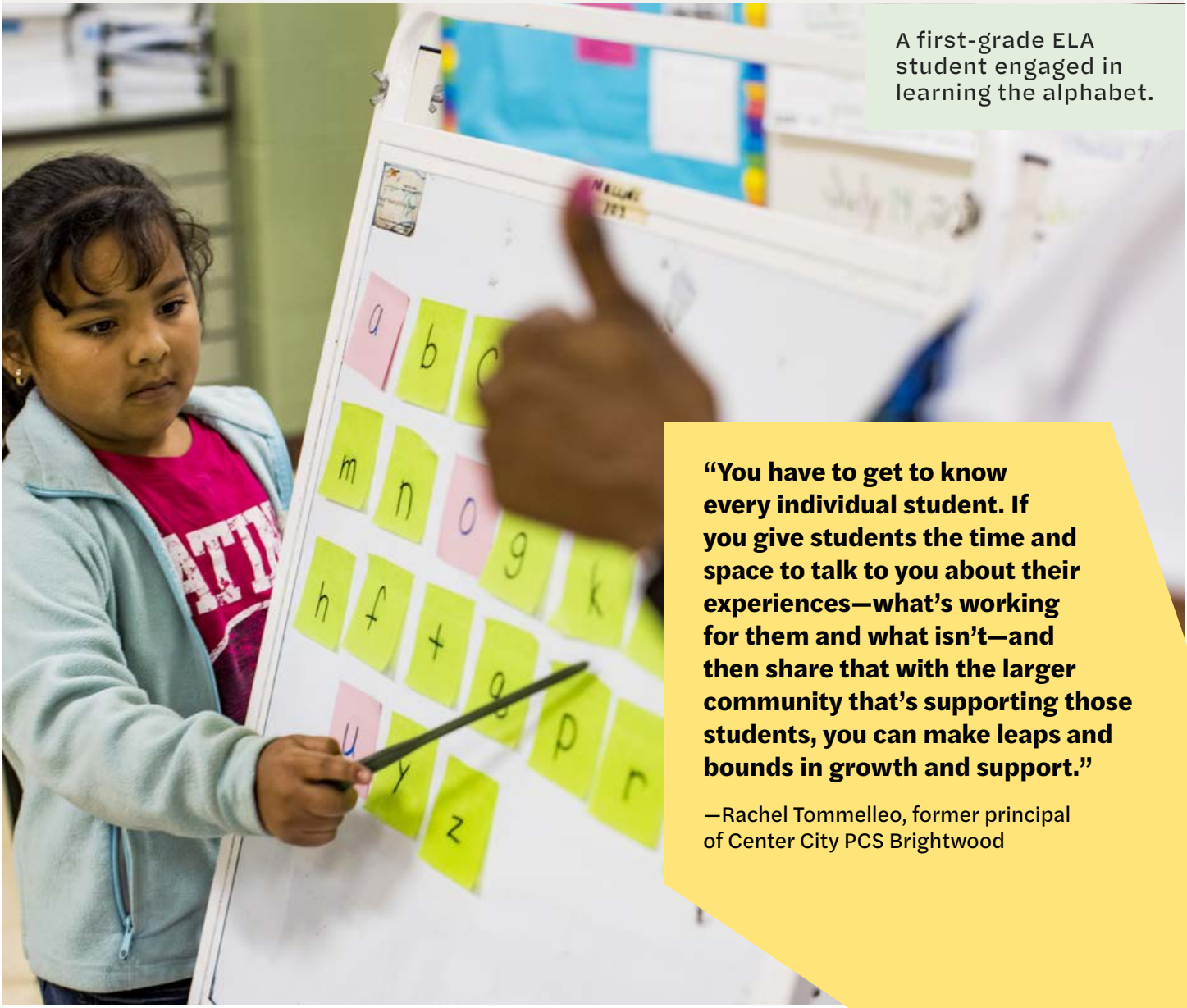
—Alma Carmona-Alday, principal of C.E. Rose PK–8

Recommendation 2: Reorient to the student experience.

Educators and leaders must do more than just listen to young people and their families. They must reorient themselves to the long-term learning journey of each individual student as a whole person who will be in the school system through age 18. Rather than planning for entire grade levels or groups, school leaders must encourage educators to find ways to guide each individual student toward grade-level learning over time.

To better understand the student experience, educators must prioritize knowing each young person as an individual and a learner. Our Opportunity Makers Toolkit offers entry points for building a holistic understanding of young people's assets and needs.

School leaders must cultivate a deep awareness of student needs by spending time in classrooms and observing the actual work students produce. Then they should evaluate each piece of the instructional program to ensure that it makes sense from the student perspective and serves those who need the most support.



A first-grade ELA student engaged in learning the alphabet.

"You have to get to know every individual student. If you give students the time and space to talk to you about their experiences—what's working for them and what isn't—and then share that with the larger community that's supporting those students, you can make leaps and bounds in growth and support."

—Rachel Tommelleo, former principal of Center City PCS Brightwood

Recommendation 3: Choose a narrow entry point.

The typical approach to school improvement has schools swinging from one initiative to the next or layering each new program onto the last, asking educators to do more and more. But the three focus areas and suggested practices we name in this report are not a checklist to be layered on top of what already exists. Instead, they are a way for schools to simplify.

What sets trajectory-changing schools apart is not just what they do but how they do it. The seven schools we studied invested in one focus area first and improved step by step, putting in sustained effort year after year. A decade into this work, the profiled schools all have a solid baseline of belonging, consistency, and coherence, and they tend to be outstanding in at least one area.

Our Baseline Assessment helps school and system leaders assess themselves against all trajectory-changing practices shared in the report and identify strengths and opportunities. This brief survey will give leaders insight into a school's current strengths and suggest starting points for improvement.

Starting areas of focus will differ, depending on the local context of each school system and community. Conventional wisdom says to focus on the weakest area first. However, it can be powerful to build on an existing area of strength to generate quick wins and build buy-in.

Kimberly Bailey leads her algebra students in a lesson on exponential regression.

"When you try to do everything at once, it's overwhelming. Really think about the needs of the school and the needs of the students, home in on one or two things, and do that extremely well."

—Christina Brown, executive director of New Heights Academy Charter School

Recommendation 4: Manage ongoing change.

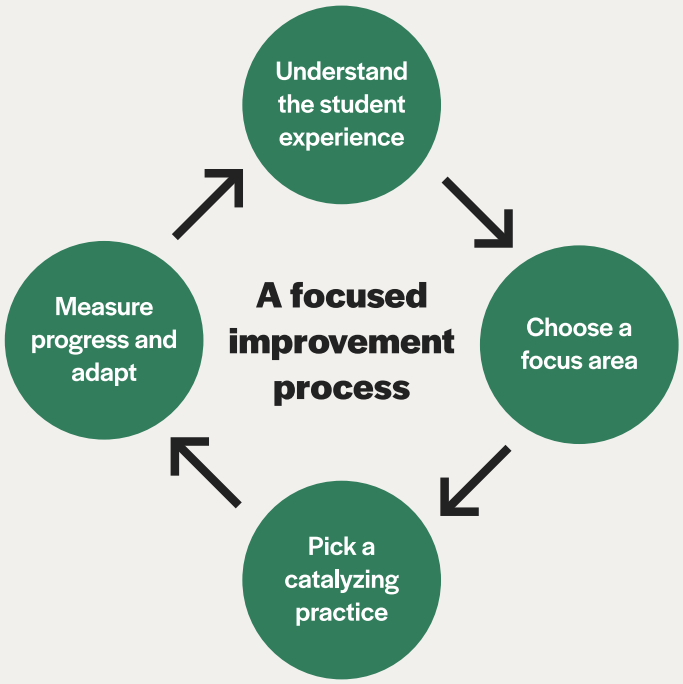
It takes time to create meaningful changes that ultimately raise student achievement. Rather than launching one-off initiatives, school and system leaders must create an ongoing, multiyear improvement process that leads to sustained improvements in belonging, consistency, and coherence. They must support these efforts with strategic resource investments over the long term and choose practices and structures that they can sustain year after year. New efforts should be focused, explicitly prioritized, and thoughtfully sequenced to build on what's come before.

We've built The Opportunity Makers Toolkit around the four-part improvement cycle we saw in trajectory-changing schools: (1) understand the student experience; (2) choose a focus area; (3) pick a catalyzing practice; and (4) measure progress and adapt. (Figure 9)

Implementing small "catalyzing" practices can reinforce a focus area and get everyone in the school community moving in the same direction. For example, teachers and school leaders may review the same student data each week. District and state leaders may review the same consistent topics in check-ins with school leaders. At every level, consistent routines create habits, spark conversations, and build momentum for change.

But catalyzing practices do not need to be set in stone. Leaders of trajectory-changing schools monitor their progress and adapt as they go. They start small, lean into practices that support their focus area, and drop the ones that don't. Over time, as one focus area is woven into the fabric of the school community, leaders pick another and start the cycle again. Even for schools with a decade of stellar student learning, the improvement process is never done.

Figure 9



"We start every year by setting the same expectations as we set the year before. That may sound redundant, but if we didn't do it, those small practices would not come to life. You want to reiterate these practices until you're certain that they are a part of the fabric of the school."

—Christina Brown, executive director of New Heights Academy Charter School

Changing Trajectories, Changing Lives

These 1,300 schools prove that it's possible for our nation's public schools to change the academic trajectories of the millions of young people who've fallen behind. With commitment from stakeholders at every level, we can create an ecosystem that supports trajectory-changing practices. We can empower school leaders and teachers to infuse belonging, consistency, and coherence into the DNA of their schools. Through these efforts, we can ensure that every young person has a strong academic foundation that is a launching pad for lives of choice and opportunity.

And while our country has long cherished the promise that public education can be the great equalizer, our research has shown that strong academic outcomes alone are not sufficient for young people experiencing poverty to have meaningful economic and social mobility in adulthood.

That's why TNTP's new Research Center of Excellence will continue to investigate how young people's experiences can become engines of mobility. Moving forward, the reports in the *Paths of Opportunity* series will explore the most critical factors of mobility, spotlighting promising practices and innovations in communities across the nation.

Given the right mix of strong academics, career-connected learning, social capital, personal support, and civic engagement, millions more young people can step onto their own paths of opportunity. Together, we can transform America's public education system so that every young person—every generation—thrives.

Resources

To access trajectory-changing resources tailored to your context, visit:
tntp.org/toolkit/the-opportunity-makers-toolkit/

Baseline Assessment: Self-assessment for school and school system leaders to analyze the strengths and needs of a single school and pick a starting place for improvement.

The Opportunity Makers Toolkit: Concrete steps that school-based educators can take to start an ongoing improvement process, with tools adapted from the seven trajectory-changing schools.

Action Guides: Road maps for stakeholders at every level—school system leaders, policymakers, caregivers, and community members—to support trajectory-changing practices.

Appendix: Methodology

School Selection

To identify trajectory-changing schools to study, we used the Stanford Education Data Archive (SEDA 4.1). SEDA combines state testing data with the National Assessment of Educational Progress to compare scores from state tests on a common national scale. It provides test scores from 2008-09 through 2017-18 in reading and math. It captures grades 3–8, so we focused our studies on elementary and middle schools.

We defined "trajectory-changing" schools as schools where the average student was not yet on grade level in the initial tested grade and students grew at least 1.3 relative grade levels per year. This threshold, while somewhat arbitrary, is also practical. Setting the bar at 1.3 relative grade levels per year captures the top 5 percent of public elementary and middle schools nationally—which sets the goal for growth at an ambitious but attainable level. At this growth rate, compounded over several years, most students who are behind in elementary and middle school can reach grade-level proficiency during their time in school.

To validate the set of schools to study, we cross-checked the SEDA data with district and state testing data. We confirmed that student academic achievement was consistent across subgroups (including grade, ethnicity, and economic status) and consistent over time (students continued to outperform their peers after SEDA data stopped in 2018). We screened out any schools that showed trajectory-changing student growth in aggregate when that growth was driven primarily by select subgroups (such as large groups of gifted students). We also confirmed that student demographics have remained largely steady over time.

We selected seven schools serving elementary and middle students in varied contexts—rural and urban, traditional public and charter—across the U.S. These schools predominantly serve historically disadvantaged populations. In the SEDA data, 70 percent of students were Latinx and 11 percent were Black; 80 percent received free and reduced-price lunch; 24 percent were multilingual learners; and 13 percent received Special Education services. Compared to schools where the average student starts at or above grade level, the studied schools serve three times as many Black and Latinx students, twice as many students receiving free and reduced-price lunch, and four times as many multilingual learners.[28] (Figure 10)

A TNTP researcher interviews students.

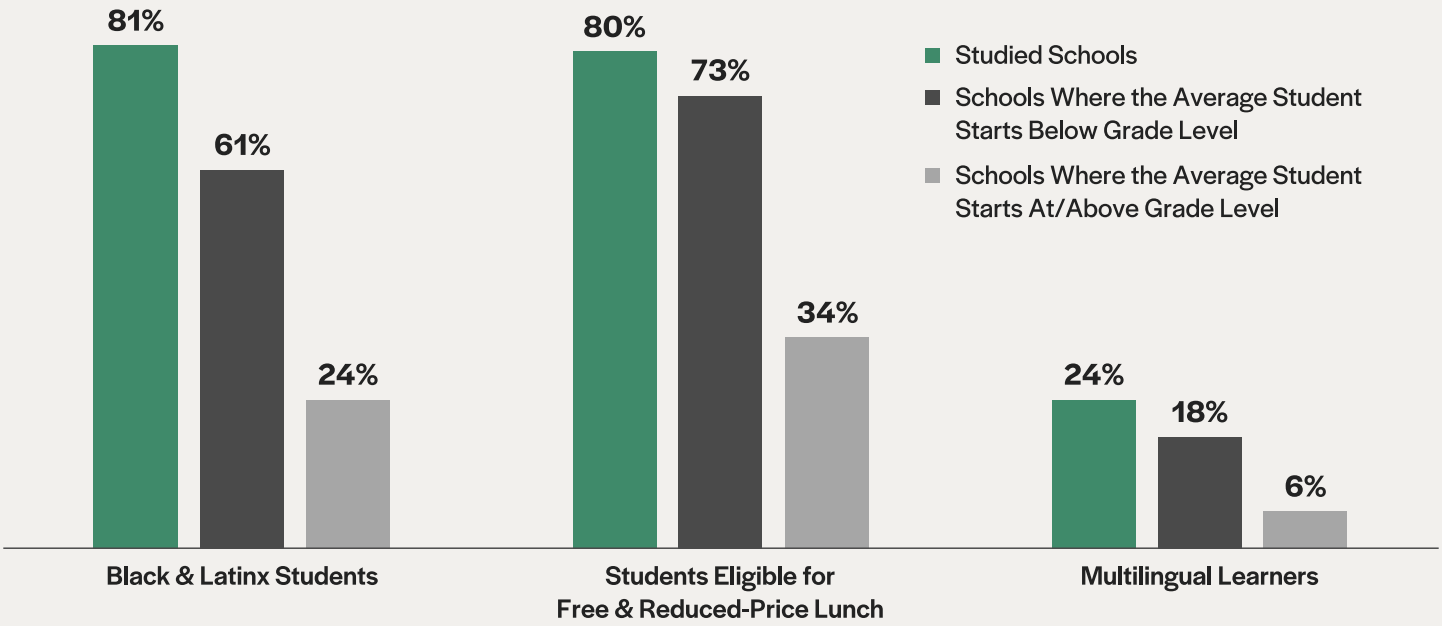
Collectively, the seven schools are broadly representative of U.S. schools where the average student starts out below grade level at the initial tested grade. But there's one important caveat: The schools serve disproportionately high numbers of Latinx students and low numbers of Black students. This is partially due to the location of the participating schools, as two are in Tucson, Arizona, and one is in Pharr, Texas.

However, it also reflects a larger demographic reality: Black students are significantly underrepresented in trajectory-changing schools overall. In SEDA schools where the average student starts below grade level, 24 percent of students were Black. But in trajectory-changing schools, where the average student catches up, only 14 percent of students were Black. By contrast, in schools where the average student falls further behind, 36 percent of students were Black—more than twice the number of those in trajectory-changing schools.[29]

This underrepresentation is due to systemic issues of access rather than individual student effort or ability. The majority-Black campus in our study shows that trajectory-changing practices are just as powerful for Black students as they are for other demographic groups. But due to compounding historical inequities, Black students have far less access to trajectory-changing schools in the first place.

Figure 10

Student Demographics at the Studied Schools Versus SEDA Sample of Schools



TNTP staff member Megan Lucas conducts classroom observations in Magnolia Almonte's fifth-grade ELA class for this report.

Data Collection

We sought out diverse perspectives from school staff, teachers, students, and caregivers to identify a set of best practices that any school community could replicate. We collected both quantitative data (i.e., academic observations and surveys) and qualitative data (focus groups, interviews, and field notes from shadowing).

To build a holistic picture of the school experience, we visited each school for a week straight at two or three points in the year. We conducted 491 classroom observations, surveyed 150 teachers, and interviewed 13 district and school leaders. We also shadowed 40 "focal" math and reading teachers in grades 3–8 (to match the SEDA data) and 144 "focal" students who were not yet on grade level.

We asked for volunteers and selected four or five teachers as a representative sample: at least one in each grade, all of whom had some students performing below grade level. We spent a full school day with each focal teacher during each visit, observing their practices and interactions in the classroom and across schoolwide meetings and activities in real time.

To capture instructional practice, we conducted academic observations (using ratings on defined indicators) and naturalistic ones (involving notes on classroom interactions in the focal teacher and student shadowing). To identify trends beyond instruction, we conducted extensive interviews and focus groups with school staff, caregivers, and students in focal classrooms. Qualitative data helped us identify patterns that cannot be captured by academic rubrics alone.

