





SUMMARY

In the spring of 2024, students across the District of Columbia took part in the first administration of the Comprehensive Assessments of Progress in Education (CAPE), a rigorous, Common Core-aligned state assessment in math and reading for grades 3–8 and high school with the same cut scores as the former PARCC test. This year’s data reveal a 31-percentage point performance gap between students from economically disadvantaged households and their more affluent peers. Nationally during the 2023–24 school year, academic recovery remained elusive for most students with persistent achievement gaps and a long road ahead.¹

Despite this, several schools with a high population of priority students—those who are from economically disadvantaged households, students of color, English learners, or have learning disabilities—achieved significantly better outcomes compared to other schools with similar demographics. EK12 developed a mathematical model to calculate each school’s Percent Proficient Above Expectations (PPAE) based on their priority student populations and grade levels served, identifying schools that perform well above expectations. In 2016, we recognized our first Bold Performance Schools across both DC Public Schools and DC charter schools and continue to celebrate these schools annually with each state assessment release.



¹ Karyn Lewis and Megan Kuhfeld. Recovery still elusive: 2023–24 student achievement highlights persistent achievement gaps and a long road ahead. (Northwest Evaluation Association, 2024).

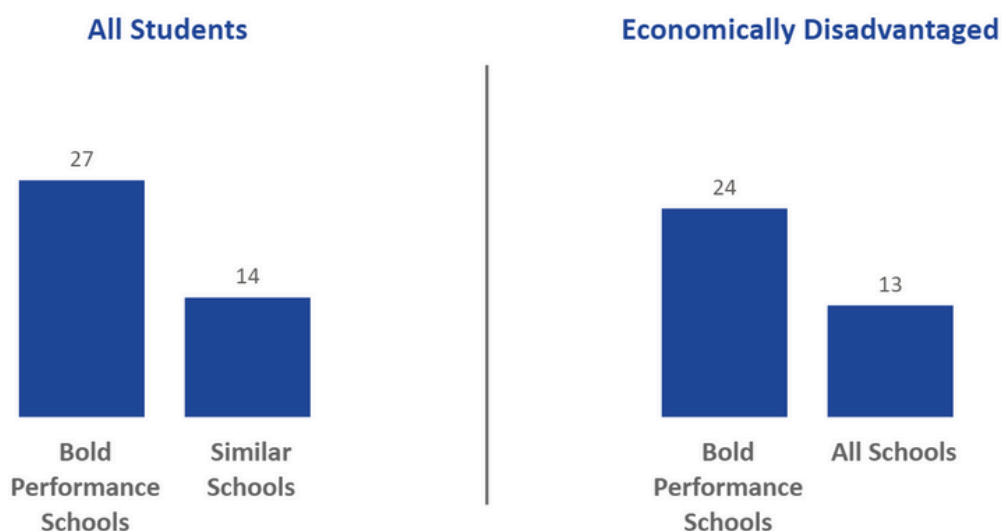


DC's 12 Bold Performance Schools in 2024 excel in supporting priority students and include public schools (DCPS) and public charter schools, spanning elementary, middle, and high school grades, and serving student populations where at least 30% are designated as economically disadvantaged.

This year's Bold Performance Schools had 2024 proficiency rates that were, on average, 13.5 percentage points higher than similar schools.

Their economically disadvantaged students performed significantly better with proficiency rates almost twice as high as the statewide performance for students from low-income families.

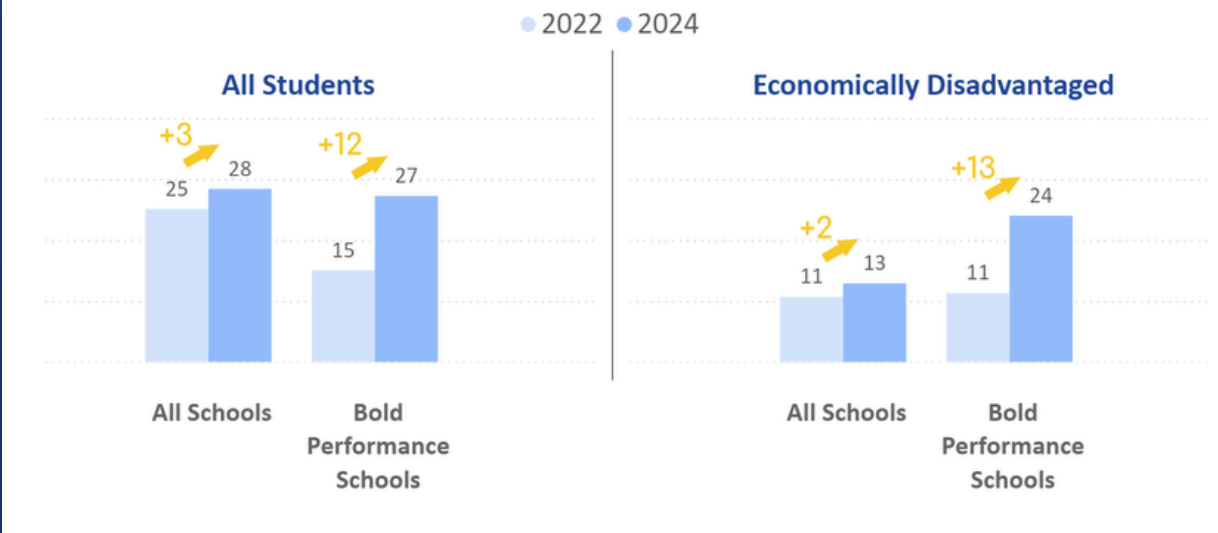
Figure 1. Math and Reading Composite Proficiency by Student Group



