

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)



Joint Public Hearing on

**Academic Achievement in the District of Columbia Public and Public Charter
Schools**

Testimony of
Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee
Chancellor

Before the
Committee of the Whole
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman
and
Committee on Education
The Honorable David Grosso, Chairperson
Council of the District of Columbia

November 22, 2019
Room 412
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004





Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, Chairperson Grosso, members of the Committees, and staff. I am Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee, Chancellor of the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). Thank you for the invitation to join you today to discuss academic achievement in DC Public Schools. As Chancellor, I consider myself the Chief Champion for our district and I am proud of the historic gains we have seen over the past decade.

I am proud to serve a district that had made bold investments and programmatic changes to better serve our students over the last 10 years. Today, I am eager to discuss DCPS' progress in academic achievement, while recognizing that there is still more to do. At the same time, as a city, we know we must continue to dedicate ourselves to the needs of our school system and we cannot shy away from programs that support our students' learning.

Slide 2

DCPS has demonstrated success in creating and improving structures across talent and curriculum that address systemic inequities and set all students and educators up for success. Over the past decade, we have taken steps to move all students toward our standard of excellence and give them the support they need to thrive. This is the result of strategic investments made over time.

As we celebrate our progress, we must also recognize that opportunity gaps persist and that more work is needed to ensure that all students are prepared to thrive in college, career, and life. To close these opportunity gaps, we know that we need to think differently about how we are removing barriers for students furthest from opportunity and supporting communities that have struggled persistently over time.

Over the last year as DCPS' Chancellor, I have heard from students and families a desire to have a strong pathway from Pre-K through high school graduation in every neighborhood and to ensure our schools have access to equitable budgets. I am fully committed to continuing to raise the bar for how we support all students from Pre-K to 12th grade. Today, I am eager to share an update on both our successes and our path forward to advancing academic achievement at DCPS.

Slide 3

2019 marks the fourth consecutive year that DCPS made progress on the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). In the last year, the number of DCPS students scoring at a Level 4 or 5 increased by 4.9 percentage points in English Language Arts (ELA) and 1.9 percentage points in Math. These scores are outpacing the state average and indicate that more students are on track to be prepared for college and career after high school.

Since 2015, the number of DCPS students scoring at a Level 4 or 5 has increased by 15 percentage points in ELA and 11.5 percentage points in Math. We know that to prepare the next generation of innovators, thinkers, and leaders, we must ensure that every student has the skills they need to succeed. I am proud that we have seen gains across multiple student groups, including for Black and Hispanic students, students with disabilities, and English Learners.

Slide 4

Our results from the 2019 Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) demonstrate that DCPS continues to be the nation's fastest improving urban school district. The TUDA measures math and reading skills for 4th and 8th graders by using the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as "the nation's report card."





Since 2009, DCPS experienced greater growth than any other urban school district in three out of the four categories measured – 4th grade reading, 4th grade math, and 8th grade math. We are also the second fastest improving urban school district in 8th grade reading.

Slide 5

Over the past decade, DCPS has increased the percent of students scoring proficient in every grade and subject and decreased the percent of students scoring below basic. I am also proud to share that we have seen gains of more than 20 points for students receiving special education services since 2009.

Slide 6

Across multiple measures DCPS has shown that our students and our schools continue to make progress. These gains are the result of strategic investments and systemic improvements that are setting more students up for success.

We know that preparing our students for post-secondary success starts with a strong academic foundation from a young age. Through universal Pre-K for all 3- and 4-year-olds, DCPS is providing outstanding instruction that is currently preparing over 6,000 Pre-K students for kindergarten with the academic and social emotional skills that they will need to succeed in elementary school.

We know that our students learn best when they're exposed to engaging content that is aligned to real-world experiences. Through Cornerstones, DCPS is providing all students with rigorous and joyful learning experiences through a curriculum that is developed by DCPS' highest performing teachers. In classrooms across the district, our second graders are learning to ride bikes and play the piano, our middle schoolers are applying their understanding of volume to design 3D-printable measuring spoons, and our high school students are using their study of societal change and leadership to design their own social action campaigns. Since 2015, DCPS has continued to improve and increase the amount of opportunities our students have to engage in these powerful lessons. These experiences bring learning to life for our students and creates memories that last far beyond the last day of school.

