



2026

DC Bold Performance Schools Report

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF BOLD SCHOOLS

21 bright spots. DC elementary and middle schools where students from priority groups beat expectations by more than 10 points.



EmpowerK12



ABOUT THE BRIGHT SPOTS

DC's Bold Performance Schools

Bold Performance Schools are the DC schools that boldly support priority students, including economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, English learners, and students of color, to reach academic success.

EmpowerK12 has named Bold Performance Schools every year since 2016 and studies what their leaders and teachers do so other schools can learn from it. In the tenth year of Bold Schools, 21 schools earn the designation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bold Schools improve at more than double the rate of similar schools

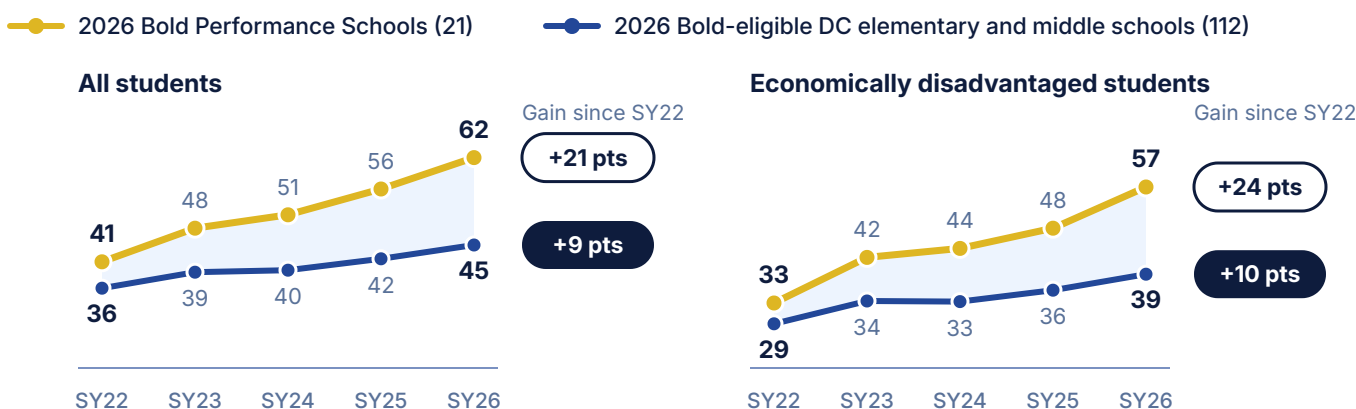
Bold Performance Schools are the DC schools that boldly support priority students, including economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, English learners, and students of color, to reach academic success. In the tenth year of Bold Schools, 21 schools earn the designation. These DC Public Schools (DCPS) and DC public charter schools serve 6,900 elementary and middle school students, 10% of students in grades PK-8.

Bold Schools serve students with backgrounds similar to those at the 112 other DC elementary and middle schools that qualify for Bold consideration, yet their results look very different. In 2026, 62% of students at Bold Schools meet the career-ready benchmark (Level 3 or above) on the DC CAPE in ELA and math combined, compared with 45% of students at other Bold-eligible schools. The difference is largest for economically disadvantaged students, with 57% reaching the benchmark, a higher rate than all students at other Bold-eligible schools.

FIGURE 1 · CAPE LEVEL 3+, SY22 TO SY26

Since the pandemic, Bold Performance Schools improved at more than double the rate of other Bold-eligible schools in ELA and math combined

Percent of students at Level 3 or above on the DC CAPE ELA and math assessments combined (the career-ready benchmark), weighted by students tested. Both groups are the SY26 cohorts followed back through every year. Pills show each group's gain from SY22 to SY26, in points.



Source: OSSE statewide assessment results (DC CAPE, published as PARCC through 2023), SY22 to SY26, via the EK12 PublicData warehouse. Economically disadvantaged students were labeled At-Risk before 2023. Bold-eligible = elementary and middle schools with more than 30% at-risk students in SY26 that were not designated Bold, per the EK12 Labs PPAE results.

Since SY22, the first test after the return to in-person learning, Bold Schools gained 21 percentage points for all students and 24 points for economically disadvantaged students. Other Bold-eligible schools gained 9 and 10 points respectively, which means that the Bold Schools improved at more than double the rate of their peers.

DC students make progress for a fourth straight year

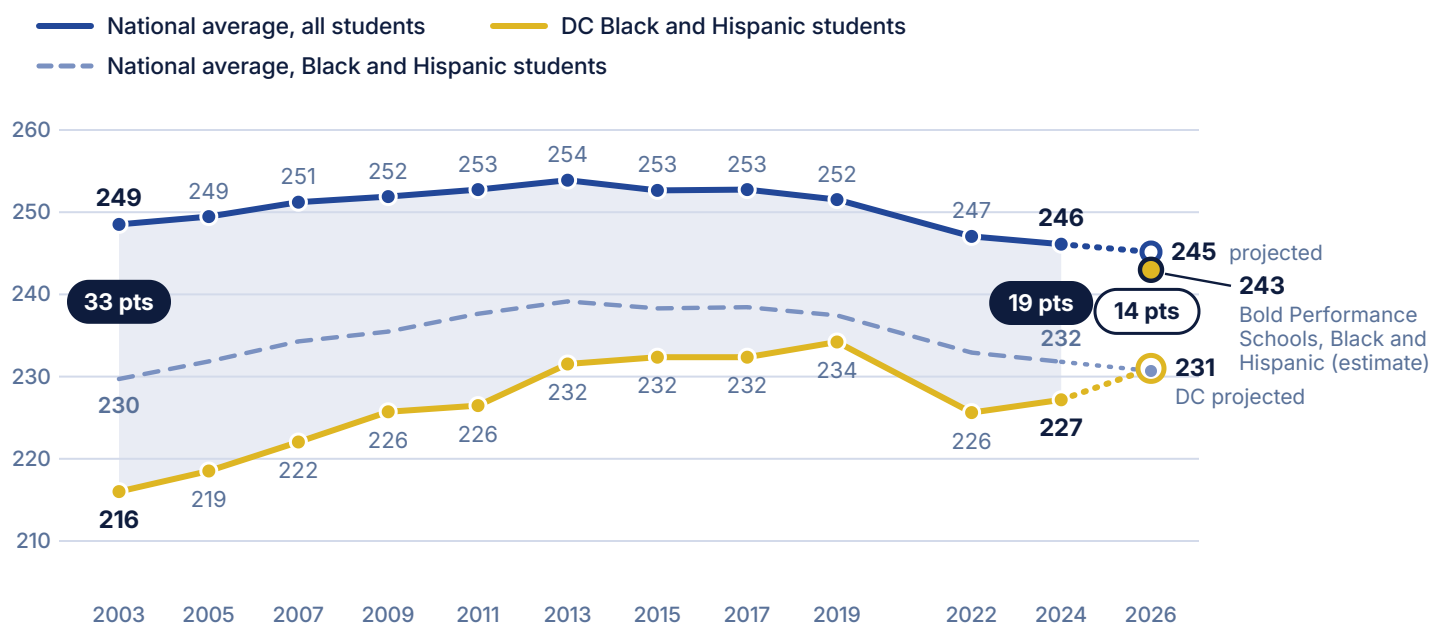
Bold Schools lead a city that is moving in the right direction. The 2026 state assessment results show gains for the fourth consecutive year, in both subjects and across every student group, building on the momentum that made DC the most improved state since the pandemic as determined by the Harvard and Stanford Education Scorecard. Six in 10 students meet the career-ready benchmark in ELA, up from 52% in 2022, and 51% meet it in math, up from 41% four years ago. In math, 1,500 fewer students scored at Level 1 compared to last year, the largest single-year decrease in the number of students furthest behind in the PARCC and CAPE era. School poverty now predicts school performance less than in any year of DC state test history, which means more schools that serve high-poverty communities produce strong results.

The Nation's Report Card tells the same story. In 2003, DC's Black and Hispanic students trailed their national Black and Hispanic peers by 14 points on the average NAEP scale score across grades 4 and 8 in math and reading, and the national average for all students by 33 points. By 2024, the gap to the national average for all students shrinks to 19 points, and EmpowerK12 projects that DC's Black and Hispanic students may match or exceed their national peers in 2026, despite being twice as likely to live in an economically disadvantaged home.

FIGURE 2 • NAEP, 2003 TO 2026

DC's Black and Hispanic students are projected to match their national peers in 2026, after trailing by 14 points in 2003

Average NAEP scale score across grades 4 and 8 in math and reading. Gold and dashed lines are Black and Hispanic students in DC and nationally, weighted by enrollment. Pills show DC's gap to the national average for all students. 2026 is projected from state results (DC) and from the 2022 to 2024 change (national).



Source: NAEP (The Nation's Report Card), 2003 through 2024. NAEP moved from 2021 to 2022 because of COVID. DC weights use OSSE audited enrollment (EdScape) from 2015 on and the NCES Common Core of Data for earlier years. National weights use public school enrollment by race from the NCES Digest of Education Statistics (fall 2023 projected).

A citywide bold goal

These gains come from sustained, deliberate investment in high-quality instructional materials, teacher support and professional development, data-driven continuous improvement, and effectively scaled evidence-based interventions like high-impact tutoring. They reflect the hard work of education leaders, teachers, staff, students, and families across DC. Building on this progress, EmpowerK12 calls for a renewed commitment to a bold goal and bold action for DC students.

BOLD GOAL

DC will be the first urban city to close performance gaps this decade. Our students will exceed the NAEP national average in reading and math in the next five years.

More Bold Schools make the goal historic for Black and Brown students

Bold Schools prove the goal is within reach. The 112 other Bold-eligible schools serve nearly 20,000 tested students in grades 3 through 8, most of them Black and Brown students from economically disadvantaged households. If those schools matched the Bold Schools' career-ready rate, roughly 3,500 more students would meet the benchmark in each subject. Growth on that scale is what the bold goal requires, and it would make DC the first major city where Black and Brown students match, and then exceed, the national average for all students.

The path is clear. DC can grow the number of Bold Schools by scaling the practices in this report, by maintaining the equitable funding and tutoring investments that fuel the recovery, and by bringing the structured literacy playbook to early numeracy. Ten years of Bold Schools show what is possible. The next ten can make it the norm.



The 2026 Bold Performance Schools

21

Bold Performance Schools in
2026

6,900

elementary and middle students
(10% of all PK-8 DC enrollment)

60%

economically disadvantaged
students (47% across all DC
PK-8 schools)

TABLE 1 · THE 2026 BOLD PERFORMANCE SCHOOLS

Twenty-one schools beat their expected proficiency rate by more than 10 points in 2026

PPAE is the school's Percent Proficient Above Expected, ELA and math combined. At-risk is the share of students from economically disadvantaged households. Prior Bold designations count the years each school earned the designation before 2026.

SCHOOL	PPAE POINTS ABOVE EXPECTED	AT-RISK SHARE OF STUDENTS	PRIOR BOLD DESIGNATIONS
Barnard ES (DCPS)	15.8	39%	1 (2025)
Center City - Congress Heights	15.3	43%	5 (2025, 2024, 2023, 2022, 2019)
DC Prep - Edgewood MS	12.7	56%	5 (2024, 2019, 2018, 2017, 2016)
Friendship - Blow Pierce MS	14.5	73%	5 (2025, 2024, 2023, 2019, 2018)
Friendship - Chamberlain ES	16.8	68%	2 (2025, 2017)
Friendship - Ideal ES	10.9	81%	First designation
Friendship - Ideal MS	14.5	68%	2 (2024, 2023)
Garfield ES (DCPS)	12.5	85%	1 (2017)
Garrison ES (DCPS)	11.4	32%	4 (2025, 2023, 2022, 2019)
Global Citizens	19.3	41%	First designation
JO Wilson ES (DCPS)	10.1	53%	First designation
Kimball ES (DCPS)	13.7	83%	First designation
KIPP DC - Promise	11.1	69%	4 (2019, 2018, 2017, 2016)
LaSalle-Backus EC (DCPS)	12.6	60%	First designation
Leckie EC (DCPS)	10.5	70%	First designation
Noyes ES (DCPS)	16.3	73%	1 (2025)
Savoy ES (DCPS)	10.7	84%	First designation
Stanton ES (DCPS)	14.8	83%	First designation
Tubman ES (DCPS)	11.0	58%	First designation
Washington Global	14.1	59%	2 (2025, 2022)
Whittier ES (DCPS)	37.2	36%	4 (2025, 2024, 2023, 2019)

Source: EmpowerK12 Bold Performance Schools analysis of OSSE DC CAPE results, 2025-26. DCPS = DC Public Schools. All other schools are DC public charter schools.

