DC BOLD PERFORMANCE SCHOOLS

2023



EmpowerK12


Center City PCS

SUMMARY

Bold Performance Schools are the DC schools that boldly support priority students — economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, English learners, and students of color — to reach academic success. The 12 schools across 11 campuses designated as 2023 Bold Performance Schools are DC Public Schools (DCPS) and DC public charter schools, serving elementary and middle grades and a student population with more than 30% of students who come from economically disadvantaged families.

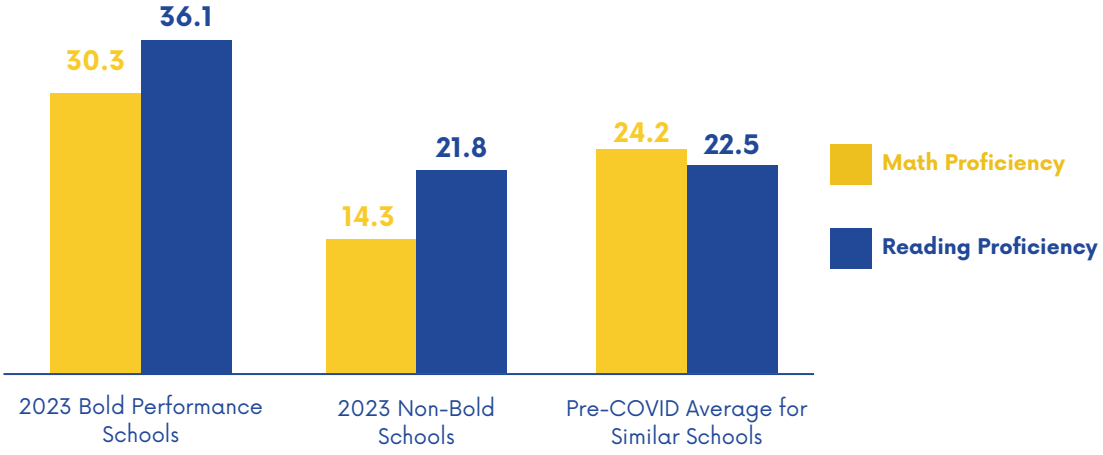
This year's Bold Performance Schools have 2023 PARCC proficiency rates that were an average of 15.1 percentage points better than other Bold-eligible schools and 11.5 percentage points better than the pre-pandemic average performance for schools serving similar demographics.



2023 BOLD PERFORMANCE CAMPUSES

Burroughs ES (DCPS)
Center City - Congress Heights
DC Prep - Anacostia MS
Friendship - Blow Pierce ES and MS
Friendship - Ideal MS
Garrison ES (DCPS)
Langdon ES (DCPS)
Payne ES (DCPS)
Rocketship – Infinity
Roots
Whittier ES (DCPS)

Figure 1. Average Math and Reading Proficiency for Bold Performance Schools Compared with Similar Schools' Proficiency in 2023 and Pre-COVID



We interviewed the instructional leadership team from every Bold Performance School to learn more about what made them successful. Leaders and teachers focused their energy on these top strategies in 2022-23, listed in descending order of strategies that schools most often attributed to their performance:

01 — Data analysis to drive instruction

Conducted on a weekly basis, educators utilize student work and exit tickets, progress monitoring trackers, standardized teacher-created short assessments, and online interim benchmark tests to adjust instructional support often;

02 — Teacher support

Instructional leaders provided coaching and professional development, often in-the-moment based on data, to ensure teachers' conceptual understanding of the standards and that they have the tools to address common student misconceptions during lessons;

03 — Family engagement

With a focus on improving attendance, educators ensured that families were frequently updated on upcoming happenings at school that their student would not want to miss;

04 — Joyful school climate

School leadership teams emphasized the importance of a fun and joyful school environment for students and adults; and

05 — Targeted small-group and individual student intervention

In addition to whole group instruction delivered with high expectations, educators grouped students using data, and oftentimes across grade levels, to address specific skill gaps and achieve success on rigorous, grade-level content.



The 2023 Bold Performance Schools' performance in math and reading demonstrate that DC's priority student groups can reach lofty goals we set for them. With bold citywide goals and a data-driven, cross-sector commitment to collaborating on innovative strategies, DC will move well beyond COVID recovery and into a renaissance era where all DC students can thrive in an increasingly global labor market.

COVID's immediate impact was inequitable. Lower-performing students and student groups pre-pandemic were more likely to return to in-person schooling after 17 months of virtual learning, even further behind their peers. The longer-term effect of the pandemic has been more broad-sweeping. National data and research show that COVID's ongoing educational impact affects nearly every student group, with historic test score declines for every race and socioeconomic group, plus a national chronic absenteeism crisis that is not limited to urban or economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. This moment in our nation's history leaves the door cracked open for something truly special to happen for DC's historically marginalized student groups: with equitable support from city leaders and data-driven instructional strategies from Bold school leaders and teachers, we will demonstrate that family and neighborhood socioeconomic status does not limit our students' potential to thrive in the life path of their choice. Our DC educational ecosystem can break the cycle of poverty for the next generation of young adults. The 2023 Bold Performance Schools demonstrate the attainability of that aspirational goal.

INTRODUCTION

Pandemic's Long-term Impact on DC Students

The 2022-23 school year began with newly released state and national assessment data that demonstrated the staggering negative impact of COVID shutdowns on students' academic progress. In August 2022, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) released DC PARCC results that showed student achievement had dropped to the lowest level since the state began administering the test in 2015. Then, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) piled on the bad news with the release of the first Nation's Report Card since the start of the pandemic. Fourth and eighth grade math and reading scores for every state and a sample of urban districts, including DC Public Schools, showed the largest drop in U.S. math scores since 1990 and a statistically significant decline in reading proficiency from 2019. In DC, scores set back a decade's worth of progress.