We also want to recognize that we cannot do this important work without our talented educators and we are committed to continuing to celebrate and support them. Since becoming Chancellor, I have met with educators in focus groups, on school visits, and at public events and will continue this dialogue to make sure that our district is meeting their needs. Over the past decade, we have maintained our commitment to strong talent recruitment and development. We are proud that our district continues to attract and retain world-class teachers as evidenced by the more than 3,000 teacher applications we received for School Year 2019-2020. We will continue to innovate around supports for our educators and are committed to building on the successes of LIFT, DCPS' teacher career-ladder, and LEAP, our content-specific professional learning communities.

As a part of that commitment to continuous improvement, this fall, I announced that DCPS would launch a comprehensive review of IMPACT, focused on teacher evaluation. Through IMPACT, DCPS provides continuous feedback to both celebrate our high-quality, school-based staff and provide opportunities for ongoing growth and development. I look forward to the ways that we will continue to update IMPACT, so that it supports the success of our educators and continues to hold them to consistent and high standards.

Slide 7

In the last two years, DCPS has focused on ensuring that all students meet our graduation standards and have the support they need to thrive. School Year 2018-2019 was the first full year of implementation of





our Pre-K to Graduation policies. Through one-on-one meetings with students, support for student scheduling, and additional data systems for schools to track student progress, DCPS is guiding every student on their path to graduation.

Through our newly updated parent-facing curriculum guides, we are providing parents from kindergarten through 8th grade information about what their student is learning to expand their learning beyond the classroom and make sure every student is high school ready.

I am also proud to report that our cohort of students entering 9th grade increased for the first time in six years. We are focused on engaging those students from day one of high school through our Ninth Grade Academies, which help students transition from middle school and prepare them for high school success by building competencies through an intentional community.

To help high school students understand where they are on the path to graduation, we released the individualized Student Guide to Graduation, Career, and College, which provides students and families with data on their progress toward graduation and actionable steps to work toward post-secondary goals.

Slide 8

This month, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education announced that 65 percent of the DCPS Class of 2019 graduated this year. We are proud of the 2,170 students that met our standards of excellence and continue to provide guidance to all students on their path to graduation, including those who may need additional time and support. While a 65 percent graduation rate represents a decline from the past year, I am confident that our graduates are entering the workforce and stepping onto their college campuses with the skills and education needed to thrive.

We also know that the path to graduation takes on many forms and that students who may need more time to master the coursework must receive the support they need to complete those credits and fulfill their graduation requirements. For example, our redesigned Credit Recovery and Twilight programs give students an opportunity to earn credits towards graduation outside of their regular course schedule in a supportive, rigorous, and personalized environment.

Slide 9

Closing the opportunity gap remains a priority for DCPS student achievement, and we continue to apply lessons learned from our understanding of PARCC and NAEP data to inform our work moving forward. For example, while we have seen growth across all racial groups in our PARCC scores, a significant Black-White opportunity gap persists. Similarly, our NAEP scores demonstrate that while all student groups are making progress, there is a persistent opportunity gap between Black and Hispanic students, and White students.

We believe that this disparity in student achievement is unacceptable and are taking steps to double-down on proven strategies and to introduce bold school models and interventions that are focused on our schools and students furthest from opportunity.

Slide 10

Just as our educators set clear expectations for our students, as a district, we must set clear and consistent standards to create equity of expectations and quality across all schools. This year, we launched the Cluster Support Model to support schools in setting up their students and community for success. Multiple central office content teams from technology, to special education services, to





operations, reconfigured their work to align to Cluster Support Teams, so that every school has a clear point of contact across each content area.

We have also strategically organized schools into clusters to ensure that schools who need the most support get the most support. This includes three smaller clusters dedicated to the Anacostia and Ballou feeder patterns. With this model, students from the Class of 2034 entering Pre-K3 at King Elementary School to the Class of 2020 at Ballou High School receive intensive support aligned with the needs of the school community.

