

RESEARCH

RESEARCH DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW



Research Department Overview

March 2023

Overall Research Department Goals/Priorities

The goal of the research department is to conduct, facilitate and disseminate research that will provide guidance and support to the Council's member districts and other key stakeholders as they work to improve academic achievement and reduce achievement gaps in large urban school districts.

Update on Recently Completed Projects/Conferences

Student Recovery Report

In October 2022, the research department released the "Student Recovery from the Pandemic: A Look at the Data" report, which provided an overview of student recovery from multiple data sources. The Council's academic KPI data, district's state assessment results as well as data from NWEA, Curriculum Associates and Renaissance Star, were compiled and analyzed to answer the following questions related to student recovery.

- How are students experiencing or connecting with school and instruction?
- How does spring 2019 performance compare to spring 2022 performance in urban schools? How do these gaps compare to national averages?
- How have performance placements for CGCS districts changed from spring 2019 to spring 2022?
- How do performance placements for CGCS districts compare to national trends by grade level?
- How does CGCS performance change or progress through each testing season? How does this compare to national trends?
- What are examples of evidence of student learning from district's state assessment data?

A copy of the report can be found attached. Results from the report tell us where we are and how we have progressed since the pandemic. They also provide an indication of subjects, grade levels, and student groups who are making improvements as well as areas of opportunity. It is important to contextualize these assessment data and academic measures in order to bring deeper

understanding to the data. We also encourage the use and triangulation of various forms of information to aid in decision making. Finally, as we continue to advance the use of evidence in decision making, we encourage the collection and inclusion of qualitative data including surveys, interviews and focus groups to help tell a more well-rounded story on student experiences.

CGCS District Enrollment Trends 2019-20 to 2022-23

The research department recently collected and analyzed enrollment from our districts for the current 2022-23 school year. 48 districts self-reported their enrollment figures, some of which were unofficial enrollment numbers. This data allows us to look at trends in enrollment over time, as we compare the 2023 self-reported enrollment data to the 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22 enrollment data from the National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data.

Overall, CGCS district enrollment is down 4.7% when pre-k students are included in the analysis and down 6% without pre-k students. We find that many of our districts have made great efforts to increase pre-k enrollment in order to address potential long-term enrollment declines. We also find increases in high school grade levels, which indicate that some students are still challenged with matriculating to the next grade level due to their inability to gain enough credits or due to district-level course passing policies. A copy of the enrollment report is attached.

2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA)

TRIAL URBAN DISTRICT ASSESSMENT ADVISORY TASK FORCE TO THE NATIONAL ASSESSMENT GOVERNING BOARD (PHASE 2)

Under Phase 2 of our contract with the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), the Council continues to lead a Task Force of local education leaders from the 27 TUDA districts.

The first meeting of the second Task Force was held on Tuesday, November 10, 2020, the second meeting was held April 27, 2021, the third meeting was held November 4, 2021, and the fourth meeting was held March 18, 2022.

The Council was granted an extension to complete TUDA task force activities through October 2022. On October 18, 2022 in Orlando, FL, the task force convened for the fifth time to share updates on the January administration of NAEP in the TUDA districts and to prepare for the October release of the 2022 NAEP results. At the meeting, feedback was shared to the Governing Board, including recommendations on areas of policy, research, and communications related to the TUDA program. This meeting was also used to share strategies for communicating out 2022 NAEP results with various stakeholders. Task Force members discussed the importance of

properly messaging NAEP 2022 results, the importance of NAEP and testing in the midst of COVID. District leaders also discussed the challenges of the January administration of NAEP in their districts, providing insights and thoughts on how NAEP can innovate in the future. The agenda and list of attendees at the October meeting are provided below.

The next TUDA task force meeting will be held March 17, 2023, in Washington, DC, the day before the Council's Legislative Conference. The Council was granted an optional year to complete TUDA task force activities through the end of the 2023 year.



**Council of the Great City Schools
& National Assessment Governing Board**



Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) Policy Task Force

Tuesday, October 18, 2022

Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress
1 Grand Cypress Blvd, Orlando, FL 32836

Agenda

9:00 – 9:15am	Welcome Remarks <i>Lesley Muldoon, Executive Director, National Assessment Governing Board (Governing Board)</i> <i>Ray Hart, Executive Director, Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS)</i>
9:15 – 10:15am	Introductions and District Updates from Task Force Members <i>Akisha Osei Sarfo, Director of Research, CGCS</i>
10:15 – 10:30 am	<i>Break</i>
10:30 – 11:00am	TUDA Selection for 2024 Administration <i>Lesley Muldoon, Governing Board</i> <i>Matthew Stern, Assistant Director of Policy and Intergovernmental Affairs, Governing Board</i>
11:00 – 11:30	NAEP Long-Term Trend Assessment Results: Reading and Mathematics <i>Laura LoGerfo, Assistant Director for Reporting & Analysis, Governing Board</i>
11:30 – 1:00pm	<i>Break for lunch on your own</i>
1:00 – 1:20pm	2023 IES Math Summit <i>Denise Walston and Akisha Osei Sarfo, CGCS</i>
1:20 – 2:20pm	Interpreting NAEP Results <i>Akisha Osei Sarfo and Chester Holland, CGCS</i>
2:20 – 2:35pm	<i>Break</i>
2:35 – 3:05pm	Contextual Results to Understand Learning Experiences During COVID-19 <i>Ebony Walton, NCES</i>
3:05 – 3:55pm	Messaging NAEP Results <i>Akisha Osei Sarfo and Tonya Harris, CGCS</i>
3:55 – 4:00pm	Closing Remarks <i>Akisha Osei Sarfo, CGCS and Matthew Stern, NAGB</i>
4:00 pm	<i>Adjourn</i>

TUDA Task Force Participants

Megan Lovinguth
Director of Assessments

Denver Public Schools

Lisa Herring
Superintendent
Atlanta Public Schools

Whitney Oakley
Superintendent/Chief Academic Officer
Guilford County Schools

Theresa D. Jones
Chief Achievement & Accountability Officer
Baltimore City Public Schools

Apryl Clarkson
Director of Research, Office of Data and Accountability
Boston Public Schools

Monica Armenta
Executive Director, Communications
Albuquerque Public Schools

Barbara Griffith
Senior Communications Officer
Fort Worth Independent School District

Chrystal Wilson
Assistant Superintendent of Communications
Detroit Public Schools Community District

Tonya Wolford
Chief, Evaluation, Research and Accountability
The School District of Philadelphia

NAEP 2022 RESULTS AND COMMUNICATION GUIDE

NAEP 2022 results were released on Monday, October 24th. In preparation for the release, the CGCS research team attended the NAEP pre-release workshop to provide districts with support in interpreting their results and messaging results to their stakeholders.

Given the nature of the 2022 NAEP data for TUDA districts—the first TUDA data since COVID—members of the TUDA Task Force made requests for guidance in interpreting results and developing appropriate, accurate, useful messaging. As a result, the Council, along with the National Assessment Governing Board, convened a small group of

research and communication directors from TUDA districts to develop a communication guide for all TUDA districts. This guidebook provides guidance on how to approach and frame messaging of NAEP 2022 results and future NAEP administrations, given differing result scenarios. Preliminary findings from this meeting were shared with attendees of NCES's pre-release workshop. The final communication guide was disseminated across TUDA districts and is attached.

NAEP DASHBOARDS

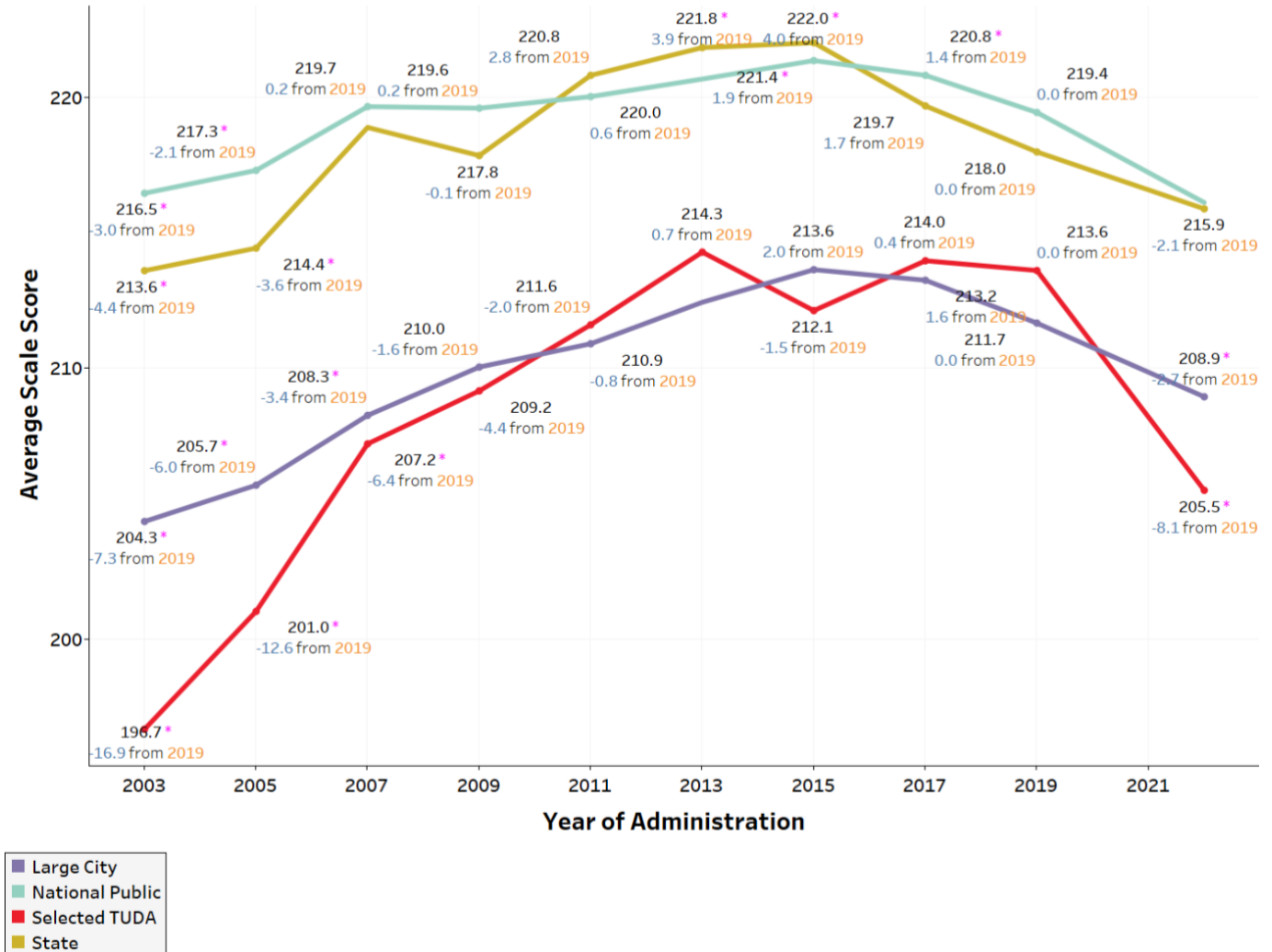
The Council's Research team has finalized the development of NAEP specific dashboards that allow users to examine and compare NAEP performance over time and across other jurisdictions. These dashboards allow users to examine performance among TUDAs and States as well as allow for group comparisons within jurisdiction. There are two separate dashboards based on the type of NAEP measure of performance (scale score and proficiency levels).

These dashboards respond to the needs of our districts for more usable ways to understand NAEP performance. They intend to advance the use of NAEP data across our districts as well as within the Council, making it easier to visualize and examine change and differences in NAEP scores as well as to identify areas of growth and improvement. These dashboards, when triangulated with other sources of information, are particularly helpful in discussions with TUDA districts on their student performance and aid the Council in making recommendations for improvement.

These dashboards will be released publicly on our website in March 2023. A series of trainings will be conducted throughout the year with research directors from TUDA districts to enhance and encourage the use of these dashboards. Below we provide several screenshots of the scale score dashboards. Below are screenshots of both the scale score and proficiency level dashboards.

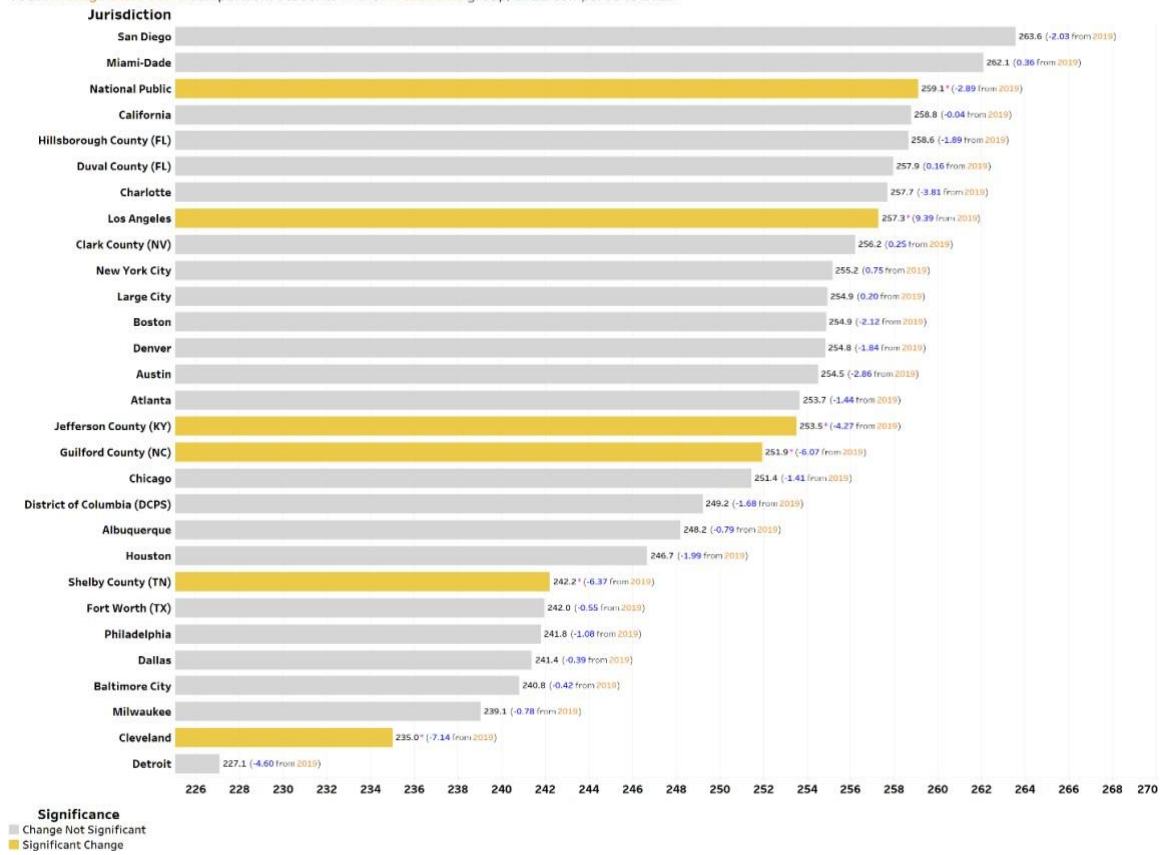
TUDA Scale Score Longitudinal Dashboard

Longitudinal Comparison of **Average Scale Score** to NAEP **Reading** assessment results from **2019**, **Fourth** grade students in the **All students** group.



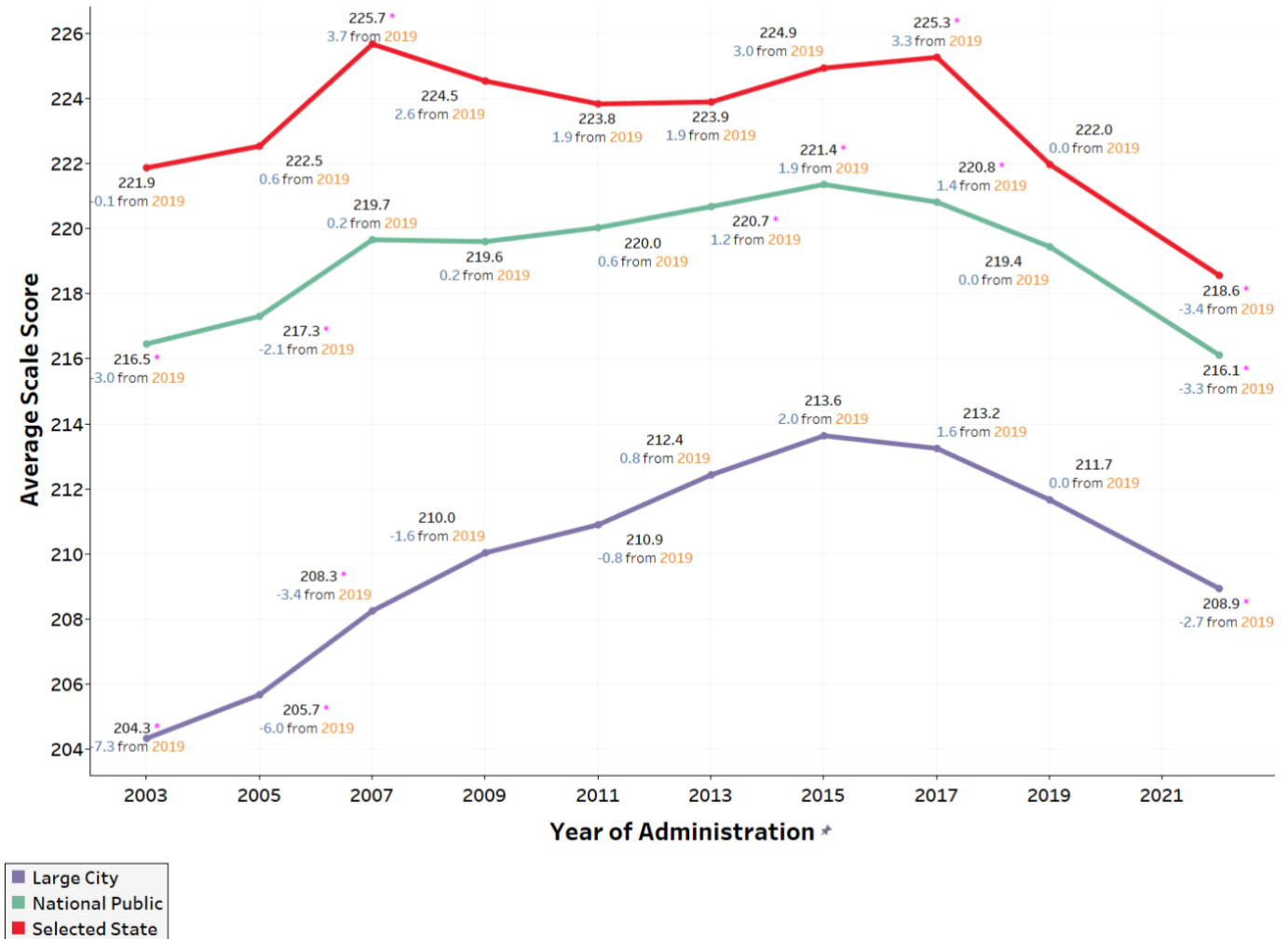
TUDA Scale Score Comparison Dashboard

TUDA **Average Scale Score** Comparison: Students in the **All students** group, 2022 Compared to 2019



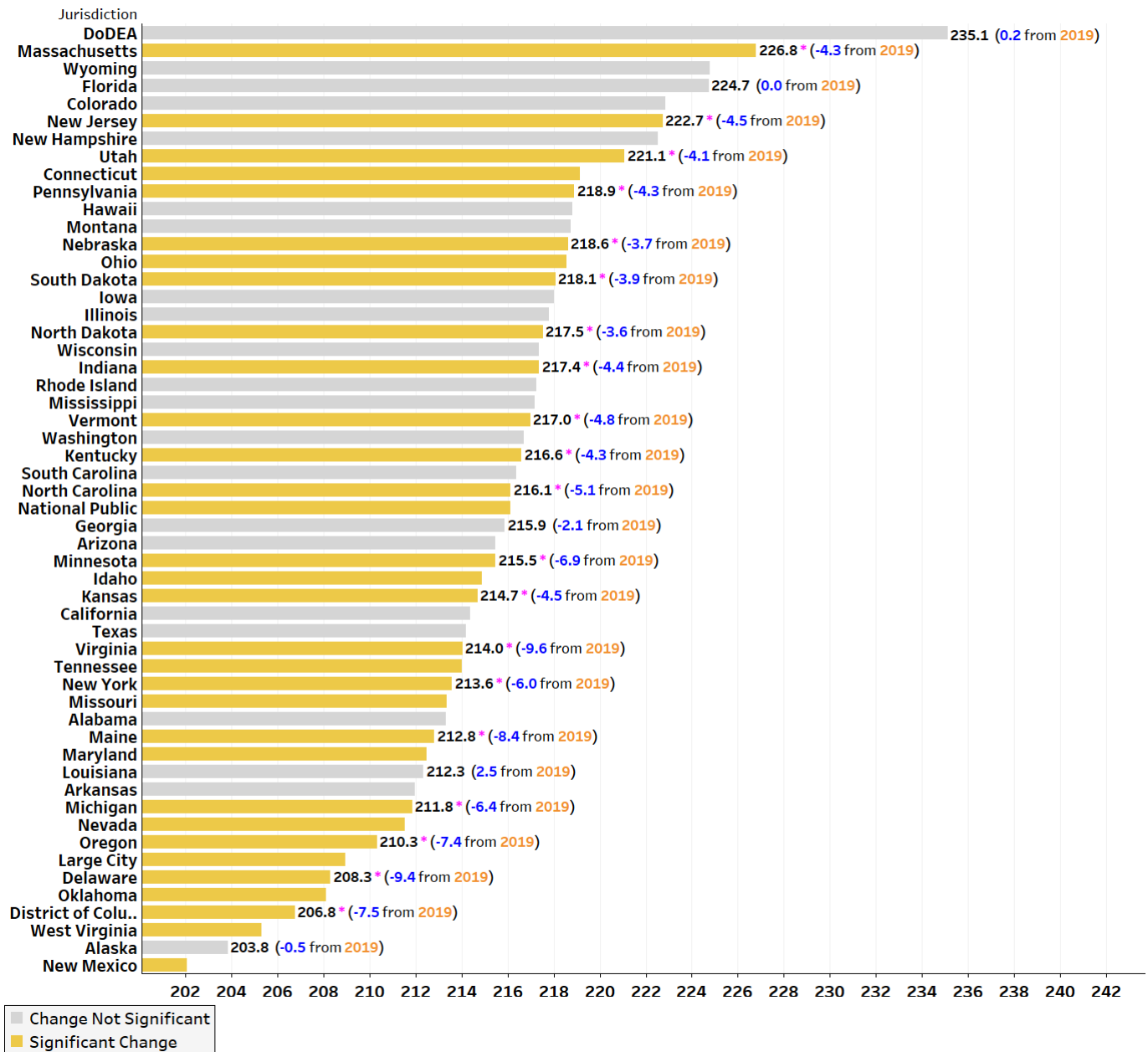
State Scale Score Longitudinal Dashboard

Longitudinal Comparison of **Average Scale Score** to NAEP assessment results from **2019**, **Fourth** grade students in the **All students** group.

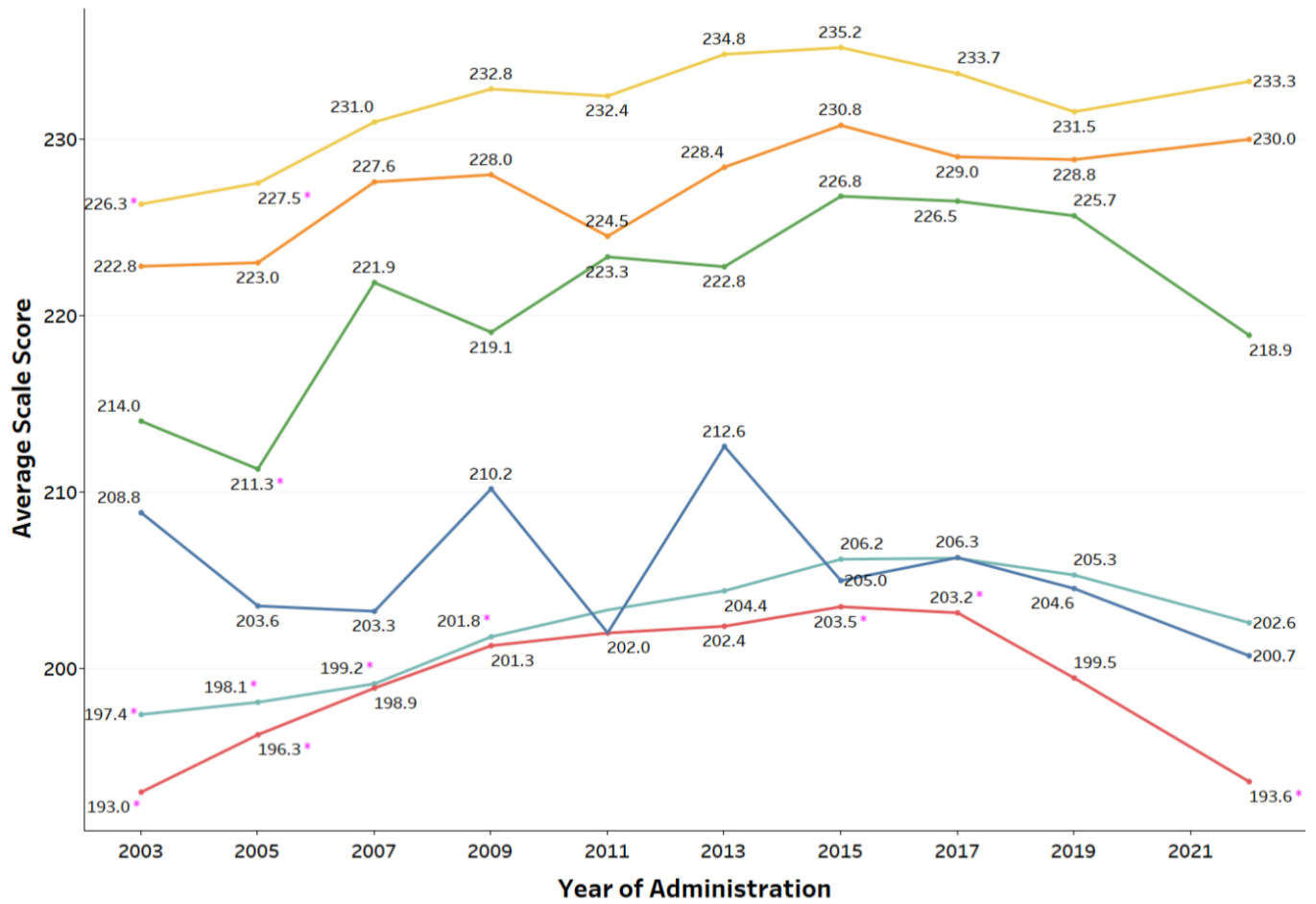


State Scale Score Comparison Dashboard

State **Average Scale Score** Comparison: Students in the **All students** group, **2022** Compared to **2019**



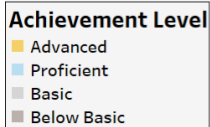
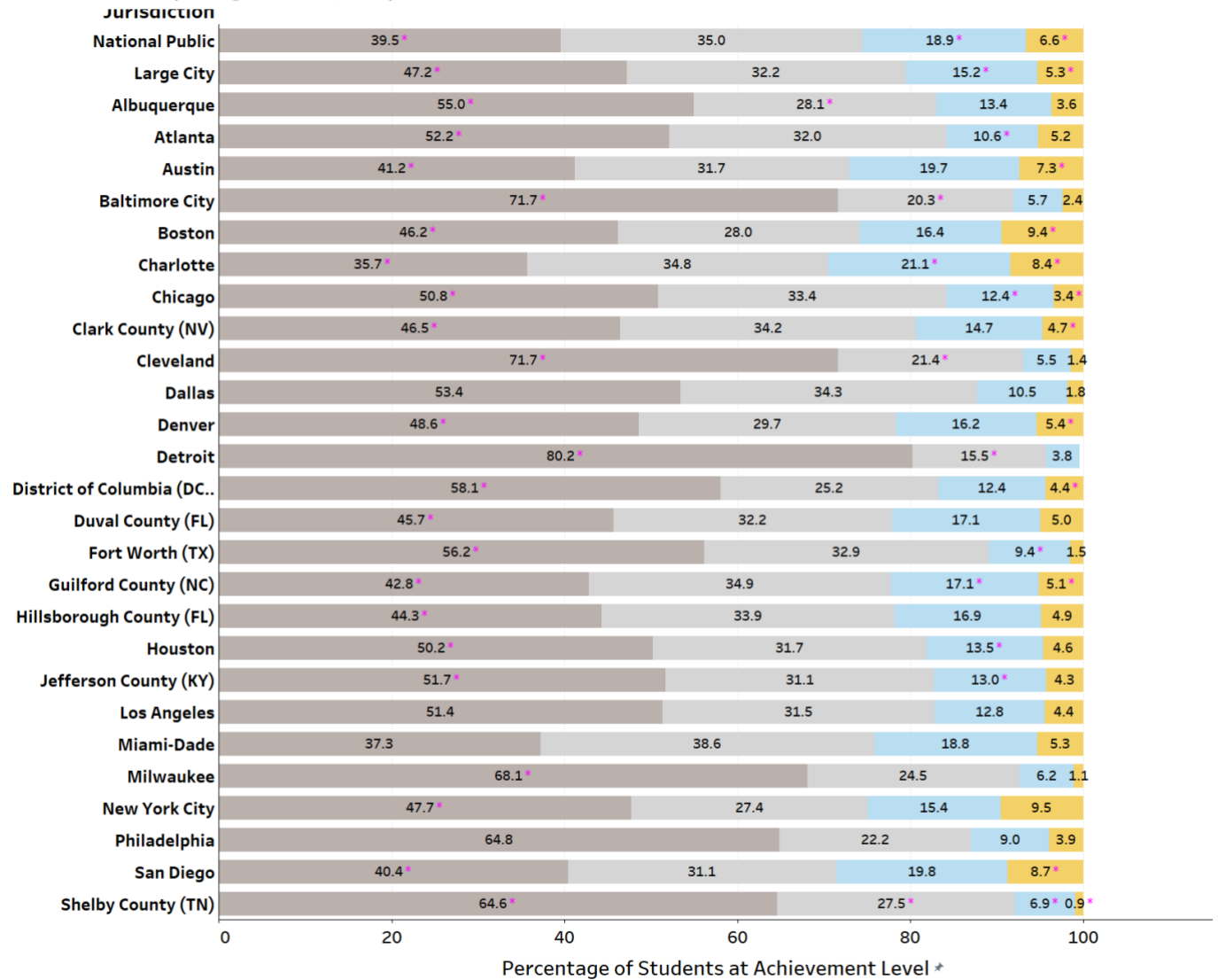
Scale Score Group Comparison Dashboard



TUDA Comparison of Achievement Levels

2022 Administration of the NAEP Mathematics Assessment

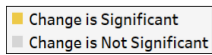
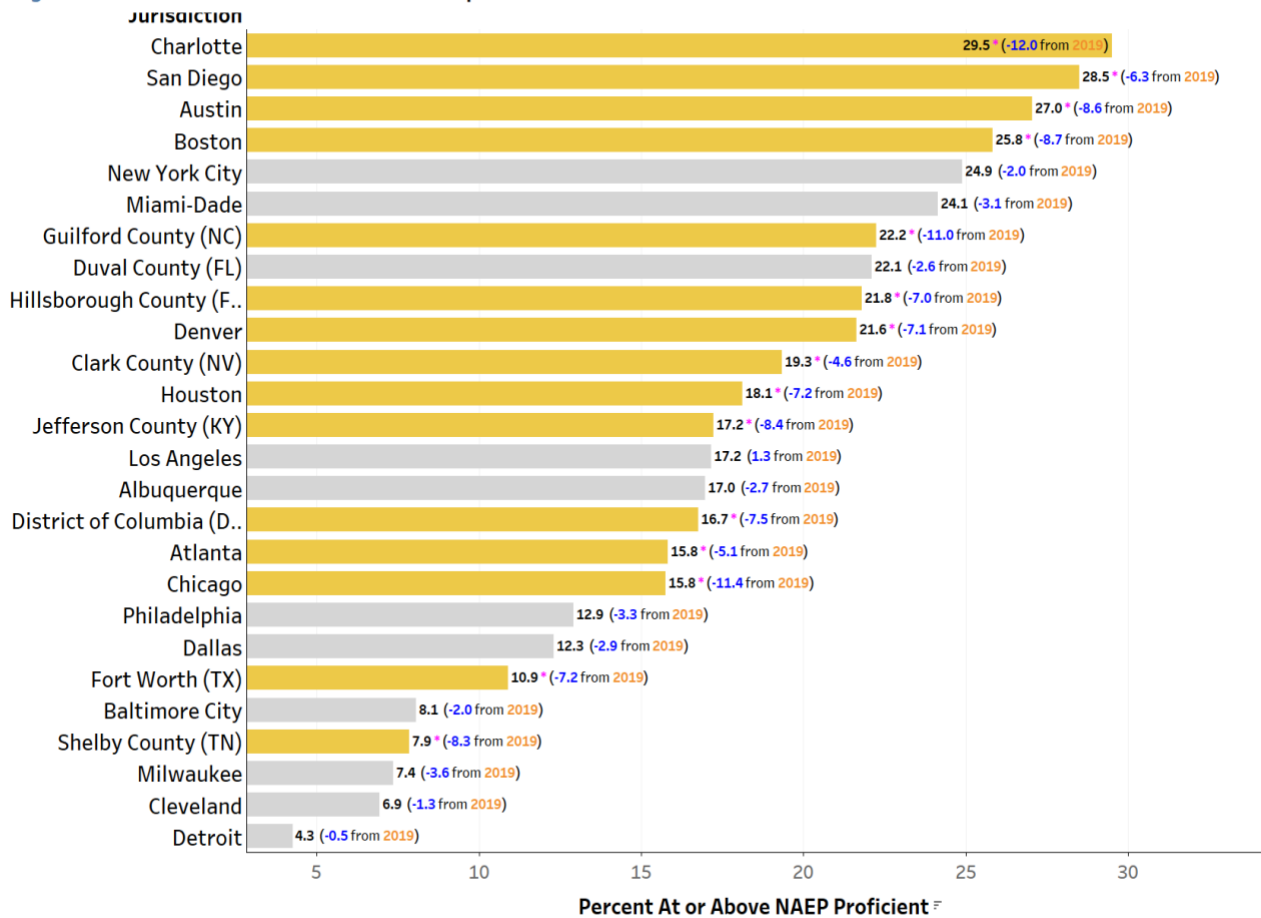
All Students Group in Eighth Grade, Compared to 2019