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL BOLD

Bold Performance Schools serve a high at-risk student population and have combined math and English language arts proficiency rates dramatically higher than schools serving students with similar demographics. Citywide, 51% of DC students met the career-ready benchmark in math (3+ on DC CAPE) and 60% in English language arts (ELA). For economically disadvantaged students, those numbers are 35% in math and 46% in ELA.

51%

of DC students met the career-ready benchmark in math in 2026

60%

of DC students met it in ELA

35%

of economically disadvantaged students met it in math

46%

of economically disadvantaged students met it in ELA

To be a Bold School, a school serves at least 30% students from economically disadvantaged households and has proficiency rates exceeding pre-pandemic expectations for schools serving similar students, as measured in the 2026 DC CAPE assessments. Using **Percent Proficient Above Expected (PPAE)**, which projects what percentage of students are expected to be proficient given a school's demographics, Bold Schools have PPAE rates at least 10 percentage points higher in math and reading combined (PPAE of 10+) than schools with similar demographics.

How we identify Bold Performance Schools

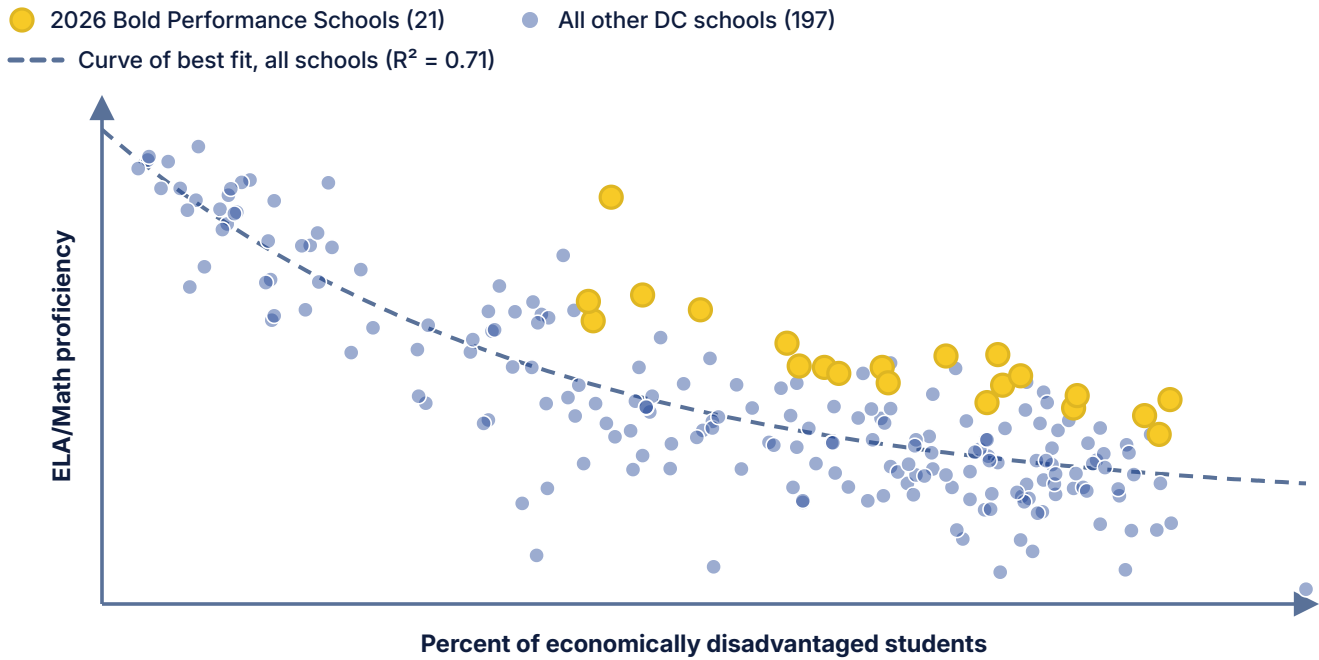
In DC and across the country, there is a powerful and persistent correlation between the number of students from priority populations a school serves and its math and reading proficiency rates. Priority populations include economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, English learners, and students of color. The larger the priority population at a school, typically, the lower the school's state assessment proficiency rates. This correlation is strong enough that if you know how many priority students a school serves, you can predict its proficiency rates with unsettling accuracy, usually within a couple of percent.

Bold Performance Schools demonstrate student proficiency rates significantly higher than schools serving similar populations, in many cases exceeding even pre-pandemic achievement expectations. To identify these schools, EmpowerK12 utilizes mathematical methods to understand how variables, such as grade levels tested and priority student group population size, interact with student performance to generate reliable predictions for the math and reading proficiency rates a school should expect. At the high school level, given the sorting inherent in our city's high school enrollment model, we implement a second model that focuses on the performance of 10th graders, controlling for the prior year 9th grade performance in addition to demographic variables.

FIGURE 3 · CAPE 2025-26, ALL DC SCHOOLS

Bold Performance Schools score 16 points above the DC trend curve and rise faster than schools serving similar students

All students, CAPE Level 3+ and 4+ averaged. Each dot is a DC public school with 2025-26 CAPE results. All 21 Bold schools sit above the trend curve. The y value is the average of each school's Level 3 or above rate and its Level 4 or above rate. Further right means a larger share of tested students are economically disadvantaged.



Source: OSSE DC CAPE results, 2025-26, via EmpowerK12's PublicData. Level 3+ and 4+ rates pool ELA and math, weighted by tested students. The economically disadvantaged share uses tested-student counts. Where OSSE suppresses the count, the At-Risk share of audited enrollment stands in. Bold Performance Schools per EmpowerK12's 2026 designations.

After running the models to predict each school's expected proficiency rates in math and reading, we calculate a school-level Percent Proficient Above Expectations (PPAE) value, the difference between actual and expected performance. As with all predictions, there is some uncertainty in the calculation, so we only select schools with a PPAE that exceeds the absolute error in measurement for the Bold Performance designation, more than 10 percent above expected. See the appendix tables for a summary of the covariates in our composite models, their weights, and the performance of the PPAE models based on the absolute prediction measurement error.



TEN YEARS OF BOLD SCHOOLS

Ten Bold practices

Schools that earn the accolade of Bold School are all unique, but in reflecting on ten years of identifying Bold Schools, it is clear from interviews with instructional leadership teams and analysis of additional performance metrics across Bold Schools that they have clear commonalities that equip students for success, and generate an impact that extends beyond the walls of their schools.

1

Set high expectations.

Bold Schools commit to high academic expectations for every student.

2

Build strong relationships.

Bold Schools cultivate intentional relationships among students, educators, and families.

3

Focus on joy and belonging.

Bold Schools create a fun and joyful school environment for students and adults.

4

Use data for continuous improvement.

Bold Schools leverage data to identify areas for growth, celebrate successes, and implement strategies that enhance student outcomes.

5

Implement targeted student intervention.

Bold Schools provide additional opportunities to access rigorous, grade-level content, using data to group students and address specific gaps.

6

Use assessments to inform instruction.

Bold Schools use student work and exit tickets, standardized and teacher-created short assessments, and interim benchmark tests to adjust instruction.

7

Provide instructional support to teachers.

Bold Schools ensure that teachers have conceptual understanding of content, tools to address student misconceptions, and consistently maximize every instructional minute.

8

Prioritize routines.

Bold Schools create a stable and predictable environment for students, where students know exactly what to expect each day.

9

Go the extra mile.

Bold Schools do what it takes to achieve success, even if it means jumping in on the small stuff or going above and beyond.

10

Support the broader education community.

Bold Schools open their schools up to others and share successes and challenges to support the broader education community.

DC'S RECOVERY

Students make gains for a fourth straight year

ELA proficiency, up 2 percentage points, now sits at its highest level since the District moved to computer-based testing in 2015, and math improved by 2.1 percentage points at the college-ready benchmark (the CAPE test places students at five levels, with Level 4+ indicating that students have mastered the material and are on track to succeed in a four-year college).

At the career-ready benchmark (CAPE 3+), six in 10 students met the standard in English language arts this spring, up from 58 percent a year ago. In math, 51 percent cleared the bar, up from 48 percent. Since 2022, the first year of testing after the pandemic closure, the share of students on track for career readiness climbed 8 points in reading and 10 points in math. DC schools also posted a reduction (-3.3%) in the percent of students furthest behind (Level 1) in math, the largest single-year decrease in Level 1 students in the PARCC/CAPE era.

The 2026 results give us reasons to celebrate, and they should sharpen our sense of urgency to continue the hard work to further accelerate outcomes for all students. Three themes stand out in the data.

Achievement gaps narrowed and student poverty is less predictive of school performance in math and reading. In fact, the correlation between the socioeconomic status of a school's student body and its proficiency rate is the lowest in DC state test history. Yet differences in performance between student groups remain stark, requiring continued urgency from adults and focus on equitable distribution of resources to support priority student groups.

Cohorts of students in grades 3-8 from 2022 to 2026 show stronger annual proficiency gains across five post-pandemic test administrations than similarly aged students' pre-pandemic, five-year trend in ELA and math. Overall, annual statewide gains in math are stronger post-pandemic than pre-pandemic. ELA results show similar improvement to pre-pandemic trends even though post-pandemic proficiency rates started higher than where DC students achieved back in 2015. We also compare the progress of two cohorts of economically disadvantaged students, those in 3rd and 4th grade in 2022 with those in 3rd and 4th grade in 2015, across five years. Improvement in annual cohort gains indicates that our educational system is likely stronger now than it was pre-pandemic.

Students who perform at Level 1 on CAPE are typically multiple grade levels behind their peers. In 2026, there were 1,500 fewer students scoring at Level 1 in math, a historic single-year 13% decrease in the number of students furthest behind. The percentage of students at Level 1 in ELA dropped to the second lowest level since computer-based testing began in 2015.

Fewer students score at Level 1 on CAPE

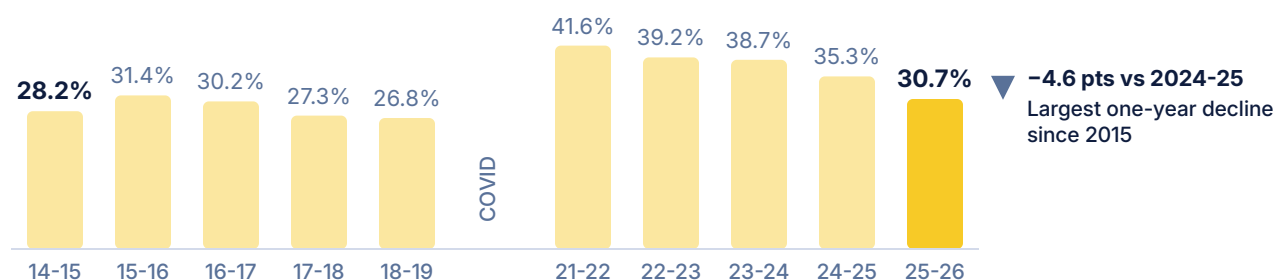
The share of students scoring at the lowest performance level, an often-overlooked measure, shows the depth and pace of academic recovery among students who are furthest behind. Students who score Level 1 in math, the lowest of five performance levels, are typically more than one grade behind. The share of economically disadvantaged students scoring Level 1 fell 4.6 points this year to 30.7 percent. That is the largest single-year decline in more than a decade of data. The rate remains 4 points higher than where it stood in 2019, and at the current pace the city will pass its pre-pandemic low next year. Across all students in math, nearly 1,500 fewer students in grades 3-10 posted a score that indicates they were multiple grade levels behind in math last year. In reading, there were nearly 1,000 fewer students at Level 1 than last year.

