



2024-25

State of D.C. Schools

» *Forward
momentum*



D.C. POLICY CENTER

Education Policy Initiative

About the D.C. Policy Center

The mission of the D.C. Policy Center is to arm decision makers with fact-based, unbiased, and reliable research and analyses to help create a vibrant local economy that can maximize opportunities for residents, workers, and businesses in the District of Columbia. Through objective and rigorous research and collaboration, the D.C. Policy Center develops and tests policy ideas, disseminates its findings, actively promotes policy solutions, and engages in constructive dialogue and debate.

About this report

State of D.C. Schools is an annual systemwide overview of public education in the District of Columbia. The report's main purpose is to give D.C. residents, parents, caregivers, policymakers, and other stakeholders a snapshot of the overall performance of the District's public schools.

This report captures school year 2024-25, including clear signs of system strength and stabilization, beyond pandemic recovery.

We hope that this State of D.C. Schools report will inform local education leaders and policymakers in their development of future policy decisions, especially as emerging federal and economic shifts introduce new pressures for schools and families.

The views expressed in this report are those of D.C. Policy Center researchers and experts and should not be attributed to members of the D.C. Policy Center's Board of Directors or its funders.

Other reports in this series

- *State of D.C. Schools, 2018-19*
- *State of D.C. Schools, 2019-20*
- *State of D.C. Schools, 2020-21*
- *State of D.C. Schools, 2021-22*
- *State of D.C. Schools, 2022-23*
- *State of D.C. Schools, 2023-24*

Acknowledgements

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INTRODUCTION

In school year 2024-25, D.C. spent a fifth of its gross operating funds budget on the public education system¹—a statement about what the city believes drives long-term prosperity. This is not merely spending on the wellbeing of children in today’s classrooms; it is a sustained investment in human capital, social mobility, and the future of the city’s workforce. Over time, stronger learning outcomes translate into higher employment, higher earnings, and greater civic participation, reinforcing the District’s economic strength and capacity to expand opportunity. For that reason, it is crucial to regularly take stock of the state of D.C.’s public schools, both District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter schools, to examine how well the system is performing and to understand the city’s growth trajectory.

Five years after the pandemic began, school year 2024-25 marked a meaningful step forward in D.C.’s public schools after several years of disruption. Enrollment increased for the third year in a row, and learning outcomes improved in both

English Language Arts (ELA) and math by 4 percentage points, the largest increase since the beginning of the pandemic. Teachers stayed at their schools in higher shares for the second year in a row, and high school graduation rates rose to the highest level in more than a decade.

Amid these successes, difficulties persisted, with chronic absenteeism remaining elevated at 40 percent and mixed success for college and career readiness. In addition, emerging federal shifts brought new challenges to schools and families, including increased immigration enforcement, uncertainty about federal funding, and higher unemployment levels.

This State of D.C. Schools report for school year 2024-25 places these developments alongside community perspectives and national and regional benchmarks to assess where the system is making durable gains and where focused, coordinated action is still needed.

STUDENTS



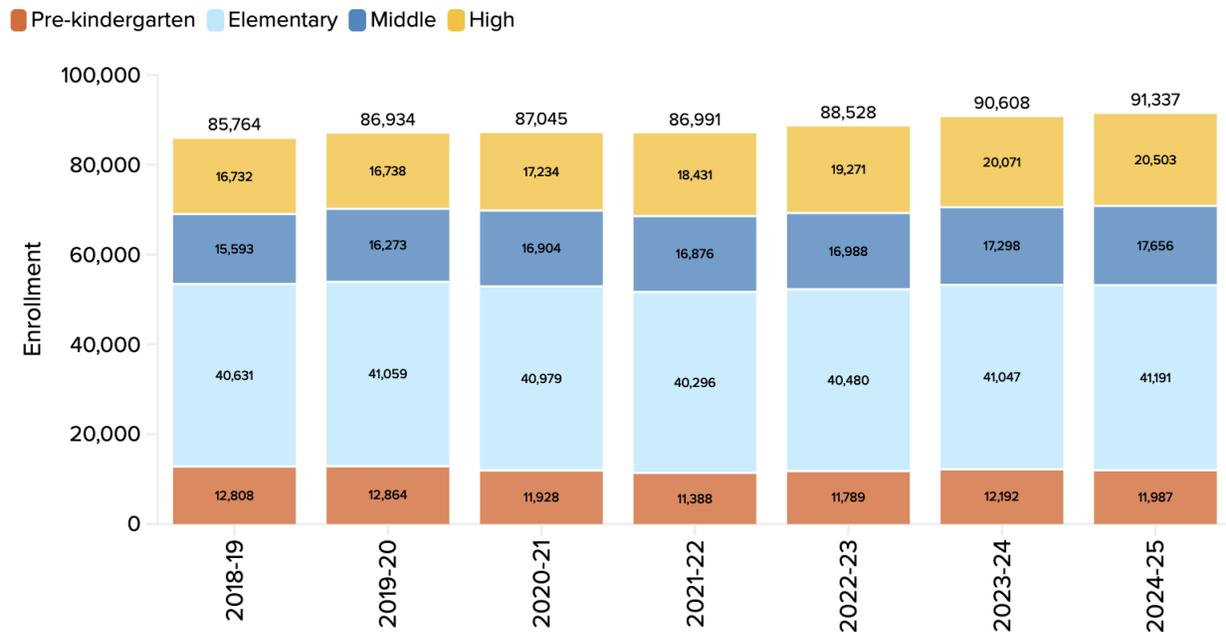
Enrollment continued to increase in D.C.'s public schools, with 91,337 pre-kindergarten through grade 12 students in school year 2024-25 (see Figure 1).² This 1 percent increase (or 729 students) from the previous year was better than neighboring states of Virginia and Maryland, where public school enrollment declined by less than 1 percent.^{3,4} This enrollment increase resulted in higher school budgets, complemented by a large increase of 12.4 percent to the foundation level of the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF).⁵

Enrollment growth was driven by upper grades

Growth was concentrated in middle and high school grades, where enrollment increased by 2 percent. Elementary school enrollment grew modestly by 0.4 percent, while pre-kindergarten enrollment declined by 2 percent.⁶ These patterns were partly a result of declining births: D.C. births peaked in 2016 (babies born that year were fourth graders in school year 2024-25) but have⁷ fallen by an average of 244 annually.

For pre-kindergarten grades, the share of children enrolled in D.C.'s public schools relative to births for this cohort also declined—indicating that more families left the city or opted out of public schools in these earliest grades.

Figure 1. PK-12 public enrollment in D.C. increased 1% from school year 2023-24 to 2024-25



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). Enrollment Audit Information for FY2018-FY2025.

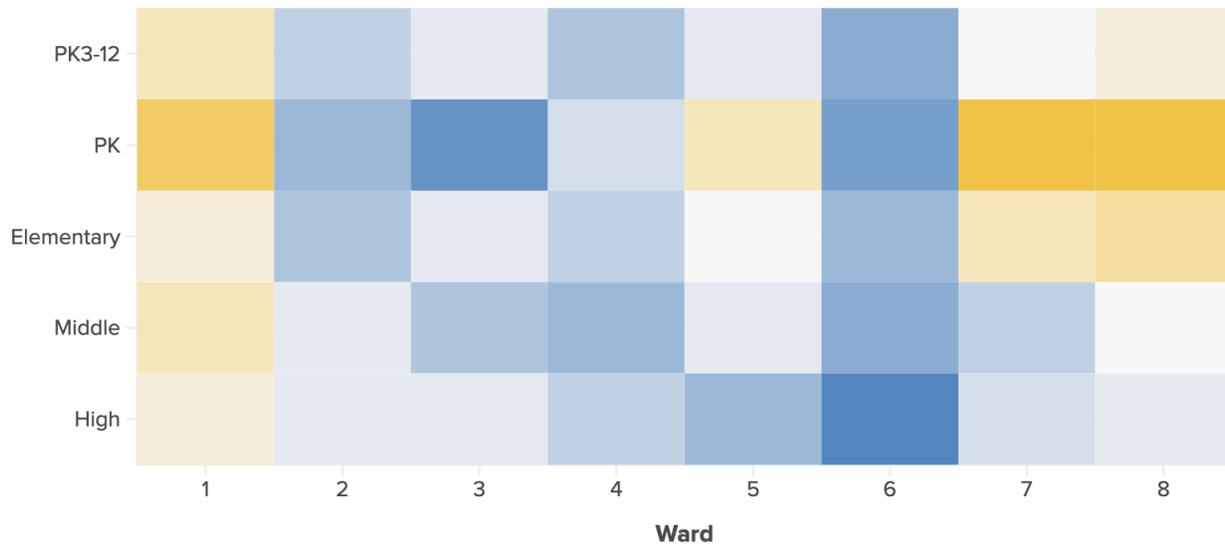


Figure 2. Enrollment varied by grade band and Ward

The grid displays the percent growth and decline in enrollment across wards and grade bands.

Enrollment change -10%  10%

Grade band



Source: Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME). 2025. "EdScape: Where public students live." Retrieved from <https://edscape.dc.gov/>



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Enrollment increased the most in Wards 4 and 6, and decreased the most in Wards 1 and 8

Enrollment grew fastest for students living in Ward 6 at 6 percent, followed by Ward 4 at 4 percent (see Figure 2). Ward 8, with one of the highest numbers of students, and Ward 1, where English learners are concentrated, both declined by more than 1 percent.⁸

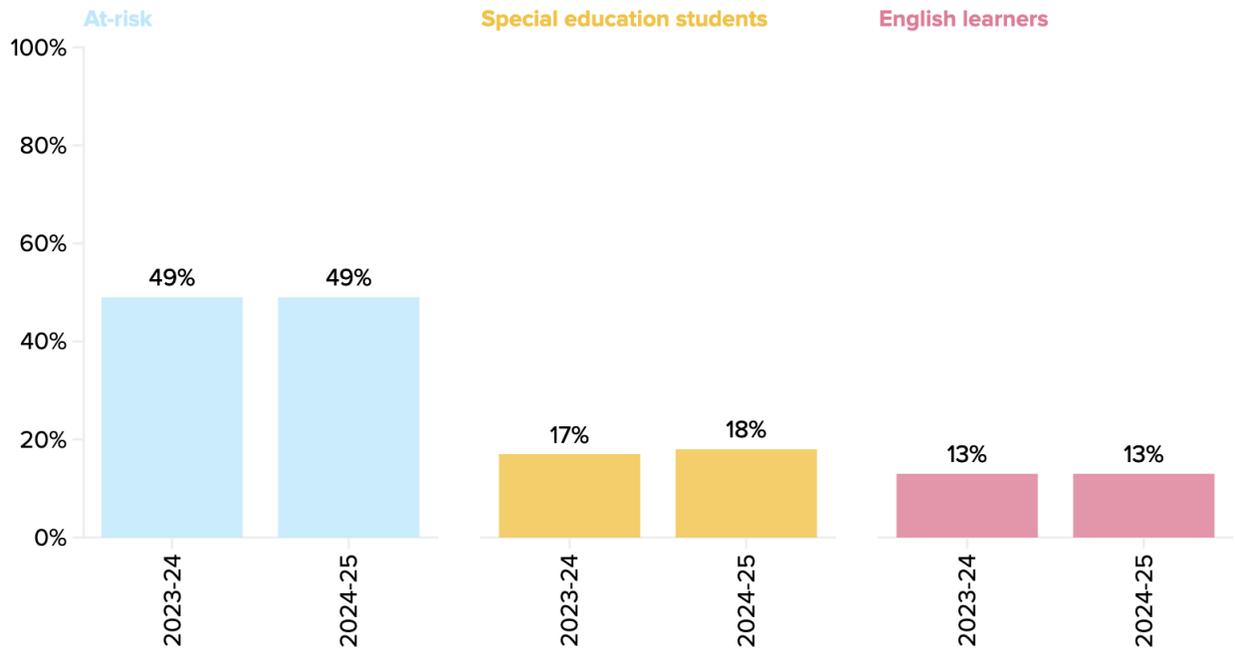
Half of students in D.C.'s school were considered "at-risk"

In school year 2024-25, 49 percent of students⁹ were designated as at-risk, meaning they were experiencing homelessness, in foster care, qualified for the Temporary Assistance for

Needy Families program (TANF) or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or were over-age in high school.¹⁰ This was the same share as the previous year (see Figure 3). National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data show that during that school year, D.C. served a similar share of students from low-income households as the nation. 32 percent of D.C.'s grade 8 students were identified as being low socio-economic status compared to 33 percent of students across the nation in 2024 (see Figure 4).¹¹

English learners comprised 13 percent of students, the same as the previous year.¹² D.C. served a higher share of this population than the nation, according to NAEP demographics for grade 8 students: 13 percent of students identified as English learners in D.C. compared to 10 percent nationally.¹³

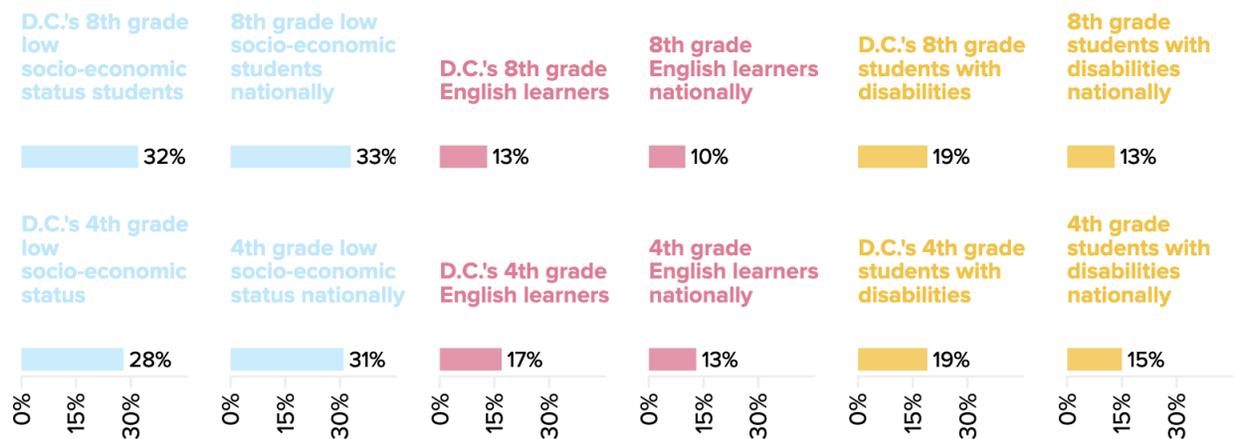
Figure 3. The share of students in special populations was similar in school years 2023-24 and 2024-25



Source: Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME). 2025. EdScape: "Public school enrollment by special needs categories." DME. Retrieved from <https://edscape.dc.gov/>



Figure 4. The share of 4th and 8th grade students in special populations in D.C. and nationally, 2024



Sources: The Nation's Report Card. "NAEP Socioeconomic Status (SES) Index." Retrieved from <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/dashboards/sesindex/> ; The Nation's Report Card. "National Student Group Scores and Score Gaps." Retrieved from <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading/?grade=8>



The share of students receiving special education services increased by 1 percentage point to 18 percent.¹⁴ According to NAEP data, D.C. served a higher share of students with disabilities: 19 percent of D.C.'s grade 8 students were identified as students with disabilities, compared to 13 percent nationally.

