

Strategies to Support Transformation in Urban School Districts

Thursday November 14, 2024



Civic Solutions Group

We are former education and government leaders seeking to support practitioners and leaders in **improving the responsiveness and quality** of public services.

- Our team works with state education agencies and local school districts to improve student academic outcomes.
- Our team members have worked in state education agencies and in local school districts.

CSG Experience

Governors in GA, LA, MI and NV

State Education Agencies in TX, LA, MD, NV and MI

Local School Districts in LA, NY, NJ, TX

Non-profit philanthropy

Civic Solutions Group

Paul Pastorek, Co-Founder

**Served on Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
(1996-2004)**

Served as Louisiana Superintendent of Education 2007-2011

Served as senior leader in two universities 2018-2023

**Serving as Executive Advisor and Conservator for school districts appointed by
the Texas Education Agency**

Agenda

01

- **Urban School District Challenges**

02

- **Role of the State vs. Role of the District/Board**

03

- **How Similarly Situated School Districts Face Challenges**

04

- **Levers to Support High Performance in Urban School Districts**

Urban School District Challenges

01



Major Objectives for Urban School Districts

**Achieving High
Academic
Outcomes for All
Students**

**Creating a Calm and
Safe Learning
Environment for
Students to Thrive**

**Preparing
Children for
Kindergarten**

**Graduating
Students Ready
for College,
Career and/or the
Workplace**

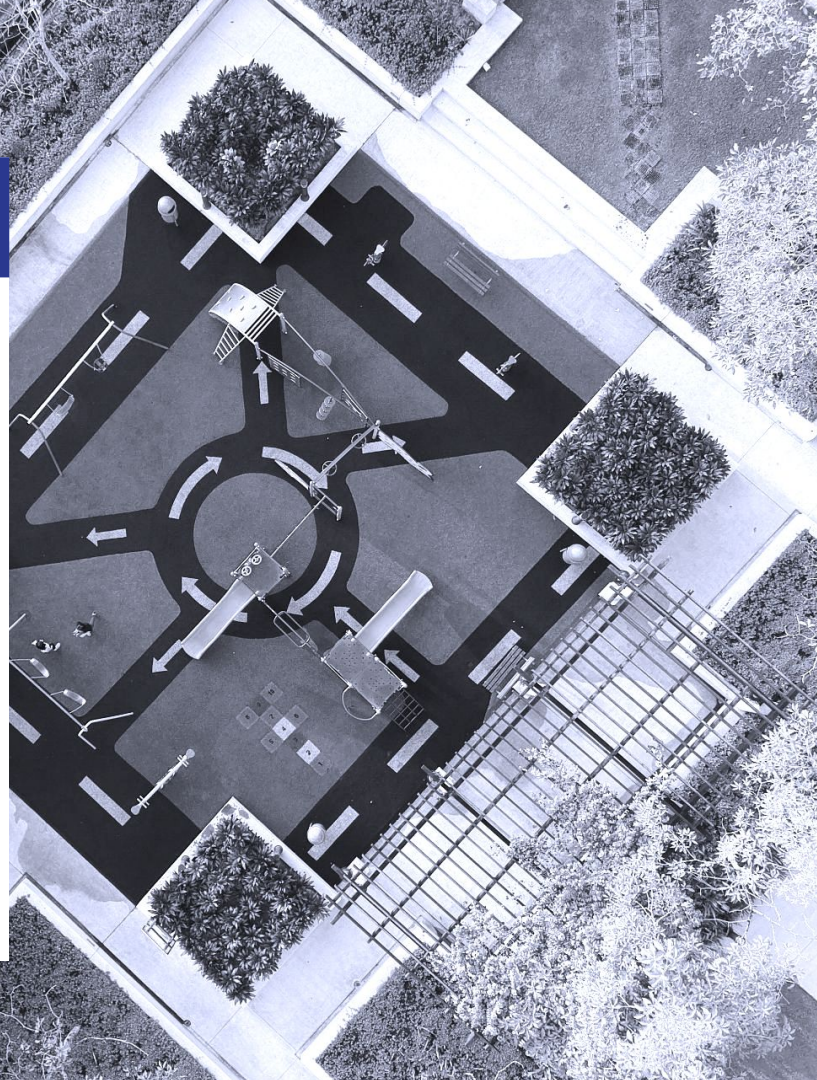
Challenges to Achieving High Academic Outcomes for All Students

- System processes or regulations which do not support success, or the obverse, the lack of systems, processes or regulations that support success
- Awareness of best practices
- Capacity to implement best practices
- Political will to undertake best practices when it tests convention
- Adequate financial resources to invest in best practices
- Human capital strategies

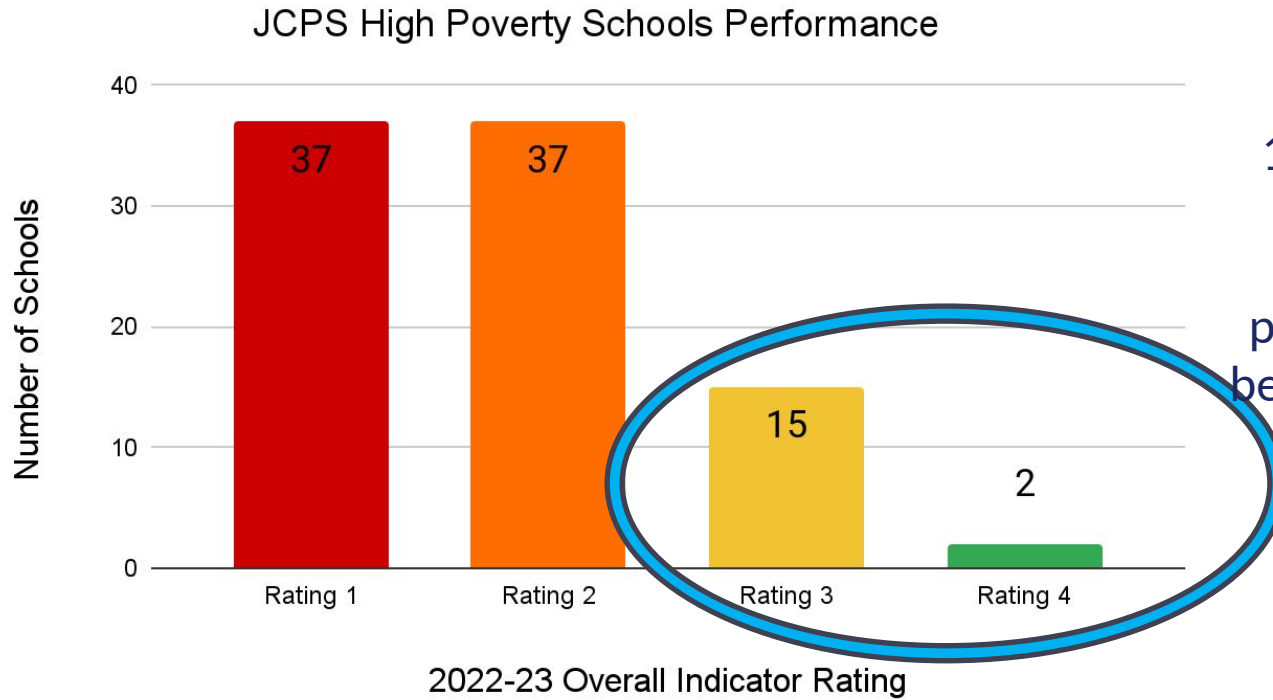
Favorable Outliers

Generally, there are outliers that prove that poor students and students of color can be more successful than some expect.

- When I became Superintendent in Louisiana, one of the first things that I did was to look for them
- I found over 20 high poverty high performing schools. All were traditional schools. When I left the position, there were 60
- We examined how these schools did it and worked with successful principals to coach other school principals
- Success is achievable with high poverty schools



There are Favorable Outliers in Jefferson County

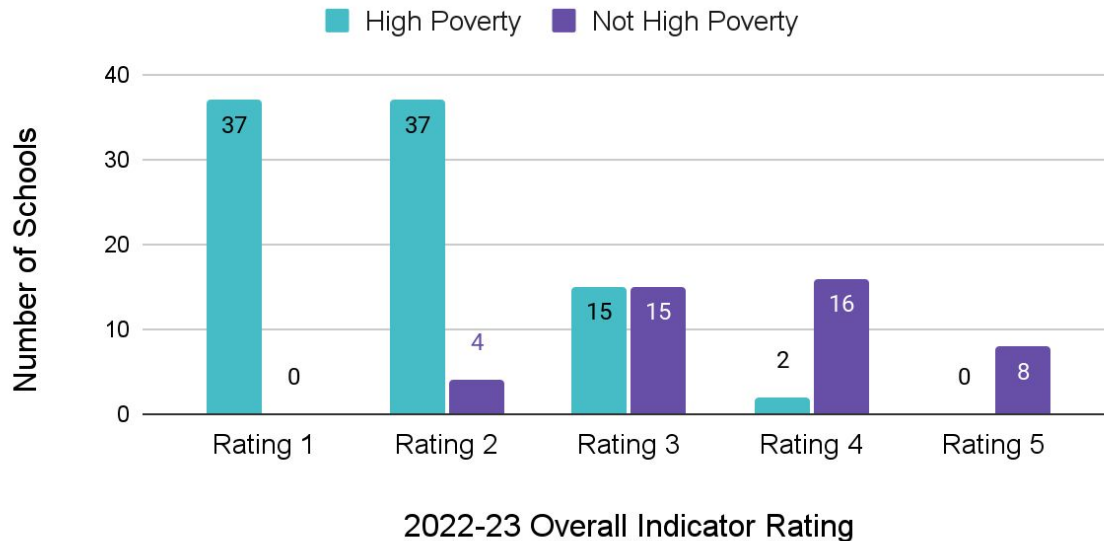


17 schools in JCPS that are already proving that high poverty schools can be average, even good

- High Poverty Schools = Economically Disadvantaged population above District average (64.8%)
- For schools with multiple accountability ratings (multiple school levels), each rating is included
- 2022-23 accountability and demographics data used (2023-24 demographics not yet publicly available)

Other Opportunities in Jefferson County Public Schools

JCPS Performance of High Poverty Schools Versus Non-High Poverty Schools



- Some high poverty schools are performing relatively well
- Some not high poverty schools are underperforming

- High Poverty Schools = Economically Disadvantaged population above District average (64.8%)
- For schools with multiple accountability ratings (multiple school levels), each rating is included
- 2022-23 accountability and demographics data used (2023-24 demographics not yet publicly available)

Role of the State vs. Role of the District

02



Traditional Roles in Creating Change

State → Standards, accountability and incentives
District → Local resources, strategy closest to schools



District Owns

- School improvement strategies
- Human capital
- Curriculum and instruction
- Athletics and extracurricular activities
- Safety and security
- Promotion and retention policies
- Discipline, truancy and absenteeism



State Owns

- Funding formula
- State Accountability Plan
- State education programs and grants
- Title 1, Special Education and federal funding
- High quality content standards
- State level strategies and/or resources to drive districts to improve
- Adopting standards for teacher certification and evaluation

State Role When District is Challenged

When a large, urban school district is struggling with student achievement and achievement gaps, the role of the state can support the district or, in exigent circumstances, direct the district.