FIGURE 4 · CAPE LEVEL 1, ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

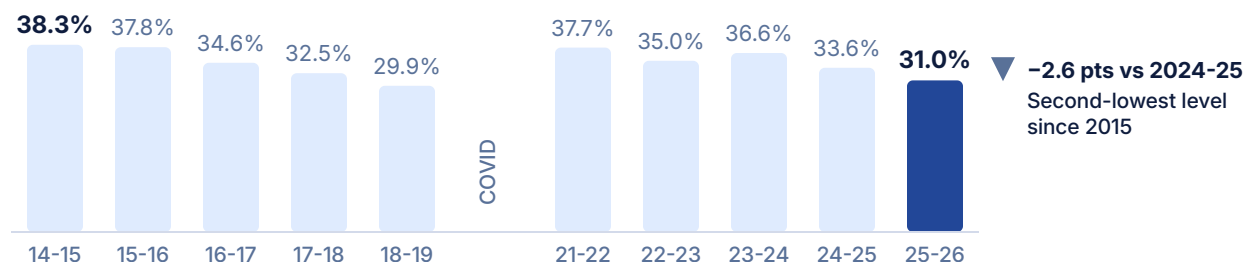
Fewer economically disadvantaged students score at Level 1 in math and ELA

Percent of economically disadvantaged students at Performance Level 1, all grades tested. Level 1 is the lowest of five levels. These students typically perform more than one grade level behind.

Math



ELA



Source: OSSE statewide assessment results (PARCC and DC CAPE), 2014-15 through 2025-26. No statewide tests in 2019-20 or 2020-21.



Global Citizens

Economically disadvantaged cohort gains indicate a stronger system

Washington's rapid demographic change raises an obvious question about its rising test scores. Are the schools improving, or is the student body simply changing? Over the past decade the District grew wealthier, and a rising proficiency rate for all students could, in theory, reflect who moved in rather than improvement in school performance. One way to answer it is to set the citywide numbers aside and follow a single group, economically disadvantaged students, whose families qualify for public assistance, face homelessness, or are in the foster care system, and who account for roughly half of DC's tested population.

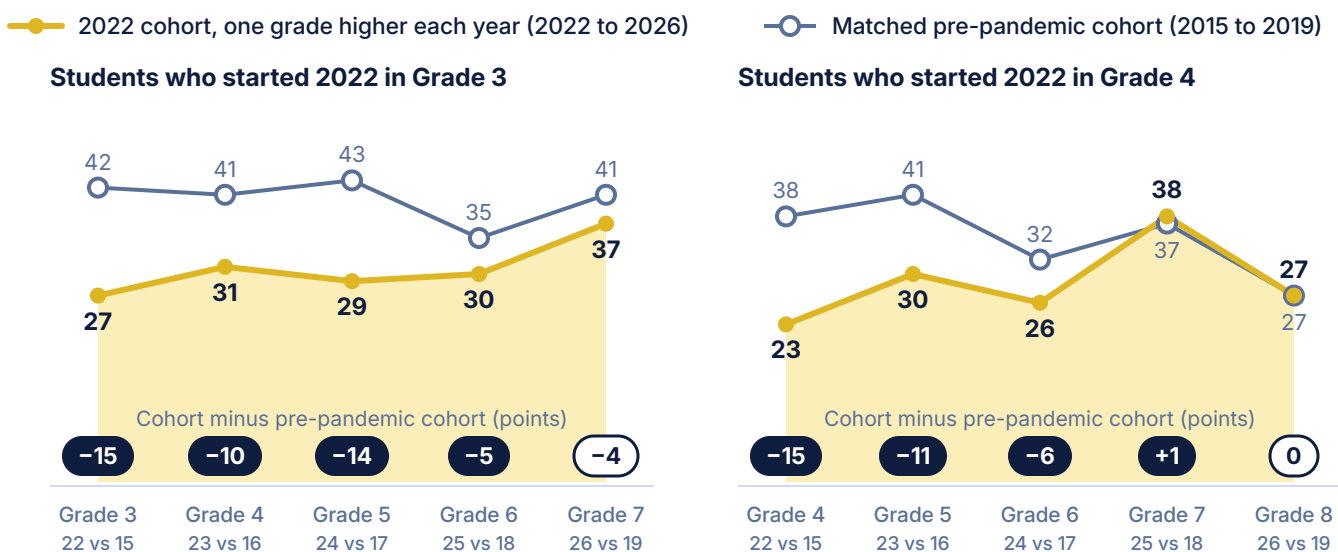
In this analysis, we follow two cohorts of economically disadvantaged students who sat in third and fourth grades in 2022 through seventh and eighth grade in 2026, pairing them with economically disadvantaged third and fourth grade students in 2015 through the seventh and eighth grades in 2019. This analysis has limits because the cohorts track grade levels, not individually matched children, and families move in and out of the District each year.

Consider math first. Before the pandemic, students tended to lose ground on average as they aged. The 2015 third graders started with 42 percent at the career-ready benchmark and finished seventh grade at 41 percent. The 2015 fourth graders slid from 38 percent to 27 percent by eighth grade. That pattern, a slow erosion of math proficiency from elementary school into middle school, prevailed in the District, as in many cities.

FIGURE 5 • CAPE LEVEL 3+, MATH

Economically disadvantaged cohorts nearly match their pre-pandemic math counterparts

Percent of economically disadvantaged students at Level 3 or above (the career-ready benchmark) in math. Each cohort advances one grade per year and is compared with the cohort that walked the same grade path from 2015 to 2019.



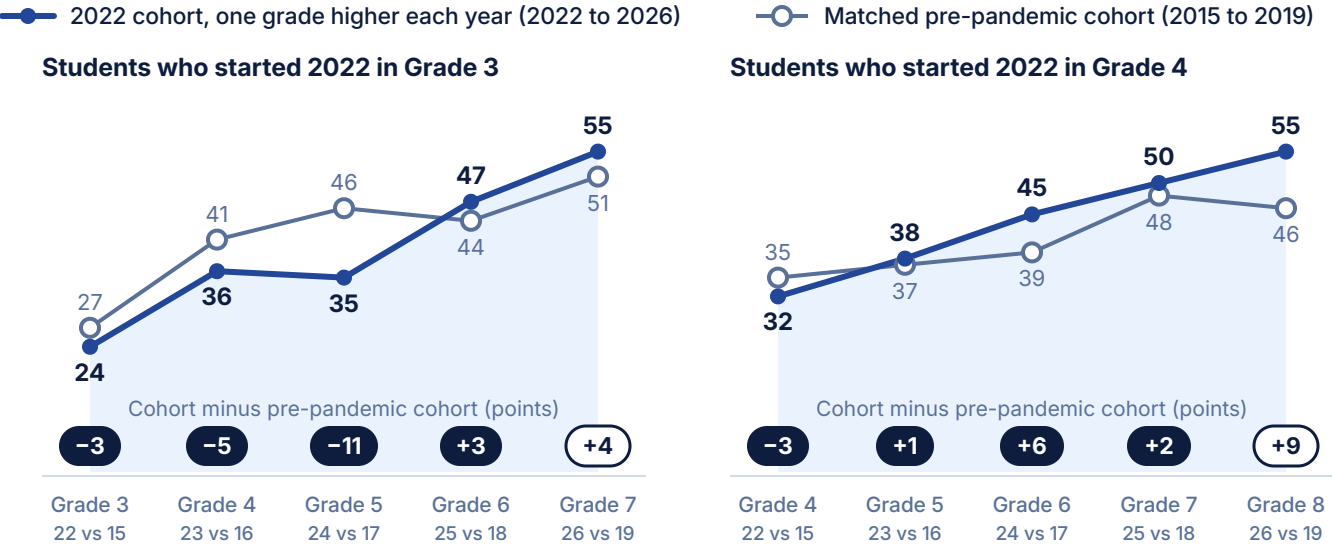
Source: OSSE statewide assessment results (PARCC 2015 to 2019, DC CAPE 2022 to 2026). Cohorts track a grade level forward.

The pandemic cohorts started far behind those benchmarks, 15 points behind in both cases, a measure of how much the virtual year and a half cost the city’s poorest children. The 2022 third graders climbed from 27 percent to 37 percent over four years, a gain of 10 points on a path where their pre-pandemic peers lost one, and the 2022 fourth graders gained 4 points compared with their predecessors who lost 11.

Reading tells the same story with a stronger ending. Both pandemic cohorts started 3 points behind their pre-pandemic counterparts and finished ahead, the 2022 third graders by 4 points as seventh graders and the 2022 fourth graders by 9 points as eighth graders. Fifty-five percent of economically disadvantaged eighth graders now read at the career-ready benchmark, compared with 46 percent for the matched group in 2019. Over four years, the newer cohorts grew by 31 and 23 points. The older ones grew by 24 and 11.

FIGURE 6 · CAPE LEVEL 3+, ELA
Economically disadvantaged cohorts outpace their pre-pandemic ELA counterparts

Percent of economically disadvantaged students at Level 3 or above (the career-ready benchmark) in ELA. Each cohort advances one grade per year and is compared with the cohort that walked the same grade path from 2015 to 2019.



Source: OSSE statewide assessment results (PARCC 2015 to 2019, DC CAPE 2022 to 2026). Cohorts track a grade level forward.

What changed between 2015 and 2022? The District trained thousands of teachers in structured literacy, built a high-impact tutoring program that reached more than 9,000 students last year, and directed additional funding to the schools serving the highest concentrations of poverty. The cohort results suggest those investments work.

+31 and +23

points of ELA growth over four years for the two 2022 cohorts

+24 and +11

points for the matched 2015 cohorts

55%

of economically disadvantaged eighth graders read at the career-ready benchmark, against 46% in 2019

Students in pre-K and kindergarten during the virtual year are not progressing as quickly as older peers

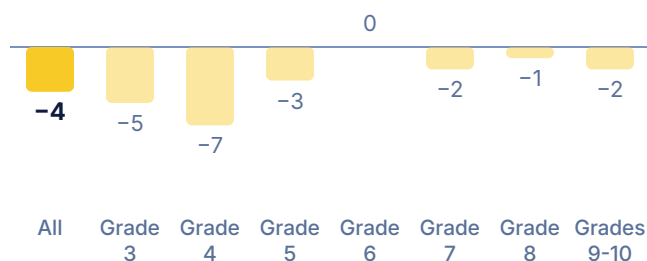
The strong recovery picture looks different for the city's youngest test takers. Last year's upper elementary students were in PK3, PK4, and kindergarten during the virtual year, missing out on critical in-person experiences that build early number sense, vocabulary, and classroom routines. In math, third grade sits 5 points below where third graders in 2019 performed, and fourth grade sits 7 points below. Among economically disadvantaged students, the shortfall grows to 9 and 10 points. Grades 6 and above, by contrast, sit within 2 points of 2019 in math and above 2019 proficiency rates in reading.