TUDA NAEP Proficiency Rate Comparison

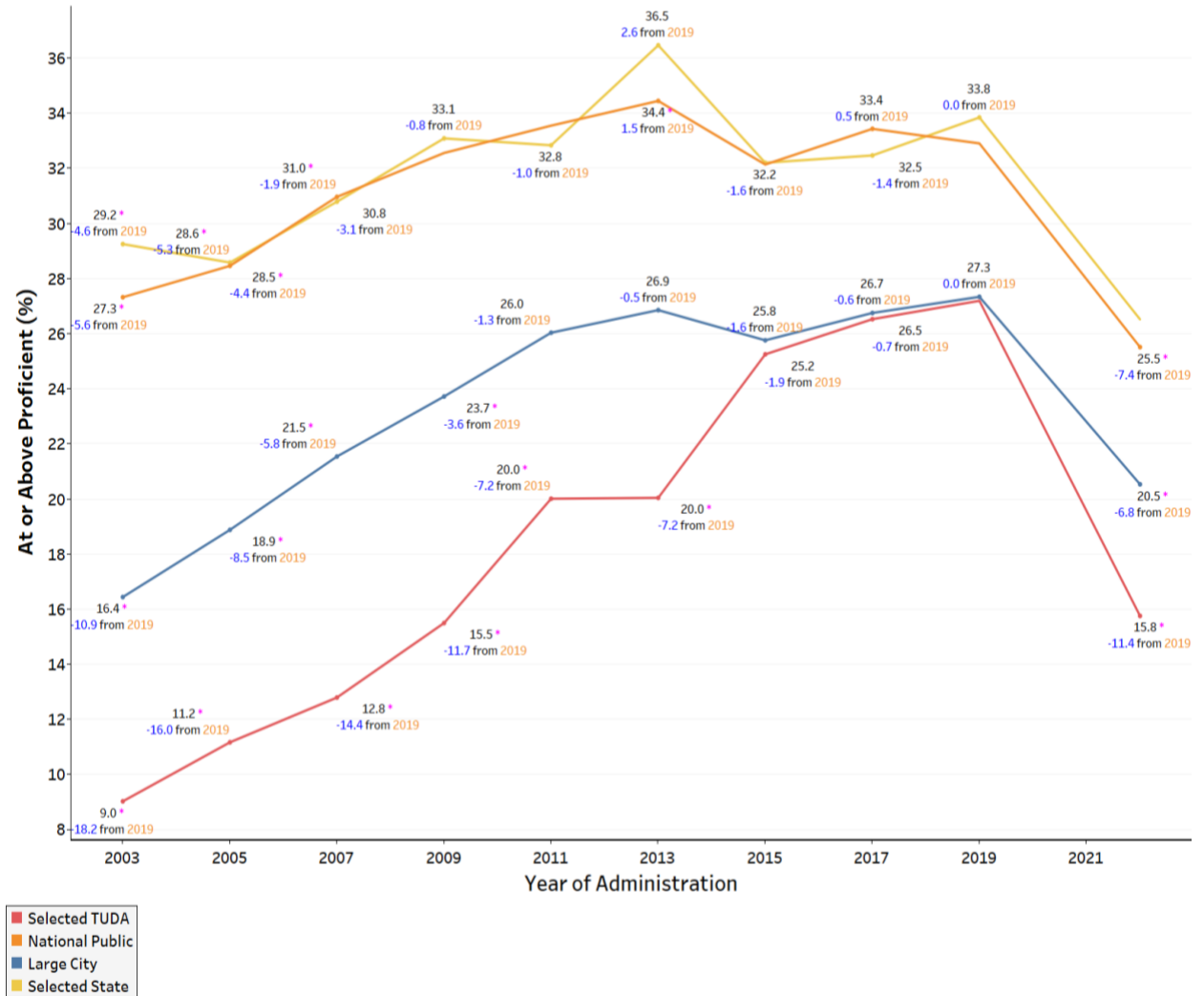
2022 Administration of the **Mathematics** Assessment Compared to **2019**

Eighth Grade Students in the All Students Group



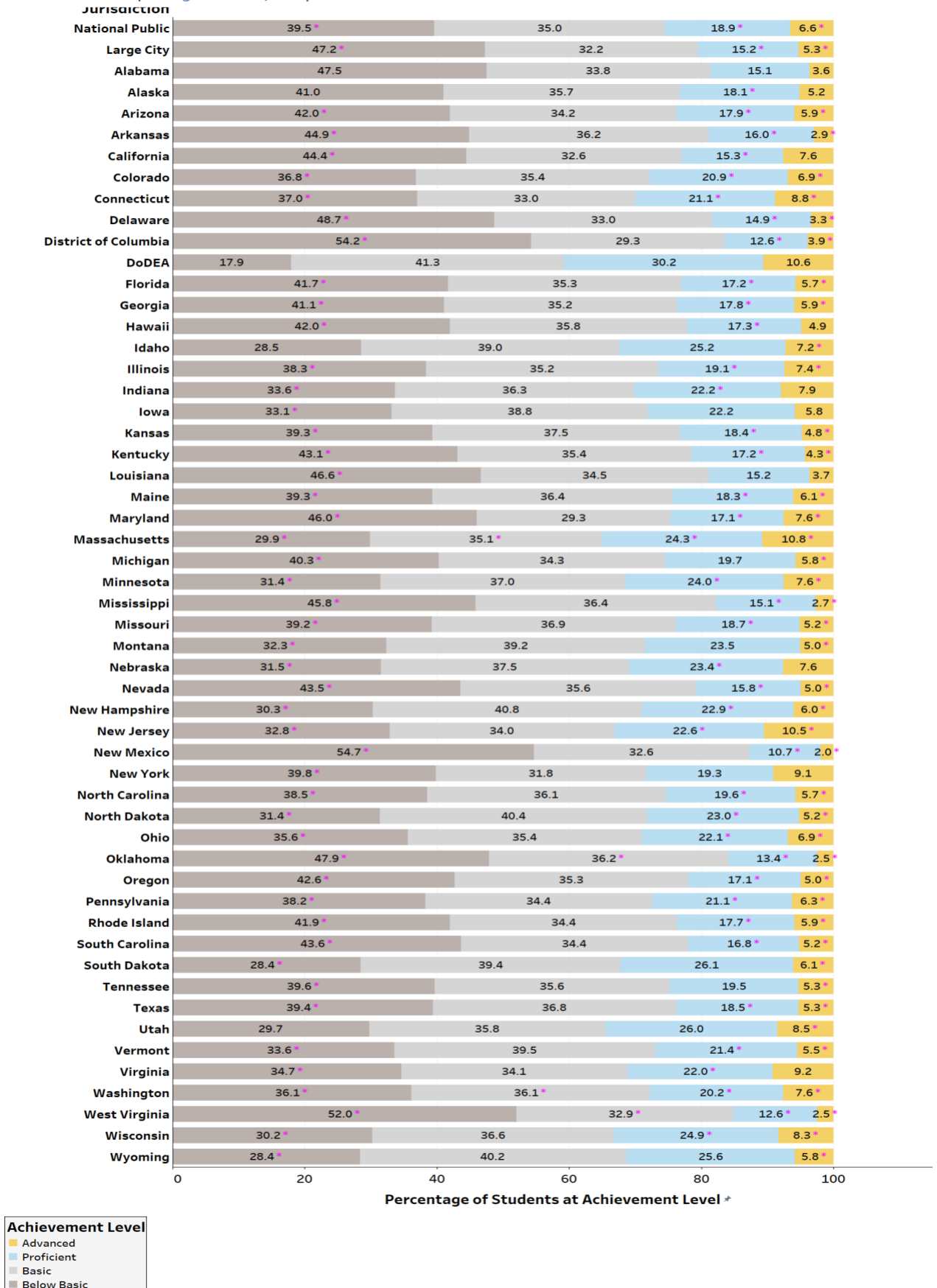
TUDA Proficiency Level Dashboard

Percentage of **Eighth** Grade Students in the **All Students** Group
Performing **At or Above NAEP Proficient** on **Mathematics** Assessment, Compared to **2019**



State Comparison of Achievement Levels

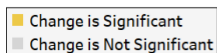
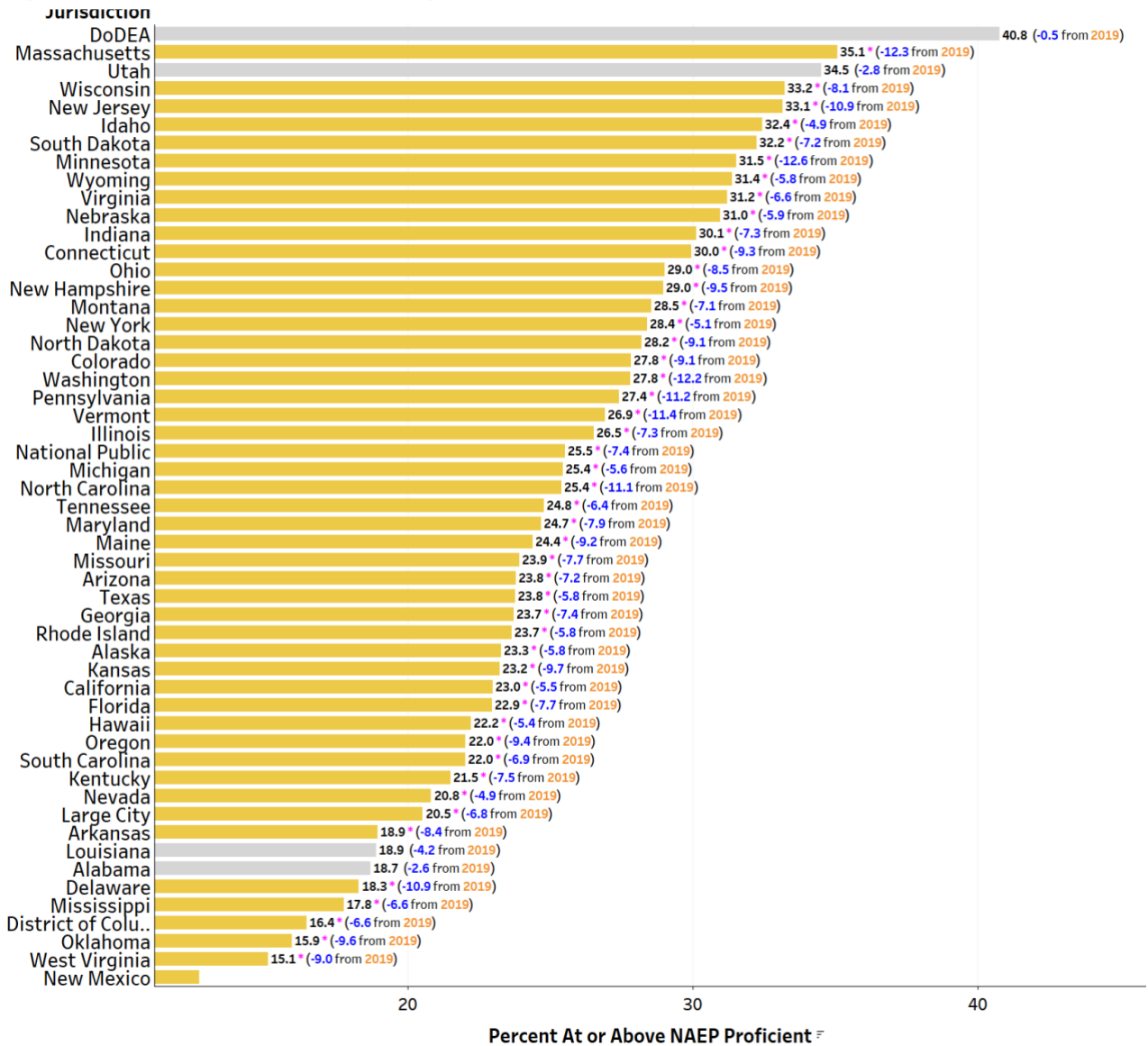
2022 Administration of the NAEP Mathematics Assessment
All Students Group in Eighth Grade, Compared to 2019



State NAEP Proficiency Rate Comparison

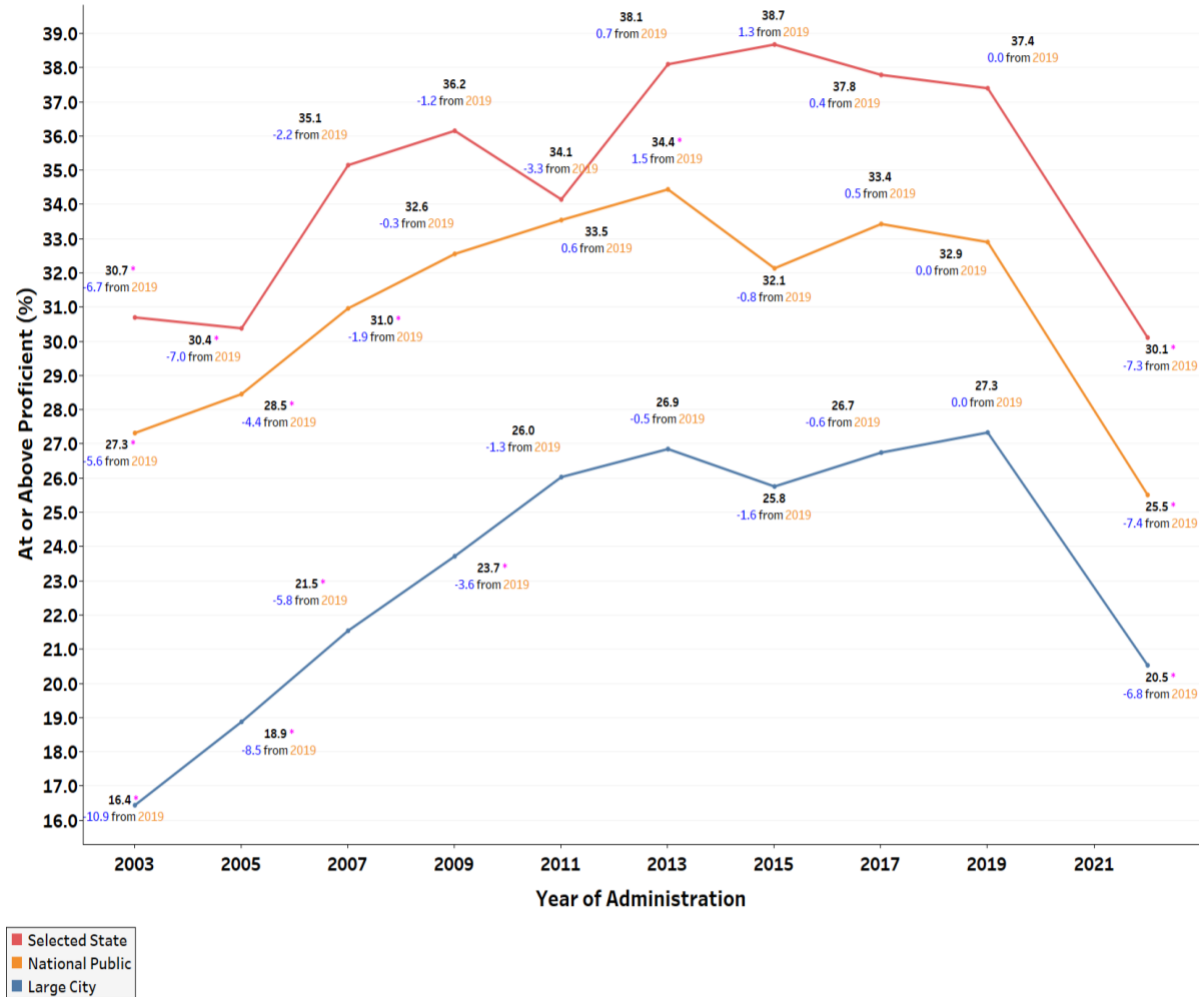
2022 Administration of the Mathematics Assessment Compared to 2019

Eighth Grade Students in the All Students Group

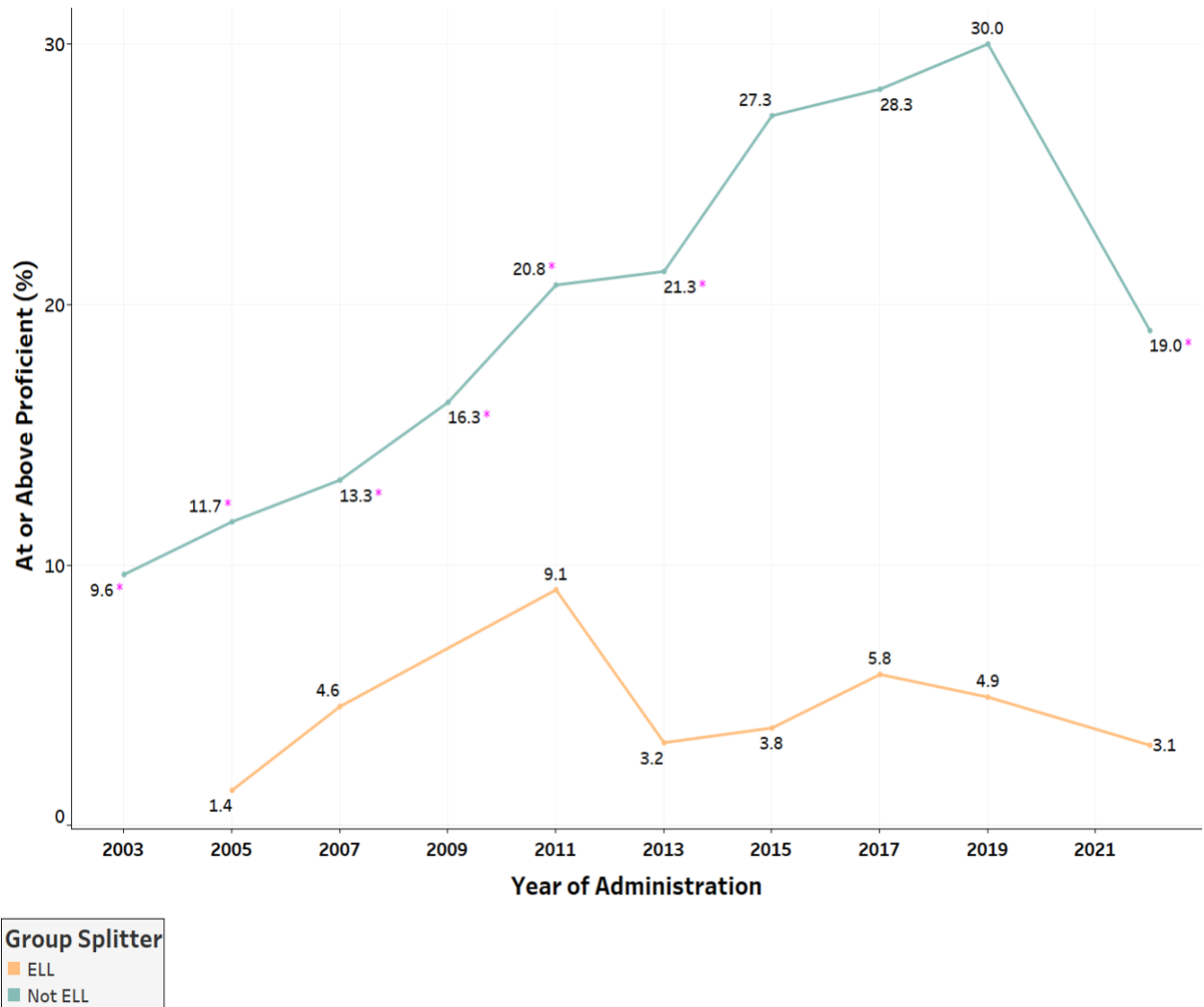


State Proficiency Rate Dashboard

Percentage of Eighth Grade Students in the All Students Group
Performing At or Above NAEP Proficient on Mathematics Assessment, Compared to 2019



Group Comparison Proficiency Rate Dashboard



Building Capacity for Evidence-Informed Improvement in Educational Agencies

In early 2022, the Council's Director of Research, Akisha Osei Sarfo, along with researchers from the University of Delaware, San Francisco Unified School District, the Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER), and the National Network of Education Research Practice Partnerships convened over 60 local and state agency research office leaders to discuss and share the work of advancing evidence-informed improvement across their agencies. These conversations grew out of several conversations among CGCS research directors as well as growing interest outside of the

Council to better understand the work and challenges of knowledge brokering and use in LEAs and SEAs. These conversations culminated into a recently released report on how to build capacity for evidence-informed improvement in education agencies designed to give education leaders and policymakers a better understanding of the work of research offices and their importance in leading and leveraging the use of evidence in decision-making. A The final report, *Building Capacity for Evidence-Informed Improvement: Supporting State and Local Education Agencies*, is attached.

Update on On-Going Projects

New ESSER Survey

The research department along with the legislative team, have developed a new ESSER survey designed to gather information on ESSER expenditures, spending and impact. More specifically, the data looks at ESSER I (CARES), ESSER II (CRRSA) and ESSER III (ARP) expenditures related to human resources, facilities, operations, as well as academic programming and support. At the end of the survey, respondents will have the opportunity to provide evidence of impact related to these efforts as well as express concerns related to the delivery and barriers to spending the funds. The survey will be administered to district superintendents and CFOs by the end of January. We will provide districts 2 months to respond to the survey.

A draft of the survey is attached. Please note that we are continuing to refine the definitions included in the survey so that they are clear and there is no overlap. We will also be adding additional questions to the survey to better understand spending practices, recovery strategies, and plans moving forward.

Operations Key Performance Indicators and Report

The board of directors authorized the development of Operations Key Performance Indicators in 2002 and the Academic Key Performance Indicators in the 2014. Several teams of educators from Council member districts crafted a list of desired indicators for operations areas including business services, finance, human resources, and technology. The Council started requesting data for the operations key performance indicators, *Managing for Results in America's Great City Schools 2022*. This report was finalized and distributed at the October 2022 Fall Conference. You can find a copy of the report attached.

Academic Key Performance Indicators Data Collection and Report

On the academic side, we collected data on several academic areas including general core instruction, special education, and English language learners. The refined set of Academic Key Performance Indicators are designed to measure the progress among the Council's membership toward improving the academic outcomes for students and include the following:

- Ninth grade algebra completion
- Ninth graders failing one or more core courses
- Ninth graders with a GPA of B or better
- Number of high school students enrolled in advanced placement
- AP exam scores of 3 or higher
- Number of high school students enrolled in AP-equivalent courses
- Four-year high school graduation rate
- Five-year high school graduation rate
- Percent of students with 20 days or more absent from school
- Instructional days per student missed per year due to suspension
- Percent of students identified as needing special education
- Percent of students placed in each general education setting by percent of time

The research team started collecting 2020-21 Key Performance Indicator data for the 2022 KPI Academic report in February of 2022. Districts were asked to provide data on high school student performance, attendance, discipline as well as special education and ELL student demographics and performance. For this year's data collection, an additional tab of data was added on teacher and principal demographics intended to better understand the diversity of teachers and school leaders in our districts. Several extensions were given to districts to submit their data with consideration for the additional stresses on districts during this pandemic. We received 57 responses to our academic KPI data collection request for this year. The final *Academic Key Performance Indicators 2022* report was released at the annual fall conference in October 2022 and can be found [here](#). The most recent academic KPI dashboards can be found on www.edwires.org.

Academic KPI Dashboards

The Council developed a series of dashboards that allow users to explore the Academic KPI data beyond what is available in the paper version of the report. In total, the Academic KPI dashboard includes over one million data points to produce over 200,000 indicators. The dashboards introduce the ability to parse the indicators by student group, over time, and between districts with similar demographics. The Council's research team has produced three dashboards to date: a dashboard containing the high school, discipline, and attendance indicators; one containing the special education indicators on risk ratios and educational settings; and one which specifically looks at ELL high school, discipline and attendance indicators. The Academic KPI dashboards are securely and confidentially available at EdWires.org.

The dashboards allow for longitudinal comparisons among districts who have submitted survey data across multiple years. Another feature of the dashboard is the ability for districts to compare themselves to peer groups. Peer groups are defined as those districts that have similar student demographics, i.e., district enrollment, FRPL eligibility, ELL status and race/ethnicity. Peer groups allow districts to compare themselves not only to *all*

Council districts, but more specifically to Council member districts that share common demographics. The newest benefit of the dashboard is its ability to compared two KPI data points at one time. This allows for more intersections to be made with the data.

The special education dashboard allows districts to see the likelihood that a student will be identified for a specific disability. Districts can also see the likelihood that a SPED student will be educated in a certain environment. These likelihoods can all be disaggregated by race, gender, FRPL status, and ELL status.

The ELL dashboard allows districts to compare the performance of ELLs in their district to other Council urban school districts and to CGCS as an aggregate. The dashboard reports on Key Performance Indicators in three areas Key Performance Indicators in 3 areas: High School Indicators, attendance and discipline. It also allows you to explore the relationship between KPIs and among districts with similar demographics. Below is an overview of the dashboard. The research team will continue to work with the ELL department on ways we can enhance the use of the ELL dashboard in terms of both data and functionality. In addition to the ELL dashboard, the Research team is developing a dashboard that will visualize and filter on the top languages spoken across our Council districts by location in a map of the United States. All academic, ELL and special education dashboards were updated with 2020-21 data and released in October 2022 and can be found at www.edwires.org.

Information Technology Update

The Council is continuing its work on new collaboration tools for member district personnel. These new tools allow member district employees to share documents and communicate with each other. This upgrade will bring many new features and a better user experience for member district employees on the platform. Chief among these upgrades is a new forum to improve upon existing listserv communication. On the forum, members can privately message each other for one-on-one discussions, post to job-alike groups, and share files with each other. Additionally, any documents shared in forum discussions will automatically be saved in a searchable database for members to review later. These great discussions features are not limited to the forum, however. Users can subscribe to job-alike groups to get email updates when new forum posts go up. For maximum convenience, users can also respond to forum posts via email.

To offer these new collaboration tools to members, The Council is also updating its internal databases. These database upgrades will aggregate data about all the unique ways that member districts interact with The Council. Some of these data points include conference attendance metrics and member activity on the new forum. With this new data, The Council will be able to determine what activities member districts find most valuable and what needs we can address in the future for member districts. This will also allow The Council to report data back more efficiently to member districts. We are excited to see what new and innovative services we can offer our members once we have access to this data.

Initial development of the new technology systems is complete. The Council is now conducting internal testing with staff to improve the user experience. Once The Council has ensured the software is secure and user friendly, we will begin phasing in pilot groups of member district staff. Finally, after pilot groups have tested the software and provided feedback, The Council will release the software to all member district staff.

Bi-Weekly Research and Assessment Director Calls

The Council of the Great City Schools began meeting weekly with Research, Evaluation, and Assessment Directors on March 24, 2020 to discuss key decisions and plans given the unprecedented national circumstances associated with Covid-19. CGCS thought it might be useful to provide a forum by which directors could talk in a safe space with colleagues across the country about how they are handling the research and assessment issues that have emerged as districts and states deal with COVID-19. We continue to discuss key issues that arise. In October 2020, Zoom meetings transitioned to every other Tuesday, at 1:00 PM EST. Recent questions for our conversations are listed below:

- How has enrollment in your districts changed from last year to this year? How much of district enrollment is lost to neighboring charter and private schools, if any? What strategies are districts using to maintain and increase student enrollment?
- Why are science scores down? What strategies are being used to address declining scores?
- How are districts measuring student mobility?
- Research department roles in developing strategic plans and goals?
- Debrief on how districts can support evidence-use cultures in districts

Monthly Chief Performance Officer Conference Calls

In December of 2022, the Council launched their first Chief Performance Officer call to support leaders in these roles across our districts. As a collective, meeting topics and content will be built to develop a knowledge base of the skills and needs of chiefs and a better understanding of the work and challenges to those working in these positions. Meetings with chiefs will be held monthly.

Assessment Consortia

The Council recently launched three assessment consortia for districts who use NWEA MAP assessments, Curriculum Associates iReady assessments and/or Renaissance Star assessments. These consortia were birthed out of the need for districts to have data CGCS member district assessment data to understand member district performance and growth pre- and post-pandemic. These data allow districts to benchmark their students' academic performance against similar districts, to set strategic annual targets and monitor their

progress throughout the pandemic and beyond. The power of collaboration under the Council is that pooling our resources together allow for more meaningful data specific to the needs of our districts.

In addition to pooling and analyzing assessment data in these consortia, time is spent sharing best practices and growing as users of the assessment platforms. Through these discussions, the Council learns more about the challenges our districts face in assessing students and factors we must consider as we measure student outcomes. Each assessment consortium meets monthly. To date, 20 member districts participate in the NWEA consortia, 16 member districts participate in the Curriculum Associates consortia, and 14 member districts participate in the Renaissance consortia, recognizing that not all districts use these assessments and others have implemented them at various degrees. Meetings thus far have focused on the different ways in which our districts administer the assessment, assessment data use, challenges with implementation and product development, differences in student performance and ways and which data can be shared within each consortia.

RAND Corporation and CGCS American School District Panel (ASDP)

This year, the Council continues their partnership with RAND Corporation to provide leaders with an opportunity to share their perspectives and contribute to decisions about education policy and practice. The first American School District Panel (ASDP) survey was conducted in the fall of 2020 with over 55% of Council member districts completing the survey which inquired about their fall COVID-19 response. Four additional surveys have since been administered (Winter 2021, Summer 2021, Fall 2021, and Spring 2022).

The Spring 2022 survey, administered from February to April 2022, was used to understand superintendent job satisfaction and career plans as well as challenges with staffing, political polarization and unfinished learning. 40 CGCS districts responded to this survey. Key findings from the spring 2022 survey are highlighted throughout several [reports](#). The Fall 2022 administration of the American School District Panel (ASDP) Survey was administered from October through December and covered topics such as school staffing and staffing shortages, navigating current events, and mathematics instruction in your district.

The Spring 2023 survey was launched on March 1, 2023 and covers topics related to math instruction, procurement, afterschool programs, and the superintendent's career.

Equity-Centered Principal Initiative with the Wallace Foundation

CGCS continues to partner with the Wallace Foundation to support the development of equity-centered school leaders through the [Equity-Centered Principal Initiative](#) in 8 large, high-needs districts, 7 of which are member districts – Baltimore City, Columbus City, District of Columbia, Fresno, Jefferson County, Portland, and San Antonio. The Equity-Centered Pipeline Initiative (ECPI) is designed to develop school leaders who will embrace and advance the equity vision of each district. Understanding the critical role of school boards in supporting major district initiatives such as ECPI, the Council's role in the project is to advance and support school board member engagement in this work,

among these districts. More information about the research study, the work of the districts and the supports they will receive can be found [here](#).

Strategic Plan Progress Monitoring Guide

At the request of CGCS research directors, the Council convened a small group of research directors to develop a guide for strategic plan goal setting and progress monitoring. In this conversation, the group highlighted several topics and considerations to be covered in the guide (see list below). This guide will build off of the strategic planning guidance developed by the Council's director of governance with specific guidance for research directors, who often play significant roles in the strategic planning process. A final version of the guide will be available by Fall 2023.

- Which key measures should be considered in strategic goals? How to determine your baseline metric? How to determine interim goals/metrics?
- What are the measures? How to determine which metrics to use in a strategic plan? Are they valid and reliable?
- What to do when districts are void of historical or comparison data?
- When should districts get research departments involved in strategic planning - at what point?
- Should strategic plan goals align with school improvement goals?
- What kinds of feedback loops should be established?
- When to adjust or change goals?

Equity Leader Playbook

At the request of our district equity leaders, the Council is developing an equity leader playbook that will provide as a guide to working as an equity leader in a large city school district. The playbook can be used a tool for equity leaders and other district leaders to drive equity throughout the district and push change in policy. The playbook will address questions such as the following:

- What does it mean to be successful in this role?
- What are some of the barriers to the work of equity leaders in large city districts?
- How can districts leverage the work of equity leaders to accelerate change and improve outcomes?

CGCS equity leaders are currently developing the playbook during our monthly meetings. They will guide the content, outcomes, and delivery of the playbook.

NAEP Item Analysis

Council staff conducted an item response analysis of math and reading items from the 2022 NAEP results. The purpose of the analysis was to understand response choices and patterns to assessment items to help understand instructional and learning gaps. Several items were selected for analysis including 4th and 8th grade items as well as items of easy and hard difficulty levels. Response choices are examined by jurisdiction, as well as racial, gender and economic student groups.

Results from the analysis demonstrate that response patterns differ across groups and jurisdictions, with certain groups of students responding better to contextual items and others to procedural items. In other cases, we find that certain groups of students were more likely to select the distractor response choice than the correct response choice. The full item response analysis is attached.

Research Brief: Examining Urban District Student Performance Trends in NAEP

With the release of 2022 NAEP scores, Council staff conducted an analysis of trends in NAEP Scores and trends over time, with a specific look at the performance of students in the National Public, Large City and TUDA jurisdictions. In addition, this research brief looks at the performance of historically -marginalized students within these jurisdictions.

While, generally speaking, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted student performance across these jurisdictions from 2019 to 2022, this brief shows that students in Large Cities have been closing the gap on the performance of students in the National Public jurisdiction from 2003 to 2022, across all tested subjects and grades. Highlights in the performance of specific TUDAs and groups of students are also provided in this research brief. Council research staff plan to continue to dive deeper into examining NAEP results, including providing research briefs on ELL and SWD students, among other topics. The full research brief is attached.

DATA ON STUDENT RECOVERY

Student Recovery From the Pandemic: A Look at the Data



Akisha Osei Sarfo, PhD
Fall Conference 2022

Various Ways to Examine and Understand Student Recovery



Recently available data and evidence help answer a variety of questions around student recovery post-pandemic.

In-classroom or In-school metrics

- How are students experiencing or connecting with school and instruction?

Formative Assessments (Assessments FOR Learning)

- How are students progressing throughout the school year? What skill gaps do students have? What supports or interventions do students need?

Summative Assessments (Assessments OF Learning)

- Did students learn the materials or information that was taught?
- What achievement was made throughout the year or over a specific period of time? How is curriculum and instruction supporting student achievement?