LOW-INCOME STUDENTS SCALE SCORE AVERAGE FOR GRADES 4 & 8, MATH & READING

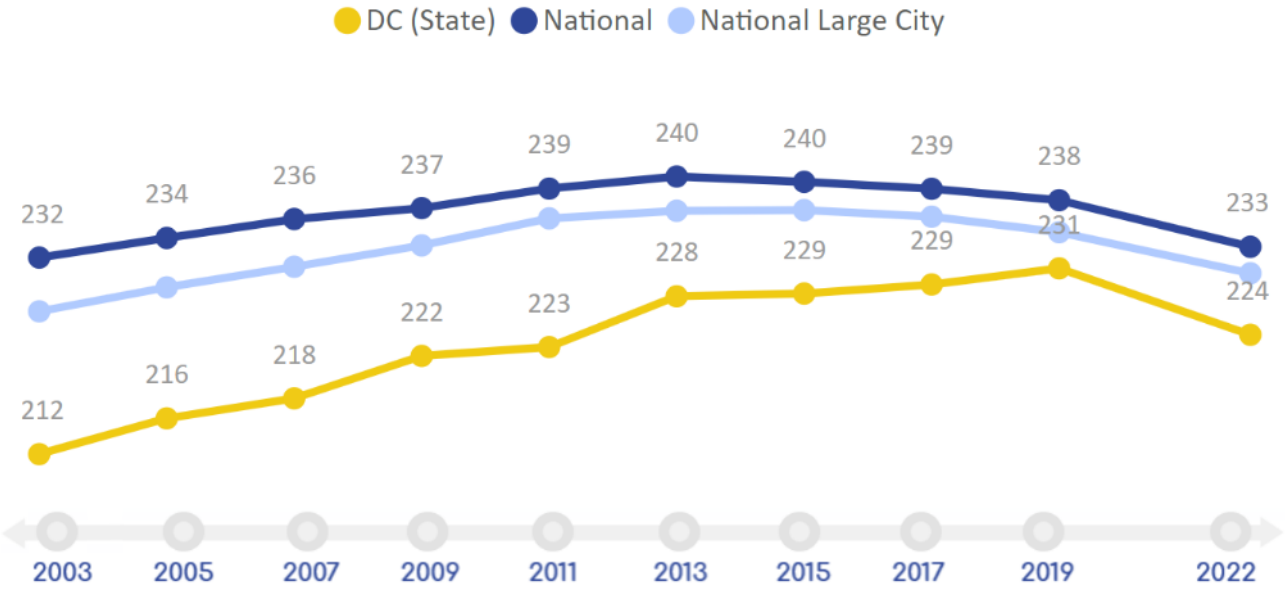
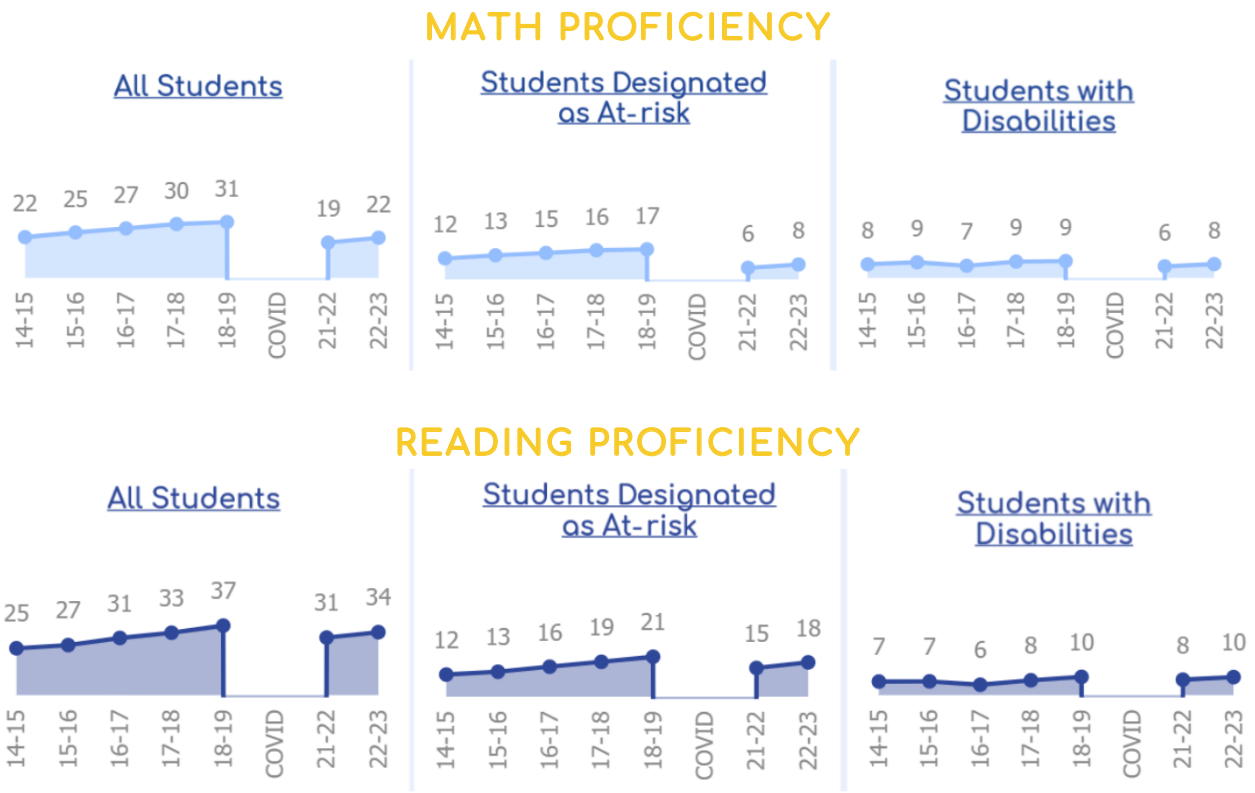


Figure 2. NAEP National and DC Average Scores in Grades 4 and 8, Math and Reading Combined

Last fall, our educators returned for a second consecutive in-person year facing tough challenges like high rates of student chronic absenteeism and low levels of foundational literacy and numeracy skills. They grappled with what strategies could move the needle forward for their lowest performing students. For many adults, the near-constant stream of negative student performance data must have felt deflating and overwhelming, but Bold Performance School educators came together and analyzed their students' data to formulate a collective action plan. They continued meeting on a daily or weekly basis to review student work to identify misconceptions and reteach lessons via small groups and individualized instruction, ultimately bending the learning curve in their students' favor.

Two months ago, their hard work finally resulted in some positive news when OSSE released results for the 2023 PARCC assessment, showing incremental gains in math and reading across most student groups. The uptick in scores is promising. However, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations remained lower than 2019 proficiency rates, especially in math, which was 6 percentage points lower than reading proficiency pre-pandemic and is now 12 percentage points lower than reading.

Figures 3 and 4. DC PARCC 4+ Math and Reading Proficiency for All Tested Students and Priority Student Groups




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At the current rate of improvement, reading proficiency will recover to 2019 pre-pandemic rates in the next 2-3 years, and math recovery may require another 4-6 years for some priority student groups. While gains this year are encouraging, the time lag for reaching pre-pandemic proficiency levels reveals the depth of the academic puzzle our students and educators are trying to solve.

Figure 5. Recovery Years Left at Current Rate of Improvement by Student Group and Metric

	ELA		Math	
Subject Group	PARCC4+	PARCC3+	PARCC4+	PARCC3+
All Students	2	3	4	4
At-risk	1	2	5	3
SwD	0	1	3	3
ELL	0	1	3	2
Asian	NOP	NOP	NOP	NOP
Black	2	3	6	5
Hispanic	5	NOP	6	6
White	NOP	NOP	1	2

NOP = Not On-Pace for recovery, scores for the student group and metric declined in 2023 instead of recovering

While the city overall lags pre-pandemic proficiency, there are schools that demonstrated 2023 math and reading performance levels that significantly exceed pre-COVID averages for schools serving similar grades and demographics.