Student performance at the Bold Performance Schools, many of which are repeat winners, has improved remarkably since the pandemic. Achievement rates in math and English language arts are up by an average of 12.2 points since 2022 for all students and 12.7 points for economically disadvantaged students, compared to state average gains of 3.3 for all students and 2.2 for economically disadvantaged students.

At this rate of improvement of 3-4 times the state average for all students, if Bold Performance Schools continued serving the same students and maintained the same rate of improvement, their economically disadvantaged students would outperform the state average for all students in three years, which would be a truly historic outcome.

Figure 2. Change in Math and Reading Composite Proficiency from 2022 to 2024



2024 BOLD PERFORMANCE CAMPUSES



This year, we are thrilled to introduce special recognition for three exceptional Bold Performance Schools with distinguished awards.

Center City – Congress Heights

DC Prep – Anacostia MS

DC Prep – Edgewood MS

Digital Pioneers Academy HS

Friendship – Blow Pierce MS

Friendship – Ideal MS

Friendship – Woodridge ES

Dorothy I. Height ES (DCPS)

W.B. Patterson ES (DCPS)

Paul PCS HS

Ron Brown College Prep HS (DCPS)

Whittier ES (DCPS)

“Boldest School”

Whittier Elementary

“Enduring Excellence”

Center City
Congress Heights

“Most Inspiring School”

Ron Brown
High School

Over the years, we have had the privilege of interviewing the leadership teams at Bold Performance Schools, all of whom deserve accolades for their vision and execution. Throughout these conversations, four key commonalities have emerged. These leaders are committed to breaking stereotypes about their students, not allowing preconceived notions to limit potential. They strive to build strong communities that include staff, students, and families, fostering a supportive and inclusive environment. A relentless focus on data-driven decision-making is evident, as they continuously analyze performance to identify areas for improvement. Furthermore, these leaders and their teams go the extra mile, demonstrating an unwavering dedication to their students' success and wellbeing.

The “**Boldest School**” award is presented to Whittier Elementary, celebrated for achieving the highest PPAE (Percent Proficient Above Expectations). Remarkably, Whittier Elementary's student proficiency rates were 21 points higher than other schools with similar demographics, a testament to their outstanding educational strategies and commitment to excellence.



The “**Enduring Excellence**” award is bestowed upon Center City Congress Heights, which has consistently earned a Bold Performance School Award each year since 2019. Their unwavering dedication to high academic standards and continuous improvement sets a benchmark for all educational institutions.

Lastly, the “**Most Inspiring School**” award, chosen by EK12 staff, honors Ron Brown High School for their exceptional commitment to fostering community and respect among the young Black men. Their efforts in nurturing a supportive and empowering environment are truly inspirational, making a profound impact on their students' personal development which has translated to bold academic improvement.

BOLD PERFORMANCE SCHOOLS... BREAK STEREOTYPES

Breaking stereotypes for all learners is essential because it fosters inclusivity and equality, ensuring every student can reach their full potential and thrive in life.

At Bold Performance Schools, a pervasive culture and steadfast commitment to high academic expectations for every single student are foundational principles.

Every element of the school environment—ranging from the curriculum to the staff and even the facility design and presentation—is meticulously crafted to uphold and advance the belief that every student can and will achieve high levels of academic success. Research consistently demonstrates that fostering high expectations for all students, irrespective of their race or income level, significantly enhances their academic proficiency.²

“**Success in this classroom is challenging yourself, growing your brain, and engaging in a productive struggle.**”

STEPHANIE BATTLE
3rd-4th Grade Math Teacher at Center City Congress Heights



² Brigid Barron and Linda Darling-Hammond. Teaching for Meaningful Learning: A Review of Research on Inquiry-Based and Cooperative Learning (Stanford University, Edutopia, 2008).