- **Legislature or State Ed Department:** Passing regulations to: strengthen expectations related to student performance; dismantle barriers that hinder school improvement
- **State Accountability:** States can direct districts to take certain actions towards improved outcomes and outline clear consequences for lack of action
- **Resources:** States can incentivize practices or behaviors through the strategic allocation of resources (human and fiscal) to address targeted areas of concern
- **Governance:** In exigent circumstances, the state can take actions to change the governance structure of a district and/or create a more competitive school environment (could include: stimulating the creation of district authorized charter schools; appointing monitors or conservators; appointing a board of managers; superintendent replacement)

How Urban School Districts Have Faced the Challenges

03



How Some Urban School Districts Address Major Challenges



Common Traits of Comparable Districts Showing Success

- **Vision for Success:** Bold leadership with deeply held beliefs and a laser focus that all students can and will succeed; setting an ambitious goals (including a North Star Goal) and pursuing it zealously.
- **High-Stakes Accountability:** Public, transparent accountability systems with rewards and consequences
- **Investments in Talent:** Incentivize high quality teaching practices, strong evaluation and support systems; strong talent pipeline initiatives
- **Actionable School Improvement Strategies:** Actionable and holistic framework of how best to allocate talent, resources, and support to struggling schools focused on teaching practices, curriculum, culture and safety, and data-informed decision-making

District Highlights



Vision, Accountability, Struggling School Support & Talent

- **Denver: High Stakes Accountability & Bold Leadership**
 - Denver began authorizing charter schools years ago- Denver's charter schools generally outperform traditional schools ([Colorado Dept of Education](#))
 - The reform effort proven to be most effective in Denver: to close low-performing schools and transfer students to higher performing schools ([CU Denver School of Public Affairs](#) study)
- **Fort Worth: Bold Leadership & Struggling School Support**
 - A group of struggling schools (Leadership Academy Network, LAN) adopted the ACE Model and then became more autonomous with a university partner and more resources, more accountability, and more autonomy with great success and results
 - After 7 years in this model, schools have moved from being the lowest performing in the district to outperforming the district in nearly all subjects and grades ([Texas Wesleyan University](#))

District Highlights



Vision, Accountability, Struggling School Support & Talent

- **Springfield, MA [Empowerment Zone](#) Partnership**
 - Collaborative approach to turning around low performing schools between the state, Springfield Public Schools and teachers union- guaranteed autonomy and renewable contract with the district. Graduation rate increased from 67% in 2015 to 86% in 2022
- **Charlotte-Mecklenburg: Talent Investments & Bold Leadership**
 - [Strategic Staffing Initiative](#): Principal and a team of ~7 staff receive an incentive package to move to a struggling school and design a turnaround plan
- **National Institute for Excellence in Teaching's [TAP System](#) for Teacher and Student Advancement**
 - Model focused on teacher and leader quality by building capacity through training, coaching, on-site support; and the development of structures and systems for continuous improvement that is showing results across 9 states

Two Case Studies



Vision, Accountability, Struggling School Support, & Talent

#1 Texas' System of Great Schools ([SGS](#))

- District volunteer strategy in urban and rural districts since 2017
- Districts are encouraged to participate and are rewarded monetarily for taking bold actions in dealing with low performing schools

#2 Houston Independent School District New Education System Schools ([NES](#))

- The Texas Education Agency appointed a Board of Managers which appointed a new Superintendent beginning SY 2023-24
- The new Superintendent created a zone where aligned curriculum practices were used with robust teacher supports

Case Study: System of Great Schools (SGS)

Managing the Outcomes of Schools

Texas Education Agency



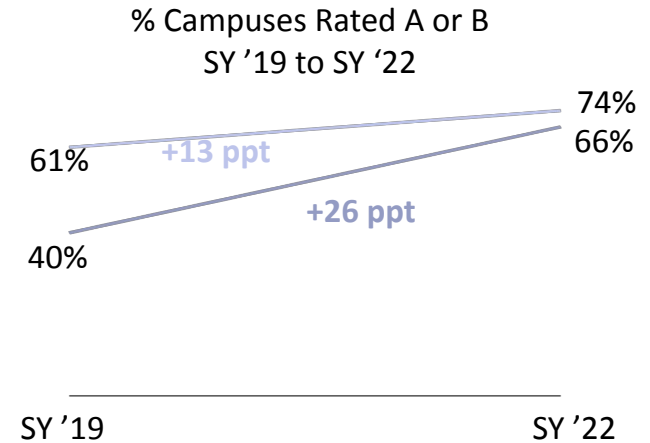
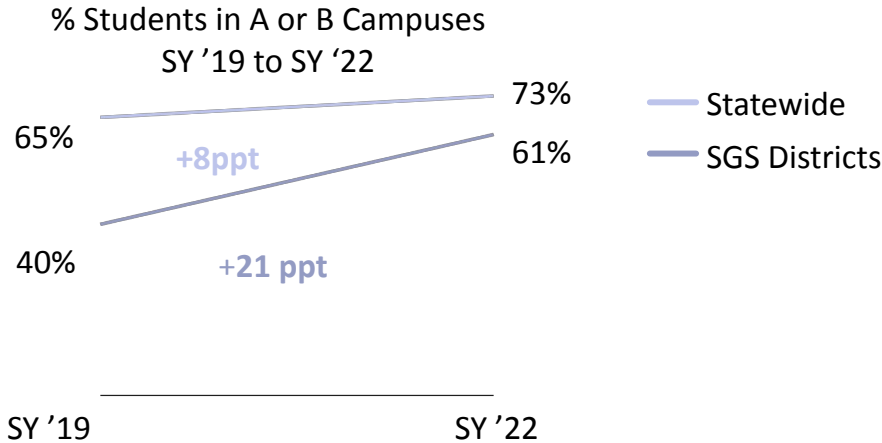
- 25 Active SGS Districts
- Over 806,500 Students Served
- Outcomes (2019-2022):
 - Greater increase in A/B campuses than state
 - Nine districts doubled # of A/B campuses

Texas System of Great Schools

More Students in High Quality, Best-Fit Campuses



94,869 MORE STUDENTS are in A/B schools in SGS districts (SY19 to SY22)



Texas System of Great Schools

Four Essential Actions



Set a North Star Goal and conduct an Annual School Planning process



Create, expand, and replicate high-quality, high-demand school models



Empower families through school choice and access supports

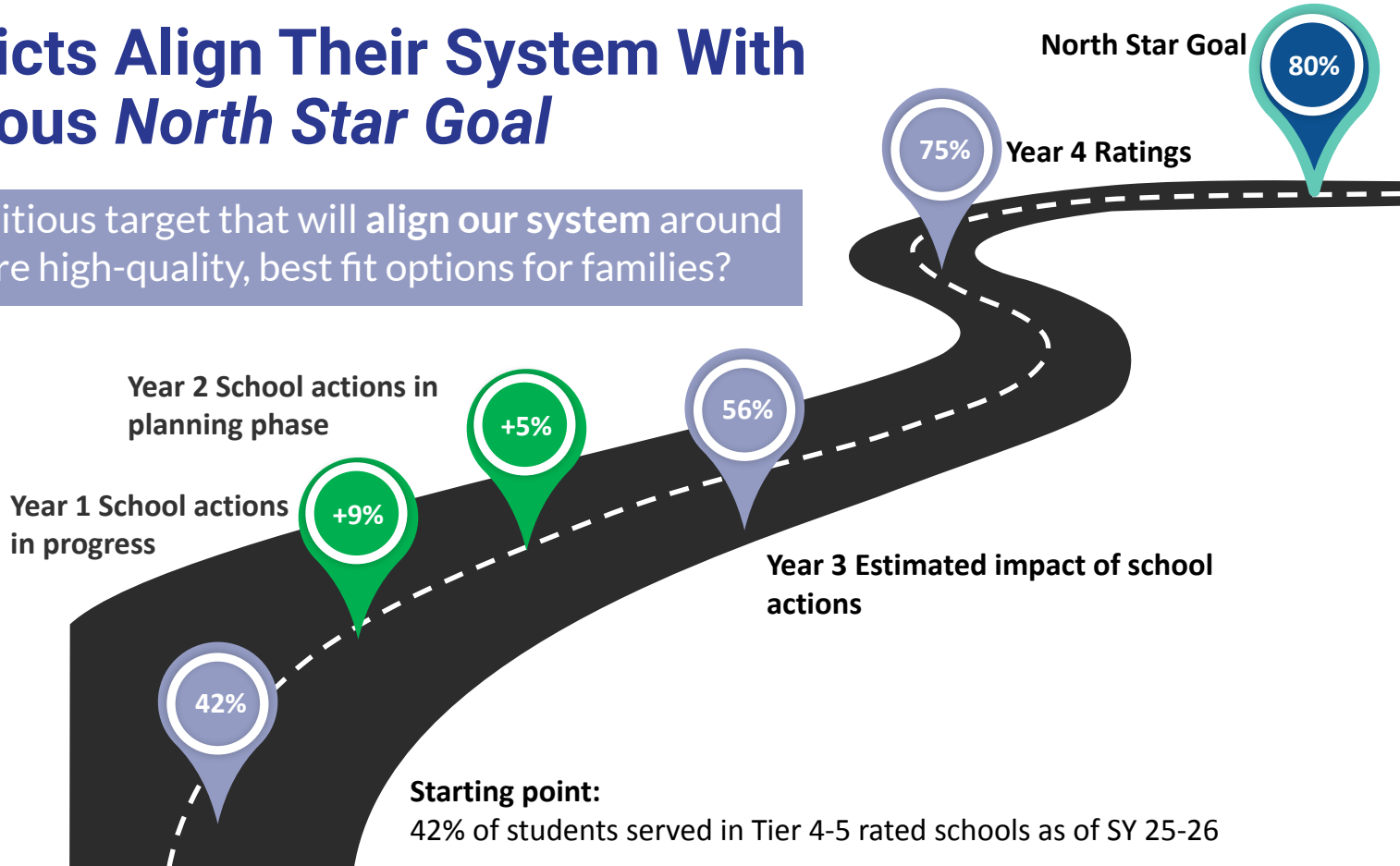


Develop collaborative and sustainable central office structures

[Resource: SGS Rubric](#)

SGS Districts Align Their System With an Ambitious *North Star* Goal

What is an ambitious target that will align our system around creating more high-quality, best fit options for families?