IDENTIFYING BOLD PERFORMANCE SCHOOLS

In DC and across the country, there is a strong negative correlation between the number of students from priority populations–students from economically disadvantaged families, students with disabilities, English learners, and those who identify as a student of color–that a school serves and schoolwide math and reading proficiency rates. The larger the priority population a school serves, typically, the lower the school's reported state assessment proficiency rate.

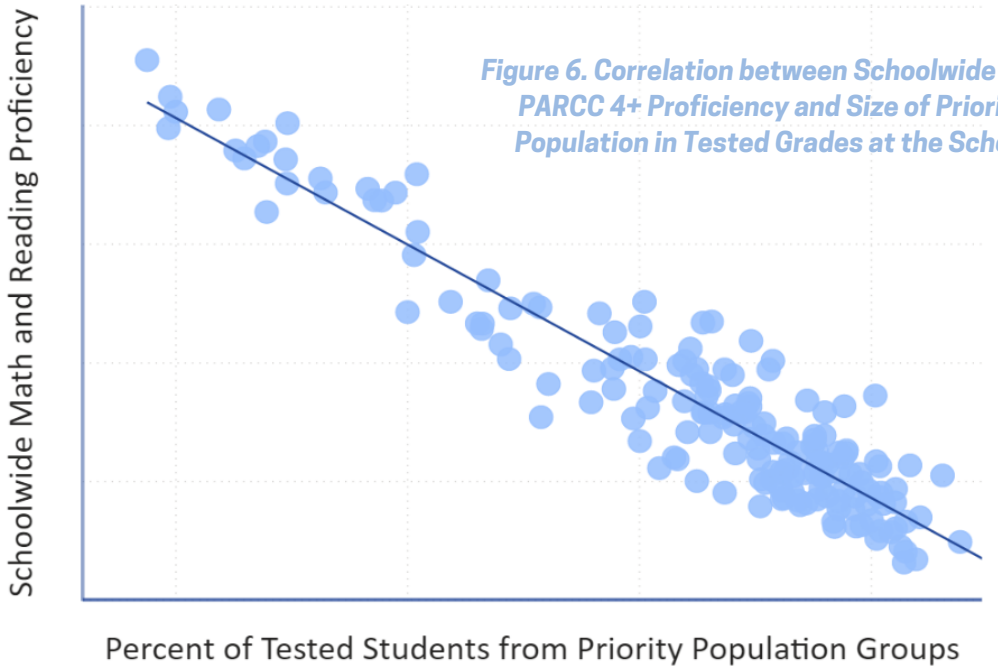


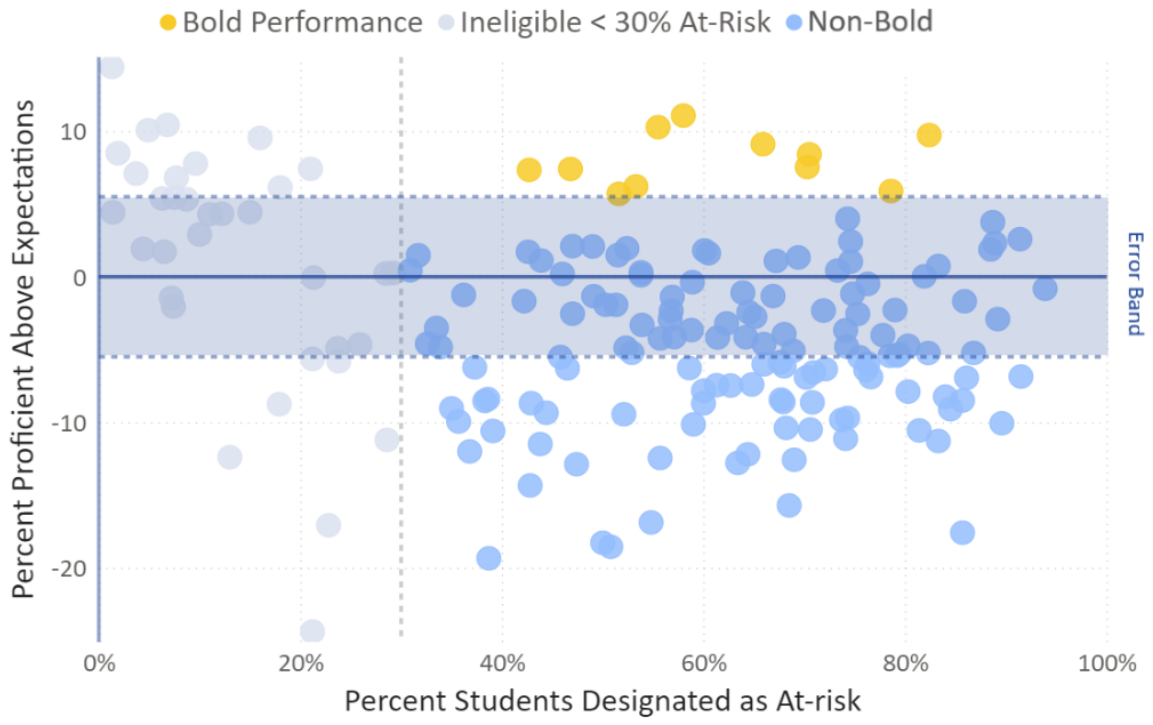
Figure 6. Correlation between Schoolwide 2023 PARCC 4+ Proficiency and Size of Priority Population in Tested Grades at the School

However, the 2023 Bold Performance Schools prove that correlation and causation can be two different things by demonstrating student proficiency rates significantly higher than schools serving similar populations and exceeding pre-pandemic achievement averages.

EmpowerK12 utilizes complex mathematical methods to understand how variables such as grade levels tested and priority student group population size interact with student performance. We employ a robust ensemble model similar to the kinds of sophisticated models that supercomputers use to forecast weather conditions to identify Bold Performance Schools. We combine multiple mathematical algorithms to generate the best predictions for math and reading proficiency rates a school should expect, given the unique student population and grade levels it serves. Our Bold Performance modeling process this year is the same as how we identified schools from 2016 to 2019 pre-COVID. See the technical discussion in a separate appendix document for more detail about this process.

After we run 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 that is the difference between actual and expected performance. As with all predictions, there is some amount of uncertainty in the prediction, so we only select schools with a PPAE that exceeds the absolute error in measurement for the Bold Performance designation. Schools must serve at least 30% of students from economically disadvantaged families and have an open enrollment policy to be eligible for the designation.

