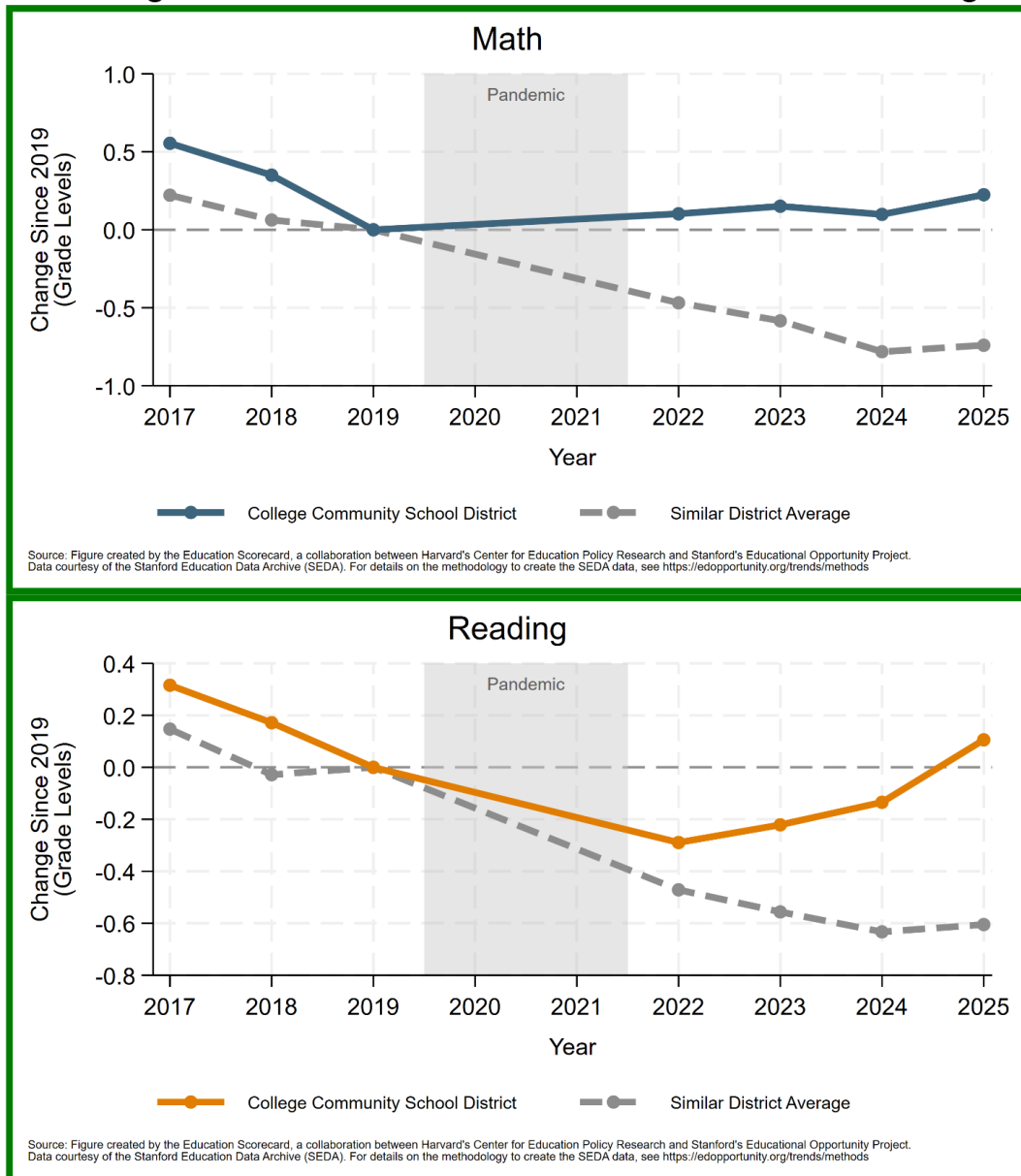


College Community School District
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

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Rising Faster than Similar Districts in Math & Reading



Similar Districts: Dubuque Community School District, Cedar Falls Community School District, West Des Moines Community School District, Davenport Community School District, Cedar Rapids Community School District



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Student Demographics:

Total student population: 5,800 students

Economically disadvantaged: 39.8%

Three largest racial demographics:

Black/African-American: 16.7%

Hispanic: 7.5%

White: 65.3%

Dr. Doug Wheeler, Superintendent of Schools for the College Community School District (dwheeler@crprairie.org)

- “I am immensely proud of our progress in meeting the evolving academic and transferable skill needs of our students. Our entire team: administrators, teachers, and support staff is dedicated to accelerating student growth through a foundation of shared language, clear systems, and responsive collaboration. We have fostered an environment where student success is powered by the continuous growth, specialized expertise, and deep-seated dedication of our team with the support of our families and community.”