FIGURE 7 · CAPE LEVEL 3+, 2026 COMPARED WITH 2019

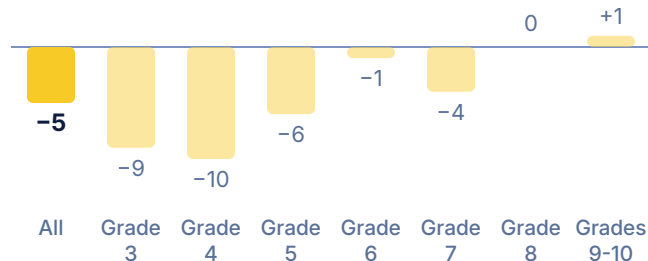
Career-ready math proficiency still trails 2019 in most grades, while ELA matches or exceeds it in most grades

Difference in the percent of students at Level 3 or above (the career-ready benchmark), 2026 compared with 2019, in points. Bars below the line mean the grade remains short of its pre-pandemic level.

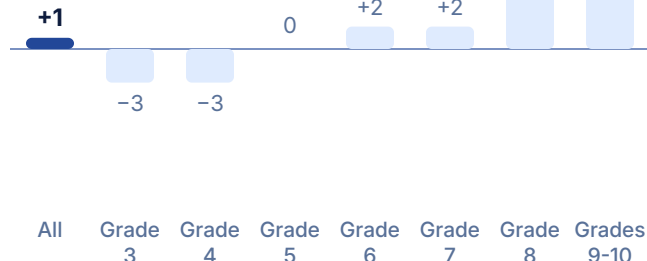
Math, all students



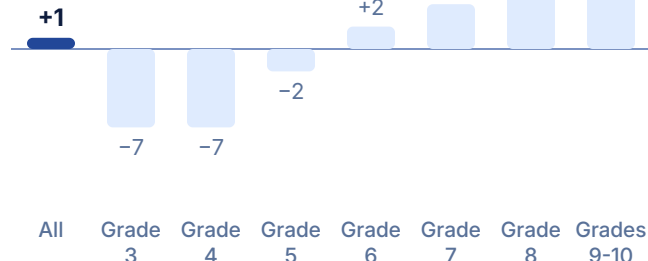
Math, economically disadvantaged students



ELA, all students



ELA, economically disadvantaged students



Source: OSSE statewide assessment results (PARCC 2019, DC CAPE 2026). Grades 9-10 reflect the high school end-of-course tests.

Early numeracy deserves the same citywide focus that structured literacy received, and the Capital Math Collective, a \$20 million public-private partnership built on the Math Task Force recommendations, arrived at the right moment. High-impact tutoring, teacher training in evidence-based math practices, and family engagement in math activities outside of class will help continue moving the numeracy needle forward.

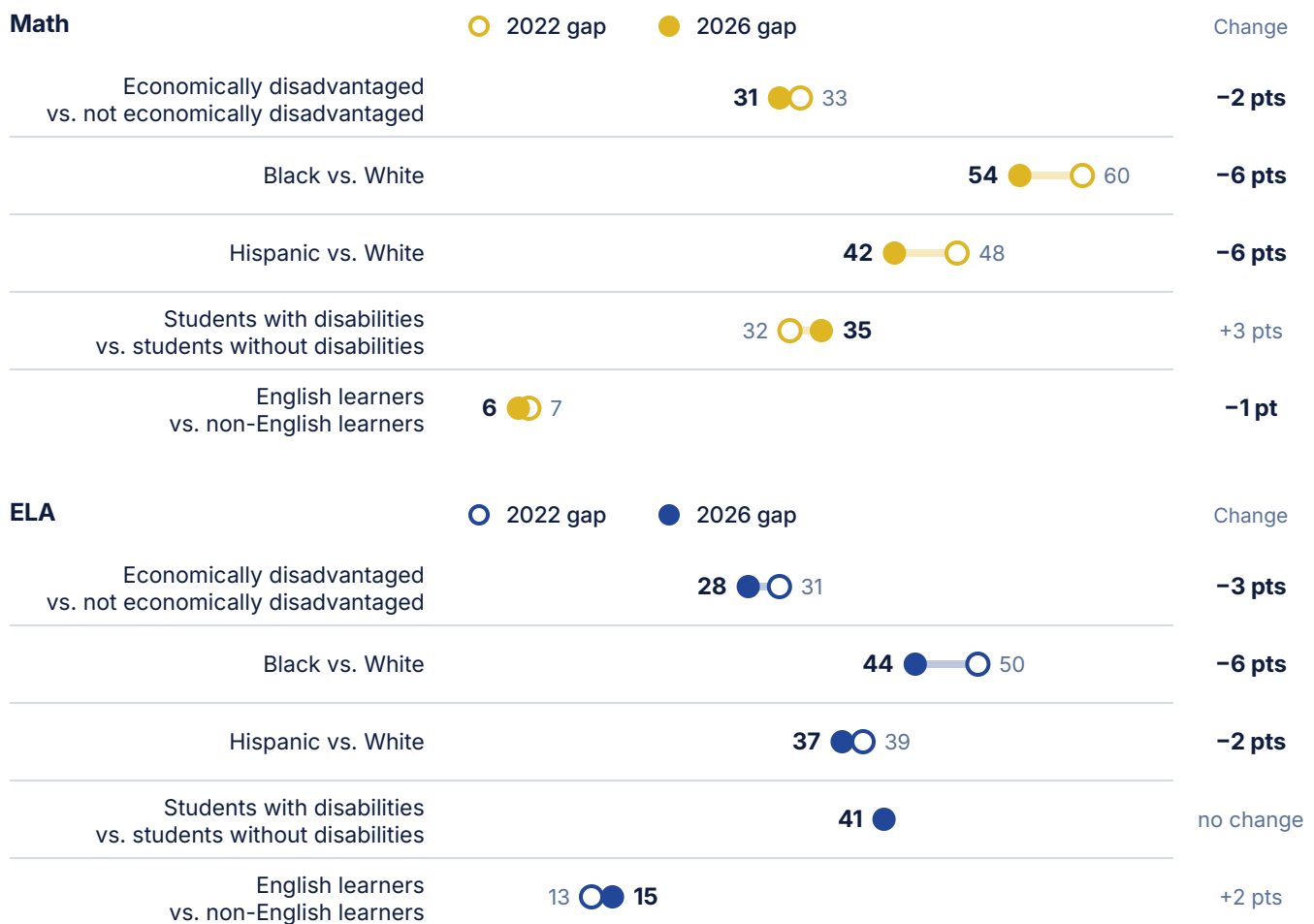
Equitable progress continues with narrowed gaps and a shrinking correlation between poverty and performance

Achievement gaps at the career-ready benchmark narrowed for most student groups since 2022, a direct result of the students who fell furthest gaining the fastest. The gap between Black and White students at the career-ready benchmark in math fell 6 points, to 54, and the gap between Hispanic and White students also fell 6 points, to 42. In reading, the Black-White gap fell 6 points to 44. Those gaps remain wide, and two grew, the math gap for students with disabilities and the reading gap for English learners.

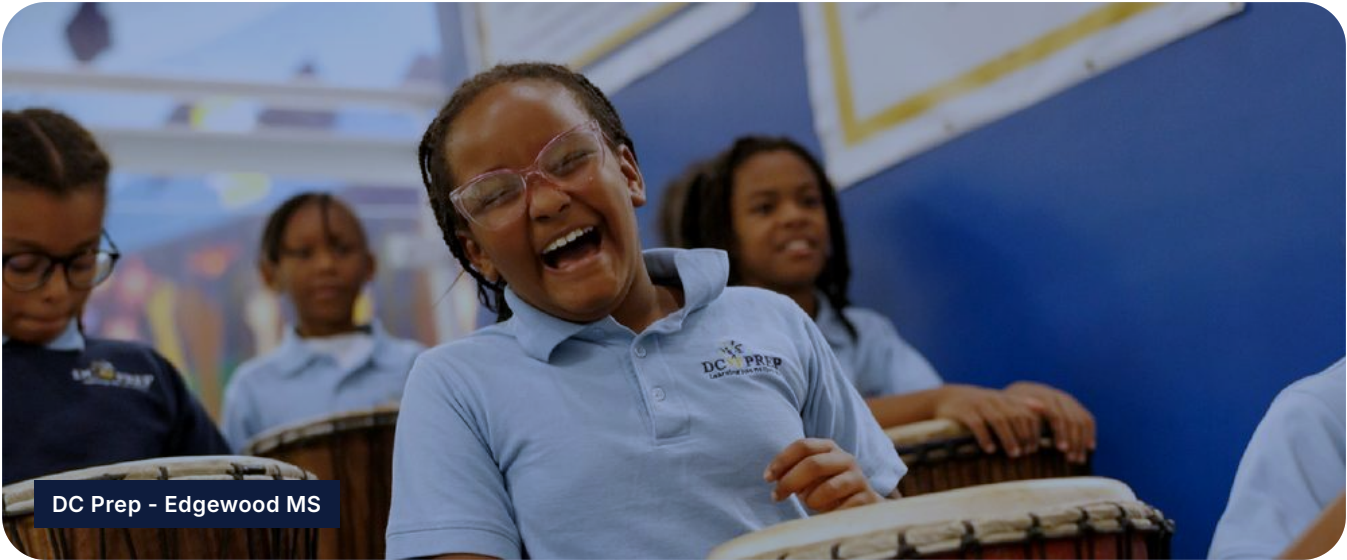
FIGURE 8 • CAPE LEVEL 3+ GAPS, 2022 AND 2026

Achievement gaps narrowed for most groups since 2022 and remain wide

Difference between student groups in the percent at Level 3 or above (the career-ready benchmark), 2022 and 2026, in points.



Source: EmpowerK12 DC State Achievement Gaps dashboard, OSSE DC CAPE results, 2022 and 2026.

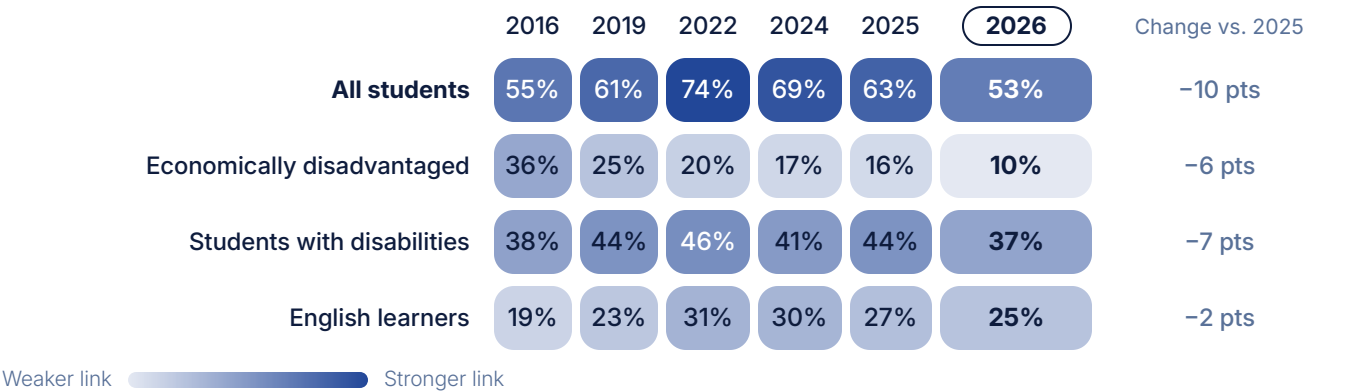


We also track how much a school’s poverty level predicts its results. A weaker relationship indicates that more schools serving high-poverty communities produce strong outcomes. In 2022, the share of economically disadvantaged students a school served explained nearly three-quarters of the variation in school proficiency rates. That figure has fallen every year since and now sits at 53 percent, below the previous record low in 2016. For economically disadvantaged students themselves, school poverty now explains about a tenth of the variation in their results, the lowest figure in any year of the analysis.

TABLE 2 • SCHOOL POVERTY AND PROFICIENCY

School poverty explains less of the difference in proficiency between schools

R-squared between school-level proficiency rates for each student group and the share of economically disadvantaged students the school enrolls, ELA and math combined. Lower values mean a school’s poverty level predicts less of its result.



Source: EmpowerK12 analysis of OSSE school-level results (PARCC and DC CAPE).