Figure 7. 2023 Bold Performance PPAE and Percent Economically Disadvantaged by School and Bold Status



THE 2023 BOLD PERFORMANCE SCHOOLS

This year's Bold Performance Schools educate 3,200 students, including 1,900 economically disadvantaged students. **Collectively, the Bold Performance Schools have 2023 PARCC proficiency rates (both PARCC 4+ and PARCC 3+ proficiency measures) that were an average of 15.1 percentage points better than other schools serving a high-priority student population and 11.5 percentage points better than the pre-pandemic average for schools with similar demographics.**

Figure 8. 2023 Bold Performance School List

School	Ward	PPAE	At-risk	PARCC 4+	PARCC 3+
Burroughs ES (DCPS)	5	13.2	51%	44.2	67.9
Center City - Congress Heights	8	10.2	56%	29.4	69.1
DC Prep - Anacostia MS	8	7.8	72%	24.6	54.3
Friendship - Blow Pierce ES	7	14.7	77%	29.1	57.3
Friendship - Blow Pierce MS	7	11.2	75%	22.7	54.5
Friendship - Ideal MS	4	8.7	73%	24.5	48.6
Garrison ES (DCPS)	2	11.5	48%	40.3	65.9
Langdon ES (DCPS)	5	8.8	64%	29.3	60.0
Payne ES (DCPS)	6	14.9	55%	45.9	65.6
Rocketship - Infinity	5	9.9	65%	29.2	57.2
Roots	4	14.8	58%	37.0	76.1
Whittier ES (DCPS)	4	11.8	53%	33.8	67.5
State Avg. Schools Serving High Priority	--	-5.4	62%	17.4	38.6

The Bold Performance Schools are selected based on their students' state assessment performance, but these schools also stand out for their performance on LEA-administered assessments, including in grades K-2, which are not tested on PARCC. Since the start of the pandemic, EmpowerK12 has organized an annual collection of computer-based assessments for students in kindergarten through 8th grade that schools administer in the fall, winter, and spring.

Economically disadvantaged students at the 2023 Bold Performance Schools have recovered COVID unfinished learning more quickly than at other schools across the District.

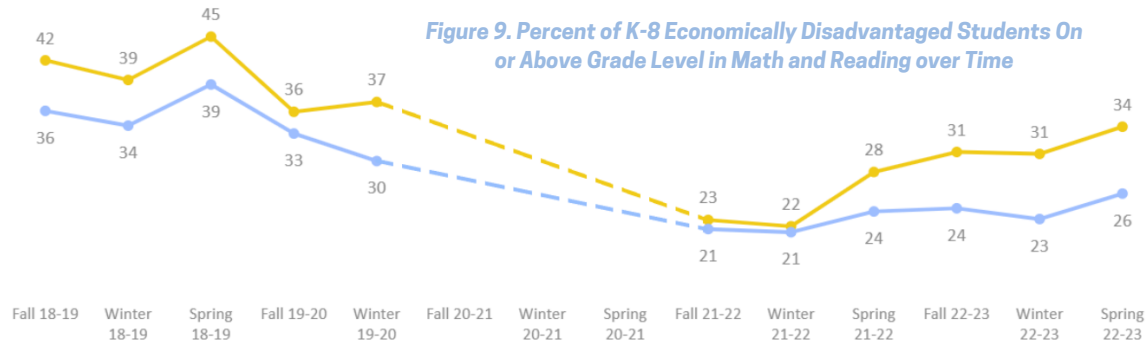


Figure 9. Percent of K-8 Economically Disadvantaged Students On or Above Grade Level in Math and Reading over Time

Nearly half (48%) of all DC students were considered chronically absent, having missed more than one day every two weeks on average (or an in-seat attendance rate < 90%) during the 2021-22 school year. Prior to COVID in 2018-19, 30% of students were chronically absent. This past year, absenteeism subsided a little bit but was still substantially higher than pre-pandemic norms. The 2023 Bold **Performance Schools have not been immune to the chronic absenteeism crisis. However, the schools averaged chronic absenteeism rates that were 8 percentage points lower than other schools serving high economically disadvantaged student populations over the last two school years.**

The difference in chronic absenteeism is only a partial explanation for the Bold Performance Schools' better-than-expected math and reading proficiency. If the key to significant academic improvement is to maximize the amount of effective instruction time students receive, then additional instructional days attended is one important step. The more significant part of that calculus is increasing the effectiveness of the time when students attend, something Bold Performance School educators have thought a lot about. Read on to learn what strategies these schools employ to increase the amount of effective instructional time their students receive.

WHAT MAKES THE 2023

BOLD PERFORMANCE SCHOOLS SPECIAL

The following is a summary of lessons learned from interviews and surveys of the 2023 Bold Performance School instructional leadership teams, which often included principals, assistant principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers. We thank our partners at the D.C. Policy Center for their help in co-designing the interview protocol and follow-up school survey as well as conducting half of the team interviews.

From our interviews, one common theme we noticed is **the presence of a great school leader and at least one strong instructional leader, who oftentimes, but not in every instance, was identified to be the same individual.** It's not a question we asked during the interviews or on the follow-up survey, but educators frequently described their school leader as a smart, fun, and caring individual who enabled them to be a great instructional coach or teacher.

The school leaders tend to be delegators with a "trust but verify" mantra. One of the leaders' strengths is ensuring their team has the support required to fight daily fires on their own instead of taking ownership of fighting the fires themselves. **The Bold Performance School principals create work environments where taking risks and asking for help are a sign of strength rather than weakness, and they seek collaborative input on creative solutions to address the needs that arise.**

Beyond a great leader, Bold Performance educators offered several strategies they believe helped their school exceed pre-pandemic achievement expectations and become a Bold School. The D.C. Policy Center and EmpowerK12 research teams coded their responses into 32 strategy categories. See the appendix for the full list. This report provides additional context and details for the top five most commonly utilized strategies that schools identified as key to their Bold Performance.

BOLD PERFORMANCE SCHOOL STRATEGIES

The top five key strategies to Bold Performance Schools' success in 2023:

01 — Data analysis to drive instruction

Conducted on a weekly basis, educators utilize student work and exit tickets, progress monitoring trackers, standardized teacher-created short assessments, and online interim benchmark tests to adjust instructional support often;

02 — Teacher support

Instructional leaders provided coaching and professional development, often in-the-moment based on data, to ensure teachers' conceptual understanding of the standards and that they have the tools to address common student misconceptions during lessons;

03 — Family engagement

With a focus on improving attendance, educators ensured that families were frequently updated on upcoming happenings at school that their student would not want to miss;

04 — Joyful school climate

School leadership teams emphasized the importance of a fun and joyful school environment for students and adults; and

05 — Targeted small-group and individual student intervention

In addition to whole group instruction delivered with high expectations, educators grouped students using data, and oftentimes across grade levels, to address specific skill gaps and achieve success on rigorous, grade-level content.