To understand the student and caregiver experiences, we surveyed 327 students and 124 caregivers about their perceptions of school. We also sat down directly with 124 focal students in small groups and 37 caregivers in one-on-one interviews. A few of these focal students and caregivers are profiled throughout the report. While their names and identifying characteristics have been changed, their stories help us understand what this data means in the lives of real young people and their families—and serve as both an inspiration and a call to action.

Research Methods

We used a convergent mixed-methods research design. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed separately, then compared in the analysis phase to see if both sets of data confirmed (or refuted) each other.[30] (Figure 11)

First, to identify trends in the qualitative data, we coded all notes from the interviews, focus groups, and naturalistic observations in the same way. Prior to data collection, we identified topics for study, including leadership, school climate, definitions of success, support structures for teachers and students, quality instruction, progress monitoring, and caregiver engagement. Within these topics, we defined a set list of 55 codes and definitions to ensure consistent analysis, and we pinpointed repeated themes by coding field notes captured during naturalistic observations. Codes tell us the themes, and the themes tell us a story.

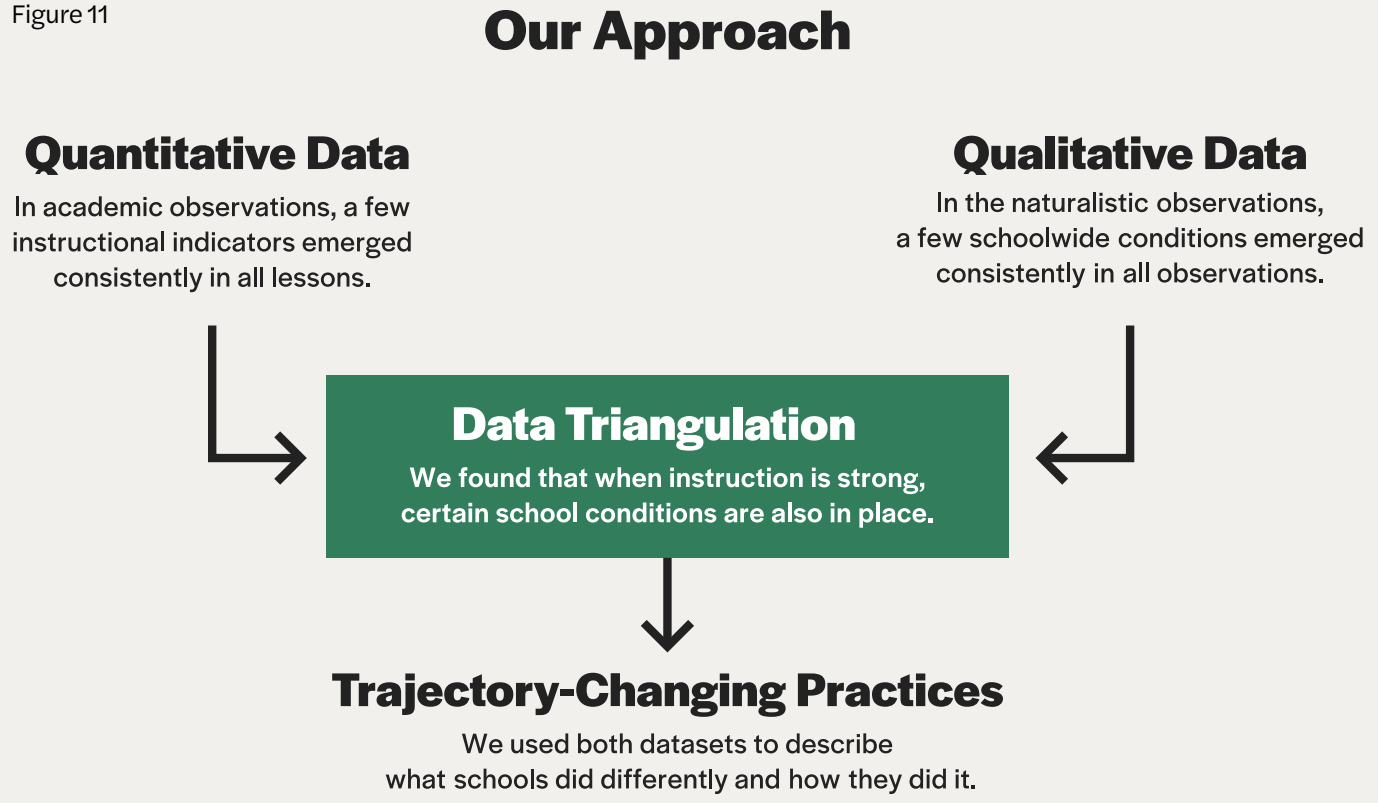
Then we triangulated both qualitative and quantitative data with correlation analyses to ensure that they were telling the same story. Of all the topics coded, several emerged consistently across all datasets and all schools. For example, codes related to belonging (including teacher-student relationships, social-emotional learning, and community) occurred frequently across classroom observations, interviews, and focus groups in all schools.

We wanted to learn more about which school factors were most associated with consistently good teaching, so we examined the correlations between our quantitative observation scores and the most frequent qualitative codes from our naturalistic observations. Statistically significant correlations confirmed that consistently good teaching and schoolwide factors like expectations and student-teacher relationships (key ingredients of belonging) tended to occur together.

Qualitative data and analysis also confirmed the schoolwide conditions that reinforce learning. For example, instructional coherence and consistency emerged as themes in both classroom observations and in interviews and focus groups with teachers, leaders, and students across all schools.

For our complete methodology, including our full analysis results, please see the Technical Appendix.

Figure 11



Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge the many individuals within and beyond TNTP who were instrumental in producing this report.

First, we are indebted to the staff of the schools and systems that took part in our study and to the school leaders who opened their schools to us. Above all, we are grateful to the 40 focal teachers who invited us into their classrooms and the 327 students and 147 caregivers who participated in interviews and focus groups to help us understand their lived experiences in trajectory-changing schools.

We give special recognition to TNTP staff: Bailey Cato Czupryk, who oversees our Research Center of Excellence, our lead researchers, Michael Franco and Dr. Kristin Walker Burt, along with the team in the field and those who supported data analysis: Rebecca Barrientos, Amanda Clair, Kiara Dismuke, Mei Guan, Melissa Picón, Joy Dominguez, Adam Maier, and Nadia Stewart. We appreciate the support and guidance of Tim Hise, Jamila Newman, Leticia de la Vara, Amy Keltner, Miri Listokin, and Natasha Bell.

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Finally, we thank Curriculum Associates for sharing their data on student learning loss during the pandemic, in efforts to drive change for the entire sector.

Disclosure

The schools studied for this report include school systems with which TNTP is currently engaged as a consultant and/or service provider, as well as some that are unaffiliated with TNTP's work. None of these school systems held editorial control over this report, and the report was independently funded. All participation was voluntary.

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About TNTP

As a leading education nonprofit since 1997, TNTP combines insight, courage, and action to conceive scalable solutions that address complex challenges from the classroom to the systems level. Today, we work side by side with educators, system leaders, and communities across 39 states and more than 6,000 districts nationwide to reach ambitious goals for student success. Our vision pushes beyond school walls, catalyzing cross-sector collaboration to create pathways for young people to achieve academic, economic, and social mobility.

The Nation's Report Card

2024 Mathematics
GRADES 4 & 8

NAEP

KEY FINDINGS

GRADE 4

FOURTH-GRADE MATHEMATICS SCORES IMPROVED COMPARED TO 2022

- Scores increased on average and for students at the 50th, 75th, and 90th percentiles
- Higher percentage of students at or above *NAEP Proficient* and lower percentage below *NAEP Basic*
- Higher scores for Black, Hispanic, and White students; no score changes for other racial/ethnic groups
- Scores increased for male and female students as well as students attending schools in the Northeast and South regions
- Most student groups with score increases also increased at the 75th percentile
- Scores increased in 15 states/jurisdictions
- Scores increased in 14 TUDA districts
- Average score lower compared to 2019

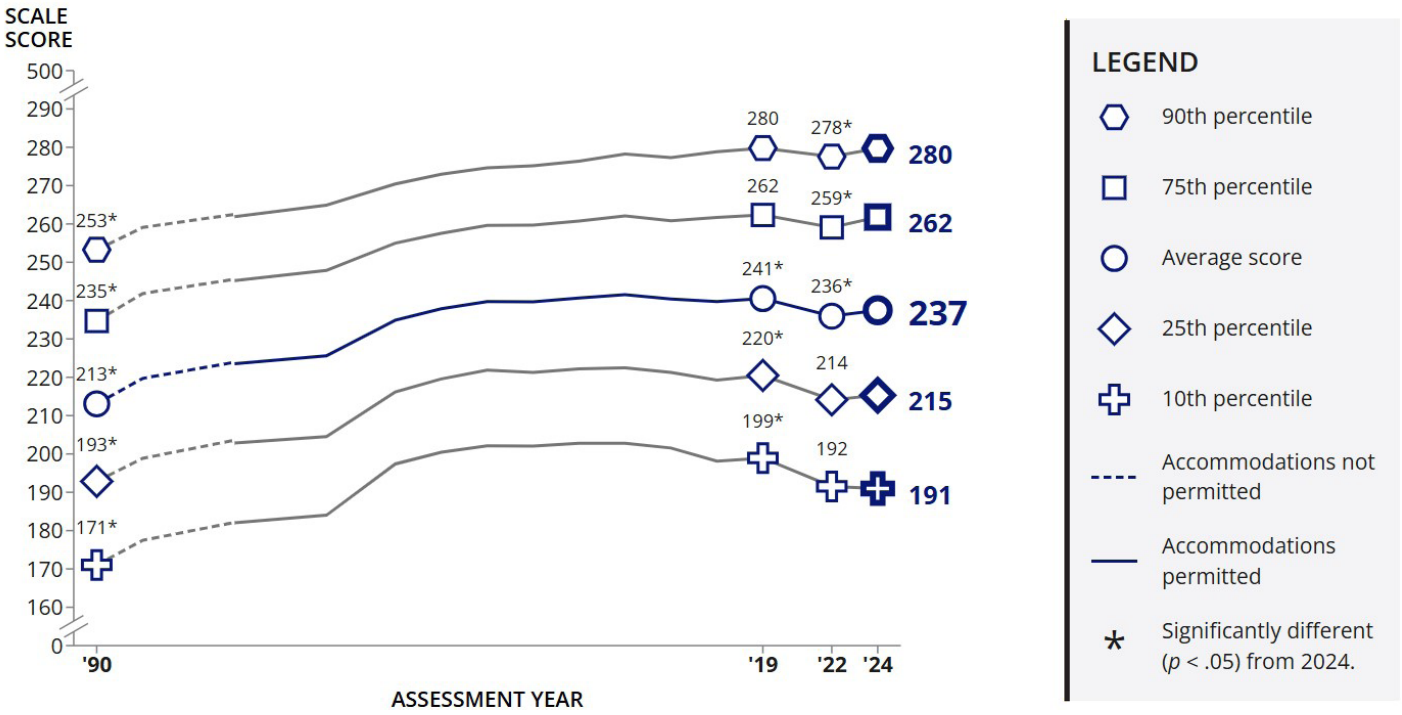
Mathematics grade 4 national score trends

Overall average score changes were:

24pts Compared to 1990

3pts Compared to 2019

2pts Compared to 2022



The Nation's Report Card

2024 Mathematics
GRADES 4 & 8

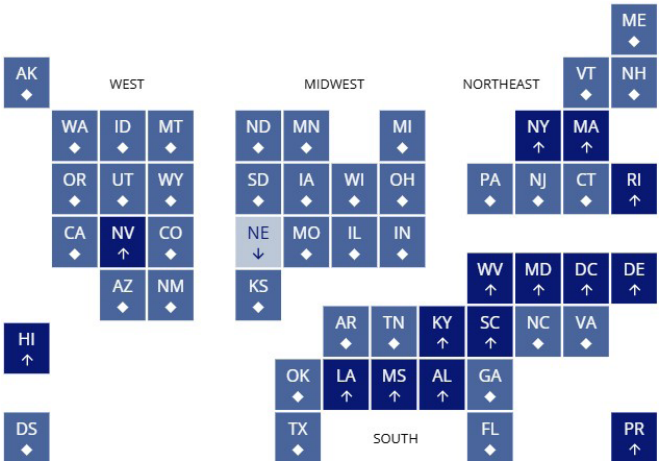
NAEP

STATES & DISTRICTS | **GRADE 4**

Mathematics grade 4 state score trends pre- and post-pandemic

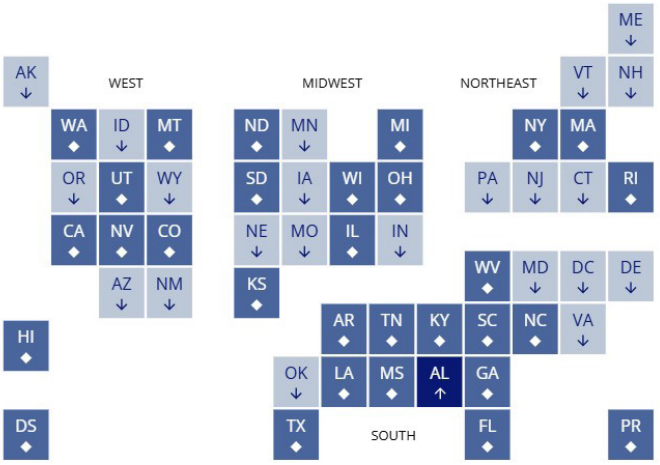
Between **2022** and **2024**, score changes were:

Nation (public)	States/jurisdictions		
increased	1 decreased	37 no significant change	15 increased



Between **2019** and **2024**, score changes were:

Nation (public)	States/jurisdictions		
decreased	22 decreased	30 no significant change	1 increased



NOTE: DS = Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA), a federally operated nonpublic school system responsible for educating children of military families.

Mathematics grade 4 district score trends pre- and post-pandemic

Between **2022** and **2024**, score changes were:

Nation (public)	Large city	Districts		
increased	increased	0 decreased	11 no significant change	14 increased

Between **2019** and **2024**, score changes were:

Nation (public)	Large city	Districts		
decreased	decreased	10 decreased	15 no significant change	0 increased

⊖ No data or not applicable.
NOTE: DCPS = District of Columbia Public Schools. The results for DCPS (District of Columbia Public Schools) include public schools only, while the results for the District of Columbia (DC) shown in the state portion of the report include results for both public schools and charter schools in DC. Large city includes public school students from all cities in the nation with populations of 250,000 or more including the participating districts.