Background:

College Community School District serves approximately 5,800 students in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and is outpacing similar districts in both math and reading growth.

With the leadership of Superintendent Dr. Doug Wheeler and an experienced and dedicated cadre of District and Building Administrators, the district has focused on building a coherent, systemwide approach to instruction and support, aligning strong classroom teaching, MTSS, targeted interventions, and family engagement. Despite increases in English learners and higher-need student populations, the district has sustained academic progress by emphasizing consistency across schools, collaboration among educators, and supports that extend beyond the classroom. This work is grounded in the District’s learner-centered, future-focussed [10-year strategic plan](#).

Strategies for Success:

Coherent Instruction + Strong Tiered Supports (MTSS)

- The district built a multi-year, systemwide MTSS framework, ensuring all students are regularly screened in math and literacy and receive targeted interventions in real time.
- Students receive support through tier 1 (universal) instruction and structured intervention blocks (“WIN time – What I Need”) embedded in the school day.
- Teachers use decision trees and intervention protocols to match supports to student needs.
- Each school operates a leadership team (“CADRE”) that:
 - Regularly reviews data
 - Conducts MTSS self-assessments
 - Aligns action plans to building needs and district priorities
 - Creates, facilitates and monitors the School Improvement Plan



Instructional Quality + Teacher Implementation Focus

- The district prioritized tight alignment to state standards and high-quality instructional materials through the development of a long-range curriculum review cycle.
- The District adopted the [New Teacher Center's Core Capabilities instructional framework](#) to support teacher development
- Analyzed student performance data and staff implementation data to identify targeted professional development, which includes:
 - Instructional coaching
 - Structured planning tool
 - Ongoing classroom observation cycles
 - Lesson studies
- Expanded Preschool access through partnerships and redesigned experiences through [experiential learning models](#) to support language development, 65% of incoming Kindergarten students have a preschool experienced in our district.

Targeted Support for High-Need Student Populations (ELL + Special Education)

- Rapid growth in English learners led to:
 - Expanded staffing and increased collaboration and training opportunities for EL teachers
 - An individualized newcomer pathway for students who are new to the country with programming based on their past educational experiences, English proficiency, academic skills, and future goals.
 - Districtwide training for all K-12 teachers regarding strategies to increase EL students' opportunities for reading, writing, and speaking in the classroom
- Strengthened special education through:
 - Realignment of Special Education staffing across the district to best meet the needs of students.
 - Strong community-based transition programs for students in 18+ programming for IEP needs.
 - The implementation of a therapeutic classroom model utilizing a research-based therapeutic approach to meet the needs of struggling learners with social, emotional, behavior IEP needs. Therapeutic models exist in both our comprehensive and special school settings, expanding our continuum of services.

Whole-Child Strategy + Family Engagement

- Expanded wraparound supports:
 - Community Engagement Specialists
 - Resource centers (e.g., food pantry, clothing and school material supports)
 - Family resource events (registration, supplies, services)
- Launched "Great Start Conferences":
 - Families individually meet teachers *before* school starts
 - Builds early trust and alignment
- Implemented ParentSquare for communication in 100+ languages



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Strong Culture: Leadership Stability, Attendance, and Student Engagement

- Long-term leadership and teacher retention enabled consistent implementation over time.
- Maintained low chronic absenteeism (often under 10%), a key driver of academic growth, with the district average for elementaries 5% lower than the Iowa average for chronic absenteeism at the elementary level
- Built systems that promote:
 - Student ownership (e.g., mastery tracking like Badge Books)
 - Consistent behavior expectations across schools

Future Focus Grounded in Best Practice

- Expanded career readiness and student-centered programming, including *Future Ready Me*, an innovative STEM and Wellness course designed for elementary students. In addition to STEM and wellness concepts, students are introduced to a variety of career pathways related to these fields, sparking interest in future opportunities and building early connections to secondary education pathways available at Prairie High School. Through interactive projects and real-world applications, students will strengthen executive functioning skills, enhance focus, and build confidence, ensuring they are future-ready both academically and personally.
- Worked with industry partners and national research to identify [PRAIRIE READY](#) indicators, readiness skills to underpin program/course development and learner experiences at the secondary level.
- Building on a strong foundation of literacy and numeracy, at the secondary level, the focus of application and durable skills is strengthened through a career academy/pathway system, including regionally relevant pathways in agriculture, health sciences/nursing, culinary arts, building trades, aviation mechanics, and teaching, with more pathways ready for launch.