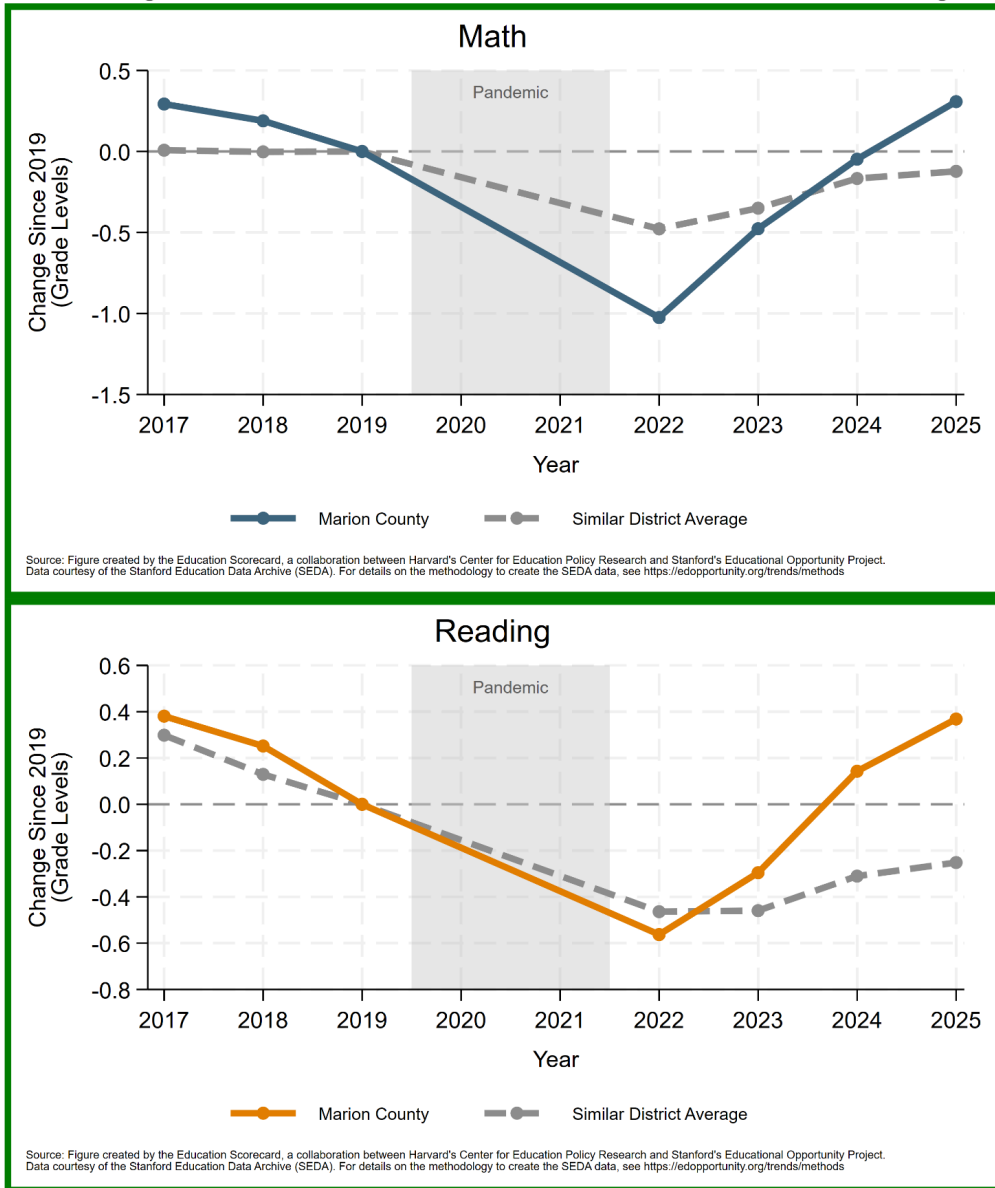


**Marion County Public Schools**  
Lebanon, KY

**Marion County, KY**

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



Similar Districts: Allen County, Graves County, Barren County, Garrard County, Grant County

### **Student Demographics:**

Total student population: 2,937

Economically Disadvantaged: 61%

Three largest racial demographics:

White: 83%

Hispanic/Latino: 11%

Two or more races: 7%

**Chris Brady**, Superintendent

[chris.brady@marion.kyschools.us](mailto:chris.brady@marion.kyschools.us)

- "In Marion County, our commitment to evidence-based instruction isn't just about adopting a new curriculum; it's about ensuring every leader and educator has the specialized training to implement it with precision."
- "We're committed to reclaiming the classroom for authentic student-to-teacher engagement. By intentionally scaling back technology usage, we are refocusing our energy on evidence-based practices and standards-aligned instruction that keeps students at the center of the learning process."