2020-21 Key Performance Indicator Data and Dashboards

ACADEMIC KEY

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS



Council of the
Great City Schools

www.cgcs.org

REPORT
2022

2020-21 Academic KPI Performance Indicators and Trends

Brian Garcia
Chester Holland
Eric Vignola
Akisha Osei Sarfo
Ray Hart

2020-21 Academic KPI Data



- Provides a look at 2020-21 student performance and trends by district
 - 57 districts provided data for this year's KPI report.
- Allows member districts to benchmark their progress on various academic metrics.
- Each district has a unique number identifier to maintain district anonymity
- Data is available to staff in member districts in both the report and in KPI dashboards available at www.edwires.org
 - KPI Dashboards accompany our KPI report and provide over 1 million data points and various ways to disaggregate and compare data

Academic Key Performance Indicators

Pre-K Enrollment Relative to Kindergarten Enrollment	Algebra I Completion Rates for Credit by Grade 9	Ninth Grade Course Failure Rates — at Least One Core Course	Ninth Graders with B Average (GPA) or Better	Absentee Rates by Grade Level
Suspension Rates	Instructional Days Missed Per 100 Students Due to Suspensions	AP Participation Rates	AP Exam Pass Rates	Four-Year Graduation Rates

Academic KPI Report Sections

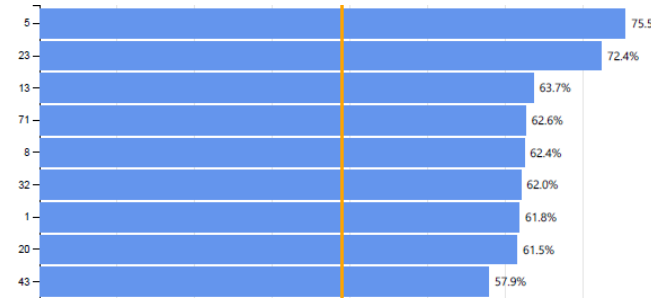
Each KPI has Several Report Sections

- 2020-21 Performance by District
- Percentage Point Change from 2017-18 to 2020-21 by District
- Trends in Data from 2017-18 to 2020-21 Grouped by Districts in Upper and Lower Quartiles
- Districts in the Best Quartile for Overall Performance
- Districts in the Best Quartile for Change in Performance

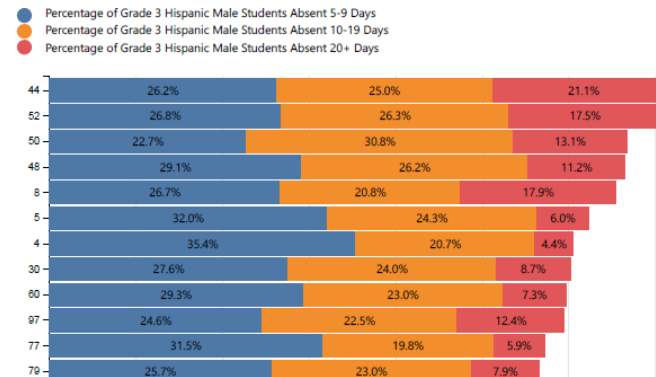
Data collected for each indicator is disaggregated and reported by race, gender, eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch, English language learner status, and special education status.



Academic KPI Report



2020-21
Performance by
District



Some KPI Data
are Reported in
Bands





Academic KPI Report

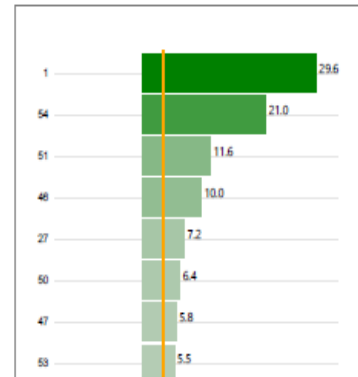
Percentage of Ninth Grade Students with B Average GPA or Better in All Grade Nine Courses

Note: Higher values and larger increases are desired

- Figure 2.25: Total number of all ninth grade Students with B average GPA or better divided by the total number of ninth grade Students, 2019-20
- Figure 2.26: Percentage Point Change in Ninth Grade Students with B Average GPA or Better in All Grade Nine Courses, 2016-17 to 2019-20
- Figure 2.27: Trends in Ninth Grade Students with B Average GPA or Better in All Grade Nine Courses, 2016-17 to 2019-20

2.27 Trends in Ninth Grade Students with B Average GPA or Better in All Grade Nine Courses, 2016-17 to 2019-20

2.26 Percentage Point Change in Ninth Grade Students with B Average GPA or Better in All Grade Nine Courses, 2016-17 to 2019-20

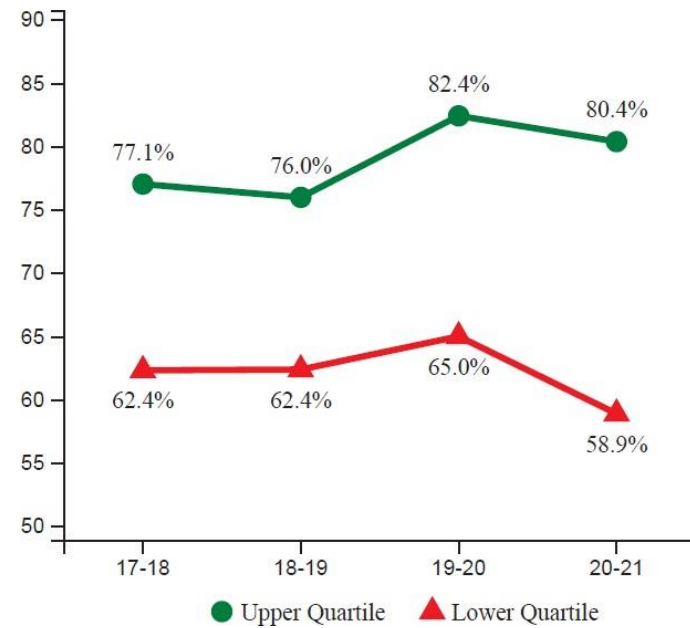


Percentage
Point Change
from 2017-18
to 2020-21





Academic KPI Report



Trends in Data from
2017-18 to 2020-21
Grouped by Districts
in Upper and Lower
Quartiles



Academic KPI Report

Districts in the Best Quartile for Overall Performance

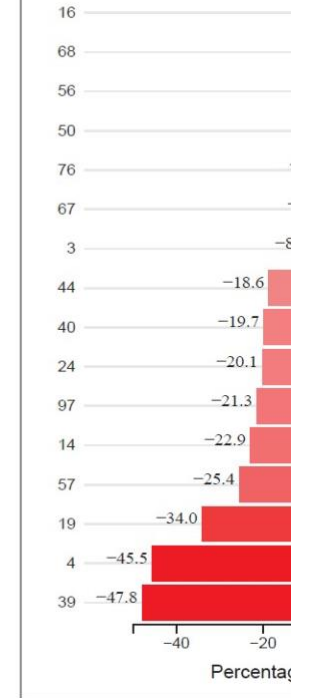


- Best Quartile for Overall Performance (2020-21)**
- Charleston
 - Chicago
 - Fayette County
 - Guilford County
 - Jackson
 - Jefferson
 - Los Angeles
 - Minneapolis
 - Newark
 - Philadelphia
 - Phoenix Union High School District
 - San Francisco
 - Seattle
 - Shelby County

Districts in the Best Quartile for Change in Performance



- Best Quartile for Change in Performance (2017-18 to 2020-21)**
- Boston
 - Cincinnati
 - Los Angeles
 - Milwaukee
 - New York
 - Newark
 - Orange County
 - Portland
 - Seattle
 - Shelby County
 - Toledo



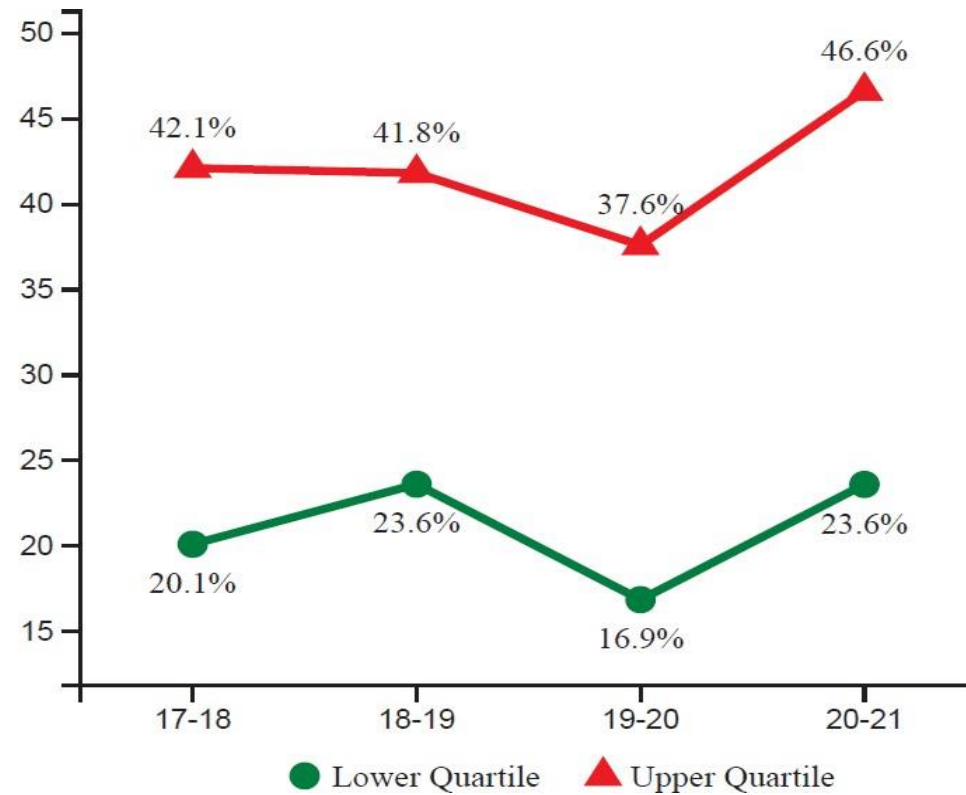
Key Findings from Academic KPIs

- We are starting to see a resetting of student performance, similar to pre-pandemic rates
- Trends from 2019-20 to 2020-21
 - Increases in course failure rates
 - Declines in Algebra I completion rates
 - Slight declines in the rate of students with GPAs of B or higher
 - Slight declines in AP exam participation
 - Declines in AP passing rates
 - In most cases, four-year cohort graduation rates hold steady
 - Continued and significant declines in suspensions and lost instructional days
- Most trends are also seen across all student groups



Trends in Ninth Grade Students who Failed One or More Core Courses

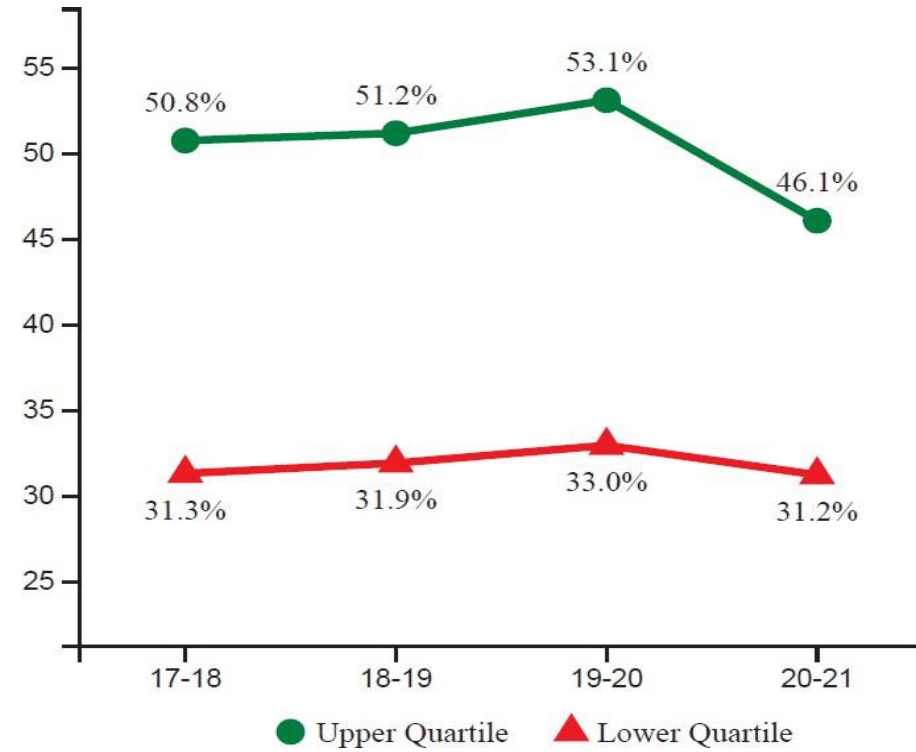
2017-18 to 2020-21





Trends in Ninth Grade Students with B Average GPA or Better in All Grade Nine Courses

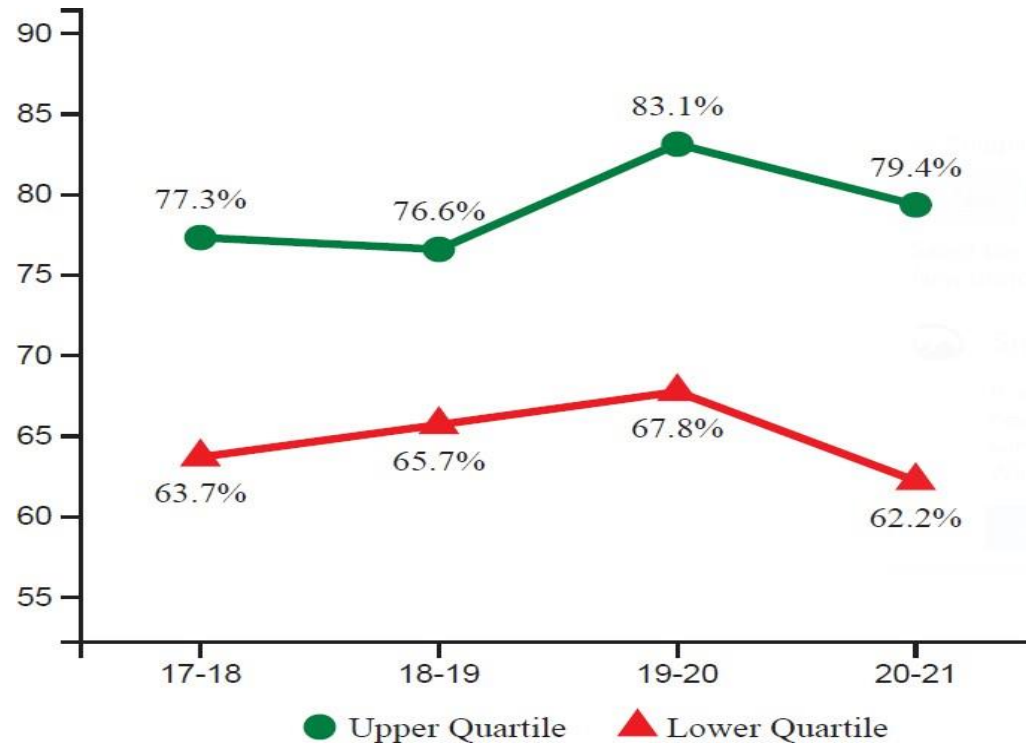
2017-18 to 2020-21





Trends in Students Who Completed Algebra I/Integrated Math by the End of Ninth Grade

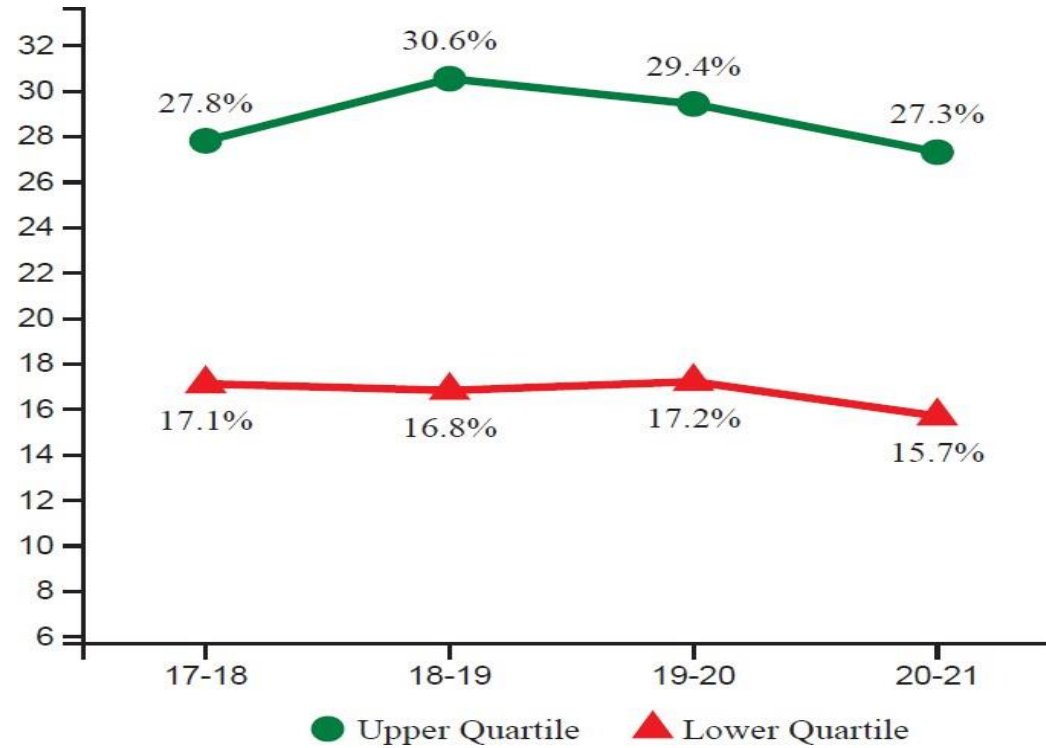
2017-18 to 2020-21





Trends in Students Who Took One or More AP Courses

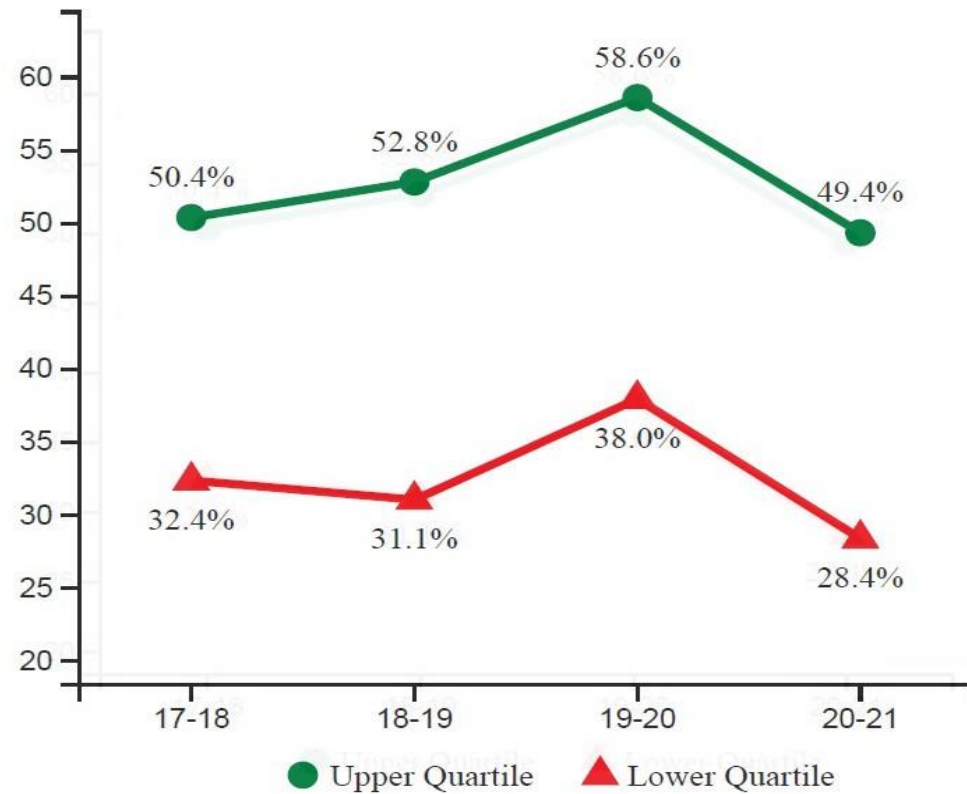
2017-18 to 2020-21





Trends in All AP Exam Scores That Were Three or Higher by Students

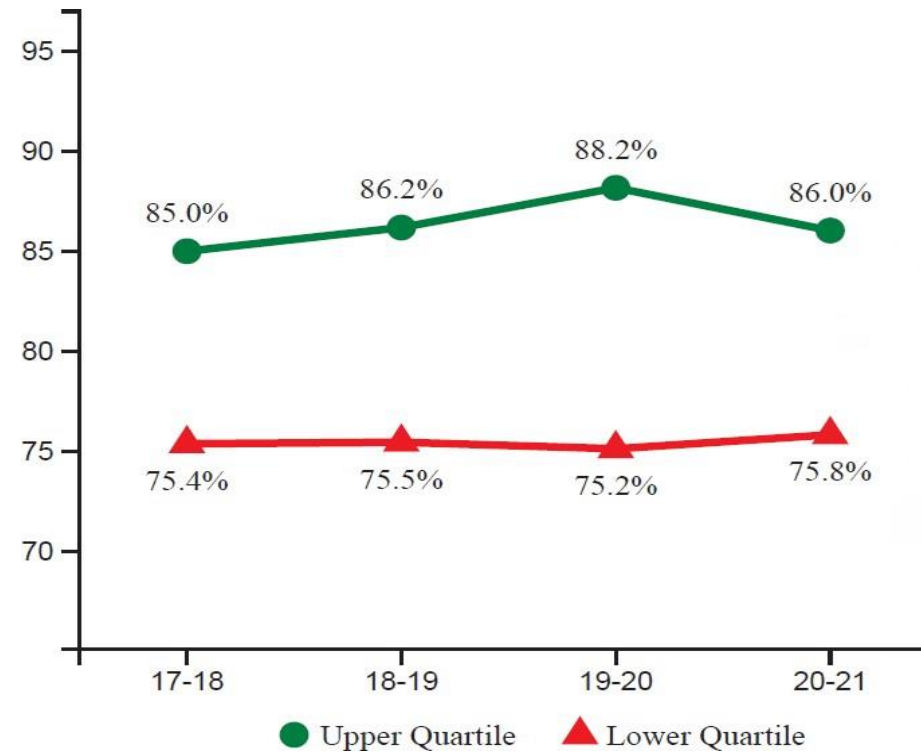
2017-18 to 2020-21





Trends in Four Year Cohort Graduation Rate for Students

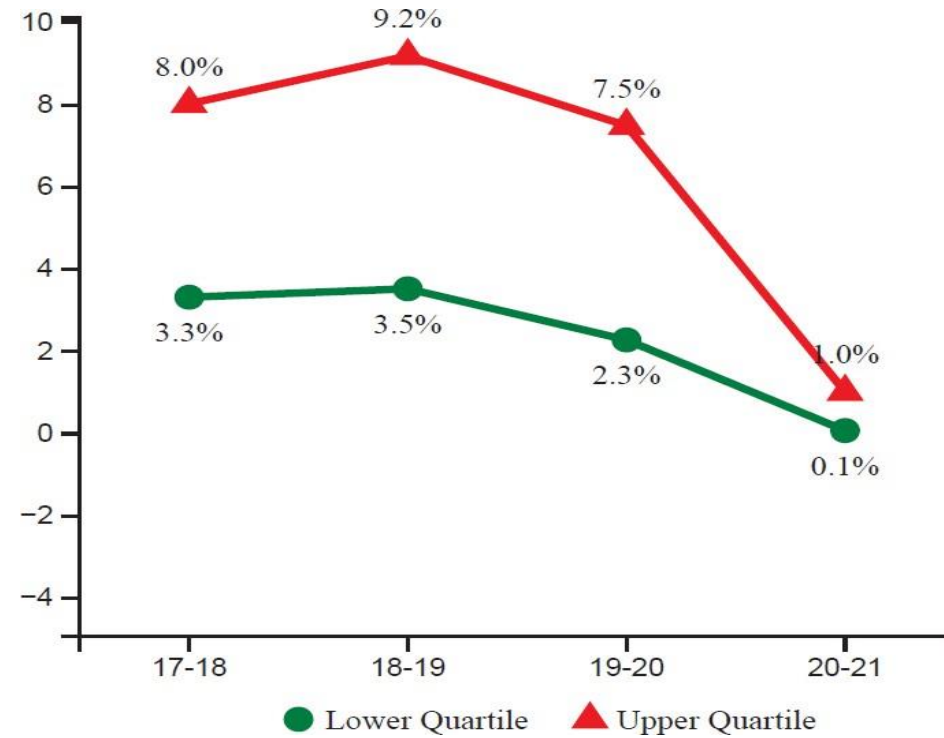
2017-18 to 2020-21





Trends in Students with Out-of-School Suspensions

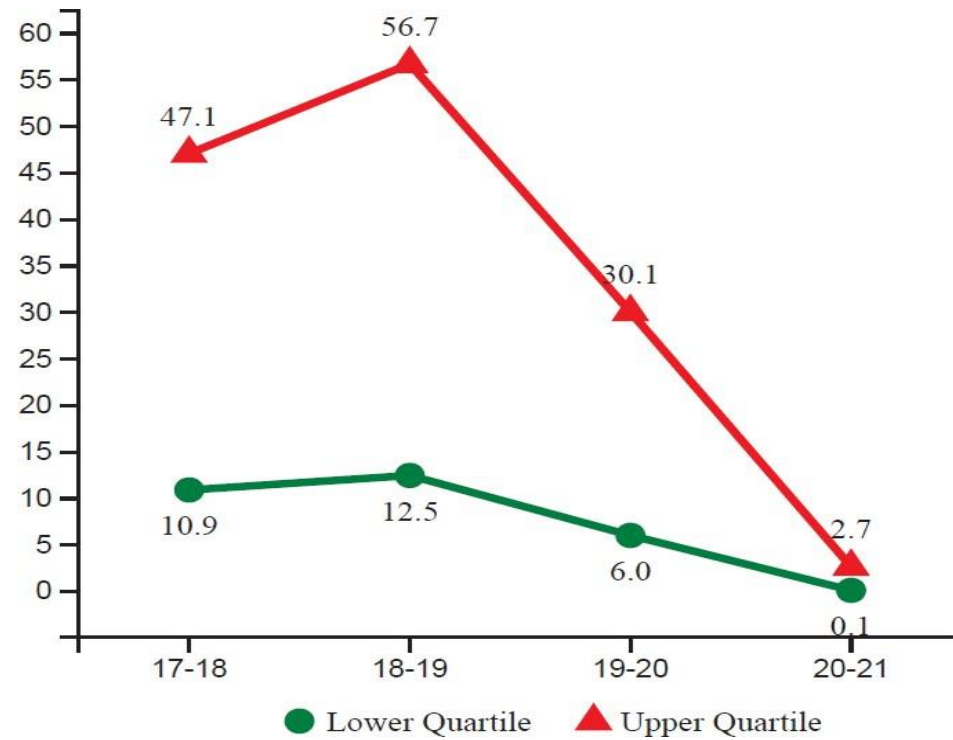
2017-18 to 2020-21





Trends in Number of Instructional Days Missed Due to Out-of-School Suspensions per 100 Students

2017-18 to 2020-21



KPI Dashboards



- Academic, ELL, and Special Education Dashboards are live and can be found on www.edwires.org,
 - Must download Tableau Reader
- Go beyond the charts in the paper report.
- Allows for easy and quick comparisons of student performance in your district to other Council urban school districts and to CGCS as an aggregate.



Council of the Great City Schools' Academic KPI Dashboard

Return to Dashboard Selection



High School Indicators

Select your district's KPI ID in the dropdown menu to the right along with the high school indicator you would like to see.

School District **1's**
Ninth-grade students with B average GPA or better in
all grade nine courses for All Students is **69%**

Your district's overall value changed
5.8
between **2017-18** and **2020-21**

Select Indicator

Ninth-grade students with B average GPA or better in all grade nine courses

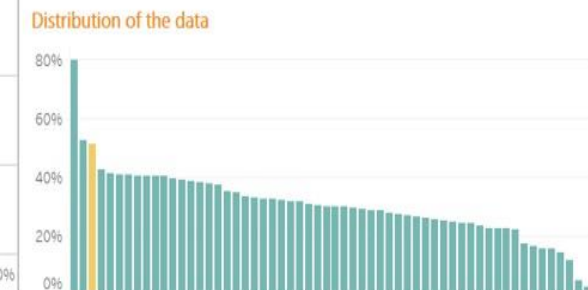
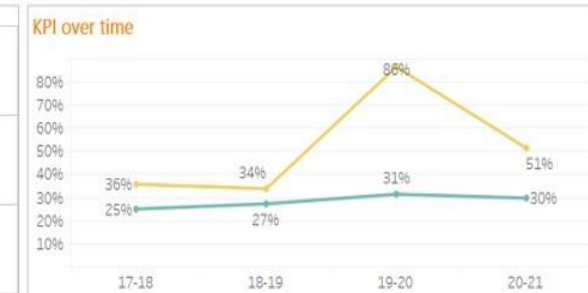
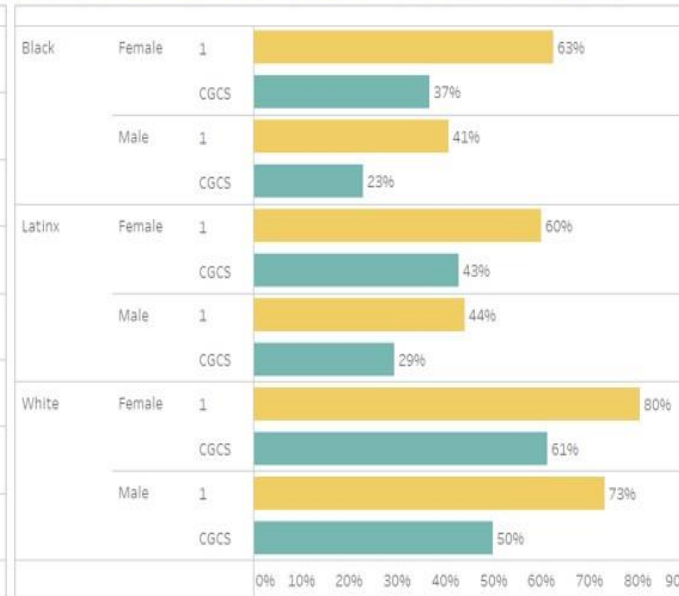
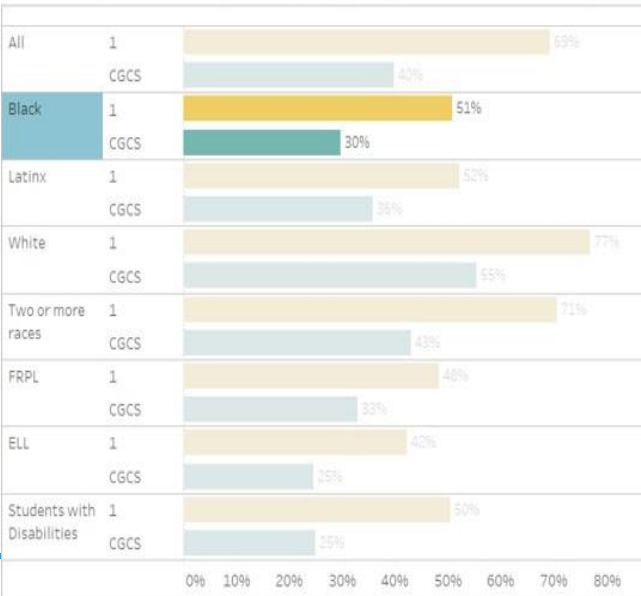
District

1

Clicking on a student group or group/gender in the bar charts below will display the longitudinal data and overall distribution of the data for that student group.

Click here to compare similar districts

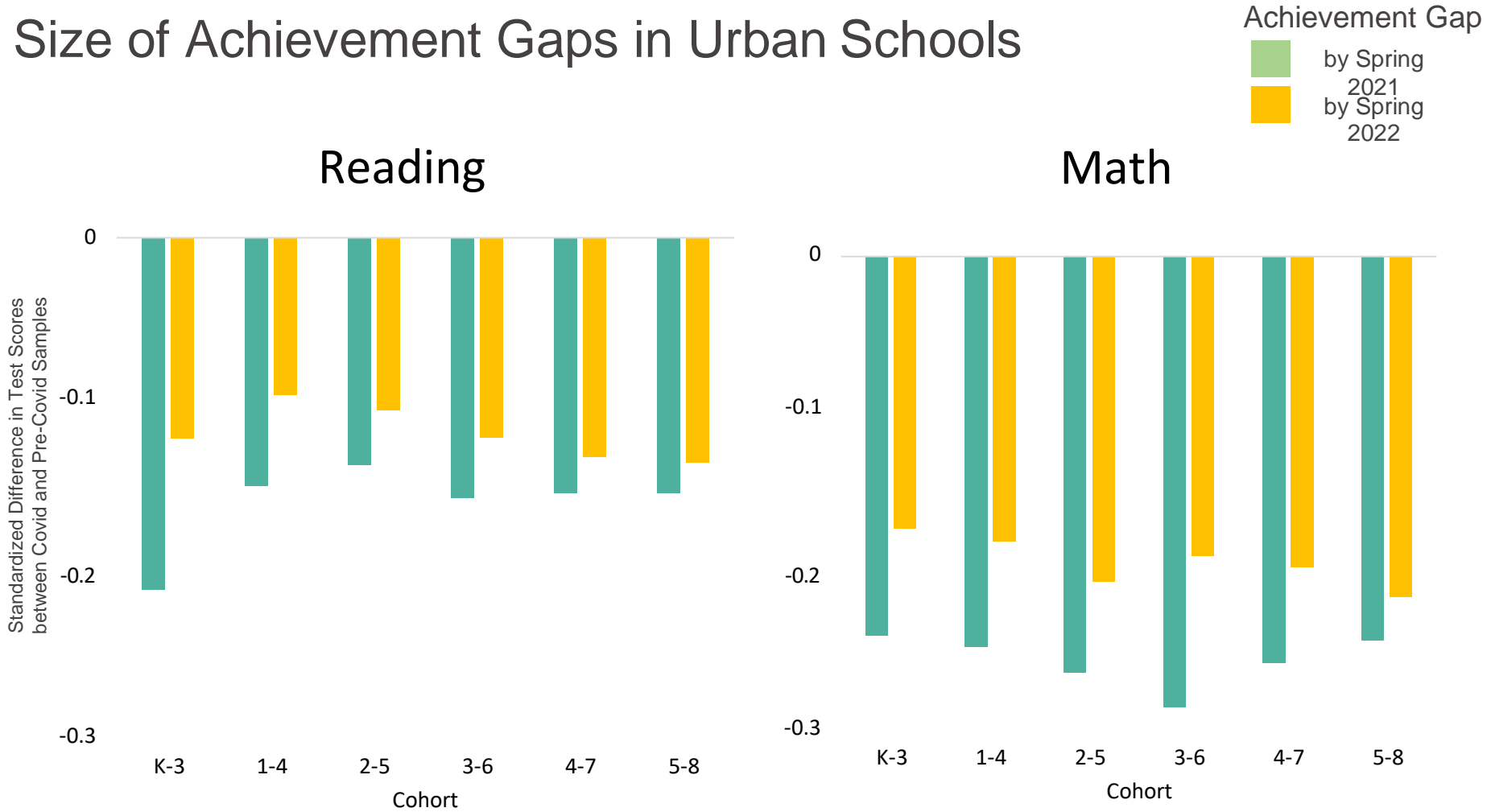
How does your district's student groups compare to the Council in **Ninth-grade students with B average GPA or better in all grade nine courses**?