DATA ANALYSIS TO DRIVE INSTRUCTION

The instructional leadership teams at Bold Performance Schools listed data analysis to drive instruction most often as a "Top 3 strategy" they focused on during 2022-23. Instructional leadership teams started by identifying specific goals they wanted to see from students by the end of the year. Then, they backwards mapped what progress was required, and by when, and identified what data would help them monitor whether students were on track. Throughout the year, Bold Performance School leaders utilized comprehensive, interactive student data dashboards, and teachers utilized daily exit tickets and weekly data deep-dive meetings to keep pace with changes happening in classrooms and adjust their strategy. Weekly data meeting agendas typically include analysis of student work, attendance data, and well-being data in pairs or groups of educators. General education teachers and instructional coaches, along with special educators, counselors, and social workers, joined weekly data meetings when needed.

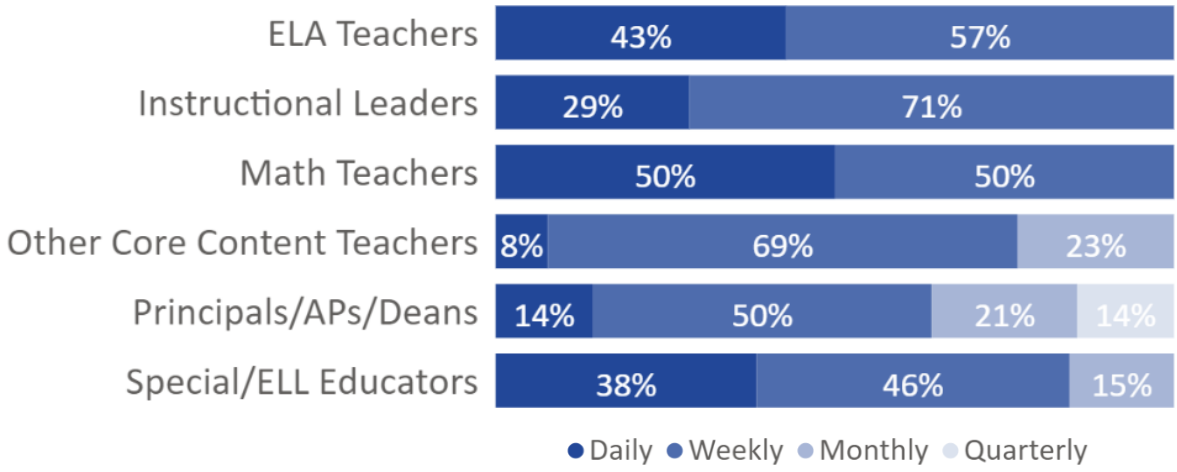
Principal Snowdy's leadership role at Friendship Ideal allows him to heavily invest in teacher professional development and support the implementation of standards-based grading and curriculum.

At Ideal, teachers analyze student data extensively with instructional coaches, plan for student misconceptions, and use high-quality curriculum that allows them to modify as they see fit all while remaining rigorous. The school uses a standards-based grading system which allows students to be engaged with the specific skills they are learning about. Students can articulate what standards they struggle with or which they have mastered. Ideal's teachers send parent communication with suggestions for ways to support at home, and the students are able to better articulate the support they need at home because they know their own data and the standards.



When we surveyed last year's 2022 Bold Performance instructional leadership teams, many of whom earned the coveted award again this year, we found that core content teachers and coaches deep dive into student data daily or weekly.

Figure 10. Frequency of Data Review by Different Educator Types at Bold Performance Schools



At Bold Performance Schools, not all data and goals conversations are about outcomes with hard numbers like attendance, assessment scores, and grades. Often, the goals and data reviewed are co-academic and social-emotional in nature, which the prevailing science of learning research suggests are important indicators of the brain's readiness to learn in class.



> Weekly data meetings and long-range planning are the keys to Whittier's success. You must create time to inspect what you expect. Long-range planning has allowed us to increase teachers' content muscle.

TIFFANY JOHNSON
Principal at Whittier Elementary in Ward 4


ideal

Additional Data-Driven Ideas from Bold Performance Schools

Simple spreadsheet trackers
A couple of Bold Performance teachers showed us detailed spreadsheet trackers of student progress that their grade level and department teams share and utilize to monitor students' individual skills and standard attainment. These simple spreadsheets include formulas for cell coloration that make it easy to find learning gaps, identify standards-level improvement to celebrate with students and see aggregate level data that they analyze during weekly data meetings.

Data and goals coaches specifically for leaders
At several of the most improved DCPS schools, instructional leaders, known as LEAP Leaders, received data-specific consultative support from central office staff to strengthen their data-driven skills and processes alongside teachers. These data coaches help leaders to define their vision and goals for their team and coach educators serving as their school's LEAP Leader to plan and implement weekly data meetings.

Monthly deep dives
Some schools conduct monthly deep dives into specific challenge areas, in addition to the weekly data meetings with teachers. These deep dives dig into one data domain at a time (e.g. attendance, discipline, grades, interventions, etc.) across the whole school and by student groups to find bright spots and root causes that can be addressed through "tier one," or whole school, strategies.



> We are unapologetic about caring about data and then we utilize that to make sure that we are providing students with targeted instruction.

TEACHER SUPPORT

Multiple instructional leaders at 2023 Bold Performance Schools provided detailed information about intentional, in-the-moment support for teachers around deep conceptual understanding of the content. At weekly data meetings, teachers practiced upcoming lessons with their colleagues participating as students. This feedback cycle gives educators the opportunity to understand possible misconceptions that may result from the lesson and refine their craft to provide the right support for all students more often.

Principal Niya White at Center City Congress Heights shared how she delegates principal duties for the day to cover a classroom: "You should always be equally ready to get down and dirty when coverage is needed or somebody is on [family] leave. It's okay for you to teach. It's probably the best opportunity for professional development and growth you can give your teachers. They can walk into your room while you're teaching to see what you're doing, how you're doing it, what resources you made, how you crafted and shifted, and the questions you were asking." On these days, teachers use the same observation forms that Principal White utilizes when she observes teachers, and teachers provide feedback to Principal White.



At Burroughs Elementary, staff find collaborative planning time to talk about strengths and needs, not deficits, of their multi-tier systems of support (MTSS) for students. Hope Harrod, 5th grade teacher at Burroughs Elementary School believes planning and collaboration is important at her school: "Collaboration allows teachers to align their philosophies and make sure that we are all aiming towards the same goal. When you get together as a community or as a learning unit, it's important for us to be very honest about what we're doing in the classroom, sharing our goals and objectives with each other."

> The best way to see success is to invest in your people. Everyone in some capacity needs to be developed in some area and feel success in their area of development. This is true of everyone from our students to our leaders. When you really take the time to invest in your people it allows you to move them towards their potential and goals set.
>
> **ANGEL MCNEIL**
> **Founding Principal at Rocketship Infinity ES in Ward 5**

Additional Teacher Support Ideas from Bold Performance Schools

LETRS training

A few of the DCPS and public charter schools recommended Lexia's LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) training. LETRS, an intense multi-day training, teaches educators the skills needed to master the fundamentals of structured literacy instruction—phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and written language.