Most students in D.C.'s public schools were students of color

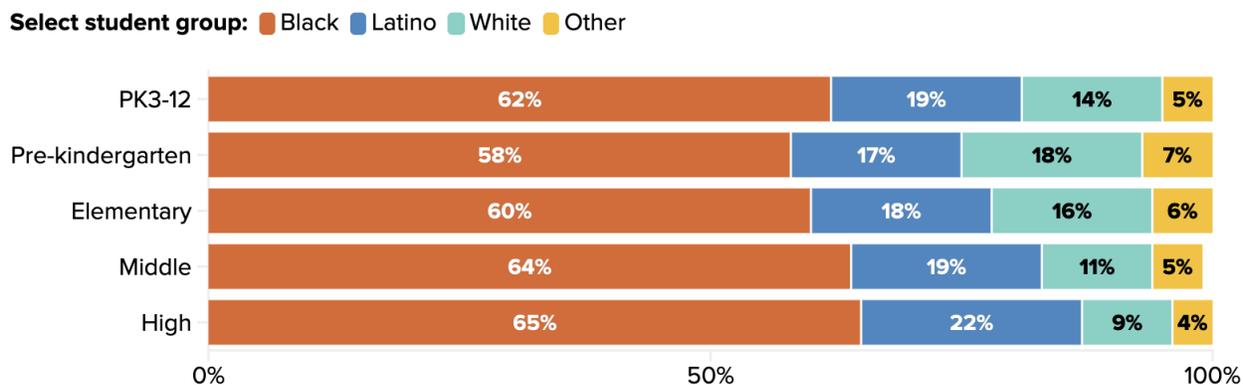
D.C.'s public school population remained predominately students of color (see Figure 5). In school year 2024-25, 62 percent of students across pre-kindergarten to grade 12 identified as Black (down 1 percentage point), 19 percent as Latino (no change), 14 percent identified as white (no change), and 5 percent as other races or ethnicities.¹⁵ Compared to the nation as of 2023, D.C.'s public schools served a higher share of students who are Black (15 percent nationally), a lower share of Latino students (30 percent nationally), and a lower share of white students (44 percent nationally).¹⁶

Wards 7 and 8 were home to the highest shares of Black students in D.C.'s public schools (86 and 92 percent, respectively) (see Figure 6). Ward 1 had the highest share of Latino students (45 percent), followed by Ward 4 (38 percent). Ward 3 had the largest share of white students (55 percent).¹⁷

Special populations are unequally distributed across D.C.

Ward 8 was home to the highest share of students identified as at-risk (70 percent), and Ward 3 had the lowest (12 percent) (see Figure 7). Ward 1 was home to the largest share of English learners (33 percent), followed by Ward 4 (28 percent). The share of students receiving special education services also varied across wards, with 20 percent of students living in Wards 7 and 8 identified as students with disabilities, compared to 10 percent in Ward 3.¹⁸

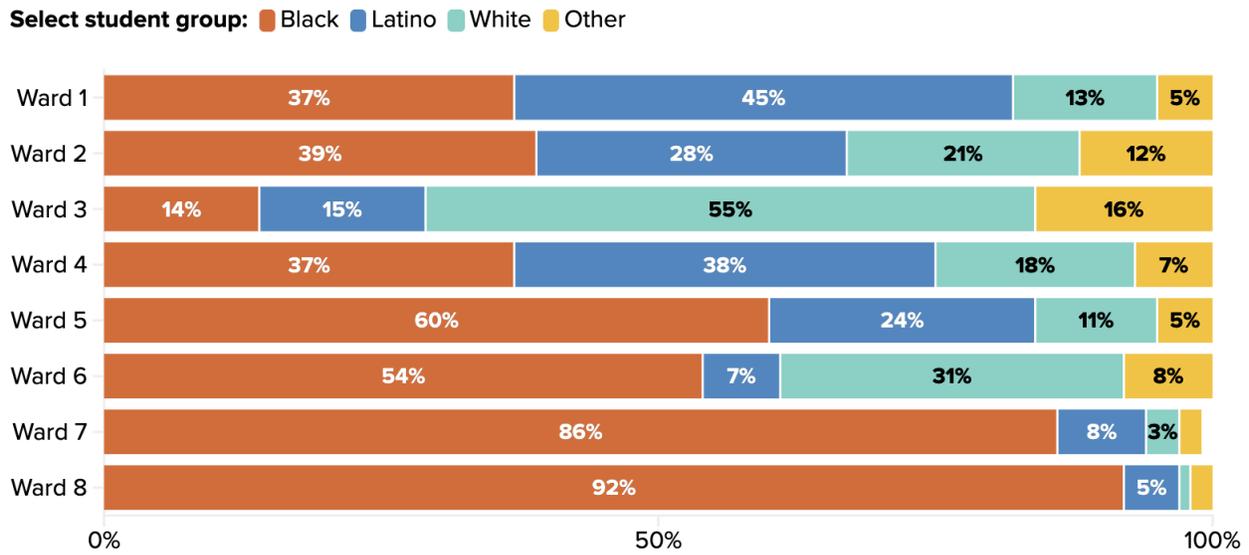
Figure 5. Most students in D.C.'s public schools were students of color, with demographics remaining consistent over the years



Source: Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME). 2025. EdScape: "Public school enrollment by race and ethnicity." Retrieved from <https://edscape.dc.gov/>



Figure 6. Student race and ethnicity, by Ward in school year 2024-25

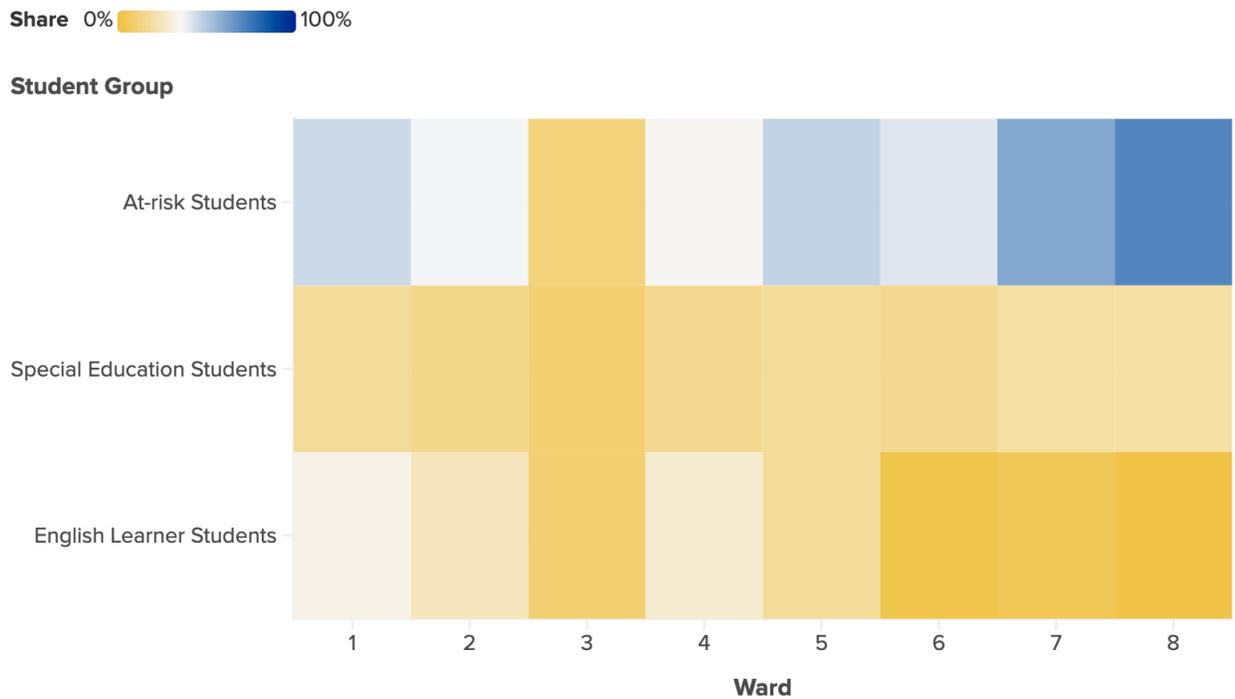


Source: Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME). 2025. EdScape: "Race and ethnicity of students by geography." Retrieved from <https://edscape.dc.gov/>



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Figure 7. Special populations by Ward in school year 2024-25



Source: Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME). 2025. EdScape: "Where students receiving special education services live." DME. Retrieved from <https://edscape.dc.gov/>



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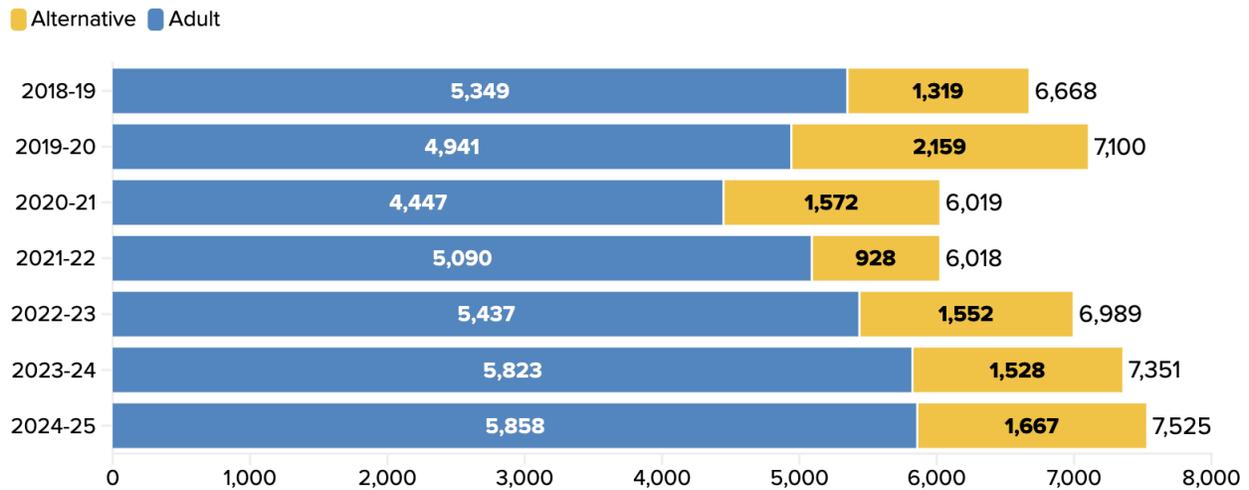
Enrollment in D.C.'s adult and alternative schools is on the rise

D.C. is unusual in providing publicly funded adult and alternative schools¹⁹ to support learners. These schools offer opportunities to earn a General Education Diploma (GED), gain English language skills, and participate in workforce development programs.²⁰ In school year 2024-25, 7,525 learners enrolled in these schools. Enrollment in these programs has been on the rise since the pandemic and increased 2 percent compared to the previous year (see Figure 8).²¹

More than half of students attend DCPS schools

D.C. offers extensive public school choice, meaning students and families can choose whether to attend their in-boundary school determined by residence, a public charter school, or a city-wide DCPS school. In school year 2024-25, 45 percent of pre-kindergarten through grade 12 students enrolled in public charter schools, representing no change from the previous school year. The remaining 55 percent enrolled in DCPS schools. Out of all students, 28 percent attended their in-boundary school, 20 percent attended a DCPS out of boundary school, 5 percent attended a DCPS application high school, and 2 percent attended a DCPS alternative or citywide school (see Figure 9).²²

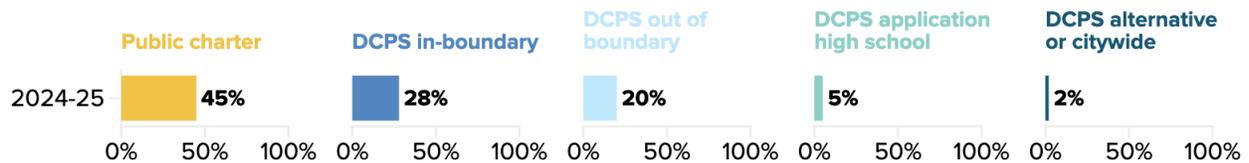
Figure 8. Adult and alternative school enrollment increased 2% from school year 2023-24 to 2024-25



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). Annual enrollment audit reports for 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25.



Figure 9. In school year 2024-25, 55% of D.C.'s public school students attended a District of Columbia Public School (DCPS) and 45% of students attended a public charter



Source: Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME). 2025. EdScape: "Trends in enrollment by sector." Retrieved from <https://edscape.dc.gov/>



In school year 2024-25, results on the state assessment, or Comprehensive Assessments of Progress in Education (DC CAPE), showed historic citywide gains in learning outcomes. Results improved across almost all wards and for most student groups. High school graduation rates surpassed pandemic school years. These gains did not extend to all indicators of performance and success. Absenteeism remained elevated, and college and career readiness were mixed.