DCPS has also partnered with Turnaround for Children to equip school leaders and staff with the knowledge, skills, and tools to meet the holistic needs of students furthest from opportunity. We have prioritized and tiered supports in alignment with school needs. This work has started with an intentional learning series around the science of learning and development, highlighting research-based best practices on the brain science around the impact of adverse childhood experiences on student development. We are supporting educators with re-examining existing structures and developing new systems that enable supportive, inclusive, and child-centered environments.

Slide 11

We also recognize the need to address the needs of the student through stronger family and community partnerships. This school year, DCPS launched the Connected Schools Model at 10 schools across the district. These schools are reaching beyond the classroom to fundamentally transform what it means to be a part of these school communities. DCPS Connected Schools provide access to resources that are aligned to the community's needs whether those are related to employment or healthcare. We know that schools and communities have symbiotic relationships – when one succeeds, the other succeeds – and so our Connected Schools Managers are building bridges to ensure that every family knows they are a welcome and valued member of their school community.

What does this look like at the school level? At Moten Elementary School, the community is focused on restorative justice practices to create a supportive environment for all students. At Kramer Middle School, the school is coordinating twice monthly food bank opportunities to ensure that families have access to healthy food.

In addition to the implementation of the Connected Schools Model, the Ballou High School and Anacostia High School communities are engaging in a redesign process to reimagine the programming and support that their school provides. The design teams at both schools have engaged with over 1700 students, families, and staff to design a school that captures the needs, hopes, and dreams of the stakeholders in their communities and the schools in their feeder patterns. The impact of this work is not limited to one graduating class or even one neighborhood – by creating schools that intentionally meet the needs of our school communities, we cannot only transform the student experience for current students, but also for generations to come.

Slide 12

Excellence is not the product of chance or circumstance. DCPS' progress has been, and will continue to be, intentionally and thoughtfully designed and implemented to meet the needs of students and families in every ward and every neighborhood. Our investments are creating a new DCPS experience for students and families, and we know that we can't do our work alone. My priority is to provide a great school in every neighborhood, and I'm glad that more families are choosing their neighborhood school. Because of our progress, DCPS now enrolls more than 51,000 students across all eight wards. We appreciate the investments of Mayor Bowser and the support of the DC Council as we continue to build





on our progress, so that every student graduates ready to take advantage of the growth and opportunity in our thriving city.

We know that we have more work to do and look forward to continuing in all the areas I outlined today and more. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.



GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)



Joint Public Hearing on

**Academic Achievement in the District of Columbia Public and Public Charter
Schools**

Testimony of
Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee
Chancellor

Before the
Committee of the Whole
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman
and
Committee on Education
The Honorable David Grosso, Chairperson
Council of the District of Columbia

November 22, 2019
Room 412
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004





Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, Chairperson Grosso, members of the Committees, and staff. I am Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee, Chancellor of the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). Thank you for the invitation to join you today to discuss academic achievement in DC Public Schools. As Chancellor, I consider myself the Chief Champion for our district and I am proud of the historic gains we have seen over the past decade.

I am proud to serve a district that had made bold investments and programmatic changes to better serve our students over the last 10 years. Today, I am eager to discuss DCPS' progress in academic achievement, while recognizing that there is still more to do. At the same time, as a city, we know we must continue to dedicate ourselves to the needs of our school system and we cannot shy away from programs that support our students' learning.

Slide 2

DCPS has demonstrated success in creating and improving structures across talent and curriculum that address systemic inequities and set all students and educators up for success. Over the past decade, we have taken steps to move all students toward our standard of excellence and give them the support they need to thrive. This is the result of strategic investments made over time.

As we celebrate our progress, we must also recognize that opportunity gaps persist and that more work is needed to ensure that all students are prepared to thrive in college, career, and life. To close these opportunity gaps, we know that we need to think differently about how we are removing barriers for students furthest from opportunity and supporting communities that have struggled persistently over time.