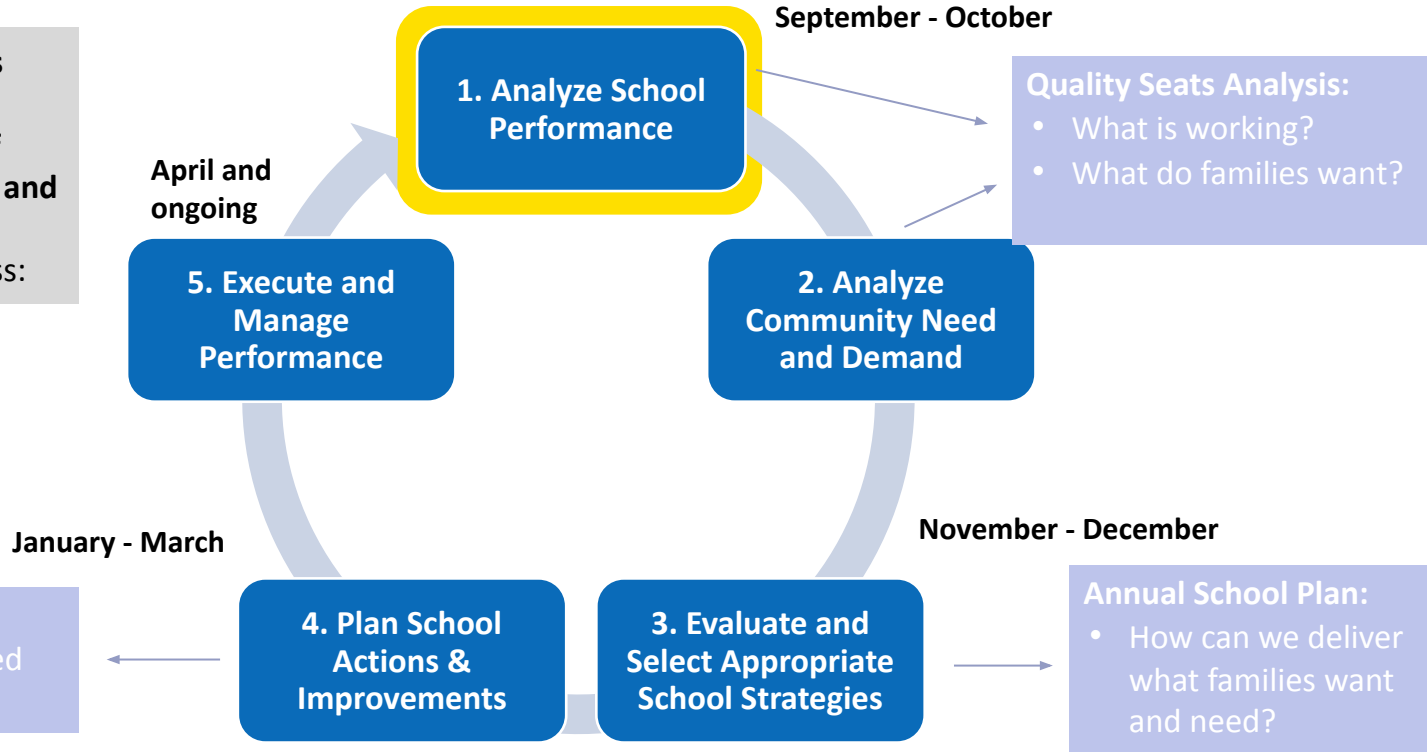


System of Great Schools Annual Planning Process

The **System of Great Schools (SGS)** supports districts in developing a strategic mix of **best-fit schools for students and families**. SGS supports this through the following process:

School Actions:

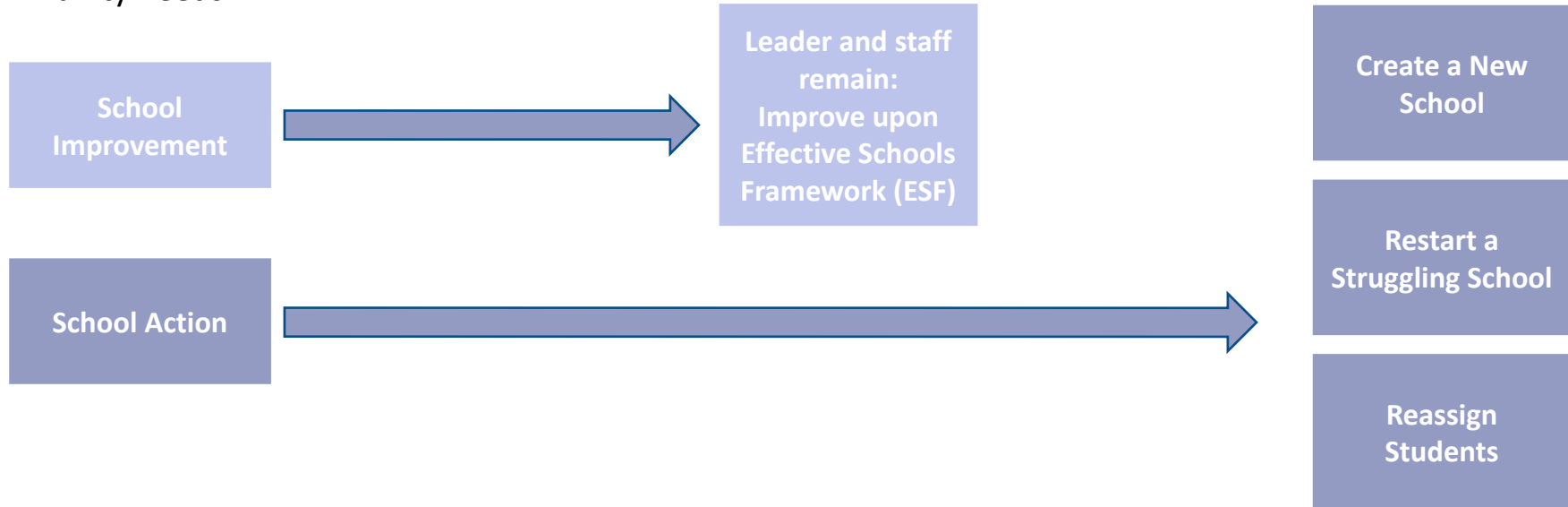
- Which evidence-supported actions will the LEA take?



System of Great Schools

Taking Actions Beyond School Improvement

Based on the Quality Seats Analysis and Annual School Plan, SGS districts weigh **all possible options** and take bold action to meet community needs.



Case Study: Curriculum and Instruction Strategies (NES)

Managing the Internal Activities of Schools

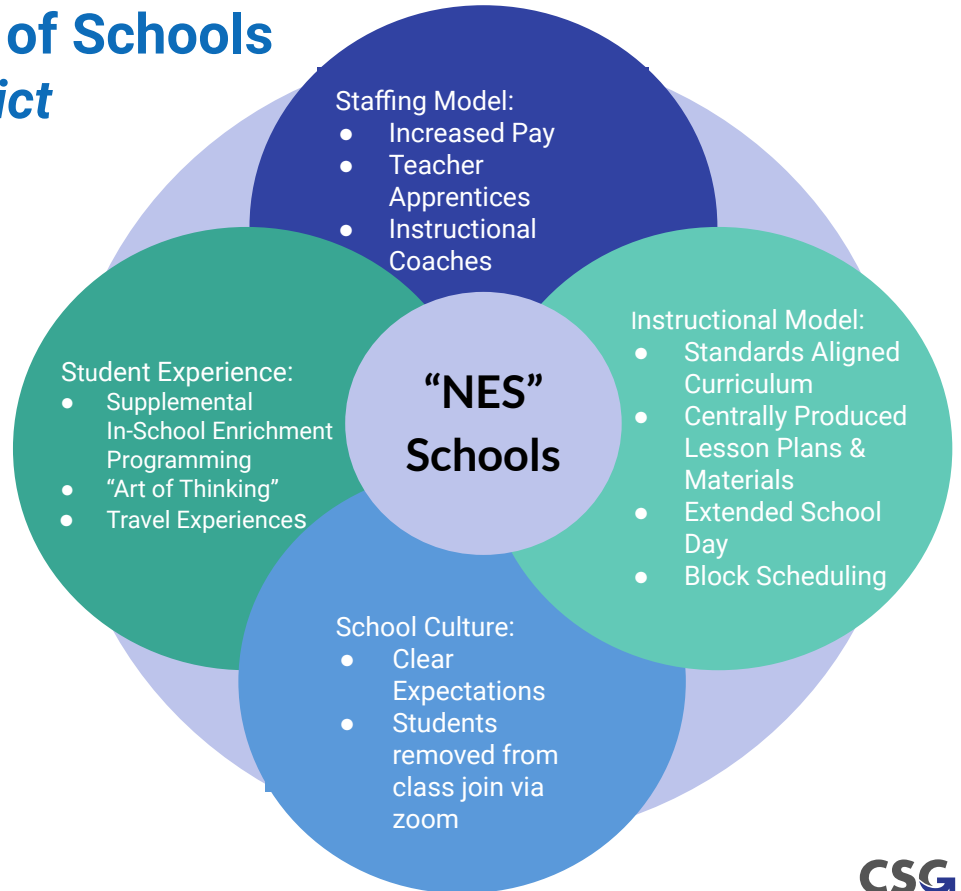
Houston Independent School District

New Education System Schools (“NES”)

Schools with low performance were designated by the district as a NES school and other schools opted in - to adopt a new way of operating focused on increasing achievement

Year 1 (2023-24): 84 Schools

Year 2 (2024-25): 129 Schools



NES Instructional Model

Balancing Standards-Based Curriculum with Differentiation of Instruction

- **Curriculum**
 - District-wide, standards-aligned curriculum
 - Dedicated support from district curriculum team providing expertise
- **Curricular and Instruction Supports for Teachers**
 - Centrally produced lesson plans for all teachers- time is dedicated to students and learning
 - Coherent teaching across classrooms and schools, ensuring standards alignment and best practices
- **Time as a Resource**
 - Maximizing learning time: supporting teachers with planning, extended school days, and block scheduling to enable differentiation

NES Early Results



First Year Results on NES Schools Shows Significant Growth

Of the 84 NES schools, 80% showed an improvement in performance based upon state accountability while 7% decreased and 13% remained the same. Narrowing down to the lowest performing (63 schools with a D or F in 2023), 92% saw improvement, 6% saw the same outcomes, and 2% saw a decline in performance.

