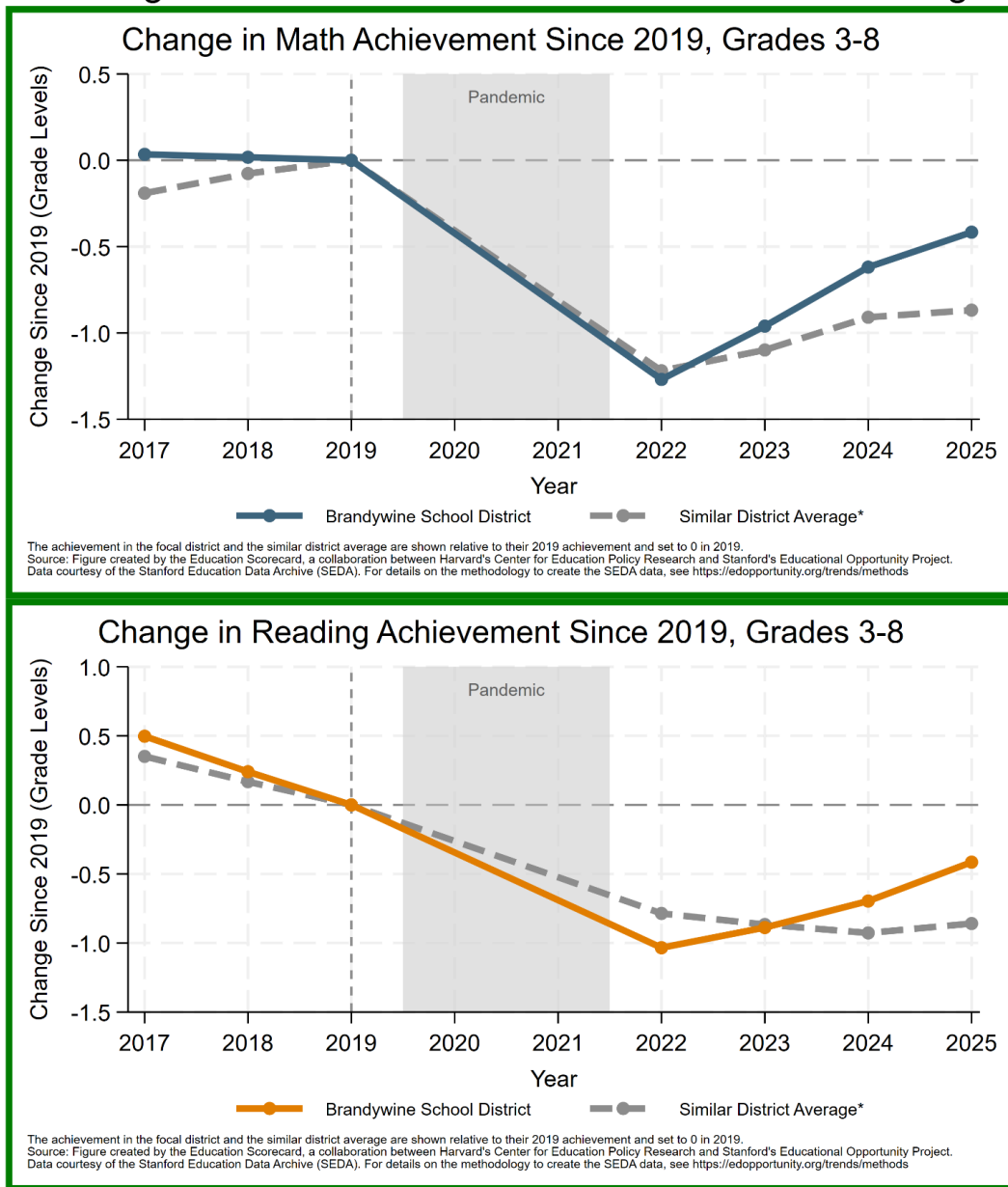




**Brandywine School District**  
Wilmington, Delaware

## Brandywine School District, DE

### Rising Faster than Similar Districts in Math & Reading



\*Similar Districts: Christina School District, Caesar Rodney School District, Colonial School District, Smyrna School District, Red Clay Consolidated School District



### **Student Demographics:**

Total student population: 10,070  
Economically disadvantaged: 25.08%

The three largest racial demographics:

White: 39.75%  
Black/African-American: 37.09%  
Hispanic: 9.98%

**Dr. Lisa Lawson, Superintendent**

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### **Background:**

Brandywine School District, located in Wilmington, Delaware, has demonstrated strong academic growth in both math and reading by focusing on instructional coherence, foundational literacy and math practices, student attendance, and data-informed continuous improvement.