Over the last year as DCPS' Chancellor, I have heard from students and families a desire to have a strong pathway from Pre-K through high school graduation in every neighborhood and to ensure our schools have access to equitable budgets. I am fully committed to continuing to raise the bar for how we support all students from Pre-K to 12th grade. Today, I am eager to share an update on both our successes and our path forward to advancing academic achievement at DCPS.

Slide 3

2019 marks the fourth consecutive year that DCPS made progress on the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). In the last year, the number of DCPS students scoring at a Level 4 or 5 increased by 4.9 percentage points in English Language Arts (ELA) and 1.9 percentage points in Math. These scores are outpacing the state average and indicate that more students are on track to be prepared for college and career after high school.

Since 2015, the number of DCPS students scoring at a Level 4 or 5 has increased by 15 percentage points in ELA and 11.5 percentage points in Math. We know that to prepare the next generation of innovators, thinkers, and leaders, we must ensure that every student has the skills they need to succeed. I am proud that we have seen gains across multiple student groups, including for Black and Hispanic students, students with disabilities, and English Learners.

Slide 4

Our results from the 2019 Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) demonstrate that DCPS continues to be the nation's fastest improving urban school district. The TUDA measures math and reading skills for 4th and 8th graders by using the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as "the nation's report card."





Since 2009, DCPS experienced greater growth than any other urban school district in three out of the four categories measured – 4th grade reading, 4th grade math, and 8th grade math. We are also the second fastest improving urban school district in 8th grade reading.

Slide 5

Over the past decade, DCPS has increased the percent of students scoring proficient in every grade and subject and decreased the percent of students scoring below basic. I am also proud to share that we have seen gains of more than 20 points for students receiving special education services since 2009.

Slide 6

Across multiple measures DCPS has shown that our students and our schools continue to make progress. These gains are the result of strategic investments and systemic improvements that are setting more students up for success.

We know that preparing our students for post-secondary success starts with a strong academic foundation from a young age. Through universal Pre-K for all 3- and 4-year-olds, DCPS is providing outstanding instruction that is currently preparing over 6,000 Pre-K students for kindergarten with the academic and social emotional skills that they will need to succeed in elementary school.

We know that our students learn best when they're exposed to engaging content that is aligned to real-world experiences. Through Cornerstones, DCPS is providing all students with rigorous and joyful learning experiences through a curriculum that is developed by DCPS' highest performing teachers. In classrooms across the district, our second graders are learning to ride bikes and play the piano, our middle schoolers are applying their understanding of volume to design 3D-printable measuring spoons, and our high school students are using their study of societal change and leadership to design their own social action campaigns. Since 2015, DCPS has continued to improve and increase the amount of opportunities our students have to engage in these powerful lessons. These experiences bring learning to life for our students and creates memories that last far beyond the last day of school.

We also want to recognize that we cannot do this important work without our talented educators and we are committed to continuing to celebrate and support them. Since becoming Chancellor, I have met with educators in focus groups, on school visits, and at public events and will continue this dialogue to make sure that our district is meeting their needs. Over the past decade, we have maintained our commitment to strong talent recruitment and development. We are proud that our district continues to attract and retain world-class teachers as evidenced by the more than 3,000 teacher applications we received for School Year 2019-2020. We will continue to innovate around supports for our educators and are committed to building on the successes of LIFT, DCPS' teacher career-ladder, and LEAP, our content-specific professional learning communities.

As a part of that commitment to continuous improvement, this fall, I announced that DCPS would launch a comprehensive review of IMPACT, focused on teacher evaluation. Through IMPACT, DCPS provides continuous feedback to both celebrate our high-quality, school-based staff and provide opportunities for ongoing growth and development. I look forward to the ways that we will continue to update IMPACT, so that it supports the success of our educators and continues to hold them to consistent and high standards.

Slide 7

In the last two years, DCPS has focused on ensuring that all students meet our graduation standards and have the support they need to thrive. School Year 2018-2019 was the first full year of implementation of





our Pre-K to Graduation policies. Through one-on-one meetings with students, support for student scheduling, and additional data systems for schools to track student progress, DCPS is guiding every student on their path to graduation.

