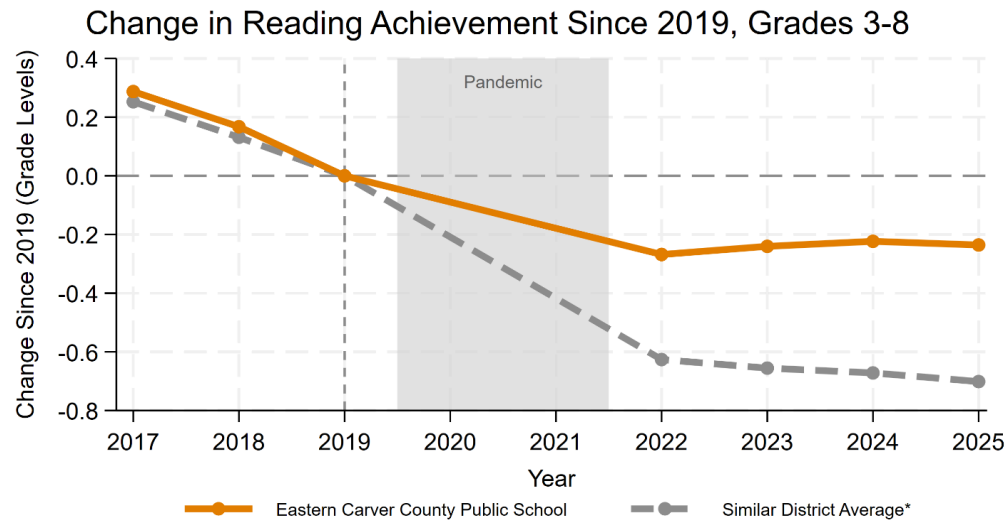
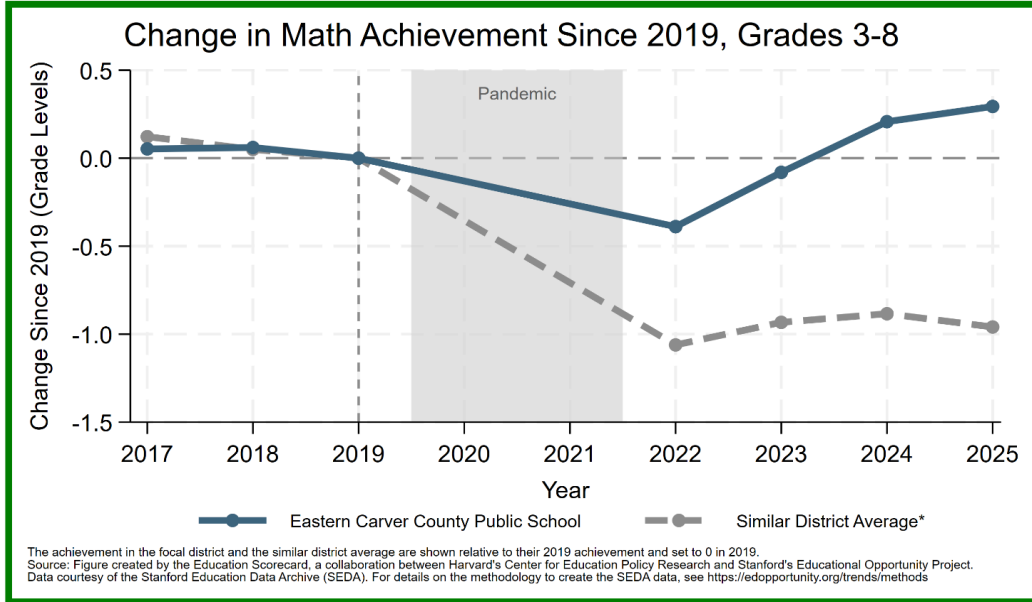


Eastern Carver County Schools

Chaska, Minnesota

Eastern Carver County Public School, MN
Rising Faster than Similar Districts in Math



*Similar Districts: Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools, Centennial Public School District, Lakeville Area Schools, Sartell-St. Stephen School District, Farmington Public School District

Student Demographics:

Total students: 9,254

Economically Disadvantaged: 18.7%

Three largest racial demographics:

White: 74%

Hispanic/Latino: 11%

Two or More Races: 6%

Dr. Erin Rathke, Superintendent

rathkeE@District112.org

“Our gains reflect a relentless commitment to serving every child regardless of their background, zip code, or school. At the center of this work are our students and the experiences they have every day in our district. We take a holistic, student-centered approach, using data to stay nimble, make adjustments, and better support our leaders, teachers, and students. I often say that data is a comma, not a period; it helps guide our next steps, not define our students. While there is still more work to do, there is also a great deal to be proud of.”