District leaders emphasized that their improvement efforts were not driven by a single initiative, but by a coordinated strategy involving experienced educators across grade levels, schools, and departments. Under the leadership of Superintendent Dr. Lisa Lawson, the district focused on strengthening classroom instruction, aligning curriculum and professional learning, supporting students through targeted interventions, and rebuilding student engagement following the pandemic.

District leaders also prioritized long-term instructional improvement over short-term test preparation strategies. Rather than focusing on “teaching to the test,” Brandywine emphasized high-quality instruction, strong classroom practices, and helping students deeply understand academic content.

### **Strategies for Success:**

#### **Curriculum Alignment and Professional Learning**

- The district implemented stronger alignment with proven best practices in early literacy learning using higher-quality instructional materials; instructional expectations were high in both literacy and mathematics among educators.
- In elementary math, the district transitioned from Eureka Math to Eureka Math Squared, investing in new manipulative kits and the aligned Zearn platform for all teachers to ensure access to grade level standards for all students.
- District leaders emphasized authentic learning experiences, small-group instruction, and classroom discourse rather than overreliance on technology-based instruction.
- Teachers were encouraged to move away from passive, Chromebook-based learning and instead focus on number talks, collaborative problem-solving, and teacher-led, whole-group, explicit instruction, followed by small-group rotations.
- In middle school mathematics, Brandywine adopted Illustrative Math and supported implementation through sustained professional learning.
- Teachers participated in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) focused on lesson



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internalization anchored in grade-level standards, collaborative planning, and instructional refinement.

- The district also invested in OGAP (Ongoing Assessment Project) training to strengthen teachers' understanding of mathematical reasoning and the progression of concepts across grade levels, helping educators deepen conceptual instruction and better support student learning.
- District leaders noted that the district's professional learning culture focused on continuous growth and improvement across all staff.
- The district maintained a strong literacy focus across content areas, supported by targeted professional learning within schools and content-specific instructional coaching to strengthen classroom practice and alignment.

## Advancing Early Literacy and Foundational Skills

- Brandywine implemented stronger literacy foundations and science-of-reading-aligned practices in grades K–2.
- The district emphasized direct, explicit phonics instruction, along with building academic vocabulary and comprehension as foundational literacy skills, and early intervention to ensure students develop strong reading skills in the earliest grades.
- Leaders noted that instructional changes at the earliest grade levels in elementary will help create stronger academic growth trends that later extend into middle school.
- The district also made strategic decisions around writing instruction and literacy expectations to ensure students developed stronger comprehension and communication skills.
- Leaders emphasized balancing foundational literacy instruction with engaging classroom experiences for younger students.

## Building a Strong Attendance and Student Support System

- Under Dr. Lawson's leadership, the district launched a districtwide attendance initiative to increase families' awareness of the importance of consistent attendance.
- Schools clearly communicated attendance expectations to families and established goals to improve attendance rates.
- The district implemented a more robust Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to identify students with attendance challenges earlier and provide targeted interventions.
- District staff created dashboards and monitoring systems to help schools regularly review attendance trends and student risk factors.
- School teams conducted regular check-ins with MTSS leaders to review student data and determine intervention strategies; Attendance Action Plans were developed as a proactive, preventive measure to support families.
- The district also focused on reducing chronic absenteeism and improving "on-track attendance," particularly at the elementary level.
- Leaders shared that students with stronger attendance patterns were significantly more likely to demonstrate proficiency in math and reading.
- Staff emphasized relationship-building with students and families as a key component of improving attendance and student engagement.

## Using Data to Drive Continuous Improvement



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- District and school leaders regularly analyzed state assessment data, interim assessment results, and growth measures to identify trends and areas for improvement.
- Leaders intentionally focused on student growth and long-term academic progress rather than solely concentrating on proficiency rates, moving away from binary “met goals” measures toward growth-based indicators to better capture student progress and discourage narrowing attention to “bubble students.”
- Teachers and school leaders used assessment results to adjust instruction, identify student learning gaps, and strengthen interventions.
- The district emphasized instructional strategies that build deep student understanding instead of relying on test-taking tricks or narrow test-preparation practices.
- Leaders also highlighted the importance of measuring growth over time and understanding how improvements in elementary grades contribute to stronger middle school outcomes.
- Brandywine’s leadership team described the district’s improvement strategy as one rooted in collaboration, reflection, and ongoing refinement of instructional practices.