2023-24 Performance of Schools That Entered NES as D or F Rated

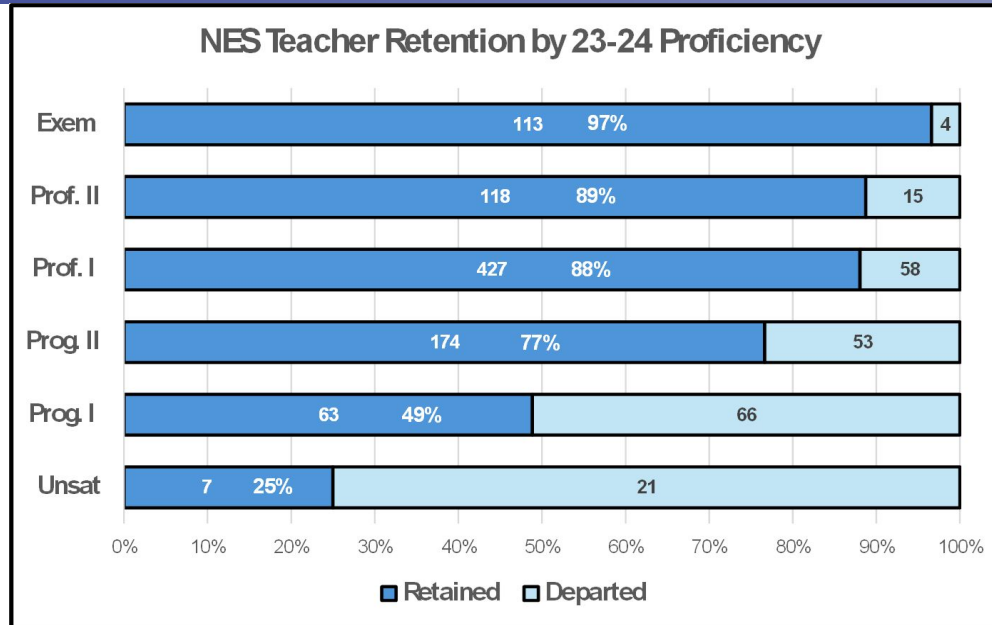
	Up 4 Letter Grades	Up 3 Letter Grades	Up 2 Letter Grades	Up 1 Letter Grade	No Change	Decrease
# of Schools	3	23	19	13	4	1

NES Early Results



First Year Results on Houston NES School Teacher Retention

Higher retention of higher performing teachers



Recommended Levers to Support High Performance in Urban School Districts

04



State Levers: Vision for Success

Actions Used by States to Influence Bold Leadership & Laser Focus on Student Success

Short-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● School-Based Decision-Making: Assure that school based decision making does not impede leadership in making hard decisions focused on student achievement● Collective Bargaining and State Regulations: Assure that both allow for transformational changes to occur● Annual Planning: Assure rigorous evaluation of schools based on data based on annual planning and quality seats analysis (as seen in the SGS model)● Board Governance: Have the Board adopt an ambitious, but achievable, five-year District and student achievement goals; the State to adopt clear consequences if targets are not met
Medium-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Annual Planning: Ensure District adopts a robust annual planning process aligned to school performance framework based largely on student academic outcomes● Portfolio Approach: Assess if districts should be encouraged to adopt a school contract or charter school model in addition to direct run schools so as to provide a robust parent choice option● School Choice: Encourage Districts to ensure parents and students shall have the right to choose any school in the district of their choice with transportation options● Board Governance: Articulate expectation of at least 50% of District Board meetings dedicated to discussing student outcomes; require construction of advisory boards for content expertise; require frequent Board self-evaluations● Resources: Design funding allocation method for state resources to be provided to the District if District is aligned to a north star goal and school actions
Long-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Annual Planning: Utilize annual planning process for reflection and actions to sustain improvements● Board Governance: Evaluate improvements and ongoing performance of District Board and Districts to determine if exigent circumstances exist to require state intervention

State Levers: High Stakes Accountability

Actions Used by States to Make Accountability Systems More Transparent and Effective

Short-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Intervention: For identified schools, ensure District takes immediate steps for the next school year with clear student achievement targets for the near term and consequences if those targets are not met● School Performance: Require Districts to publicize state accountability results in transparent and meaningful ways, especially within processes (eg; enrollment applications) that inform parent decision making● High Quality Seats Analysis: Require District to analyze the number of seats in high and low performing schools and use a performance framework to decide on school actions to increase high performing school seats
Medium-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● School Actions: Require District to develop a framework for school actions, such as implementing high quality operating models, school redesign, replace leadership, create new schools, restart struggling schools, reassigning students, and school closure to align with school performance framework● Resources: Identify resources and allocation methodology to align with school actions● School Culture: Monitor and analyze potential disproportionality related to student behavior/discipline and Special Education referrals; provide technical support to District
Long-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● School Performance: Develop a user-friendly accountability system that is transparent and easy to understand, with clear ties to potential school actions

State Levers: Investments in Talent

Actions used by States to Incentivize High Quality Teaching and the Development of Talent Pipelines

Short-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● District Leadership: Ensure that Board hires a Superintendent ready to take bold school actions based on superior school models and should schools fail to make progress● Teacher Evaluation: In all schools, particularly for state identified Comprehensive School Improvement/ Bottom 5% schools (CSI/5%), direct District and school leadership that all teachers should be evaluated on a frequency to support ongoing teacher development● New Curriculum Implementation: Assure that teachers are well trained and supported in new curriculum implementation and that structures are in place to evaluate implementation
Medium-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Teacher Evaluation: Work with legislature to update state regulations to align with best practices associated with teacher quality● Pipeline Programs: Expand pipeline programs for school leaders and teachers to improve overall retention and quality● Incentive Pay: Evaluate incentive pay structures that lead to better outcomes for students and, if necessary, redesign pay structures to encourage high quality teachers to transfer to struggling schools and get better outcomes for students in those schools
Long-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Teaching Models: Evaluate existing models of teacher development to determine effectiveness in supporting better student outcomes and, if not, explore alternative teaching models and teacher certification. Develop ongoing pipeline of high-quality teachers and leaders trained in proven models

State Levers: School Improvement Strategies

Actions Used by States to Support Districts in Adopting Actionable Strategies for School Improvement

Short-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Targeted Support: For state identified schools (CSI/5%), provide immediate guidance on school improvement models (eg; NES, ACE, TAP, etc.) to be adopted for the next school year with clear student achievement targets● Resources: Review and determine whether Title 1 resources are leading to better outcomes for students and, if not, provide a mandated utilization of Title I resources aligned to support improved student outcomes consistent with the school improvement model(s)
Medium-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● District Actions: Assess school improvement strategies for District adoption (empowerment zones, earned school autonomy, etc.) and align policies to allow for implementation● Curriculum: Have a qualified accreditation agency evaluate and determine whether District curricula meets state content standards● School-Based Decision-Making: Assure that the school-based decision-making structures are consistent with the school improvement model(s)
Long-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● School Actions: For schools not showing improvement, ensure that school actions are being taken, aligned to school performance framework● Best Practices: State should celebrate successes for struggling schools that show improvement, reward those schools, and document best practices for future implementation in other Districts and schools.



「 Questions? 」

Thank you!

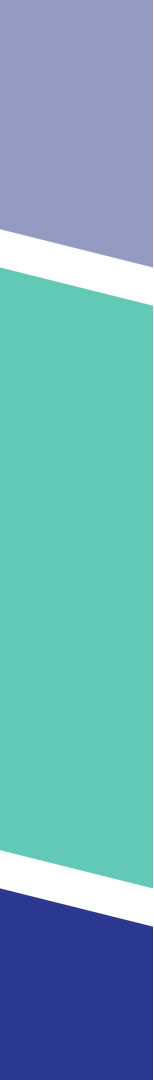


CSG

Appendix



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Additional Data Analysis

Continuing Challenges in Jefferson County Public Schools

Achievement Gap: While there has been growth, the achievement gap persists

JCPS CAREER AND TECHNICAL POSTSECONDARY READINESS

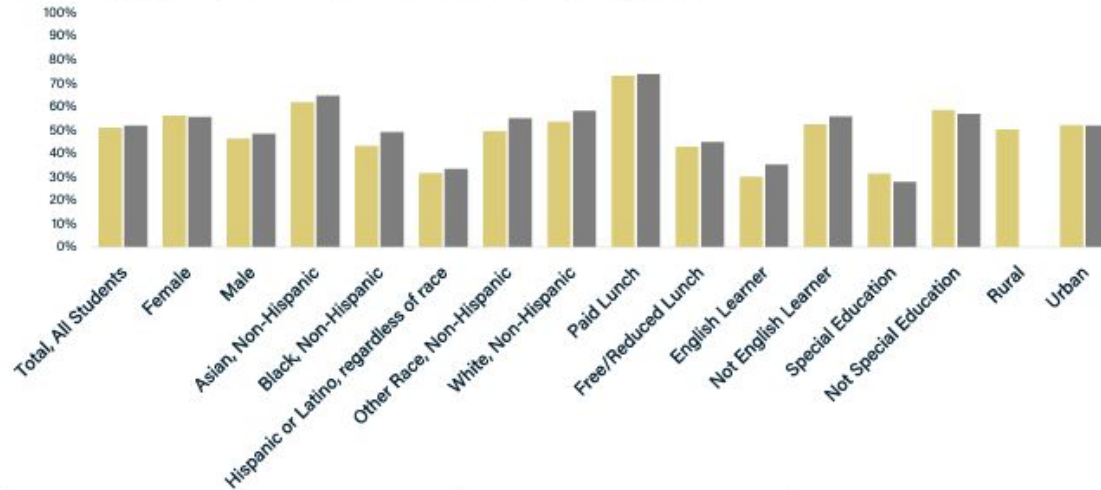
Demographic Category	Both Academic and Career Ready		
	21-22 %	22-23 %	23-24 %
All	16%	35%	44%
Black	8%	25%	31%
White	23%	43%	54%
Non-White	11%	30%	37%
Demographic Category	Overall Readiness		
	21-22 %	22-23 %	23-24 %
All	66%	73%	77%
Black	52%	61%	67%
White	77%	83%	85%
Non-White	57%	66%	71%

Continuing Challenges in Jefferson County Public Schools

Achievement Gap

Spring 2023 3rd Grade Proficiency in **Reading** For Fall 2019 Kindergarteners

Proficiency rates are the percentage of kindergarteners deemed proficient or distinguished on the Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA) in Reading in Spring 2023 out of all 2019-20 kindergarteners enrolled in the 2022-23 academic year. Those not proficient were either novice on KSA, apprentice on KSA, or held back before 3rd grade.