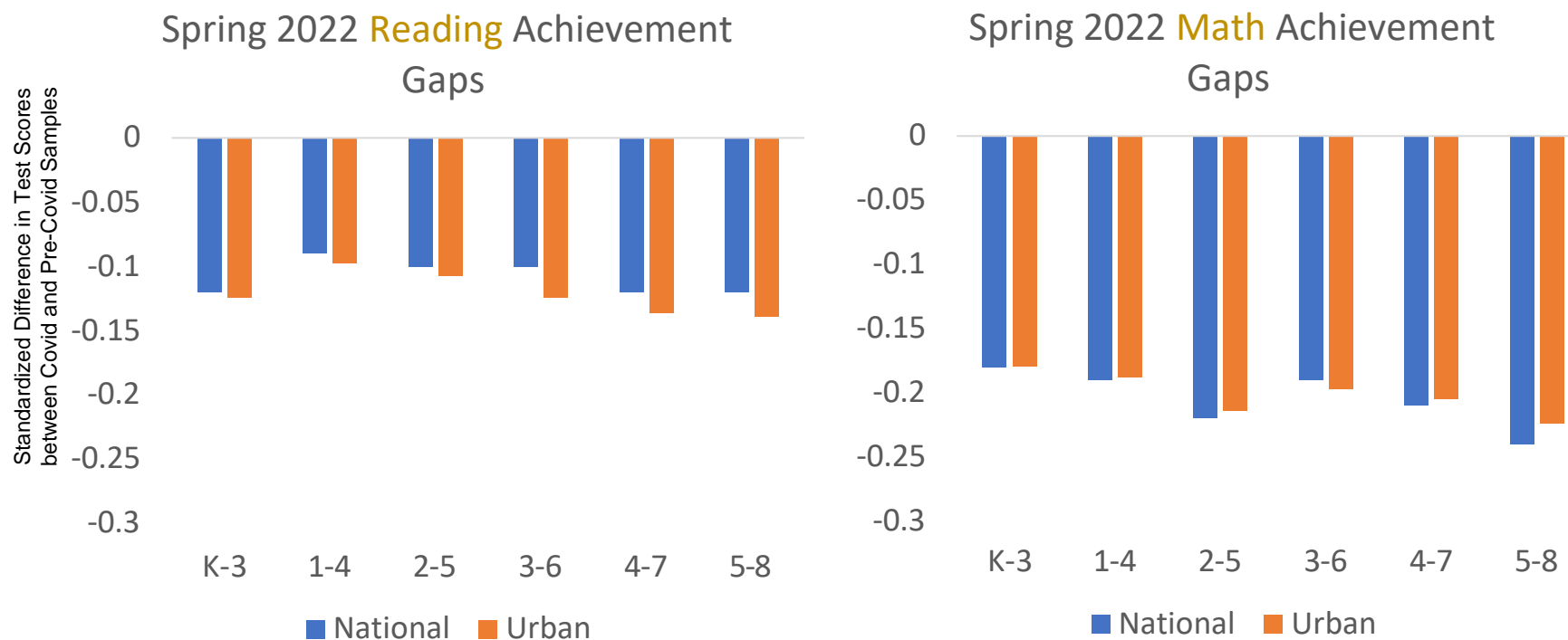
Formative Assessment Data Trends and Comparisons

How does spring 2019 performance compare to spring 2022 performance in urban schools? How do these gaps compare to national averages?

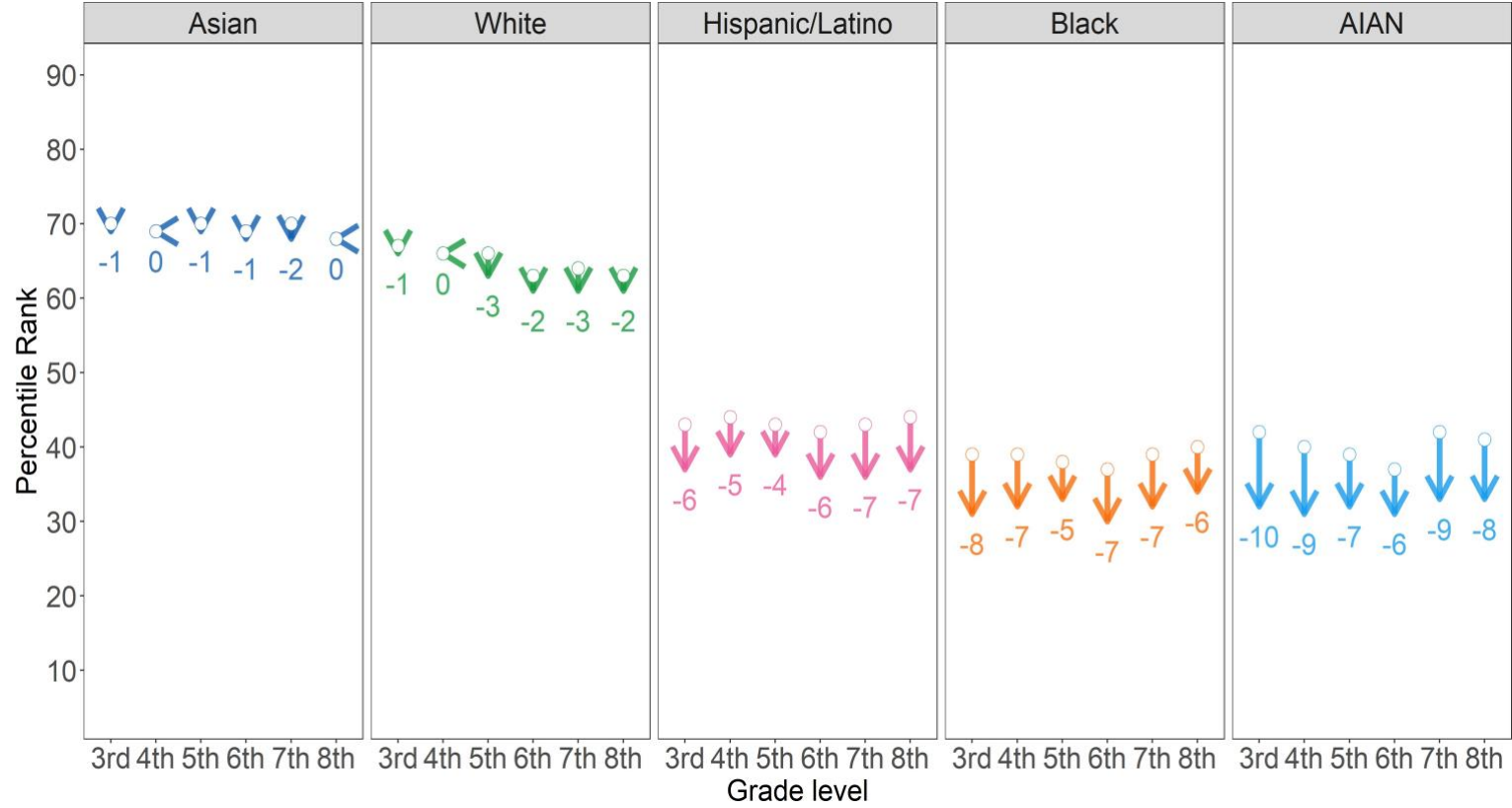
Size of Achievement Gaps in Urban Schools



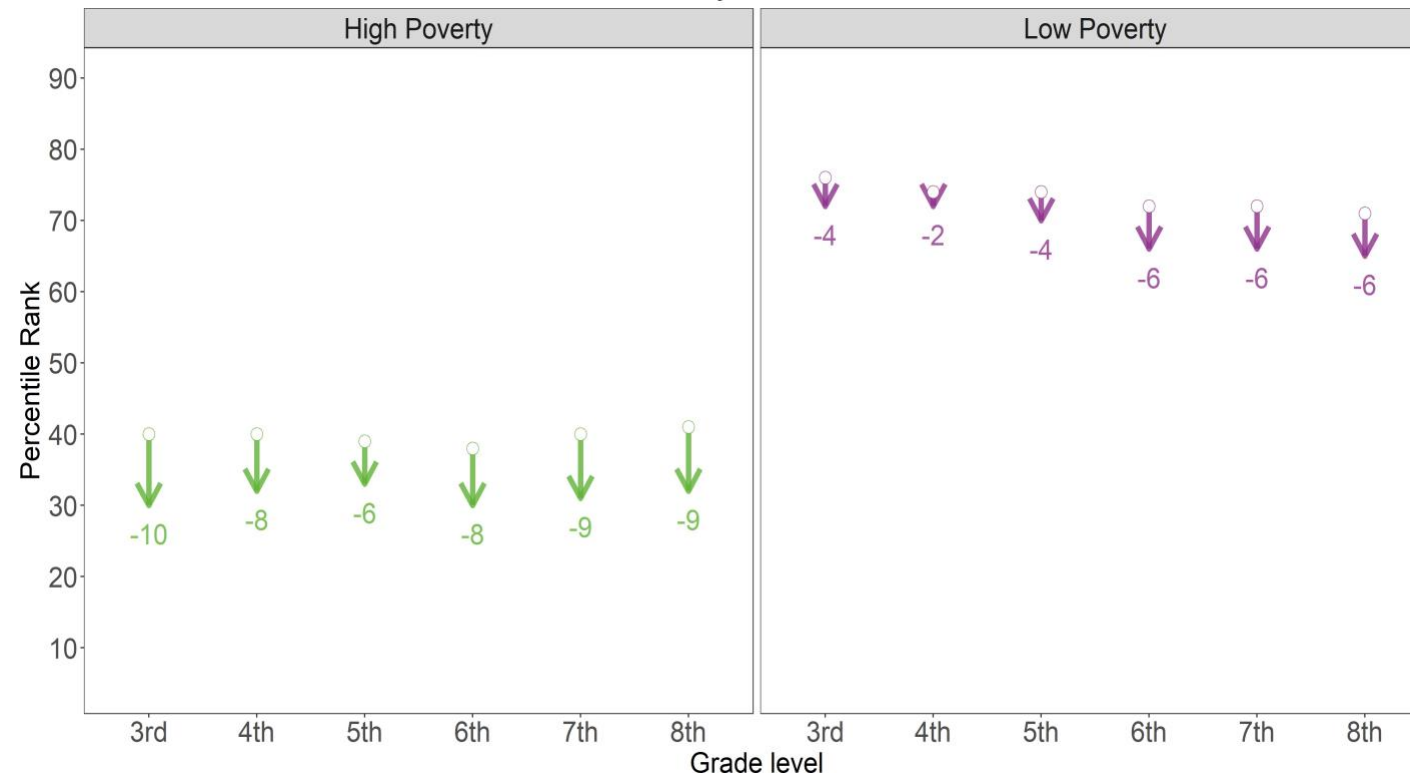
Size of Spring 2022 Achievement Gaps in Urban Schools Compared to National Averages



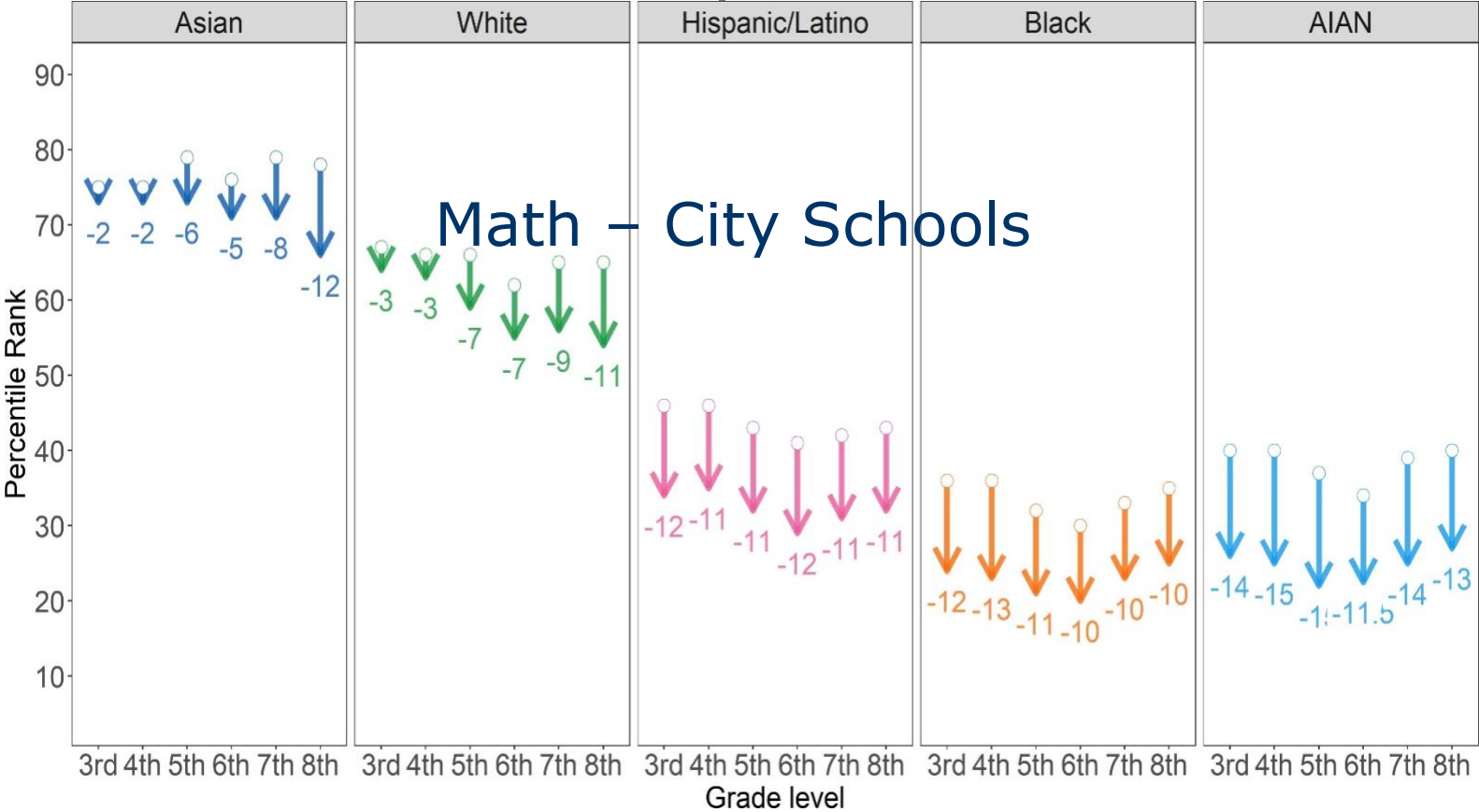
Reading – City Schools



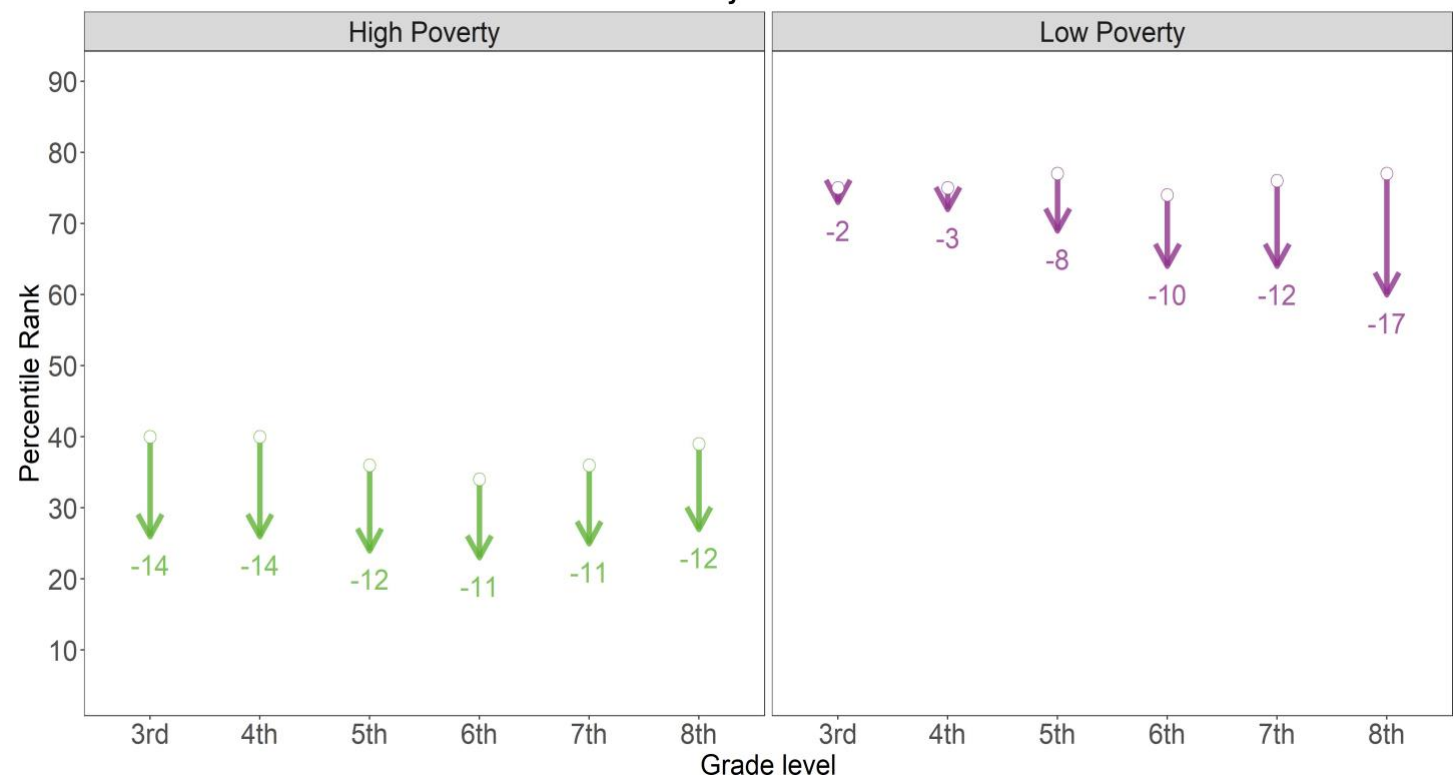
Reading – City Schools



Math – City Schools

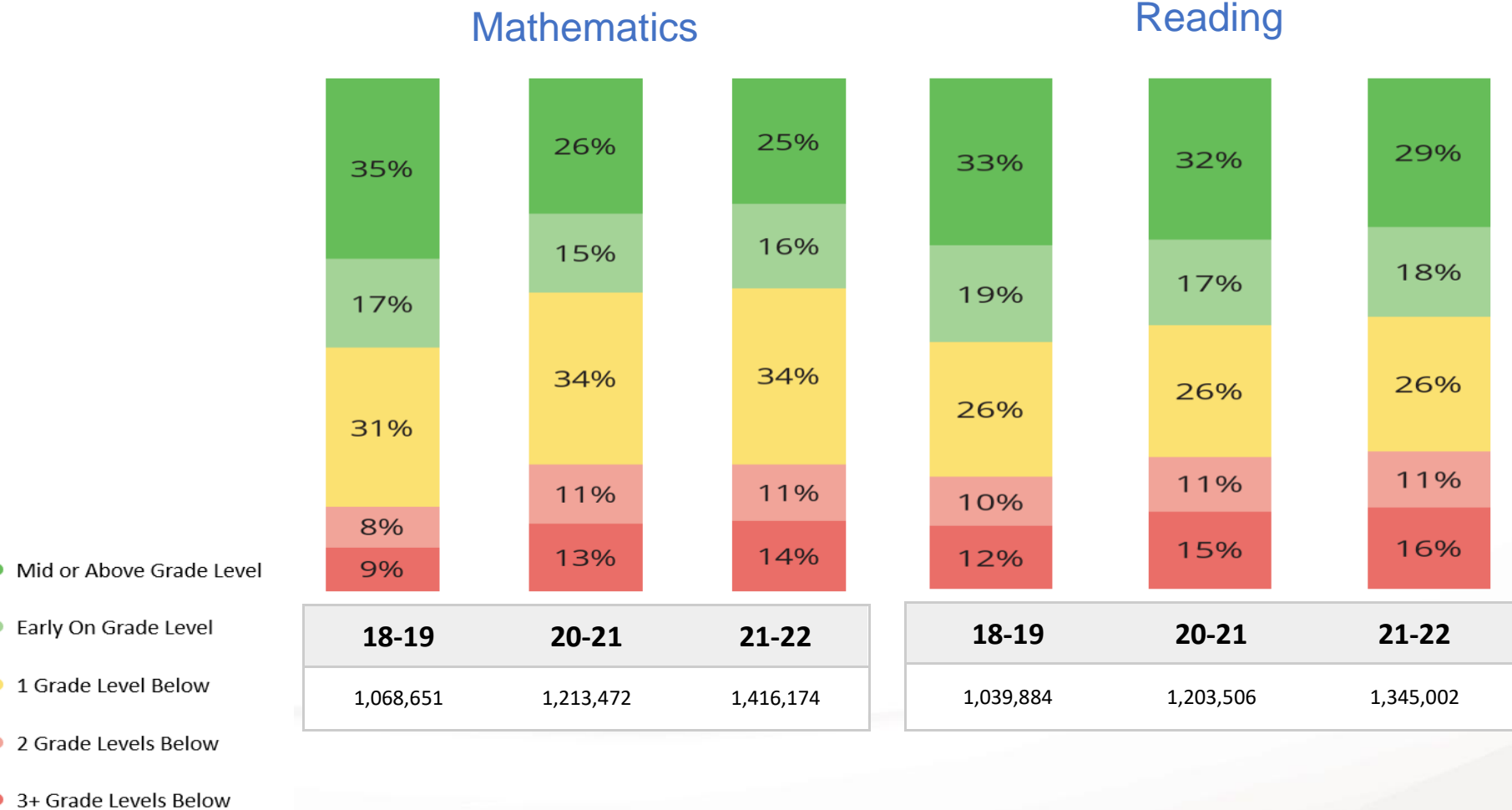


Math – City Schools



How have performance
placements for CGCS districts
changed from spring 2019 to
spring 2022?

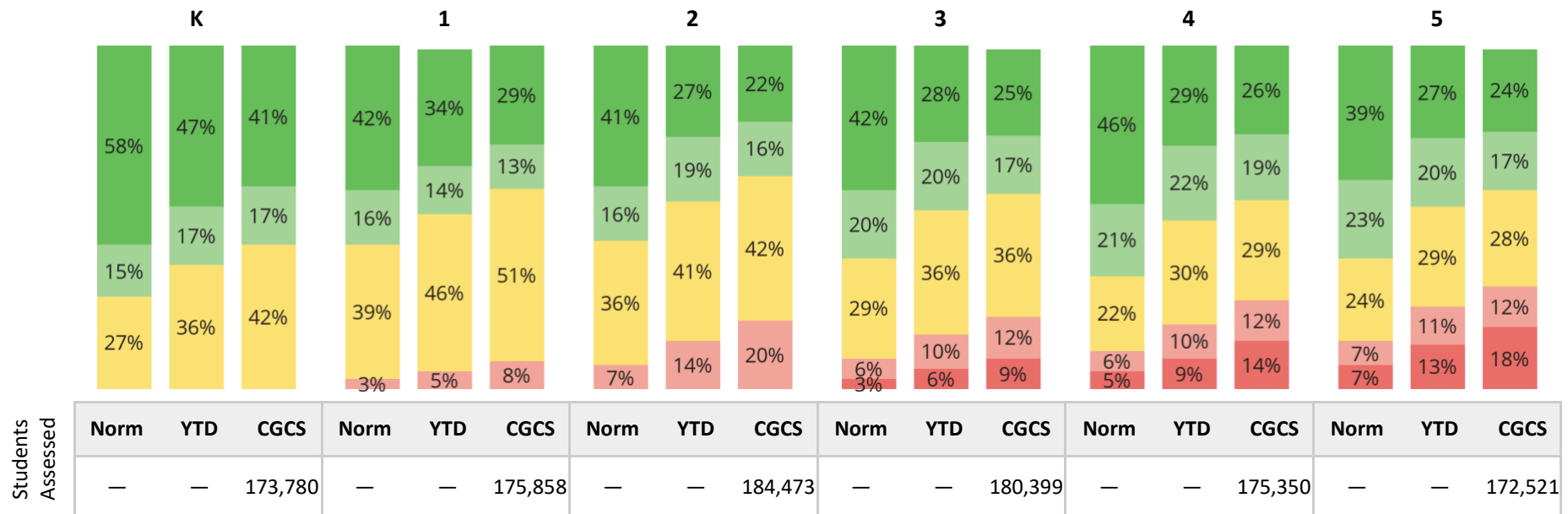
Spring 2022 Council Placements Relative to Spring 2019 and Spring 2021



How do performance
placements for CGCS districts
compare to national trends by
grade level?

How Do the Council's Placements Compare to the Benchmarks?

Spring Placement Distribution for Council and National Benchmarks



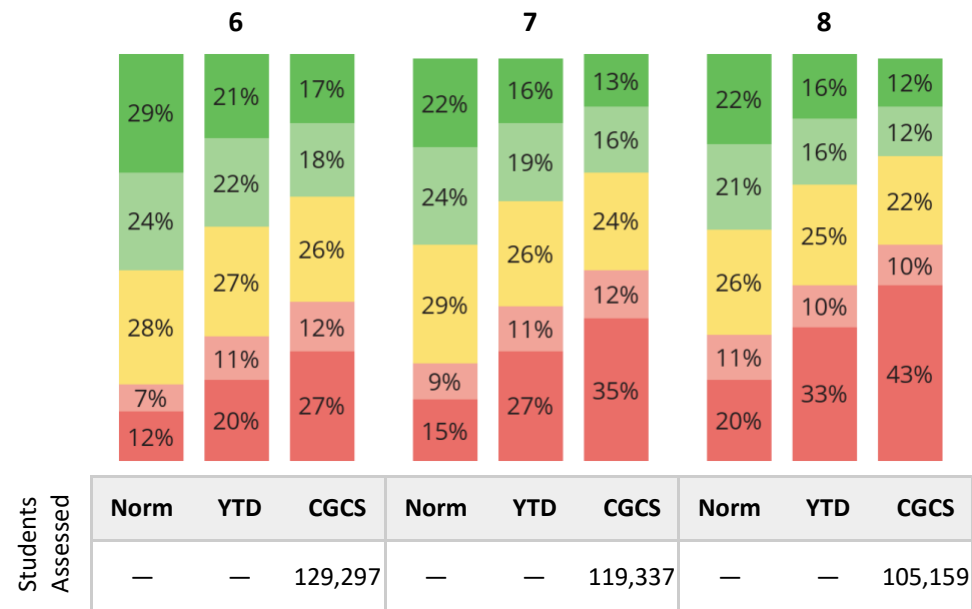
● Mid or Above Grade Level
 ● Early On Grade Level
 ● 1 Grade Level Below
 ● 2 Grade Levels Below
 ● 3+ Grade Levels Below

Norm: i-Ready Spring 18-19 National Norms

YTD: National Spring 21-22 population year-to-date

How do the District's Placements Compare to the Benchmarks?

Spring Placement Distribution for Council and National Benchmarks



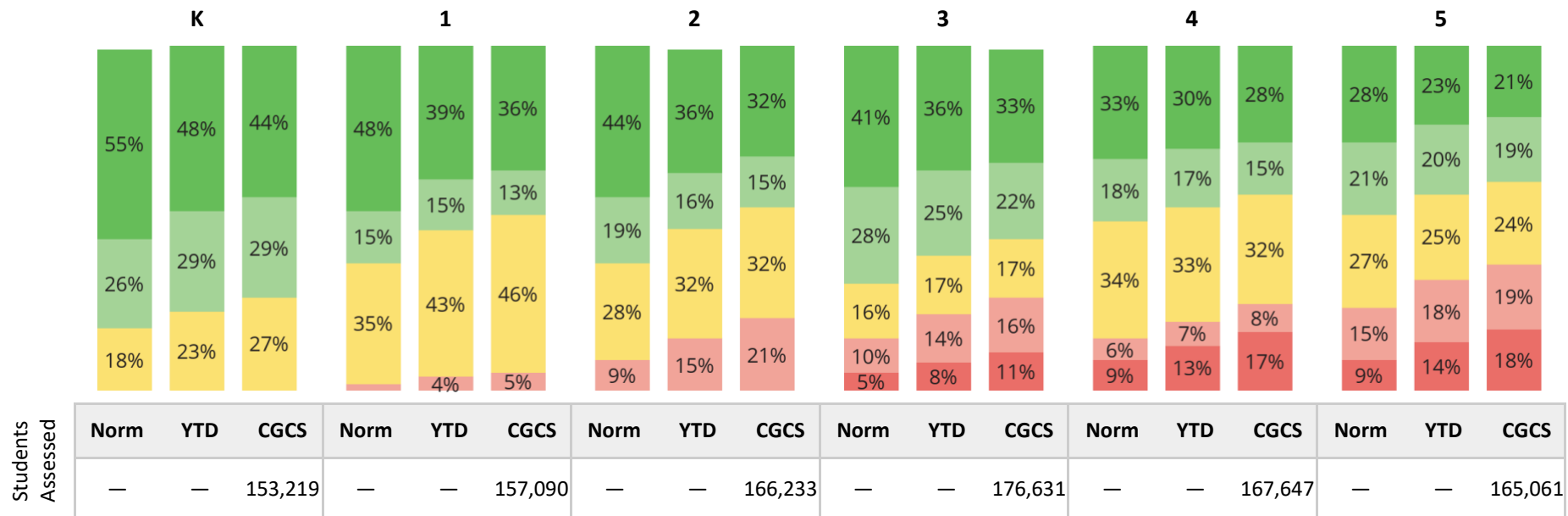
● Mid or Above Grade Level
 ● Early On Grade Level
 ● 1 Grade Level Below
 ● 2 Grade Levels Below
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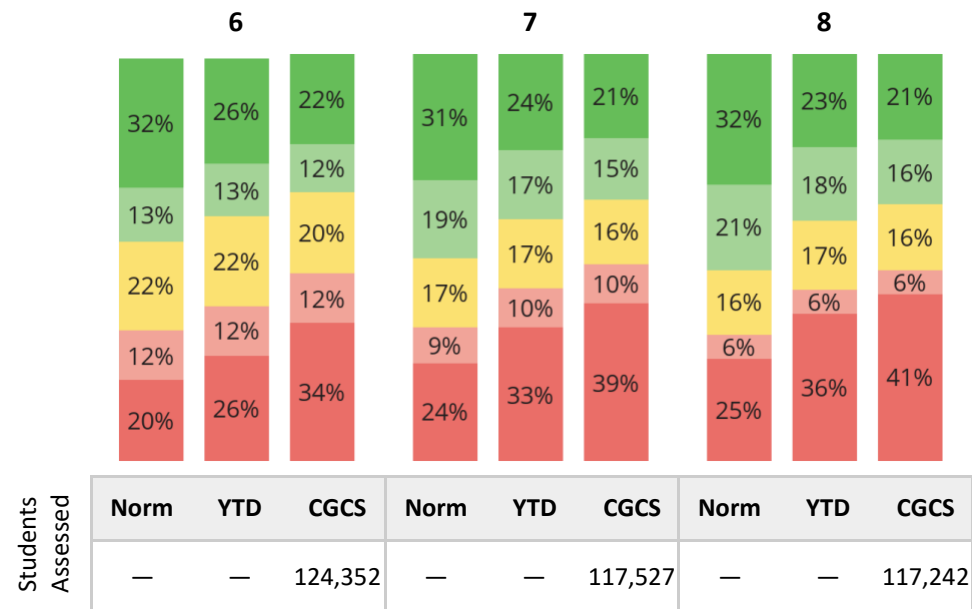
Mid or Above Grade Level Early On Grade Level 1 Grade Level Below 2 Grade Levels Below 3+ Grade Levels Below

Norm: i-Ready Spring 18-19 National Norms

YTD: National Spring 21-22 population year-to-date

How do the Council's Placements Compare to the Benchmarks?