Involve special education and English learner teams

Another common theme across the Bold Schools was an emphasis on inclusivity of special learners and educators. Several principals described how their special education staff are part of the school's core instructional leadership team, participating in subject and grade level team meetings, and how they prioritize keeping all students in the general education setting as much as possible.

Teacher-led professional development on data analysis and wellbeing

In addition to peer observations, at many Bold Schools teachers lead professional development. Examples of topics were diverse and included analyzing iReady data (Burroughs), adult mindfulness and wellness (Whittier), responsive classrooms (Payne), and effective small group instruction (multiple Bold Performance Schools).

Monitor teacher wellbeing

Center City tracks educators' holistic wellbeing twice a year via the ThriveK12 educator school climate and wellbeing. The survey provides school leaders with educator wellbeing index scores and a school climate sub-score, both important indicators which have been statistically significantly linked to student growth in math and reading. Other Bold Performance schools utilize Panorama and TNTP Insight surveys to assess teacher satisfaction and gather feedback about school culture.

> **"We really focused on investing in our teachers. [For] our network, there's an extensive investment in curriculum and professional development of our teachers and staff, so they're not spending a lot of time trying to make up whatever they're going to teach to have a solid curriculum they can build upon."**
>
> **JOHN SNOWDY**
> **Principal at Friendship Ideal MS in Ward 4**

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Teachers and school leaders repeatedly emphasized the importance of creating strong relationships between and among school leaders, teachers, students, and families. Often, they called their school a "tight-knit family." Principals described setting the tone by facilitating fun activities and taking a therapeutic approach with their staff and families to ensure their support needs were met. From what teachers said, that approach seemed to filter down to classrooms, with teachers building strong relationships with students and their families. One common family engagement strategy that elementary school leaders said had a positive impact on student attendance were customized weekly parent emails, and letters sent home with students that described all of the fun upcoming activities in the next week that students would not want to miss.

> "Importantly, our families are partners in this work. We build a deep relationship with them to best support their 'Preppies'."
>
> **EMMA BIVONA**
> **Principal at DC Prep Anacostia MS in Ward 8**



Additional Relationship-Building Ideas from Bold Performance Schools

Actively listen to and support adult emotions
The last couple of years have challenged everyone, physically and emotionally. Several Bold School leaders recommend finding leadership and social-emotional learning (SEL) coaches who give staff and parents therapeutic skills to support themselves and others. One suggestion they had was when working through a challenging conversation with a teacher, student, or parent, ask, "How do you feel about it?" If the response is an unexpected emotion, follow up with, "How did I miss that?"

Quarterly family surveys
A few of the schools administer quarterly family surveys to gauge parent satisfaction and seek their input about their schools' key initiatives. They often follow up with parents by providing an overview of survey results and a list of adjustments the school plans to make to address feedback.

We also heard helpful tips like providing catered hot dinners for families, along with to-go care packages, using online tools for managing classroom communities and family engagement (several schools named Class Dojo as a strong tool), and offering counseling support for families experiencing hardships. One Bold School offers contracted counseling services primarily used for student cases for families who identified it as a helpful resource during home visits and virtual check-ins.


WHITTIER
EQUITY
for
Robots &
Molecules
Coding &
Whittier
WHITTIER EMEN
WARD 4
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JOYFUL SCHOOL CLIMATE

Friday attendance at Center City Congress Heights, a PK3-8 school in Ward 8, was typically lower than the other days of the week, so Principal Niya White and her team created "Fun Fridays"in 2021-22. While having fun and surprise treats are common elements during a typical school day, the Congress Heights team was determined to step up their game to boost attendance on Fridays. Around 2 p.m., while students finish up a long week of learning, Principal White hides somewhere in the building. Excitement and anticipation for "Where's Mrs. White," Congress Heights' class-versus-class game challenge begins across all grades. Clues are called out over the intercom, and each class must determine where Ms. White is hiding based on the clue given. Each class sends one student out of the room to search at a time, in what staff tell us resembles "controlled chaos, but the kids have so much fun with it!" The class that finds Principal White in her hiding spot first wins the points. Staff announce the winning class and hiding location, and students return to their classrooms to call out the next clue and give Mrs. White time to hide again. Data suggested "Fun Fridays" had a positive impact, so the school continued the tradition with some modification in 2022-23.

On Fridays at Langdon Elementary School, a DCPS elementary school in Ward 5, the BOOM Room opens for kids who have earned 30 minutes to spend in this special place. Principal Kemi Husbands provided a description of the BOOM room: "Students earn positive points for the BOOM room, which is an acronym for Behaving and Operating in an Outstanding Manner. Kids can earn 30 minutes on Fridays to the game room with a Wii, the latest movies, books, and ping pong. The BOOM room is important because it signals to our students that this building is designed, built, and constructed with them in mind." Iche Buchanan, an educator at Langdon, also wholeheartedly confirmed that the BOOM room is one of several things that makes Langdon a special place: "We really focus on our children and the whole child, making it fun to come to school. So they want to come to school. We have lots of fun at school. It's great!"

Those are just two examples of the creative fun that Bold Performance Schools utilize to boost attendance and ensure students think of school as a fun place to be every day. However, the fun is not limited to students. Bold Performance leaders and teachers frequently talked about the fun they have as adults as a reason their school is special. Leaders and teachers from multiple schools mentioned that their school had a great "Sunshine Committee." The voluntary Sunshine Committee, also referred to as a Hospitality Committee by one Bold School, is a group of educators who meet to generate ideas that spread happiness and joy for staff and students, such as a Compliment Challenge, where staff were asked to send compliments to 10 other members and surprise treats like a massage therapist.

In support of positive school culture and climate, Bold Performance Schools utilized and prepared their staff in new ways to accommodate post-lockdown social-emotional challenges. D.C. Prep Anacostia Middle strategically used their ESSER funds to hire additional clinical support staff and therapists to meet student needs and invest in regaining their school's culture. In addition, hiring more permanent, internal substitutes to provide a sense of normalcy and less interruptions to students' learning and routines. In hiring these internal staff positions, staff were more familiar with curriculum and teaching styles if a teacher were to be absent, and student needs had a greater likelihood of being met because of the extra support in the building.

Additional Fun and Joyful Ideas from Bold Performance Schools

Morning meetings
Morning meetings can be a valuable time for relationship-building, student sharing, and also having fun. Stephanie Byrd, Principal at Payne Elementary School in Ward 6: "At morning meetings, we acknowledge every student who comes to school, give students a space to share, and learn about each other. It's a place where we make sure that we're having fun."

Mindfulness opportunities for educators at school
School leaders described their staff as being part of a family, one where everyone supports each other's wellbeing. Whittier's leadership hosted a workshop where staff created their own "multiple support animal" as part of a team builder to boost wellbeing.