Learning outcomes improved the most since the pandemic, broadly across student groups and the city

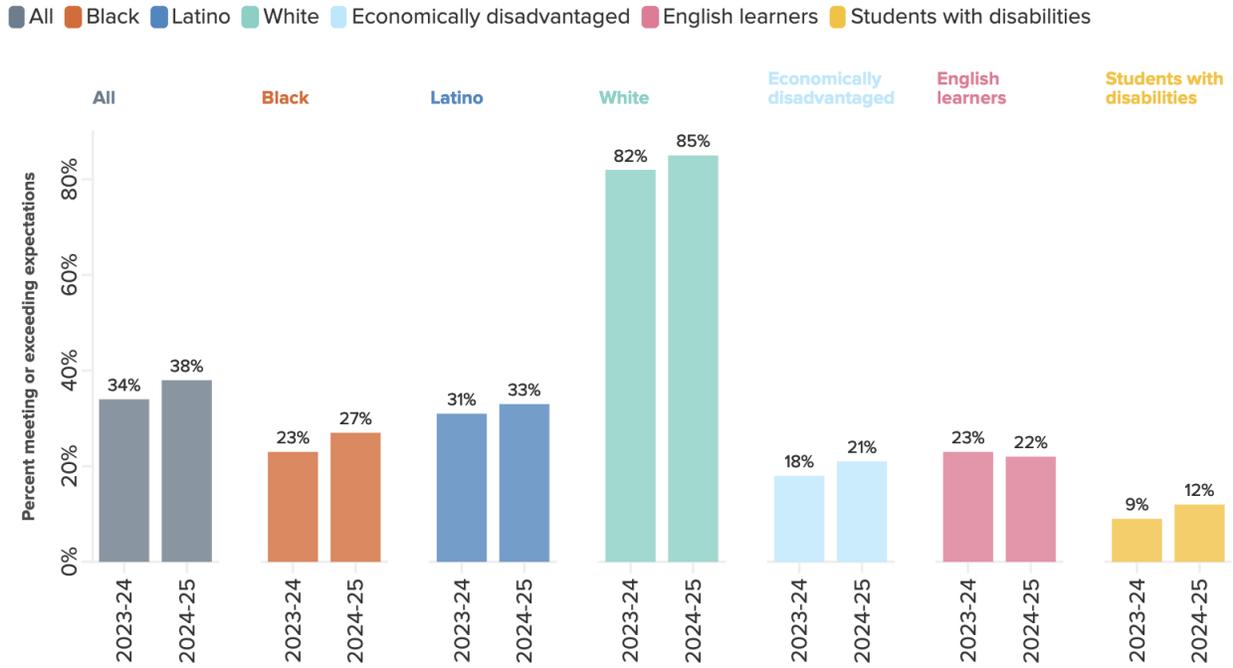
During school year 2024-25, the District experienced its largest improvement in learning outcomes since 2019. In ELA, 38 percent of students met or exceeded expectations, a 4-percentage point increase from the previous school year and the highest scores have been in the last decade (see Figure 10). In math, 26 percent of students met or exceeded expectations, still below pre-pandemic levels but marking a 4-percentage point increase from the previous year (see Figure 11).²³ This improvement happened alongside strategic citywide investments to boost student outcomes, including implementation of OSSE's Recommendations for Structured Literacy Instruction,²⁴ expanded CTE opportunities, and embedded high-impact tutoring.²⁵



“We made all our goals. Our scores had been flat or decreased over the past two years. [In response] a major change in rigor [caused by] a new framework forced them to change how they taught.”

D.C. Principal

Figure 10. English Language Arts (ELA) learning outcomes improved 4 percentage points from school year 2023-24 to 2024-25

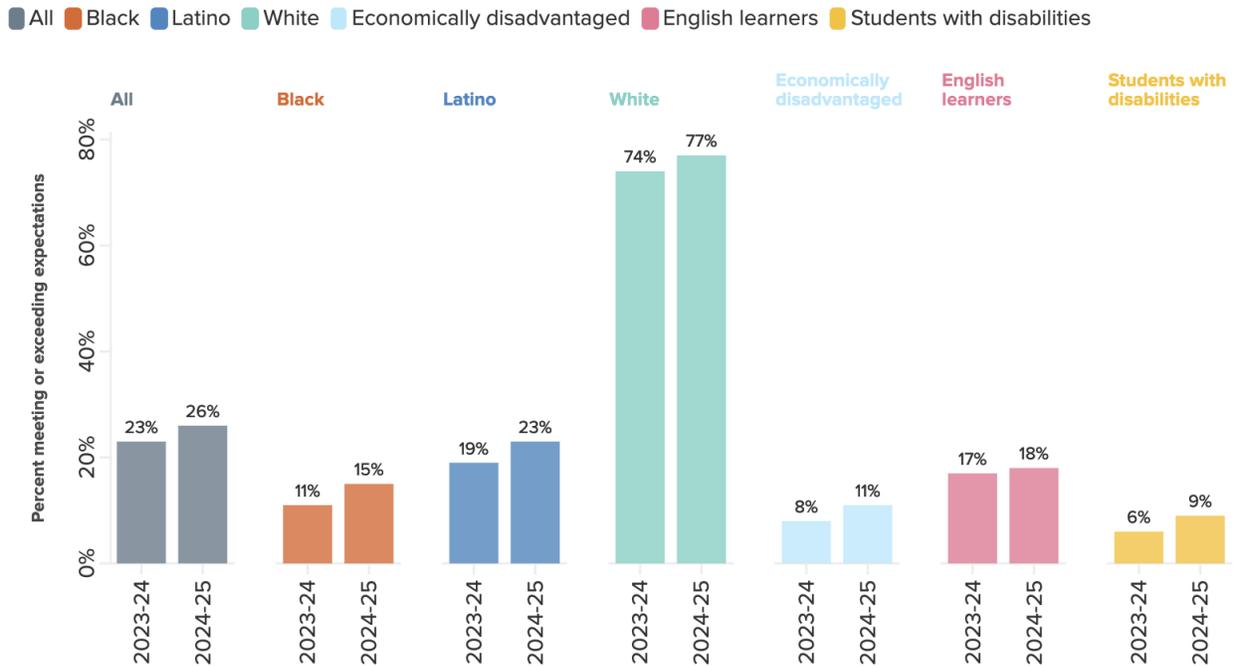


Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2025. "District of Columbia Statewide Assessment results for school years 2023-24 and 2024-25."

Note: 76% of Asian students, 33% of American Indian/Alaskan Native students, 52% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students, and 71% of students identifying as two or more races met or exceeded expectations in school year 2024-25.



Figure 11. All groups improved their Math learning outcomes from school year 2023-24 to 2024-25



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2025. "District of Columbia Statewide Assessment results for school years 2023-24 and 2024-25."

Note: 70% of Asian students, 27% of American Indian/Alaskan Native students, 29% of Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students, and 59% students identifying as two or more races met or exceeded expectations in school year 2024-25.



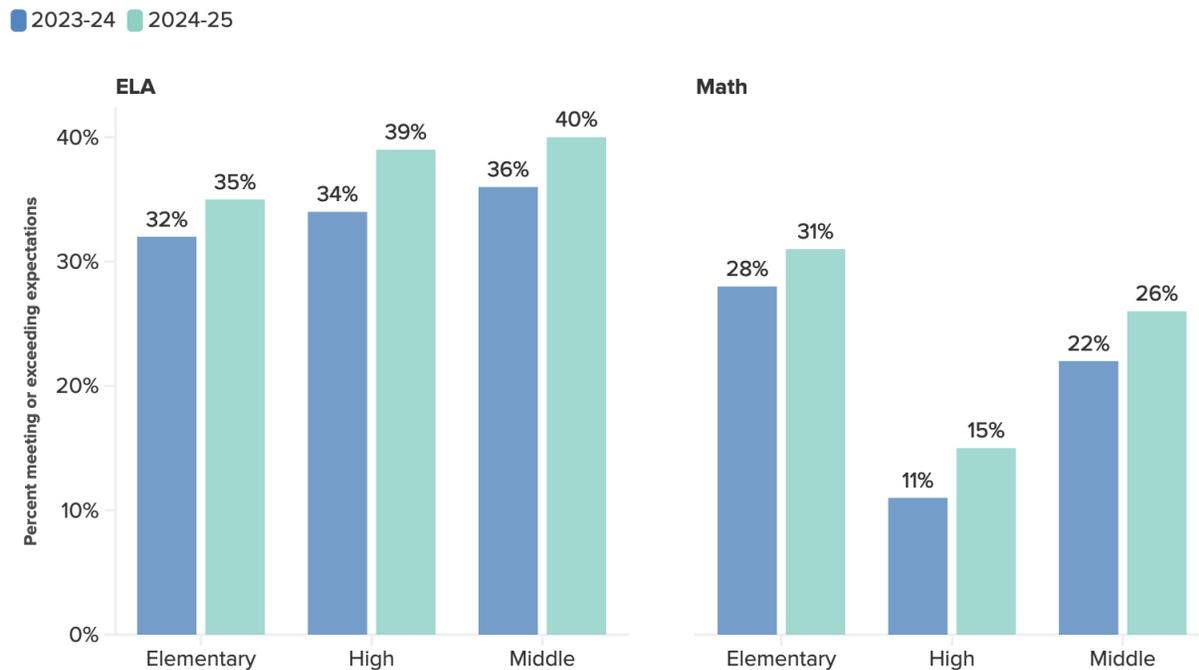
All student groups improved in math from the previous school year. Black and Latino students experienced the largest gains in math, with proficiency rates increasing by four percentage points.²⁶ In ELA, learning outcomes also improved for most groups. Black students saw a 4-percentage point increase, and economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities each improved increased by 3 percentage points. English learners were the only group to decline in ELA performance by 1 percentage point.²⁷

Learning outcomes improved across grade bands in both ELA and math, with high school students improving the most in ELA by 5 percentage points (see Figure 12). Similarly, all grade bands improved their math performance. Middle and high school students both improved their scores from the previous year by 4 percentage points.²⁸

“I teach middle school, and this year, they came very low in knowledge and they were behind. We realized we needed to change the kids’ mindsets. Many of them just didn’t want to be in school, it was not just history class, there were behavioral problems. We got together with the other teachers and administration and came up with individualized plans to tackle the issues. By the end of the year, they were doing great! They have made so much progress.”

D.C. Teacher

Figure 12. English Language Arts (ELA) and Math CAPE learning outcomes by grade band, school years 2023-24 and 2024-25



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2025. "2025 Statewide Assessment Results: English Language ELA (ELA) and Math."



Recognizing excellence

DC Bilingual PCS and Payne Elementary were honored as National Blue Ribbon Schools by the U.S. Department of Education.⁷²



Schools across almost all wards improved learning outcomes in both subjects

In ELA, average learning outcomes improved in every ward except for Ward 1, which saw no change (see Figure 13).²⁹ In both ELA and math, Ward 3 schools continued to post the strongest performance: 7 out of 10 students met or exceeded expectations in ELA and 6 out of 10 did so in math (see Figure 14). Large disparities in academic proficiency remained: across Ward 8 schools, 2 out of 10 students met or exceeded expectations in ELA and 1 out of 10 students did so in math.³⁰

Pandemic related learning gaps persist in younger grades and most acutely for economically disadvantaged students

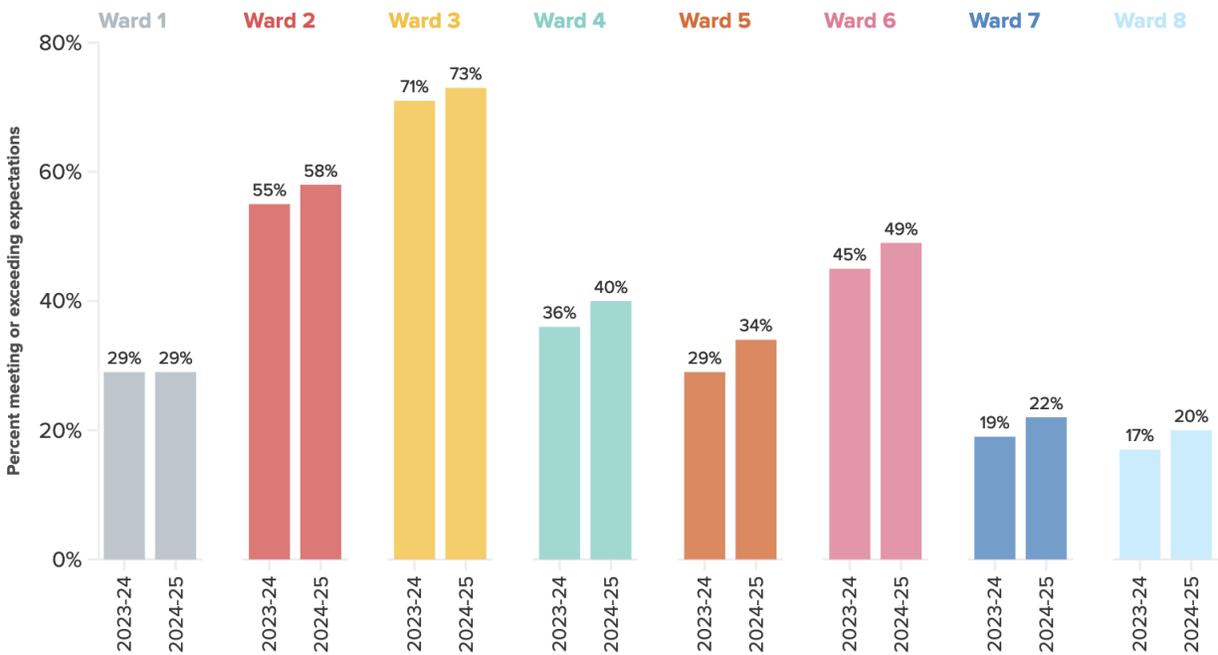
Grade 3 CAPE results indicated that the pandemic's effects persist—especially for economically disadvantaged students. This cohort, which was in PK3 during spring 2020 and learned virtually in PK4, continued to trail students in the same grade pre-pandemic. In school year 2024-25, the share of grade 3 students who met or exceeded expectations was 3 percentage points lower in ELA (with

gaps twice as large for economically disadvantaged students) and 8 points lower in math (with gaps one and a half times as large), compared to school year 2018-19 (see Figure 15).