Spring Placement Distribution for Council and National Benchmarks



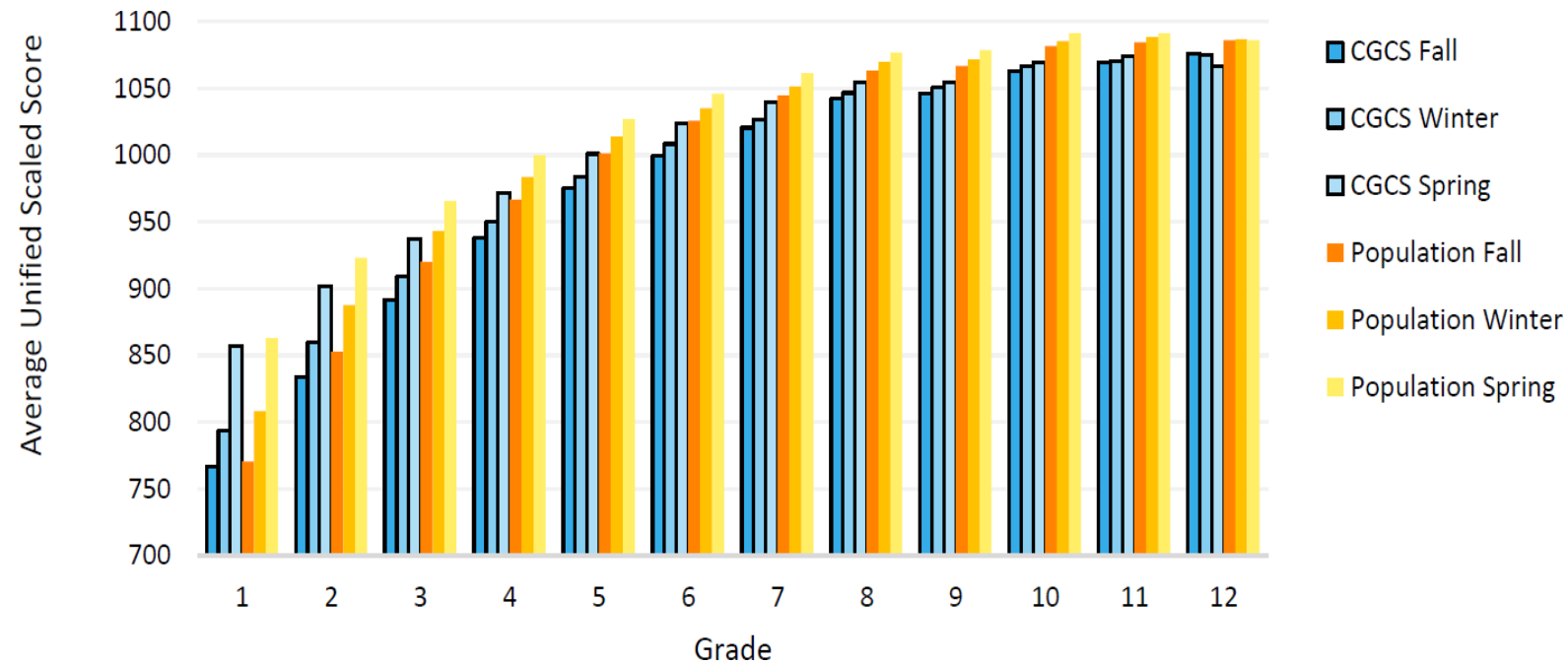
Mid or Above Grade Level Early On Grade Level 1 Grade Level Below 2 Grade Levels Below 3+ Grade Levels Below

Norm: i-Ready Spring 18-19 National Norms

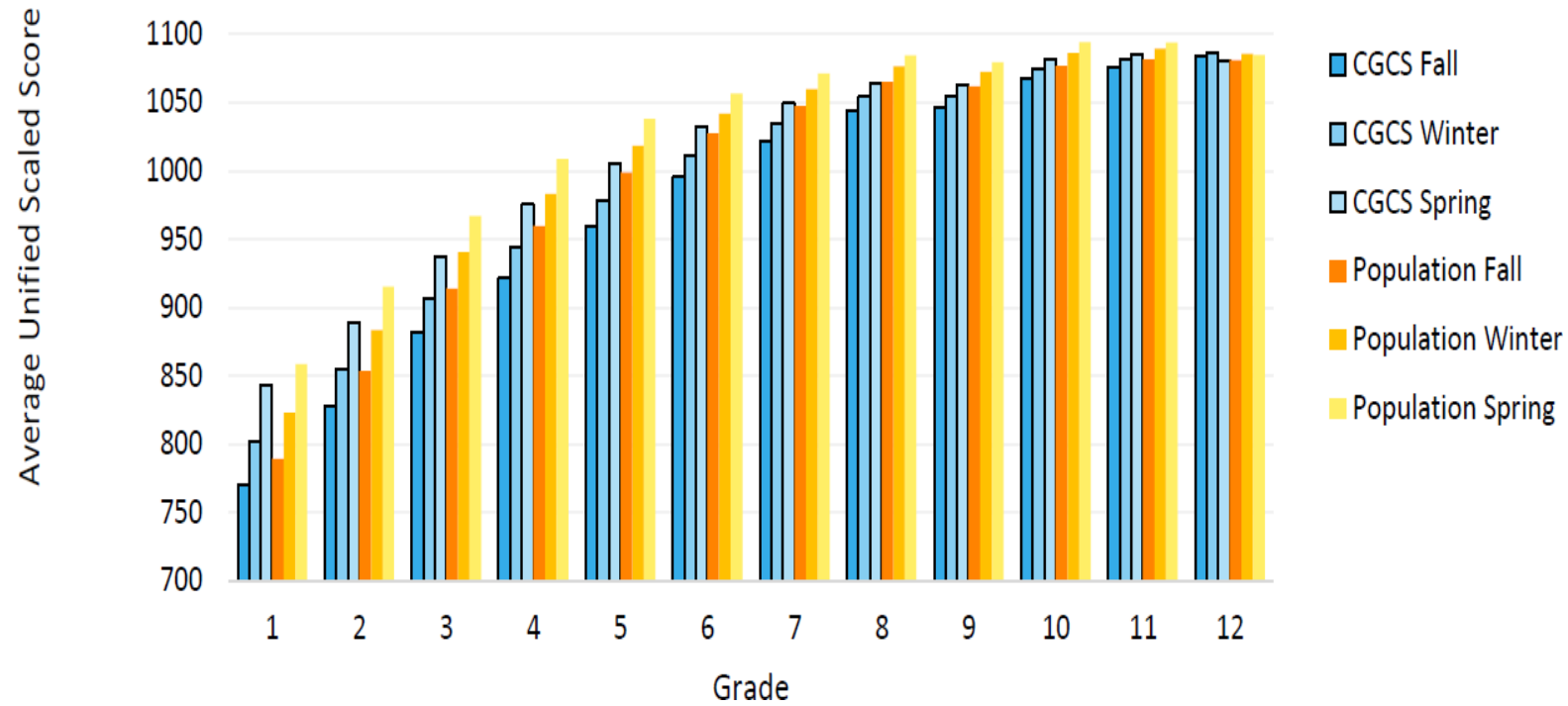
YTD: National Spring 21-22 population year-to-date

How does CGCS performance change or progress through each testing season? How does this compare to national trends

Star Reading Performance as a Function of Grade and Season



Star Math Performance as a Function of Grade and Season



NAEP TUDA Update

NAEP 2022 Results



-
- NAEP is the only nationally representative assessment of student learning
 - Allows TUDA districts (26) to compare their achievement results to students across the country, state and other large urban districts
 - 2022 NAEP results will be publicly released on NAEP day – Monday, October 24th
 - NAEP TUDA Communication Guide will be distributed to aid in messaging 2022 results

Internally Used NAEP Dashboard

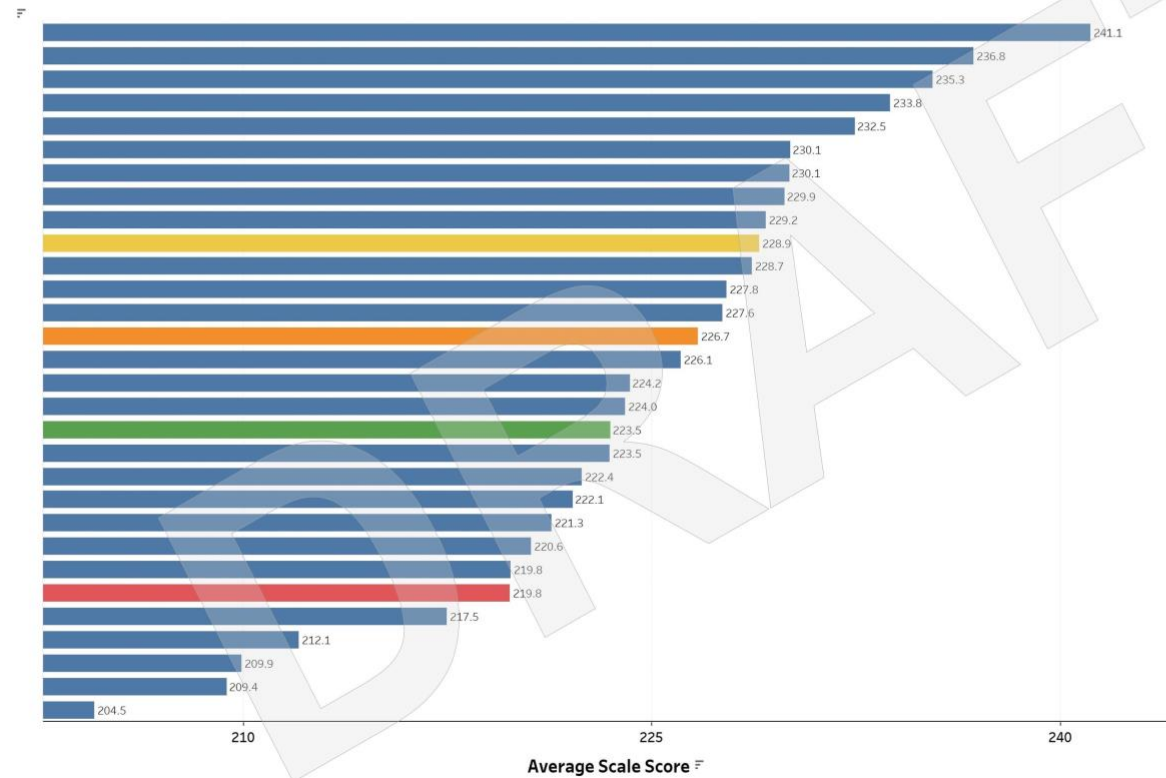
Allows users to examine and/or compare average scale scores by:

- Jurisdiction (State, TUDA, Large City, National Public)
- Year of Administration (2003-2022)
- Student Group (Main Groups and Crosstabs)
- Grade Level (4th and 8th)
- Subject (Math and Reading)

**Dashboard does not provide indicators of differences that are statistically significant.*

TUDA Comparison Dashboard

NAEP 2019 Average Fourth grade Mathematics Scale Scores
Economically Disadvantaged Group



Student Group Select
Economically Disadvantaged

Year
2019

Subject
Mathematics

Grade
Fourth

Home

TUDA Comparison

TUDA Longitudinal

TUDA Racial Gaps

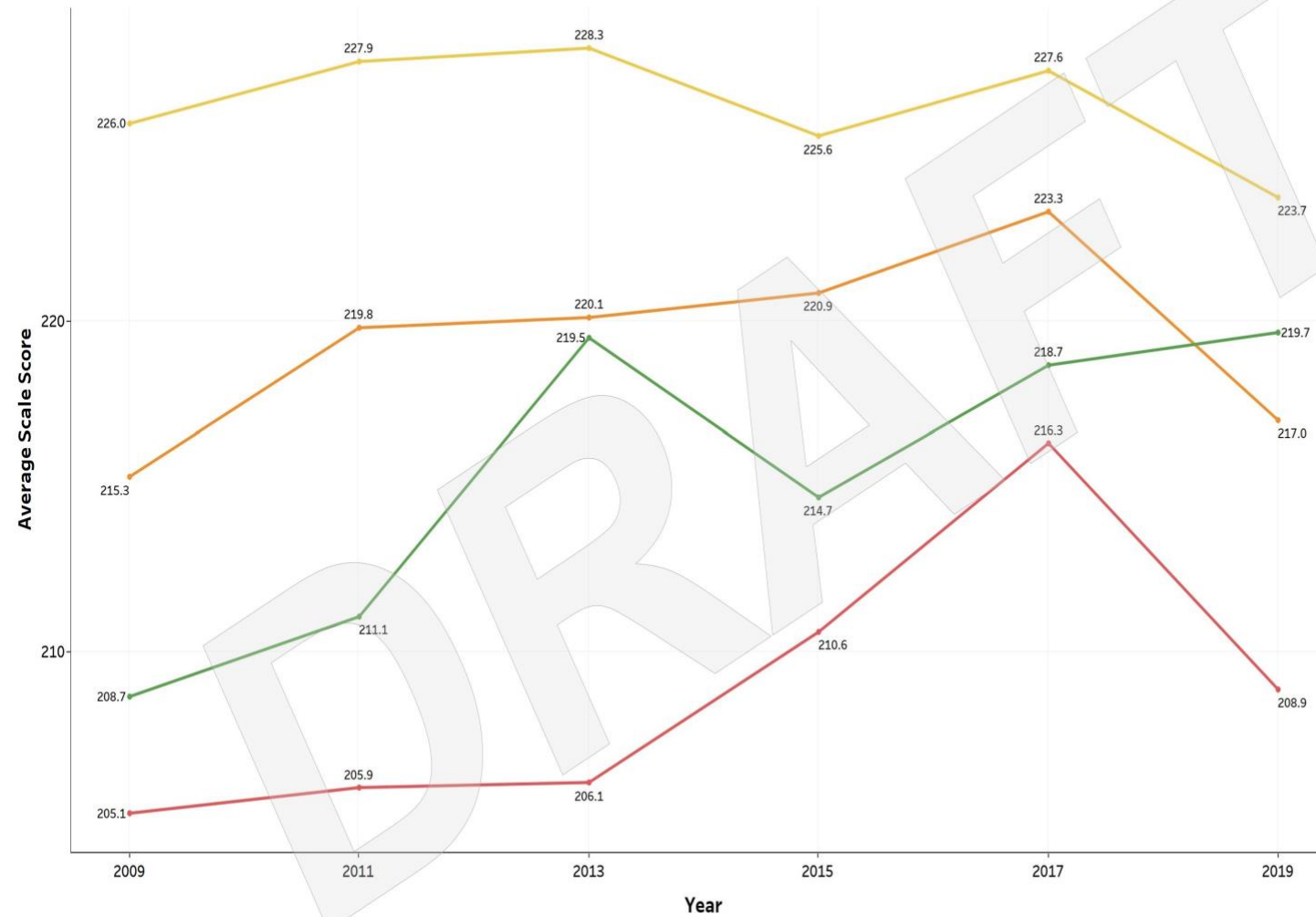
State Comparison

State Comparison

State Racial Gaps

TUDA Longitudinal Dashboard

NAEP Average **Reading** grade **Eighth** Scale Scores, 2003-2019
All SWD, no 504 plan group.



Group
All SWD, no 504 plan

Subject
Reading

Grade
Eighth

Home

TUDA Comparison

TUDA Longitudinal

TUDA Racial Gaps

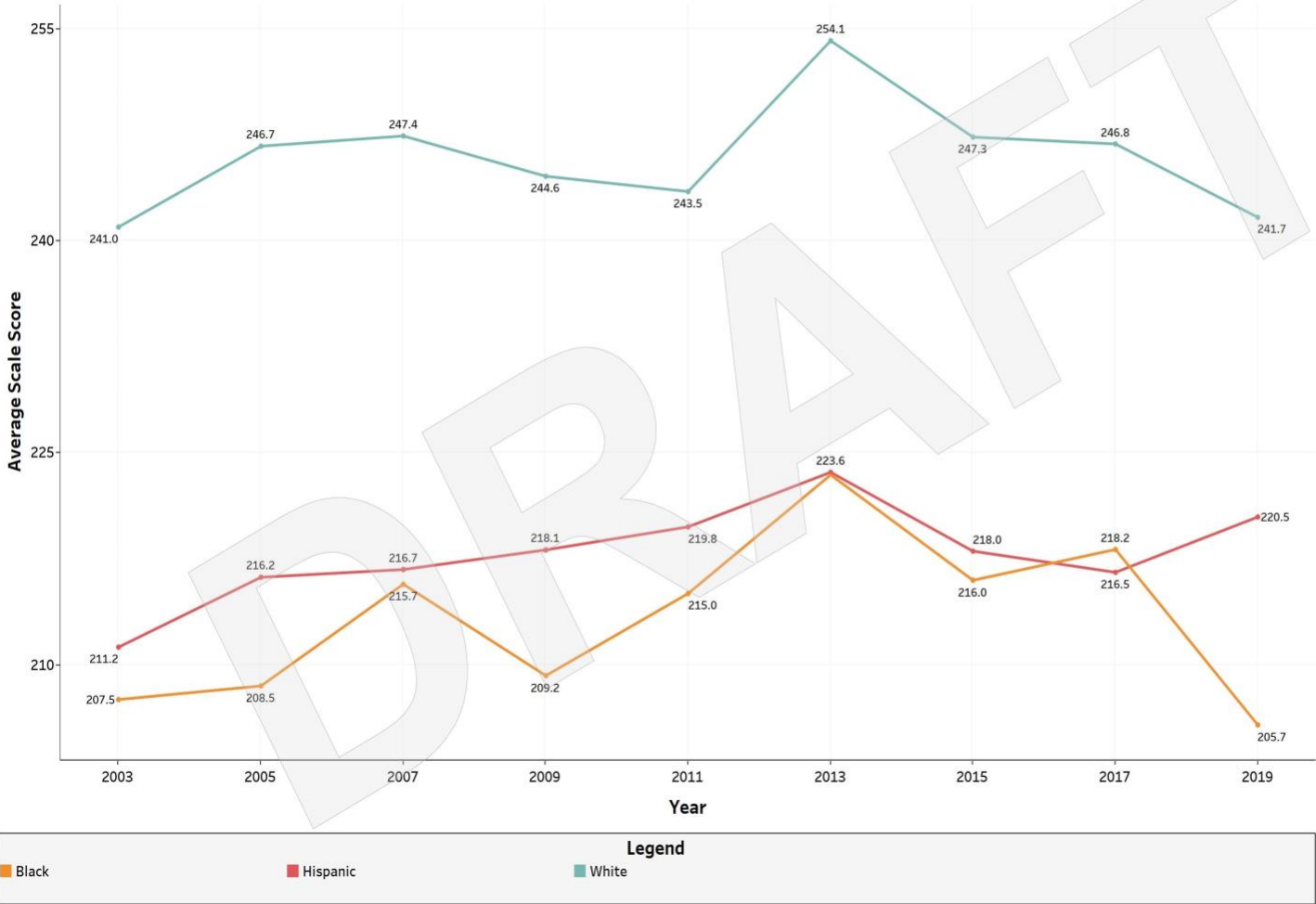
State Comparison

State Longitudinal

State Racial Gaps

TUDA Racial Gaps Dashboard

Racial Gaps in Average NAEP Scale Scores
Fourth grade students, Mathematics



Student Group Select

All Students

Subject

Mathematics

Grade

Fourth

Home

TUDA Comparison

TUDA Longitudinal

TUDA Racial Gaps

State Comparison

State Longitudinal

State Racial Gaps

District Assessment Data as Evidence of Student Learning

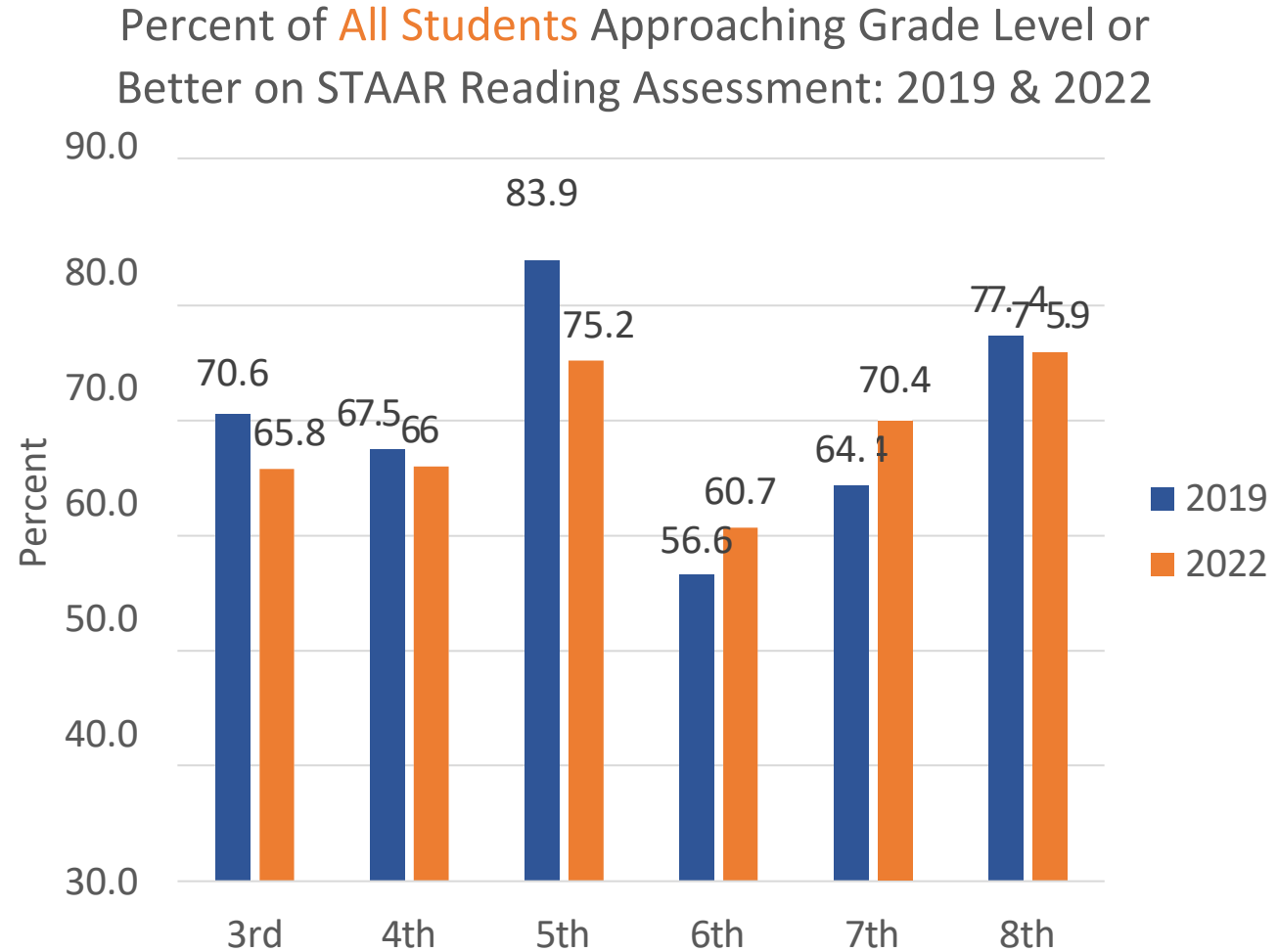
District State Assessment Results

- Recovery is also evidenced in district state assessment results.
 - We are seeing greater recovery in reading than math
 - Many districts are experiencing significant challenges in recovering science learning
 - In select districts, 2022 student performance meets or exceeds pre-pandemic rates
 - In other districts, we are seeing significant gains that out pace the gains seen by other districts within the state or state gains themselves.



Dallas ISD STAAR Reading Results:

All Students

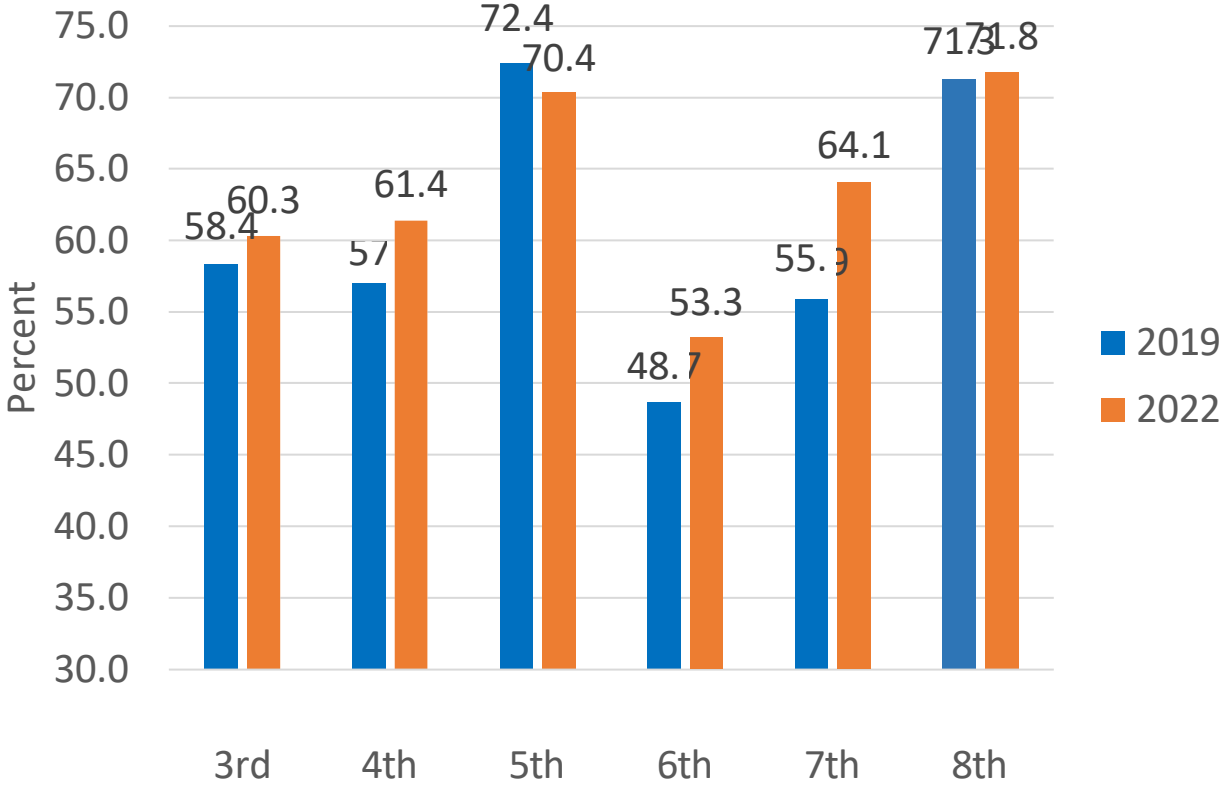




Dallas ISD STAAR Reading Results:

Black Students

Percent of **Black Students** Approaching Grade
Level or Better on STAAR Reading
Assessment: 2019 & 2022

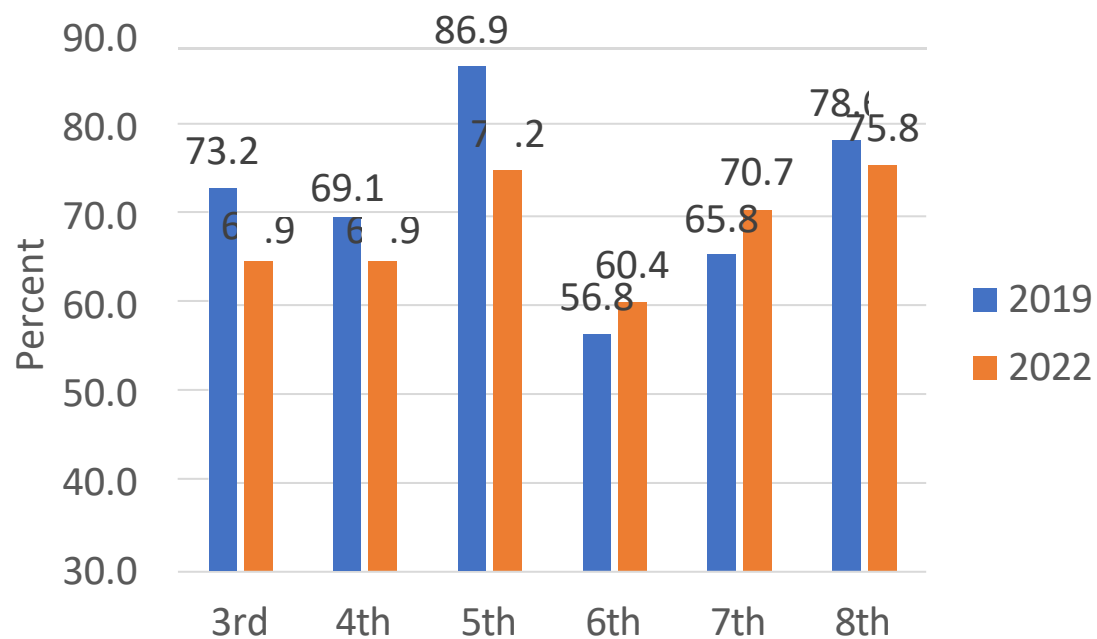




Dallas ISD STAAR Reading Results:

Hispanic Students

Percent of **Hispanic Students** Approaching
Grade Level or Better on STAAR Reading
Assessment: 2019 & 2022

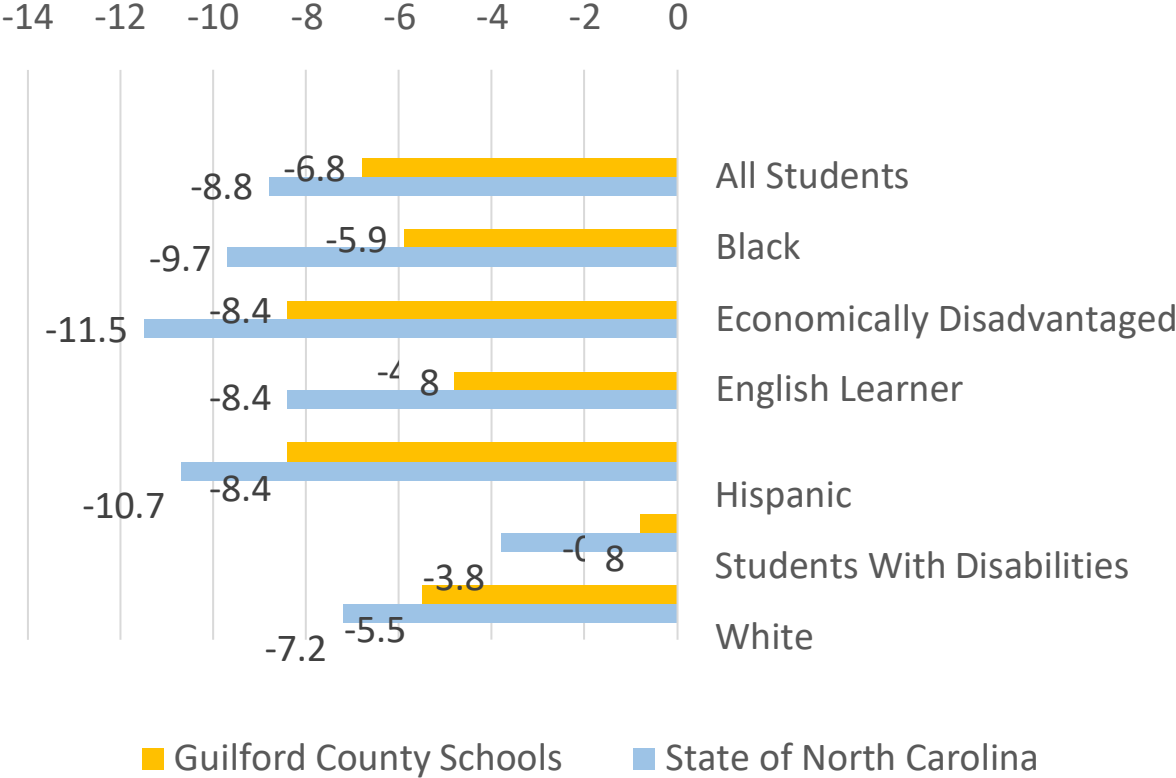




Guilford County Schools

End of Grade Math Results

End of Grade Math Proficiency (Grade 3-8)
Percentage Point Change from 2019 to 2022
Guilford County vs. North Carolina

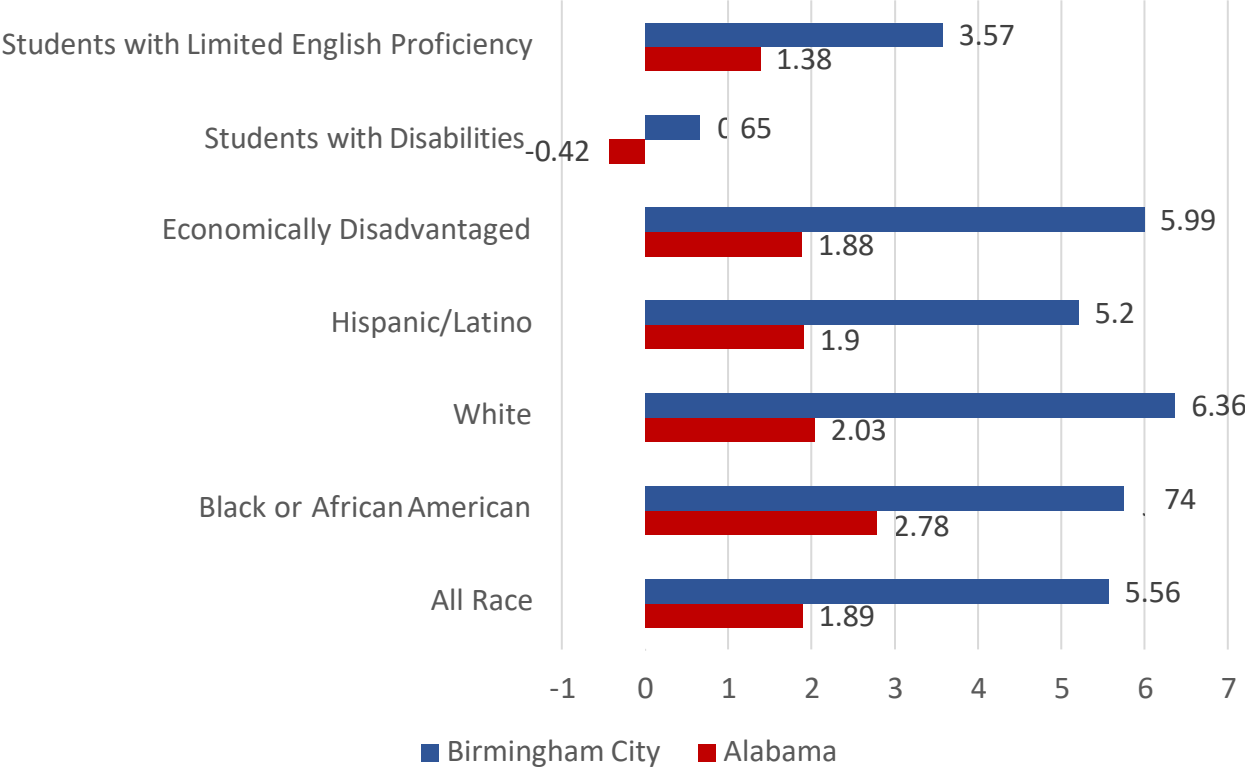




Birmingham City Schools

ELA Results

Grades 3-8 ELA Proficiency
Percentage Point Change from 2019 to 2022
Birmingham City vs. Alabama



**Building Capacity for
Evidence-Informed Improvement:
Supporting State and
Local Education Agencies**



Final Report
October 2022

**Understanding and Leveraging
Internal Research Offices**

- Build capacity in your organization for the strategic use of evidence in decision making
- Discusses how districts and education agencies can support and leverage the work of internal research offices and methodological talents in the generation and use of evidence in school districts

Moving Forward



-
- These data tell us where we're at and how we've progressed since pre-pandemic
 - These data also give us an indication of subjects, grade levels, and student groups who are making improvements as well as areas of opportunity
 - Contextualizing Assessment and Academic Measures Help Bring Deeper Understanding to the Data
 - Utilize various forms of evidence to triangulate results and aid in decision making
 - Qualitative data including surveys, interviews and focus groups
-

ENROLLMENT DATA TRENDS

2022-23 CGCS Enrollment Data



Goals for Today's Session

- For you to walk away understanding the larger trends around enrollment and 1 - 2 ways you'll share or use this data to increase enrollment.
- For the team to understand trends so that we can support increased enrollment across our districts.