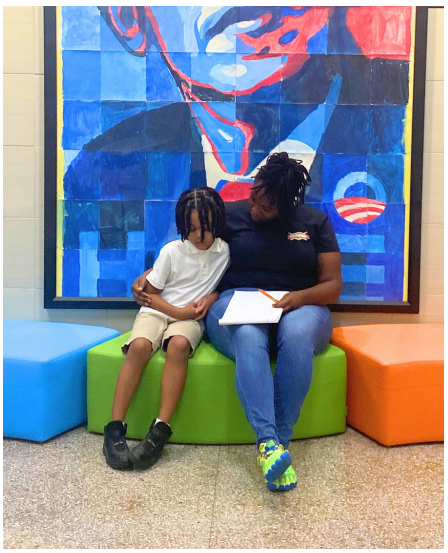
Focus on student discourse
We heard several strategies related to improving students' interactions with their peers and their confidence to take academic risks, including the creation of multi-age groups where older students get to be leaders, utilizing responsive classroom strategies that allow kids to try to solve novel problems and talk through their mistakes instead of just guessing.

Commitment to giving all students enrichment and participatory learning activities
Bold Schools make a strong commitment to ensuring all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status, disability status, or home language, have access to a wide range of real-world opportunities to broaden their knowledge base and apply learning. Leaders are unequivocal in their determination to find the financial resources, even if the fiscal future gets tight, to continue field trips, afterschool and weekend enrichment programs, and access to hands-on creation and arts spaces.

> **Instead of trying to download things for the students, students grapple with the things they learn, the concepts. They talk about it their thinking or demonstrate it.**
>
> **GREGORY SPEARS**
> **Principal at Friendship Blow Pierce in Ward 7**

TARGETED SMALL-GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL STUDENT INTERVENTIONS

Many educators across the District and nation are struggling with the push for rapid academic acceleration amid substantial unfinished learning gaps created by the pandemic. The feeling of impending, widespread burnout is real. We asked Bold Performance School staff how their school addresses these dueling concerns, and they frequently responded with affirmation of that concern, how they maintain a positive spirit that their students do not have unfinished learning, and that interventions and small groups are key strategies to helping students access grade-level content.



While data suggest most students returned in fall 2021 with significant knowledge gaps for their assigned grade, many Bold Performance teachers and leaders conveyed a sense of confidence that with the right support and interventions, all students could access grade-level content and achieve. They described how other co-academic skills (such as resilience, problem-solving, and self-advocacy) that students gained during the virtual year were utilized during 2021-22 to propel student academic skills forward.

> Our students designated as at-risk often bring the most reserves and resources in terms of resilience. We try to tap into that and hold them to high standards. We also ensure they receive the support to address any other non-school or social-emotional needs that affect them, so they can shine their brightest.
>
> **BRIGHAM KIPLINGER**
> **Principal at Garrison Elementary in Ward 2**



> By using small group instruction, data driven interventions, heavy writing focus, and standards-based grading, we are able to specifically and intentionally determine what we teach and how our students will learn.
>
> **JOHN SNOWDY**
> **Principal at Friendship Ideal in Ward 4**

Leaders felt that their teachers were approaching burnout even before the 2021-22 school year. The level of support students needed, academically and socially-emotionally, was substantial, and they knew their pre-pandemic staffing levels could not provide all the interventions needed. At least six Bold Performance Schools, using federal recovery funds, hired additional staff as grade-level interventionists. We did not explicitly ask this question in the survey, but six schools mentioned these hires when answering other open-ended questions. The interventionists sometimes push into the classroom to provide on-demand support for students during whole-class instruction, and at other times, they pull students into small groups or one-on-one learning opportunities.

Federal recovery dollars are set to expire in 2024 (or in 2025 if extensions are granted). We asked Bold School leaders how interested they would be in a permanent increase in staffing levels to include more interventionists, small-group instruction specialists, and full-time tutors. Every one of the 14 responses indicated that they were at least somewhat interested, and 79% said they would be very interested in such a plan.

High-impact tutoring was another intervention strategy that 86% of Bold Performance School survey respondents indicated that they utilized during 2021-22. About one-third of the schools offered tutoring during the school day by paying staff extra to tutor during their breaks and planning periods. Another third offered tutoring during the school through external organizations or with college students. The rest held tutoring before or after school or on Saturdays.


ROOTS
PCS
5TH GRADE
GRADUATE
2023
RYN
HUME-
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GRADUATE
2023
ROOTS
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ZION
BUTLER
ROOTS
PCS
5TH GRADE
GRADUATE
2023

Additional Intervention and Small Group Ideas from Bold Performance Schools

Student-led small groups
Burroughs Elementary's Principal Levar Jenkins on the value of seeing students leading small-group instructional activities: "It's really refreshing to see students taking ownership of not only what they're learning, but how they're going to apply that learning to something greater."

Partnership for Inclusive Classrooms
Bold School educators have previously mentioned the Relay Graduate School for Education program as a helpful program. Relay partners with schools, school leaders, and teachers to build the capacity to create and sustain the inclusive practices necessary to provide all students – particularly exceptional learners – with the academic and strength of character skills in the general education setting.

Schools mentioned other strategies outside of the top six as being helpful for students and educators but did not assess them to be the most important keys to their success. For example, in response to our questions, most every Bold School mentioned expanded opportunities for their students as both an equity issue and key to gains they see in math and reading achievement. A few important examples of this include:

Maker spaces
Whittier elementary has a monthly "focus on opportunities" for students and created a "maker space" in the building designed to provide learners with more experiences like creating a news broadcast, playing chess, and participating in enrichment activities that activate their literacy and numeracy skills. Center City is actively building a large maker space in Northeast DC to provide students with enrichment experiences for all six of their campuses.

Additional instructional time offered
Center City, Payne, Roots, and Whittier all mentioned the importance of offering additional instructional time through extended school day, tutoring, Saturday academies, and summer camps for supplemental instruction.

Emphasis on science and social studies
Several Bold schools prioritize science and social studies instruction, ensuring every student, even in untested grade levels, receives multiple lessons per week. At Payne Elementary, students in grades 3-5 participate in science learning blocks in both the morning and afternoon.

> "At Roots, we believe that exposure is the key to intelligence. The students of Roots PCS are the flowers of tomorrow!"
>
> **RASHEKI KUYKENDALL**
> **Roots PCS in Ward 4**

ADDITIONAL BRIGHT SPOTS

Last year, we lowered the threshold for being considered a Bold Performance School from a PPAE, percent proficient above expectations, of 10.0 before COVID to a PPAE of 5.0, which was a level that indicated high likelihood that the schools' proficiency rates were at or above pre-pandemic averages for similar schools. This year, we raised the bar to 7.5 PPAE and plan to raise it again in 2024 back to 10.0 PPAE, the level that indicates proficiencies that are statistically significantly higher than pre-pandemic averages.

Given that we raised the bar this year, we want to recognize the following schools serving a high economically disadvantaged population, each earning a 2023 PPAE above 5.0 but below this year's Bold Performance level of 7.5 PPAE.