ACCESS Scores improved for English learners

The ACCESS assessment evaluates English language skills for English learners in kindergarten through grade 12 across Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing, to measure English language proficiency.³¹ In school year 2024-25, 86 percent of English learners met their proficiency goals, an increase of 11 percentage points.³²

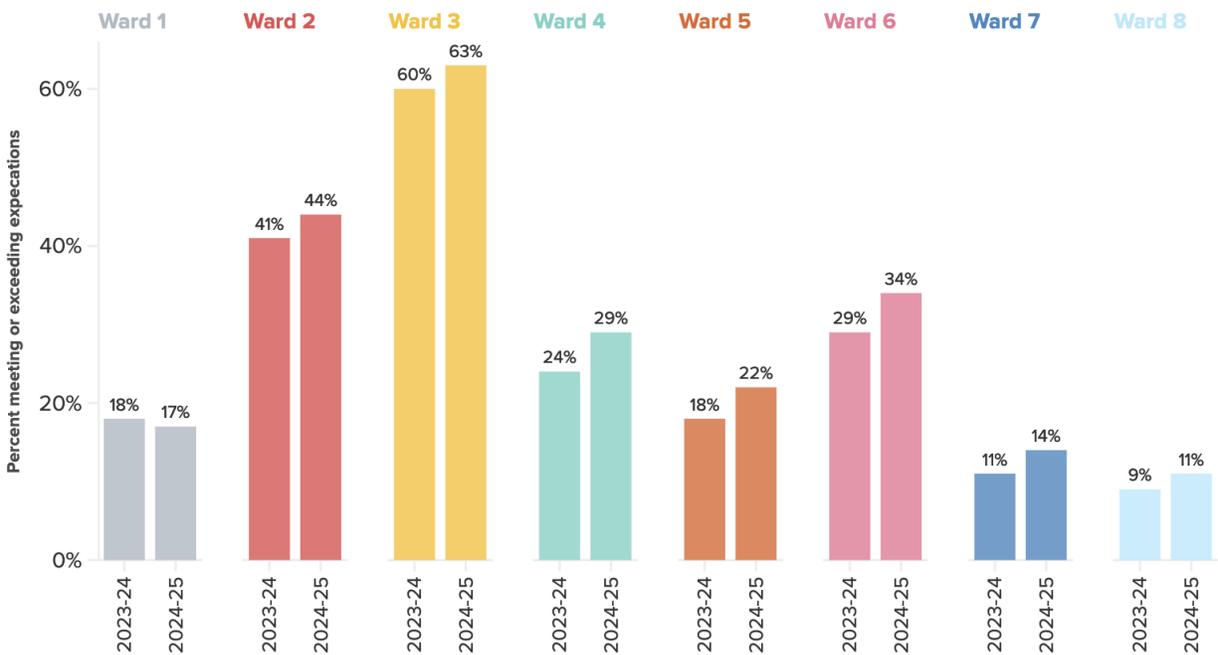
Figure 13. 7 out of 8 Wards improved their ELA learning outcomes from school year 2023-24 to school year 2024-25



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2025. "District of Columbia Statewide Assessment results for school years 2023-24 and 2024-25."



Figure 14. 7 out of 8 Wards improved their math learning outcomes from school year 2023-24 to school year 2024-25

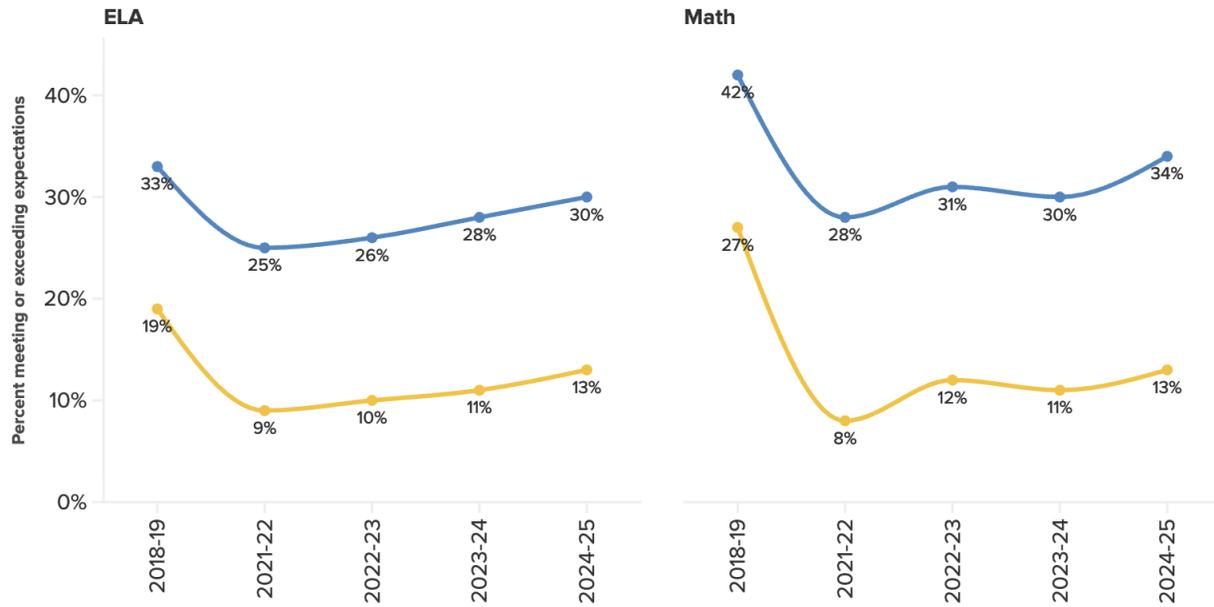


Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2025. "District of Columbia Statewide Assessment results for school years 2023-24 and 2024-25."



Figure 15. D.C.'s 3rd grade learning outcomes decreased from school year 2018-19 to 2024-25

■ All ■ Economically disadvantaged/at-risk



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). "District of Columbia Statewide Assessment results for school years 2018-19, 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25." Retrieved from <https://osse.dc.gov/page/data-and-reports-0>





AI in public education

Through listening sessions and interviews, students, teachers, and school leaders in D.C. consistently expressed a shared view: Artificial Intelligence (AI) is now a permanent feature of the education landscape. The challenge is ensuring it functions as a tool that supports learning and not as a substitute for authentic thinking and original work. Across all groups, there is a desire for District-level guidance and policies that define appropriate use and set expectations for students and educators. Teachers report already using AI in limited, purposeful ways, and school leaders generally support this approach so long as AI augments instruction and does not replace creativity, judgement and intellectual effort.

In *D.C. Voices on AI in Public Education*,³³ stakeholders identified both opportunities and risks. On the opportunity side, they pointed to strong partnerships, increasing clarity about the instructional problems AI can help address, a labor market being reshaped by these technologies, and opportunities to build on innovative ideas. At the same time, participants raised concerns about diminished independent thinking, inequitable access in higher-poverty communities, the growing burden on individual educators to vet tools, and the unresolved racial and ethical implications of AI.

AI is already reshaping how students learn. Ensuring that students and educators develop the skills and guardrails to use these tools responsibly will be essential to realizing AI's potential to enhance, rather than undermine, teaching and learning.³⁴

“We don’t have a schoolwide policy [on AI]. Some teachers are heavily against it, some are not. If we learn how to use it properly, it can really help us. I don’t use it to write my essays, but I do use it to help me choose the right words. Many kids are using it now.”

D.C. High School Student



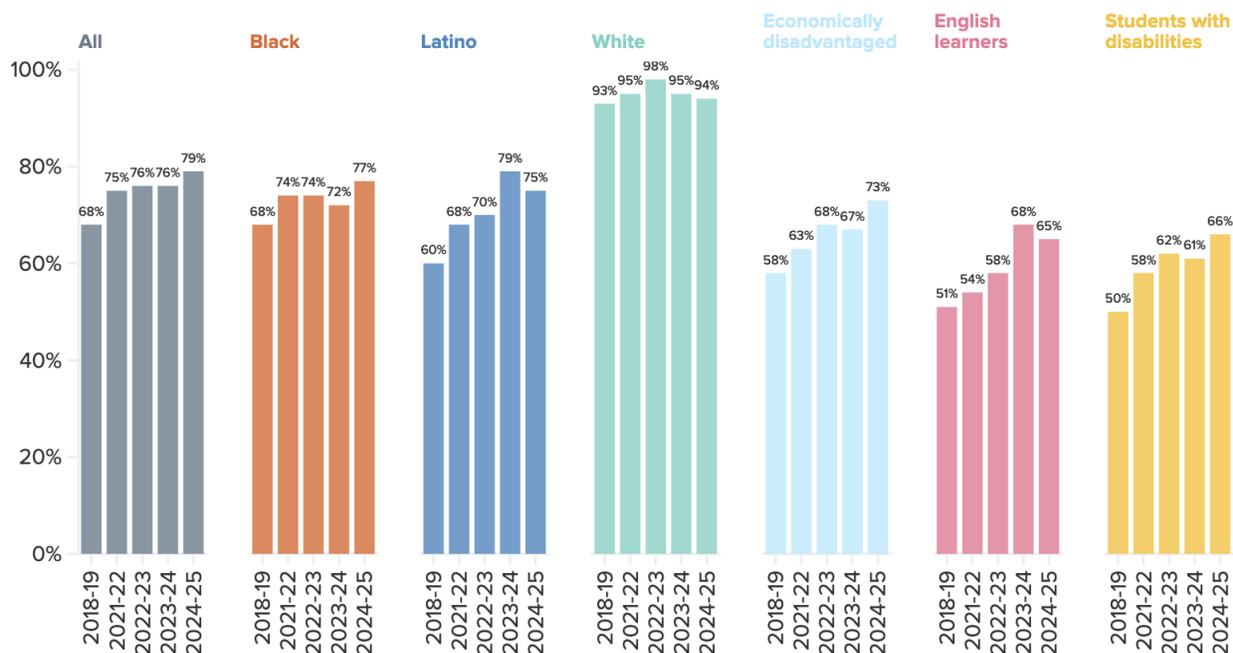
College and career readiness outcomes were mixed

Indicators of college and career readiness moved in different directions in school year 2024-25. Four-year graduation rates improved, but several downstream measures weakened, including participation in advanced coursework participation (but those who participated passed at higher rates), the share of students meeting the SAT College and Career Ready Benchmark, and postsecondary enrollment six months after graduation.

High school graduation is at a decade high

Four-year high school graduation rates reached their highest levels in a decade, with 79 percent of students graduating on time (see Figure 16). Black students, economically disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities drove much of this improvement, with graduation rates for each group increasing by more than 5 percentage points. At the same time, some student groups experienced declines in their four-year graduation rates, including Latino students (down 4 percentage points), English learners (down 3 percentage points), and white students (down 1 percentage point).³⁵

Figure 16. Graduation rates were 11 percentage points higher than pre-pandemic school year 2018-19



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2025. "DC School Report Card Graduation Metric Scores for 2018-19, 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25."

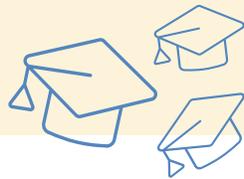


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Compact 2043

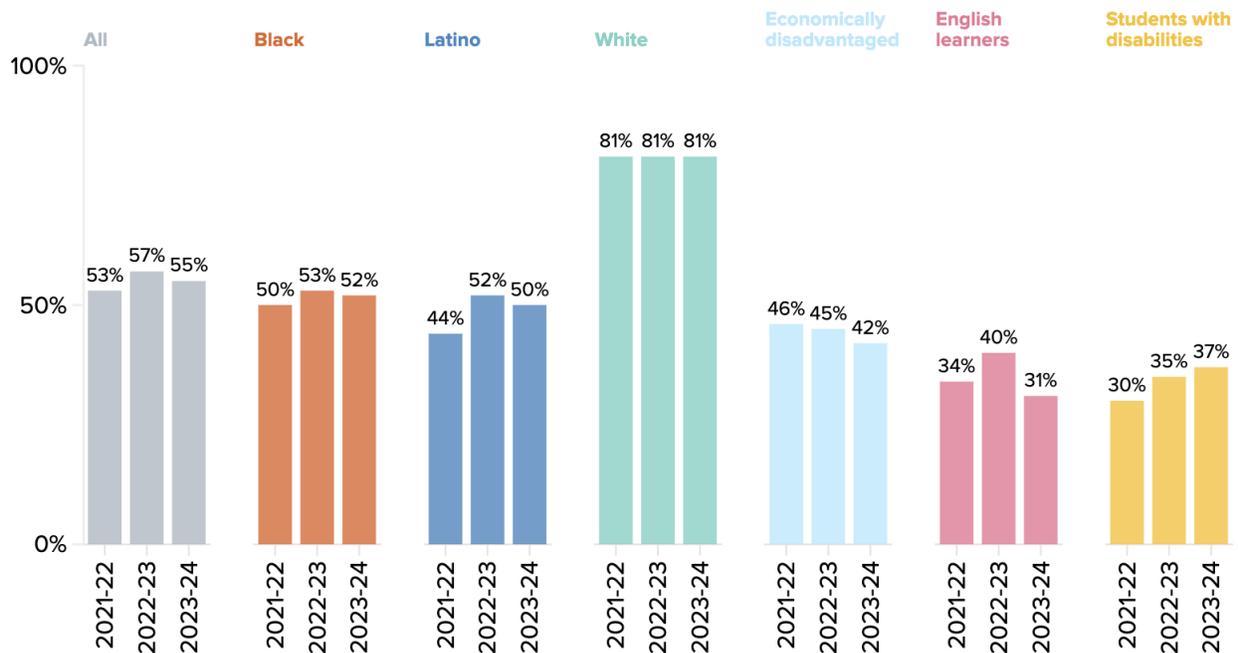
The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) launched Compact 2043 in 2025. Compact 2043 is a citywide commitment to strengthen and expand postsecondary pathways for DC students. The initiative aims to ensure that all children born today graduate from high school prepared for success in higher education and good jobs. Compact 2043 is anchored in three core goals: (1) D.C. students graduate high school prepared to enter colleges and careers; (2) high school graduates earn postsecondary degrees and credentials that give access to the good jobs of today and tomorrow; and (3) D.C.'s education and workforce systems work together to drive economic mobility and broad-based prosperity for residents and the local economy.⁷⁵



Postsecondary college enrollment six months after graduation edged down

For the class of 2024 (the most recent data), 55 percent of students enrolled in a postsecondary institution within six months of graduating high school (see Figure 17). This was a 1 percentage point decrease from the previous year (without rounding as represented in Figure 17). There was a decline in postsecondary enrollment across almost all main student groups, aside from white students and students with disabilities. English learners had the sharpest decline at 9 percentage points.³⁶

Figure 17. The share of alumni enrolling in postsecondary six months after graduation declined 2 percentage points for 2023-24 graduates



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2025. "DC School Report Card - Four-Year Graduation Rate."