Through our newly updated parent-facing curriculum guides, we are providing parents from kindergarten through 8th grade information about what their student is learning to expand their learning beyond the classroom and make sure every student is high school ready.

I am also proud to report that our cohort of students entering 9th grade increased for the first time in six years. We are focused on engaging those students from day one of high school through our Ninth Grade Academies, which help students transition from middle school and prepare them for high school success by building competencies through an intentional community.

To help high school students understand where they are on the path to graduation, we released the individualized Student Guide to Graduation, Career, and College, which provides students and families with data on their progress toward graduation and actionable steps to work toward post-secondary goals.

Slide 8

This month, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education announced that 65 percent of the DCPS Class of 2019 graduated this year. We are proud of the 2,170 students that met our standards of excellence and continue to provide guidance to all students on their path to graduation, including those who may need additional time and support. While a 65 percent graduation rate represents a decline from the past year, I am confident that our graduates are entering the workforce and stepping onto their college campuses with the skills and education needed to thrive.

We also know that the path to graduation takes on many forms and that students who may need more time to master the coursework must receive the support they need to complete those credits and fulfill their graduation requirements. For example, our redesigned Credit Recovery and Twilight programs give students an opportunity to earn credits towards graduation outside of their regular course schedule in a supportive, rigorous, and personalized environment.

Slide 9

Closing the opportunity gap remains a priority for DCPS student achievement, and we continue to apply lessons learned from our understanding of PARCC and NAEP data to inform our work moving forward. For example, while we have seen growth across all racial groups in our PARCC scores, a significant Black-White opportunity gap persists. Similarly, our NAEP scores demonstrate that while all student groups are making progress, there is a persistent opportunity gap between Black and Hispanic students, and White students.

We believe that this disparity in student achievement is unacceptable and are taking steps to double-down on proven strategies and to introduce bold school models and interventions that are focused on our schools and students furthest from opportunity.

Slide 10

Just as our educators set clear expectations for our students, as a district, we must set clear and consistent standards to create equity of expectations and quality across all schools. This year, we launched the Cluster Support Model to support schools in setting up their students and community for success. Multiple central office content teams from technology, to special education services, to





operations, reconfigured their work to align to Cluster Support Teams, so that every school has a clear point of contact across each content area.

We have also strategically organized schools into clusters to ensure that schools who need the most support get the most support. This includes three smaller clusters dedicated to the Anacostia and Ballou feeder patterns. With this model, students from the Class of 2034 entering Pre-K3 at King Elementary School to the Class of 2020 at Ballou High School receive intensive support aligned with the needs of the school community.

DCPS has also partnered with Turnaround for Children to equip school leaders and staff with the knowledge, skills, and tools to meet the holistic needs of students furthest from opportunity. We have prioritized and tiered supports in alignment with school needs. This work has started with an intentional learning series around the science of learning and development, highlighting research-based best practices on the brain science around the impact of adverse childhood experiences on student development. We are supporting educators with re-examining existing structures and developing new systems that enable supportive, inclusive, and child-centered environments.

Slide 11

We also recognize the need to address the needs of the student through stronger family and community partnerships. This school year, DCPS launched the Connected Schools Model at 10 schools across the district. These schools are reaching beyond the classroom to fundamentally transform what it means to be a part of these school communities. DCPS Connected Schools provide access to resources that are aligned to the community's needs whether those are related to employment or healthcare. We know that schools and communities have symbiotic relationships – when one succeeds, the other succeeds – and so our Connected Schools Managers are building bridges to ensure that every family knows they are a welcome and valued member of their school community.

What does this look like at the school level? At Moten Elementary School, the community is focused on restorative justice practices to create a supportive environment for all students. At Kramer Middle School, the school is coordinating twice monthly food bank opportunities to ensure that families have access to healthy food.