Background:

Eastern Carver County Schools (ECCS) serves approximately 9,250 students across 23 schools in the southwestern Twin Cities suburbs of Carver, Chanhassen, Chaska, and Victoria. Over the last decade, the district has evolved from one experimenting with personalized learning to one that pairs student-centered instruction with a disciplined, systemwide improvement process. Superintendent Dr. Erin Rathke helped design the very math, literacy, and school improvement strategies now driving achievement gains.

ECCS has built a culture of continuous school improvement that has translated into measurable academic gains. The district has redefined the work of the principal as an instructional leader, set ambitious growth goals for every student with accelerated targets for students furthest from opportunity, and built one of the most sophisticated attendance infrastructures in the state. In math, ECCS has posted substantial growth since 2019 and has sustained performance above pre-pandemic benchmarks. Reading has remained solidly above state baselines with room for further secondary acceleration. District leaders attribute this trajectory not to a single program, but to a combination of stronger school improvement systems, attention to attendance, and deliberate shifts in adult practice.

Strategies for Success:

Redefining school improvement and the principalship

- The district redefined the principalship around instructional leadership and school improvement as the principal's primary work, not an additional task layered on top of operations.
- District leaders redesigned school improvement from standard “2% growth” targets to specific goals for all students plus accelerated goals (2–3x growth) for students farthest from opportunity (students of color, multilingual learners, etc.).
- The district’s instructional approach is grounded in its longstanding investment in [personalized learning](#), which places students at the center of their own learning through

flexible modes of instruction, evidence-based practices, and ongoing student voice in shaping the classroom experience.

- Principal meetings focus on improving adult practice through clear instructional expectations, learning walks, consultancy protocols around data, and practice with coaching conversations.

Resetting rigor in middle school math

- The district worked deliberately to disrupt the assumption that incremental growth from a low starting point was enough. The district established a universal expectation of grade-level proficiency for every student, centering the work of educators on identifying and implementing the necessary instructional pathways to achieve that goal.
- The district shifted back to full state standard language and required common unit assessments across middle schools to re-establish a clear bar for grade-level expectations.
- Teachers at one middle school introduced [Building Thinking Classrooms](#); ECCS funded PD and planning time, allowing the model to spread organically without mandates, given limited external research and the need for strong teacher commitment.

Building a district-wide attendance infrastructure

- ECCS launched its [Attendance Matters](#) campaign over three years ago, anchored by an attendance goal that every educator is responsible for and aware of. The campaign carries a consistent logo, posters, and stickers across schools.
- The Research Evaluation and Assessment (REA) department sends bi-weekly disaggregated attendance data (grade level, student group, school site, and date) so principals can make data-driven decisions in real time.
- The REA team developed an in-house attendance heat map that disaggregates attendance patterns by race, school and day. The heat map has allowed the district to identify and respond to specific drivers of absence and anticipate and prepare for future patterns.
- When [Operation Metro Surge](#) ramped up in the region, the district drew on this same data infrastructure to move from heat-map-level monitoring to weekly individual-student attendance review. District teams built alternative learning pathways, including online options, to ensure students kept learning even if they ultimately left the district.
- Family-facing communication is a deliberate strategy: before each break, families receive communications in their preferred language reminding them of the return date and explaining why attendance matters academically. The district also delivers direct social-emotional learning instruction to students about why their own attendance matters.

Equity-driven culture of belonging and student voice

- ECCS links equity work directly to engagement and learning, treating racial and cultural identity, psychological safety, and student voice as core academic foundations rather than side initiatives.
- A team of multicultural liaisons supports deep relationships with families and ensures communication reaches families in their preferred language and reflects an understanding of differing cultural perspectives on school.

- The research, evaluation, and assessment team now embeds student focus groups into major initiatives so that changes to curriculum, pedagogy, or engagement strategies are co-shaped by students' lived classroom experiences.
- Responding to community and student feedback, the district has deepened its commitment to active learning environments where students are empowered to engage collaboratively, exercise risk-taking within a culture of psychological safety, and co-construct their classroom experience.