Discussion Questions



- What is surprising about the trends you see in the data?
 - In general, there is an increase in enrollment at the high school level, why is this or might this be the case?
 - What next steps will you take as the result of this data?
 - If applicable, what has the impact of declining enrollment had on your district?
 - If applicable, how has your district used data to address declining enrollment?
-



CGCS District Enrollment Trends 2019-20 to 2022-23*

Brian Garcia

CGCS Research Team

*Please note that some districts provided unofficial 2022-23 enrollment figures.

CGCS District Enrollment Overall Changes

47 Districts Reporting



	% Change – With Pre-K	% Change – Without Pre-K
Initial Decline from 2019-20 to 2020-21	-4.3%	-3.5%
Change from 2020-21 to 2021-22	0.8%	-0.5%
Change from 2021-22 to 2022-23	-1.0%	-2.0%
Overall Change from 2019-20 to 2022-23	-4.5%	-5.9%

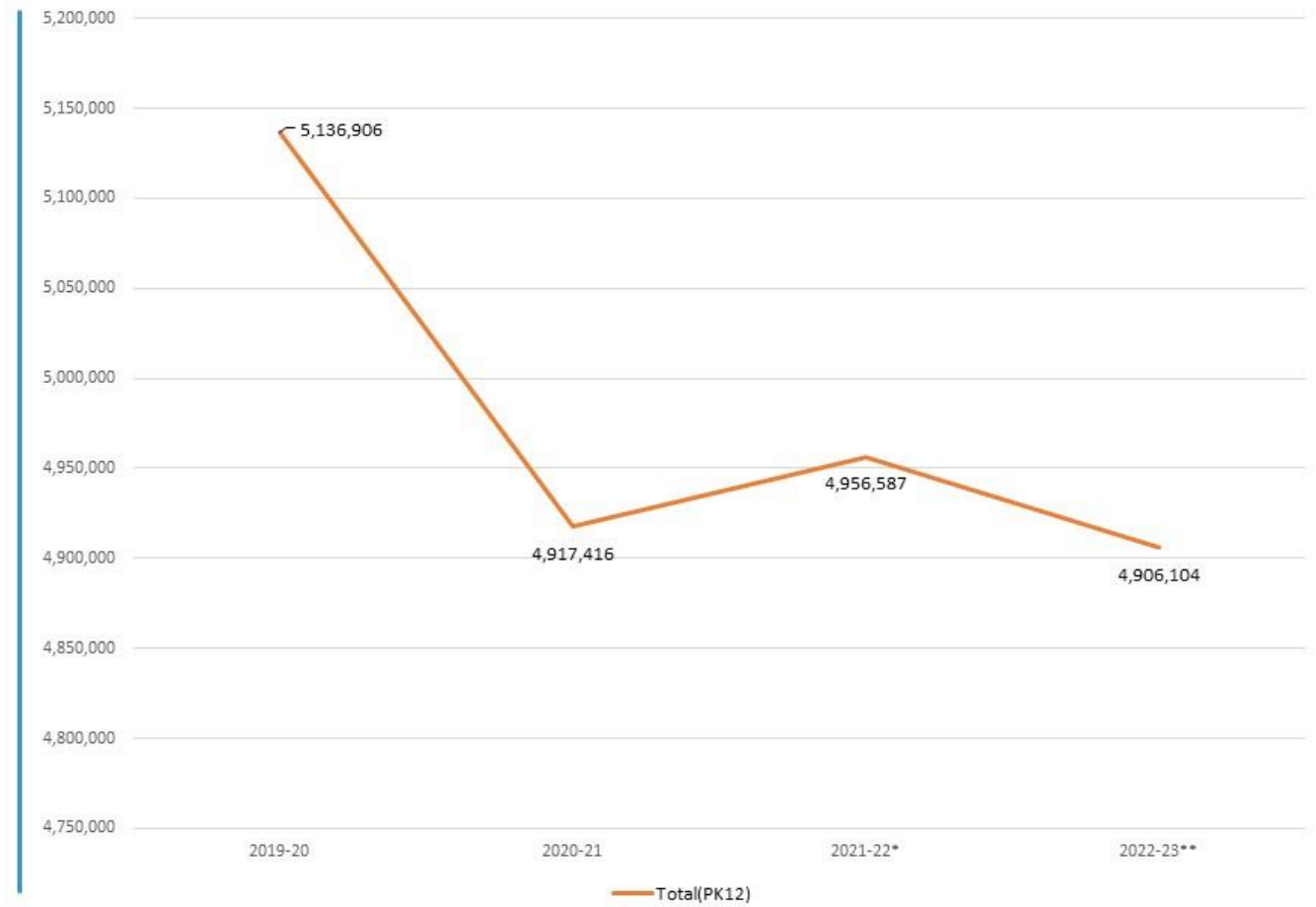
* 2021-22 Grade level enrollment data gathered from Academic KPI and district state website

** 2022-23 Grade level enrollment data submitted by districts. Last updated 12.15.2022



Total Enrollment 2019-20 to 2022-23 PreK - 12

48 Districts Reporting



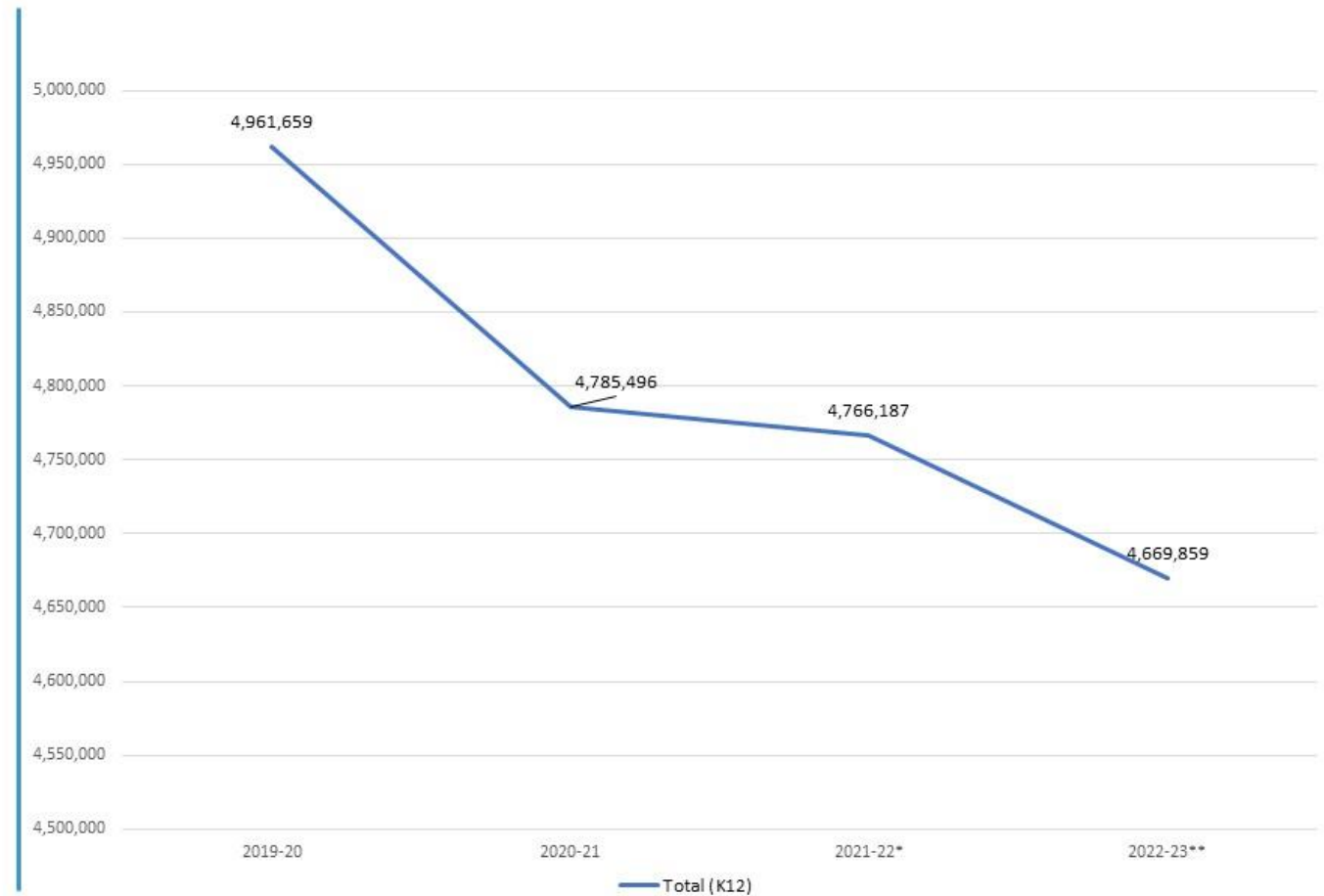
* Note: Data from the following sources: CCD, Education Data Portal (Version 0.16.0), Urban Institute, accessed 12.15.2022, <https://educationdata.urban.org/documentation/>, made available under the ODC Attribution License. CGCS Academic KPI 2021-22.

**2022-23 Grade level enrollment data submitted by districts and may include unofficial enrollment counts. Last updated 12.15.2022.



Total Enrollment 2019-20 to 2022-23 K-12

48 Districts Reporting



*Note: Data from the following sources. CCD, Education Data Portal (Version 0.16.0), Urban Institute, accessed 12.15.2022, <https://educationdata.urban.org/documentation/>, made available under the ODC Attribution License. CGCS Academic KPI 2021-22.

**2022-23 Grade level enrollment data submitted by districts and may include unofficial enrollment counts. Last updated 12.15.2022.



Total Enrollment 2019-20 to 2022-23 PreK-12 and K-12

48 Districts Reporting

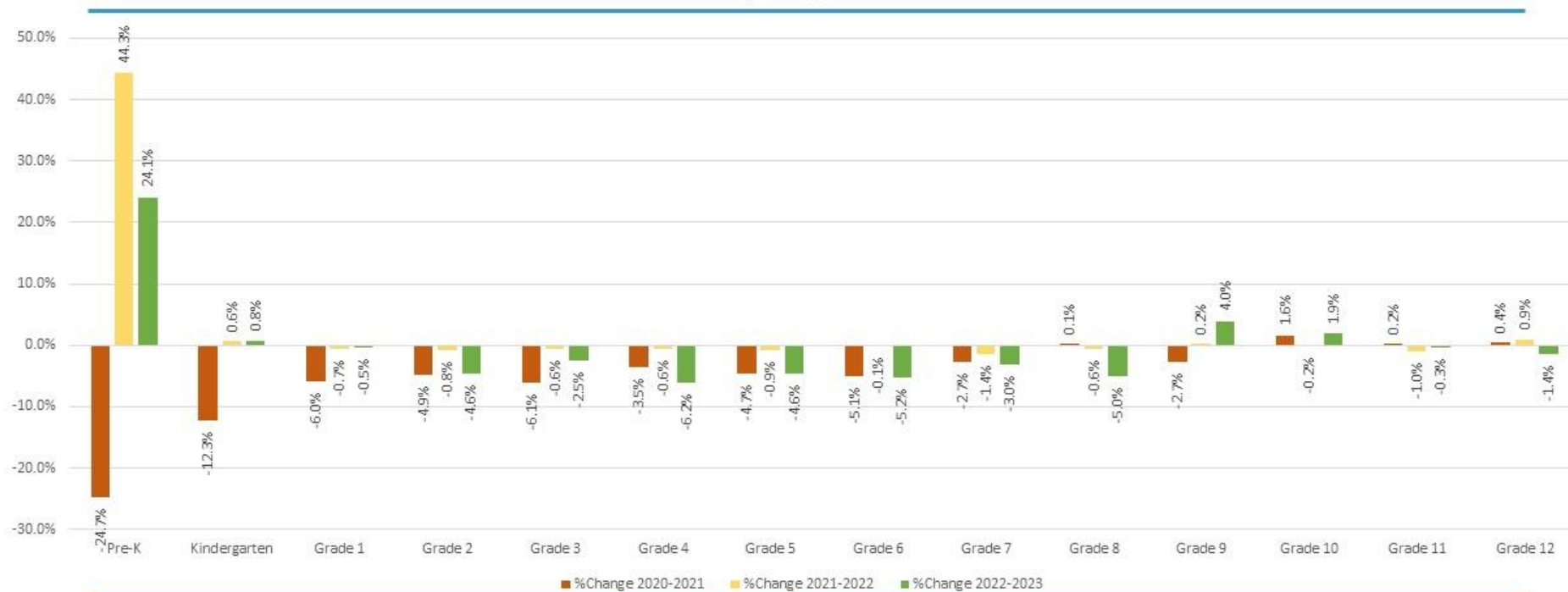


* Note: Data from the following sources: CCD, Education Data Portal (Version 0.16.0), Urban Institute, accessed 12.15.2022, <https://educationdata.urban.org/documentation/>, made available under the ODC Attribution License. CGCS Academic KPI 2021-22.

** 2022-23 Grade level enrollment data submitted by districts and may include unofficial enrollment counts. Last updated 12.15.2022.



Percent Change Year to Year by Grade Level 2019-20 to 2022-23 48 Districts Reporting

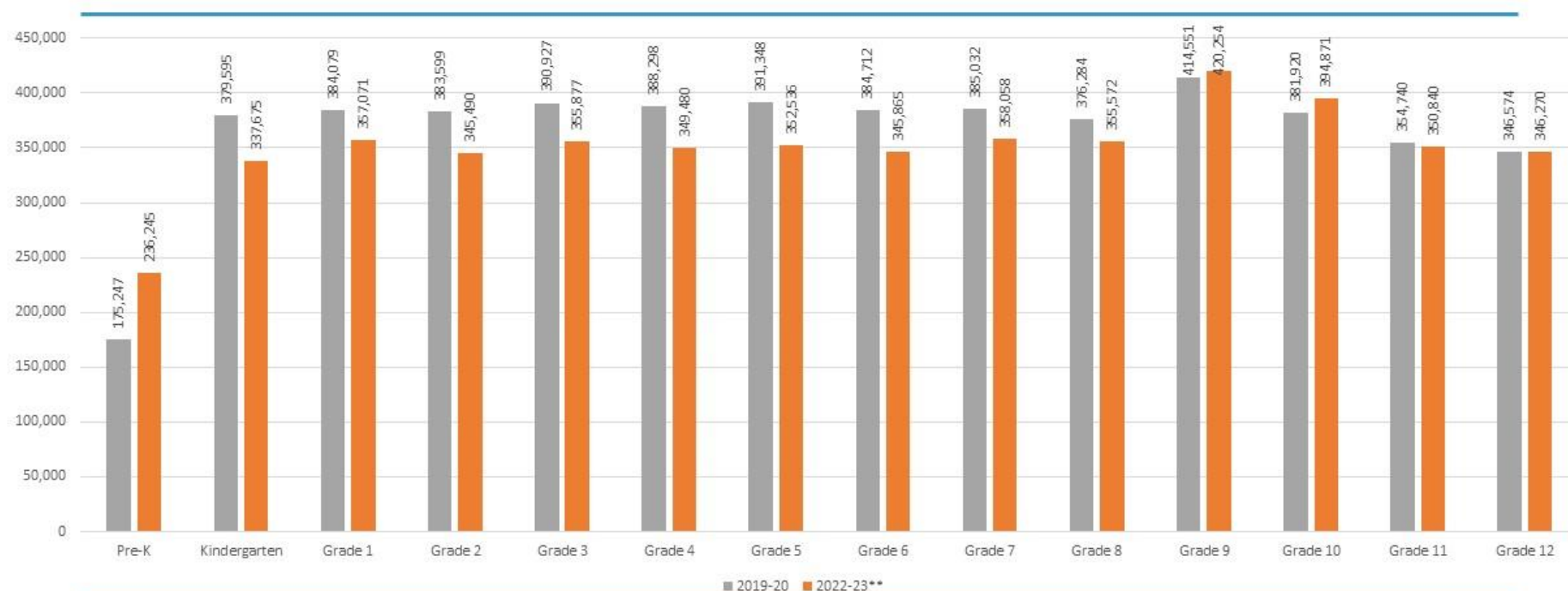


- 2021-22 Grade level enrollment data gathered from Academic KPI and district state website
- 2022-23 Grade level enrollment data submitted by districts and may include unofficial enrollment counts. Last updated 12.15.2022



Total Enrollment by Grade for 2019-20 and 2022-23 School Year

48 Districts Reporting

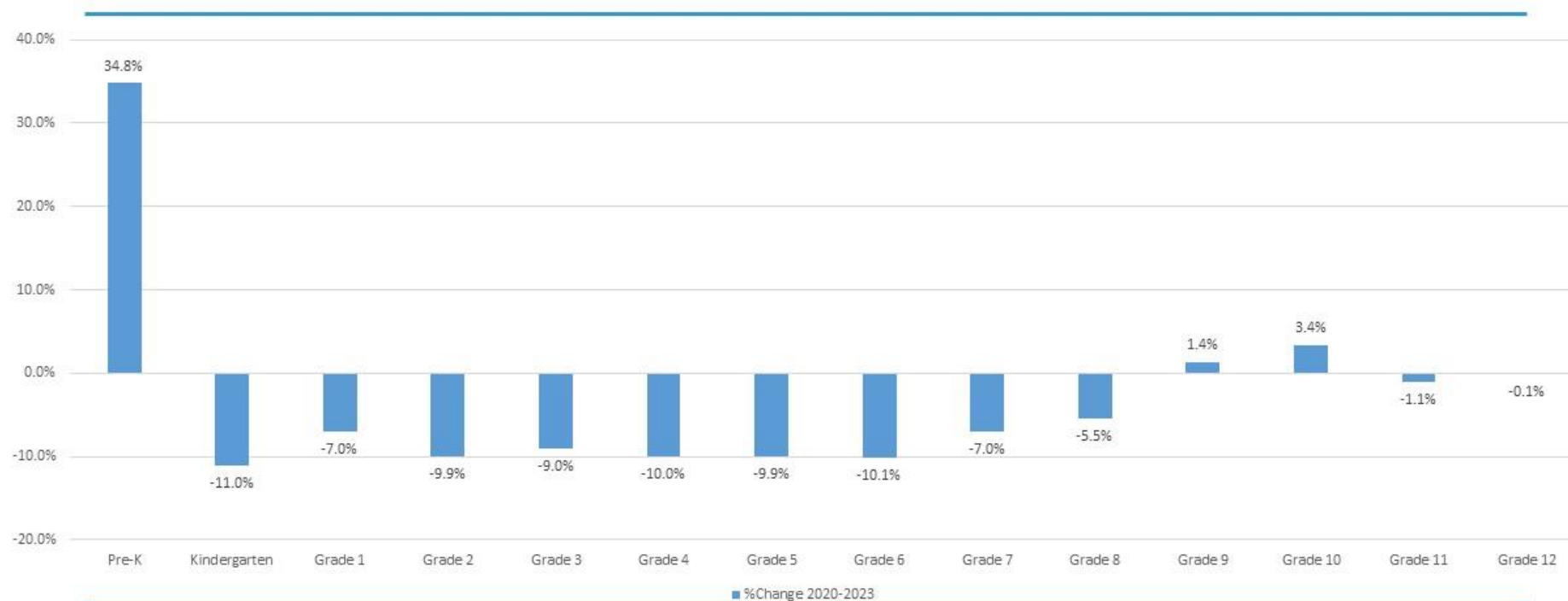


** 2022-23 Grade level enrollment data submitted by districts and may include unofficial enrollment counts. Last updated 12.15.2022



Percent Change in Enrollment by Grade for 2019-20 to 2022-23

48 Districts Reporting



- 2021-22 Grade level enrollment data gathered from Academic KPI and district state website
- 2022-23 Grade level enrollment data submitted by districts and may include unofficial enrollment counts. Last updated 12.15.2022



Total Enrollment by Grade for Each Year 2019-20 to 2022-23

48 Districts Reporting



* Note: Data from the following sources: CCD, Education Data Portal (Version 0.16.0), Urban Institute, accessed 12.15.2022, <https://educationdata.urban.org/documentation/>, made available under the ODC Attribution License. CGCS Academic KPI 2021-22.

** 2022-23 Grade level enrollment data submitted by districts and may include unofficial enrollment counts. Last updated 12.15.2022.

Discussion Questions



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 - In general, there is an increase in enrollment at the high school level, why is this or might this be the case?
 - What next steps will you take as the result of this data?
 - If applicable, what has the impact of declining enrollment had on your district?
 - If applicable, how has your district used data to address declining enrollment?
-

NAEP TUDA COMMUNICATION GUIDE

NAEP TUDA COMMUNICATION GUIDEBOOK

OCTOBER 2022

Dear TUDA leaders,

In October 2022, the National Assessment Governing Board, along with the Council of the Great City Schools, convened a small number of communication directors and research leaders from six TUDA districts to share best practices and strategies for analyzing, interpreting, and messaging NAEP TUDA results.

This guidebook was developed to increase understanding and use of NAEP data and to support your efforts in communicating results. While these resources are optional, we recommend you tailor these resources as needed, based on your TUDA's results and your local context.

National Assessment Governing Board and the Council of the Great City Schools

Many thanks to all communication and research leaders who contributed to this guidebook.

- Roseann Canfora, Ph.D., *Cleveland Metropolitan School District*
- Seth Coleman, *Atlanta Public Schools*
- Wanda Edwards, *Guilford County Schools*
- Maricarmen Eroles, *Dallas Independent School District*
- Charlenta Govan, *Dallas Independent School District*
- Will Jones, *Denver Public Schools*
- Cecilia Oakeley, *Dallas Independent School District*
- André Riley, *Baltimore City Public Schools*
- Sonya Stephens, *Guilford County Schools*
- Aaron Ware, *Dallas Independent School District*

Additional thanks to the following CGCS staff for their support in developing and editing this guidebook.

- Brian Garcia - *Research Manager, Council of the Great City Schools*
- Tonya Harris - *Director of Communications, Council of the Great City Schools*
- Chester Holland - *Research Manager, Council of the Great City Schools*
- Akisha Osei Sarfo - *Director of Research, Council of the Great City Schools*
- Ray Hart - *Executive Director, Council of the Great City Schools*



What is the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)?

- Also referred to as the Nation's Report Card, NAEP is the only nationally representative assessment of student learning, providing data for the nation, 53 states and jurisdictions, and 26 urban districts as part of the TUDA program.
- NAEP was created in 1969 to measure student achievement in reading, mathematics, science, civics, U.S. history, and other subjects.
- All NAEP assessments take place between January and March of the year administered.
- The NAEP Assessment schedule can be found here: <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/calendar.aspx#:~:text=All%20assessments%20take%20place%20between,may%20be%20subject%20to%20change>.
- NAEP is typically administered every two years apart from the 2019 and 2022 administrations when there was a three-year gap due to school disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic.

What does NAEP measure for districts in the TUDA program?

- Districts that volunteer to participate in the Trial Urban District Assessment program receive data that represents achievement in their district, in reading and mathematics, by student groups, such as gender, race/ethnicity, and by critically important contextual data, such as school resources and teacher expertise.
 - No individual or school results are provided.
- Selection criteria is based on district size, percentages of Black or Hispanic students, and percentages of students eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program. Specifically, TUDA districts must be in cities with more than 250,000 residents and enroll more than 4,000 students in both fourth and eighth grades. The demographic requirements for TUDA eligibility can be found here: <https://www.nagb.gov/content/dam/nagb/en/documents/policies/Trial-Urban-District-Assessment-Policy.pdf>.
 - Information on school and student selection for taking the NAEP test can be found here: https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/assessment_process/selection.aspx.



The Origin of the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA)

In 2001, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the National Assessment Governing Board, and the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) successfully advocated Congress to appropriate funds for a district-level NAEP assessment on a trial basis—one that would be voluntary for districts which meet certain selection criteria. In 2022, 26 large city districts participated.

- TUDA began in 2002 with six urban districts participating in the NAEP reading assessment.
- In 2009, 18 districts participated in mathematics and reading.
- 21 districts participated in 2011, 2013, and 2015.
- 27 districts participated in 2017 and 2019.
- 26 districts participated in 2022.

Current TUDA Districts and Initial Participation Year

Albuquerque Public Schools	2011
Atlanta Public Schools	2002
Austin Independent School District	2005
Baltimore City Public Schools	2009
Boston Public Schools	2003
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	2003
Chicago Public Schools	2002
Clark County (NV) School District	2017
Cleveland Metropolitan School District	2003
Dallas Independent School District	2011
Denver Public Schools	2017

Detroit Public Schools	2009
District of Columbia Public Schools	2002
Duval County Public Schools	2015
Fort Worth Independent School District	2017
Guilford County (NC) Schools	2017
Hillsborough County (FL) Public Schools	2011
Houston Independent School District	2002
Jefferson County Public Schools (Louisville, KY)	2009
Los Angeles Unified School District	2002
Memphis-Shelby County (TN) Schools	2017
Miami-Dade County Public Schools	2009
Milwaukee Public Schools	2009
New York City Department of Education	2002
San Diego Unified School District	2003
School District of Philadelphia	2009

Why does our district choose to participate in NAEP TUDA?

- Success in [our school district] starts with examining what students in our urban district know and are able to do, so we can understand how prepared they are for academic success.
- NAEP enables urban districts to make apples-to-apples comparisons with other large urban districts across the country as we examine educational strengths and opportunities in each district and in TUDA districts from across the nation with similar challenges and demographics.
- NAEP shows how achievement varies across, for example:
 - different student groups (racial, gender, English learners, students with disabilities, students in poverty)
 - large urban TUDA districts
 - states

- national public schools,
 - different school resources and contexts
- Our participation in NAEP makes certain the needs, experiences, resources, and diversity of our students and communities are well represented.
- TUDA results provide a consistent measure of student performance over time.
- Results put district performance in a national context, allowing districts to compare their performance and trends to both large city and national public measures. State assessment results only allow you to compare student achievement within your state.
- Results can be used to inform and strengthen district efforts and allow district staff to learn from peers across the country who have shown success when working with their students, staff, and communities.

How does NAEP differ from state assessments?

States administer their own assessments, which are designed to provide individual student data aligned to content standards unique to each state. NCES administers NAEP in every state, offering a common measure of student achievement that allows for direct comparisons among states and participating urban districts.

- State assessments and criteria for success vary by state while NAEP is common across all states and jurisdictions.
- NAEP provides the most reliable understanding of student achievement across the nation and over time.

How are NAEP results reported?

The most common metrics used when reporting and messaging NAEP results are average scale scores and achievement levels.

Average Scale Scores

- Average scale scores simply reveal what average scores a given district, state, or the nation attains, reported in points. But sometimes small point differences are significant and important, other times what seem like large point differences are not significant. This is due to the number of students in each sampling and other statistical considerations.
- Average scale scores enable interpretations about the current level of student achievement; progress or growth of students over time; and relative comparisons between jurisdictions (groups of students in states, districts, or U. S. territories)

- These continuous scores can be used to look at point differences and estimate differences that are statistically significant.
- Statistical significance relays that the differences are not by chance and indicates that differences in scores are “real” or “true”.

NAEP scale scores range from 0-500.

Achievement Levels

- Achievement levels tell a different story from achievement levels by placing students in groups based on their assessment score.
- NAEP scores are reported in three achievement levels (*NAEP Basic*, *NAEP Proficient*, and *NAEP Advanced*).
- The achievement levels are based on cut scores set by the Governing Board and the report cards show the percentage of students scoring at each reported achievement level.
- Students performing at or above the *NAEP Proficient* on assessments demonstrate solid academic performance and competency over challenging subject matter.
- *NAEP Proficient* **does not** represent grade level proficiency. States define proficiency differently.

How can NAEP results be analyzed, interpreted, and used in your messaging about your district's efforts to improve student outcomes?

Telling the story about your district's performance and progress requires analysis of NAEP results. Below we list commonly asked questions around district NAEP performance that you may want to consider when examining NAEP results.

Comparing results to previous years

- How does student performance from 2019 (pre-pandemic) compare to 2022 (current day)?
- How does student performance look over time? Over the last decade? In comparison to the first year of NAEP administration in your district? What are trends in the NAEP data?
- What's happening now?

- Comparing current scores to those from the last two to three administrations provides context for current scores relative to prior administrations.
- What if differences in your districts' scores were not significant (didn't change) between 2019 and 2022?
 - No significant changes in scores from 2019 to 2022 may indicate that your district has helped mitigate the various impacts of COVID-19 on student learning.
 - No significant changes in scores may indicate that instructional and other investments in our districts may have supported efforts to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on student learning.

Comparing results to other jurisdictions (districts, states, and the nation)

- How did my district compare to other jurisdictions over time (national public, large city, state, other TUDA districts)?
 - Be sure to couch your results in the broader context of state and national performance. Did your district grow or decline at the same rate as the state, national public, or large cities? If so, were your district's changes of similar magnitude and direction to state, national public, and/or large city trends?
- Instead of comparing the performance of your district to other TUDA districts, consider comparing the performance of students by race/ethnicity and poverty (e.g., black economically disadvantaged students, Hispanic economically disadvantaged students) to that of other jurisdictions?
- How does your district's performance compare with other jurisdictions that share common state assessments?

Examining results among student groups

- How did my various student groups perform on 2022 NAEP? How did this student group perform over time?
- Consider examining achievement gaps between student groups?

- Have gaps between student groups increased or decreased over time?
- Make sure these comparisons are not influenced or explained by other factors such as poverty. For example, comparisons by race in some large urban districts may really reflect very different income levels between the groups (e.g., affluent White students compared to lower income Black students).
- Note that some groups did not have enough students to report scores.
- For students with disabilities, consider mentioning inclusion rates or exclusion rates.
- Rates for including English learners in the NAEP math assessments may vary by state.
- When looking at student group performance, you also should consider comparing state and national trends in student group performance.

Comparing results by subject

- Does performance differ between reading and math? To what degree?

Comparing NAEP results to state and local assessment results

- Different results between NAEP and state or local assessments may be a result of students having more instructional weeks before testing or other factors that differ between the assessments (e.g., test items, sample size).
- Consider triangulating or examining your NAEP results in combination with other assessment results, looking for similarities or differences.

What are some contextual understandings of your district that should be considered when messaging NAEP results?

Describing factors that may have influenced student learning during the pandemic will be critical to helping stakeholders gain a more well-rounded understanding of results.

- The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to changes in student performance between 2019 to 2022.
 - Sample Messaging: The NAEP data reflect the significant impact that the pandemic had across the nation and our district. The NAEP 2022 results

give a snapshot of the impact of learning disruption, and these results highlight the need for our investments to help our teachers and staff address the unfinished learning our students have experienced. Our district is working not only to recover from the pandemic, but to exceed our pre-pandemic performance levels for our students.

- Note that nationally, student performance in reading and mathematics has declined since 2019.
- 2022 scores are a representative snapshot of student performance post-COVID-19, but do not speak to recovery efforts.
- 2022 scores estimate where you were in winter 2022.
- 2022 NAEP results are one of the best measures of the impact of COVID-19 on student learning, although we still don't know the full impact of COVID-19.
- The COVID-19 Omicron surge, starting in December 2021, and lasting through Winter 2022, created a significant amount of disruption to instruction and the school community.
- Instructional and curricular responses to COVID-19 may have impacted results.
 - How did your district respond to COVID-19? How did your district invest ARP funds to support student learning?
- Districts and states had different approaches to dealing with COVID-19.
- Changes in district enrollment may have created differences in how communities and schools were impacted by the pandemic.
- Non-COVID-19 related instructional and curricular changes that occurred from 2019 to 2022 may also be reflected in results.

Finding the Positive

While NAEP results can be used to understand areas of opportunity and challenges in your district, it is equally important to find and report good and encouraging news.

- ARP funds are assisting in the academic recovery of our students, providing instructional investments to support student learning among other activities.

- NAEP results are a tool to assist us as we navigate through academic recovery.
- You can present your district in the best light by taking deep dives into your data and finding the bright spots.
 - Did your district do better than national public, large city, or TUDA districts?
 - Did your district grow over time?
 - No significant changes in results from 2019 to 2022 also signify a win considering all that has occurred over the last 3 years with COVID-19.
- Using NAEP scores can help drive improvements in your district. The results can be used to decide where targeted supports could be directed to address specific needs.

Future Examinations of NAEP results

The initial release of NAEP results provides a broad view of student performance, allowing us to examine results by student groups and over time. With more analysis, districts and researchers can delve into results by:

- Examining challenges in performance among students in poverty;
- Providing a more nuanced view of the data, including areas where initial analyses may be missing an important piece of the story; and
- Examining the relative success of peer districts across the nation and investigating what influenced higher achievement levels in districts.

Language is extremely important in reporting results.

- Be candid about the impact of the pandemic on the district, state, and nation.
- Find a way to tell what is working well in your district.
- Say things simply and clearly.
- Stay away from statistical jargon.

Frequently Asked Questions

	Nation's Report Card (National Assessment of Educational Progress or NAEP)
What is the purpose?	The Nation's Report Card (also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress or NAEP) provides national, state and TUDA district level data on how well students are doing on a common measure across the country.
Which students are assessed?	A nationally representative sample of students are tested. The 2022 reading and math assessments were administered to nearly 500,000 fourth and eighth graders in nearly 11,000 schools nationwide.
What content is assessed?	This 2022 Nation's Report Card assessed students on reading and math. (In some years, the assessment is also administered to twelfth graders and in additional subjects, including history, science, civics, and more.)
When was the assessment given?	It was administered in early 2022. The previous administration was in 2019.
What are the achievement levels?	NAEP achievement levels describe what students should know and be able to do. Results are reported as percentages of students performing at or above NAEP Basic , NAEP Proficient , or NAEP Advanced . Scoring at the NAEP Proficient level <u>cannot</u> be compared to grade-level proficiency on state or district assessments.