In addition to the implementation of the Connected Schools Model, the Ballou High School and Anacostia High School communities are engaging in a redesign process to reimagine the programming and support that their school provides. The design teams at both schools have engaged with over 1700 students, families, and staff to design a school that captures the needs, hopes, and dreams of the stakeholders in their communities and the schools in their feeder patterns. The impact of this work is not limited to one graduating class or even one neighborhood – by creating schools that intentionally meet the needs of our school communities, we cannot only transform the student experience for current students, but also for generations to come.

Slide 12

Excellence is not the product of chance or circumstance. DCPS' progress has been, and will continue to be, intentionally and thoughtfully designed and implemented to meet the needs of students and families in every ward and every neighborhood. Our investments are creating a new DCPS experience for students and families, and we know that we can't do our work alone. My priority is to provide a great school in every neighborhood, and I'm glad that more families are choosing their neighborhood school. Because of our progress, DCPS now enrolls more than 51,000 students across all eight wards. We appreciate the investments of Mayor Bowser and the support of the DC Council as we continue to build





on our progress, so that every student graduates ready to take advantage of the growth and opportunity in our thriving city.

We know that we have more work to do and look forward to continuing in all the areas I outlined today and more. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.



November 2019

Academic Achievement in the District of Columbia



District of Columbia Public Schools | 1200 First Street, NE | Washington, DC 20002 | T 202.442.5885 | F 202.442.5026 | dcps.dc.gov

November 2019 Hearing on Academic Achievement in Schools

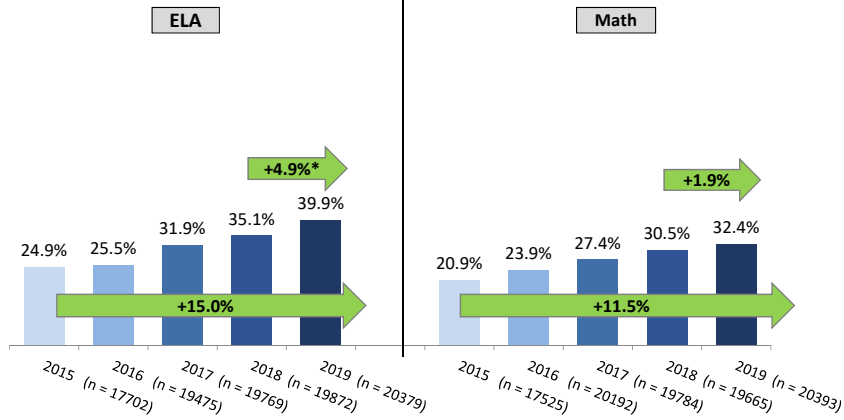
DCPS is proud of historic gains for all students over the past decade.
However, more work is needed to close the opportunity gap.

- **PARCC and NAEP** data reveal historic classroom achievement gains for all DCPS students.
- We are committed to proven **strategies that address inequities** and set students and educators up for success.
- To close the **opportunity gap**, we are creating new strategies around students who are furthest from opportunity.



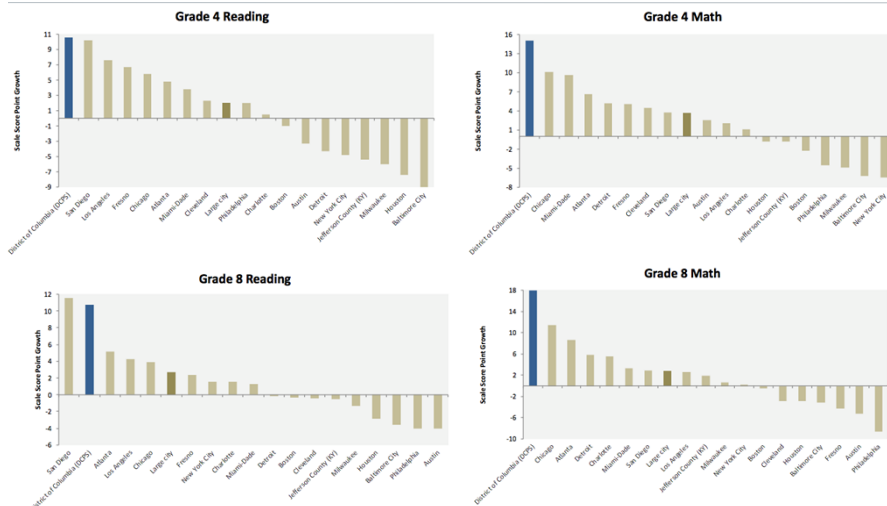
DCPS has steadily improved on PARCC since 2015, with increases of 15 percentage points in ELA and 11.5 percentage points in math.