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Advanced coursework performance and participation

In school year 2024-25, 52 percent of high school students participated in advanced coursework, including Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and Dual Enrollment in a higher education institution.³⁷ This share is difficult to compare to previous years, as the population included in this metric has changed.³⁸

Those who participated in advanced coursework achieved better outcomes: 53 percent of high school students who took an AP or IB exam passed, an improvement of 2 percentage points (see Figure 18). Gains were especially large for Latino students, white students, and economically disadvantaged students, who all saw increases of 5 percentage points.³⁹

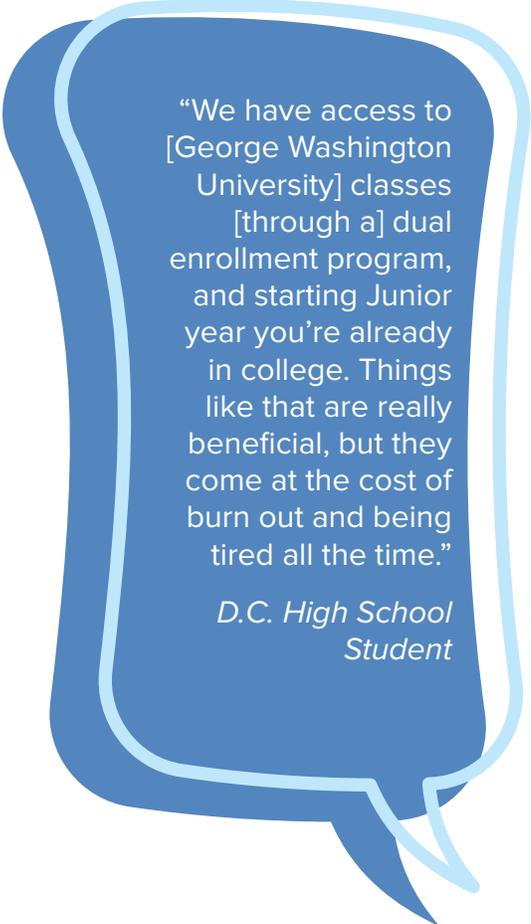
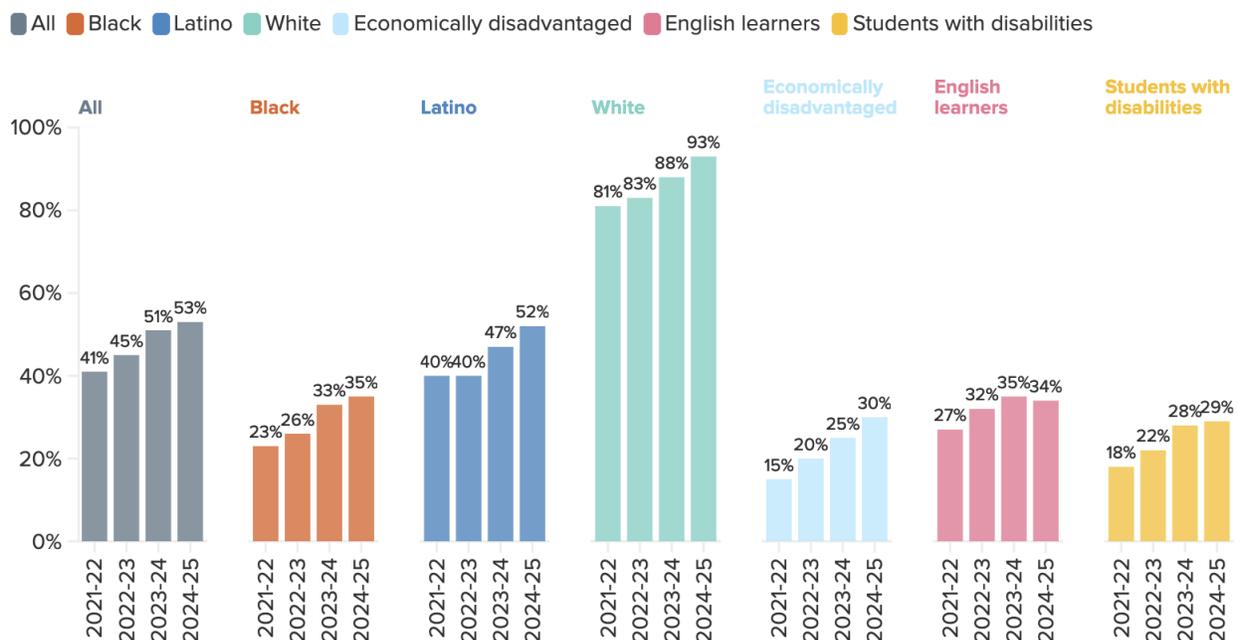


Figure 18. The share of high school students who took at least one Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) exam and passed increased 2 percentage points in school year 2024-25



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2025. "DC School Report Card - Advanced coursework and SAT-metric scores for school years 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25."



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Early Career Outcomes Survey and Graduate Earnings Study

The Office of Education Through Employment Pathways (ETEP)'s Alumni Early Career Outcomes Survey, published in December of 2025, found that Black graduates with bachelor's degrees are the least likely to realize the full economic return to their credentials and substantially less likely than their white peers to earn a living wage.

Financial pressure also shapes postsecondary persistence: many alumni reported skipping, delaying, or leaving college because of costs, alongside barriers like health, family responsibilities, and academic challenges.⁴⁰

At the same time, the payoff of college completion remains large. Using the U.S. Census Bureau's Postsecondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO) data⁴¹ for the University of the District of Columbia (UDC), ETEP found that bachelor's degree holders are predicted to earn \$3.7 million in 2022 constant dollars over their lifetime compared to \$1.4 million for high school graduates in D.C. This means approximately \$47,500 more per year in earnings during a typical 40-year career, or enough to justify the time and money costs associated with completing postsecondary education.⁴²

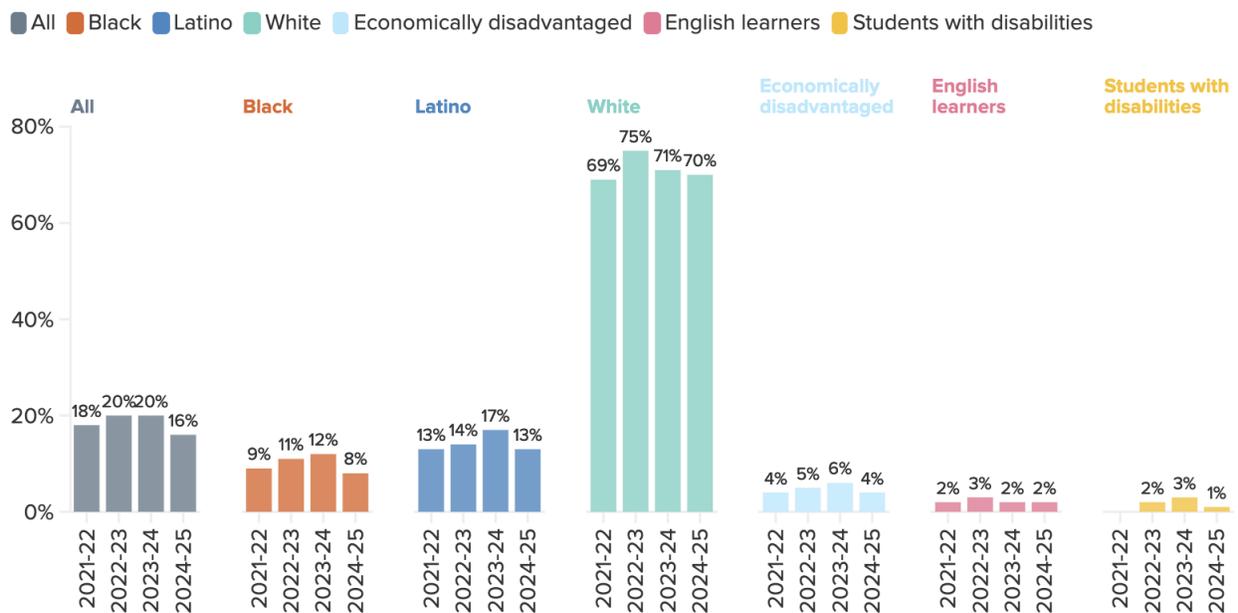
Ward 8 ATC opened

D.C. launched a new Advanced Technical Center (ATC) in Ward 8, expanding access to students across DCPS and public charter high schools to industry credentials, college credits, and paid internships in cybersecurity and health fields. Students can gain clinical experience in high-demand fields like nursing, medical assisting, and emergency medical first response.⁷⁶ With two sites now serving 370 students, the ATC model aligns secondary education with higher education and employer partners to create clearer, faster pathways into postsecondary study and well-paying, in-demand occupations.

Share of students meeting SAT College and Career Ready benchmark declined

In school year 2024-25, 16 percent of D.C.'s public high school students were identified as college and career ready according to the SAT College and Career Ready Benchmark (see Figure 19), a 4-percentage point decline from the previous year. On this metric, all student groups saw a decline in scores except for English learners, who saw no change.⁴³

Figure 19. The share of D.C.'s public school students meeting or exceeding SAT college and career ready benchmark declined 4 percentage points in school year 2024-25

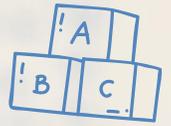


Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2025. "DC School Report Card - Advanced coursework and SAT-metric scores for school years 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25."

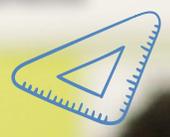
Note: The percent of students with disabilities meeting or exceeding the SAT college and career ready benchmark in school year 2021-22 was less than 1 percent.



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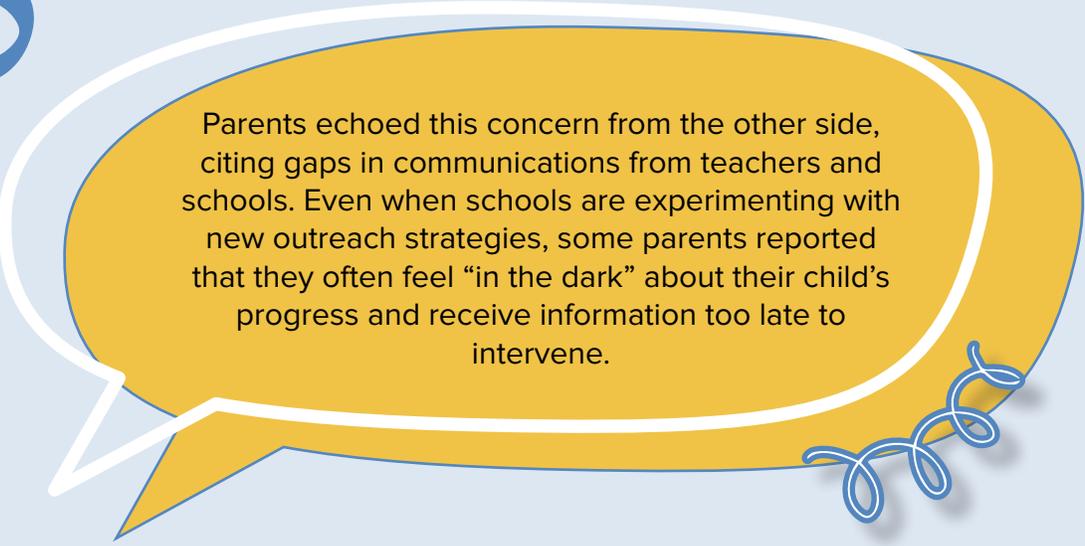
SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT



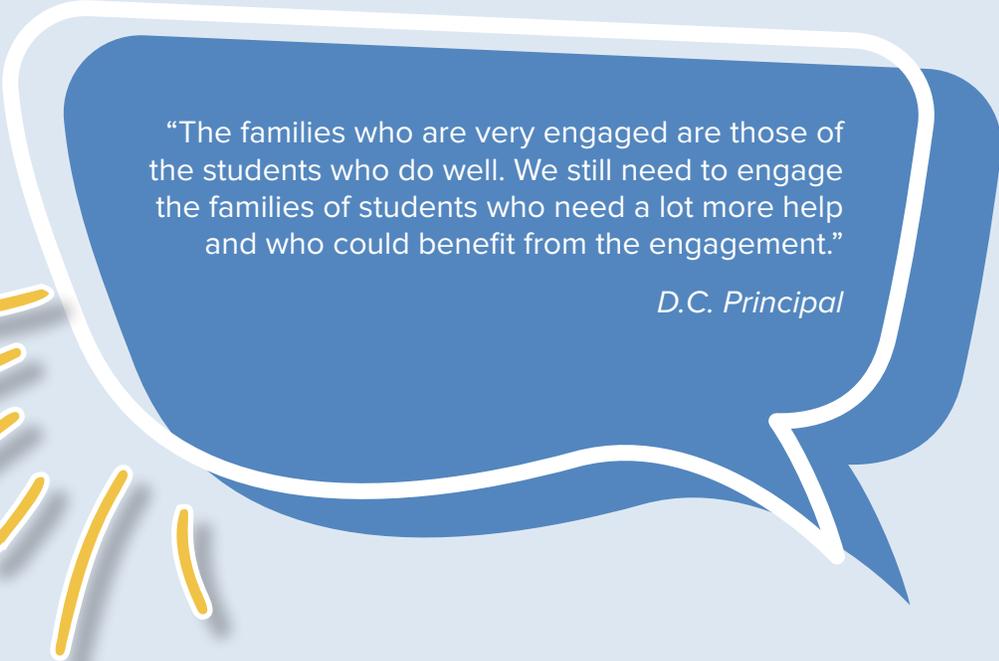
Parent and school leader perspective on family engagement

In D.C. Policy Center interviews, parents and school leaders consistently pointed to the strength of a school community as the key driver of school success. Both groups emphasized that early and sustained family engagement is critical to students' long-term academic outcomes. School leaders described an ongoing effort to create more meaningful opportunities for families to participate in school life and to communicate those opportunities more clearly. Several noted that expanded use of social media and digital tools has helped reach parents more effectively.

