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Nashville schools rank in the top 10 for recovery since the pandemic, but racial disparities persist

ROSE GILBERT FEBRUARY 14, 2024

Metro Nashville Public Schools ranks among the top school districts in the country for academic recovery since the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a new study conducted by researchers at Stanford and Harvard.

“This recognition underscores not only the strategies we’ve designed but also the extremely impressive work so many people across the district have done to implement those plans and ensure our students are getting what they need, both in and out of the classroom,” said Director of Schools Dr. Adrienne Battle.

The Education Recovery Scorecard tracks learning loss and recovery by looking at test scores from 2019 through 2023 at 8,000 schools across the United States. On Tuesday, educators and local elected officials gathered at Ida B. Wells Elementary School to celebrate the study’s findings in Davidson County.

Here are a few of the highlights:

MNPS ranked 3rd among top 100 districts in math growth from 2022 to 2023

MNPS ranked 6th among top 100 districts in English Language Arts (reading) growth from 2022 to 2023

MNPS was one of only two large urban districts to rank in the top 10 for both math and reading

Dr. Ray Hart, the executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, called the district’s progress “impressive.”

“They are leading the nation and we are pleased to learn from them about what it means to lift up student achievement across the country,” he said.

However, Hart also acknowledged that schools are still not back to where they were before the COVID-19 pandemic.

“To be sure, there is more work to be done,” he said, “Our children are not where they need to be.”

In particular, while Black and white students' math and reading scores recovered at similar rates, Black students fell behind much further during the pandemic, leading to enduring racial disparities. In fact, while the national achievement gap between Black and white students narrowed last year, in Tennessee it actually widened. That includes the gap in reading and math proficiency scores in Davidson County.

The scorecard cited specific MNPS strategies that contributed to the district's relatively quick academic recovery, including programs supported by federal ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) funding. That one-time funding ends in June, 2024. However, Mayor Freddie O'Connell said that the city has put aside money to allow those programs to continue after federal funding runs out.

"My administration has worked closely with Dr. Battle, her team and the school board to ensure that, unlike a lot of the rest of the country, we don't face a cliff. Rather, we have worked to build a bridge for ESSER," he said.

A big part of that, he explained, will be retaining staff hired with ESSER funding.