Continuing Challenges in Jefferson County Public Schools

Achievement Gap

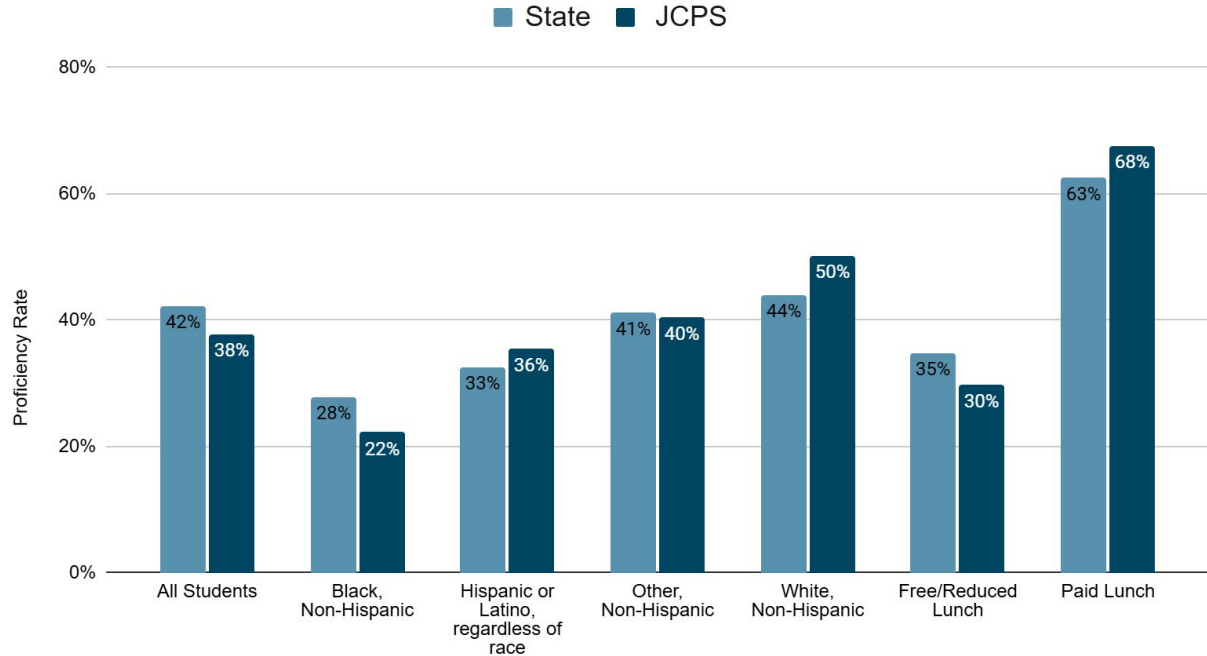
Difference in Proficiency

Difference between Free/Reduced Lunch and Paid Lunch student performance:

State = 28%

JCPS = 38%

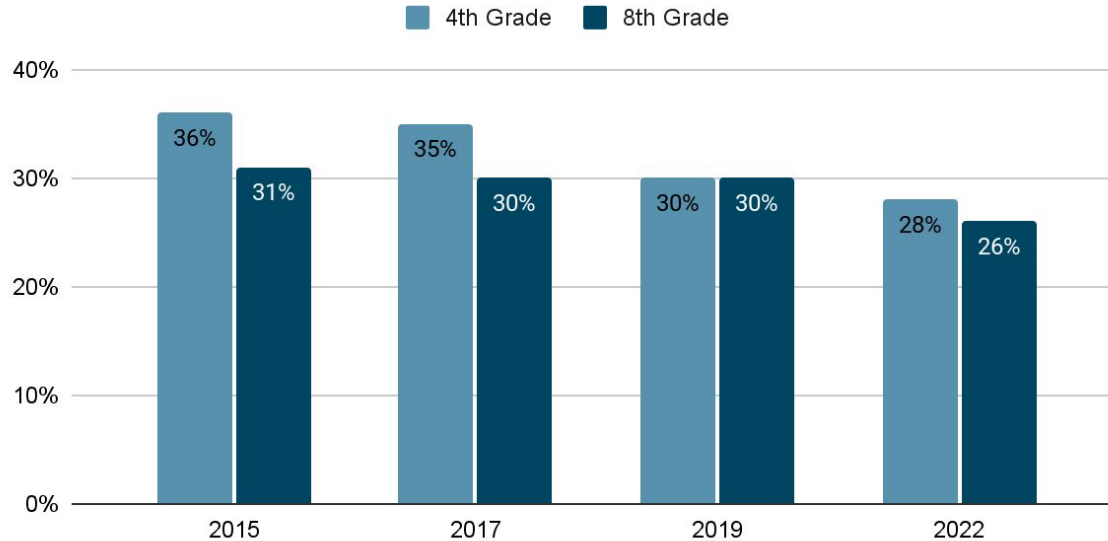
Spring 2023 3rd Grade Proficiency in Reading For Fall 2019 Kindergarteners



Continuing Challenges in Jefferson County Public Schools

Longitudinal Performance

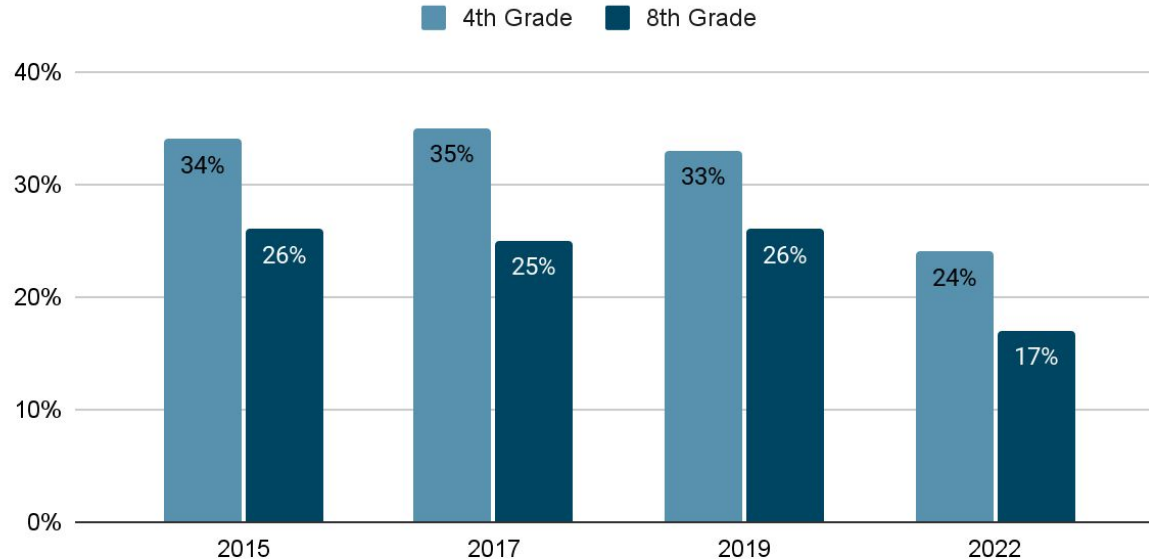
Academic Trends: Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA)
NAEP Scores: Reading - % At or Above Proficient



Continuing Challenges in Jefferson County Public Schools

Longitudinal Performance

Academic Trends: Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA)
NAEP Scores Mathematics - % At or Above Proficient





Additional NES Information

NES Staffing Model



Quality Instruction & Teacher Supports

- **Teacher Incentives:** Teachers at NES schools are compensated > \$10,000 more per year on average than teachers at non-NES schools
- **Teacher Quality:** Teachers must be deemed eligible to teach at an NES school through a district proficiency screening (bottom 15% ineligible)
- **Apprentice Teachers:** Apprentice teachers co-teach, substitute teach; eligible for a teaching position once certified
- **Learning Coaches:** Staff that support students in individual and group assignments; support teacher with administrative responsibilities
- **Coaches:** Teachers receive coaching from instructional experts

NES Student Experience



Learning through building knowledge, perspective & experience

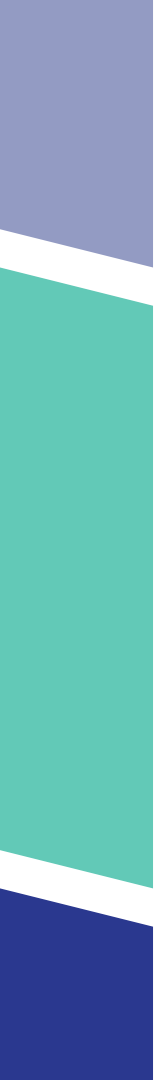
- **In-School Supplemental Student Enrichment:**
 - Supplemental Dyad classes taught by community consultants/experts focused on fitness, music, arts, media, technology, and hands-on science in addition to traditional electives and magnet programming. (Grades 3-8)
- **“Art of Thinking”:**
 - 3 times a week class focused on critical thinking, problem-solving, and how to assess, evaluate, and effectively utilize information and how these skills can lead to better understanding & decision-making (Grades 3-10)
- **The World is the Classroom:**
 - Provide travel experiences chaperoned by teachers for eligible students

NES School Culture



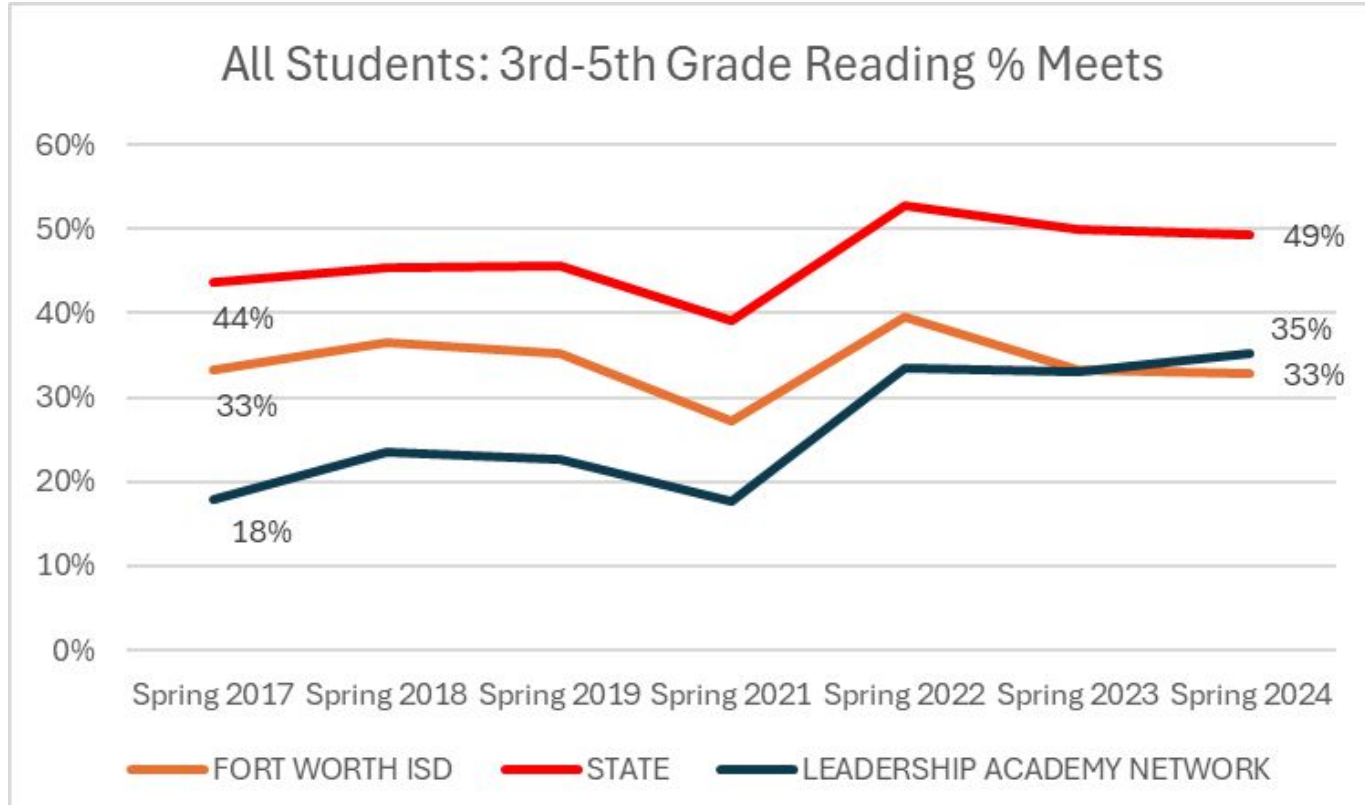
Fostering a Safe & Supportive Environment