Overall DCPS PARCC Proficiency (% L4 + L5)



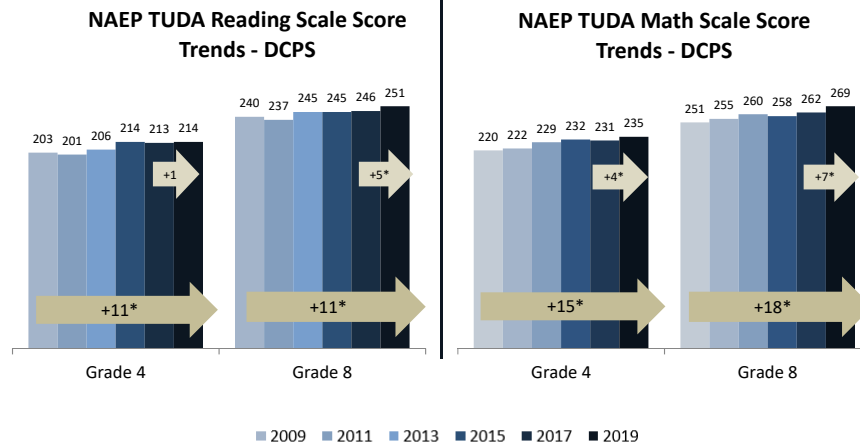
3

Our nation's report card, NAEP, highlights the strides made by DCPS students.



4

Our nation's report card, NAEP, highlights the strides made by DCPS students.



PARCC and NAEP results indicate that our strategic investments are setting more students up for success.



Access to early childhood education is pivotal to kicking off a strong experience with educational systems.

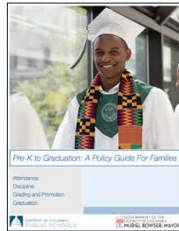


Cornerstones are the anchor of our rigorous curriculum, which provide our students with rigorous joyful learning aligned to real-world experiences.

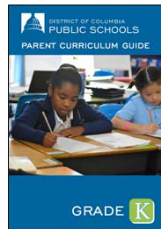


Talent in each and every classroom is the key to success. Through **IMPACT** and **LEAP**, we are striving to ensure every classroom has an outstanding educator.

To improve outcomes, DCPS students are engaging in rigorous academics and personalized post-secondary planning.



Released **Pre-K to Graduation Policy Guide for Families** to clarify standards related to attendance, graduation, grading and promotion.



Updated **parent-facing curriculum guides** for kindergarten through eighth grade that will support meaningful planning conversations for students in order to increase readiness before high school.

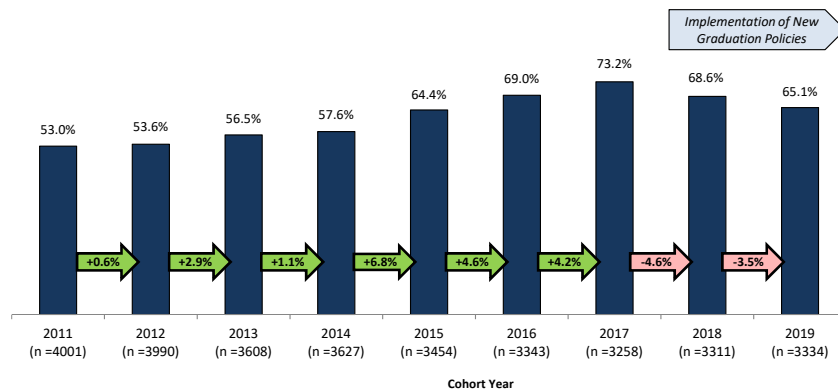


Introduced the personalized **Guide to Graduation, Career, and College** to increase transparency with students and families, as well as encourage postsecondary planning.

