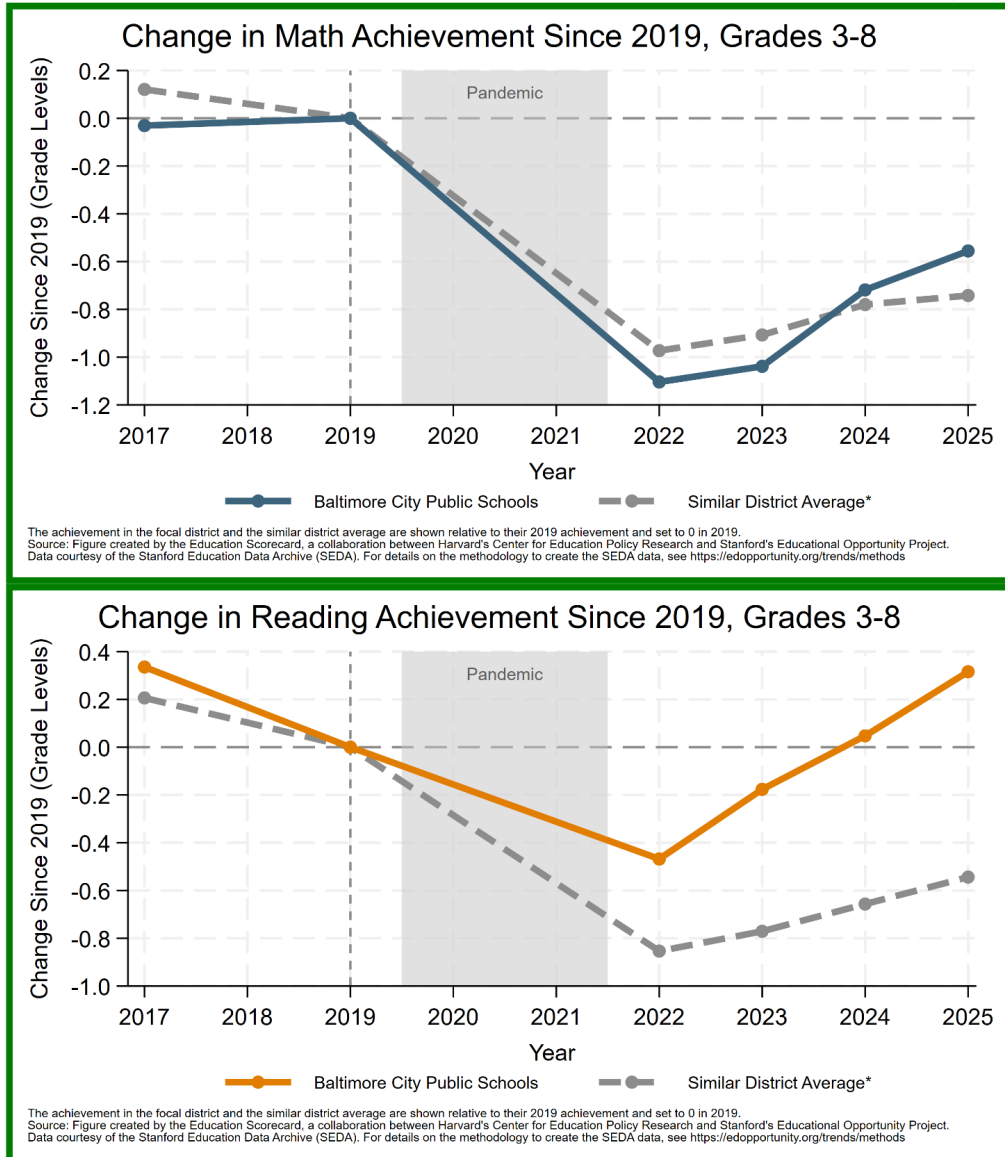


Baltimore City Public Schools
Baltimore, MD

Baltimore City Public Schools, MD
Rising Faster than Similar Districts in Math & Reading



*Similar Districts: Wicomico County Public Schools, Washington County Public Schools, Dorchester County Public Schools, Somerset County Public Schools, Frederick County Public Schools



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Student Demographics:

Total student population: 76,807
Economically Disadvantaged: 70%

Three largest racial demographics:

Black: 70%
Hispanic: 20%
White: 7%

Dr. Sonja Santelises, CEO

Background: Under the leadership of CEO Dr. Sonja Santelises, Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools) transformed teaching and learning through strategic investments in literacy, math, and holistic student supports. Over the past nine years, City Schools has [outpaced](#) the state in growth in English Language Arts (ELA) and has achieved three consecutive years of math gains, equaling the state's gains. By leveraging significant public and philanthropic investments—including over \$420 million for community schools and \$23 million for secondary literacy—the district is successfully supporting its students in tackling non-academic barriers while driving student growth in core subjects. These evidence-based strategies, ranging from high-dosage tutoring to paid summer credit recovery, ensure that all students remain on a rigorous track toward graduation and long-term success.