The Nation's Report Card

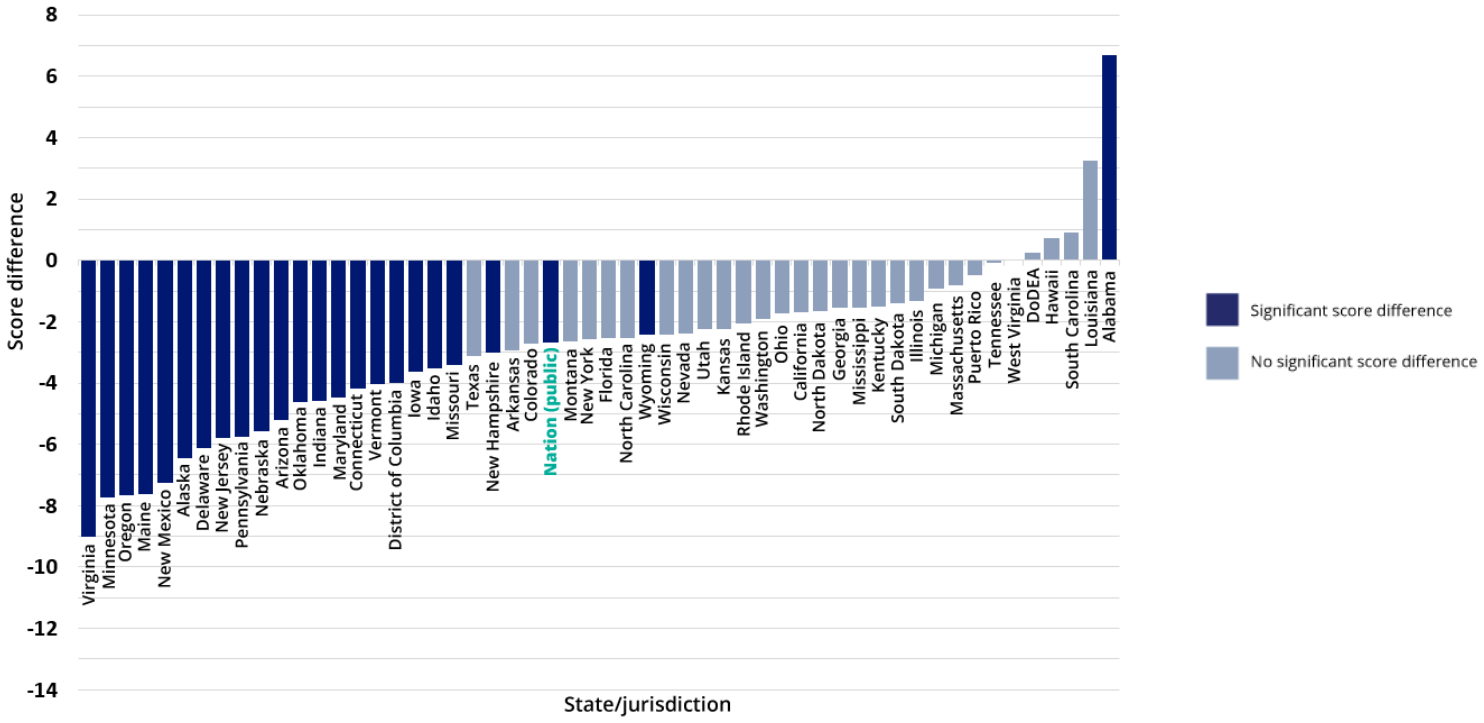
2024 Mathematics
GRADES 4 & 8

NAEP

STATES & DISTRICTS

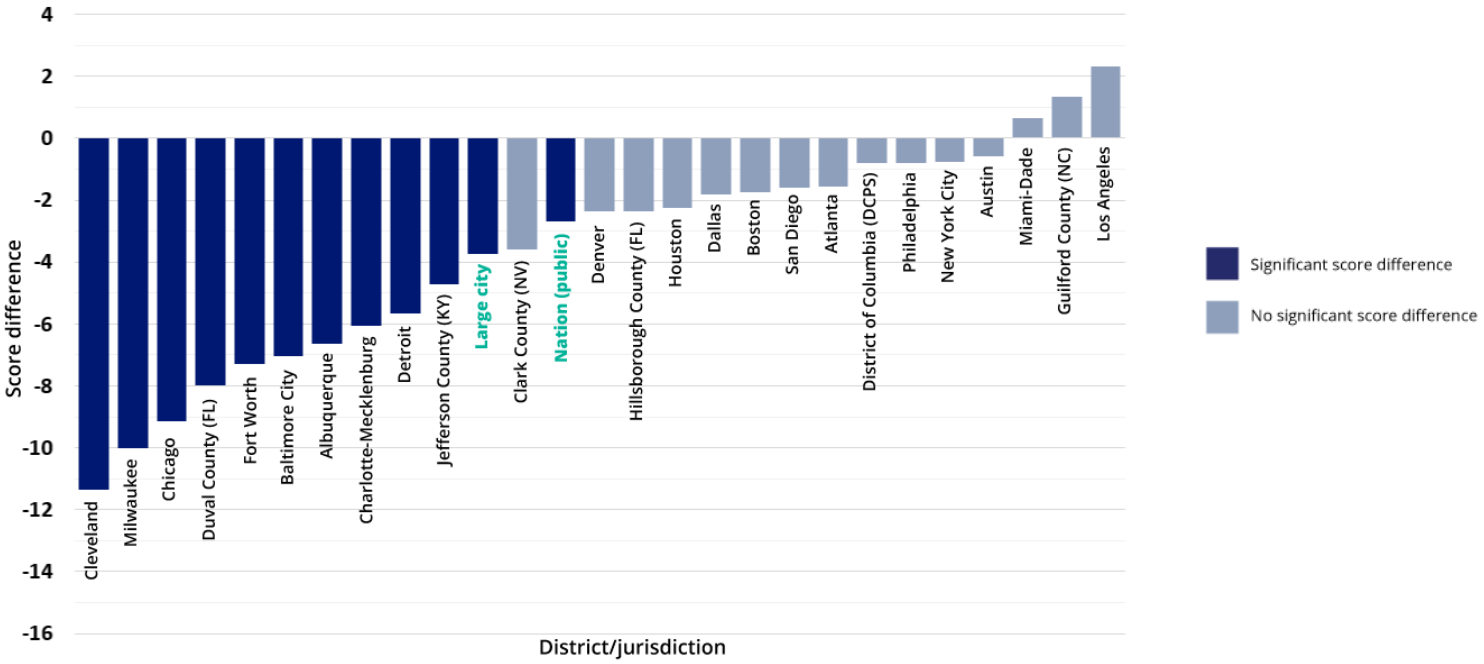
GRADE 4

Score point difference from 2019 to 2024 in grade 4 mathematics by state/jurisdiction



NOTE: DoDEA = Department of Defense Education Activity, a federally operated nonpublic school system responsible for educating children of military families.

Score point difference from 2019 to 2024 in grade 4 mathematics by district/jurisdiction



NOTE: DCPS = District of Columbia Public Schools. Large city includes public school students from all cities in the nation with populations of 250,000 or more including the participating districts.

The Nation's Report Card

2024 Mathematics
GRADES 4 & 8

NAEP

KEY FINDINGS

GRADE 8

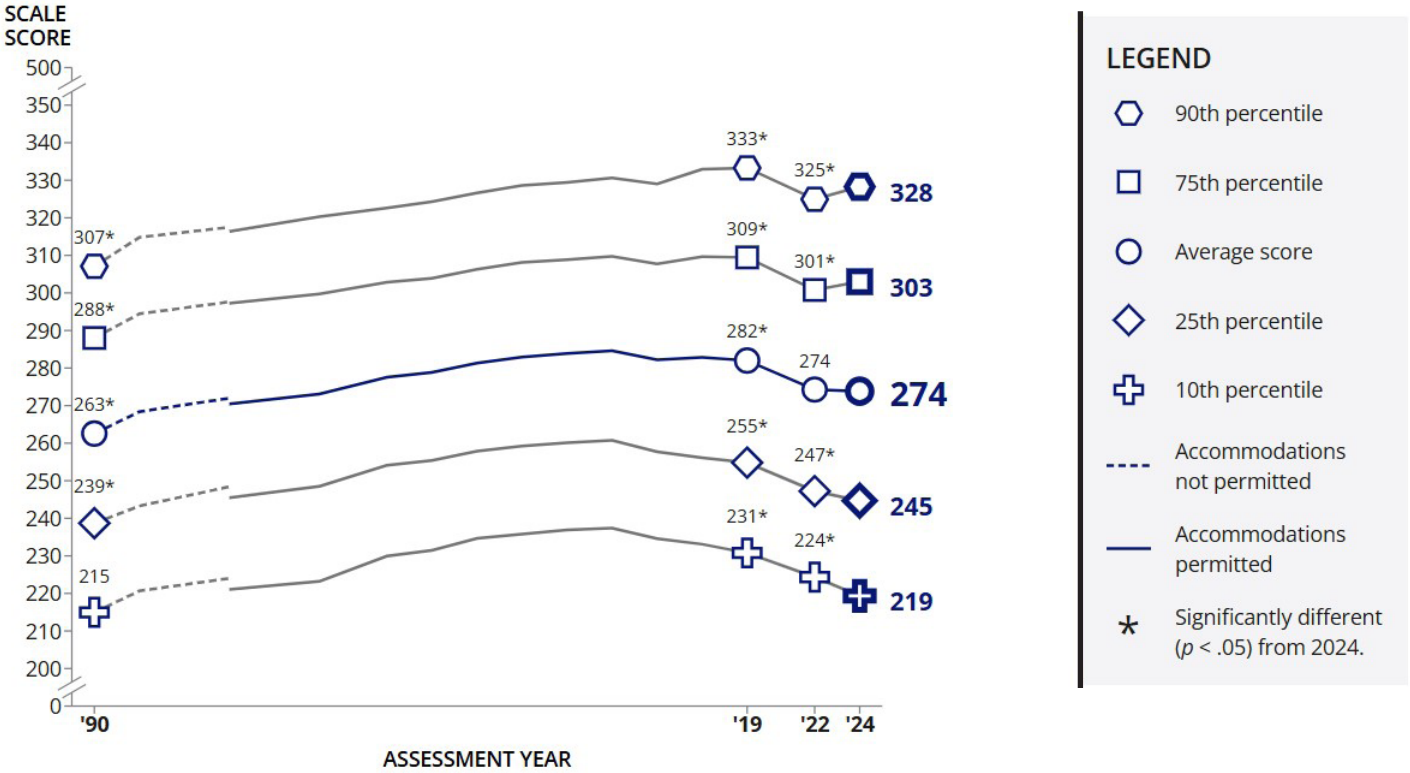
EIGHTH-GRADE AVERAGE MATHEMATICS SCORE DID NOT SIGNIFICANTLY CHANGE WITH DIFFERENCES IN PERFORMANCE BETWEEN HIGHER- AND LOWER-PERFORMERS

- Scores diverged with increases for students at the 75th and 90th percentiles and decreases for students at the 10th and 25th percentiles
- Higher percentages of students at or above *NAEP Proficient* and below *NAEP Basic*
- Scores declined for Hispanic students, students who were identified as economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, and English learners
- Student groups with score declines also declined at the 25th percentile
- Scores declined in 4 states/jurisdictions
- Scores declined in 8 TUDA districts
- Average score lower compared to 2019

Mathematics grade 8 national score trends

Overall average score changes were:

- **11pts** Compared to 1990
- **8pts** Compared to 2019
- No significant change Compared to 2022



The Nation's Report Card

2024 Mathematics
GRADES 4 & 8

NAEP

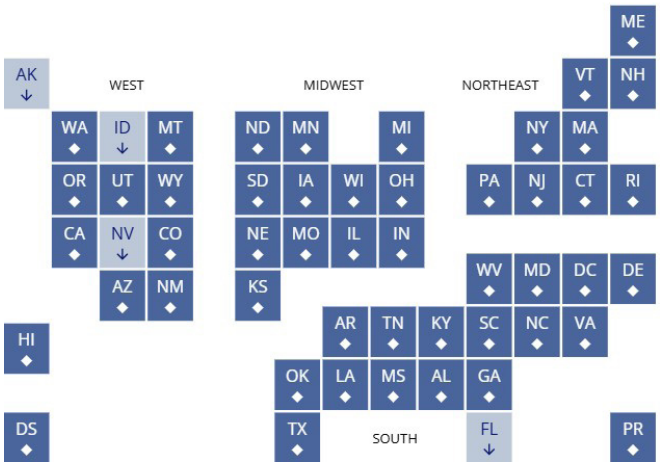
STATES & DISTRICTS

GRADE 8

Mathematics grade 8 state score trends pre- and post-pandemic

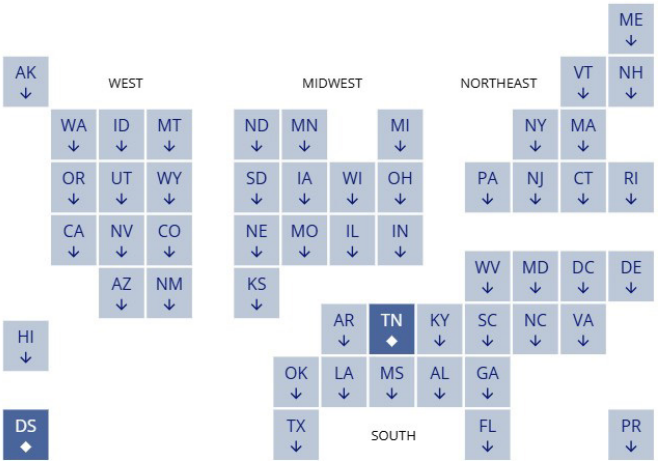
Between **2022** and **2024**, score changes were:

Nation (public)	States/jurisdictions		
no significant change	4 decreased	49 no significant change	0 increased



Between **2019** and **2024**, score changes were:

Nation (public)	States/jurisdictions		
decreased	51 decreased	2 no significant change	0 increased



NOTE: DS = Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA), a federally operated nonpublic school system responsible for educating children of military families.

Mathematics grade 8 district score trends pre- and post-pandemic

Between **2022** and **2024**, score changes were:

Nation (public)	Large city	Districts		
no significant change	no significant change	8 decreased	17 no significant change	0 increased

Between **2019** and **2024**, score changes were:

Nation (public)	Large city	Districts		
decreased	decreased	21 decreased	4 no significant change	0 increased

⊖ No data or not applicable.
NOTE: DCPS = District of Columbia Public Schools. The results for DCPS (District of Columbia Public Schools) include public schools only, while the results for the District of Columbia (DC) shown in the state portion of the report include results for both public schools and charter schools in DC. Large city includes public school students from all cities in the nation with populations of 250,000 or more including the participating districts.

The Nation's Report Card

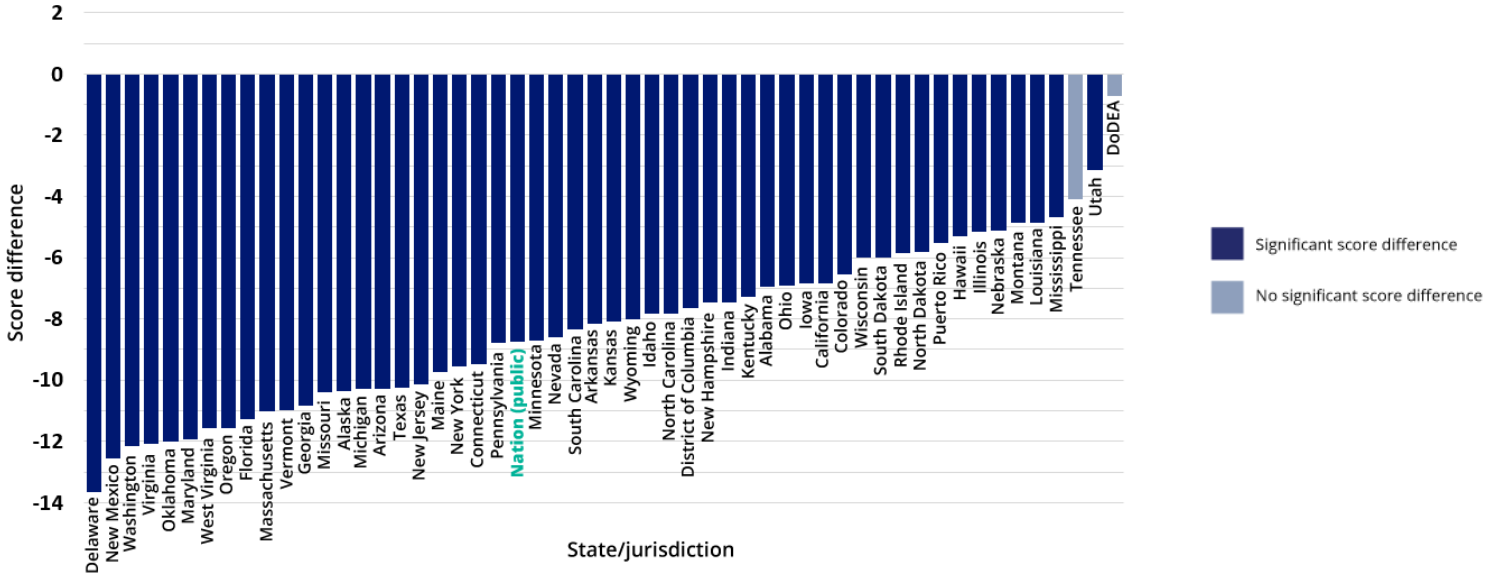
2024 Mathematics
GRADES 4 & 8

NAEP

STATES & DISTRICTS

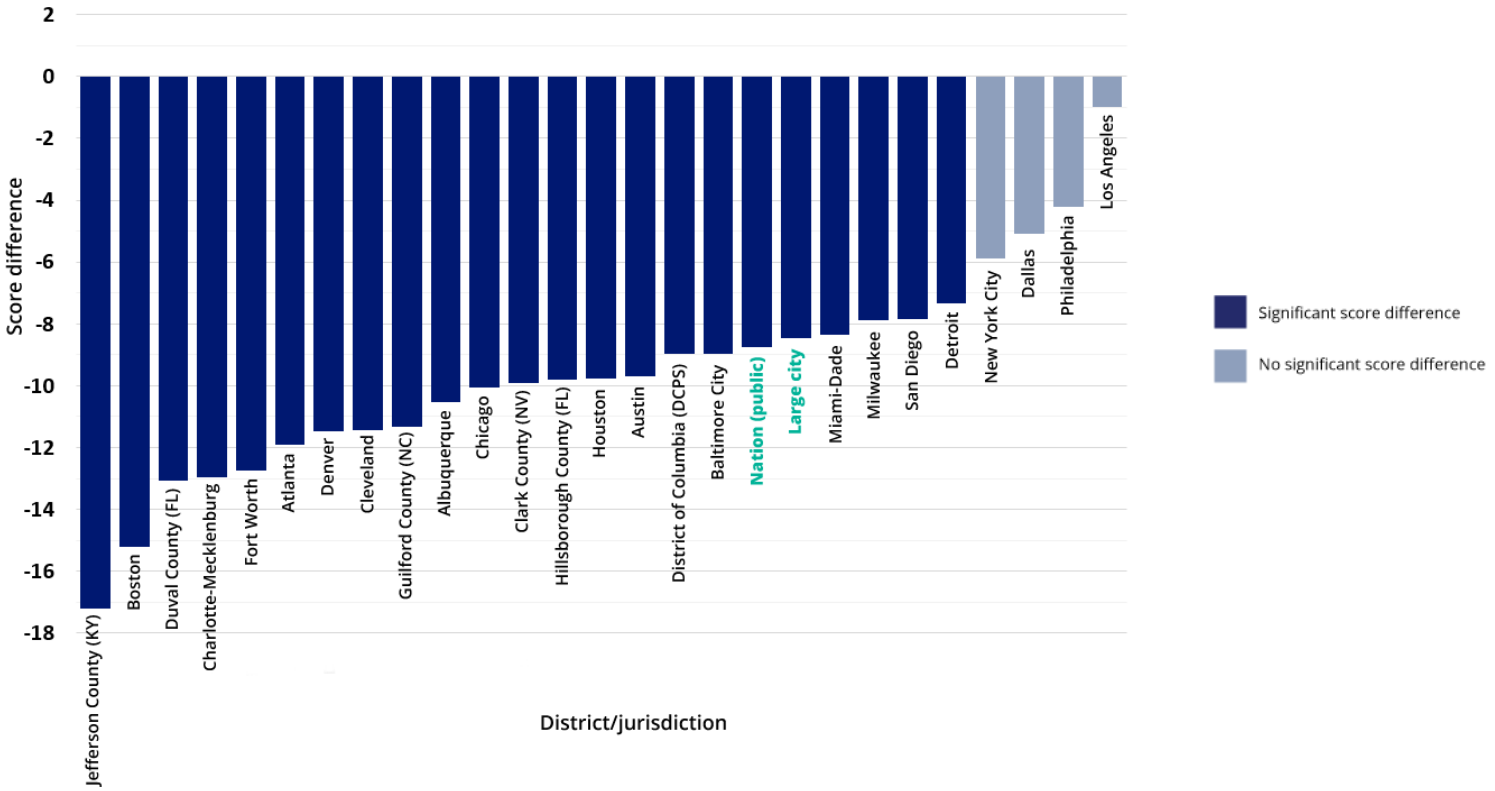
GRADE 8

Score point difference from 2019 to 2024 in grade 8 mathematics by state/jurisdiction



NOTE: DoDEA = Department of Defense Education Activity, a federally operated nonpublic school system responsible for educating children of military families.