DC’s per-pupil funding formula is considered one of the more progressive in the country because it provides a high funding weight, calculated as a percentage of the base weight that all students receive, for high-need students. Mayors Gray and Bowser and the DC Council have all taken specific actions to make DC’s approach to school funding more equitable over the last decade and a half by adding the funding weight for at-risk students, adding funds to the base, adding a new weight for schools serving high concentrations of at-risk students, and improving funding parity between DCPS and charter schools.

HOW THIS LOOKS IN PRACTICE

Ten Bold practices in action

1

Set high expectations.

Bold Schools commit to high academic expectations for every student.

Bold Schools set clear, measurable goals for each student that establish a high bar for student success. The schools develop a school-wide vision at the start of the school year, building on prior year successes and challenges, and incorporating input from teachers and families. Schools then develop specific strategies and tactics to realize that vision. School-level and student-level goals are established and shared. Students and families know each student's own goals, and students are celebrated for interim milestones and meeting those goals.

- At **KIPP DC - Promise**, the school uses vision-setting protocols and a structured process for teachers to reflect on their vision for classrooms and instruction. The end result was "a very clear strategic plan that everyone can rally around." The school set a focus on literacy and students' comprehension of grade-level texts in particular, and then developed strategies to build out those areas throughout the school day.
- At **Barnard Elementary School**, each student knows what they are working toward, even kindergarteners. At **Center City - Congress Heights**, students examine their data to determine, "How can I be better?"
- At **Friendship - Blow Pierce Middle School**, there is a specific focus on making sure that individualized instruction is for all students, at all performance levels, from those below grade level to those who are already proficient.



Washington Global

2

Build strong relationships.

Bold Schools cultivate intentional relationships among students, educators, and families.

Bold Schools deeply appreciate the importance of strong relationships within their entire school community. This value is demonstrated through routines such as greeting students at the door each morning, stopping students in the hallways to check in with them, family morning coffee events, and cultural events to which the entire school community is invited. Some schools have clearly communicated “open door” policies where parents and caregivers may come observe instruction for a specific child.

- **Global Citizens** emphasizes the importance of educators becoming part of the community that they serve: “You have to believe that you are a part of their community.”
- **Tubman Elementary School** conducts home visits to strengthen relationships with students and families.
- **Savoy Elementary School** engages parents as partners in student achievement, getting buy-in for assessments, explaining how assessments work, sharing results, and discussing learning gaps and ways that parents can provide support.
- **Center City - Congress Heights** provides families with prepackaged learning resources and explanations of student performance data to facilitate learning beyond the school day.
- **Stanton Elementary School** provides certificates of achievement for parents in addition to students when a student meets a milestone.



You can't do this as a school by yourself.

DR. GARY HAMILTON, PRINCIPAL, SAVOY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

3

Focus on joy and belonging.

Bold Schools create a fun and joyful school environment for students and adults.

Bold Schools create an environment students, teachers, and staff enjoy. Attendance is boosted when students want to be in the building. Educators feel a greater sense of connection and fulfillment when there are more reasons to smile. Everyone is more focused when they have opportunities to celebrate and have fun together. Sports, music, and other activities also give students opportunities to connect with each other and enjoy school in a different way.

- **Friendship - Ideal** hosts town halls that conclude with games and activities, such as dodgeball, tug-of-war, and relay races. Students can also earn tickets for 30 minutes in a game room.
- **DC Prep** creates “magical moments” for students, such as Medieval Monday when students are studying the middle ages, and organizes an “AttenDANCE” to celebrate attendance.
- **Garrison Elementary School** uses Panorama data to check in on how students are feeling and then determines the best ways to take action to make improvements.
- **LaSalle-Backus Education Campus** has weekly virtual assemblies to celebrate birthdays and other events, and a celebration wall.

4

Use data for continuous improvement.

Bold Schools leverage data to identify areas for growth, celebrate successes, and implement strategies that enhance student outcomes.

Bold Schools have clear routines to collect data, review data, and determine next steps to support student growth and performance. Data dashboards are easy to access. Teachers have dedicated time to meet, collaborate, and review data. Data meetings are frequent and allow for immediate course-correction, adjustment of intervention groups, and follow up with students who may not be on track. Often these schools have mechanisms to share data about student performance with families, so that the right people know how each student is progressing, where there may be gaps, and how to support each student.

- **Friendship - Blow Pierce Middle School** has an internal tracker for students and projections about what level they should be reaching, with weekly data meetings with the teaching teams to review progress and make adjustments. The school shares the data with students to be “open, honest, transparent” and support student ownership of their data. It also provides online resources for students to work on at home.
- At **Leckie Education Campus**, the school has developed a culture of honest reflection and problem-solving related to student performance. “Teachers feel successful when they are able to track the data and see students are growing. If we feel like there is a barrier, we have a culture where we can speak very clearly and very honestly with each other. There is always someone there to support.”



Data is used as fuel instead of a gotcha moment. We use data as a way of life and that is how we drive outcomes.

JON ROLLE, PRINCIPAL, GARFIELD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



5

Implement targeted student intervention.

Bold Schools provide additional opportunities to access rigorous, grade-level content, using data to group students and address specific gaps.

Bold Schools structure school schedules to allow for student intervention. A common approach is an intervention block to set aside dedicated time for intervention. The schools engage many adults in the building, including school leadership, classroom teachers, special education teachers, interventionists, and other staff to lead small group instruction, so that all students get regular time with adults who are focused on supporting their learning needs. Ongoing review of data is a key component of this approach, allowing for grouping and re-grouping of students over time as needs evolve. Nailing core school operations is also essential, so that students and teachers can be at the right place at the right time, to keep learning on track.

- **DC Prep Edgewood Middle School** uses a dedicated “What I Need” time to group students according to specific skill gaps and match them with instructors who can meet those needs.
- At **KIPP DC - Promise**, a wide range of staff are used to support small groups, including school administrators and even the dance teacher.
- **Garrison Elementary School** universally assesses students on foundational reading skills and follows up with diagnostic testing when necessary. Garrison uses fluid intervention groupings that can cut across grade levels. The school keeps a list of students hovering just below grade level to maintain visibility of their progress and provide appropriate support, including additional instruction time, or “double dosing,” as needed.
- At **Center City - Congress Heights**, intervention groups can shift day-to-day based on gaps identified on specific concepts.
- At **Washington Global**, additional grant resources including the EmpowerK12 Math Acceleration and CitySchools high-impact tutoring grants support the staffing needed for intervention.

6

Use assessments to inform instruction.

Bold Schools use student work and exit tickets, standardized and teacher-created short assessments, and interim benchmark tests to adjust instruction.

Bold Schools rely on standardized assessments, interim benchmark tests, exit tickets and student work to have clear measures of student progress and address challenges. The start of the school year is a critical time for these schools, when they conduct early literacy screenings, establish performance benchmarks, and set goals for the year. But even more important are the frequent opportunities throughout the year to check in, celebrate successes, and take swift action if a student is not on track.

- At **Friendship - Chamberlain Elementary School**, every lesson ends with a data point, typically an exit ticket, to gauge student understanding and inform instruction going forward.
- **Whittier Elementary School** places a strong emphasis on math error analysis to identify student misconceptions and determine what additional instruction is needed.
- **Global Citizens** conducts literacy screenings as soon as the second week of school to identify student needs.
- At **Friendship - Blow Pierce**, the school uses MAP assessment results to communicate an approximate grade-level equivalency, to make it easier for students and families to understand progress.

7

Provide instructional support to teachers.

Bold Schools ensure that teachers have conceptual understanding of content, tools to address student misconceptions, and consistently maximize every instructional minute.

Bold Schools provide teachers with the tools, resources, and support needed to make the most of each instructional minute and day. Teachers have frequent feedback loops and the culture is one of self-reflection, honesty, and continuous improvement. Often the principal is a lead instructional support, modeling strong instruction throughout the building, whether as a substitute for an absent teacher or to support a classroom in the moment. School administration norms on observations to ensure consistency of feedback. Strong coaches are often core to this type of approach. This type of support and culture frequently leads to strong teacher retention, creating a virtuous cycle where teachers continue to become more skilled and better at working together as a team.

- **Noyes Elementary School** focuses on differentiating its teacher support to meet the varying needs of teachers.
- **KIPP DC - Promise** has “an unwavering culture of observation and feedback” to support instructional improvement.
- **Stanton Elementary School** uses peer observations and recorded instructional sessions to support teacher learning and reflection.

8

Prioritize routines.

Bold Schools create a stable and predictable environment for students, where students know exactly what to expect each day.

In Bold Schools, expectations are clear, routines are established, and consistency reigns. Students, teachers, and staff are able to work together across grades and disciplines due to adherence to the schedule, and commonly accepted policies and procedures support the school community even when there are unexpected barriers or surprises.

- At **Garfield Elementary School**, each day begins with a 15-minute “Strong Start” to transition into the learning environment and build each classroom community.
- At **LaSalle-Backus Education Campus**, the week ends with celebration huddles.
- At **Tubman Elementary School**, teachers have daily collaborative team meetings to support consistent instructional planning and regular review of student data.

Friendship - Ideal ES



9

Go the extra mile.

Bold Schools do what it takes to achieve success, even if it means jumping in on the small stuff or going above and beyond.

Bold Schools stay focused on their core teaching and learning mission, while acknowledging that the success of that mission depends on many other factors. Going the extra mile looks different for each school and community, but the impact of these efforts is felt in each of the schools.

- **Stanton Elementary School** identified a barrier related to uniforms and implemented key supports for families: a laundry room and a uniform swap. Stanton also offers a Saturday school and an afterschool “power hour” to provide additional instructional time.
- At **Center City - Congress Heights**, the school leader grades written responses to give an objective lens and to allow for a next-day turnaround to identify any gaps and provide feedback to students.
- **Friendship - Chamberlain** celebrates students who meet their MAP goals by asking students how they would like to be celebrated and making those celebrations happen.

“

Sweat the small stuff, with a lot of love and care.

CHELSEA DUNN, PRINCIPAL, KIPP DC - PROMISE

10

Support the broader education community.

Bold Schools open their schools up to others and share successes and challenges to support the broader education community.

The Bold Schools are willing to share about and reflect on how they operate and allow others into their buildings to see their work in action. Through this report, school walkthroughs, and more informal connection points, these schools are providing insights and inspiration to others. Through these interactions, the Bold Schools support a DC school ecosystem that learns and improves, and can grow to even greater levels of student success.



LaSalle-Backus EC

WHAT MAKES THE 2026 BOLD SCHOOLS UNIQUE

Spotlight on AI in schools

The 2026 Bold Schools exemplify the ten things that make a Bold School. Yet these schools also are meeting the moment with their own way of demonstrating what it means to get bold results for students in DC.

The 2026 Bold Schools post their results in the first school years in which most of their students can get a finished answer from a chatbot in seconds. Nationally a year ago, 63% of high school students and 46% of middle school students used AI for homework. AI can make students look like they are learning faster while they learn less. In a working paper that follows 26,811 students in grades 7 through 12 in central China, homework scores rise 18% after students adopt AI on their own, and monthly exam scores fall 20%. We asked leaders at Bold Performance Schools with middle school students how they tackle AI. Here is what they focus on.