- **Clear Expectations**
 - Clear expectations for maintaining a positive and safe learning environment based upon three core principles: 1) Do not disrespect teachers or classmates; 2) Do not disrupt the learning environment; 3) No bullying.
- **Minimizing Disruption:**
 - In order to not detract from a teacher's focus on instruction, administrators manage behavioral issues and determine right next steps.
- **Minimizing Learning Loss Due to Behavior:**
 - If a student is removed from the classroom due to behavior, after initial management, students rejoin the classroom via zoom to receive instruction



**Fort Worth Leadership
Academy Network
Performance: STAAR
PROFICIENCY**

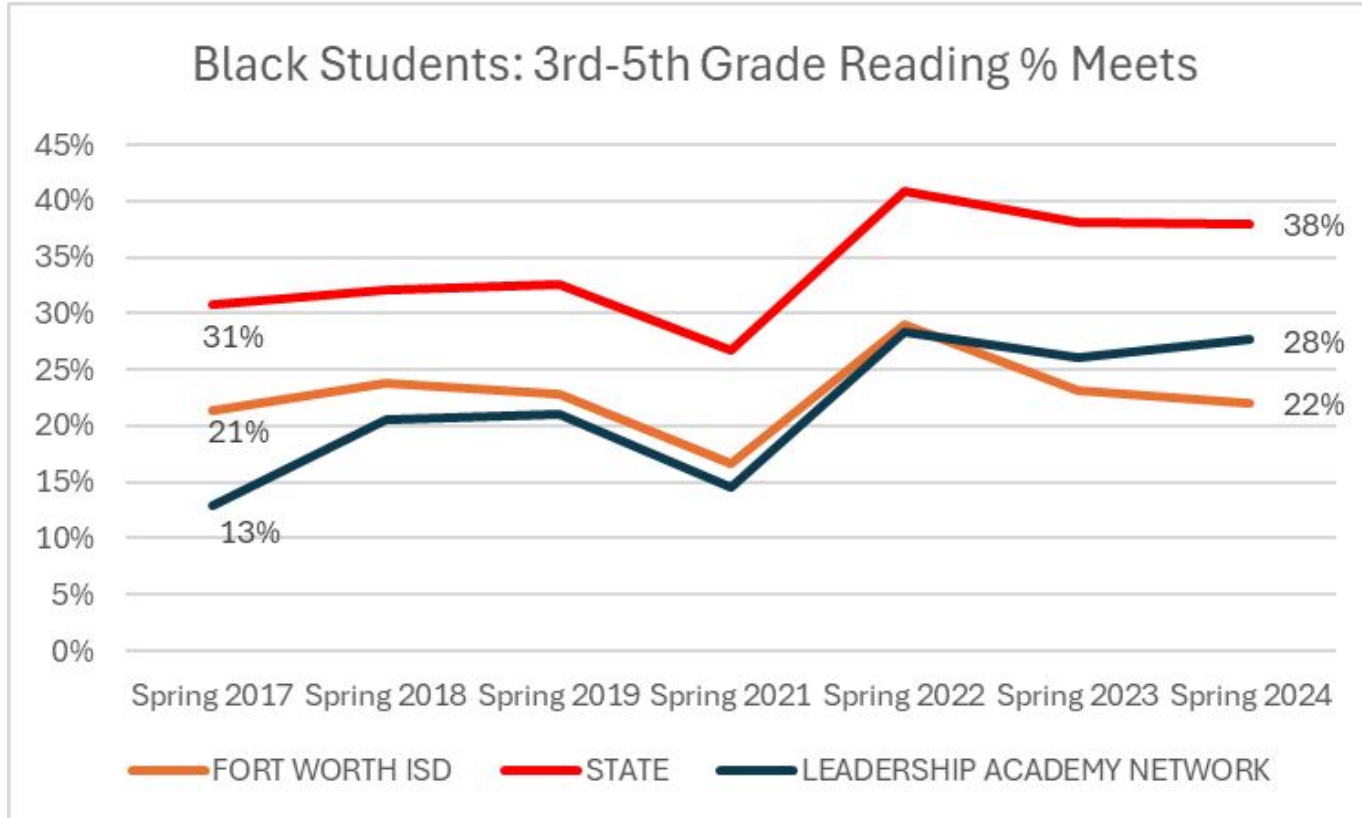
GRADES 3-5 % MEETS **READING**



+6pp
+17pp
+0pp

Note: PEIMS Subset not applied; for Grade 5, first admin only where applicable; first time testers only. In 22-23 and 23-24, test was redesigned to include both Reading and Writing