Score point difference from 2019 to 2024 in grade 8 mathematics by district/jurisdiction



NOTE: DCPS = District of Columbia Public Schools. Large city includes public school students from all cities in the nation with populations of 250,000 or more including the participating districts.

The Nation's Report Card

2024 Reading
GRADES 4 & 8

NAEP

KEY FINDINGS

GRADE 4

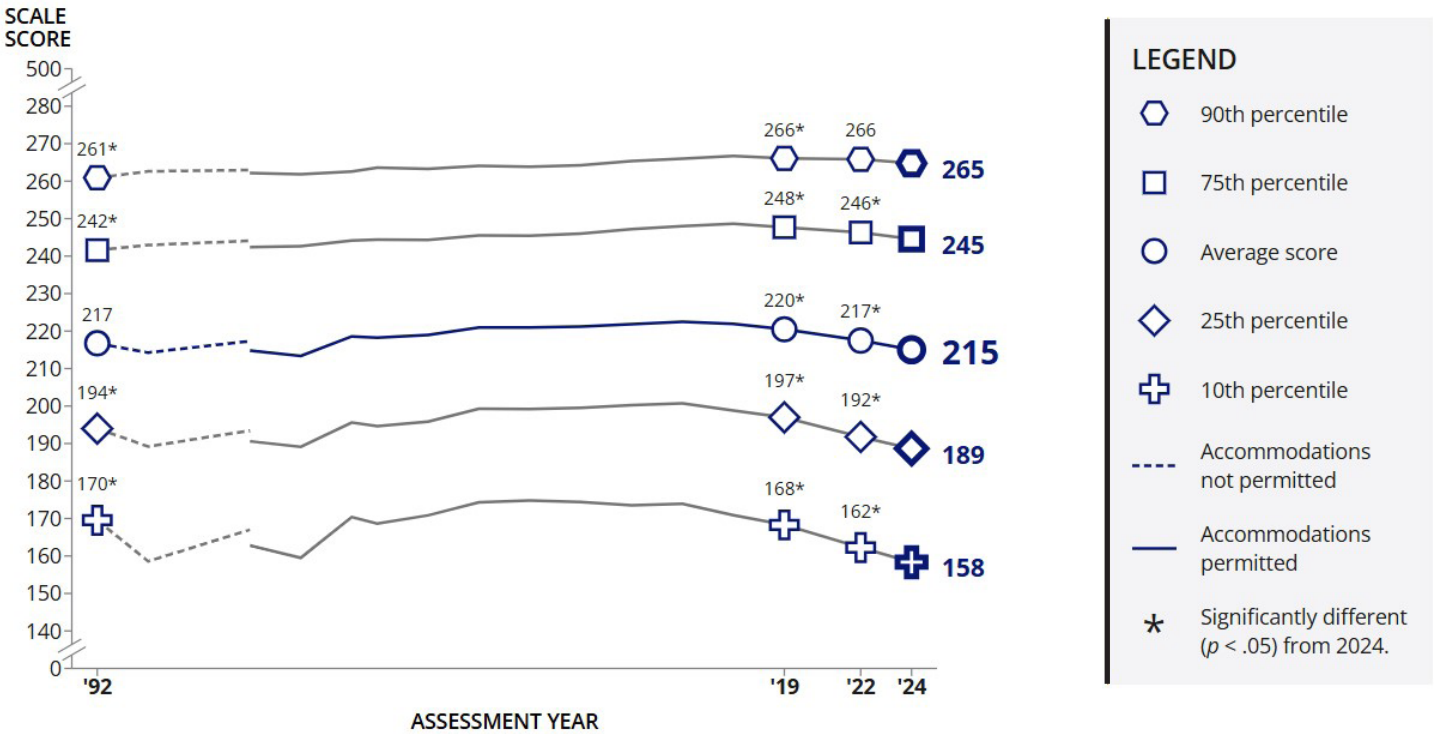
FOURTH-GRADE READING SCORES CONTINUE A DECLINE THAT BEGAN PRE-PANDEMIC

- Lower average score reflected in declines at the 10th, 25th, 50th, and 75th percentiles
- Lower percentage of students at or above *NAEP Proficient* and higher percentage below *NAEP Basic*
- Scores declined for many student groups, for example: Asian, Asian/Pacific Islander, students of Two or more races, and White students; male and female students
- Scores declined in 5 states/jurisdictions
- Scores declined in 4 TUDA districts; score increased in 1 district
- Average score lower compared to 2019

Reading grade 4 national score trends

Overall average score changes were:

- No significant change — Compared to 1992
- ↓ 5pts — Compared to 2019
- ↓ 2pts — Compared to 2022



The Nation's Report Card

2024 Reading
GRADES 4 & 8

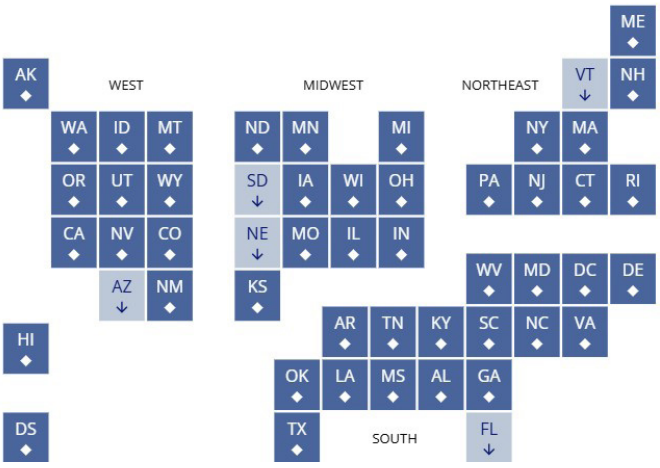
NAEP

STATES & DISTRICTS | **GRADE 4**

Reading grade 4 state score trends pre- and post-pandemic

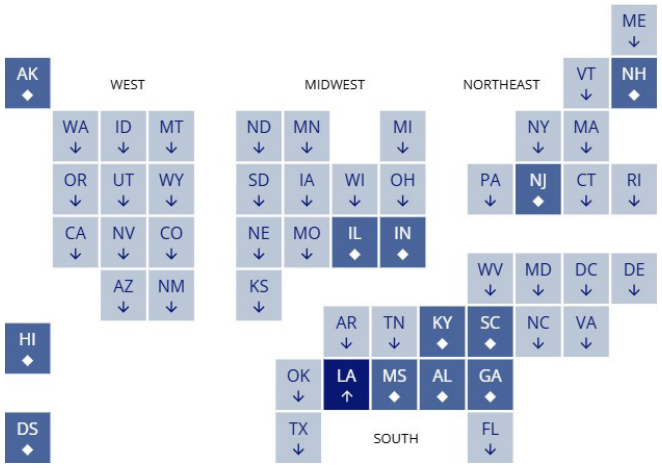
Between **2022** and **2024**, score changes were:

Nation (public)	States/jurisdictions		
decreased	5 decreased	47 no significant change	0 increased



Between **2019** and **2024**, score changes were:

Nation (public)	States/jurisdictions		
decreased	39 decreased	12 no significant change	1 increased



NOTE: DS = Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA), a federally operated nonpublic school system responsible for educating children of military families.

Reading grade 4 district score trends pre- and post-pandemic

Between **2022** and **2024**, score changes were:

Nation (public)	Large city	Districts		
decreased	no significant change	4 decreased	20 no significant change	1 increased

Between **2019** and **2024**, score changes were:

Nation (public)	Large city	Districts		
decreased	decreased	11 decreased	14 no significant change	0 increased

⊖ No data or not applicable.
NOTE: DCPS = District of Columbia Public Schools. The results for DCPS (District of Columbia Public Schools) include public schools only, while the results for the District of Columbia (DC) shown in the state portion of the report include results for both public schools and charter schools in DC. Large city includes public school students from all cities in the nation with populations of 250,000 or more including the participating districts.

The Nation's Report Card

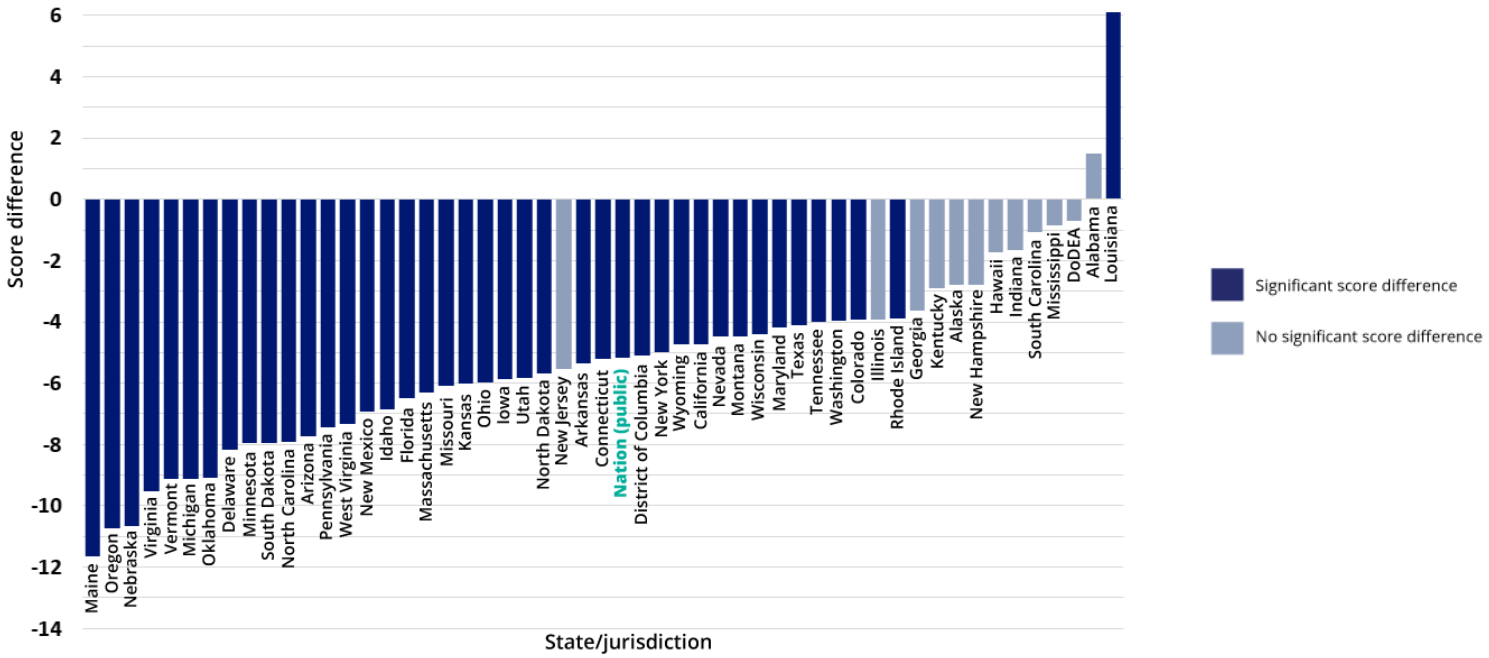
2024 Reading GRADES 4 & 8

NAEP

STATES & DISTRICTS

GRADE 4

Score point difference from 2019 to 2024 in grade 4 reading by state/jurisdiction



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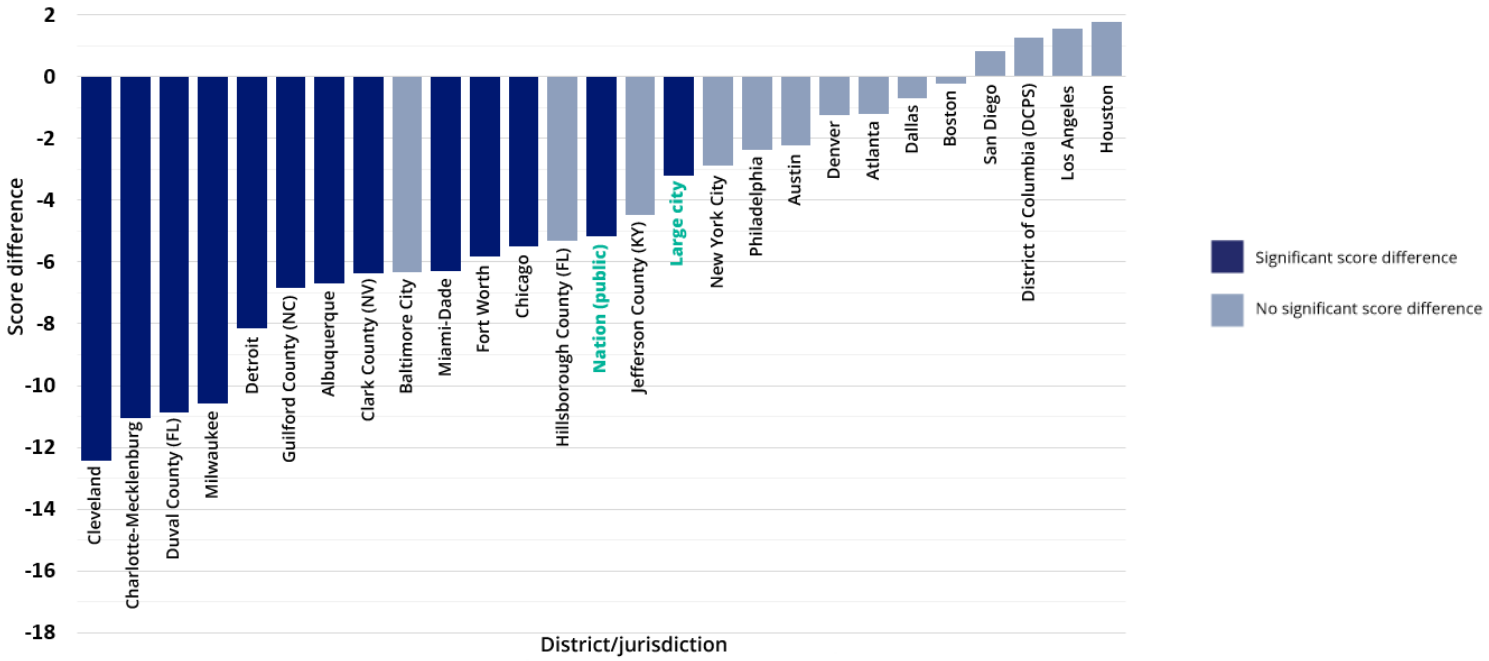
Score point difference from 2019 to 2024 in grade 4 reading by district/jurisdiction



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The Nation's Report Card

2024 Reading
GRADES 4 & 8

NAEP

KEY FINDINGS **GRADE 8**

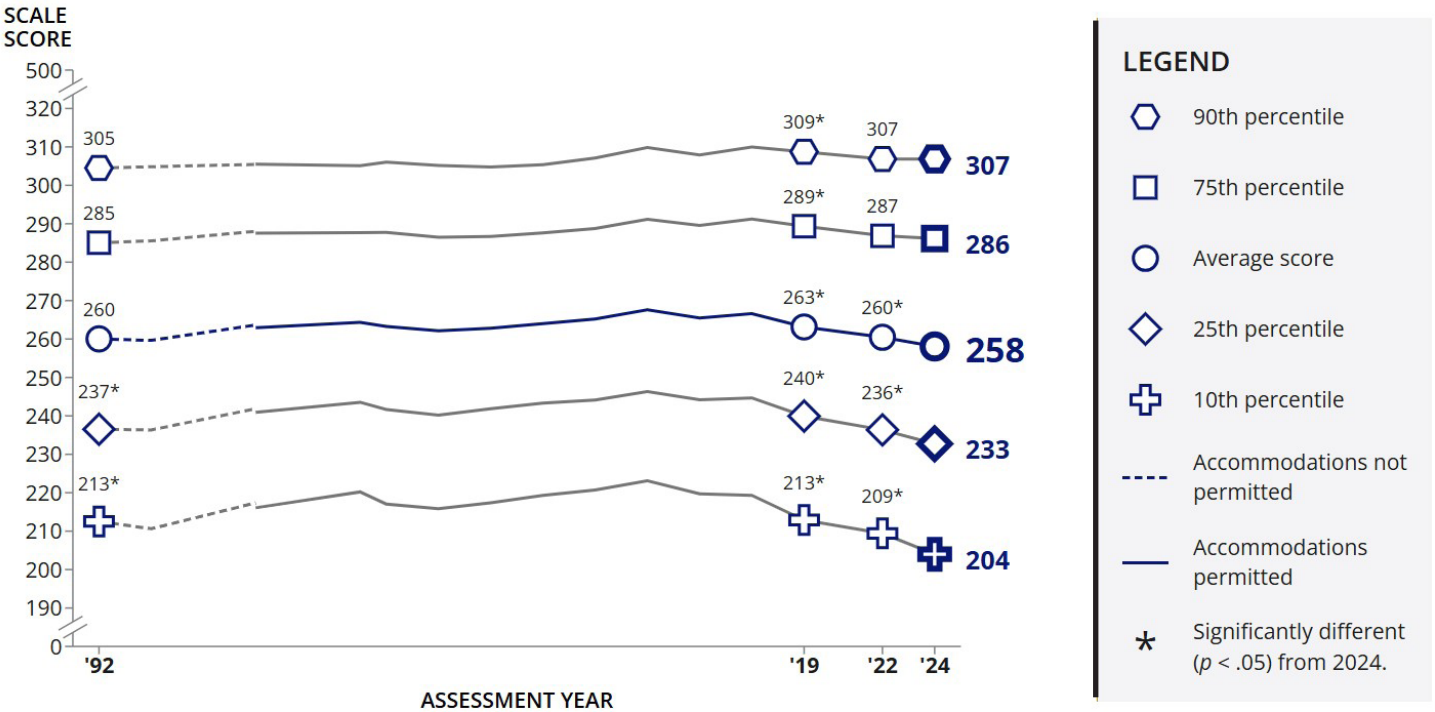
EIGHTH-GRADE READING SCORES CONTINUE TO DECLINE

- Lower average score reflected in declines at the 10th, 25th, and 50th percentiles
- Higher percentage of students below *NAEP Basic*; no significant change in percentage at or above *NAEP Proficient*
- Scores declined for many student groups, for example: Hispanic and White students; male and female students
- Most student groups with score declines also declined at the 25th percentile
- Scores declined in 8 states
- Scores declined in 7 TUDA districts
- Scores at the 10th and 25th percentiles and the percentage of students below *NAEP Basic* lowest since the first assessment in 1992
- Average score lower compared to 2019