This culture of high expectations and inclusivity manifests in multiple ways across Bold Performance Schools. Teachers maximize instructional time for students with disabilities and English language learners by incorporating special educators and interventionists into regular classrooms to co-teach lessons, ensuring that these students remain engaged with grade-level content. At Dorothy Height Elementary, the school leadership team describes how integrated special educators are in the classroom and how students without IEPs frequently ask for additional support from the interventionist. Digital Pioneers High School lost 4 kids in 285 days to gun violence in 2023-24, and the team credits their culture of “high expectations and high empathy” to their student and staff overcoming tragedy to excel beyond expectations academically. **As CEO of Digital Pioneers, Mashea Ashton, puts it, “Tough times don’t last, but tough people do.”**



“

Every day I strive to make sure that kids see that there is a different life if they are not born into the life that they believe they should have.”

MONAI CHAVERS
Math Instructional Coach at
Whittier Elementary

All students, regardless of their initial skill deficits, are given daily exposure to rigorous grade-level material, with specialized interventions available to support those who need extra help. Bold School educators also prioritize the integration of social-emotional skills with academic development, providing students with the essential tools and language necessary for effective engagement and learning. This holistic approach not only nurtures academic excellence but also equips students with the social and emotional competence required to thrive.

BOLD PERFORMANCE SCHOOLS... BUILD COMMUNITY

In Bold Performance schools, both adults and students act with mutual respect, accountability, and a knack for having fun! Educators and school administrators consistently highlighted the significance of fostering robust relationships among school leaders, teachers, students, and families. They frequently referred to their school community as a "tight-knit family." Principals set the tone by organizing enjoyable activities and adopting a therapeutic approach to ensure the needs of their staff and families were addressed. This strategy, as described by the teachers, seemed to permeate their own classrooms, resulting in strong bonds between teachers, students, and their families.

At Ron Brown High School, school days start with "community circles." Ninth grade students all meet together from 10:15-10:40 every day. All juniors and seniors meet together three times a week to participate in conversations where they learn about each other, build relationships, and develop personal and interpersonal skills. Every academic period also starts with community circles to create safe spaces for students to address important issues and limit distractions during the academic lesson that hour.



One thing that's special to me is every time I walk to school and come in, everybody greets me and the principal's always at the front desk. The assistant principal always has a smile on his face. The adults here make me feel special, but they try to make everything fun for me."

TANOOR

a 4th Grade Student at Whittier Elementary

A crucial element in fostering a vibrant school community at Bold Performance Schools is the intentional scheduling of enjoyable activities for students, teachers, and families.

These activities are not mere distractions but essential components that fortify the bonds within the school. Organizing events that bring everyone together helps create an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding, essential for a supportive educational environment. For example, regular family fun nights, where parents and children can engage in games and activities together, help bridge the gap between home and school life, creating a cohesive and inclusive community. Educators at Height ES credit their wellness team, investment in the Transcend whole child model, a culture of love and empathy that starts with Principal Preston, and check-in calls with families during breaks as important activities that build a strong school community.

Additionally, staff appreciation days and team-building exercises among teachers promote a positive work culture and enhance collegial relationships. Activities such as potluck dinners, talent shows, and community service projects allow students to see their teachers and administrators as approachable and invested in their wellbeing. These important events help members of the school community feel valued and connected, motivating them to contribute positively to the social and academic ecosystem. **As Principal Niya White of Center City Congress Heights aptly puts it, “Everybody leans on each other, respects the lean, and returns the lean.” Principals of Bold Performance Schools tell us that this sense of community leads to better retention rates of great staff and, in turn, contributes to their students’ academic acceleration.**



BOLD PERFORMANCE SCHOOLS... FOCUS ON CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Bold Performance School leadership teams use data for continuous improvement purposes and not as a stick. They focus on leveraging data to identify areas for growth, celebrate successes, and implement strategies that enhance student outcomes. To prevent information overload, educators at Bold Schools commonly review data more frequently and in smaller, manageable segments based on priority. Instructional leadership teams describe that they started the year identifying specific goals they want to see from students by the end of the year. Then, they backwards mapped what progress was required, and by when, determining which data to monitor and know if students were on track from a pacing standpoint. At Paul Public Charter High School, leaders convene “think tanks” that include administrators, teachers, school operations staff, and instructional coaches to ideate about goals and hammer out details.