GRADES 3-5 % MEETS **READING**



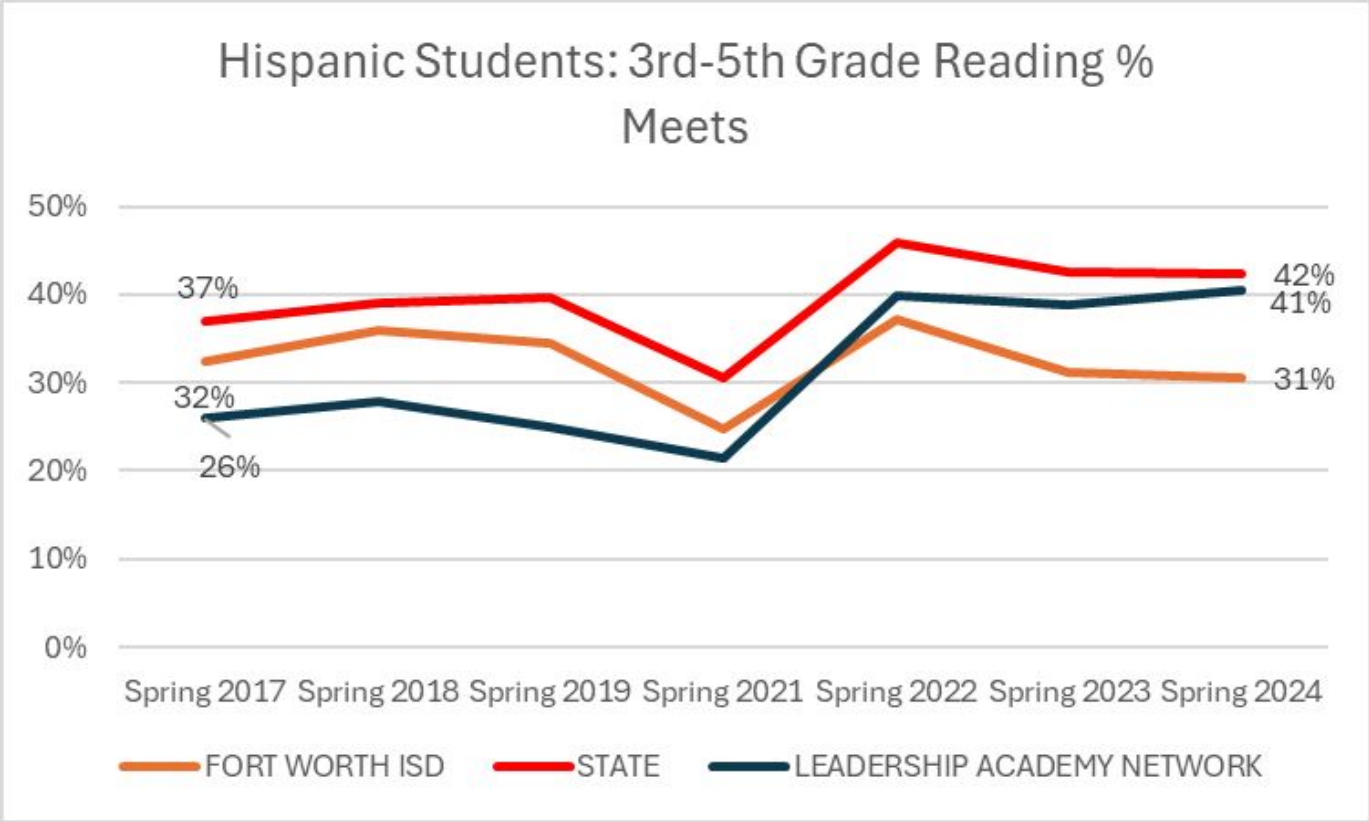
+7pp

+15pp

+1pp

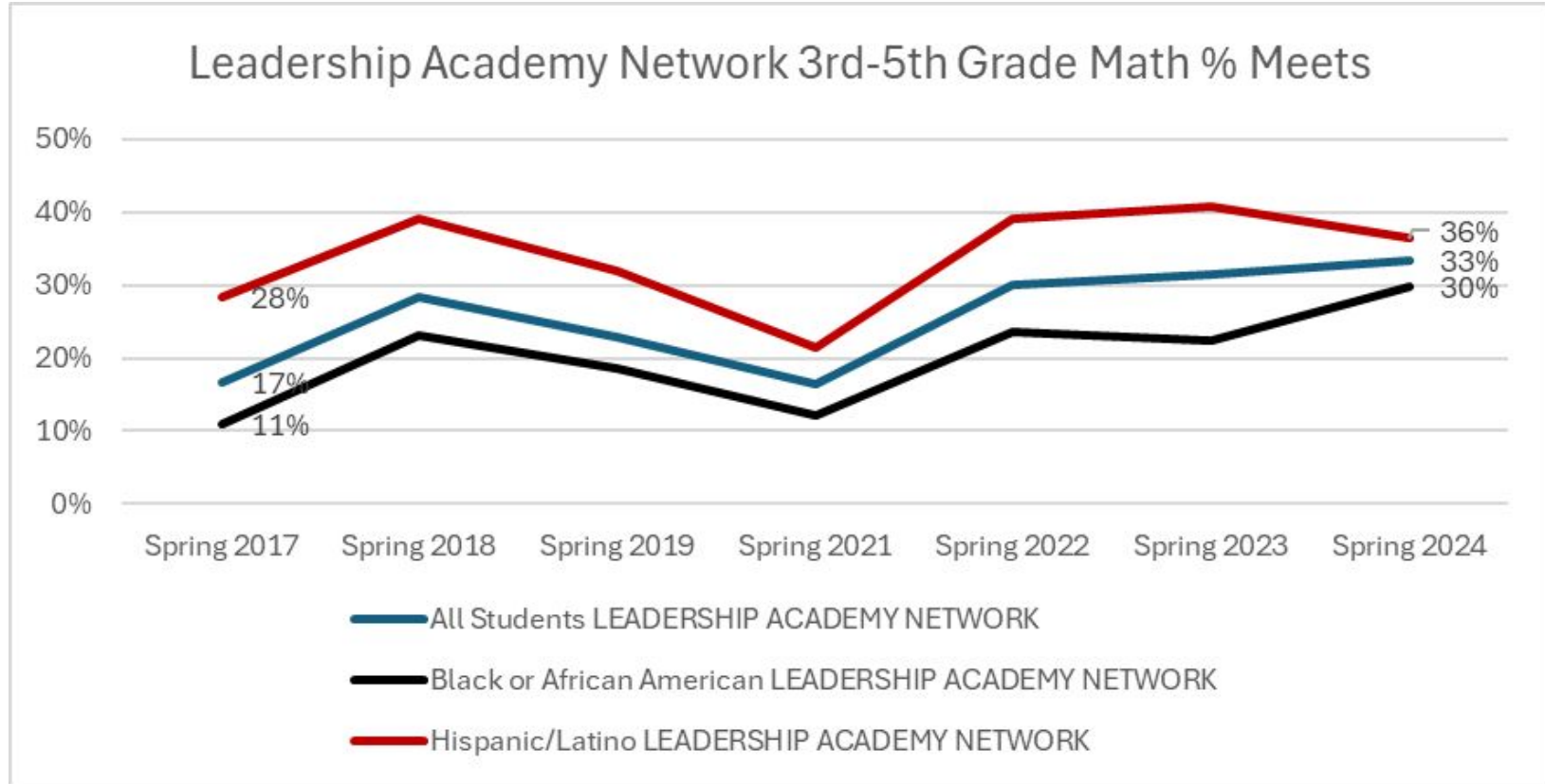
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GRADES 3-5 % MEETS **READING**

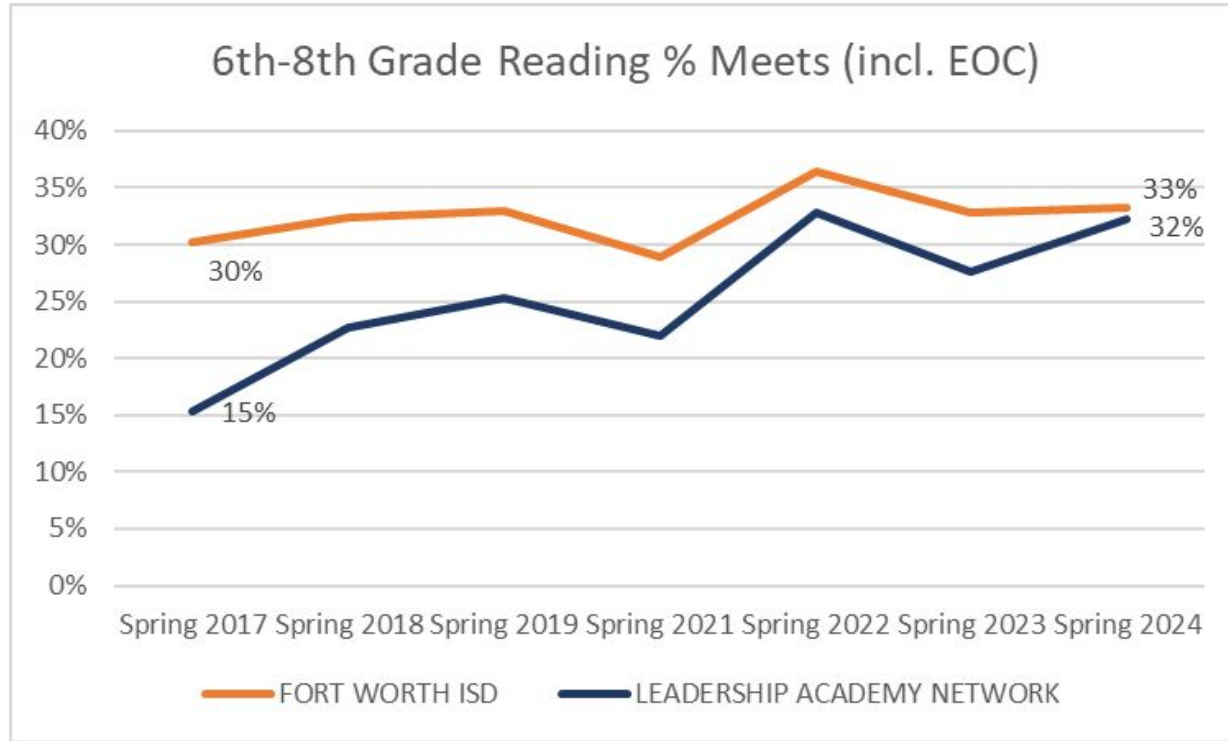


Note: PEIMS Subset not applied; for Grade 5, first admin only where applicable; first time testers only, In 22-23 and 23-24, test was redesigned to include both Reading and Writing

GRADES 3-5 % MEETS MATH



GRADES 6-8 % MEETS Reading incl. EOC

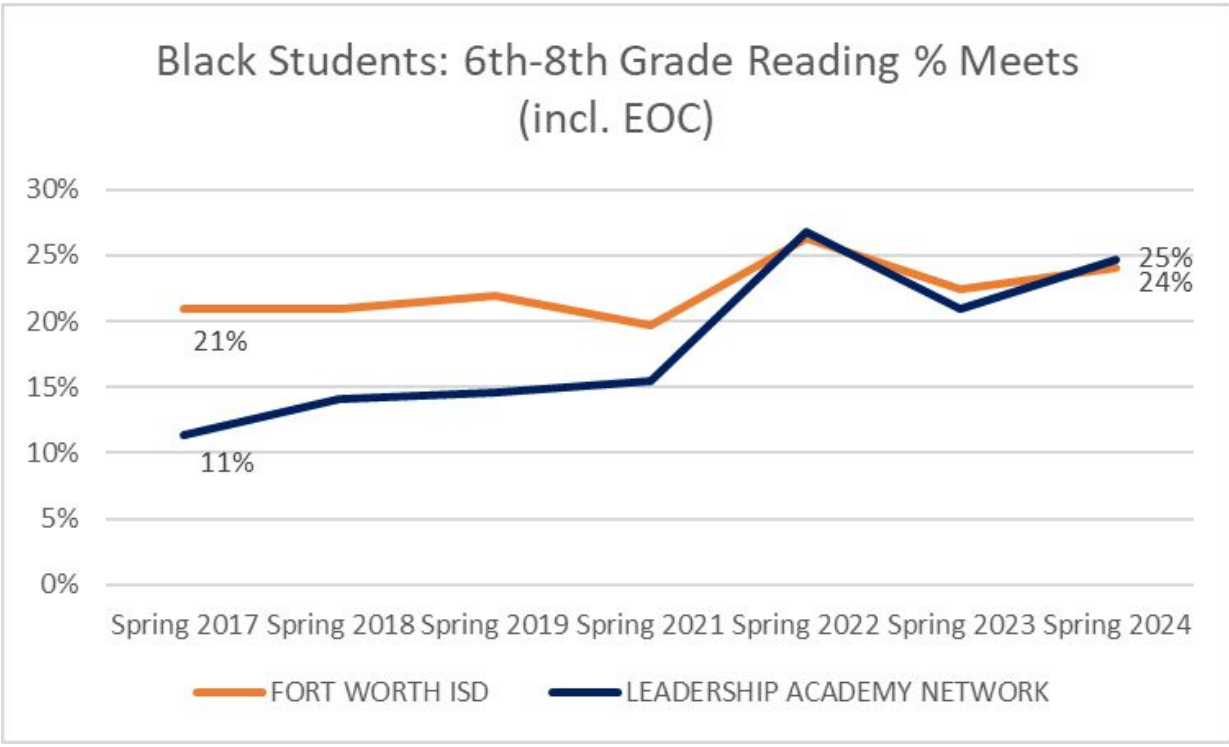


+3pp

+17pp

Note: PEIMS Subset not applied; for Grade 8, first admin only where applicable; first time testers only, In 22-23 and 23-24, test was redesigned to include both Reading and Writing, middle school testers only for EOC results

GRADES 6-8 % MEETS Reading incl. EOC

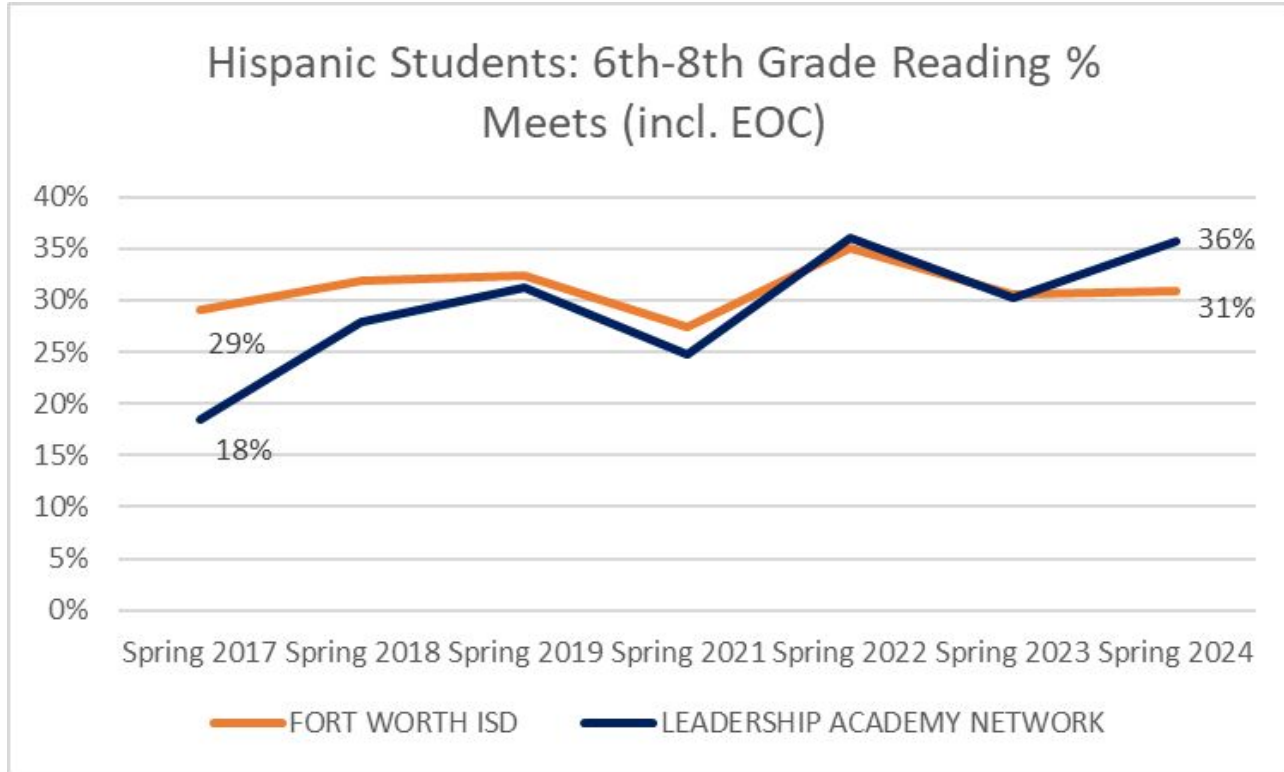


+3pp

+13pp

Note: PEIMS Subset not applied; for Grade 8, first admin only where applicable; first time testers only, In 22-23 and 23-24, test was redesigned to include both Reading and Writing, middle school testers only for EOC results