Reading grade 8 national score trends

Overall average score changes were:

- No significant change — Compared to 1992
- 5pts — Compared to 2019
- 2pts — Compared to 2022



The Nation's Report Card

2024 Reading
GRADES 4 & 8

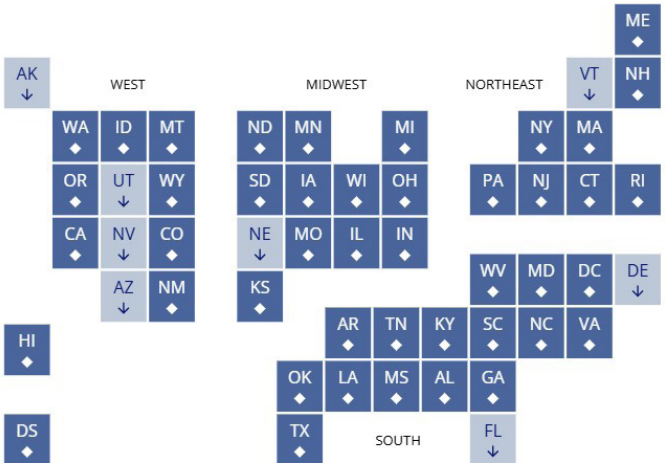
NAEP

STATES & DISTRICTS | **GRADE 8**

Reading grade 8 state score trends pre- and post-pandemic

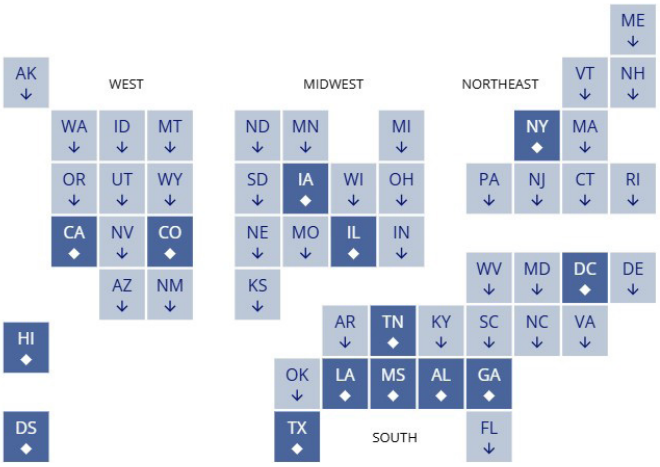
Between **2022** and **2024**, score changes were:

Nation (public)	States/jurisdictions		
decreased	8 decreased	44 no significant change	0 increased



Between **2019** and **2024**, score changes were:

Nation (public)	States/jurisdictions		
decreased	38 decreased	14 no significant change	0 increased



NOTE: DS = Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA), a federally operated nonpublic school system responsible for educating children of military families.

Reading grade 8 district score trends pre- and post-pandemic

Between **2022** and **2024**, score changes were:

Nation (public)	Large city	Districts		
decreased	decreased	7 decreased	18 no significant change	0 increased

Between **2019** and **2024**, score changes were:

Nation (public)	Large city	Districts		
decreased	decreased	11 decreased	14 no significant change	0 increased

⊖ No data or not applicable.
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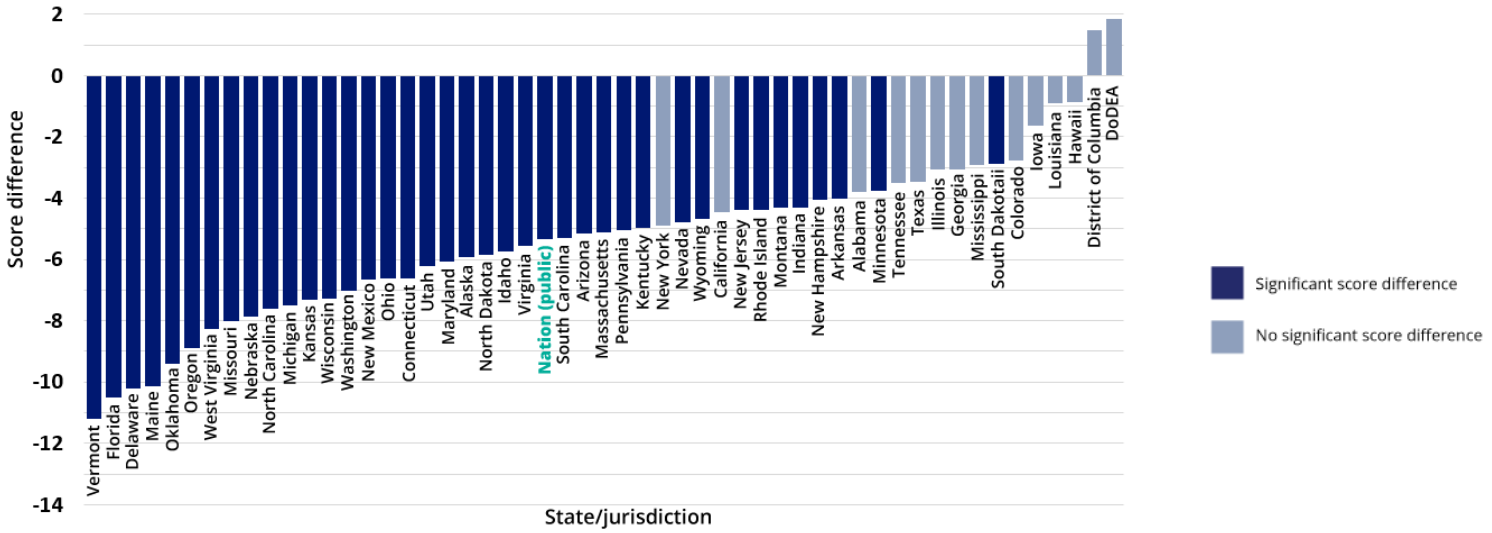
2024 Reading GRADES 4 & 8

NAEP

STATES & DISTRICTS

GRADE 8

Score point difference from 2019 to 2024 in grade 8 reading by state/jurisdiction



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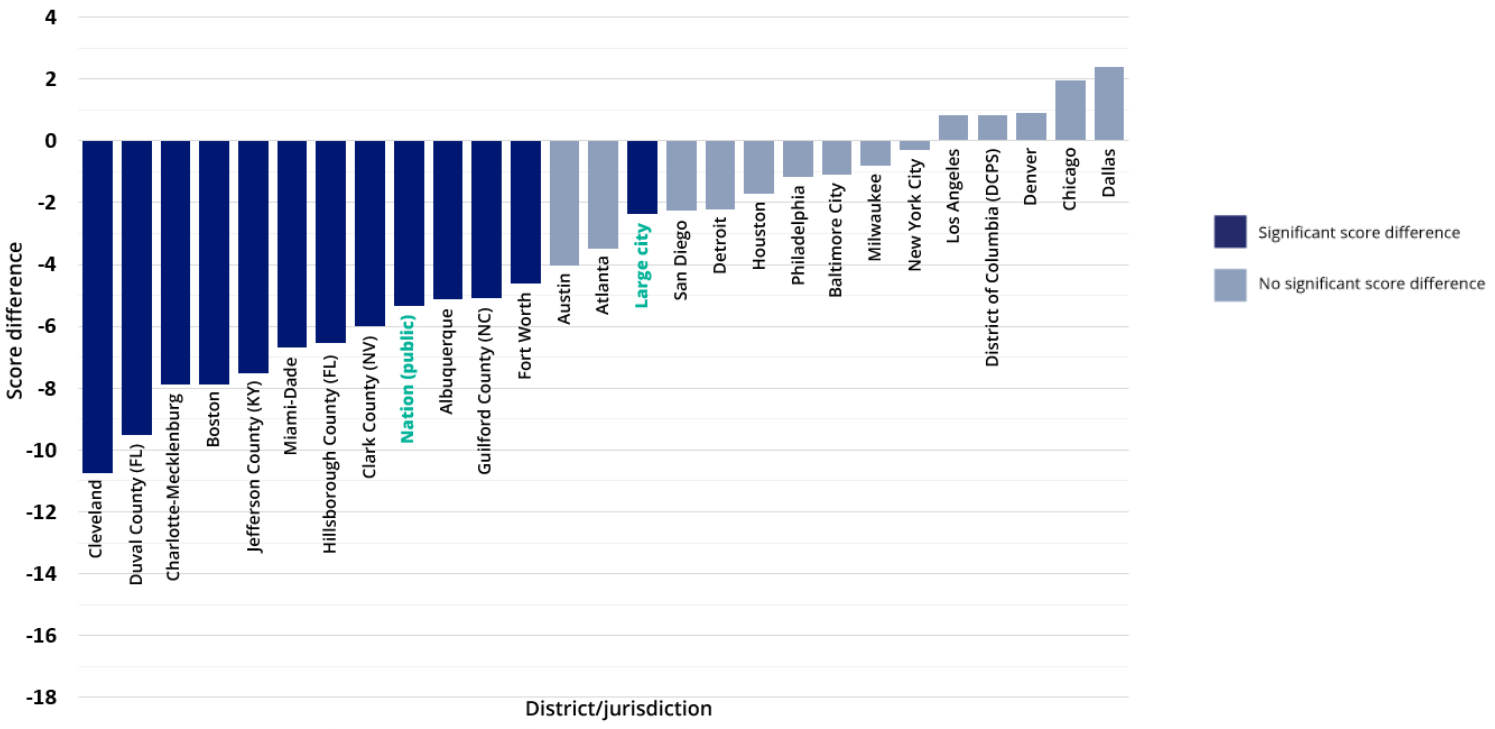
Score point difference from 2019 to 2024 in grade 8 reading by district/jurisdiction



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Coversheet

Record Attendance

Section: I. Opening Items
Item: B. Record Attendance
Purpose: FYI
Submitted by:

BACKGROUND:

Pre-work

Coversheet

Approve Minutes

Section: I. Opening Items
Item: D. Approve Minutes
Purpose: Approve Minutes
Submitted by:
Related Material: 25-0117 Outcomes Committee Meeting Minutes #3 (1).pdf

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Outcomes Committee Meeting Minutes #3

Via https://bostonprep-org.zoom.us/j/7171526696
January 17, 2025
11:00 AM- 12:15 PM

Committee Members Present: Sarah James, Tom Huff, Natalie Branch-Lewis, Vanessa Lipschitz, Bryant Jones, David Berkeley, David Wolff

Staff Members Present: Lauren Bardsley, Robert Rametti, Lily Jewell, Meekerly Sanon,.Vanessa Shiu, VaLonda Harris, Tori Riley

I. **Open Meeting Protocol:**
- Sarah Called the meeting to order at 11:04 AM. Welcomed committee back in the new year
- Set the tone that we have the task of confirming the policy context for graduation requirements
- Conducted icebreaker to set an positive and engaging tone

II. **Vote Approval of Minutes**
- . Sarah presented the previous minutes. Bryant made a motion to approve, Vanessa seconded. All members made a motion to approve.

III. **Public Comment**
- Sarah James invited members of the community to join. No community members were present.

IV. **Agenda/ School Business**

- Policy Changes: Question 2 Ballot Questions
  - There have been several policy changes impacting schools on a state level and we will need to address how these policies have impacted our internal policies. Given that question 2 was voted in, MCAS is no longer a HS graduation requirement. The committee works to vote on a policy for graduation to present to the board.
  - Meekerley clarified what Question 2 means for our kids: students will still take the MCAS. It is now up to each individual district to determine local graduation requirements and local competency determinations among our student population
  - Prior to Question 2: Graduation requirements must include local graduation requirements and statewide competency. Now Post Question 2 graduation requirements mean students must meet local graduation requirements as well as local competency determination
    - DESE continues to expect the MCAS tests to continue to be administered by all MA schools with schools demonstrating 95%+ participation to remain in good standing
  - Our goal is to decide and agree on local competency determination
  - Meekerly opened it up for any questions from the committee. Additionally, wanted to make sure that the committee and board feel comfortable explaining to others what the impact of question 2 has on our school community
  - Iteration 1- Worked on and met with community members to receive feedback and further develop. Wanted to make sure that we are still holding a high bar for our students. Moved to iteration 2
  - Iteration 2 of Proposal:
    - Local Graduation requirements: MCAS score of 470 in ELA, Math, Science

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(Physics or Biology)
        - Local Competency Determination: Passing core requirements (ELA, Languages, History, Science, Math, PE/Health, Arts, Electives, Ethics, Summer Enrichment)- includes an increased weight for IAs from 10% to 20% of final score. Additionally, passing ethics defense.
    - The goal is to vote in a policy that will be able to remain consistent over the years to keep it simple for students and staff to understand the bar.
- Discussion Questions on Graduation Requirements:
    - Are we in agreement in support of MCAS as part of the requirement? Why?
    - Minimum Score
    - Avoiding Redundancy
    - History Implications
    - Updating our Approach to Ethics Defense
    - Question: How does this impact our current seniors? And has this been communicated to families?
        - The proposed graduation requirements are currently the requirements students, which would cause less disruptions
    - Question: how will families and kids feel about us keeping MCAS when the state does not?
        - Want to make sure that the language is extremely clear for students, families, and community members
        - We want to make sure the bar is high enough and accurate representation of what students would need to be able to do to succeed in college
    - Question: How does the student experience change? Is it simply the IA counting for more?
        - We can decide if the weight of IA changes this year or next year
    - Question: Do we know what BPS is doing? How will this impact recruiting students?
        - We want to maintain a high bar for students and families so we are fulfilling our mission
- Discuss Next Steps: Re-do iterations and re-meet as a committee, Proposal adaptation right now, Move to recommend iteration 2 with the adjustments we discussed for approval at the board meeting in February with agreement to come back to discussion for future cohorts.
- Sarah requested motion to vote to recommend this iteration to the board, Tom moved, Natalie seconded. Berkeley voted yes, Wolff voted yes, Sarah voted yes, Tom voted yes, Natalie voted yes. We moved to recommend this iteration to the board.
- Committee requested the school based team make sure the language in the memo is super clear for current seniors and how this will impact our future cohorts of students

V. Sarah closed meeting at 12:15 pm

Coversheet

Academic Updates: i-Ready Data and Interim Assessment Performance

Section: II. Outcomes
Item: B. Academic Updates: i-Ready Data and Interim Assessment Performance
Purpose:
Submitted by:
Related Material: 25-0228 Reading Performance Update.pptx
25-0228 IA Performance.pptx

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SY25 Reading Performance Update
February 28, 2025

I-READY OVERVIEW

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i-Ready is a comprehensive online platform designed to support student learning and growth in mathematics and reading. It combines diagnostic assessments with personalized instruction to provide educators with actionable insights and targeted teaching tools. i-Ready is widely used in schools across the United States to enhance student achievement, improve instructional efficiency, and close learning gaps.

1. **Diagnostic Assessment:**
   - The i-Ready Diagnostic is an adaptive test that adjusts its questions based on each student's responses.
   - The test is administered three times a year to track progress over time.

1. P**ersonalized Learning Path:**
   - Based on diagnostic results, i-Ready creates an individualized learning pathway for each student. This pathway includes engaging, interactive lessons tailored to their specific needs.
     - Lessons address foundational skills, on-grade-level content, and areas where students may need additional support.

3. Progress Monitoring

- The program continuously monitors student progress, providing real-time data on lesson completion, mastery, and growth.
- Teachers and administrators can use this data to adjust instruction and allocate resources effectively.

I-READY OVERVIEW: STUDENTS RECEIVE AN OVERALL PLACEMENT SCORE

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Student Rostered Grade

	Emerging K	Grade K	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Grade K	100-360	361-392 393-479 N/A	480-536	537-560	561-800									
Grade 1	100-345	346-433	434-457 458-479 480-536	537-560	561-602	603-800								
Grade 2		100-418	419-490	491-515 516-536 537-560	561-602	603-629	630-800							
Grade 3		100-418	419-475	476-513	514-544 545-560 561-602	603-629	630-640	641-800						
Grade 4		100-418	419-475	476-498	499-554	555-575 576-602 603-629	630-640	641-653	654-800					
Grade 5		100-418	419-475	476-498	499-539	540-578	579-605 606-629 630-640	641-653	654-669	670-800				
Grade 6		100-418	419-475	476-498	499-539	540-563	564-597	598-615 616-640 641-653	654-669	670-684	685-800			
Grade 7		100-418	419-475	476-498	499-539	540-563	564-582	583-608	609-631 632-653 654-669	670-684	685-703	704-800		
Grade 8		100-418	419-475	476-498	499-539	540-563	564-582	583-593	594-619	620-641 642-669 670-684	685-703	704-723	724-800	
Grade 9		100-418	419-475	476-498	499-539	540-563	564-582	583-593	594-604	605-639	640-660 661-703 N/A	704-723	724-735	736-800
Grade 10		100-418	419-475	476-498	499-539	540-563	564-582	583-593	594-604	605-624	625-651	652-672 673-723 N/A	724-735	736-800
Grade 11		100-418	419-475	476-498	499-539	540-563	564-582	583-593	594-604	605-624	625-636	637-659	660-691 692-735 N/A	736-800
Grade 12		100-418	419-475	476-498	499-539	540-563	564-582	583-593	594-604	605-624	625-636	637-644	645-667	668-703 704-800 N/A

I-READY OVERVIEW: STUDENTS ARE ASSESSED ACROSS 5 DOMAINS

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- **Phonological Awareness**—Phonological Awareness is the understanding that a spoken word is made up of different parts and that each of these parts makes a sound. For example, the word bat includes the sounds /b/, /a/, and /t/, and the word batter can be broken into two syllables that make the sounds /bat/ and /ter/. Phonological Awareness is an important building block for Phonics. Readers need to be able to distinguish, or make out, the individual sounds in spoken words before they can fully master matching sounds to letter.