At the same time, principals observed that families of higher-achieving students are typically the most engaged. Many continue to grapple with how to connect with and involve parents of students who are experiencing academic difficulties.



Parents echoed this concern from the other side, citing gaps in communications from teachers and schools. Even when schools are experimenting with new outreach strategies, some parents reported that they often feel “in the dark” about their child’s progress and receive information too late to intervene.



“The families who are very engaged are those of the students who do well. We still need to engage the families of students who need a lot more help and who could benefit from the engagement.”

D.C. Principal

Student experience is captured for the first time by school climate surveys

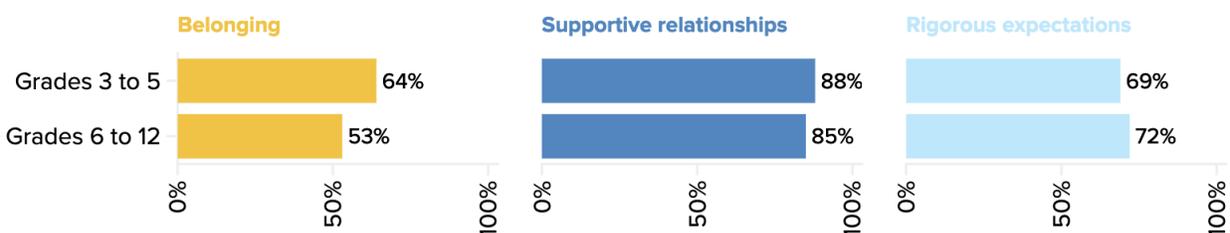
For the first time in school year 2024-25, OSSE partnered with Panorama Education to administer statewide school climate surveys,⁴⁴ establishing a common baseline for measuring student, staff, and family experiences—although DCPS schools and some others had used a version of this survey in the past. In its inaugural year, response levels were relatively strong for students (76 percent) and staff (55 percent), while family participation lagged at 20 percent (lower parent survey response is aligned with national trends).⁴⁵ Survey topics included students’ sense of belonging, perceptions of school safety, rigorous expectations, and supportive relationships.

With one year of citywide data, findings should be interpreted as descriptive rather than evaluative. Nonetheless, they offer useful signals. For example, student sense of belonging declines after elementary school, while their sense of supportive relationships and rigorous expectations remains stable across age groups (see Figure 20).⁴⁶

“School is very tiring. We also have personal lives and extracurriculars, problems at home. It’s hard to manage it all. Perspective is important. I’m starting to get lazy, too. There are just too many projects, too much testing.”

D.C. High School Student

Figure 20. DC SAYS, findings by age for students in select topics



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2025. "D.C. Survey About Your School (DC SAYS)." OSSE. Retrieved from <https://osse.dc.gov/schoolclimatesurveys>



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STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

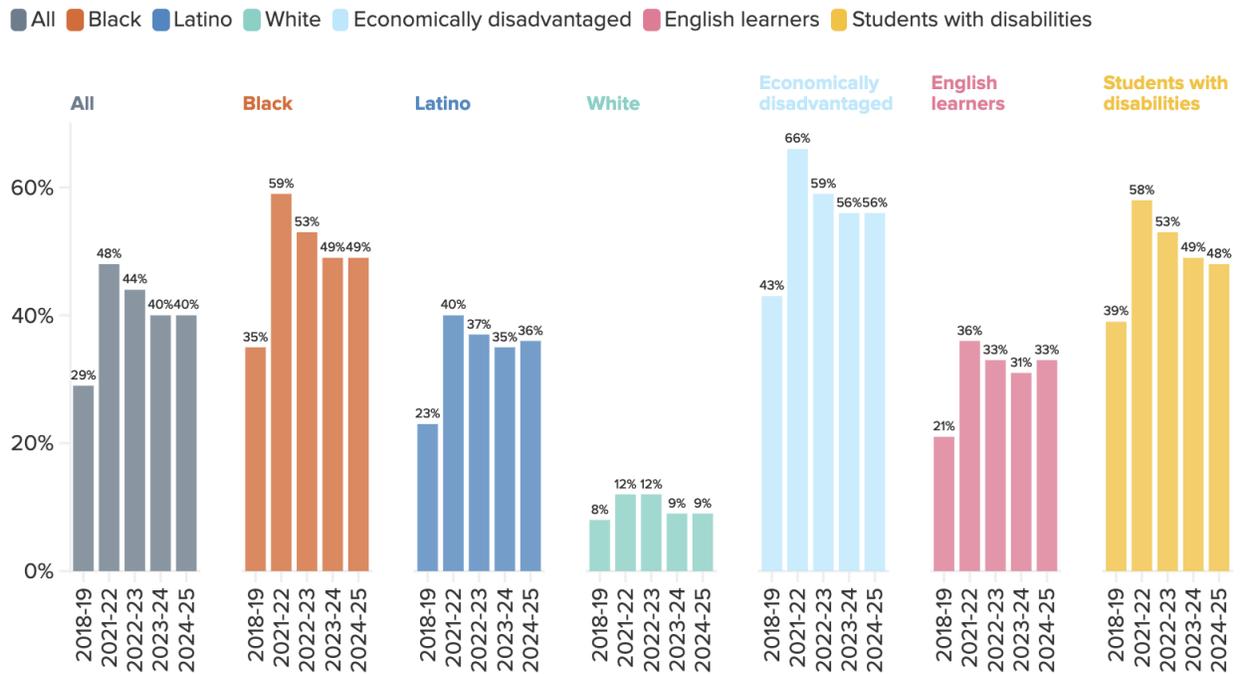
Youth Risk Behavior Survey data point to persistent gaps in access to mental health support across D.C. high schools. In 2023, only 23 percent of students reported they most of the time or always received the help they needed—a five-point decrease since 2017.⁷⁷ The data suggest not only high levels of unmet need, but a system that has struggled to keep pace with rising student stress.

Qualitative insights reinforce this picture. In a D.C. Voices article, students described daily stress as a constant and noted that many school-based wellness activities feel disconnected and ineffective. At the same time, they expressed strong appreciation for the care and commitment of the adults who support them.⁷⁸

System leaders underscored that creating safe, predictable school environments are both feasible and foundational. The two critical constraints to achieving this are funding and the availability of well-trained, trusted staff who are fully integrated into school communities.

At the school level, expanding mental health services requires coordination, consistency, and capacity—particularly in secondary schools, where academic and emotional needs intensify. Sustained investment in school-based mental health teams, paired with broader policy changes, improved funding stability, better interagency collaboration, as well as continued focus on increasing student attendance, will be critical to meeting the evolving needs of D.C.'s students and families.⁷⁹

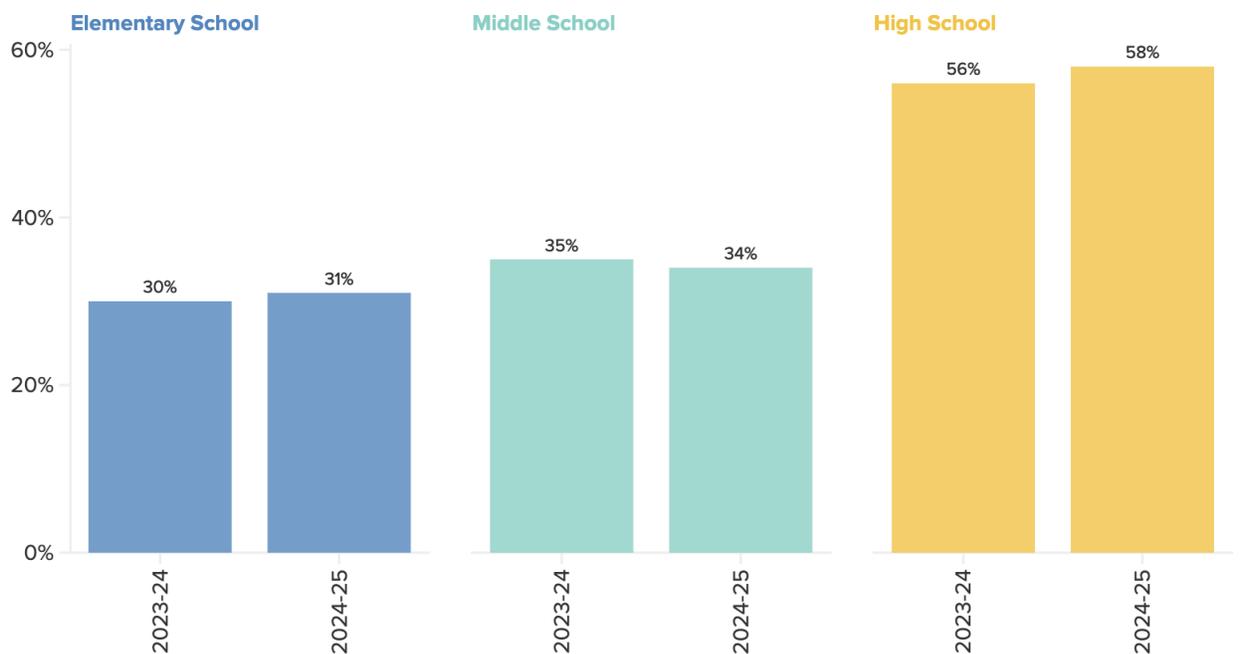
Figure 21. Chronic absenteeism rates remained at 40% in school year 2024-25



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2025. "2018-19, 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25 attendance data."



Figure 22. Chronic absenteeism rates by grade band, school years 2023-24 and 2024-25



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2025. "District of Columbia Attendance Report Rates - School Years 2023-24 and 2024-25."



Chronic absenteeism remained at the same level

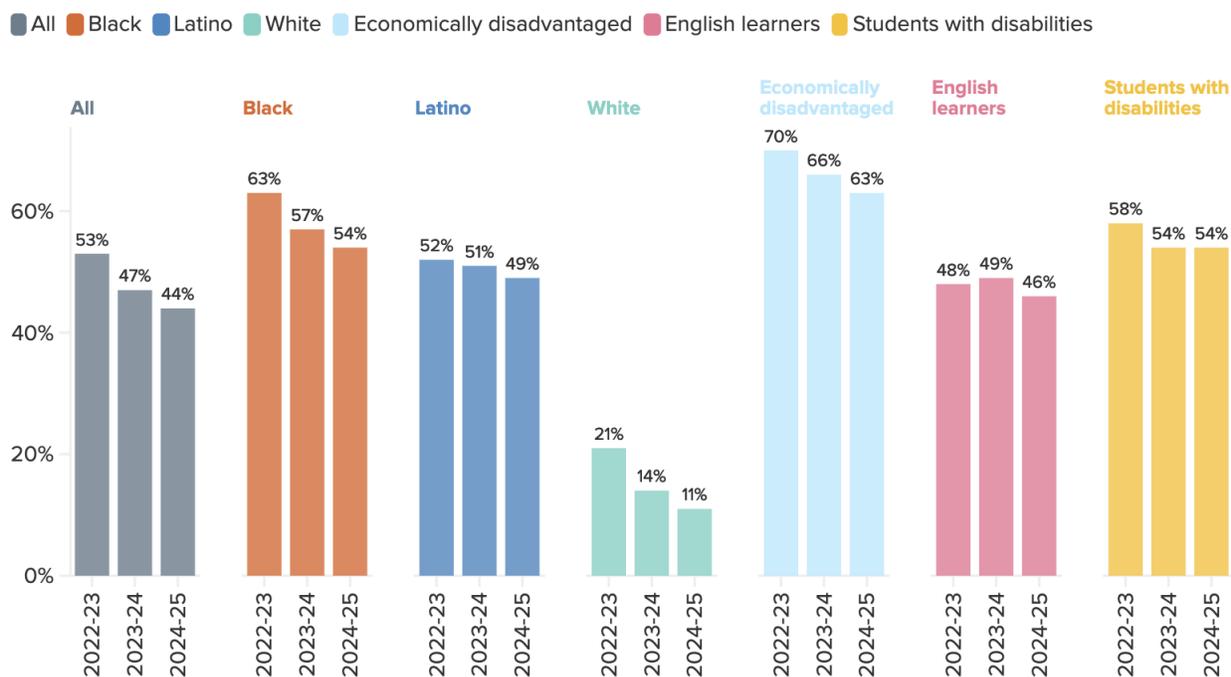
In school year 2024-25, 40 percent of students were chronically absent, meaning they missed 10 percent or more of the school year (including both unexcused and excused absences, see Figure 21).⁴⁷ This represents no overall change from the previous year, with absenteeism remaining the same or increasing slightly for many student groups. English learners' chronic absenteeism increased the most, by 2 percentage points, from 31 percent to 33 percent.

By grade band, elementary and high school students' chronic absenteeism increased slightly from school year 2023-24 to 2024-25 (see Figure 22). Middle school students' chronic absenteeism decreased 1 percentage point.⁴⁸

Pre-kindergarten chronic absenteeism improved

In pre-kindergarten, a non-compulsory grade, chronic absenteeism improved for the past two years, a promising sign for early attendance habits that can improve future attendance. In school year 2024-25, 44 percent of pre-kindergarten students were chronically absent, a 3-percentage point improvement from the previous year and lower than chronic absenteeism rates observed for later grades (see Figure 23). Even with this progress, the large gap between white students and all other student groups remain. While chronic absenteeism among white pre-kindergarten students was 11 percent in school year 2024-25, that rate was above 45 percent for all other groups. Economically disadvantaged pre-kindergarteners had the highest rates of chronic absenteeism, at 63 percent.⁴⁹

Figure 23. Pre-kindergarten chronic absenteeism rates declined 9 percentage points since school year 2022-23



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2025. "2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25 attendance data."