Strategies for Success:

Expanding evidence-based, high-dosage tutoring:

- City Schools provides high-dosage math tutoring through efforts like the [Reach Together Tutoring Program](#), a partnership with the University of Maryland–Baltimore County (UMBC). UMBC students have served as math coaches in City Schools since 2016; the current Reach Together program was piloted in the 2021-2022 school year with 350 students in four schools.
- Through this program, tutors receive \$18 per hour to work with 1-2 students, delivering sessions at least twice weekly for 45 minutes during the school day's intervention block. Tutors use Saga Education and Rocket Math curricula to provide consistent, high-quality instruction to students. A UMBC evaluation of the program found that 85% of students felt more confident in math after receiving the tutoring.
- The Reach Together program expanded in 2023-2024 with a grant from the [Maryland Tutoring Corps](#), a one-time opportunity using the state's ESSER funds to allow [nearly 1,000](#) college and graduate students across the state to tutor middle schoolers in three Maryland districts. Reach Together now reaches 675 students in grades 1-8 across 10 City Schools sites.

Incentivizing extended learning opportunities:

- To combat summer and pandemic-related learning loss and high dropout rates, City Schools transformed summer school into a robust, curriculum-aligned extended learning season.
- Through a partnership with [YouthWorks](#), a youth employment program under the Mayor's Office of Employment Development, the district pays high school students \$12.50 per hour to attend intensive summer learning or [credit recovery](#) courses, allowing them to prioritize graduation requirements without sacrificing necessary income.



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- To ensure instructional consistency, all summer and credit recovery programs utilize the district's core curriculum. According to Dr. Santelises, this consistency not only allows students to revisit content they did not master during the school year, but it also allows educators to teach units that they did not have time to cover.
- The district also encouraged philanthropic partners to focus on instructional alignment, which led non-district-led summer programs to adopt the same curriculum used in City Schools.
- The district worked with the Baltimore City Department of Recreation and Parks to align summer programming schedules so that students did not have to miss out on recreational activities due to summer learning.
- Dr. Santelises attributes much of the success the district has seen with summer learning to monitoring attendance during the summer, ensuring that students are actually receiving the intervention they need.

Providing holistic support through Community Schools:

- Leveraging [over \\$420 million](#) in Concentration of Poverty Grants between 2020 and 2024, the district has turned every school into a designated Community School, serving as a physical hub for social services, healthcare, and mental health support.
- Each site employs a Community School Coordinator who connects families with community resources related to housing, employment, food security, and other needs. 71 City Schools sites also house food pantries.
- Dr. Santelises emphasizes that providing a single point of contact to support family needs significantly alleviates the burden on families to tackle non-academic challenges, such as housing and food insecurity, that otherwise negatively impact student learning and classroom focus.
- In addition to assisting with family needs, Community School Coordinators weave in programming and resources designed to help families support their child's education. The district has created grade-level [learning guides](#) that provide key reading and math milestones for grades PreK-5, which includes information about evidence-based learning strategies.

Building evidence-based literacy training and instruction:

- City Schools has administered the DIBELS reading screener three times per year for [over ten years](#) to measure student performance on key reading skills.
- Leveraging over \$23 million in support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's [Networks for School Improvement \(NSI\)](#) portfolio since 2018, the district has focused on secondary literacy through its 9th Grade On-Track Initiative.
- In 2018, the district has established 26 Literacy Intensive Learning Sites that utilize high-quality, standards-aligned ELA curriculum, and onsite literacy coaches to improve teacher content and pedagogical knowledge in middle and high school.
- A [2020 expansion](#) of the program across 12 high schools funds teacher training on data-driven progress tracking, earlier access to college and career coaching, and the hiring of new staff to ensure ninth graders stay on a trajectory toward graduation.
- A Mathematica [analysis](#) of the NSI initiative (across all 34 NSIs) found that the ninth-grade on-track NSI improved students' grade point average by about 0.11 points on a four-point scale, and improved course pass rates by 3-4 percentage points.