63%

of high school students nationally
used AI for homework a year ago

46%

of middle school students
nationally used AI for homework

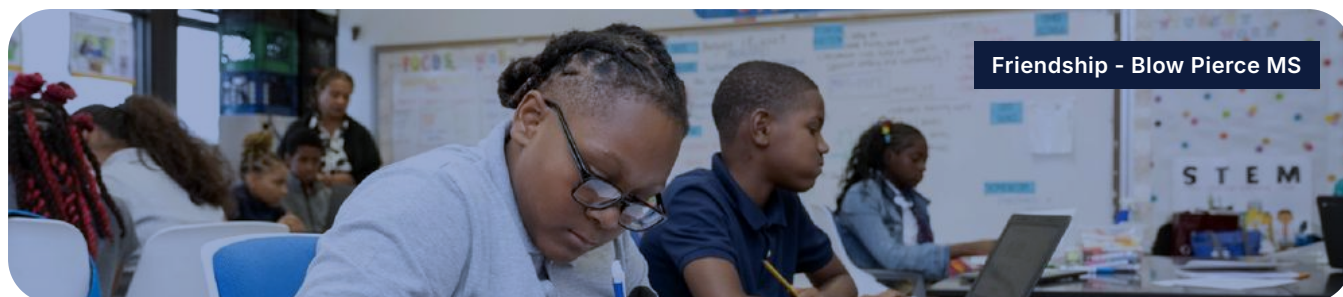
-20%

monthly exam scores after
students adopt AI on their own,
while homework scores rise 18%

Protect the cognitive lifting. Bold Schools treat paper and pencil as a deliberate instructional choice. Several 2026 Bold Schools pull technology out of intervention and small-group time so that students work with an adult, and middle schools in particular shift toward paper-and-pencil work. The goal is productive struggle where students think through hard problems themselves, with a teacher close enough to step in.

Watch the signal AI cannot fake. A chatbot can complete homework, but it cannot sit for an exit ticket. Bold Schools lean on short-cycle, in-class checks for understanding, so teachers see what each student can do without help and regroup students the same week to address misconceptions.

Teach students to judge AI. Washington Global, the only standalone middle school among the 2026 Bold Schools, addresses AI literacy with eighth graders as a unit after the spring CAPE test. In English language arts, students and teachers run classroom writing prompts through ChatGPT or a similar tool, and then students grade the AI's response against the class rubric, naming what the machine gets wrong and what a strong human response does better.



Friendship - Blow Pierce MS

SPOTLIGHT

DC Public Schools

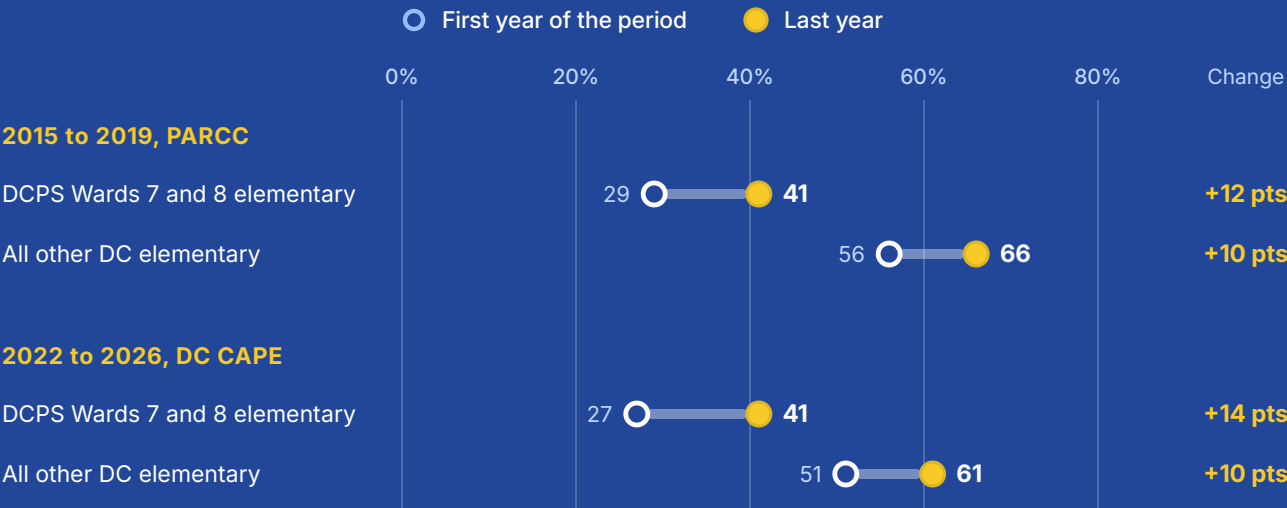
System supports that accelerate elementary outcomes

In 2021-22, the first CAPE administration after the pandemic closure, 24.9% of economically disadvantaged DCPS elementary students met the career-ready benchmark (CAPE 3+) in math and 31.8% met it in ELA. By 2025-26, those rates reached 42.5% in math and 41.6% in ELA, gains of 17.6 points in math and 9.8 points in ELA over four years. The results show up in the Bold Schools data, with DCPS elementary schools accounting for 11 Bold Performance Schools in 2026, compared with just five back in 2022.

FIGURE 9 • PARCC AND CAPE LEVEL 3+, DC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Ward 7 and 8 DCPS elementary schools gained 14 points since 2022, against 10 points elsewhere in DC

Percent of all students at Level 3 or above (approaching, meeting, or exceeding expectations, the career-ready benchmark), averaged across ELA and math. Each group is a weighted average of its schools, by students tested.



Source: OSSE statewide assessment results (PARCC 2014-15 and 2018-19, DC CAPE 2021-22 and 2025-26), all tested grades. Composite = simple average of the ELA and math rates. Ward 7 and 8 group = DCPS schools with Ward 7 or 8 addresses serving elementary grades. All other DC elementary = every other DC public and public charter elementary or PK-8 school with results in both years of the period. Schools in each group: 27 and 91 for 2015 to 2019, 28 and 111 for 2022 to 2026.

Chancellor Kim Jackson and her team point to a set of system supports that reach every elementary school.

A coherent curriculum, backed by training at every level. DCPS trained teachers in the science of reading and small-group instruction in the early grades, then applied the same playbook to math. The rollout of Eureka Math Squared paired the curriculum with a full year of professional development, coaching, and cluster-level support from instructional superintendents who address the specific needs of their school leaders and teachers. DCPS also adopted the Building Blocks pre-K math curriculum for early childhood classrooms.

Data routines from the classroom to the central office. Grade-level teams meet weekly with a coach to plan lessons and anticipate where students face productive struggle. Weekly school data meetings go deep into specific data points and specific students. Cluster meetings of elementary school principals surface trends across schools and grade bands, and the district tracks cohorts by curriculum adoption and by each student's point of entry after the pandemic. "The data is the data," Dr. Jackson says. "Sometimes we are going to love it, sometimes we are going to like it, and sometimes we are going to be like, oh my goodness. The most important part of data meetings is that they are learning experiences."

Principal autonomy inside a DCPS way. Every school uses the DCPS curriculum and the supports that come with it. School leaders decide how to present the work and structure grade-level teams, and most principals add supplements that build on the curriculum rather than replace it. Dr. Jackson, a former principal herself, describes the balance this way. "Every school community has their own personality, and we have hired high-quality school leaders to lead that community. We trust the balance that comes there. The school leader knows what we need to do as a district. They also know their community and how to merge the two."

Families as partners in academics. DCPS used a recent math grant to codify district-sponsored math nights and launched family math dinners, where teachers host families for intimate lessons alongside their students. A micro-grant process, now in its second year after a spring launch, funds schools to host their own dinners and schoolwide math nights. Instructional coaches apply to work with Tier 3 intervention families, and special education teachers host sessions for inclusion students.



Family engagement is huge and is a very important part of the success. We must make certain that our families are aware of the curricula that we use.

DR. KIM JACKSON, CHANCELLOR, DC PUBLIC SCHOOLS

11

DCPS elementary schools
named Bold in 2026

5

in 2022

DCPS now aims to carry this momentum into middle school through sixth grade academies, expansion of the Reading Clinic, high-impact tutoring, and a strategic priority on belonging and attendance.

SPOTLIGHT

Friendship Public Charter Schools

Instructional systems supporting middle school growth

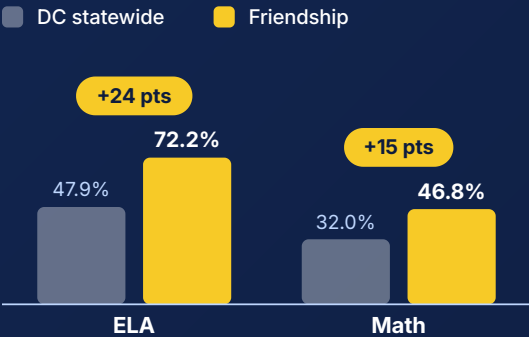
In 2025-26, 72.2% of economically disadvantaged middle school students at Friendship Public Charter Schools met the career-ready benchmark (CAPE 3+) in ELA and 46.8% met it in math, compared with 47.9% and 32.0% for economically disadvantaged middle school students statewide. ELA proficiency rose every year since 2021-22, when 48.9% of these students met the benchmark, for a gain of 23.3 points over four years. Math proficiency has climbed 17 points over the last three years. Three of the network's six PK-8 campuses earn recognition as Bold Performance Schools in 2026.

Friendship's leaders describe a recovery effort rooted in consistent expectations for grade-level instruction, deliberate support for teachers, and targeted responses to what students know and can do.

FIGURE 10 · FRIENDSHIP MIDDLE GRADES, CAPE LEVEL 3+

Friendship's economically disadvantaged middle school students beat the statewide rate by 24 points in ELA and 15 in math

Percent of economically disadvantaged middle school students at Level 3 or above, 2025-26, Friendship PCS and DC statewide.



Source: Friendship Public Charter Schools, OSSE DC CAPE results, 2025-26.

Coherent PK-8 leadership, supported by instructional expertise. Within Friendship's PK-8 campuses, building-wide leadership sustains academic expectations as students move from elementary to middle grades while families maintain relationships with their school community. Network content directors, instructional specialists, reading specialists, and teacher leaders reinforce these expectations through curriculum support and coaching. Friendship's Instructional Framework connects four practices, intellectual planning and preparation, content and pedagogy mastery, data analysis and action planning, and observation and feedback. These routines give teachers a shared approach while allowing leaders to respond to their school communities.



One advantage of our PK-8 model is continuity. Students and families know their school, and our leaders can build on those relationships while holding consistent expectations for teaching and learning year after year.

PATRICIA BRANTLEY, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, FRIENDSHIP PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

A young girl with dark skin and braided hair is smiling at the camera. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a classroom setting.**Friendship - Blow Pierce MS**

Data cycles that drive small-group instruction and high-impact tutoring. MAP Growth, classroom assessments, student work, and exit tickets help teams pinpoint misconceptions and plan what comes next. In collaborative planning and data meetings, teachers use that evidence to organize flexible small-group instruction during the regular school day, reteaching priority skills, providing targeted practice, and extending learning where students are ready. High-impact tutoring adds a distinct layer of intensive, one-to-one or small-group support. Friendship received an OSSE high-impact tutoring grant in 2024. During the earlier recovery years, acceleration teachers also contributed through co-teaching, small groups, and individual tutoring. The aim is more purposeful use of instructional time.

Research-based literacy and mathematical thinking across subjects. Friendship strengthened its multi-tiered literacy system with campus literacy specialists, science-of-reading professional learning, and regular progress monitoring. Its intervention approach included Lexia PowerUp to support decoding and comprehension in upper elementary and middle grades. Across subjects, educators reinforce academic vocabulary, reading comprehension, and evidence-based writing. In mathematics, the Standards for Mathematical Practice guide opportunities for students to reason, model, explain their strategies, and defend solutions as they build accuracy and fluency.

Student mastery made visible and used to improve teaching. Students demonstrate understanding through writing, discussion, independent practice, problem solving, and checks for understanding, giving teachers evidence of learning beyond participation alone. Teachers use that evidence to adjust pacing, grouping, and instructional support. Observation and feedback cycles give leaders and coaches opportunities to refine questioning, scaffolding, and the cognitive demand of tasks. Professional development is connected to the daily work of planning, instruction, and analyzing what students can independently demonstrate.



The point of looking at data is to change what happens next for students. Small-group instruction allows teachers to respond to what students know, where they need support, and when they are ready to move further.