- Chavez - Parkside HS
- DC Prep - Anacostia ES
- DC Prep - Edgewood MS
- Digital Pioneers - Cap Hill
- Eagle - Riverfront
- E.L. Haynes - HS
- Friendship - Collegiate
- Friendship - Southeast MS
- KIPP DC - Honor
- Patterson ES (DCPS)
- Sojourner Truth

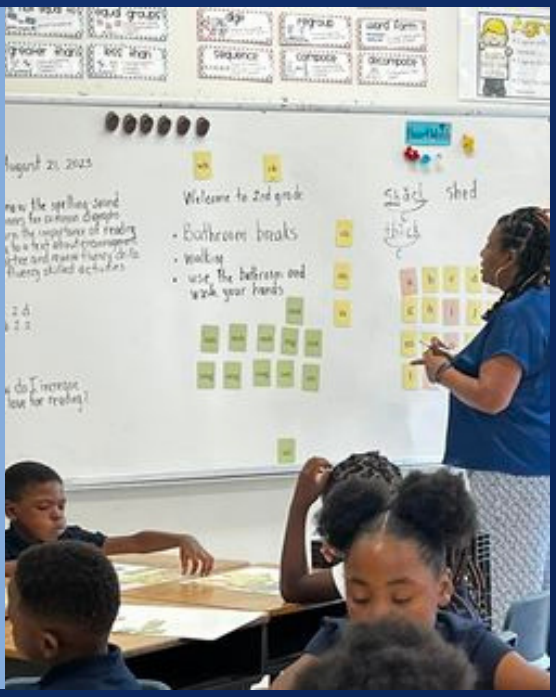


EmpowerK12 also recognizes middle and high schools that serve a high economically disadvantaged population and significantly improved their PPAE for the percent of students approaching, meeting, or exceeding expectations on the DC state assessment (commonly referred to as "PARCC 3+ proficiency") in math and reading. The effects of the pandemic were more acutely observed when looking at the PARCC 3+ proficiency rates with larger proficiency rate declines in the percent of students achieving at level 3+ than at level 4+ and achievement gaps that widened more for 3+ than 4+, especially for middle and high schools. Monitoring both proficiency rates helps us better track whether all students are improving, not just higher performers.

There is still a strong correlation between PARCC achievement and the percentage of a school's population who are economically disadvantaged students. However, the proportion of a school performance, both PARCC 4+ and PARCC 3+, that can be mathematically explained by their students' socioeconomic status (r-squared, coefficient of determination) decreased by 8% from last year. A significant portion of that positive outcome is due to the performance of the 2023 Bold Performance School.

The following middle and high schools, which had the most improved PPAE for PARCC 3+ from 2022 to 2023, also play a role in reducing the correlation between socioeconomic status and proficiency:

Anacostia HS (DCPS)
Ballou HS (DCPS)
DC Prep – Edgewood MS
Dunbar HS (DCPS)
Friendship – Armstrong MS
Friendship – Collegiate HS
Friendship – Tech Prep HS
Johnson MS (DCPS)
KIPP DC – Honor
Kramer MS (DCPS)
Sojourner Truth
Sousa MS (DCPS)



BOLD RECOMMENDATIONS

Work with Bold School leaders to establish a set of citywide bold goals that move beyond academic recovery and to an academic renaissance where student accomplishment in the arts, sciences, humanities, and technological coding compliments dramatic improvement in math and reading skills.

Invest in innovation and research, particularly for mathematics, school climate, and middle school, to allow educators to try new promising practices, learn when and how it works best quickly, spread bright spots, and know how to course-correct when strategies must be improved.



Our students need bold goals, bold approaches, and bold stakeholder collaboration to move beyond simple recovery to an era where all District students, regardless of socioeconomic or disability status, can thrive in an increasingly global labor market.

Following our 2022 Bold Performance Schools report, DC education agency leaders established strategic plans outlining a path toward accelerating student achievement. All of these plans, however, fall short of articulating concrete, measurable, ambitious targets. We believe that it remains a necessity to energize and coalesce the DC education community around the right set of bold goals we can hold ourselves accountable for achieving. Our students deserve a clear commitment from their leaders.

The 2023 Bold Performance Schools demonstrate the real possibility that DC students from low-income families can demonstrate performance on par with their more affluent national peers. When that happens, our city will have taken a massive step towards breaking the cycle of poverty and afforded all students with the opportunity to compete for the careers of their choice in what is an increasingly national and global job market. We must commit to an innovative, forward-thinking spirit, sharing data frequently and the promising practices we learn about along the way. Adopting the "Rule of 3's" – a cross-industry best practice for improving the effectiveness of strategies at scale – can ensure DC once again becomes a leader in education at the national level. There are three steps to following the Rule of 3's:

01

3Di – "3% for Data and Innovation"

The first step of any innovation or intervention rollout is to add at least 3% to the budget to cover data collection, analysis, and improvement activities. Three percent is an industry baseline standard for effective research and development of new initiatives.

02

3tV – "tend to the Variation"

The second step in the Rule of 3's for new initiatives is recognizing that almost every good idea can work and scale, but not everywhere, every time. Leaders and implementers should regularly tend to the variation in performance and more deeply understand what's working, where, and why.

03

3Y's – "3 Why's."

When probing qualitative information about why an intervention is working or not, we must remember to ask "why" at least three times successively. Almost always, an initiative's issue or lack of broad success at the surface level is just that, and the real root cause of variation in performance is something we find and correct by digging deeper.

The 2020's will be defined by the COVID-19 pandemic at the beginning of the decade. The last two-thirds of the decade will be defined in how we choose to respond. DC's Bold Performance Schools teach us that remarkable achievement for all students is possible when we balance the art and science of education to learn quicker, better, together. With inspiring, talented educators collaborating cross-sector using data-driven approaches, we can boldly close opportunity gaps for students furthest from the opportunities they deserve.

ABOUT EMPOWERK12'S

BOLD SCHOOLS INITIATIVE

In spring 2015, students across the District of Columbia participated in the first administration of a rigorous, Common Core-aligned state assessment, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), in math and reading for students in grades 3-8 and in high school. The first year's data showed an average 26.8 percentage point performance gap between economically disadvantaged students designated and their more affluent peers. That gap grew to 27.0 percentage points in 2016.

Yet, several schools serving a large high-priority student population, inclusive of economically disadvantaged students, students with learning disabilities, English learners, and students of color, had significantly better outcomes than other schools serving similar populations. EmpowerK12 developed a mathematical model to calculate every school's Percent Proficient above Expectations (PPAE), based on their student population, to identify schools that boldly perform above expectations. In 2016, we identified our first 11 Bold Performance Schools across both DC Public Schools and DC public charter schools and continue to identify and celebrate the Bold Performance Schools annually with every PARCC release.

In 2018, we created and recognized Bold Growth Schools, schools where equitable growth rates for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds would, if continued, close national performance gaps within five years. Bold Growth Schools return in spring 2024 once growth data is available via the DC School Report Card this winter.

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