“It's not all about the big tests and big quizzes, but it's how students are performing in the moment and making sure to address any misconceptions as they're happening.”

MELISSA BLACK
2nd Grade ELA Teacher at Whittier Elementary



Every Bold Performance school reported that teachers examine student information to make instructional decisions at least weekly, if not daily. They utilize comprehensive, interactive student data dashboards, and teachers review daily exit tickets and student work at 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 information about students' wellbeing in pairs or groups of educators. General education teachers and instructional coaches, along with special educators, counselors, and social workers, join weekly data meetings when needed.

This systematic, data-driven approach ensures that educators remain responsive to student needs and continuously refine their instructional practices.



During our on-site interviews, we consistently heard accounts of data being harnessed for positive, improvement-oriented purposes. Several Bold schools shared with us their practice of "celebrating failure," emphasizing that failure is embraced as a vital part of the learning process for both students and teachers. Staff and leaders regularly analyze data to either refine practices that are not yielding desired results or discontinue them entirely. We commend Bold Performance schools for their open, positive approach to data usage and their courageousness in changing direction when the evidence suggests it is necessary.

BOLD PERFORMANCE SCHOOLS... GO THE EXTRA MILE AND GET INTO THE DETAILS

School administrators and educators are deeply dedicated to achieving positive outcomes for students. At Bold Performance Schools, going the extra mile means being incredibly detailed and consistent in the small things, like setting and maintaining routines and expectations. Educators understand that these seemingly minor aspects of daily school life collectively create a stable and predictable environment in which students can thrive.

By ensuring that students know exactly what to expect each day, teachers minimize distractions and maximize productive learning time. This predictability helps students feel secure and engaged, ultimately fostering a more conducive atmosphere for academic and personal growth. **“The kids know what to expect when they come through our front doors. We get in this line, we read, and we understand what's about to go down. There are no surprises for them, and students know what their day is going to look like. Sweating the small stuff has made it easy to teach,”** says Wendy Oftedahl, Middle School ELA Teacher at Center City Congress Heights on the importance of setting routines for students and sticking to it.

At Digital Pioneers, cell phones in class were becoming a major distraction, and to address school leaders and teachers crafted a detailed plan to ban phones from class time. They mapped schoolwide routines for leader, teacher, student, and parent responsibilities with details of exactly what words to use when students do not follow the rules. Then, they practiced those routines with adults, students, and parents.

For the Paul High School team, they attribute some of their success to meticulous tracking and review of every lesson plan teachers deliver. They utilize a robust Google Sheets tracker that monitors when lesson plans are submitted, what was the feedback on them from leadership, how teachers are engaging students, and what misconceptions students might still have after the lesson that can be addressed in small groups and during tutoring sessions. **According to Executive Director of Paul PCS, Charlotte Spann, “consistency is key.”**

Additionally, teachers at several Bold Performance Schools go beyond their regular duties by offering extra tutoring sessions both during and after school hours. Recognizing the diverse needs of their students, these dedicated educators provide targeted support to ensure that every child can achieve their full potential. This commitment is further incentivized by the schools, which compensate teachers for their additional efforts. By providing these tutoring opportunities, educators can address individual learning gaps, reinforce classroom instruction, and foster a supportive learning environment that extends beyond the traditional school day.



We know that student learning is more than just reading and math. You have to tap into student talents and gifts so that they can truly flourish. That's been one of the things that really, really has impacted our student culture and student achievement."

TIFFANY JOHNSON

Principal of Whittier Elementary

Bold Performance Schools also recognize that productive learning extends beyond traditional academic subjects. They offer a variety of fun and enriching extracurricular activities designed to tap into students' unique talents and gifts. Whether it's through sports, arts, music, or clubs, these activities provide students with opportunities to explore their interests, develop new skills, and build a sense of community. This holistic approach not only enhances student engagement but also contributes significantly to their overall wellbeing and achievement.

In short, Bold Performance Schools sweat the small stuff.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

EmpowerK12 thanks the Data and Assessment team at OSSE for their decision to design the CAPE test that allows for longitudinal analyses and publish granular data that power our Bold Performance Schools work. We are immensely grateful to the Bold Performance School leaders who graciously gave their time to participate in interviews and surveys to share their best promising practices:

Charles Hunt and the Ron Brown High School team

Charlotte Spann, Stephanie Hawkins, and Tracy White, Paul PCS
Joshua Wiley, Tiffany Johnson, and the Whittier Elementary team

Mashea Ashton, Digital Pioneers

Masi Preston and the Height Elementary team

Niya White and the Center City Congress Heights team



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