VIELKA SCOTT-MARCUS, CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER, FRIENDSHIP PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

The common thread is consistency with responsiveness. Shared expectations, strong relationships, and progressively more precise instruction carry students toward high school.

Spotlight on proactive problem solving

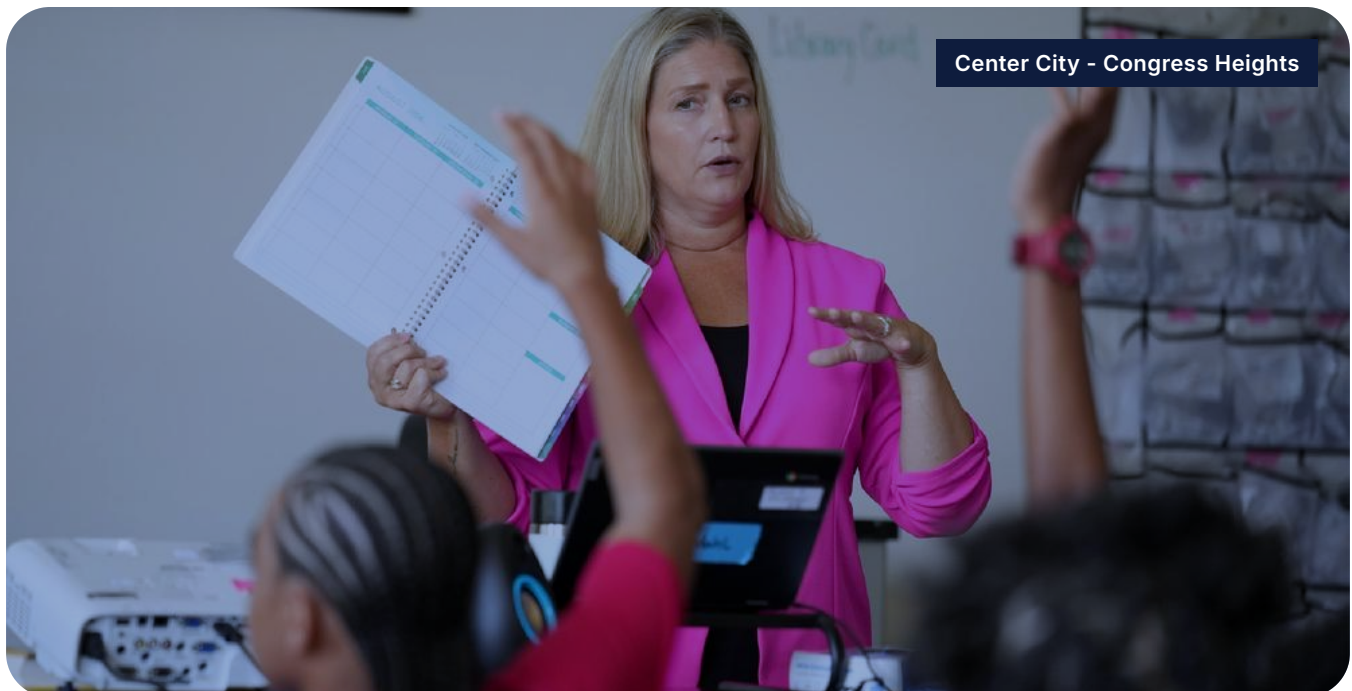
Bold Schools have trusted leaders who are skilled at keeping the focus on what matters and proactive problem solving. These leaders build a strong, aligned leadership team to address core areas that are needed for success, including instructional, operational, and relational expertise. When asked what makes their success possible, from staffing, to schedule, to leadership, to partners, their answer is consistently “D: All of the above.”

These leaders are not spending their days putting out fires, even though they will always jump in as needed. They are focused on proactive problem solving that prevents the fires before they start. For example, they plan for how they will use the time when absent students show up, and do the work to connect with families to get students back in school sooner. They model working hard, and they also model taking “wellness breaks” to make the work sustainable. They work smarter and they are consistent, every day, with expectations, with routines, with procedures, and with their unwavering belief in students.

“

There is a difference between doing a lot and working hard versus doing a lot of the right work.

NIYA WHITE, PRINCIPAL, CENTER CITY - CONGRESS HEIGHTS



FAMILIES AS PARTNERS · WRITTEN BY EMILY GARCIA, FLAMBOYAN

Bold Schools know families are essential partners in student success

Across DC's Bold Performance Schools, sustained improvement is not driven by one single practice or strategy alone. Strong schools create cultures of high expectations, use data to continuously improve instruction, and build strong relationships across their communities. How a strategy is implemented matters as much as the strategy itself.

Families are essential to that process. Data show school leaders where students are struggling, missing school, or experiencing inconsistent outcomes. Families help schools understand why. When leaders create the conditions for educators to build trusting relationships with families and communicate consistently with families, schools are better positioned to understand their data, identify barriers earlier, and develop responsive strategies.

Through training, individualized coaching, funding, practical tools, and access to a data platform, Flamboyant helps schools across DC build sustainable family engagement practices. This support helps educators shift mindsets and develop the knowledge, skills, and systems needed to make family engagement part of everyday practice. Flamboyant's expert coaches support schools in listening to families, students, and staff, selecting strategies that respond to their community's context, and strengthening relationship-building, ongoing communication, and academic partnering. Flamboyant also works with school leaders and Family Engagement Leadership Teams to embed family partnership into schoolwide systems, codify effective practices, and plan for leadership transitions, building the internal capacity schools need to sustain the work over time.



Friendship - Chamberlain ES

What these schools teach us

Garfield Elementary, Kimball Elementary, and Stanton Elementary demonstrate what happens when a school shifts family engagement from a nice-to-have to an integral component of school improvement.

At Garfield Elementary School, located in Ward 8, leaders wanted families, many of whom had attended the school themselves, to be partners in its success. Educators begin each year with relational home visits, meeting families in their communities, and learning about the factors affecting students' attendance and learning. These relationships helped Garfield move beyond engaging families primarily through events and toward partnering with them around academic progress. Although schools cannot resolve every barrier independently, they can respond more effectively when they understand what students and families are experiencing.

At Kimball Elementary School, the team recognized that families were not simply an audience for school data but were partners in making sense of it. This meant investing in capacity-building for educators to rethink their approach to academic partnering, such as parent-teacher conferences or Academic Parent Teacher Team meetings. By developing educator capacity to help share data with families meaningfully, provide instruction and support around activities to support target skills at home, and ensure access so that families can continually monitor their child's performance, the conversation shifted from "What is my child learning?" to "How can I help support this learning at home?"

Stanton demonstrates how leaders can embed family engagement into the structures that drive school improvement. In partnership with school leadership, the Stanton Family Engagement Leadership Team incorporated discussions about family engagement into grade-level meetings, data conversations, and other planning routines, ensuring the work did not depend on one staff member. This schoolwide approach helped Stanton move from reactive communication toward ongoing partnership. Families understood what students were learning, and educators gained partners who could reinforce expectations and address concerns before they escalated.

While every school context is different, the experiences of these three schools point to several lessons for school, district, and system leaders.



Build relationships before challenges arise.

When educators intentionally build trust with families before there is a problem to solve, the foundation is created for mutual respect, honest, proactive communication, and shared action.

Connect family engagement to academics.

Effectively engaging families is more than inviting them to a Math Night or a social event. Educators help families understand what their children are learning, how they are progressing, and how they can support success in meaningful, manageable ways.

Create the space for educators to learn alongside families.

Families are experts in their children in the same way that schools and educators are experts in content and pedagogy. Strong partnerships allow educators to use this expertise to respond to students' strengths and needs, resulting in improved outcomes.

Build structures to sustain the work of family engagement.

Family engagement is most effective when it is embedded into instruction, attendance strategies, school-improvement planning, educator development, and continuous-improvement routines.

FROM BRIGHT SPOTS TO SYSTEMWIDE PRACTICE

These schools reinforce something Flamboyant has learned through years of partnering with DC educators and families. Strong family engagement does not happen by chance. School and system leaders intentionally create the conditions for it.

That means investing in educator capacity, protecting time for relationship-building, setting clear expectations for family engagement, and embedding expectations for partnering with families into the way schools pursue their academic priorities.

When families and educators have trusting relationships and work together as partners, students are better positioned to succeed.



WHAT DC CAN DO NEXT

A citywide bold goal

The District of Columbia is making headlines for our progress in increasing K12 student outcomes. We produced a stronger pandemic recovery than others across the country.¹ As performance nationally has dropped or stayed flat, DC's most recent results on the Nation's Report Card showed continued progress. DC tied students in Delaware for the greatest improvement in math in the nation.²

These gains were achieved due to sustained, deliberate effort and investments in areas such as high-impact tutoring, high-quality instructional materials, teacher support and professional development, and data-driven continuous improvement. The results reflect the hard work of many education leaders, teachers, staff, and students across DC.

Building on these successes, it is time for a renewed commitment to a **bold goal** and **bold action** for DC students.

BOLD GOAL

DC will be the first urban city to close performance gaps this decade. Our students will exceed the NAEP national average in reading and math in the next five years.

The path forward

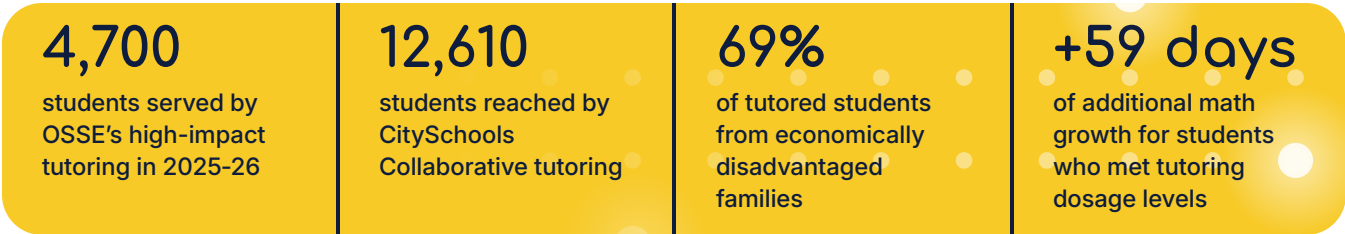
The 2026 state assessment results confirm that many of the District's strategies work, and the task at hand is scale and maintaining focus.

Friendship - Ideal ES

1. DC Policy Center, D.C.'s academic recovery outperforms similar states and districts (dcpolicycenter.org).

2. Executive Office of the Mayor, Nation's Report Card shows continued improvement in District's public schools (dc.gov).

Continue scaling what works, including classroom instructional supports and high-impact tutoring. OSSE served more than 4,700 students³ and CitySchools Collaborative reached 12,610 students⁴ through high-impact tutoring (HIT) in 2025-26, with 69% of those students from economically disadvantaged families and a majority with baseline test scores in the bottom quartile. OSSE analysis found that students who received at least 20 hours of tutoring in reading saw more favorable score changes across grade bands. In math, our own research found that DCPS and public charter students who met high-impact tutoring dosage levels demonstrated an additional 59 instructional days of growth⁵ compared with peers who started the fall at the same performance level and did not receive HIT. Stanford researchers also found that DC students were more likely to attend school on days they were scheduled for tutoring.⁶ Thousands more students need access to HIT to help them get more at bats and catch up with their peers.



Bring structured literacy’s playbook to early numeracy. The District trained thousands of educators in the science of reading, and ELA recovery followed. A similar initiative is needed for math. DCPS has demonstrated strong improvement in math proficiency, especially at elementary schools East of the River, by taking a coherent approach to training everyone in evidence-based math instruction, from instructional superintendents to principals to teachers. In early elementary classrooms across DCPS, math instruction and intervention blocks follow a standard protocol informed by research and the Eureka Math Squared curriculum. Teachers and aides target intervention and small group coaching based on how students perform on daily lessons and weekly math skills assessments.