- **Phonics**—Phonics instruction teaches students how to connect the sounds they hear in spoken words to the letters they see in written words. For example, a student who can connect sounds to letters knows to read “th” in then as a single sound /th/, rather than the sound /t/ and the sound /h/. Students have to learn many different connections between sounds and spelling patterns. In fact, there are so many connections that learning Phonics can feel like learning the rules to understand a hidden code. But this skill is mastered by taking one step at a time, learning one rule and then another, and so on. Once students can make these connections quickly and easily, they can really start to read for meaning.

- **High-Frequency Words**—High-Frequency Words are the words that appear most often in what students read. Words such as the, and, and it are high-frequency words. Because these words appear so often, readers must learn to recognize them automatically. Also, these words are often spelled in ways that can be confusing. Words such as could and there do not follow the rules that connect sounds to letters in most words. Learning to recognize these words automatically helps students read more quickly and easily, which gives them a better opportunity to understand what they are reading.

I-READY OVERVIEW: STUDENTS ARE ASSESSED ACROSS 5 DOMAINS

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- **Vocabulary—**Vocabulary is the name for the words a student knows. The more words a student knows, the easier it is to understand what the student reads. Good readers know the meanings of many words. Students grow their vocabularies by hearing and reading new words, talking about words, and being taught specific words.

- **Comprehension: Overall—The Comprehension:** Overall score and placement is derived from all Reading Comprehension items students see on the Diagnostic for Reading, including Comprehension: Literature items and Comprehension: Informational Text items. This score describes students' overall understanding of both fiction and nonfiction texts and can help educators understand a student's general comprehension strengths and instructional priorities.

- **Comprehension: Literature—Comprehension:** Literature describes a student's ability to understand types of writing that are usually made up, or fictional. Stories are the literary texts that students read most often, but plays and poems are also examples of literary texts. A student who understands literature might identify the sequence of events in a story, discuss the meaning of a poem, or explain the lines a character speaks in a play. As a student develops as a reader, the student is able to understand stories, plays, and poems that are increasingly complicated.

- **Comprehension: Informational Text—Comprehension:** Informational Text describes a student's ability to understand types of writing that are usually true. Books about science or history are examples of informational text, as are newspaper articles or magazine articles. This kind of writing is often structured differently than literary texts. Informational text often does not tell a story, and it is usually organized into sections with headings. Additionally, it might contain charts, diagrams, and graphs that are important to understanding. A student who understands informational text might identify the main idea and supporting details, describe the way the writing is organized, or draw information out of a photograph or diagram.

GRADE PLACEMENT BY DOMAIN

Majority of students have mastered phonological awareness, phonics, and high frequency words.

**All students placed out of *phonological awareness testing after the first assessment, which is why there are no results for this sub-test.*

Phonics Grade-Level Placement

Mid or Above Grade Level	Early On Grade Level	One Grade Level Below	Two Grade Levels Below	Three or More Grade Levels Below	Not Assessed
94%	0%	0%	0%	6%	0%

High-Frequency Words Grade-Level Placement

Mid or Above Grade Level	Early On Grade Level	One Grade Level Below	Two Grade Levels Below	Three or More Grade Levels Below	Not Assessed
42%	0%	0%	0%	0%	58%

GRADE PLACEMENT BY DOMAIN

Most students struggle with vocabulary and comprehension of literature and informational texts

Vocabulary Grade-Level Placement

Mid or Above Grade Level	Early On Grade Level	One Grade Level Below	Two Grade Levels Below	Three or More Grade Levels Below
9%	12%	21%	12%	46%

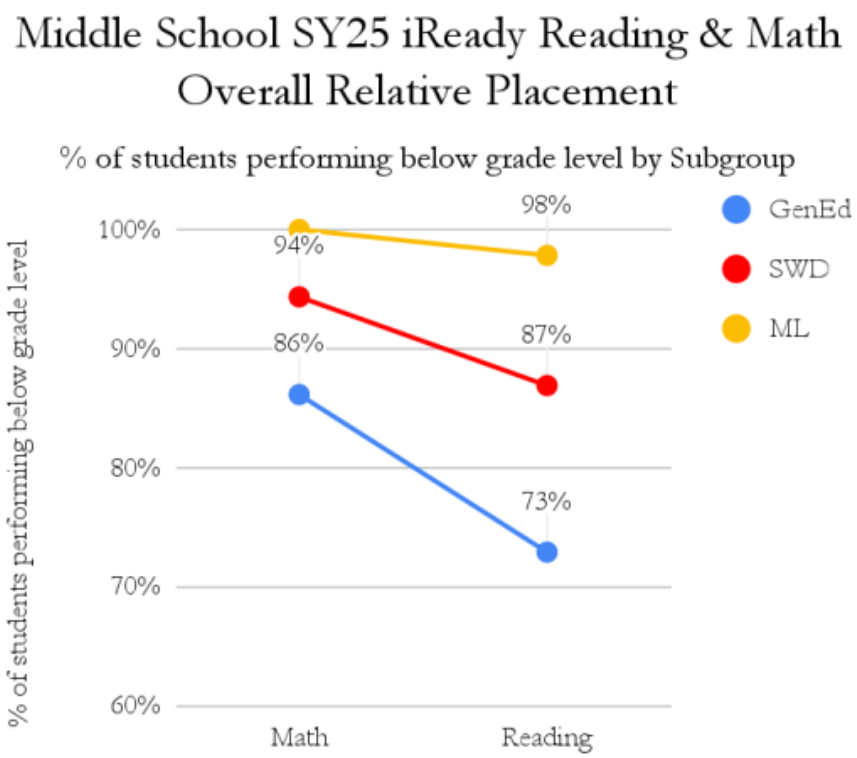
Literature Grade-Level Placement

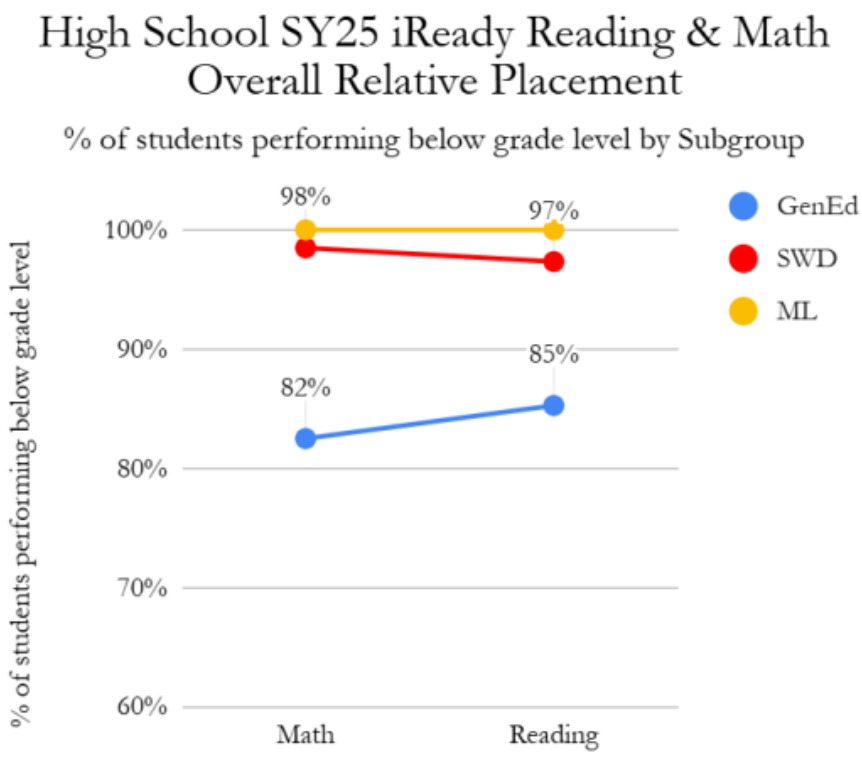
Mid or Above Grade Level	Early On Grade Level	One Grade Level Below	Two Grade Levels Below	Three or More Grade Levels Below
13%	11%	20%	11%	45%

Informational Text Grade-Level Placement

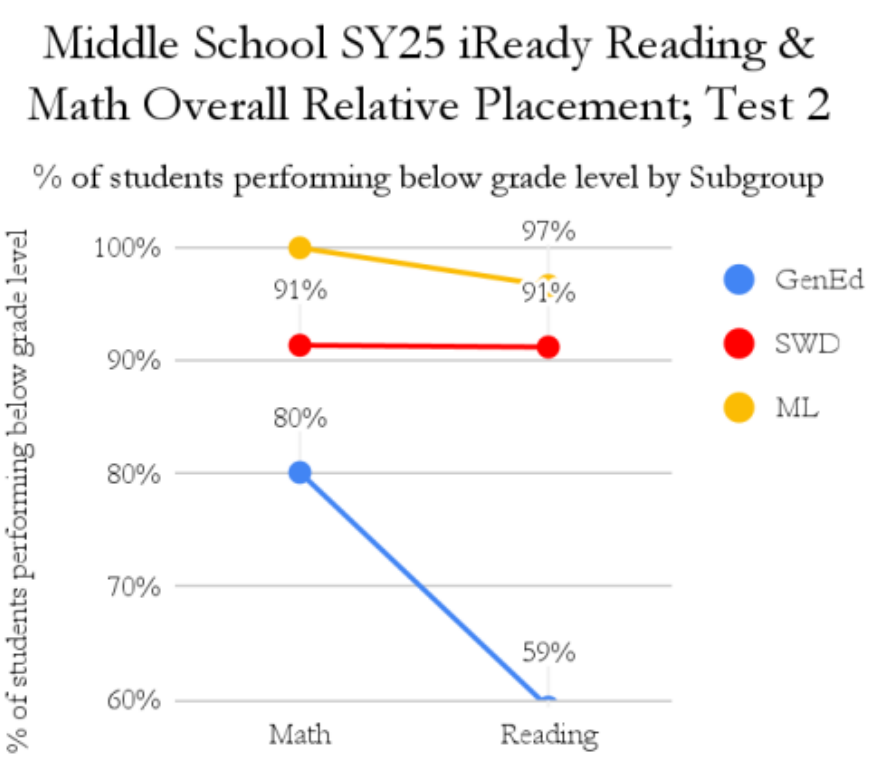
Mid or Above Grade Level	Early On Grade Level	One Grade Level Below	Two Grade Levels Below	Three or More Grade Levels Below
10%	12%	16%	10%	53%

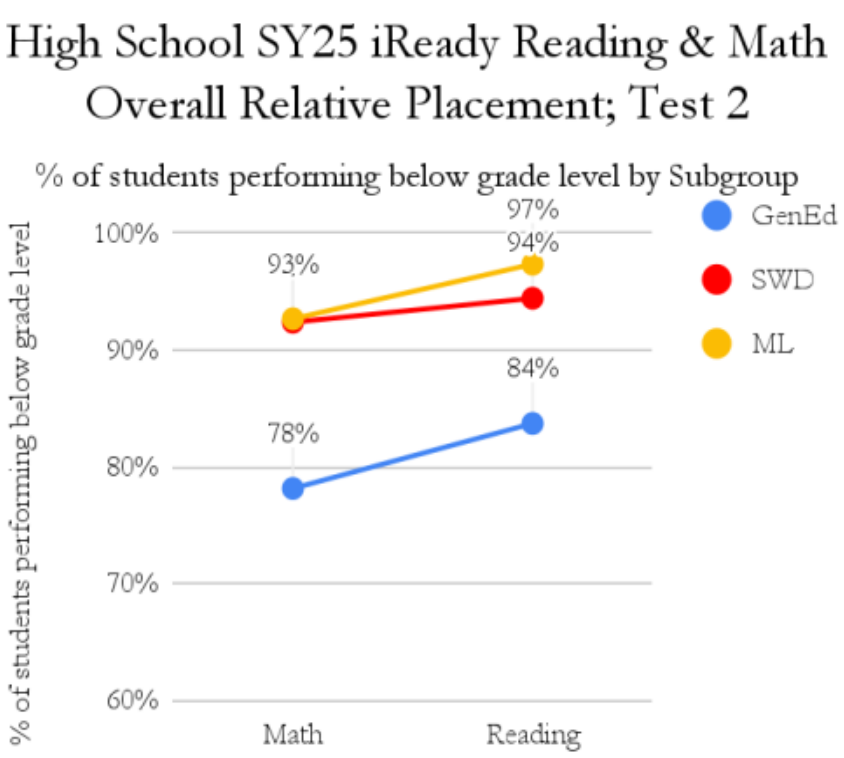
SWD/ML Reading Levels Lag Behind Gen. Ed Peers