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A NOVEL STUDY:

Patterns and predictors of **CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM** in D.C. Middle and High Schools

“Although we worked really hard around attendance, it continued to be a persistent issue. A lot of families are still trying to recover from COVID, job loss, finances, inflation, it impacts our families and parents’ abilities to get their kids to school on time, especially for those working two jobs. In some cases, older kids are responsible for getting younger siblings to school. Kids stay up to play video games until 11pm and are tired. We have a lot of siblings and cousins – once a kid gets sick, the household gets sick, so we have a lot of absences. Nevertheless, we did make growth on our truancy rate.”

D.C. Principal

Using four years of student-level records from the Office of the State Superintendent of Education—spanning two pre-pandemic and two post-pandemic school years—the D.C. Policy Center examined postsecondary outcomes across five attendance tiers.⁵⁰ The findings show a clear and consequential relationship between attendance and college and career readiness. Seven in ten graduates with satisfactory attendance enrolled in postsecondary education, compared to three in ten with profound absence. Students with stronger attendance records were also far more likely to meet AP/IB benchmarks, participate in dual enrollment, and earn college and career ready scores on the SAT.⁵¹

Chronic absenteeism remains a central challenge, especially in high school. *Patterns and Predictors of Chronic Absenteeism in D.C. Middle and High Schools* identified three notable dynamics. First, chronic absenteeism has changed in who it affects and when it spikes post-pandemic—the transition to high school emerged a key inflection point with students in grade 8 (along with Black and economically disadvantaged students) experiencing the largest post-pandemic increases. Furthermore, female students are now more likely than male students to be chronically absent.

Second, chronic absenteeism is highly persistent—82 percent of students who were chronically absent in 2021-22 remained so the following year, although students with moderate levels of chronic absenteeism and economically disadvantaged students were somewhat more likely to improve.

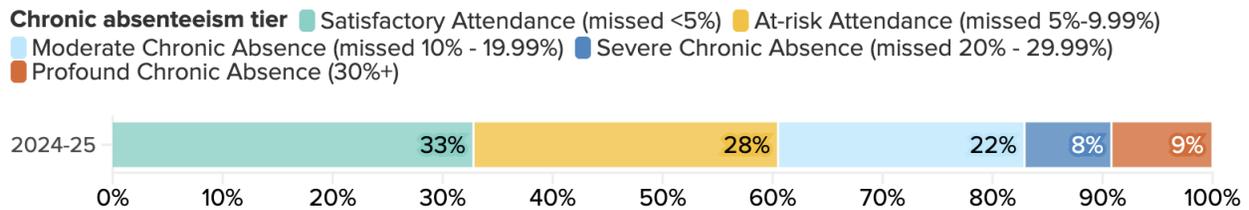
Third, the strongest predictors of chronic absenteeism mirror pre-pandemic patterns. Economic disadvantage, repeating grade 9, and prior-year absenteeism remain the most powerful predictors. Students who scored below expectations on the grade 8 statewide assessment were more likely to be chronically absent in grade 9.⁵²

To understand attendance patterns, OSSE monitors attendance risk tiers. In school year 2024-25, 33 percent of students had satisfactory attendance, 28 percent had at-risk attendance, 22 percent had moderate chronic absence, 8 percent had severe chronic absence, and 30 percent had profound chronic absence (see Figure 24).⁵³

Discipline levels showed little change

In school year 2024-25, 6 percent of students were suspended out of school at least once, unchanged from the previous year (see Figure 25). Suspension rates remained higher for Black students, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students at 9 percent. In-school suspension also remained flat at 1 percent.⁵⁴

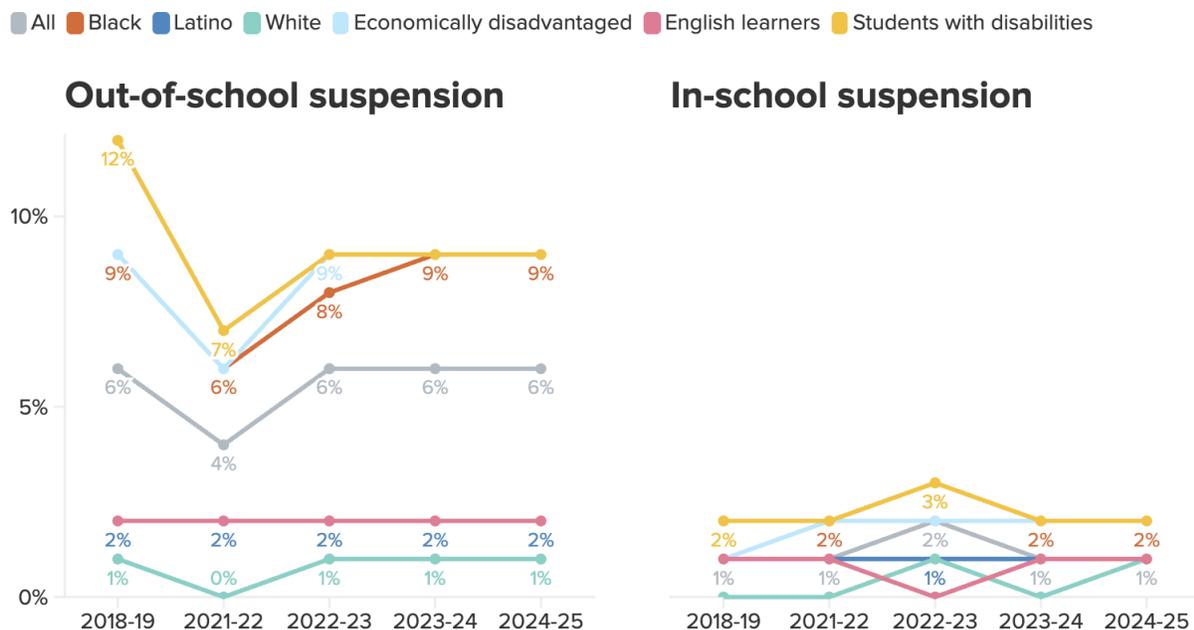
Figure 24. Chronic absenteeism tiers, school year 2024-25



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2025. "2024-25 Attendance Brief." OSSE.



Figure 25. Out-of-school and in-school suspension rates remained consistent from school year 2023-24 to 2024-25



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2025. "DC School Report Card data - Student discipline for school year 2018-19, 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25."





CEDAR TREE
ACADEMY
LEARN YOUR BEST TOMORROW

cedar tree

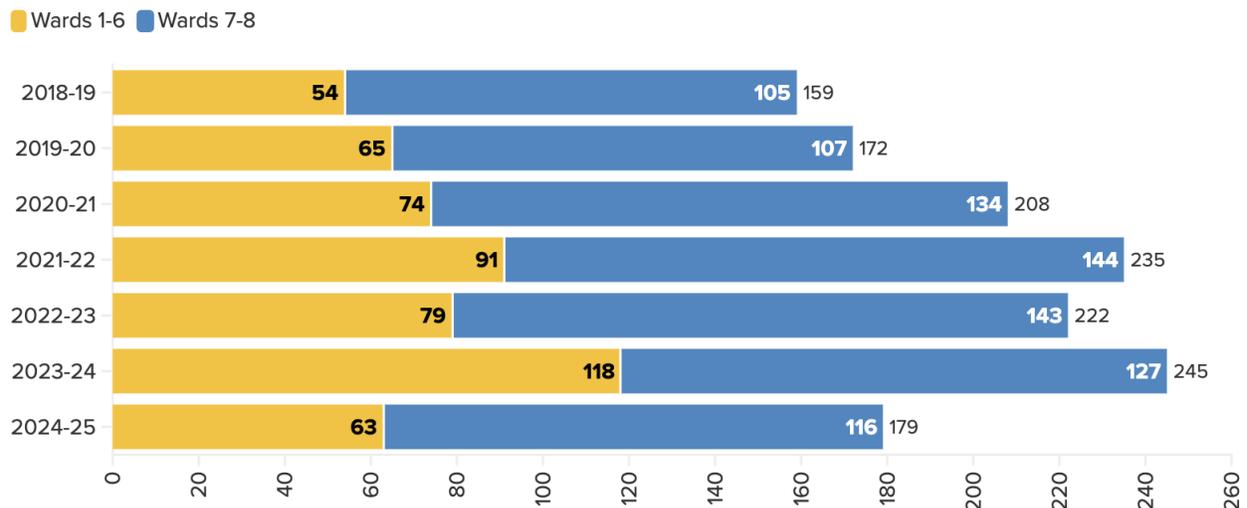
School safety

Trends in citywide violent crime provide important context for understanding school climate and student experiences. Homicides declined by 27 percent during school year 2024-25, especially in Wards 1 through 6 where they fell by nearly half (see Figure 26). More than two-thirds of these homicides occurred in Wards 7 and 8, where students tend to travel longer distances to school and spend more time in transit. Reductions in homicide and violent crime matter for schools not only as public safety outcomes, but as inputs to learning. Lower exposure to homicides and violent crime is associated with reduced student stress and improved attendance,⁵⁵ and a growing body of research shows that community gun violence—whether chronic

or episodic—has lasting negative effects on students' academic performance and overall health and well-being.⁵⁶

In this context, effective school responses extend beyond security measures. When students are exposed to trauma and community violence, schools that invest in building strong adult-student relationships, adopt trauma-informed practices, cultivate a positive school climate, and deploy a tiered approach for evidence-based interventions are better positioned to buffer the effects of community violence. Preparedness to respond to crises, alongside sustained mental health supports, is central to stabilizing learning environments and supporting students.⁵⁷

Figure 26. The number of homicides decreased in school year 2024-25



Source: Open Data DC. 2025. "Crime Incidents in 2025" Open Data DC. Retrieved from https://opendata.dc.gov/datasets/74d924ddc3374e3b977e6f002478cb9b_7/explore?location=38.903999%2C-77.012050%2C12.19



Perceptions of public safety

Perceptions of safety differ markedly by stakeholder group, underscoring a gap between how schools are experienced by students and how they are perceived by families. Averaged across grade bands, DC SAYS school climate survey results showed that about half of students feel safe at school. Meanwhile, 73 percent of families felt that their students were safe at school (see Figure 27). The perceptions of safety while traveling to school were more aligned between students, teachers, and families, but students still expressed the least favorable responses regarding their experiences with safety.⁵⁸

Educator workforce

Teacher and school leader retention are core indicators of system stability and instructional capacity. Both improved in school year 2024-25.

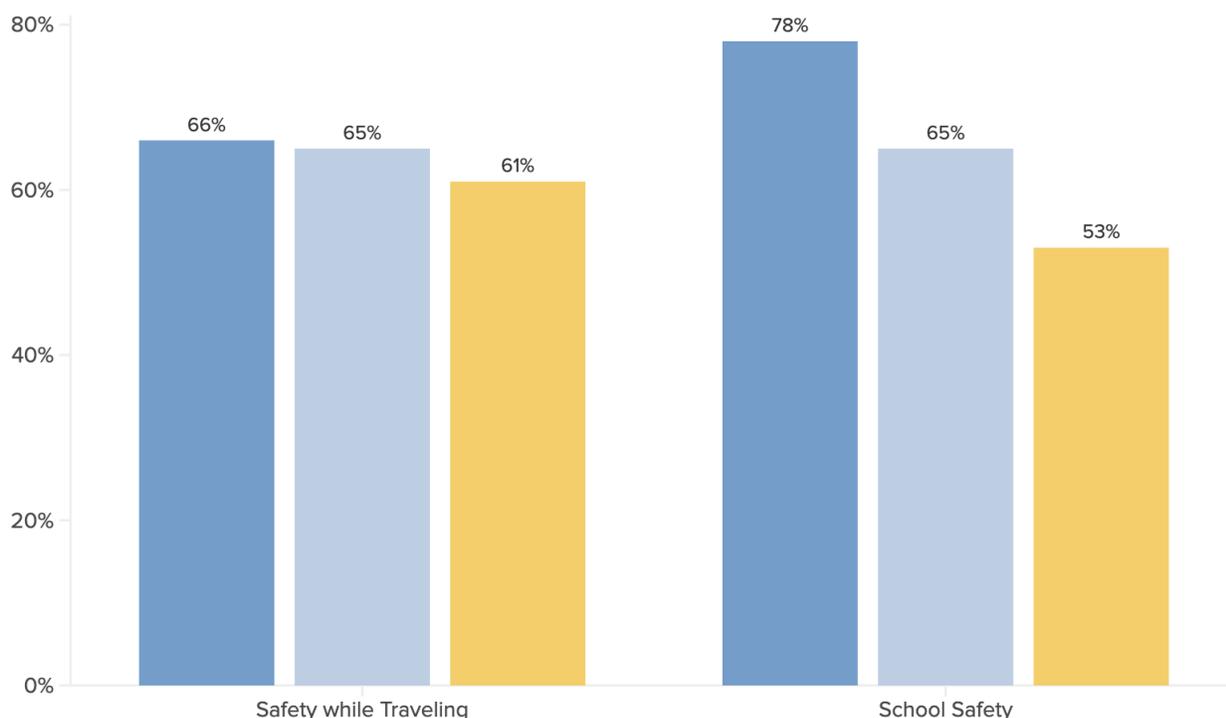
Teacher retention

In school year 2024-25, D.C.'s public schools employed 8,939 teachers. Teachers who kept the same role in the same school made up 76 percent of the total teaching force, marking a 2-percentage point increase over the previous year (see Figure 28). An additional 8 percent moved to a different school within the system, leading to an overall retention rate of 84 percent.⁵⁹

Figure 27. D.C.'s students reported lower levels of safety at school and during commutes compared to other groups

Survey Category ■ Family ■ Staff ■ Student

Percent of favorable responses



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education. DC Survey About Your School (DC SAYS) – School climate surveys (2025).

Note: Family and Student categories are calculated as averages by the D.C. Policy Center.