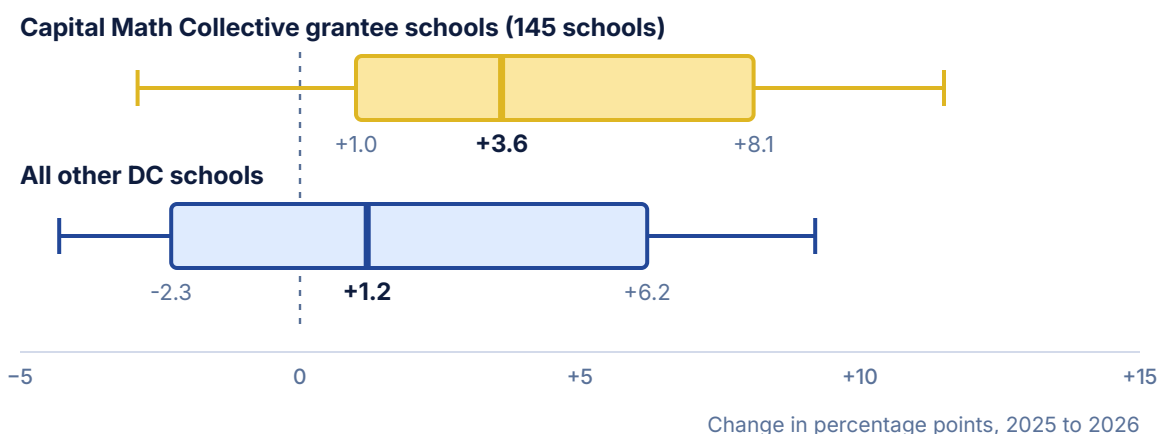
The Capital Math Collective, a privately funded \$20 million citywide initiative, helps DCPS scale teacher support and provides more than \$2 million in grants to 23 charter schools for similar professional development and instructional coaching for math teachers. DC should ensure all DCPS and public charter schools have access to evidence-based math instructional strategies by developing a robust math instructional leader network, either within a government agency like OSSE or by adding government funds to public-private partnerships like the Capital Math Collective. After year one of the two-year grant, DCPS and charter school grantees outgained non-grantees in math 3+ proficiency from the prior year, 3.6 percentage points for grantees to 1.2 points for non-grantees, a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.01$).

3. OSSE, 2026 DC Statewide Assessment Results, August 2026 (osse.dc.gov).
4. CitySchools Collaborative, CityTutor DC (cityschoolscollab.org/citytutor).
5. EmpowerK12, 2025 CSC High-Impact Tutoring Impact Evaluation (empowerk12.org/research-source).
6. Stanford SCALE, Effects of High-Impact Tutoring on Student Attendance: Evidence from a State Initiative (scale.stanford.edu).

FIGURE 11 · CAPITAL MATH COLLECTIVE, 2025 TO 2026

Capital Math Collective schools posted larger math gains than other DC schools

Change in the percent of students at Level 3 or above (the career-ready benchmark) in math from 2025 to 2026, by school, all students and all tested grades. Each school counts once. Box: middle half of schools. Line: median school. Whiskers: 10th to 90th percentile.



Source: EmpowerK12 analysis of OSSE school-level DC CAPE results, 2025 and 2026. Grantee schools posted larger one-year gains than other DC schools (Mann-Whitney U test, $p = 0.006$). This compares school-level changes and describes the pattern. It does not estimate the initiative's impact. Schools in the comparison (145 at the ten Cohort 1 grantee LEAs): DCPS (114), Friendship (15), Center City (6), Capital City (3), Digital Pioneers (2), and one school each at Cesar Chavez, DC Scholars, Inspired Teaching, Thurgood Marshall, and Yu Ying.

Maintain investment levels. The equitable funding formula and the investments in tutoring and teacher development created this momentum, and sustained funding will carry it forward. Four years of post-pandemic gains have shown what DC's public schools can do when citywide strategy, funding, and instruction pull in the same direction. The next four will show if our public officials want to continue and accelerate that progress.



About EmpowerK12's Bold Schools initiative

EmpowerK12 analyzes data utilizing rigorous methodologies to help education stakeholders understand how schools are performing on a variety of metrics, including how well schools serve at-risk students, which is central to the organization's mission. Learn more about EK12's mission and how we support bold school improvement through access to rigorous data analytical tools, training educators to turn data into action, and by fostering collaborative improvement by identifying real-time bright spots across a broad network of schools at empowerk12.org.



Acknowledgements

The research behind this tenth anniversary report on DC's Bold Performance Schools was made possible by the generous support of the CityBridge Foundation and the Flamboyant Foundation. EmpowerK12 also thanks Bridget Cherry, Dorie Turner Nolt, and Michelle Lerner for their help completing the research and drafting the report.



APPENDIX

Bold Performance PPAE model data

The tables below report how accurately the proficiency models behind every school's PPAE (Percent Proficient Above Expected) value fit the school results they were trained on, using root mean square error (RMSE), absolute error, and R squared, the squared correlation between predicted and actual proficiency rates. The lower the error and the higher the R squared, the more accurately a model predicts state test results at a school level. We generate composite models in math and English language arts (ELA) for every grade band (upper elementary, middle, and high school) for both publicly reported proficiency thresholds, the career-ready benchmark (CAPE 3+) and the selective college-ready benchmark (CAPE 4+). Each composite model averages three components trained on the three most recent school years. Every school's overall PPAE is the difference between its actual performance and the composite model's output.

Table 3 shows how strongly each covariate relates to proficiency in every model's training data, as the absolute correlation between the covariate and the school proficiency rate. Table 4 reports each model component's fit, with the component definitions below it.

ES = elementary school. MS = middle school. HS = high school. ELA = English language arts. 3+ = career-ready benchmark on the CAPE test. 4+ = selective college-ready benchmark on the CAPE test.

TABLE 3 · PPAE MODEL COVARIATES

How strongly each covariate relates to proficiency, by model

Absolute correlation between each covariate and the school proficiency rate in each model's training data, school years 2023-24 through 2025-26.

MODEL	ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	STUDENTS OF COLOR	STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES	ENGLISH LEARNERS	MID-YEAR ENTRY RATE
ES ELA 3+	0.745	0.729	0.451	0.017	0.318
ES ELA 4+	0.784	0.826	0.414	0.003	0.268
ES Math 3+	0.724	0.717	0.378	0.094	0.290
ES Math 4+	0.781	0.845	0.335	0.049	0.227
MS ELA 3+	0.642	0.660	0.574	0.060	0.373
MS ELA 4+	0.764	0.808	0.453	0.087	0.333
MS Math 3+	0.714	0.685	0.412	0.036	0.422
MS Math 4+	0.791	0.825	0.263	0.050	0.334
HS ELA 3+	0.412	0.721	0.440	0.145	0.395
HS ELA 4+	0.641	0.874	0.422	0.174	0.323
HS Math 3+	0.725	0.853	0.299	0.058	0.375
HS Math 4+	0.774	0.870	0.096	0.185	0.232

Source: EmpowerK12 Bold Performance PPAE models, 2026. The grade levels a school tests (elementary, middle, high, alternative) are also model inputs.

APPENDIX

TABLE 4 · PPAE MODEL ACCURACY

Model accuracy by grade band, subject, and threshold

RMSE, absolute error, and R squared for each model component and the ensemble, measured on each model's training data, school years 2023-24 through 2025-26. Errors are in percentage points of proficiency.

MODEL	COMPONENT	RMSE	ABSOLUTE ERROR	R SQUARED	MODEL	COMPONENT	RMSE	ABSOLUTE ERROR	R SQUARED
ES ELA 3+	GBT	9.6	7.8	0.871	MS Math 3+	GBT	9.2	7.4	0.865
ES ELA 3+	DL	10.1	8.0	0.704	MS Math 3+	DL	8.6	6.7	0.760
ES ELA 3+	Lin	10.4	8.4	0.680	MS Math 3+	Lin	9.8	7.8	0.689
ES ELA 3+	Ensemble	9.2	7.4	0.771	MS Math 3+	Ensemble	8.4	6.7	0.796
ES ELA 4+	GBT	8.6	7.0	0.909	MS Math 4+	GBT	7.0	5.3	0.915
ES ELA 4+	DL	8.1	6.4	0.796	MS Math 4+	DL	6.1	4.7	0.830
ES ELA 4+	Lin	8.9	7.1	0.752	MS Math 4+	Lin	7.1	5.4	0.774
ES ELA 4+	Ensemble	7.8	6.4	0.828	MS Math 4+	Ensemble	6.2	4.7	0.849
ES Math 3+	GBT	10.4	8.4	0.845	HS ELA 3+	GBT	10.5	8.3	0.824
ES Math 3+	DL	11.6	9.2	0.636	HS ELA 3+	DL	10.9	8.3	0.678
ES Math 3+	Lin	12.6	10.1	0.574	HS ELA 3+	Lin	9.3	7.1	0.754
ES Math 3+	Ensemble	10.8	8.8	0.707	HS ELA 3+	Ensemble	9.1	7.0	0.786
ES Math 4+	GBT	8.9	7.1	0.909	HS ELA 4+	GBT	8.4	6.5	0.891
ES Math 4+	DL	8.6	6.7	0.790	HS ELA 4+	DL	6.7	5.2	0.844
ES Math 4+	Lin	9.7	7.8	0.730	HS ELA 4+	Lin	6.7	5.2	0.846
ES Math 4+	Ensemble	8.4	6.8	0.822	HS ELA 4+	Ensemble	6.4	5.0	0.878
MS ELA 3+	GBT	8.6	7.0	0.861	HS Math 3+	GBT	9.4	6.7	0.821
MS ELA 3+	DL	9.0	7.3	0.700	HS Math 3+	DL	7.4	5.9	0.816
MS ELA 3+	Lin	9.0	7.4	0.698	HS Math 3+	Lin	7.5	6.0	0.809
MS ELA 3+	Ensemble	8.0	6.6	0.783	HS Math 3+	Ensemble	7.3	5.7	0.840
MS ELA 4+	GBT	7.7	6.3	0.903	HS Math 4+	GBT	8.8	4.5	0.785
MS ELA 4+	DL	7.0	5.7	0.805	HS Math 4+	DL	5.3	3.5	0.878
MS ELA 4+	Lin	7.6	6.1	0.770	HS Math 4+	Lin	6.3	4.2	0.826
MS ELA 4+	Ensemble	6.7	5.7	0.838	HS Math 4+	Ensemble	6.2	3.7	0.854

Source: EmpowerK12 Bold Performance PPAE models, 2026. The DL component is a committee of 40 neural networks run with a fixed seed, so every result is reproducible.

GBT Gradient Boosted Trees, an ensemble method that builds an additive model in a stage-wise fashion, where new decision trees are added to the model to correct the errors of previous trees.

Lin Multivariate Linear Regression, a straightforward statistical model that finds the best-fitting linear equation to describe how multiple input features affect multiple continuous output variables.

DL Deep Learning, models using deep neural networks to automatically discover complex patterns in data.

Ensemble The composite model, the average of the three components listed above. Each school's expected proficiency rate is the ensemble's prediction.

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Whittier ES (DCPS)

The highest Percent Proficient Above Expected in the city, 37.2 points.



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MOST INSPIRING

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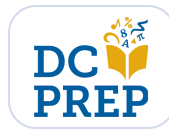
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Friendship -
Chamberlain ES



Friendship - Ideal
ES



Friendship - Ideal
MS



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Garrison ES
(DCPS)



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Kimball ES (DCPS)



LaSalle-Backus EC
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Noyes ES (DCPS)



Savoy ES (DCPS)



Stanton ES (DCPS)



Tubman ES (DCPS)



Washington Global



Whittier ES (DCPS)

DCPS = DC Public Schools. All other schools are DC public charter schools.



Ten years of Bold Performance Schools, 2016 to 2026.

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