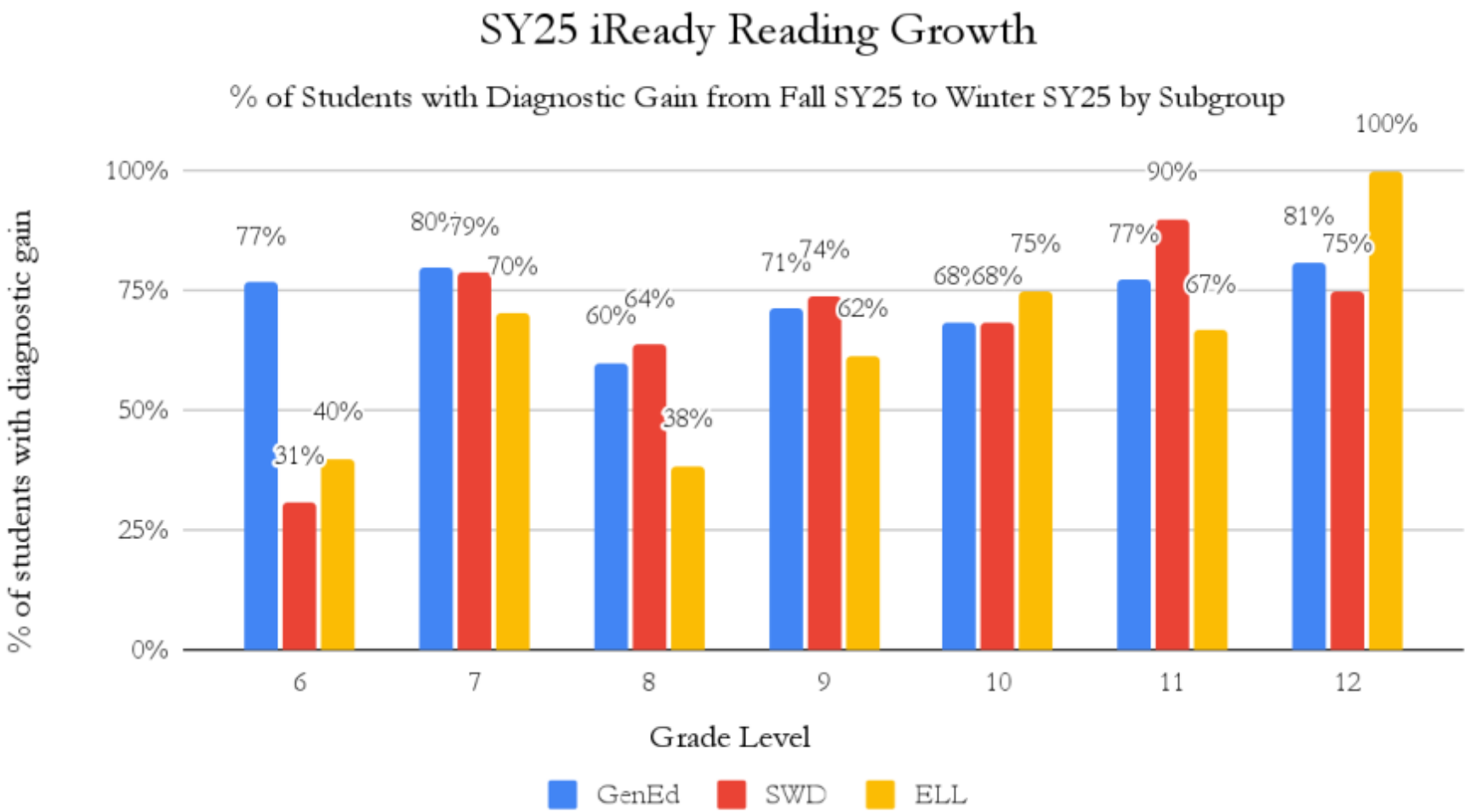


SWDs and ML students read below grade level at higher rates than gen ed students



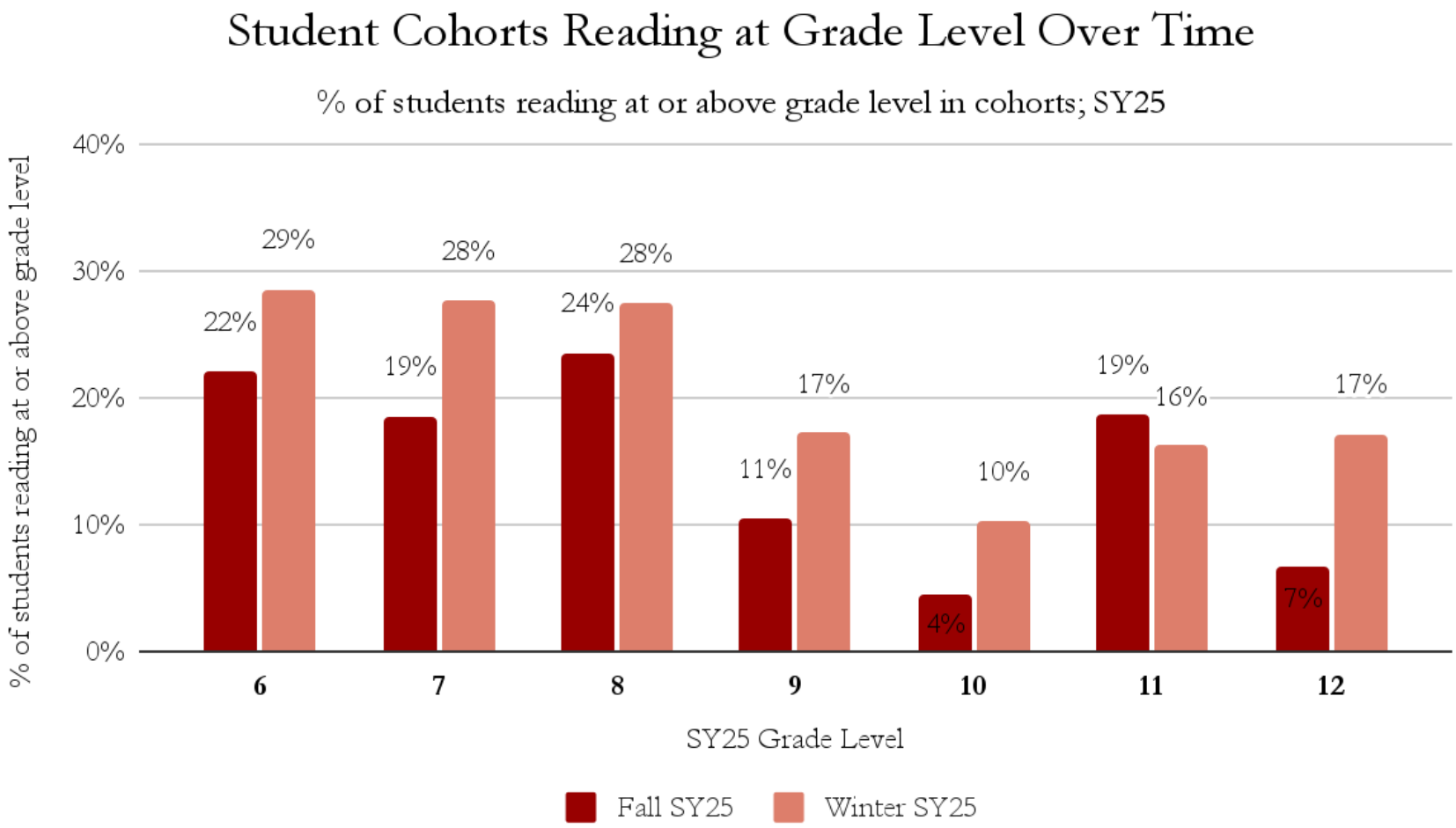


Gen. Ed. students show greater gains; grades 7, 11, and 12 show greatest gains in all subgroups

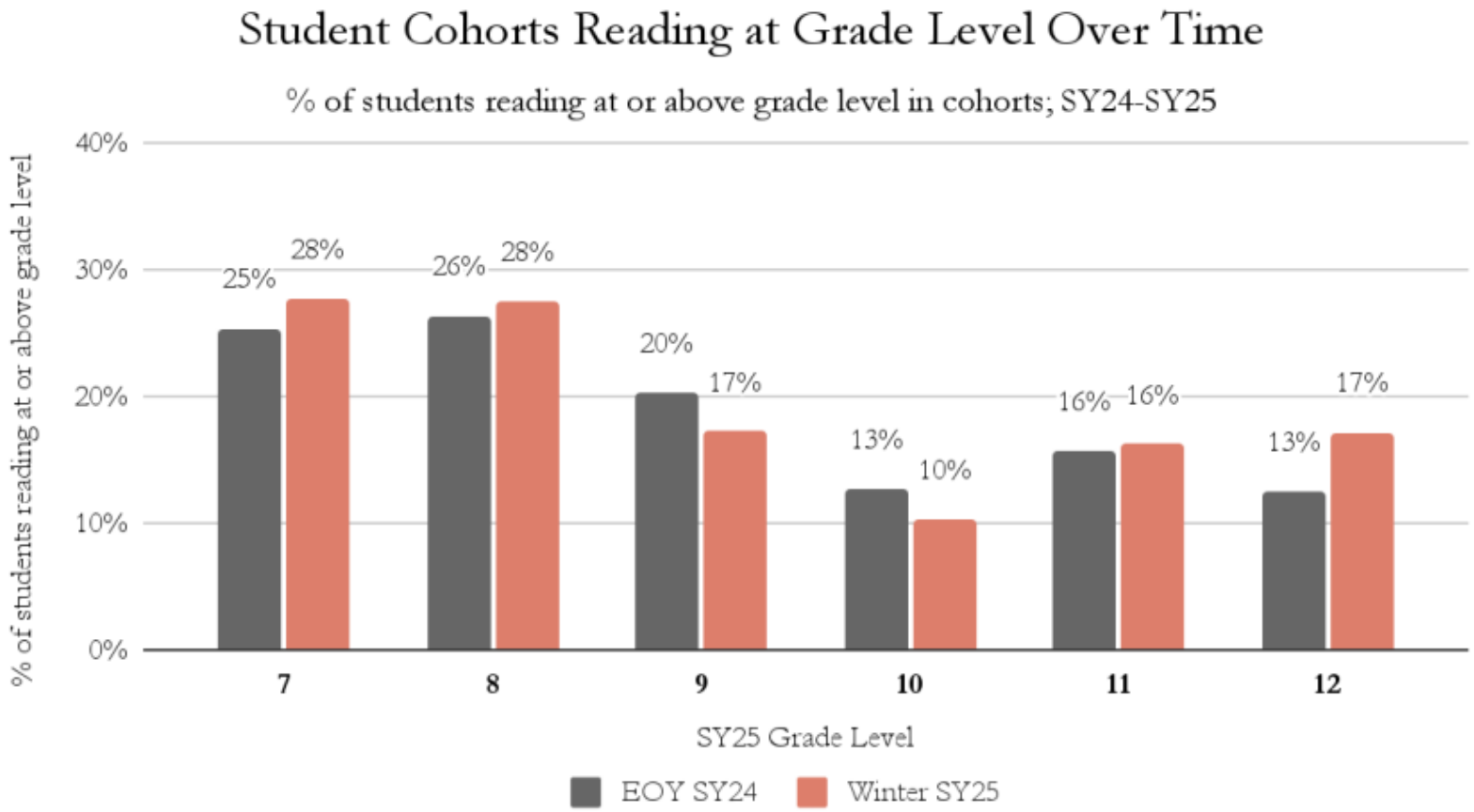


Note: Diagnostic Gain is the scale score point gain from the baseline test to the most recent test

The percent of students reading on or above grade level went up across almost all grade levels from Fall SY25 to Winter SY25

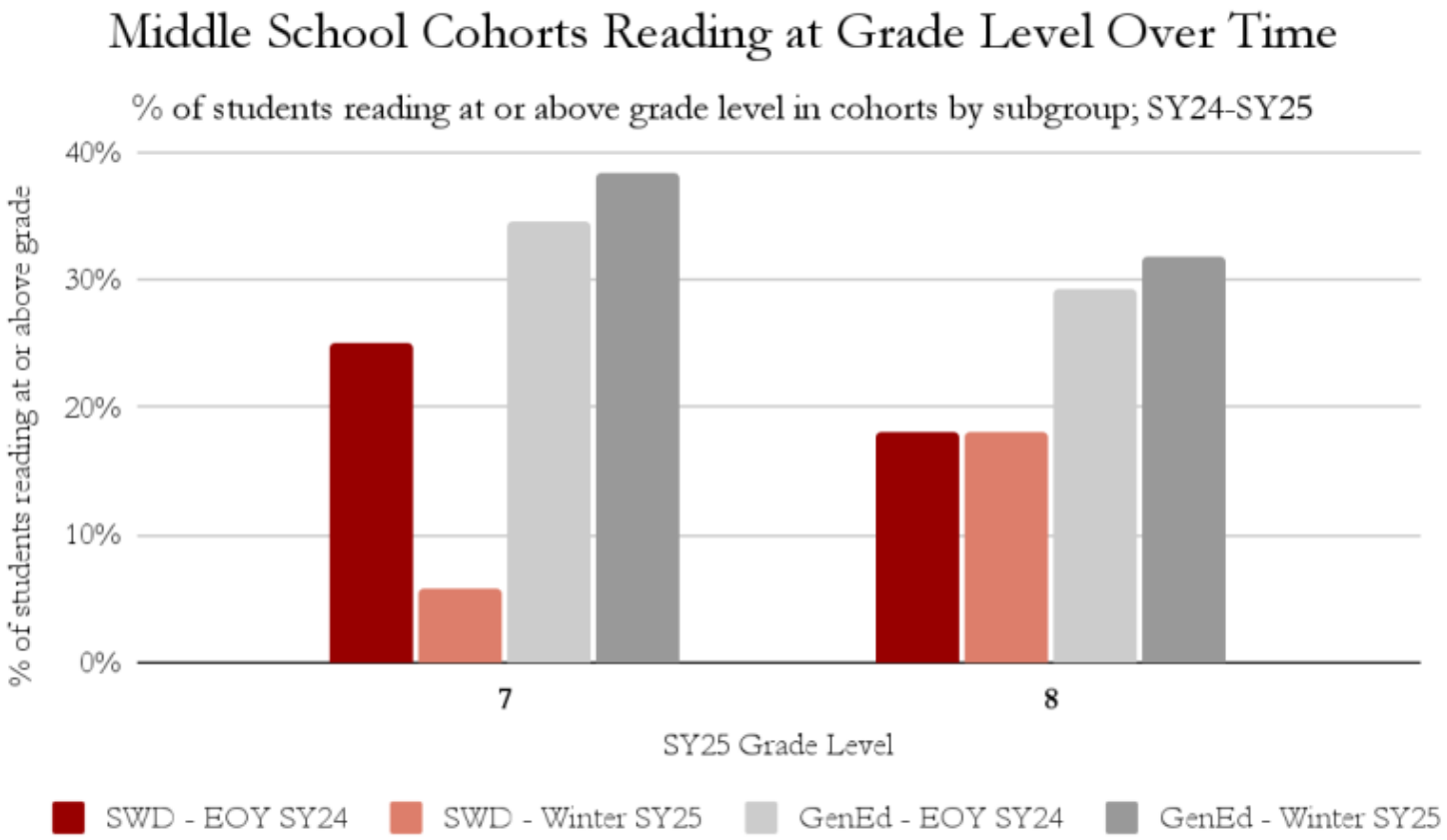


Students are losing ground from one year to the next, despite making gains within a single year



Note: The SY25 6th graders are not included because they were not enrolled at Boston Prep in SY24

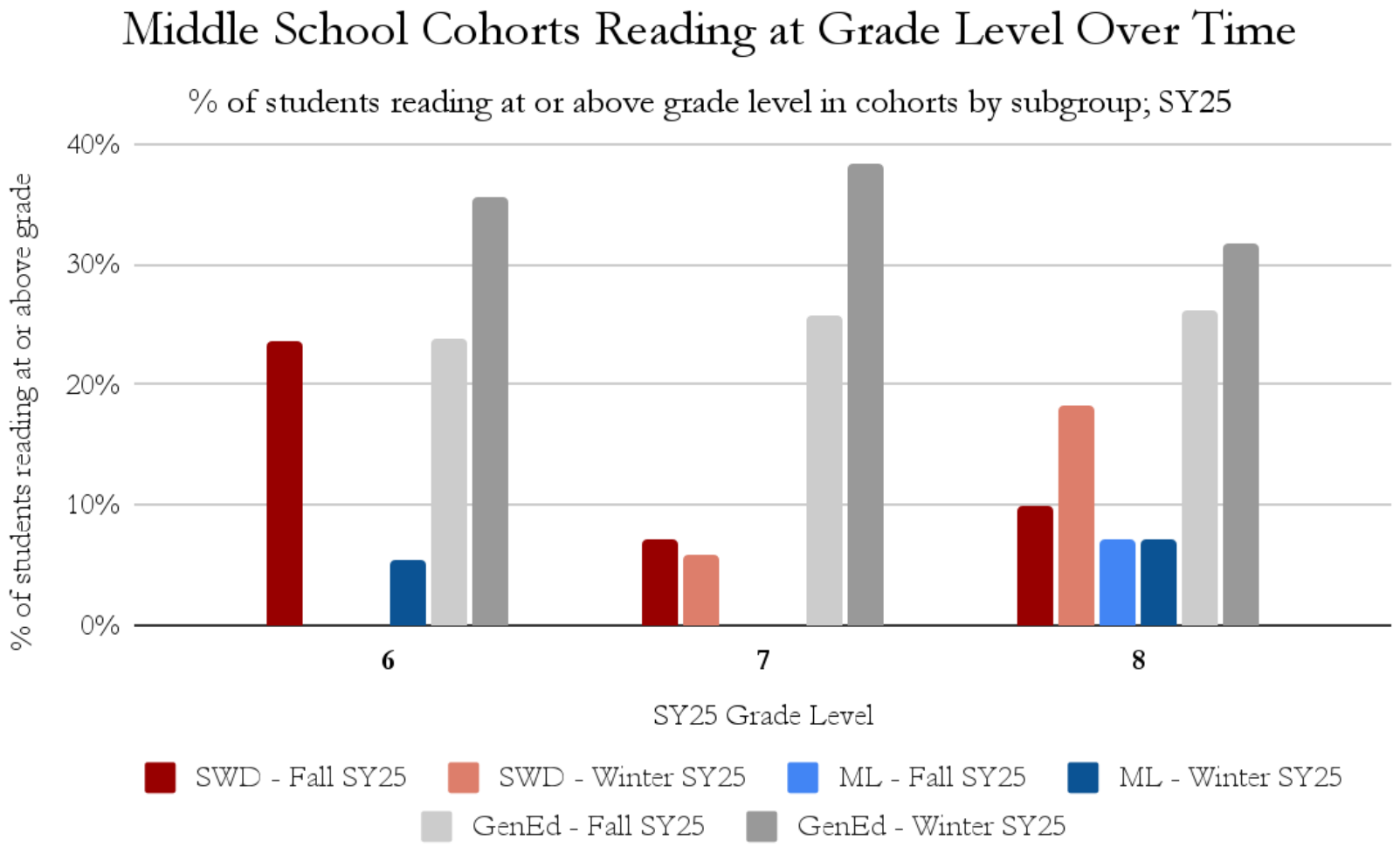
SWDs show more growth from 7th to 8th grade; other students decline from one year to the next



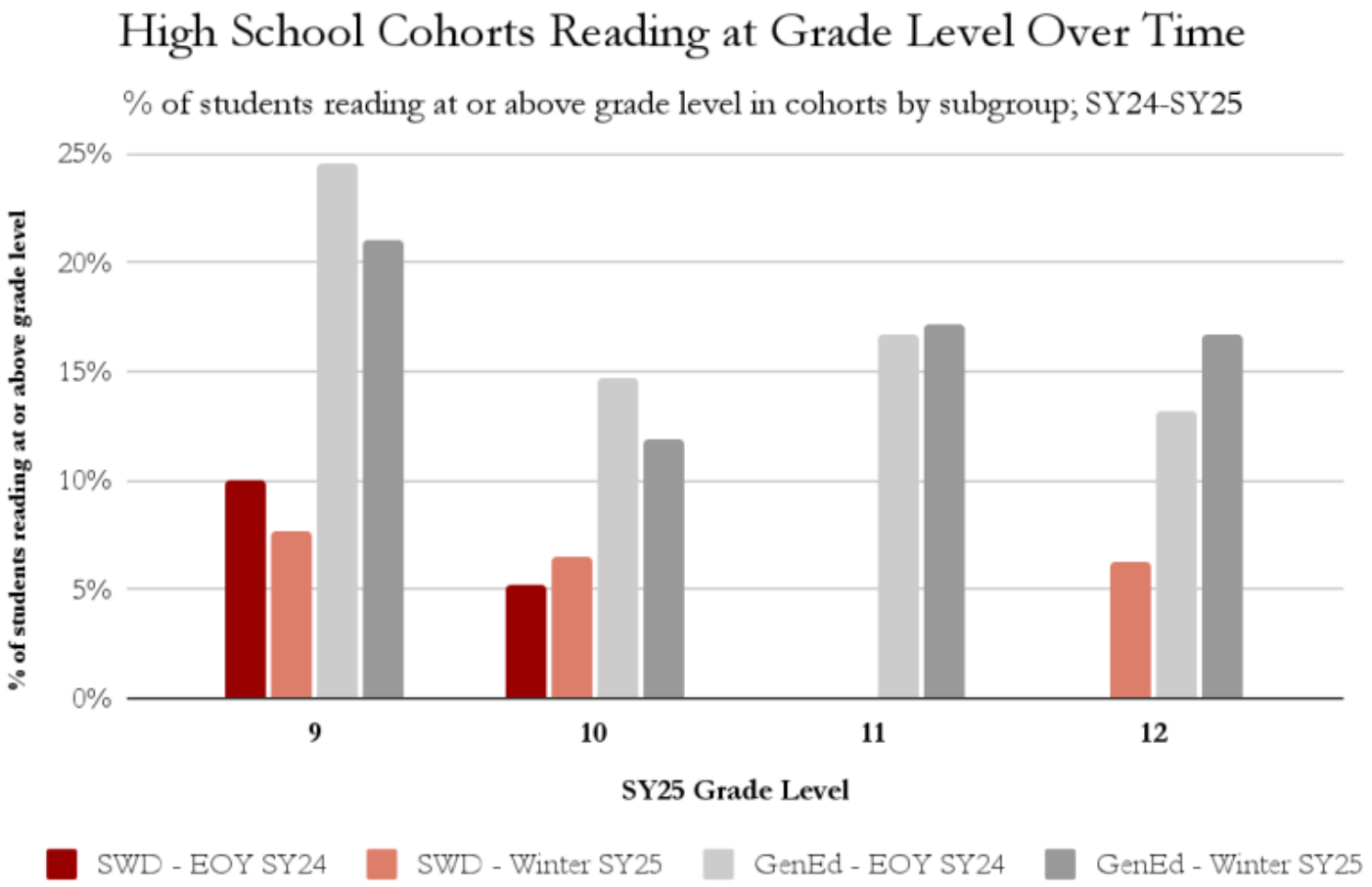
Note 1: 0% of ML students across all grade levels in SY24 and SY25 are reading above or at grade level, so they are not included in this graph