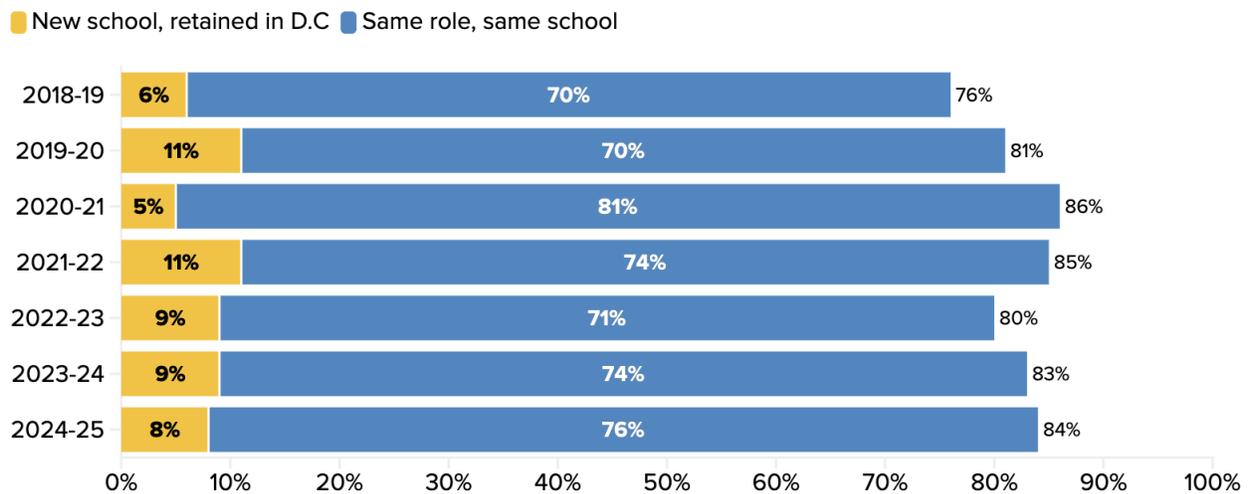


In interviews, teachers consistently pointed to the importance of a positive, healthy school culture, and a trusting, supportive relationship between the administration and staff as central to their decision to stay.

Retention patterns varied across demographic groups. In the District, Black teachers make up the largest share of educators (55 percent) followed by white

teachers (23 percent), Latino teachers (11 percent), and Asian teachers or teachers of other races and ethnicities (combined 9 percent).⁶⁰ In school year 2024-25, Latino teachers posted the highest same-role, same-school retention rate (81 percent) and Black teachers had a 76 percent same-role, same-school retention rate (see Figure 29).⁶¹

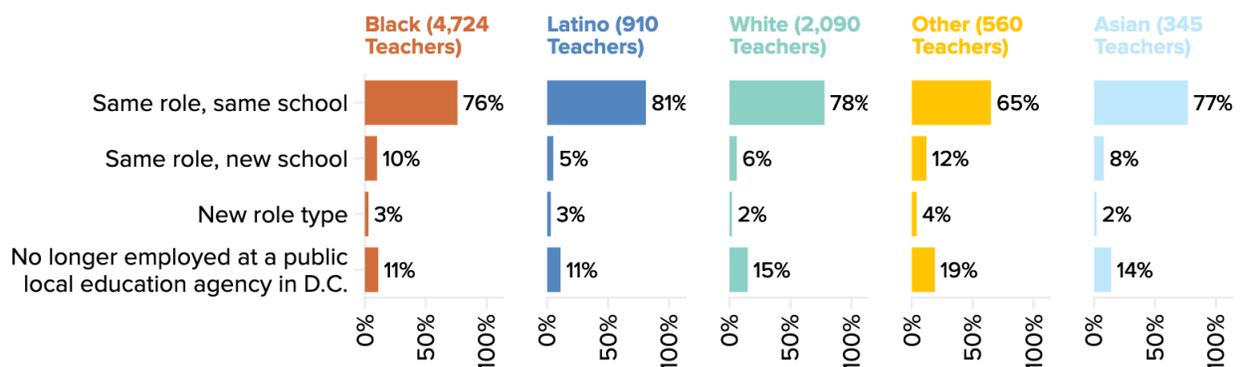
Figure 28. Same role and school teacher retention improved 2 percentage points in school year 2024-25



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2025. "District of Columbia Educator Retention data from school year 2018-19 to 2024-25."



Figure 29. Latino teachers had the highest same role, same school teacher retention in school year 2024-25



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2025. "2024-25 District of Columbia Educator Retention Brief." OSSE.





Experience level was also strongly associated with retention. Among teachers with more than 10 years of experience, 83 percent remained in their same role and school, suggesting that more experienced teachers are increasingly remaining in the District (see Figure 30). For teachers with 6 to 10 years of experience, 77 percent stayed in the same role and school. Teachers with the least amount of experience were the most likely to leave D.C.'s schools, with 18 percent exiting.⁶²

The teacher workforce was relatively evenly distributed across experience bands. Teachers with up to 1 year of experience and more than 10 years of experience each accounted for 23 percent of D.C.'s public school teachers. Teachers with 2 to 5 years of experience represented the largest group (26 percent), followed by those with 6 to 10 years of experience (25 percent).⁶³

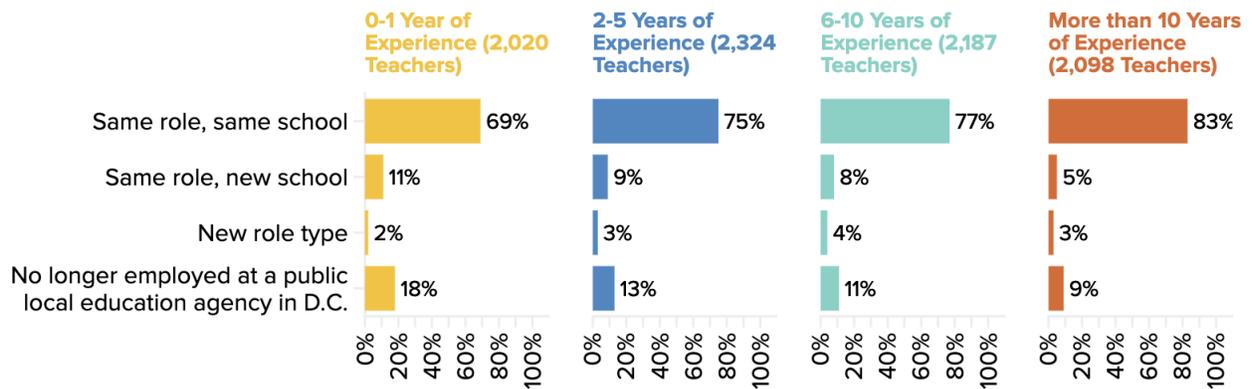
School leader retention

Overall retention rates of principals in D.C. increased by 4 percentage points in school year 2024-25 to 83 percent, and 78 percent of principals remained at the same school they led in school year 2023-24 (see Figure 31).⁶⁴

“Support from administration is key. I have worked with the same principal for a long time. They have expressed a lot of trust in my experience. Then they know where to support and let us work on where we have more expertise.”

D.C. Teacher

Figure 30. Teachers with more than 10 years of experience remained in their same role and school at the highest rate in school year 2024-25

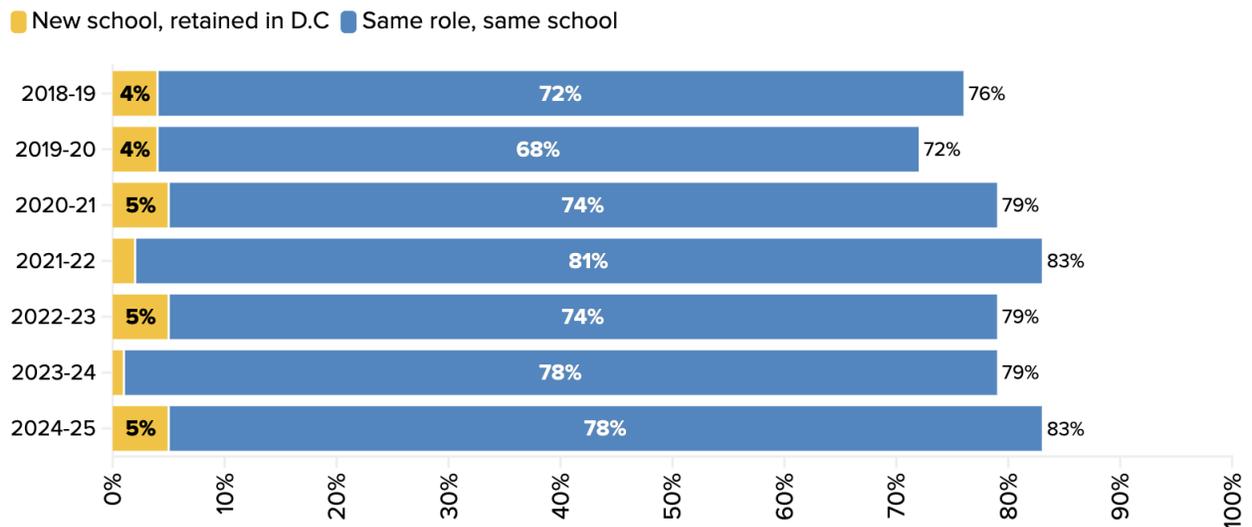


Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2025. "2024-25 District of Columbia Educator Retention Brief." OSSE.



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Figure 31. Principal retention increased to 83 percent in school year 2024-25, 4 percentage points higher than the previous year



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2025. "District of Columbia Educator Retention data for school years 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22, 2023-24, and 2024-25"



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LOOK AHEAD



School year 2025-26 opened against a more uncertain economic and federal government backdrop, with direct implications for both school budgets and, more immediately, family stability. The District's labor market has weakened: Between January and August 2025, the District's resident unemployment rate increased from 5.3 percent to 6 percent, continuing an upward trend that began after the unemployment rate reached a pandemic-era low of 4 percent in mid-2022.⁶⁵

Job growth has stalled or turned negative across nearly all sectors, with disconcerting sharp declines in federal employment and professional services.⁶⁶ Current projections are similarly cautious, pointing to potential headwinds for household incomes, and by extension, student and family wellbeing.⁶⁷

⁶⁸

Federal policy changes may further shape the fiscal environment for schools. There have been proposed increased flexibility around the use of federal funding and consolidations across multiple programs, which have not been approved.⁶⁹ At the same time, a new federal tax expenditure program could direct private contributions to scholarship granting organizations in the coming years, potentially increasing private funding that could support some programs in public schools.⁷⁰

Demographic trends add another layer of pressure. Declining births today and in future years could translate into continued enrollment declines, which would put additional strains on school budgets.⁷¹ Taken together, economic, policy, and demographic dynamics suggest a more challenging operating environment for D.C.'s public schools in the near term.



From recovery to forward momentum

School year 2024-25 marked an important turning point for D.C.'s public schools. On multiple indicators, the system appears to be moving beyond pandemic recovery and into a period of renewed stability and meaningful progress (see Figure 32). Enrollment continued to rise, learning outcomes improved at the fastest pace seen in a decade, graduation rates reached historic highs, and educator and school leader retention continued to strengthen.

On several core measures, outcomes have now returned to or surpassed pre-pandemic levels, including learning outcomes in ELA, high school graduation rates, and suspension rates, with six-month postsecondary enrollment approaching pre-pandemic benchmarks. These trends

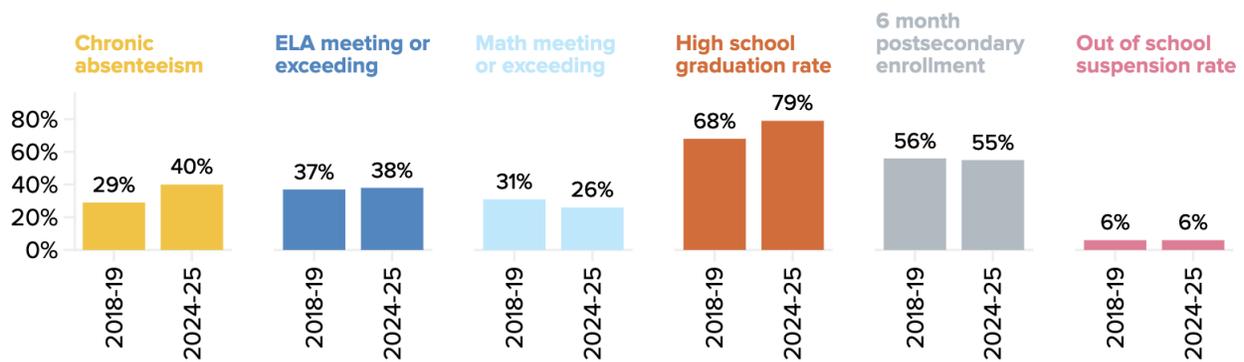
suggest that the system has regained a degree of institutional footing.

At the same time, recovery remains uneven and incomplete. Chronic absenteeism is still elevated, particularly among high school students and economically disadvantaged youth. Large gaps in learning outcomes across wards and student groups persist. While a larger share of students is earning diplomas, a slightly smaller share is enrolling in postsecondary education or meeting the SAT college-readiness benchmark, raising concerns about the depth of preparedness behind rising graduation rates. Students, educators, and families also continue to navigate mounting pressures—from mental health needs to economic uncertainty—that shape daily school experiences. Sustaining recent academic gains will require schools to continue treating attendance, student

engagement, and mental health supports as core instructional infrastructure, especially during the middle to high school transition years. Strengthening preparation for life after high school will demand renewed focus on rigorous coursework, coherent postsecondary pathways, and targeted completion supports. Maintaining system momentum will depend on stable, predictable school environments—where educators are supported and empowered, families are meaningfully engaged, and students feel safe, connected, and challenged.

With increased economic and policy uncertainty in school year 2025-26, the experience of 2024-25 offers both encouragement and urgency. D.C.'s public schools have demonstrated that improvement is possible. The central task ahead is to sustain momentum so progress becomes the norm, disparities narrow, and every student graduates, not just with a diploma, but with a genuine pathway to opportunity beyond high school.

Figure 32. State of D.C. Schools: Recovery Dashboard



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). "DC School Report Card Data." OSSE.



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Endnotes

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Our deep thanks and appreciation to the organizations and individuals whose photos appear throughout this report.

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