7

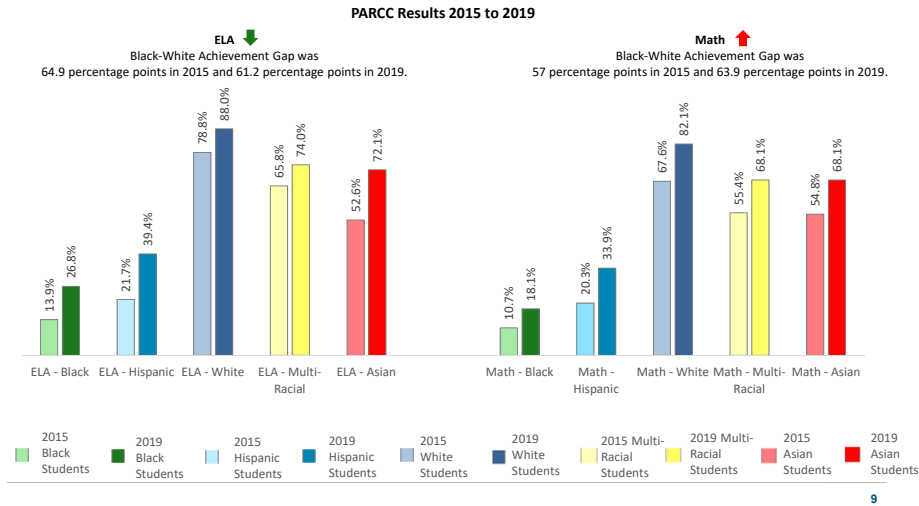
While the DCPS graduation rate has declined for two years, DCPS is now focusing on individualized and family supports.

DCPS 4-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates

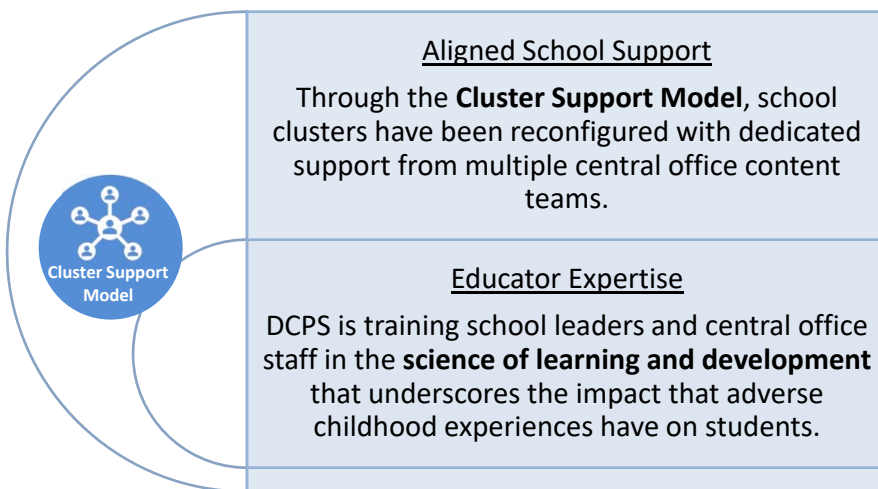


8

Despite strategic investments and improvements, the opportunity gap persists as measured by the PARCC.



The persistent achievement gap has highlighted the need for direct investments in schools and students furthest from opportunity.



We also recognize the need to address the needs of students through stronger family and community partnerships.

The **Connected Schools** model builds off of national research and local best practice around community schools and leverages city-wide agencies to increase community access to government and community services beyond the typical school day.



School Redesign is a transformation strategy supporting Anacostia HS and Ballou HS to partner with their communities to reimagine schools, particularly for students furthest from opportunity.