Note 2: The SY25 6th graders are not included because they were not enrolled at Boston Prep in SY24

Gen Ed students and SWD students in grade 8 demonstrated growth this school year

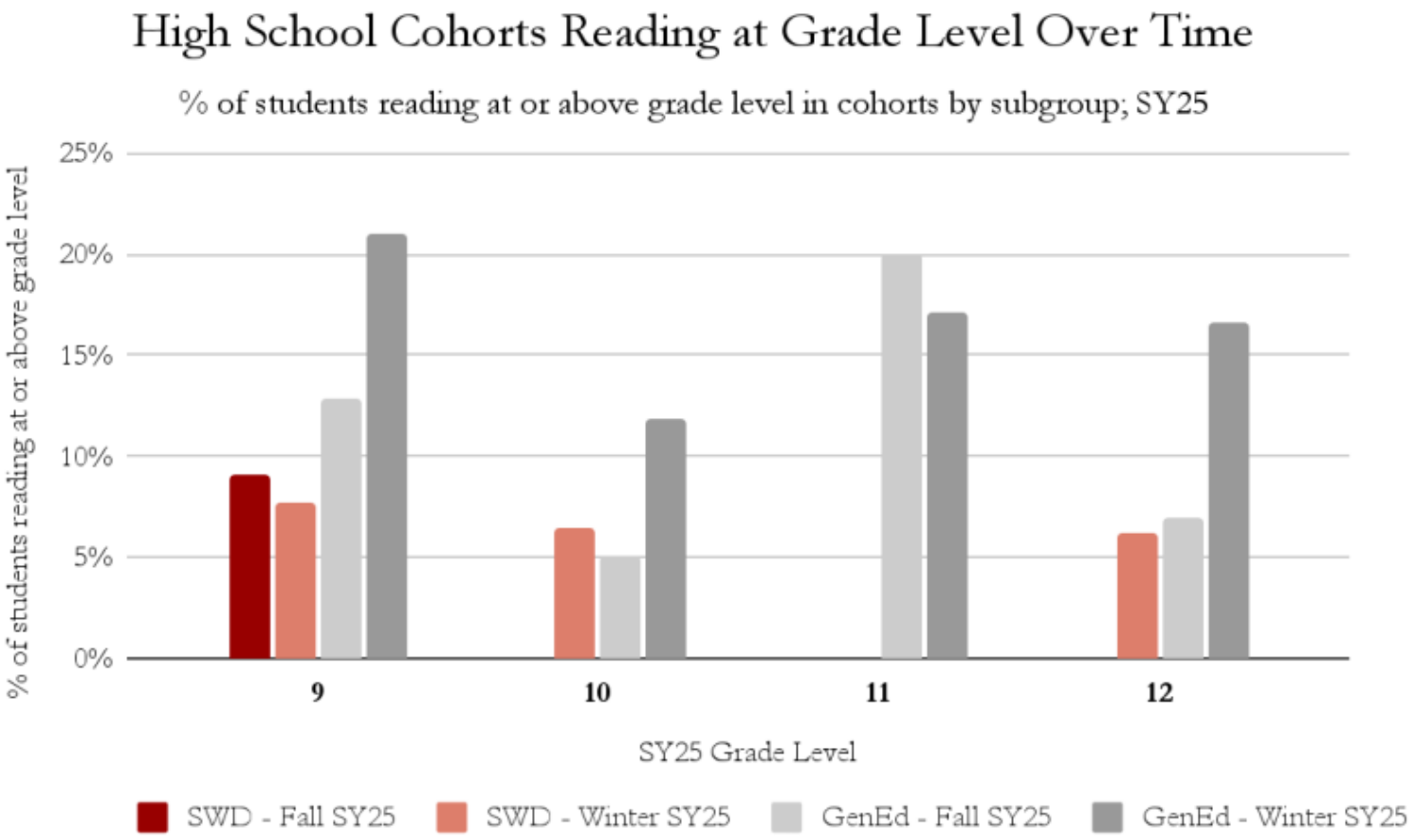


Students lose ground from one year to the next, even after gaining ground within a single school year



Note 1: 0% of ML students across all grade levels in SY24 and SY25 are reading above or at grade level, so they are not included in this graph

Gen Ed 9th, 10th, 12th grade show growth this year



Note 1: 0% of ML students in the High School are reading above or at grade level in either test, so they are not included in this graph

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

BOSTON PREP

- **General Student Population**
  - Showed overall improvement in reading performance from Fall SY25 to Winter SY25
  - Improvements were observed across most grade levels

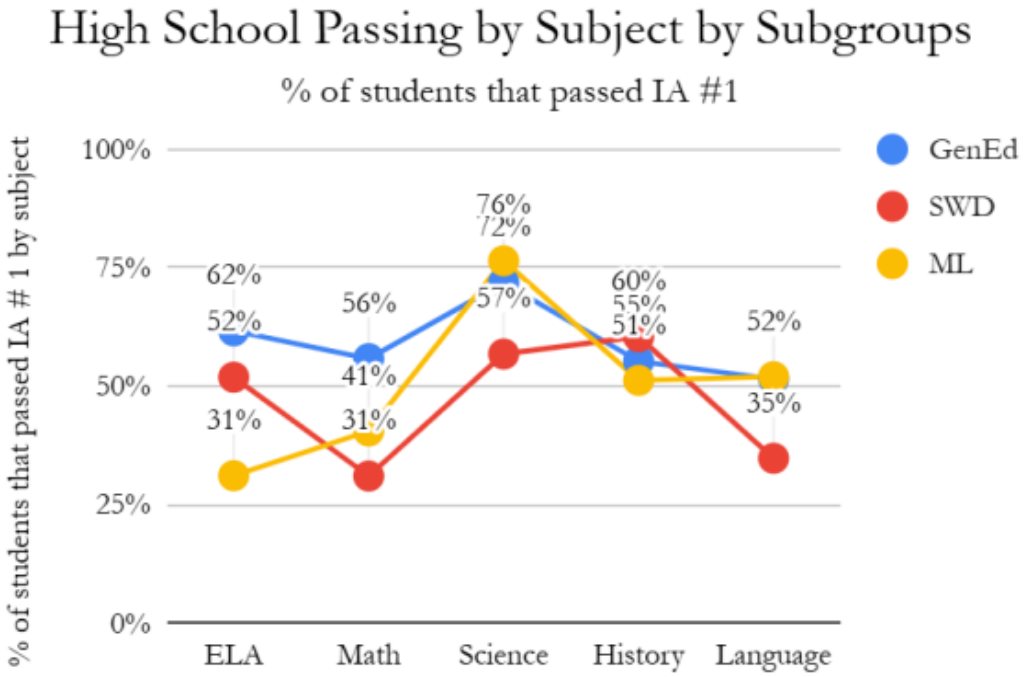
- **Multilingual (ML) Students**
  - 0% of ML students reading at or above grade level across all grades in both SY24 and SY25
  - This pattern persists in both Fall and Winter assessments
  - High School ML students show particular challenges, with none reaching grade-level reading proficiency

- **Year Over Year Growth**
  - Fall 2025 to Winter 2025 shows many students making growth; the year over year growth is more limited, with several grade levels showing a decline. We hypothesize this is because the target for “on grade level” increases each year as students progress through the grade levels. Students will need to make more than one year’s growth to close the gap between “below” and “on” grade level.

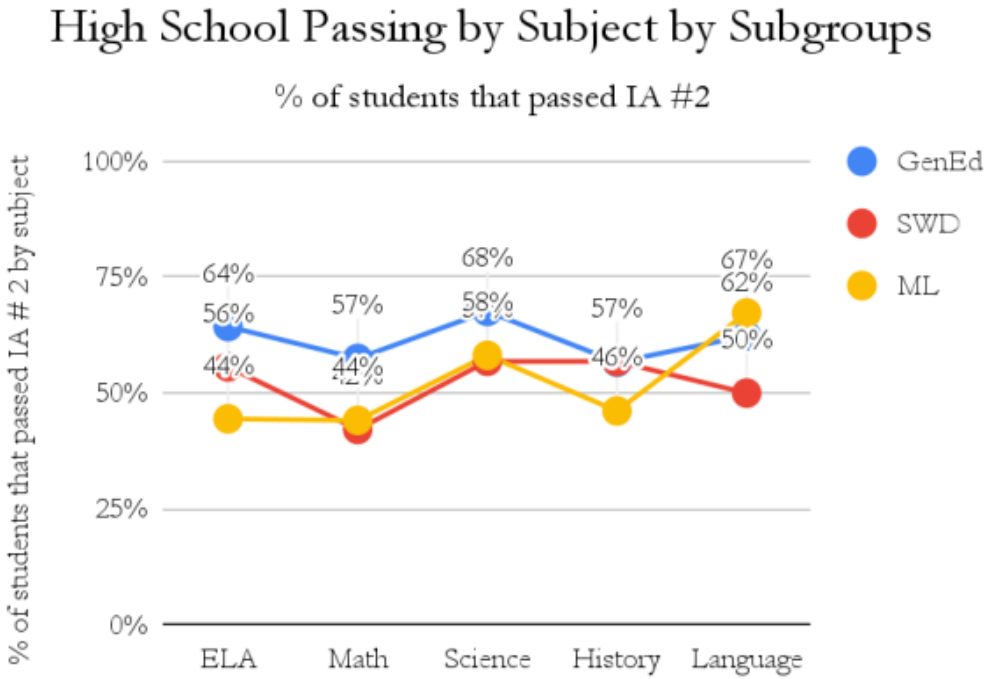
Interim Assessment Performance

February 2025

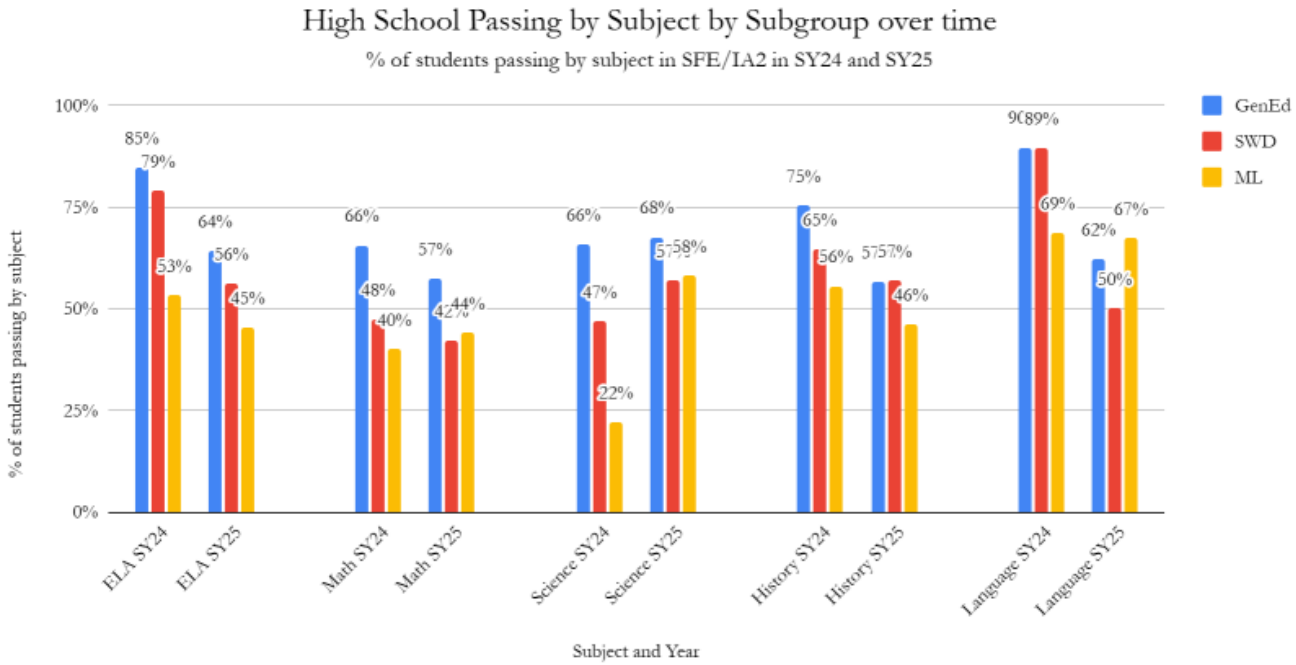
IA #1 : % of students passing by subject; High School



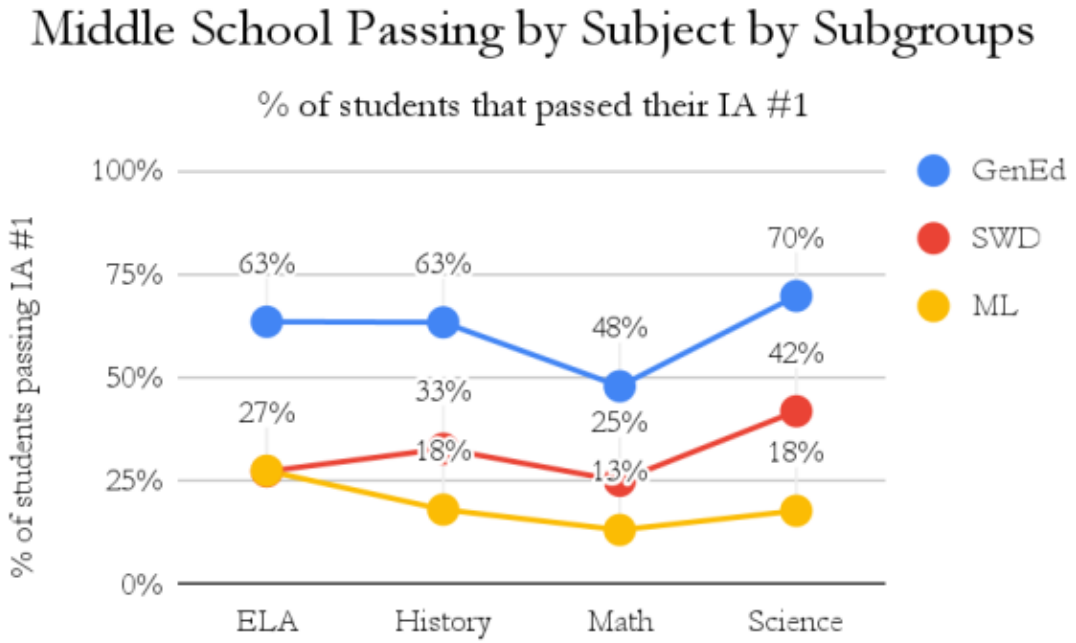
IA #2 : % of students passing by subject; High School



SY24 SFE vs SY25 IA #2: % of students passing by subject; High School



IA #1 : % of students passing by subject; Middle School



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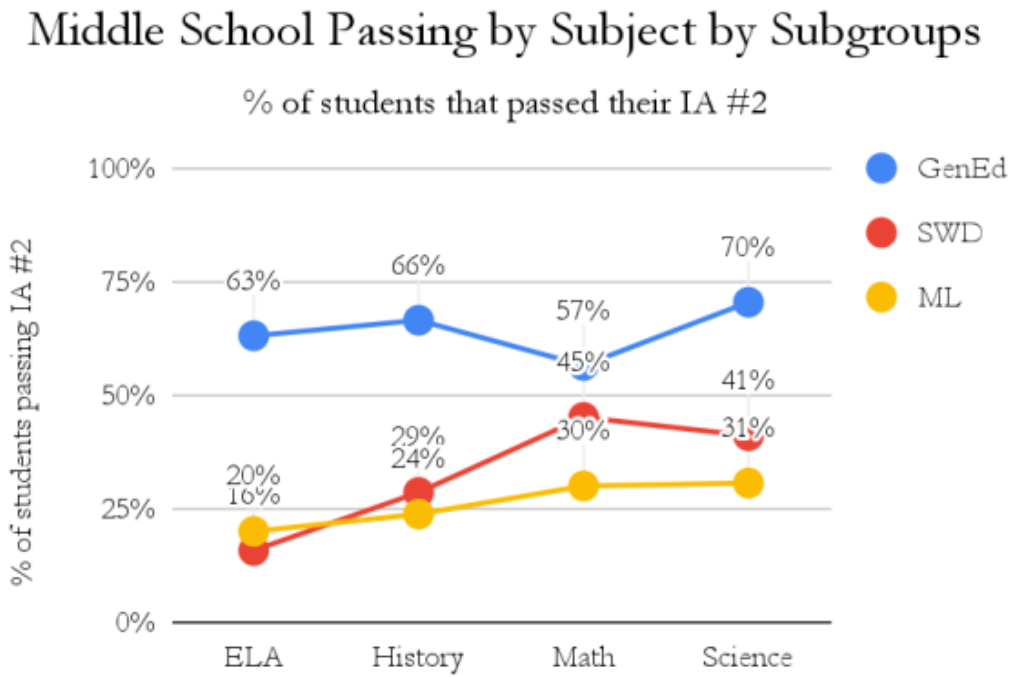
IA #2 : % of students passing by subject; Middle School



SY24 SFE vs SY25 IA #2: % of students passing by subject; Middle School