**Brigitte Blom**, President & CEO, Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence

- "The remarkable academic gains in Marion County are a direct result of a community-wide commitment to rigor, evidence-based instruction, and the professional growth of their educators," said Brigitte Blom, President & CEO of The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence. "Marion County's success is a testament to what is possible when rural districts prioritize high-quality materials and invest deeply in the specialized training required to implement them with precision."

### **Background:**

Marion County Public Schools (MCPS) serves a rural population in central Kentucky. Under the leadership of Superintendent Chris Brady, the district has prioritized high-quality instructional materials and direct student-to-teacher engagement. The district's efforts have yielded significant growth in recent years; between the 2021-22 and 2024-25 school years, students in grades 3-7 improved by over 10% in the percentage of those scoring proficient or above in reading, and the percentage of eighth-grade students scoring proficient or above in math surged from 18% to 50% in the same time period. By transitioning into a content-specific coaching model and committing to evidence-based training, MCPS has established a rigorous environment dedicated to long-term student mastery.

### **Strategies for Success:**

Adopting high-quality curricula and utilizing data-driven instruction:

- In alignment with Kentucky's 2022 Read to Succeed Act, the district committed to a full rollout of evidence-based literacy curricula, including [Amplify CKLA](#) for elementary grades and [Amplify ELA](#) for middle school. According to Instructional Supervisor Dana Thomas, the district prioritized consistent use of Amplify materials for grades K-8 to ensure a smooth continuation of learning.
- To support effective implementation of the materials, MCPS prioritized building teacher capacity through a tiered coaching model. In the first year of the elementary rollout of Amplify CKLA, the district focused primarily on lesson and unit internalization, and coaching support will be more fully implemented in the next academic year to deepen that work. At the middle school level, where the internalization process progressed more quickly, coaching support—including classroom conversations, participation in

professional learning communities, and real-time feedback—was introduced earlier in the implementation phase.

- In math, schools use Curriculum Associates' [i-Ready](#) at the elementary level and [Savvas](#) for middle and high school. Similarly, coaches from the curriculum vendors frequent MCPS classrooms to observe and offer feedback.
- Since 2019, MCPS has utilized instructional coaches to support teacher development, but the role was restructured in 2022 to transition from a school-based model to a content-driven one. Under this approach, two secondary coaches manage math/ELA and science/social studies, while three elementary coaches oversee math, ELA, and science/social studies across the district's four elementary schools.
- These coaches operate in six-to-nine-week cycles, working directly with teachers to deconstruct state standards, conduct deep lesson internalizations, and use diagnostic and annual assessment data to drive instructional decisions.
- The district has encouraged a commitment to literacy by ongoing LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) training to ELA teachers. This training extends beyond the classroom, with both school- and district-level administrators completing the program to ensure alignment on evidence-based literacy practices. Since 2022, 44 teachers and administrators have completed LETRS training in the district. This shared knowledge allows leadership to better support teachers and make informed decisions about the foundational reading instruction happening across grade levels.

#### Creating an environment for engagement:

- After identifying an overuse of digital devices, district leadership led an effort to scale back Chromebook and other technology usage to foster more direct student-to-teacher engagement. The district implemented monthly technology-free days at the middle school level to eliminate digital distractions during the school day.
- Amanda Farmer, principal at Marion County Middle School, states, "During walkthroughs on screen-free days, I observe students that enjoy the tasks they are working on, are working collaboratively and are actively engaged in learning. Screen-free days create a more student-driven environment rather than a teacher-centered environment."

#### Instruction-focused leadership development:

- The district operates a year-long Aspiring Leaders program that prepares the next generation of administrators through book studies, departmental job shadowing, and peer-reviewed mock interviews.
- Retention efforts begin with a structured new teacher support program that pairs incoming staff with mentor teachers for classroom observations and collaborative meetings. Teacher mentors provide at least 40 hours of support to their new teacher partner throughout the school year to guide them through the challenges of the first year of teaching.
- The district encouraged teacher-led innovation by awarding \$75,000 across 30 grants to educators who proposed creative and effective classroom initiatives to positively affect student achievement. This enabled teachers to purchase materials like a crescent-shaped white board table for small group math instruction and maps and globes to enhance Amplify CKLA instruction.