What's on the test?	Questions include multiple choice questions and open-ended questions.
At what level are results reported?	Results are reported at the national and state levels, as well as for 26 TUDA districts. There are no district, school, or individual results.
Why does this assessment matter?	This is a common measure for how students are doing nationally and across states. The assessment gives an important view over time (since the 1960's).
Where can I learn more?	Explore the results at www.nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/

NAEP / TUDA Resources

- An Overview of NAEP_
https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/about/pdf/naep_overview_brochure_2021.pdf
- The Value of NAEP (video resource;_
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQ81_1osEMQ)
- Maine – What is NAEP, video for parents_
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4yHyYea4VmM>
- *Mirrors or Windows: How Well Do Large City Public Schools Overcome the Effects of Poverty and Other Barriers*, CGCS, June 2021_
<https://www.cgcs.org/domain/360>
- *Making the Grade in American's Schools – Assess Student Achievement in Urban Districts*, Kristin Blagg, Urban Institute, June 2016_
<https://www.urban.org/research/publication/measuring-and-assessing-student-achievement-urban-school-districts>

Sample Messaging from Districts

Fort Worth Independent School District

NEWS RELEASE

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Release: IMMEDIATE

Date: October 24, 2022

Fort Worth ISD Receives Test Scores from “The Nation’s Report Card”

The National Assessment of Educational Progress – or NAEP – released its first test scores in three years today and, predictably, results show the impact of the pandemic on student outcomes in both the state of Texas and across the nation.

The Fort Worth ISD is one of 26 large urban districts across the country, and one of four Texas districts –including Austin, Dallas, and Houston – that participate in the NAEP Trial Urban District Assessment. All of these districts agree to have a representative sample of students participate.

NAEP is far different from STAAR testing. While STAAR measures student performance on state curriculum standards, NAEP testing is not aligned with standard in any state nor are scores adjusted for a state or district's demographic makeup.

As the results -- called the "Nation's Report Card"-- reveal, reading scores of the fourth and eighth graders who take the test declined in most states during the pandemic. And, mathematics scores declined in nearly all districts and states throughout who participated.

In fact, the national average score declines in math were the largest ever recorded in that study, according to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics.

In January and February of this year, NAEP assessments were administered to 4th and 8th grades nationwide in reading and math. This test was last administered in 2019. Due to the pandemic there was a three year gap -from 2019 to 2022.

"Notably at reading at both fourth and eighth grades, the Fort Worth ISD maintained pre-pandemic scores," " said Ray Hart, the executive director of the Council of Great City Schools. "Sustaining achievement in any grade or subject in the face of a global crisis is no easy and it is a testament to Fort Worth's academic continuity planning during the crisis, as well as their proactive recovery when schools reopened."

- NAEP mathematics scores for FWISD 4th and 8th grade students decreased from 2019 pre-pandemic to 2022 post-pandemic, a trend

that was seen in many large urban districts, and states across the nation.

- NAEP reading scores for FWISD 4th and 8th grade students saw no significant change from 2019 pre-pandemic. As with other assessments, student NAEP scores in reading saw less negative impact from the pandemic than their mathematics scores.

The Fort Worth ISD continues to aggressively address student progress in reading and mathematics. The District has shifted to a new literacy approach – the science of reading – that is showing early and remarkable success in reading.

FWISD has also introduced a new math curriculum that is also indicating promising outcomes: Eureka in the elementary grades and Carnegie in middle school are yielding positive reactions from District educators. The District is continuing to add supports for mathematics by rolling out a new tool for elementary students next week for individualized student practice. A similar support tool – Mathia – will be available for middle school students.

“To be clear, these data aren’t showing that students are any less capable of meeting and exceeding high academic standards,” said Mr. Hart. “Rather these scores highlight the unfinished learning that districts are currently addressing with a wide range of academic supports.”

-FWISD-

Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and the [Fort Worth ISD Mobile App](#) for the latest information.

2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress Results Show Signs of Promise and Areas for Improvement for The School District of Philadelphia

Posted on October 24, 2022

Categories: [News from SDP](#)

District performance in three of four tested areas was comparable to 2019 pre-pandemic levels, but scaled scores are lower than comparable public school districts in other large cities

PHILADELPHIA, PA — The 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report shows the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) performed similarly to 2019 in three of four tested areas, despite the unprecedented disruption in education due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The District held steady with no statistically significant declines – meaning there was no real change when sampling errors were considered – in fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade reading and math overall, and across all student groups. Scaled scores for fourth-grade math declined eight points versus 2019. However, the majority of public school districts in large cities continue to outperform SDP across all four tested areas.

Nationally, public school districts experienced statistically significant declines versus 2019 across all four tested areas: down five points in fourth-grade reading, three points in eighth-grade reading, five points in fourth-grade math and four points in eighth-grade math. Results for large cities which are comparable to Philadelphia showed statistically significant declines in three of four tested areas when compared to 2019: down three points in fourth-grade reading, and eight points in both fourth-grade and eighth-grade math, with no change in eighth-grade reading.

“Holding steady in three of four areas given the many challenges that all school districts have experienced these past three years is encouraging news that we intend to build on going forward,” said Superintendent Tony B. Watlington, Sr., Ed.D. “But we have a long way to go to ensure all students are succeeding academically. That’s why, outside of student safety, improving academic outcomes for all of our students will be our highest priority as we develop our new five-year strategic plan. Our goal is to make the School

District of Philadelphia one of the fastest improving, large, urban school districts in the country for achieving successful outcomes for all students.”

The School District has already begun to implement efforts designed to create a culture of teaching and learning excellence in every school. These efforts include enhancing teacher supports, such as Professional Learning Communities, and using quarterly assessments across all grades in English Language Arts and Math to give educators more detailed information about their students’ performance and inform personalized instruction and interventions for students.

Highlights of the 2022 NAEP results are as follows:

Average Scaled Score (range 0 to 500)			
	2019	2022	Change vs 2019
4th-Grade Reading			
Nation (public)	219	216	-3*
Large City (public)	212	209	-3*
School District of Philadelphia	197	195	-2 no statistically significant change
8th-Grade Reading			
Nation (public)	262	259	-3*
Large City (public)	255	255	0 no statistically significant change
School District of Philadelphia	243	242	-1 no statistically significant change
4th-Grade Math			
Nation (public)	240	235	-5*
Large City (public)	235	227	-8*
School District of Philadelphia	217	209	-8*

8th-Grade Math			
Nation (public)	281	273	-8*
Large City (public)	274	266	-8*
School District of Philadelphia	256	252	-4 no statistically significant change

**Note: results with a * are statistically significant, meaning there is a high degree of confidence that there is a real difference when sampling errors are considered. A more detailed explanation from NAEP can be found at <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/faq.aspx#q18>.*

“The NAEP data, collected at the peak of the COVID-19 Omicron variant wave, reflect the significant impact that the pandemic had in our Great Cities and the challenges facing students in the aftermath of the pandemic,” said Executive Director Ray Hart of the [Council of the Great City Schools](#). “To be clear, the data aren’t showing that students are any less capable of meeting and exceeding high academic standards. Rather, these scores highlight the unfinished learning that districts are currently addressing with a wide range of academic supports. Sustaining achievement in any grade or subject in the face of a global crisis is no easy feat and is a testament to Philadelphia’s academic continuity planning during the crisis, as well as their proactive recovery efforts when schools reopened.”

Deemed the Nation’s Report Card, the National Assessment of Educational Progress is highly regarded as a nationally representative assessment of what American students know and can do in English Language Arts and Math. Its assessments are typically conducted every two years in math and reading, however the latest assessment represents a three-year timeframe due to the pandemic.

“The School District of Philadelphia has been a voluntary participant in the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) for reading and math since 2009,” said Dr. Tonya Wolford, the School District of Philadelphia’s Chief of Evaluation, Research, and Accountability. “The importance of being able to compare our School District’s performance to others across the nation cannot be overstated. NAEP data along with other achievement data from state and district assessments provides a broad lens for us to view how our students are performing and what areas we need to focus on to improve academic outcomes.”

Los Angeles Unified's NAEP Scores Increase as District Intervention Methods Proving Successful (10-23-22)

CONTACT: Shannon Haber
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Oct. 23, 2022

Los Angeles Unified's NAEP Scores Increase as District Intervention Methods Proving Successful

Los Angeles, CA (Oct. 23, 2022) – Los Angeles Unified students demonstrated the most improvement from 2019 to 2022 on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) test in comparison to any other large city, indicating the District's COVID-19 intervention strategies are achieving positive results. NAEP – also referred to as the Nation's Report Card – released its biannual Mathematics and Reading Assessments, which is the gold standard in comparing Los Angeles Unified students' performance to other large urban districts across the country.

"The Los Angeles Unified community has worked tirelessly over the past few years and endured incredible challenges throughout the pandemic, so this news is truly a bright spot after a period of darkness," Superintendent Alberto M. Carvalho said. "The strategies we have implemented to address learning loss and achievement gaps are working. Is there more work to be done? No doubt. But these are early signs that our deliberate and strategic initiatives are getting students back on track after the past few years of adversity."

Compared to other large cities across the country, Los Angeles Unified demonstrated greater improvement between 2019 and 2022. This is particularly evident in 8th grade Reading, where scores improved by 9 points since 2019 – an important indicator as many anticipated a precipitous decline following the pandemic – with the national average declining by 3 points in the same time period. Additionally, increased scores were not driven by a small number of schools making gains – approximately one-third to one-half of the sampled schools (among which were higher and lower performing schools) increased scores from 2019 to 2022. Other significant data includes:

- In 4th grade Reading, students in Los Angeles Unified improved by 2 points since 2019, while large cities declined by 3 points. The national average, by comparison, also declined by 3 points since 2019.
- In 4th grade Math, students in Los Angeles Unified declined by 4 points since 2019, while large cities declined by 8 points. The national average, by comparison, declined by 5 points since 2019.
- In 8th grade Math, Los Angeles Unified improved by 2 points since 2019, while large cities declined by 8 points. The national average, by comparison, also declined by 8 points since 2019.

“Because of our intentional planning and utilization of ESSR funds on instructional programs, teacher incentives and connectivity support, our schools are making positive headway that should be celebrated,” Superintendent Carvalho continued. “We will continue formulating strategies that directly impact student achievement and ensure student success. We also thank our teachers, school site employees, District leaders, support staff and families for their unyielding commitment to our students and school communities. Their hard work and dedication is appreciated every day.”

As part of the 2022-26 Strategic Plan, Los Angeles Unified has implemented several tactics to address the learning loss from the pandemic including optional Acceleration Days that provide additional instruction time to identify areas of improvement, expanded tutoring services to assist students during and after school hours, robust summer school programs which served over 100,000 students, an influx of counselors and mental health supports, targeted professional learning opportunities for teachers at highest-needs schools that result in effective, equity-driven instruction and multiple opportunities for intervention and credit recovery in Reading, Mathematics and other subjects to students in need.

While these early-warning intervention methods are crucial for all students, they are especially critical for historically underserved students who were most adversely affected by the pandemic. Los Angeles Unified will continue developing and offering opportunities for students of color, families of low socioeconomic status and students with disabilities, whose learning loss is more acute than their peers.

Responding to Nation's Report Card, Guilford County Schools Officials Urge Action to Accelerate Learning and Address National Crisis in Education

Oct. 24, 2022 - The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was released earlier today and showed a national crisis in education that extends to nearly all large districts, including Guilford County Schools (GCS). Nationally, the pandemic has erased more than a decade of academic progress and every district in the country must focus on accelerating learning to ensure that students have the skills they need to compete. GCS students - while outperforming averages for large districts - saw a drop in reading and math scores.

"The pandemic has been the most disruptive singular force in education in a century, but the challenges we face are not solely the effect of a global health crisis. The disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic exposed historical systemic gaps in our nation's education systems and these data make clear that there is an urgent need to accelerate learning," said Superintendent Dr. Whitney Oakley. "We have a stronger foundation to build upon in Guilford County than in many other large districts. Our students outperformed national large city averages across most demographics and our achievement gaps are lower than many of our peer districts. But that does not mean our local crisis is any less urgent. Student performance is down in our county and we need to embrace community-wide efforts to accelerate learning."

Oakley was named superintendent earlier this year. She is a Guilford County native and attended Guilford County Schools from kindergarten through high school. Oakley continues to prioritize high-dosage tutoring, extending learning time and providing student access to grade-level content.

NAEP tests differ from end-of-grade (EOG) and end-of-course (EOC) tests given statewide. Students in grades four and eight are randomly selected for testing, either in reading or math. More than 400,000 students at approximately 5,000 schools were tested nationwide in January, February and March 2022, during the height of the Omicron COVID-19 outbreak. In Guilford County Schools, approximately 3,600 students participated in NAEP testing.

GCS, along with 25 other large city school districts, is a member of the [Trial Urban District Assessment](#) (TUDA) partnership. This partnership allows GCS to test additional students and to view district-level NAEP results, which provides the district with actionable, accurate data on how students compare to others nationally. GCS continues to outperform the majority of TUDA districts across the country in math and reading and has lower achievement gaps between black and white students than most other TUDA districts.

GCS saw a drop in reading and math scores. However, GCS students scored higher than or on par with the majority of their large city peers. NAEP defines “large city” districts as urbanized areas with populations of more than 250,000.

Fourth Grade Math

The average score for fourth graders in GCS dropped seven points from 2019 to a score of 229, a decline similar to that of the large city average, which fell eight points to a score of 227. GCS students performed better than their peers in large city schools, higher than 13 other TUDA districts and similar to seven others.

Eighth Grade Math

The average score for eighth graders in GCS dropped 10 points from 2019 to a score of 270, a decline similar to that of the large city average, which fell eight points to a score of 266.

GCS students performed better than their peers in large city schools, higher than 16 other TUDA districts and only lower than one TUDA district. Additionally, in grade eight, both black students and students with disabilities averaged higher math scores than the nation, state and large cities.

Fourth Grade Reading

The average score for fourth graders in GCS dropped seven points from 2019 to a score of 211. The large city score fell three points to a score of 209. GCS students performed better than their peers in large city schools, higher than 12 other TUDA districts and similar to nine others. Also, in GCS grade four reading, black students outscored national, state and large city averages.

Eighth Grade Reading

The average score for eighth graders in GCS dropped six points from 2019 to a score of 252. The large city average score remains the same at 255. GCS students performed higher than nine other large TUDA districts, similar to nine TUDA districts and slightly lower than large city districts overall.

“Despite the challenges of the pandemic, Guilford County remained significantly higher or on par with other large city school districts across the country,” said Ray Hart, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools. “This illustrates that their investments in recovery from the pandemic are beginning to pay dividends.”

National results were released today at nationsreportcard.gov. GCS staff will facilitate a detailed NAEP results presentation for the Board of Education and members of the community at the Board’s Nov. 15 meeting. That meeting is scheduled for 6 p.m. at the High Point City Council Chambers, 211 South Hamilton Street, High Point.

National reading and math results generally steady, set baseline for growth

BY [THE HUB](#) ON OCTOBER 24, 2022 [HEADLINES](#), [NEWS](#), [NEWS BRIEFS](#), [UNCATEGORIZED](#)

While performance in math and reading by Dallas ISD fourth and eighth graders in the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress remained generally steady, the results showed that the district and the nation must continue working to improve.

This first national assessment after the pandemic saw most of the 26 Trial Urban District Assessment districts and large city schools experience steep declines in performance, especially in math, which registered the largest ever significant decline since the assessments—also known as The Nation’s Report Card—began in 2003.

The story is slightly different for Dallas ISD, where fourth graders’ performance in the math assessments did not register significant change compared to 2019 pre-pandemic results and outperformed 16 other participating TUDA districts and students in large city schools.

Another highlight of the 2022 NAEP for Dallas ISD is the performance of English language learners, who did better than their national peers in all grades and subjects tested. This is important because emerging bilingual students make up 48.4 percent of Dallas ISD’s student population.

The results also show room for growth. Dallas ISD eighth graders registered a four-point decline in math performance compared to 2019; however, they did as well as or outperformed 14 other participating TUDA districts in the 2022 results.

“These national results give us a baseline from which we can continue to work to improve and lift up our students,” said Dallas ISD Superintendent Stephanie Elizalde. “They also show a student-centered board who supported the hard work teachers, principals, auxiliary staff, parents, partners, and everyone with our district did during the pandemic to minimize disruptions and accelerate learning.”

What might not be evident in the data from the 2022 NAEP is where individual participating districts were in their pandemic recovery curve, said Ray Hart, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, based in Washington, D.C. Data reflect a global change in learning and whether districts had started to turn the tide or were further along in their recovery.

“The 2022 data addressed what we all know—the pandemic had an effect on our students, our schools and our communities,” Hart said. “Sustaining achievement in any grade level is no easy feat, and it’s a testament to Dallas’ academic continuity planning during a crisis, as well as the district’s proactive recovery efforts.”

Dallas ISD Assessment Highlights

Math

Fourth-grade students who were identified as eligible for the National School Lunch Program, Hispanics and students identified as English language learners performed significantly higher in the math assessment than those in national public schools and large cities.

Performance by African Americans remained steady compared to 2019 and was similar to that of their peers in national public and large city schools.

In the eighth-grade math assessment, Dallas ISD African American and Hispanic students performed similar to national public schools and large cities while English language learners performed significantly higher than national public schools and large cities.

Reading

In fourth grade, while performance by African American and Hispanic students was similar to that of their peers in national public schools and large cities, English language learners significantly outperformed students in those categories.

English language learners significantly outperformed their peers in national public and large city schools while other eighth-grade student groups performed similar to 2019.

**BUILDING CAPACITY FOR EVIDENCE-INFORMED
IMPROVEMENT**

Building Capacity for Evidence-Informed Improvement: *Supporting State and Local Education Agencies*



Final Report
October 2022

State education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) are critical levers for strengthening the educational system's capacity to generate and use evidence for continuous improvement. However, the work of evidence generation and use is not well-understood within these agencies, nor is there a strong understanding of how the larger educational ecosystem influences this aspect of agency work. This report summarizes two convenings with state and local agency research office leaders, organized by members of the broader education community to create a space to share and to learn about the evidence-related work of educational agencies. More than 60 participants joined these convenings to share perspectives on the factors that support the work as well as the challenges they face, offering recommendations for how the larger educational system can support and benefit from their efforts to generate, elevate and facilitate the use of evidence.

Organizers

Elizabeth Farley-Ripple, *University of Delaware*

Norma Ming, *San Francisco Unified School District*

Dan Goldhaber, *University of Washington & the American Institutes for Research*

Akisha Osei Sarfo, *Council of the Great City Schools*

Paula Arce-Trigatti, *National Network of Education Research Practice-Partnerships*

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Building capacity for evidence-informed improvement

Education can be a powerful vehicle for increasing economic opportunity and upward mobility. But the ability of the education system to serve students well depends fundamentally on making sound educational decisions and investments. Evidence often plays a role in educational decision-making, albeit not always in straightforward, easily-documentable ways (e.g., see Tseng and Coburn, 2019). At the same time, the recognized value of using evidence has increased significantly over the last two decades. Indeed, when Congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, it emphasized using evidence to justify educational decisions.

Evidence, of course, can take many forms, from randomized controlled trials to anecdotes about how teachers or students feel about a policy or practice. There are also clear differences in the ability to generate and draw causal conclusions from different types of evidence. Yet, while education agencies recognize there are clear standards for what constitutes statistical significance and causal inference, the statisticians' standard of research evidence is often not a standard for practical significance that is appropriate to use when faced with a decision. Moreover, it is arguably not a standard that is often met in practice given costs associated with evidence generation and use (Conaway, 2020; Conaway and Goldhaber, 2020; Ming & Goldenberg, 2021). Education agencies find that all forms of evidence can be valuable and rely on the best available evidence when making empirically-based decisions, thus, the fundamental question is: how do we improve the generation and use of research evidence and elevate its role amongst the myriad issues that factor into debates about policy and practice?

Before we get into this issue it is useful to be more precise about what we mean as terms like *evidence* and *research* often get used interchangeably and the distinction between these terms is often a subject of debate. In what follows, we define “research evidence” as evidence that is generated from “the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs” (a definition consistent with what has been used in federal law) and use the term “evidence” alone to constitute broader forms of information gathering about programs or policies.¹

The importance of educational agencies

Scholars and advocates have noted the important roles that state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) play in strengthening the educational system's capacity to

¹ See Tseng (2012) for more discussion about the use of these terms.

generate and use evidence for continuous improvement. These can include, for instance, creating clear lists of evidence-based interventions; building local capacity to find, evaluate, and use research to support improvement planning and implementation; building data and other systems that enable stakeholders' use of evidence; and generating local evidence (including via collaborative research with partners) (Yoshizawa, 2021; Kochanek, et al, 2015; Results for America, 2017; Goertz, et al, 2013; Shewchuk & Farley-Ripple, 2020; Conaway, et al, 2015; Data Quality Campaign, 2016; Farley-Ripple, et al, 2017).

SEAs and LEAs have varying appetites and capacities for this work. In some school districts and states there are explicit commitments to generating and using evidence, because the agency has either a specific unit tasked with those activities (e.g. a research office (RO)) or individuals whose job responsibilities focus on evidence building. But the role of evidence generation and use within these agencies is not well understood, nor is there a strong understanding of how the larger educational ecosystem influences this aspect of agency work. Further, ROs exist in only a small percentage of districts, generally larger and urban districts, and there is similar variation in capacity at the SEA level. Yet, even in agencies that do not have an RO or personnel responsible for evidence generation and use, there will still be calls to bring research and other forms of evidence to bear in decision-making. Thus, while some of the issues that we discuss are centered on the role of ROs, the underlying issues that arise when considering how to generate, elevate or facilitate the use of evidence cut across all school districts and states.

Why now?

There are at least two reasons why considering the role of educational agencies in making decisions is especially important at this time.

First, the recent [National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine report \(2022\)](#) commissioned by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) to advise on the future of education research calls for greater attention in national research priorities to supporting the needs of, collaborating with, and mobilizing knowledge within LEAs. The development of this report served as a backdrop for several other conversations within the education community. For example, in August 2021, motivated by the opportunity to offer feedback to IES about the directions for its next 20 years, Carrie Conaway (Harvard University) wrote a blog post about funding research that is *useful* and *used*. Cara Jackson (Abt Associates) then tweeted out a poll based on those ideas, where the most voted-upon recommendation was to fund researchers embedded in educational agencies. Still yet, a small group of individuals began a social media dialogue about the use of research by school districts and through those discussions two

provocative ideas emerged: the idea that accountability functions can *hijack* the resources inside a research office in an education agency, and the idea that partnering with external researchers and evaluators can *cannibalize* the limited time, energy and resources for those internal research offices to do their work. These conversations crystallize a tension for the field. We have a backdrop of demand for evidence use in educational agencies coupled with significant challenges faced in generating and using evidence.

The convenings

In order to develop a deeper understanding of how to support the generation and use of evidence in educational agencies, we invited current and former staff at state and district agency research offices to share their experiences. Given their proximity to practice and policy decisions, these research offices are poised to have a large influence in how and what types of evidence get taken up in their respective organizations. But, as noted above, little is known about how best to leverage this potential, including how to staff these departments, what responsibilities they should (or should not) take on, and how to enhance their work.²

On March 3, 2022, we hosted a convening of education agency research office leaders to hear from them about their work and what is needed to fully leverage their contribution to evidence-informed improvement across the education system. It was attended by 44 individuals with diverse backgrounds: 30 represented school districts, 3 came from state departments of education, and the rest of the participants came from research institutions, university affiliated organizations, and other independent agencies, many of whom had prior roles in research offices in SEAs or LEAs and were invited to contribute from this perspective. This group represented a range of roles and careers, with the most common job titles being Senior Researcher, Senior Associate, Senior Data Strategist, Senior Director of Research & Evaluation, Senior lecturer, Senior Research Associate, Senior Researcher, and Senior Executive Director of Data, Assessment, and Accountability. These participants were in varying stages of their careers with individuals being in their positions ranging from 30 days to 25 years and at their organizations ranging from 1.5 months to 28 years.

On June 10, 2022, we hosted a follow-up convening with 41 stakeholders, including many of those that attended the first convening, as well as external stakeholders representing federal and philanthropic funders, non-profits, Regional Educational Laboratories, higher education

² Importantly, we recognize that ROs are not the sole place from which evidence emerges in SEAs or LEAs, and that agencies vary in how they organize and develop evidence-related work. At the same time, staff in these offices are intentional and identifiable in their roles of producing and driving the use of evidence as well as a helpful starting point for opening up a conversation about supporting internal capacity for evidence generation and use.

institutions, and policy advocacy organizations. During this conversation, we discussed a draft of this report and discussed key questions that would strengthen its content and impact:

1. How can research offices and staff, as well as education agencies, better organize and coordinate evidence production and use?
2. In what ways can SEAs or LEAs collaborate or coordinate work to enhance capacity for evidence production or use?
3. What current initiatives and supports exist to support the evidence use and production activities of districts? How can we ensure access to these resources, particularly for agencies with the greatest need for additional capacity?
4. What else might external organizations, networks, and governing bodies do to strengthen and support the work of education agency research staff?
5. How do agencies without designated offices or staff manage demands for the production and use of evidence? To what extent do the ideas captured here fit with their needs and goals?

About this report

This report is an *initial step* in elevating the voices of those tasked with leading the generation and use of evidence, to be shared with a broader set of stakeholders – representing policy, practice, and research – with the intent to inform systemwide efforts to address the challenges and needs that surfaced during the conversation. We recognize there are missing voices from the conversation - for example, those responsible for evidence generation and use outside of designated ROs as well as districts that do not have ROs. Our hope is that iterations of this conversation continue with additional representatives in these spaces in the future.

That said, our goal was to build knowledge with the intention of sharing it not only among those that attended, but with others across the educational system, and to develop an understanding of how research offices collectively and other organizations can support this work and these activities.

The report is organized as follows. First, we introduce the work of research offices as background to understanding the outcomes of the conversation on March 3 (*What does the work look like?*). Second, we summarize conversations about the *strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats* which research office staff reported, organized by the parts of the education system that shape their work (*What shapes the work?*). Third, we conclude with *preliminary* recommendations for and lingering questions about better supporting education agency research offices, informed by the conversation with a broader set of educational stakeholders on June 10 (*How can we support the work?*).

What does the work look like?

We first describe a few key aspects of the evidence-related work of research offices and research staff in LEAs and SEAs. These descriptions of course do not address all aspects of their work and may not apply to all agencies. Nonetheless, we intend this as a high-level overview to orient those who may not be familiar with the evidence-work of these individuals and offices.

Accountability reporting

Much of the accountability work of internal research offices focuses on compliance with state and federal (ESSA) accountability reporting requirements including the tracking of student academic performance as measured through assessments, attendance, discipline or graduation rates as well as completing mandated surveys. Some districts may also develop and track local accountability measures, likely tied to school or even teacher performance, or help monitor and track performance related to their district's strategic plan goals. Yet, accountability work within these offices can also extend to cover ad-hoc data reporting for other district departments or school board members, or responding to public records requests and media inquiries.

While accountability work is centered around state and federal reporting requirements, accountability leads often assist with evaluating related programming and summarizing results to report out to both internal and community stakeholders. These reports or presentations help inform stakeholders of the progress students are making towards accountability related goals and help guide district or school programming or strategies targeted towards reaching these goals.

With COVID-19, district offices have seen an increase in reporting requirements. For example, data collection requirements under ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief), which are designed to create a national database on district level expenditures and district level staffing, are estimated to cost districts 2 million hours of new data collection, increasing school district burden from 5 to 140 hours to complete (Council of the Great City Schools, 2022). With decreasing capacity and limited resources, increases in accountability and data reporting requirements have stretched internal research offices' abilities to be responsive.

Local evaluation and analyses

Before and beyond reporting summarized data to external governing bodies, local and state education agencies also engage in additional analysis and research to inform internal

decision-making. This ranges from analyzing existing data or research evidence to seeking out additional data and research for further insights or to provide local evidence.

Analyses of existing data can include descriptive summaries of data beyond what was required for mandatory reporting, possibly through additional metrics, time points, or disaggregations. For example, schools and districts may be interested in exploring course grades using different calculations for grade point average or at different thresholds (C's and above vs. passing), or in examining attendance over shorter time intervals (class period vs. full-day; six-week cycle vs. semester or year). Disaggregations could also entail closer examinations of various student subgroups, requiring different definitions of race and ethnicity, or intersections of race/ethnicity with socioeconomic status, or of English proficiency with home language.

Further analyses can zoom in to the individual or zoom out to broader aggregate patterns. Individual-level analyses involve identifying specific students or schools meeting pre-defined criteria for providing differentiated services (e.g., readiness or on-track indicators; school funding tiers). Descriptive analyses include longitudinal trends and time series; cross-sectional comparisons across school sites; or statistical identification of unusual patterns and outliers. Correlational analyses examine relationships between outcomes (e.g., socioemotional learning and academics) or between inputs (e.g., teacher characteristics, school funding) and outcomes (e.g., school climate, academic performance). Predictive analyses include modeling student growth on academic and other outcomes based on various inputs, constructing leading indicators and their thresholds for differentiating tiers of supports, or proposing potential improvement targets.

Beyond mandatory data collection and reporting, local education agencies may also seek to gather information from additional measures, such as district-level interim assessments or surveys of students, families, and staff. Evaluating specific programs and policies can motivate more narrowly targeted data collection, potentially including observations, interviews, and focus groups. Data collection for evaluations is often guided by prior collaboration in articulating the program logic model or theory of action, identifying measures aligned to that theory, developing instruments and measures, and planning the evaluation design along with a sensible sampling strategy. All of this requires coordination and management of various administration processes.³

³This can include administering assessments and surveys, as well as organizing the databases, maintaining codebooks with data definitions, coordinating and linking data across different systems, creating reports or dashboards to visualize the data, and supporting staff in interpreting these data.

External research partnerships

Research staff or offices at educational agencies may also seek to enhance the research capacity of the agency through engagement with external (to the agency) researchers at universities, research institutions, independent consultants, and/or non-profit agencies. In some cases, agency-external researcher relationships may take the form of a research-practice partnership (RPP), which typically involves a long-term relationship between research and practice institutions that collaboratively identify and jointly work on high priority research-based challenges from the world of education practice. In other cases, the relationship may take on the form of a consultant-client agreement in which the external research entity is contracted to complete a specified project(s) under a more transactional than relational arrangement.

A growing number of external research partnerships in LEAs and SEAs are characterized as RPPs. There is a great deal of variation in how RPPs are structured, in who is represented in the core partnership team, and in the types of research and research-based activities that are undertaken (Farrell, et al., 2021; Arce-Trigatti, Chukhray, and López Turley, 2018). For example, some RPPs may conduct programmatic evaluations of agency-led implementation, while other RPPs may work closely with the agency to conduct exploratory analyses that might inform broader policy decisions. Some education agencies may be able to support multiple RPP-based projects while other agencies may wish to focus on a singular one. Related, some agencies may also have multiple RPPs associated with their organization, and as such, may work with several external organizations on various projects. Other RPPs may consist of one practice-facing agency and one research-based agency.

A key feature of partnership work is that *it is done in collaboration* with the agencies that are focused on the connection between research and practice. In theory, this is critical to producing the kinds of research or research-based products that will be of great value. But this also requires careful facilitation and navigation, as there may be different timelines, incentives, and political contexts that may meaningfully impact how the collaboration plays out. The building of trust across partners is very important as is the development of a shared vision for working with external partners.

A partnership broker, intermediary, or boundary spanner (i.e., one that works at and across the boundaries of education research and practice) can be especially helpful in supporting this kind of joint work given their ability to translate and connect as needed. Research staff in education agencies are particularly well-suited for this kind of role given their expertise of both research and practice.

Brokering and facilitating use of evidence

As suggested above, a key role for research staff is as knowledge broker, which includes a wide range of activities such as leading, conducting, and reporting research to less visible tasks associated with negotiating internal and external politics around using the results of research and evaluation (Neal, et al., 2021; Rycroft-Smith, 2022; Shewchuk & Farley-Ripple, 2020). Other tasks may include finding or conducting reviews of relevant external research, whether to provide insights on effective practices to consider, or to offer benchmarks for comparison with other education agencies.

Research staff are often involved in building the agency's capacity for evidence generation and use. This can include work that focuses on developing the research and data literacy of school and district staff as well as other stakeholders, through professional learning, workshops, or other forms of technical assistance. Capacity-building also includes developing systems and processes that facilitate the generation and use of evidence - including developing research agendas, strengthening data systems, creating legal agreements for data sharing, and developing routines to ensure that programs are evaluated and that the evidence is used to guide decisions. These outcomes are important enabling conditions for other aspects of the evidence use work of LEAs and SEAs.

Another component of knowledge broker work among research staff entails facilitating and negotiating evidence use. This means not merely generating evidence described above (e.g. accountability reporting, evaluation, external research), but also helping stakeholders to understand its meaning, its relevance to local needs and issues, and its implications for policies and practices. Through this work, research staff can help agency staff to develop more meaningful questions about the evidence they need, help them to better understand the value of evidence and their work (and also demand for it), and ensure appropriate use of that evidence in making decisions that support teaching and learning. Facilitating use requires that research staff navigate the politics of education: understanding when and how to communicate evidence that is “bad news” or doesn't fit with current priorities, managing power dynamics within the central office and between internal and external partners, and understanding policy windows for driving evidence-informed change. These roles demand deep knowledge of the organization and local context.

At the core of this work is building and maintaining relationships with both internal and external stakeholders. Whether conducting local evaluations, building partnerships with external researchers, or reporting to the school board, research staff need to develop strong and trusting relationships. Relationships are important for accessing relevant information, from

finding external research to inform local work to learning about initiatives in other units or departments. In turn, strong relationships enable the research office or staff to be a source of information and support to others, which facilitates their capacity building and evidence use work. Relationships with internal (e.g. district leadership, other departments) and external (e.g. community members, researchers, vendors, state/federal agencies, other networks) individuals and organizations enable collaborative work that helps develop and achieve the agency's evidence objectives.

Collaborative work is likely to be particularly important for smaller LEAs. This is both because smaller LEAs will have more limited numbers to work with (in terms of sample sizes of teachers and students) when trying to draw inferences, and because they may lack financial support or research capacity. This suggests the importance of cooperation between smaller LEAs and a key coordination role of SEAs.

What shapes the work?

At the heart of the March 3rd convening were small group conversations in which participants engaged in a strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats (SWOT) analysis of their work. Participants self-selected into groups with different starting points - external partnerships, local evaluation, assessment and accountability reporting, and a fourth group that was open to all - but were not limited to talking about those issues, and were encouraged to discuss and post to a jamboard to share their ideas. We synthesized these remarks and summarized them here as strengths and challenges, organized by the multiple levels of the education system that influence their work.

Education Agency Research Offices and Staff

Within education agencies, the primary responsibilities for facilitating the generation and use of evidence may be concentrated within an internal research office or distributed across personnel who also hold other responsibilities. Here we describe the strengths and challenges they report facing due to their positionality of working within the agency, whether in a dedicated research office or in other offices.