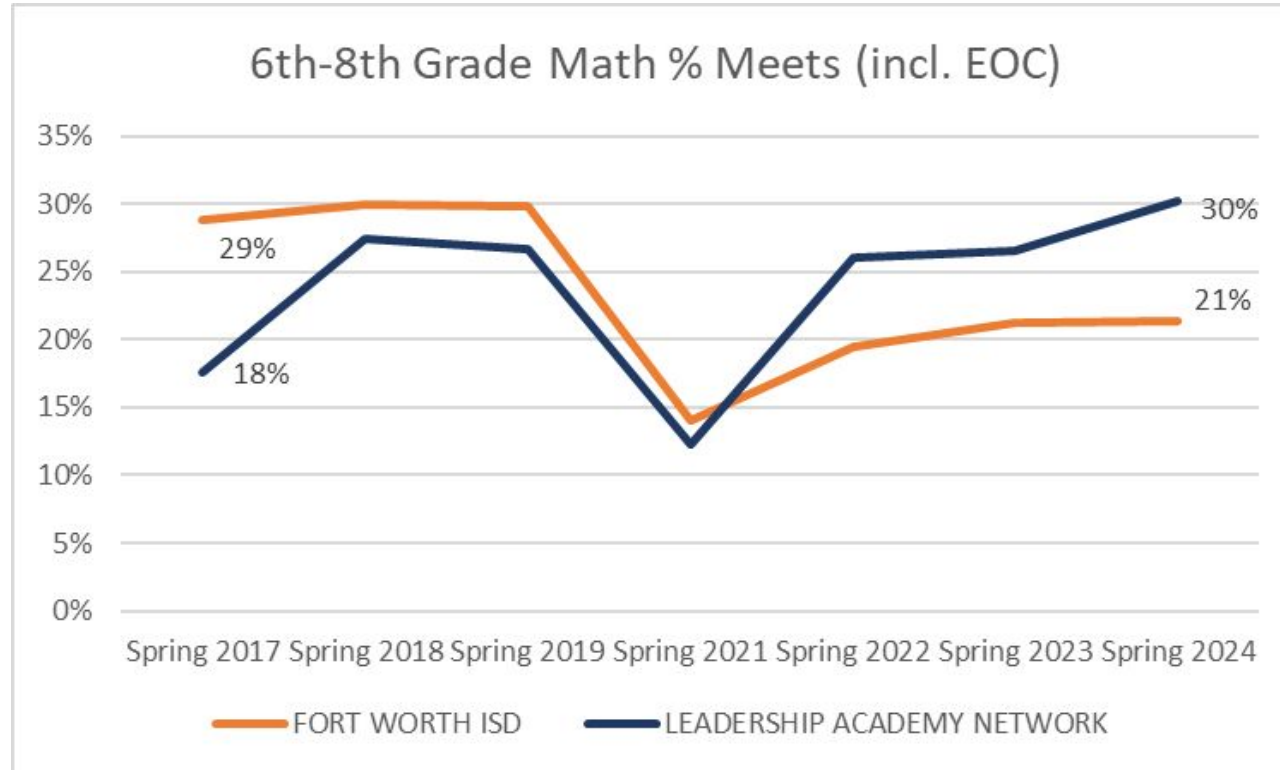
GRADES 6-8 % MEETS Reading incl. EOC



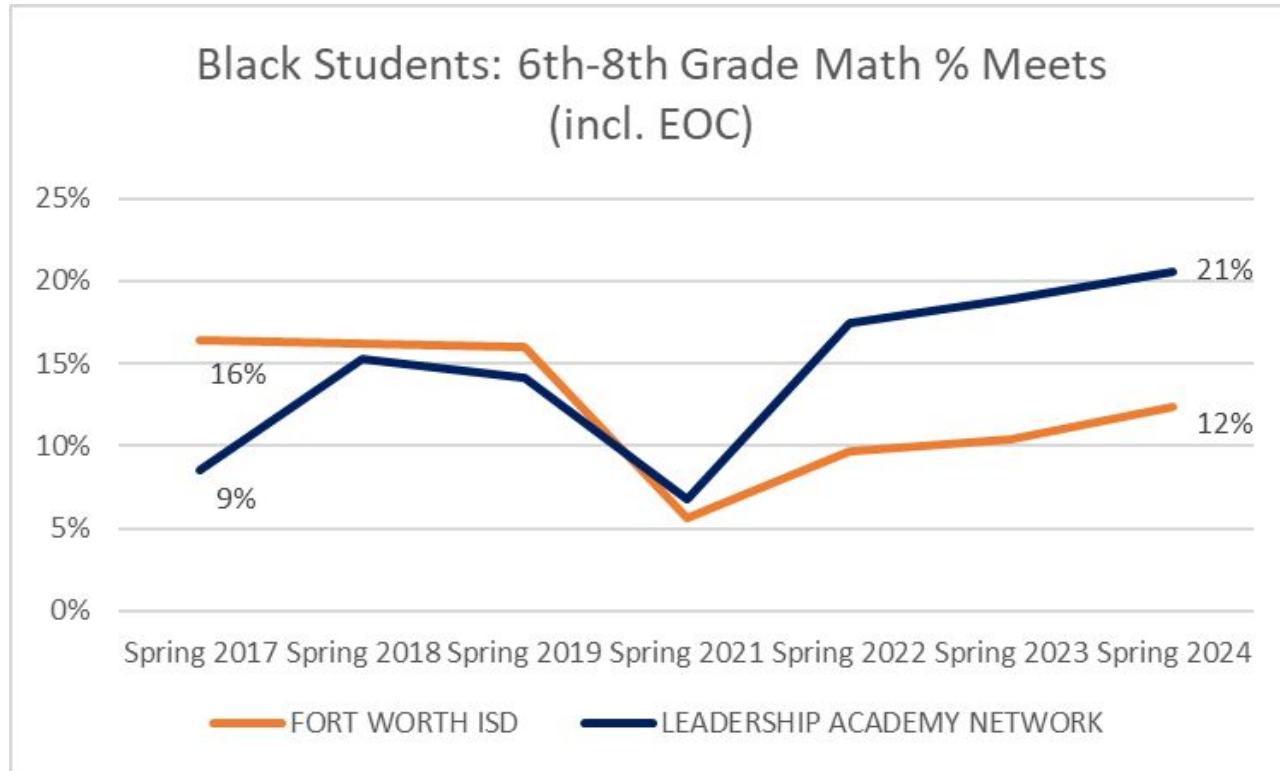
+17pp

+2pp

GRADES 6-8 % MEETS MATH incl. EOC

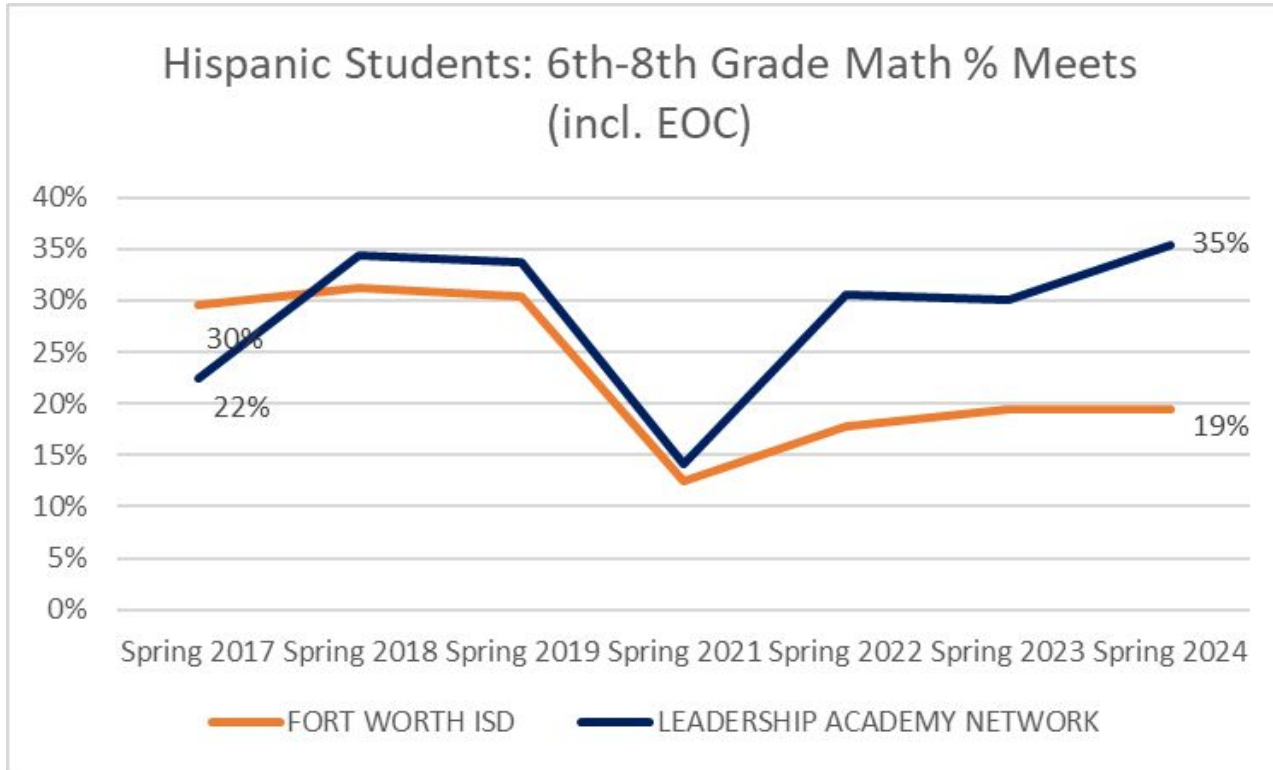


GRADES 6-8 % MEETS **MATH incl. EOC**



+12pp
-4pp

GRADES 6-8 % MEETS **MATH incl. EOC**



+13pp

-10pp