Strengths include relationships with key decision-makers, local knowledge of context, and access to data. Close relationships with agency leaders facilitate timely access to sometimes-sensitive knowledge as well as opportunities to influence decisions, not just during narrow policy windows but also across multiple leaders in a range of formal and informal

decision-making spaces. These relationships may build on a foundation of awareness of the kinds of evidence which specific individuals are likely to understand and appreciate, as well as their prior knowledge, beliefs, and values. Such relationships enable gathering valuable information for generating more useful evidence in response to agency needs, as well as brokering better use of data and evidence.

Access to knowledge and data arises both from interpersonal relationships and from institutional embedding. Local knowledge may encompass factual details about implementation, relevant history and context, and related initiatives, as well as familiarity with norms, values, and the culture of the agency and community. Due to institutional barriers to protect security and privacy, data access is much easier from within the agency than through external data-sharing agreements, resulting in access to sensitive fields or levels of disaggregation which are not available to outside partners.

Potential strengths in future opportunities range from making better use of available internal and external resources, to engaging in the work more strategically. Some possible adaptations to the work address data management and analysis, such as improving processes and systems for organizing and sharing data, analyzing existing longitudinal data, using data to reveal current conditions, conducting more timely and actionable analyses, planning evaluations before the work begins, applying continuous improvement methods, and studying implementation before impact. Other opportunities focus on relationships, such as strengthening connections with decision-makers, expanding participatory approaches to reach a broader range of interest holders, and developing more proactive partnerships, whether with those who seek data or with those who seek change. Additional opportunities for capitalizing on external resources to build capacity within the organization include pursuing training in evaluation methods, partnering with outside researchers to develop new skills, taking on interns or research fellows, and rebuilding internal research and data teams.

Challenges include weaknesses internal to the structures and resources for research offices and research staff, as well as external threats coming from elsewhere in the agency or beyond. Internal weaknesses include political vulnerability resulting from within-agency positionality, as well as a range of constraints associated with limited resources and capacity for education agencies to engage with data and evidence. Political vulnerability complicates sharing both unfavorable and favorable findings, with agency staff being hindered from presenting unfavorable results or encountering distrust by outside audiences when presenting favorable results.

Resource and capacity limitations emerge at both the institutional and individual levels. The limited resources in local education agencies are typically prioritized for directly serving students and schools, with minimal allocations for research and data infrastructure. Agency research staff thus may lack access to academic libraries, institutional review boards, survey platforms, grant support, funding to support data collection, and graphic design and dissemination resources. Further, agencies may be unable to invest either in the technical systems for robust data, knowledge management, and project management systems, or in the staff and training required to maintain these systems and ensure consistent practices for their use. Of the small number of staff with research skills, the need to address a wide range of education issues demands them to become generalists rather than maintaining up-to-date methodological or content expertise. Small team sizes also limit opportunities for advancement, which may lead talented staff to go elsewhere for further career development. With upper management positions potentially requiring board approval amidst politically uncertain environments, research staff may prefer the stability and leadership opportunities in other organizations. The additional managerial and political demands associated with these positions may also be unappealing to research staff who feel that those expectations compromise their time or freedom to conduct rigorous analysis and maintain their connections to the research community.

External challenges include unreliable resources, staff turnover, competing demands, and unrealistic expectations. Budget cuts and dependence on soft money pose challenges to stability. Such reduced resources, along with political fluctuations in governing leadership, may hasten staff turnover. Competing demands on limited time and resources arise from tensions in responding to multiple interest holders, multiple purposes for data, and shifting priorities. In addition to managing other responsibilities, internal agency research staff may be asked to provide data and analyses for other departments, board officials, external funders, public records requests, and media inquiries. Tensions arise between using data for internal improvement and releasing data for public accountability, especially when high-visibility requests are both urgent and unexpected. Given limited capacity, such requests may displace conducting and sharing other analyses which may have greater potential for informing improvement of policy and practice. Finally, unrealistic expectations for data emerge when interest holders demand immediate results, when the desired outcomes are not aligned with program activities or locus of control, or when political agendas become embedded in the requested analyses.

Education Agencies More Broadly

Research offices or staff exist within larger agencies with broad goals and responsibilities for educational opportunities and outcomes of the communities they serve. These contexts are an important and influential backdrop to the evidence work of these individuals. Below, we share participants' perspectives on how their larger agency shapes their work.

Among the **strengths** that agencies afford is their continued use of locally relevant data, research, and evaluation in decision-making. Agencies' interest in data and research has increased tremendously with the pandemic in terms of their need to understand the impact of COVID on student learning, to determine where to allocate additional funding received due to the pandemic, to identify students who need additional supports due to unfinished learning, and their desire to understand the impact of pandemic-related instructional strategies intended to accelerate learning missed during the pandemic.

At the same time, there are various ways that agencies pose **challenges** for the evidence work of research offices and staff. Agency leadership may not fully understand that the role of research offices in agencies has expanded outside of typical data or research requests to include producing reports to help inform stakeholders on how students have experienced learning throughout the pandemic; measuring students' unfinished learning; and developing evidence-based plans to recover student learning, among other things. Meeting these demands and requests has become even more challenging over the last couple of years, particularly with education becoming a battleground in an increasingly political climate and among families' growing dissatisfaction and anxieties about their children's schooling during the pandemic. Yet, education agencies may lessen the opportunity for the production and use of evidence from research offices through a weak data culture, poor communication with public stakeholders about how to interpret data in published reports, misalignment of research and evaluation timelines with district budget and policy decision making, inconsistent coordination between departments about anticipated data requests, and understaffed research departments. Faced with urgent needs to staff schools, districts may deprioritize hiring for research departments and other central offices. Staffing policies developed for other education agency roles also may not align with the standards of the field for education researchers, making it more difficult to attract and retain staff with research skills within education agencies.

These agencies have opportunities to develop and promote a positive and strong data culture among their staff and in the community, which is critical for research offices to leverage the production and use of data and research. Strong data cultures that properly invest in and

support the brokering and use of evidence are built on a sound understanding of the work of research offices and allow time and flexibility for research offices to work strategically. Investing in and developing strong data cultures within education agencies and their communities can also reduce the misuse or misunderstanding of data and research in decision making and in public discourse. This is also important for protecting the time and energy of research staff, for whom spurious data requests may become a source of frustration or otherwise “hijack” their capacities away from longer-term analytical projects.

Another challenge of education agencies is the need to align work and timelines as well as a lack of stakeholder buy-in to research processes. Oftentimes, the work of internal research offices does not align with the work of collaborating departments, where they are not included in the development of theories of action and useful or sensible logic models, in clearly defining what is being evaluated, and setting overall expectations for research and evaluation products. Involvement in these early conversations is critical to supporting proper program development and implementation and allows programs to be set up properly for evaluation. Data collection and research processes also require buy-in from all stakeholders, both at the leadership level and throughout the agency. Not only does buy-in from stakeholders support sufficient data collection, it builds capacity for data use in classrooms and schools and allows for the best use of evidence throughout the agency. While research offices may need to work independently to complete some research and evaluation processes, they truly benefit from coordinated and collaborative efforts across districts to collect and share evidence. Finally, the work of internal research offices often does not align with or lacks coordination between producing research or evaluation reports and making policy decisions. Ensuring alignment of timelines allows for budget and policy decisions to be grounded in evidence.

The work of internal research offices is often driven by agency leadership and governance. Leadership tends to have their own philosophies around data and that shifts with changes in leadership. Changes in board policies or agencies with other governing priorities may also add or change requirements or requests around data collection and reporting.

Agencies sometimes bring in external research partners to add capacity and talent to research offices or when there is mistrust among internal research offices. While external research partners may prove beneficial, their inclusion often requires additional management work and data collecting for research offices and can also diminish the hard work and capabilities of internal research staff.

External governing bodies

The conversation among participants sometimes reflected the ways in which external governing bodies can indirectly influence the work of research offices and staff in LEAs and SEAs.

One way external governance may **strengthen** their work is through ESSER funding, which became available to SEAs and LEAs in 2020 to assist in addressing the needs of students and communities during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. As noted above, the need for academic recovery and ESSER requirements themselves have the potential to increase demand for rigorous evidence as SEAs and LEAs look to strategically target resources to improve student learning. Funds can also be used to build a research office or research team's much-needed capacity as demand for evidence grows. Last, ESSER increases the visibility of the research office by drawing attention to evaluation and reporting needs and contributions to the work of the system.

An ongoing **challenge** for the work of research staff and research offices is shifting accountability requirements. Changes to test policies, optional testing initiatives, changing or removing graduation requirements all demand shifts in the data, accountability, and evaluation work, which strains already-thin resources and draws attention away from the strategic work of research staff. Additionally, accountability policies emphasize student outcomes and teacher qualifications and less often systems and practices. This emphasis can narrow LEA and SEA priorities and limits the potential contributions of research offices to instructional improvement. Last, limited focus on accountability for good business practices can lead to organizational conditions which make it difficult to leverage the potential of research offices or to generate and use evidence in improvement efforts.

External research partners

Working with external research partners is often an important part of generating and using evidence in educational agencies. While there are several benefits to these partnerships, they can also create additional challenges for staff.

Among the **strengths** of partnering with external researchers is the possibility and potential for enhancing or extending the research capacity of the education agency. These capacities include resources such as time, skills, or expertise that either may not be available at the agency or may be available but in limited capacity due to other competing demands (e.g., accountability reporting). Additionally, there is an opportunity to engage in a variety of novel activities when working with an external partner, including modifying the research question generation process, utilizing new methods to investigate research questions, learning from

others, and connecting to and with a broader research community beyond the agency walls. The potential for political cover afforded by externally produced research, especially due to the perceived independence of such research, is also an important strength.

Related, there are also several opportunities and benefits to structuring research efforts in this way. For example, in terms of the individual benefits, partnering with external researchers may help to change one's own perspective of a problem of practice, may validate different kinds of expertise with respect to addressing a practice priority, may afford various training opportunities on both the research and practice sides, and may offer intellectual stimulation. At the organizational level, partnering with external researchers may strengthen the connection between research and practice, a relationship that has historically had its own difficulties. And finally, the research itself may benefit, through the production of higher quality research that is informed by both research and practice, through more cost-effective approaches, and through the identification and development of new questions.

Despite the numerous potential benefits associated with external partnering, there are a number of **challenges** that influence the facility of adopting this type of approach. For example, the management of external partnerships tends to come with its own set of challenges, including (but not limited to) relationship management, unanticipated time demands, lack of institutional knowledge of the education agency, friction due to unfamiliarity or differing norms of communication, and so on. For example, working with external partners requires considerable additional responsibilities in the form of securing approval of contracts, setting up legal agreements (e.g., MOUs), preparing and sharing data, and even scheduling meetings across institutions. Moreover, launching an externally-partnered research project in partnerships presents a particular set of challenges that may derive from a mismatch between research needs and expertise, a misalignment between academic and practice incentives, substantially different timelines guiding the work of research and practice, as well as the political realities of practice-facing settings, which may be prohibitive. Additionally, there may also be externally-partnered research that is not necessarily attuned to the needs or practice, such as the program evaluations required by philanthropic funders, external research grants with inflexible demands, and national survey studies that aren't intended to inform a particular local agency's policies and that are not usually helpful for improvement.

There are also some inherent features of collaborative research approaches that are challenging, such as the lack of stable funding for many external partnerships, the lengthy time required to build truly meaningful relationships, and the negotiation of political dynamics between partners (e.g., the hiding of unfavorable results or the forging ahead of publishing these), which can be tricky. Finally, there may be systemic factors that threaten this approach, including the existence of White privilege in academia, the upholding of harmful and

imbalanced power dynamics between research and practice partners, limited budgets that can constrain an agency's ability to fully leverage external partnerships, and turnover on both the research and practice sides.

Other research organizations and intermediaries

Other research organizations and educational intermediaries - outside of formal partners - can shape the work of research staff in LEAs and SEAs.

One of the **strengths** which research staff bring to their work is their professional networks which often include these organizations. These include membership in professional associations, relationships with other government agencies, and other networks (e.g. Council of the Great City Schools, National Network of Education Research-Practice Partnerships) to which they belong. Additionally, they also often have informal relationships with members of the larger educational system, including researchers and policymakers, from their current and prior professional roles. Together, these networks offer valuable resources - such as knowledge, additional capacity, and social capital - that help research staff navigate and succeed in their evidence use work. However, networks or professional communities of research offices or staff are smaller or less established, which can mean that for some agencies, research staff are isolated and reliant on the knowledge and resources within their own context. For them, building connections through networks of researchers may help fill this gap.

On the other hand, **challenges** pertaining to other organizations and intermediaries were noted. First, as research offices seek to build their capacity, they compete with these other organizations for talent, often losing due to better pay and working conditions. Further, there are challenges associated with building and leveraging relationships with these other organizations. Additionally, there may be few resources within education agencies - whether staff, time, or financial resources - to dedicate to building relationships or partnering with other organizations in ways that leverage shared resources.

How can we better support the work?

Within the SWOT conversations, participants also shared what different stakeholders in the system could do to support their work in promoting the generation and use of evidence in their organization. Their initial ideas are a useful starting point for an agenda to enhance the system's capacity for evidence-informed improvement.

Education agency research offices and staff

We make a number of suggestions for internal agency research office staff to build on the above strengths and opportunities and to address weaknesses and threats. Our specific recommendations span five themes: strengthening internal agency relationships, engaging in strategic work, improving data collection and use, building team capacity, and leveraging external partnerships.

1. Within-agency relationships: Starting with the general principle of ensuring that practitioners and leaders are actively involved in research and evaluation, strengthening relationships within the agency addresses questions of “with whom” and “how”. Issues of “with whom” include forging relationships with less-connected departments and schools, as well as advocating for more coherence and less “siloeing” between divisions. Collaborating with the fund development office early in the process of seeking external grants also strengthens connections to staff who can facilitate greater evidence use. However, research offices must build these relationships while also maintaining independence from other departments, in order to protect the neutrality of their evaluations and reporting. Examples of “how” to build relationships include conversations and co-development. Conversations with leaders asking them how they used previous analyses before conducting new analyses raises expectations for using evidence, not just producing evidence, and may also help shape analyses to be more useful. Other conversations include sharing updates on the range of research projects and data collection activities taking place, in order to prioritize and plan sampling strategies carefully among them. Co-development may occur prior to starting work, such as collaboratively building research agendas with department leaders each spring to prioritize and plan projects for the following academic year. This also includes jointly creating logic models, rubrics, and clear expectations for deliverables and timelines to guide the data collection, analysis, and reporting. Co-development may also occur at the conclusion of a project, where research staff and practitioners jointly plan and facilitate organizational learning opportunities to share research and evaluation findings with broader audiences to formulate actions based on the evidence.

2. Strategic work: Working more strategically addresses how to anticipate as well as how to triage and adapt to requests involving data and evidence, whether by decreasing, increasing, or otherwise improving specific activities. To anticipate requests, discussing how research may be useful can guide the search for evidence prior to implementation, as well as the data collection plan during implementation. Reframing evidence more broadly than just research or data may also help illuminate the role of research staff in informing organizational decision-making. Triage may translate into meeting minimum reporting and compliance

obligations but declining other requests for technical assistance outside of research and evaluation, through engaging in difficult conversations with colleagues about which analyses would yield the greatest impact on decisions. Research offices also have the opportunity to learn to be more forward thinking and work more strategically to anticipate common research or data requests and to build their internal capacity to adhere to the increasing requests. A related recommendation is to develop a menu of standardized services to reduce customized reporting and analysis. In conjunction, research staff should simultaneously invest more effort in turning data into useful information and in conducting analyses that will inform high-leverage decisions. Another strategy may be to identify the kinds of data-related activities that can and should be done by other offices in the agency, and to support them in building their capacity to gather and use evidence thoughtfully.

3. Data collection and use: Improving data collection and use encompasses strategies to facilitate data collection, analyzing existing data, and creating tools to support the interpretation of data. Tools for efficient informal data collection may include survey instrument templates with fields that facilitate linking records and disaggregating information according to standard reporting categories. Another possibility is to provide examples of embedded measures that can be readily integrated into regular practice, to allow scraping and analyzing the data later. Other recommendations include conducting more longitudinal rather than just cross-sectional analyses of available data, and sharing data conversation protocols for practitioners and leaders to use when discussing data interpretations and implications.

4. Team capacity: Building team capacity addresses hiring as well as on-the-job professional learning and collaboration opportunities. Research staff need to be creative, critical thinkers with a strong background in research methods, statistics, and evaluation. Since salaries in education agencies are not particularly competitive with other industries seeking similarly qualified people, creating attractive work conditions requires providing the right balance of guidance, support, and independence for them to thrive. Professional learning may include training in additional research and evaluation methods from external sources, as well as immersing junior team members in the work of schools and other departments to better understand their perspectives, experiences, and needs. Given the often solitary nature of data and analysis work, providing the team with opportunities to collaborate and learn together builds collegiality and collective efficacy, in addition to strengthening the validity and robustness of the work.

5. External partnerships: Finally, leveraging external partnerships combines setting clear expectations with collaborating strategically. Before bringing in external research partners, agency staff should consult with their internal research colleagues to weigh the tradeoffs

between the independence and extra capacity of an outside partner, and the longer timelines, reduced flexibility, increased inefficiencies, and opportunity costs associated with external partnerships. Setting expectations include establishing boundaries for sharing data and for interacting with other district and school staff, along with establishing norms that any access to data (primary or secondary) comes with the expectation of returning useful information gained from those data. Those norms may specify expectations for how and when to provide periodic updates, as well as formats for reports and other deliverables. Partnering strategically with outside researchers allows agency staff to learn from them while balancing responsibilities to avoid redundancy and maximize complementarity of efforts. Other opportunities for partnering include sharing lessons with research staff in other agencies, such as strategies for prioritizing across the range of demands or other practical tools. Strategies for managing research requests may include asking departments to conclude certain research projects before initiating new projects, closing projects which have not provided the expected deliverables, tracking the impact of research projects on instructional time or educators' work time, and normalizing saying "no" to projects which are not worth the investment.

Others within education agencies

Agencies can advance the work of research offices and staff by continuing to build and strengthen the culture around evidence production and use. This will require an investment not only in people working in research departments but also in gaining knowledge around the work of research departments and the value of internal and external research. It also includes protecting research staff, their work and participation in data collection and analysis efforts through the development of policies and practices that support the production of research and evaluation throughout the agency. Having stable agency leadership can make the work of research offices less challenging and allow for more strategic planning. It can also foster a more stable research unit within the agency, where research departments are better able to recruit and retain talented research staff.

A critical issue is examining how the agency's organizational structure may support or hinder evidence generation and use. There is considerable variation both across and within agencies over how research staff are organized. Reporting structure emerged as one key theme throughout our meetings. Some research offices which were situated underneath other departments such as human capital, curriculum and instruction, student services, or education leadership noted that it was problematic for maintaining independence from the programs being evaluated. Locating the research office within the information technology department brought other concerns, such as reducing the visibility of research or potentially reinforcing misconceptions of research as data access rather than as evidence to guide decision-making.

Multiple members of research offices which reported to the accountability officer, chief of staff, superintendent, or board appreciated the ways that it elevated the importance of research and evaluation. However, regardless of position in the organization, maintaining connections with leaders across program areas continues to be important for providing a broad view of the system and ensuring the relevance of research and evaluation.

A related question is whether to distribute research or data analysts across different divisions or to concentrate them within a centralized research office. Locating analysts in other departments provides programmatic and operational leaders with more immediate access to relevant data and evidence. In organizational cultures which model using evidence to learn and improve, this can enable leaders to adapt more rapidly as information is updated. However, others have observed that this arrangement may lead to greater variability in analysts' training and responsibilities for research and data use. It may also lead to redundancy in work and lack of organizational clarity, where different analysts may be performing very similar tasks according to different standards. In organizations with hierarchical reporting structures or cultures of top-down decision-making, power dynamics favoring upper management may result in analysts being expected to complete short-term reporting tasks on demand, rather than more in-depth projects based on their interests and expertise. In contrast, situating all analysts in the same department may provide more flexibility in aligning projects with their areas of interest, content expertise, and methodological expertise. Leveraging collaborations across analysts with complementary areas of interest and expertise could yield greater efficiency and more robust work. Allowing analysts to specialize rather than all becoming generalists could also lead to greater differentiation, professional satisfaction, and long-term retention, by creating more opportunities for advancement. Both reporting structure and location of analysts in the agency are perennial themes in discussions among networks of research staff. We recommend a deeper analysis of these different organizational structures and how they function as barriers or facilitators affecting evidence use.

Education agencies should commit to gaining a better understanding and working knowledge of how to measure and monitor improvement and progress, moving from quick data pulls and data reporting for sake of accountability, to asking questions around implementation, outcomes and "how do we know". Agencies should use data in less reactive ways and in more strategic ways, embedding data practices throughout the fabric of decision-making throughout the agency.

Gaining buy-in from key stakeholders, both internally and externally, around the importance of data collection and use in agency decision-making is also critical. This means having

stakeholders understand why data is being collected, how it's being collected, how their voice will be protected throughout the research process, why the research or evaluation is being conducted, and reporting findings back to stakeholders.

Overall, agencies could benefit from seeing research offices as part of a system of learning. In particular, it is important that research is valued throughout agencies, such that there is coordination across different parts of the agencies that are essential to providing evidence. The collection of various kinds of data that inform research will happen across different parts of an agency, from parent surveys to information about teacher retention. Similarly, evidence may be used by different parts of an organization from human resources to curriculum specialists. The key is that all parts of agencies should see that they have a role in helping to create or utilize evidence. External researchers can help to make this clear, but to do so they must understand the institutional structures of the agencies they work with and appreciate the constraints that different parts of agencies are working under.

As other departments within the agency grow in working with research offices throughout decision-making processes and in developing programs or initiatives, the agency will build knowledge and capacity around learning the work of research offices. Shared knowledge around research and evaluation processes, buy-in from key stakeholders, and creating a collaborative around producing research and evidence use will help guide the use of evidence and bridge the gap between other departments and internal research offices.

The broader research community

Partnerships with external researchers offer promising opportunities to enhance existing capacity, but they are not without challenges. Our participants offered a number of recommendations for those in the research community (e.g., researchers based at universities, research institutions, and/or non-profit organizations) wishing to collaborate with those in research-driven roles in education agencies.

First (and perhaps foremost), make the space and time to listen carefully to members of practice-side agencies so that they may describe their research priorities and proposed research questions. If pursuing a partnership structure, this conversation should include a two-way exchange of ideas so that both research and practice expertise are helping to shape the ensuing work. As part of this first step, establish initial channels of communication that will enable relationship development to emerge and strengthen over time.

Once partnership research work has commenced, make sure to share insights or findings that may be helpful to practice-based team members all along the way. In particular, creating opportunities to make sense of the data and findings with both research and practice partners will be especially important. Ensure there are plenty of opportunities to discuss all aspects of the work before “going public” with any findings, giving each side sufficient time to plan their externally-facing response to a report.

Engaging in partnership work itself requires its own set of competencies, skills, and mindsets that need to be established and developed over time, i.e., it cannot be assumed that everyone will know how to effectively work together on day one. Training opportunities in this regard may include learning how to become an RPP broker, practicing communications with non-academic audiences, and reexamining existing organizational norms or structures that may be reinforcing of White privilege and harmful power dynamics.

Finally, it will also be important to establish key agreements between partners that will help support the work, including data sharing agreements, working through IRB requirements, understanding intellectual property rights, and negotiating contracting requirements.

External research organizations and intermediaries should look for ways that they support, and not supplant, the work which agency research staff have the qualifications and interest to do. It is especially important to allow internal research staff to engage in intellectually satisfying and meaningful work, not just the more routine tasks of reviewing applications for compliance and obtaining data to share with external researchers.

Other organizations and intermediaries

Participants in the convening commented on particular ways that other actors in the larger educational community could contribute to and support their work.

Regional support units - referred to differently across states as intermediate units, regional service centers, and so on - as well as regional data and technology centers are positioned to and often do serve as important sources of capacity for generating local evidence. Relatedly, existing systems and processes housed at other levels of the system can enhance LEA and SEA capacity. For example, the State Longitudinal Data System grant program funded by the Institute for Education Sciences has resulted in large administrative datasets which can and have been leveraged for local research and evaluation. A key to fully leveraging these systems is streamlining and clarifying how data is collected, packaged, and accessed so that it can be used for compliance reporting as well as for local data analysis, research, and evaluation -

what some participants in our meetings referred to as “democratizing data”.

Institutes of higher education (IHEs) can play a role as well. First, they can offer professional learning that meets the needs of research staff in SEA and LEAs. But they can also contribute to the preparation and professional learning of other members of SEA and LEA staff (e.g. school and district leaders) in ways that help them to lead for evidence-informed improvement. As noted earlier, how SEAs and LEAs are organized and staffed as well as the mission and vision of the organization shape the opportunity for the generation and use of evidence. By preparing educational leaders in ways that support an evidence-use agenda, IHEs can contribute to capacity systemwide. Lastly, IHEs can provide internship opportunities for graduate students to gain practical experience analyzing data and conducting research in schools or by hiring experienced consultants or part-time retired staff.

Last, other organizations, such as professional organizations, networks, Regional Education Laboratories, and Comprehensive Centers, can support the work of SEA and LEA research staff. These organizations can help build capacity within and across education agencies through their technical assistance. They may also create opportunities to build stronger networks across SEA and LEA research offices (as well as among staff in agencies without research offices) that would help those agencies to build capacity and leverage existing knowledge and tools among the educational agency research community. For example, Results for America offers a State Education Fellows program, and the National Network of Research Practice Partnerships and Council of the Great City Schools offer peer groups for district research leaders. Efforts could include cross-agency collaborations as well as leveraging regional comprehensive centers and regional education laboratories (RELs). SEAs may also be positioned to serve in these roles when supporting LEAs.

Funders and Governing Bodies

Education agencies need a stable, reliable funding stream to enable and sustain the work of their research staff, who reported being underfunded and understaffed to conduct the full range of work that they are expected to do. Such funding would be valuable for both ongoing tasks and professional growth. While donors often prefer to support projects with carefully defined time constraints and goals, this may result in patchwork funding arrangements which create inefficiencies, inequities, and other unintended consequences. For example, conducting one-off program evaluations may help vendors sell their services and allow researchers to amass more publications, but piecemeal evaluations make it difficult for agencies to compare or generalize across multiple programs to inform more systemic decisions. Other inequities may result if one program is evaluated favorably by a high-status researcher, while other promising

programs with lower-status evaluations (if any) receive less attention. Rather than asking individual providers to secure separate evaluations, donors should provide the funds to the agency to evaluate the broader scope of alternatives under consideration applying consistent standards of evidence.

Another challenge comes from external grants and accountability mechanisms with onerous reporting requirements. Inefficiencies result when agencies need to expend more resources compiling data to fit rigid accountability templates than using data for improvement. Moreover, the benefits gained upon reporting outcomes to one funder may not transfer meaningfully to other workstreams. Instead, funders and governing bodies should look for ways to structure their accountability expectations to support stronger internal systems for reporting and improvement to serve both immediate and long-term data needs. In particular, they should encourage systematic collection of data on implementation conditions and processes, not just outcomes, in order to better inform how to produce those outcomes.

While funding external researchers and intermediaries is another popular strategy for augmenting internal agency capacity, funders should beware of tradeoffs and inequities which may end up “cannibalizing” support for internal research. The money and status associated with external research partners may undermine the autonomy and professionalism of agency staff who now have to compete with outsiders to shape their own work. Supporting external research also adds to the workload of agency research staff, as noted above, while simultaneously taking opportunities away from them. In conjunction with the previous observations that research staff sometimes leave education agencies due to lack of opportunities for career advancement, this combination of factors becomes especially problematic. As a rule, donors should not fund external partners or intermediaries to perform work that the internal agency has the capability, interest, time, and resources to complete; that is, the funding should supplement, not supplant, the agency’s existing capacity. Providing the resources directly to the agency, rather than to external research partners, allows agency staff more flexibility and leverage either to conduct the analyses themselves or to direct the funding to the projects and partners which they consider most valuable.

Funders can also enhance capacity to generate local evidence by targeting resources towards different aspects of work (described above). To ensure that this additional capacity is maintained internally, funders should require external partners to include an explicit sustainability plan to integrate their work into the agency’s routine systems and processes. This may include a combination of training and coaching to develop the necessary knowledge and skills internally, along with a strategy to fade supports until the agency can successfully complete the required work independently and cost-effectively.

Further, partnering with external researchers often requires greater investments than funders offer. Partnerships require longer-term efforts to build and maintain relationships both before and between undertaking formal projects. The ongoing conversations which emerge from trusting relationships help to ensure that projects are realistic and aligned with agency priorities, and increase the likelihood that the research will be used productively. In contrast, funding is typically provided only for specific projects after partners on both sides have already explored the potential collaboration space to identify where working together would be fruitful. Funders need to be realistic about these invisible costs of partnership, whether by providing more support for sustainable partnership infrastructure or by allowing more time for partnerships and projects to develop and mature.

Rather than funding standalone projects which rely on external resources, funders should invest in creating robust systems, structures, and processes for evidence generation and use, in order to build this capacity within agencies. Some examples include survey platforms, data infrastructure, knowledge management systems, and data visualization tools. These should be owned and managed by the agency to ensure long-term sustainability, as well as flexibility to adapt to local needs. Other possible investments include professional learning, networking, and knowledge-sharing opportunities. Funders could also support additional capacity in SEAs and LEAs through schemes which train researchers to work (and stay) in education agencies.

Other Actions Across the Educational Ecosystem

Not all recommendations were directed at specific stakeholders. Below are two areas for improvement that benefit from collaboration across different actors in the educational ecosystem.

Supporting agencies without designated research offices or staff.

In both conversations, questions and concerns about how these issues and recommendations apply to agencies that do not have designated research offices and staff. Their voices were under-represented in the conversation, but several participants work with these agencies or aim to support them - particularly rural districts. They noted that absent research offices or staff, questions about data or evidence fall to leaders (e.g. superintendents) and school boards who may lack time and expertise in data and research. Further, these agencies may lack larger networks that allow for “cross-pollination” of research or research-based ideas.

Recommendations discussed to support SEAs and LEAs more broadly may have particular significance for those that lack research offices or staff, including leveraging regional centers, developing productive and equitable research partnerships, and developing targeted funding and professional learning, and establishing networks for knowledge sharing.

Developing a workforce of agency-based researchers.

Lastly, in order for the work of evidence-informed decision-making in education agencies to move forward, the field needs to invest in building and developing the workforce of agency-based researchers. While there are programs such as Harvard's Strategic Data Project that focus on placing strong data or research staff in education agencies and graduate programs focused on research, evaluation or data analytics, there are still a limited number of opportunities for people to receive training in scientific practice of evidence generation, brokering, and use in the education field, particularly compared to the training opportunities for researchers. While many people enter this work from other fields of study, there are also limited opportunities for staff to engage in ongoing professional learning opportunities related to this work.

Building sustainable resources to support agency-based researchers.

The range of recommendations detailed here for funders and governing bodies underscores the need for significantly greater resources to support the evidence infrastructure in education. While philanthropic organizations have been filling in many gaps, more systematic and coordinated funding through federal and state sources would enable more reliable, stable, and equitable funding across the full range of education agencies and beneficiaries. In particular, we highlight a key opportunity for IES's National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE) to play a larger role in coordinating the curation and use of evidence through the What Works Clearinghouse, as well as across its system of Comprehensive Centers and Regional Educational Laboratories. With greater resources and a stronger leadership role, NCEE could guide the field in building more robust networks of connections between the education research and practice communities.

Moving the Conversation Forward - Next Steps

The conversation among SEA and LEA research offices and staff yields important insights into the nature of evidence generation and use, the factors and conditions that shape the work, and potential strategies for enhancing their capacity to support evidence-informed improvement. Yet, the conversation also raises issues in need of further discussion. Below we highlight several ideas that invite continued thought, questioning, and collaboration in advancing the culture of evidence.

Continue our Learning

We have learned a lot about the work of research agencies and their ability and barriers to evidence use and production, but we also left these conversations with a number of lingering questions. The following set of questions provide new thinking and conversation that can inform our collective efforts to strengthen capacity for evidence-informed improvement.

- How do school systems best organize their structures and align their functions to promote quality use of evidence and evidence use?
- How might educational data systems, knowledge management systems, and evidence repositories be improved to facilitate evidence generation and use in school systems?
- What are the policies and procedures that help promote effective evidence generation and use?
- To what extent is the work of research offices and staff in SEAs and LEAs similar or different? Are there ways it can be better coordinated as to be complementary?
- What models or best practices can help align incentives between external researchers and education agencies?
- How can the evidence generation and use needs of LEAs without research offices or staff be met?

Continue the Conversation

Answers to these questions could emerge from forums that enable conversations about these issues and knowledge sharing about best practices. This can include continuing the work of already established networks of state and district research leads that have been previously mentioned in this report as well as cross collaborative efforts among these groups. But these conversations should expand to include:

- policy actors that can change policy and procedures related to the work of research in education agencies
- governing bodies and granting agencies that promote and financially support the production, curation, and use of research (i.e. federal and state regulatory agencies; IES, including NCER, NCSE, and NCEE; private foundations; and others)
- Regional Educational Laboratories and Comprehensive Centers that provide professional learning opportunities around evidence brokering
- professional associations;
- and non-research office district or state leaders responsible for leading evidence generation and use.

Continuing these conversations will be critical to leveraging support and building capacity for evidence-informed improvement in education agencies.

In Conclusion

In the two convenings and in this report, we sought to draw attention to the critically important role of research staff in LEAs and SEAs in generating and using evidence to inform educational policy and practice. We have shared key activities and challenges associated with those roles from the perspective of those engaged in that work, and in doing so, surfaced a number of recommendations to help advance the generation and use of evidence. But an arguably more foundational issue is how to create a culture - not just within education agencies, but beyond - that values evidence in decision making. What we imagine here goes far beyond generating reports and calling upon numbers for compliance purposes. Rather it is a culture that centers improvement not just accountability, that regularly asks questions when there is uncertainty about the implications of a policy or practice, and where there is an openness to weighing evidence against the myriad other political and cultural considerations that also affect decisions.

How to create a culture that values evidence goes beyond the scope of this report, but we want to close by acknowledging the importance of such a culture not only for leveraging the role of SEAs and LEAs in producing and using evidence, but ultimately for creating and sustaining conditions that support evidence-informed improvement across the education system.

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